

**[Begin George Tenpo CD 1]**

**Interviewer:**

It is now 10:20 a.m. on Wednesday, April 7, 2004. My name is Ike Hatchimonji. The first name is spelled I-k-e; the last name is H-a-t-c-h-i-m-o-n-j-i. We are at the home of Mr. George Tenpo. That's G-e-o-r-g-e - last name; T-e-n-p-o. His address is 23730 Pennsylvania Avenue in Torrance; that's T-o-r-r-a-n-c-e, California.

Today what we will be undertaking is part of the South Bay Oral History Project, an activity of the South Bay Chapter of the Japanese-American Citizens League. The audio equipment recording this interview is being monitored by Mr. Wilber Sato. That's W-i-l-b-e-r; the last name, S-a-t-o. And, the interview is being... excuse me; I made a mistake here. Mr. Sato is cataloging the interview, and the audio equipment is being monitored by Mr. Joh, J-o-h; last name Sekiguchi, S-e-k-i-g-u-c-h-i.

All copyrights, title, and any other rights arising from this interview, whether in its entirety, part, or derivative form, and whether in audio, written, or any other format, shall belong to the South Bay Chapter of the Japanese-American Citizens League. Copying of this interview recording whether in its entirety or part is strictly prohibited without a written authorization from the Japanese-American Citizens League South Bay Chapter. Thank you very much.

Now, also in accordance with the requirements of our project, we have provided Mr. Tenpo with a pre-inventory... pre-interview questionnaire, a South Bay Historical Project Fact Sheet, a form entitled "Recorded Life History and Deed of Gift," which Mr. Tenpo has signed, a suggested list of questions that will be asked, and a Work for Hire Agreement that I will sign as the interviewer. As described in the recorded Life History and Deed of Gift form, you have the right, Mr. Tenpo, to review the full transcript of the interview and make any corrections you wish within the guidelines of the form. I want you understand that?

About the interview itself, I will ask certain factual questions that will be objective in nature. Your date and place of birth are examples. Other questions will be subjective. In other words, you'll be asked important questions in which you'll be asked to express your feelings. We think this is very important. So, as to be complete and be---be as open as possible in your answers. We emphasize that; okay?

The interview will last for as long as you wish to be interviewed. Feel free to make any comments that are important, that may not be covered by the questions; all right. Half-way through the interview, or when you feel a need for it, you will have---you can have a break of ten or fifteen minutes, whatever the case.

The questions will follow in a chronological order, that is, from the earliest days of your life up to the present. This is the first CD as being recorded on this date. We will now begin the interview itself.

Please state your full name and spell it, please.

0H04M36S

**Tenpo:**

My name is George, G-e-o-r-g-e; Tenpo.

**Interviewer:**

Middle name, sir?

**Tenpo:**

Middle name is J, J-o-j-i.

**Interviewer:**

Fine.

**Tenpo:**

And Tenpo, T-e-n-p-o.

**Interviewer:**

Tenpo; fine. Okay; and where were you born, sir?

**Tenpo:**

I was born in Compton, California.

**Interviewer:**

Compton, California; okay.

**Tenpo:**

You want my birth date?

**Interviewer:**

Yes.

**Tenpo:**

I was born on May 28, 1923.

**Interviewer:**

And where did you grow up?

**Tenpo:**

I grew up mostly in Harbor City.

**Interviewer:**

Harbor City; that's in the South Bay area.

**Tenpo:**

In the South Bay area.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; and what were your parents' names? Perhaps you could spell those out as well.

**Tenpo:**

My father's name was Hyochi Tenpo, spelled H-y-o-c-h-i, Hyochi...

Interviewer:

Okay.

Tenpo:

Tenpo, T-e-n-p-o. And my mother's name was Shizue Tenpo, spelled S-h-i-z-u-e, Shizue Tenpo, T-e-n-p-o.

**Interviewer:**

And where in Japan did they come from?

**Tenpo:**

They were both from Hiroshima in Japan.

**Interviewer:**

Hiroshima Prefecture; okay.

**Tenpo:**

Prefecture.

**Interviewer:**

Is there a smaller township or a...?

**Tenpo:**

Yes, my father was born in a village called Katsuga.

**Interviewer:**

Katsuga?

**Tenpo:**

Katsuga, uh-huh; and my mother was born in Mita, which is next village from Katsuga.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, I see; then were they married before they came to the United States?

**Tenpo:**

No, they got married after she came over.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; so when did both parents migrate to the... America?

**OH06M30S**

**Tenpo:**

Well, I assume that my father immigrated in 1916, and they got married in 1918.

**Interviewer:**

I see; okay. Why did they immigrate to America?

**Tenpo:**

Well, for prosperity... to make money [*Laughs*] and go back to Japan.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, I see.

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

Times were hard in Japan, I believe.

**Tenpo:**

Yes, uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

They sought a better experience... I see. And, where did they first settle in America?

**Tenpo:**

Well, my father settled in Seattle... Sacramento.

**Interviewer:**  
Sacramento?

**Tenpo:**  
Yeah, and he worked for the railway company.

**Interviewer:**  
Oh, I see; okay. Do you recall what railroad that was?

**Tenpo:**  
I don't know... maybe Union Oil? I don't know.

**Interviewer:**  
Going back a little bit, what was the port of entry? You said Seattle?

**Tenpo:**  
Seattle; yes.

**Interviewer:**  
And, your father's occupation when he first arrived was to work on the railroad?

**Tenpo:**  
Yes; right.

**Interviewer:**  
And, what did your mother do after she arrived?

**Tenpo:**  
Well... housewife.

**Interviewer:**  
Housewife; okay... those were difficult times, I'm sure.

**Tenpo:**  
Yes.

**Interviewer:**  
Do you have any siblings, and if so, please give me their names.

**Tenpo:**  
Siblings...

**Interviewer:**

Brothers and sisters?

**Tenpo:**

Oh, my brothers and sisters? I have an older brother who passed away. His name **was Kei Hakaru** Tenpo.

**Interviewer:**

Could you spell that?

**Tenpo:**

K-e-i... Hakaru... H-a-k-a-r-u... is it?

**Interviewer:**

I believe so

**Tenpo:**

Hakaru.

Interviewer:

Okay.

**Tenpo:**

And my younger sister, Margie Michiko.

**Interviewer:**

M-i-c-h-i-k-o isn't it?

**Tenpo:**

Yes; and my youngest sister Yueko Tenpo... Y-u-e-k-o, Yueko Tenpo.

**0H08M55S**

**Interviewer:**

Okay; what elementary school did you attend?

**Tenpo:**

Harbor City Elementary School.

**Interviewer:**

Harbor City... that's after your parents moved?

**Tenpo:**

Oh, yes; after they moved from Compton to Harbor City.

**Interviewer:**

About what year was that?

**Tenpo:**

What year?

**Interviewer:**

Let's see, you were born in 19...?

**Tenpo:**

1923... so probably 1924, probably. And my father did the farming until 1941 until the war broke out.

**Interviewer:**

So he farmed in the Harbor City area?

**Tenpo:**

We farmed on the corner of Western and Sepulveda.

**Interviewer:**

Western and Sepulveda?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah, by the Santa Fe Railroad track.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, gee.

**Tenpo:**

Right there, very close. [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

Very close... was it a large farm?

**Tenpo:**

Well, it was a truck farm, and probably about couple of acres and grew vegetables, strawberries, cauliflower, broccoli, [*Laughs*] cucumbers.

**Interviewer:**

Most---most of the farmers in that area grew...?

**Tenpo:**

Yes, about the same thing; yes

**Interviewer:**

Okay let's see; did you go to Japanese language school and, if so, what was the name?

**Tenpo:**

Well, it was called Japanese---Harbor City Japanese School.

**Interviewer:**

I see.

**Tenpo:**

The school was combined with the church.

**Interviewer:**

Oh.

**Tenpo:**

And our reverend was Rev. Tokonaga and he taught the Japanese language.

**Interviewer:**

That was a Buddhist church?

**Tenpo:**

Buddhist church; yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Did you speak English or Japanese at home?

0H10M59S

**Tenpo:**

[Laughs] My parents didn't speak English at all; so we had to speak Japanese. [Laughs]

**Interviewer:**

It's very important to learn the language.

**Tenpo:**

[Laughs] Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

During your years going to grammar school and Japanese language school and you were growing up all these years in Harbor City; is that correct?

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; did your family own your own home?



**Tenpo:**

Well, actually, I guess they did. They built a barrack-like house, you know? [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

Yeah; they built their own home?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah, they built their own home.

**Interviewer:**

So, the home was actually on the--on the farm.

**Tenpo:**

On the farm on the property, but the parents were sub-leasing the land.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah; you could not own land.

**Tenpo:**

No, they had no right to....

**Interviewer:**

That was unfortunate because that was the case with so many immigrant Japanese that could not own land.

**Tenpo:**

That's right.

**Interviewer:**

The alien land laws were very restrictive.

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

So you had to lease the land and you were at the mercy of the landlord, I imagine on the---you had to pay quite a lot of rent?

0H12M20S

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

That's too bad. Please describe your hometown, I guess that would be Harbor City, and give us an idea of what---was it a large city, small city or...?

**Tenpo:**

Well, where we grew up in Harbor City a lot of the families came from the same village, from Hiroshima. They were all close; they all farmed together, so they got well---got along very well. So, like before New Years, we all got together and had Mochitsuki [**Laughs**] in the morning.

**Interviewer:**

Which is rice...?

**Tenpo:**

Well, the parents got up early in the morning around three o'clock and got ready, you know, start steaming the rice, you know. [**Laughs**] And then after the rice was ready to be pounded [**Laughs**] we would all pound the rice, and the ladies made it into Mochi, a thick rice paste.

**Interviewer:**

It was all a family affair wasn't it?

**Tenpo:**

Yes, family affair---and after it was over, all the kids---all of us went to go to a movie in Lomita.

**Interviewer:**

Oh yeah; that's great.

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

One of the few days of the year when you could really celebrate?

**Tenpo:**

Yes; and at that time, what---admission for the movie theater was only about a quarter. [**Laughs**]

**Interviewer:**

A quarter; tell me about your city and other surrounding...a pretty rural area?

OH14M05S

**Tenpo:**

Yes; well actually, you know around Harbor City there were a lot of these derricks, oil derricks? And when we were young, we'd climb up the derricks and when we got to the top we could see as far as L.A., the City Hall, you know. And all around was just bare. [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

Farm land?

**Tenpo:**

Farm land, uh-huh; very few houses around.

**Interviewer:**

Uh-hm; dirt roads?

**Tenpo:**

Dirt roads [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

Okay; could you describe the past with the present as far as some of the locations that you're familiar with? I mean I imagine the development in this area is so, well, so different.

**Tenpo:**

Oh, yes; well you can't compare what it was like before now, because now it's more like city; yeah. [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

We've come a long ways then?

**Tenpo:**

The roads are all paved, and [*Laughs*] sidewalks, street lights, you know. Before then there were no street lights, no curbs.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; the next question is something I think you're going to have to give some thought to. What was your relationship to your parents? Was it the traditional relationship of Japanese...?

**Tenpo:**

Yes; well, we were taught to obey our parents. Yes.

**Interviewer:**

Especially your father?

**Tenpo:**

Discipline, yes.

**Interviewer:**

Tell me more about that. I mean, even within your siblings, I understand, the older son, would he have a certain status with respect to the other children in the family?

OH16M08S

**Tenpo:**

Well, since he was the eldest he used to look after us. One thing I want to say is my father and my relationship... when I was taking judo, and he would always when we go to judo for practice, he would always be there, and when the tournament come up... when there's a tournament, he always asked me to swallow a raw eggs, which would make me strong you know. **[Laughs]**  
**[Laughs]** Yes.

**Interviewer:**

You had big tournaments then with other...?

**Tenpo:**

Oh yes, we used to go up to Palos Verdes, Moneta and L.A., Terminal Island, you know.

**Interviewer:**

So you competed with the local...?

**Tenpo:**

Local judo teams.

**Interviewer:**

And then your mother... a traditional Japanese family; your mother didn't have the authority, I guess, that your father...?

**Tenpo:**

Yes, she always had to obey what my father....

**Interviewer:**

But she worked hard, I imagine.

**Tenpo:**

Oh, yeah. They both worked hard on the farm.

**Interviewer:**

Provided for the children.

**Tenpo:**

But, you know my father was a heavy drinker. He loved sake (fermented rice wine), you know. He'd be plowing the ground out in the field and when he would get an urge to drink he'd let the horse stand out in the field and come home... [**Laughs**] and have sake.

**Interviewer:**

Well, I'm sure he had to have some kind of diversion like that. Yeah; I guess for the old Issei, the first generation Japanese, that was one of their few outlets is to drink.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; they had no other entertainment or nothing.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah, yeah; that's too bad. Okay; this is another question that you might want to think about. How did the other kids in the neighborhood treat you? I guess that would be the non-Japanese kids.

**0H18M22S**

**Tenpo:**

Well, I got along pretty well with the other Caucasian, other national kids that were different in race.

**Interviewer:**

Were there any acts of discrimination?

**Tenpo:**

No; no acts of violence or anything like that.

**Interviewer:**

Did they make fun of you or anything?

**Tenpo:**

No, no.

**Interviewer:**

Good; did you face any discrimination, I asked you that, prejudice while you were growing up, other than with your neighbor kids. Were there any acts that you could recall, or your parents had, that you felt were discriminatory?

**Tenpo:**

I don't think so.

**Interviewer:**

Nothing on the surface at least.

**Tenpo:**

No.

**Interviewer:**

Did you attend a middle school or a junior high school?

**Tenpo:**

Yes; I went through middle school, junior high, then high school.

**Interviewer:**

Which ones were those?

**Tenpo:**

I went to Narbonne High School, and then I transferred to Torrance High School.

**Interviewer:**

Narbonne, there is---that's in Lomita?

**Tenpo:**

In Lomita; uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; did you go there for four years?

**Tenpo:**

No, around junior year, I transferred to Torrance High School because...

**Interviewer:**

Torrance High School?

**Tenpo:**

... they had an auto shop there which Narbonne didn't have the subject auto shop. I was real interested in automobile; uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; so you graduated from Torrance High School?

**Tenpo:**

No, I didn't graduate. [*Laughs*] I graduated in Denson, Arkansas, in the Jerome Concentration Camp.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, that's right, so that's---you had to interrupt your high school education. Okay; this question here---could you name some of your friends, Japanese-American friends, or non-Japanese-American friends?

**Tenpo:**

Oh, Dick Mertz.

**Interviewer:**

Dick Mertz?

**Tenpo:**

He's---his parents were of German descent. We were very good friends.

**Interviewer:**

How did that relationship come about? A neighbor or....

**Tenpo:**

Yes; neighbor and also we were in the same grade.

**Interviewer:**

And you sort of had a friendship all through school?

**Tenpo:**

Yes; right.

**Interviewer:**

Dick Mertz, M-e-r-t-z?

**Tenpo:**

M-e-r-t-z; yes.

**Interviewer:**

Anybody else that you want to think about?

**Tenpo:**

Well, we had a good---a very friendly poultry farmer with whom my parents did business with. We used to buy chicken manure from them.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, yeah; you used that chicken manure in farming---good. Okay; this is the next question again is something about your social life. I imagine you must have had some kind of social life.

**Tenpo:**

Social life---not much. [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

With your church, your school?

**Tenpo:**

Just with school.

**Interviewer:**

What sort of things?

**Tenpo:**

I didn't go dancing or anything like that. I didn't belong to any activities like sports, you know baseball or anything like that.

0H22M07S

**Interviewer:**

You didn't?

**Tenpo:**

No.

**Interviewer:**

You were pretty busy working; you didn't have the time?

**Tenpo:**

Oh, yeah; I had to work on the farm before we'd go to school. We were out in the field and after we came back from school [*Laughs*] we worked on the farm; uh-huh, yes.

**Interviewer:**

Until late in the evening, I imagine.

**Tenpo:**

Oh, yes; uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

So you really didn't have much time for...?

**Tenpo:**

No, no activities or no entertainment.



**Interviewer:**

What about the weekends?

**Tenpo:**

Weekends---well sometimes we'd go take in a movie with our friends.

**Interviewer:**

So that was your idea of fun, just go to the movies, judo maybe?

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

0H22M56S

**Interviewer:**

Well, aside from the work that you did on the farm, did you have some other kind of work you did perhaps during the summer months?

**Tenpo:**

No.

**Interviewer:**

You were interested in automobile work? You didn't do any job--any job training?

**Tenpo:**

No.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; so most of your work was restricted to the farm...

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

... going to school...?

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

Ok; here's another question. Were you involved in community organizations while you were involved in the church, in Japanese language school, any other clubs?

**Tenpo:**

No; no other clubs.

**Interviewer:**

Were your parents active in the community---I don't know like Kenjinkai Prefecture organization?

**Tenpo:**

No; they were not active at all.

**Interviewer:**

But, active to the extent that you had these people that came from Hiroshima that all lived in the same area?

**Tenpo:**

But they didn't belong to Hiroshima Kenjinkai club.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, they didn't?

**Tenpo:**

No; I don't think so.

**Interviewer:**

The Kenjinkai club being the groups that came from the same prefecture in Japan?

**Tenpo:**

Yes uh-huh; yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah; did you have occasion to go to the big city like Los Angeles?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah, when we had tournaments in LA we used to go. And then after tournament, oh, the big treat was eating at the Far East Chinese Restaurant. **[Laughs]**

**Interviewer:**

That's so typical. **[Laughs]**

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; you know farmers weren't so well off; so once in a while when we got treated to a Chinese restaurant. It was a big treat.

**Interviewer:**

It was a big thing? Everybody came in...especially after the judo tournaments and the kendo tournaments?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Let's see; were you married prior to World War II?

**Tenpo:**

No; after the war.

**Interviewer:**

After the war?

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

You did have some girl friends prior to World War II?

**Tenpo:**

No; I wasn't interested in girls. [*Laughs*] As a matter of fact, when we got married, we got married in Kamakura.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, in Japan?

**Tenpo:**

In Japan in Japanese traditional style.

**Interviewer:**

Oh my.

**Tenpo:**

Me, I wore hakama. She had the onikakashi you know this headgear, you know? And then san san kudo you know, exchanging whiskey---sake, you know.

**Interviewer:**

You call it san...?

**Tenpo:**

Kudo.

**Interviewer:**

San San Kudo

**Tenpo:**

Kudo. San San Kudo or something like that.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; let's see. Okay; this question---where did you meet your spouse?

**Tenpo:**

Well, it was more of a---it was arranged. Uh-huh; she was in Hawaii; I was in Yokohama; and a lady where my parents lived, she was a go-between, you know?

0H26M31S

**Interviewer:**

Oh yeah; a matchmaker?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; a matchmaker, uh-huh. And then we started corresponding and....

**Interviewer:**

So this was after the war?

**Tenpo:**

After the war.

**Interviewer:**

And you were still Japan?

**Tenpo:**

I was still in Japan.

**Interviewer:**

And your wife to be was in Hawaii?

**Tenpo:**

And she was in Hawaii. [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

Was she born in Hawaii?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah, she was born in Hawaii.

**Interviewer:**

So she was a second generation?

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; wow interesting. Yeah; they did a lot of matchmaking back in those days.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; right.

**Interviewer:**

What was your wife doing making--how did she make a living before she was married in Hawaii?

**Tenpo:**

Well, in Hawaii she was making aloha shirts.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, she worked in a factory like; I see.

**Tenpo:**

Well, it was a personal business, not a factory.

**Interviewer:**

Oh is that right; interesting. Okay; after you, let's see, were married, where did you reside?

**Tenpo:**

After we got married we lived in Yokohama. What was... oh; Yokohama, we rented a room just---room about---the room was only 10 X 10.

**Interviewer:**

Really?

**Tenpo:**

Uh-huh; we had to share---and we had no...so we had to share the bathroom, but the kitchen; there was no kitchen, so my wife had to cook with a charcoal hibachi. I think it was called a charcoal-broiler---burner, you know for our cooked meals.

**Interviewer:**

---

**Tenpo:**

Charcoal burner, you know, for cooking?

**Interviewer:**

Yes.

**Tenpo:**

She started the fire with a coal and then cooked on that.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, my goodness.

**Tenpo:**

Yes. And so she cooked outside on the veranda, like there. It was very cold during the wintertime but she had to go outside, and we had a real hard time.

**Interviewer:**

How long did you live in Yokohama together?

**Tenpo:**

About, let's see; about three years, maybe.

**Interviewer:**

What did you do?

0H29M06S

**Tenpo:**

I was working for Tokyo **Shatio**. Tokyo **Shatio**, they had a contract with the U.S. Army reconditioning these heavy trailers, you know---10-wheel trailers.

**Interviewer:**

That's where you did your auto-mechanics?

**Tenpo:**

Well, no; I was more of an interpreter. I was in the liaison department---the Liaison Office.

**Interviewer:**

So you worked for the U.S. Army then.

**Tenpo:**

Well, I was paid by the company.

**Interviewer:**

By the company; they contracted it.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; they contracted with the U.S. Army, uh-huh; yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Three years.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; did you have any children before---no; not before World War II, but...?

**Tenpo**

Well, after, you know, my daughter was born in Yokohama.

**Interviewer:**

She's your first born?

**Tenpo:**

Yes; uh-huh, first child.

**Interviewer:**

That would be 1948, 49, 50?

**Tenpo:**

1950, let's see; around 1951, I think.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; and then you had other children after that?

**Tenpo:**

My other son, Alvin, was born here in Hawthorne.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; and let's see, there was one more child...

**Tenpo:**

Oh, after we come back from Japan, I worked for Miyagi Nursery in Hawthorne.

**Interviewer:**

You had another child after that?

**Tenpo:**

Well, at Miyagi Nursery my other son was born, Alvin. So we only have Susan and Alvin in our family.

**Interviewer:**

While you were growing up---going back to your childhood...was there any Japanese expression---saying that seemed to resonate in your up-bringing, such as, e-n-r-y-o s-u-r-u, or s-h-i-k-a-t-a; then g-a-I; then Enryo suru means to hold back, hesitate.

**Tenpo:**

Hold back, yes.

**Interviewer:**

And Shikata Ga Nai would be sort of a 'it-can't-be-helped attitude'?

**Tenpo:**

It-can't-be-helped; yes.

**Interviewer:**

Those are just examples, but are there other expressions, any of these that you seem to---like maybe your parents used some of these...taught you some of these.

**Tenpo:**

Well, they say, Gambare [*Laughs*].

**Interviewer:**

Which means?

**Tenpo:**

Be persistent.

**Interviewer:**

G-a-m-b-a-r-e, be persistent.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

I think many of the old parents taught their children certain values, certain codes of conduct, such as be patient---it can't be helped if something happens beyond your control, or to be---well, are there any other expressions that you can think of?

**Tenpo:**

Other....



**Interviewer:**

Just think---sort of have a military aspect to it?

**Tenpo:**

I can't think of any. [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

Well, perhaps later on, if you...

**Tenpo:**

\_\_\_\_\_ [Thinking]

**Interviewer:**

We're now going to the period of World War II. I know we've delved a little bit in it, but this is where we'll start on this. The attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, was a very definitive day in everyone's life, and, of course, being of Japanese ancestry your life was changed drastically, yours and that of your family. And what we want to talk about in this phase of the interview is how you felt; what your experiences were and what your emotions were. And we'll start off with just a simple question, perhaps. What were you doing on December 7, 1941? That was a Sunday, in the morning and, of course, news came that Pearl Harbor was attacked. And usually a reaction was rather strong. Your parents---you were living on the farm then and everything?

**Tenpo:**

We didn't know what was happening. We were very bewildered and scared.

**Interviewer:**

Did you---how did you or your parents feel about that? Did they think it was...?

**Tenpo:**

I don't know; I guess they didn't know what to do, because when the war broke out, during the night everything was blacked out. You'd see convoys of troop going by, you know.

0H35M25S

**Interviewer:**

Really?

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

They were headed toward the port, I guess.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; uh-huh. And we had to close all of the curtains so that no lights could be seen---real blackout.

**Interviewer:**

Did you feel that you might be in danger from your neighbors, because...?

**Tenpo:**

Being Japanese?

**Interviewer:**

Being of Japanese ancestry.

**Tenpo:**

[Thinking]... I don't know.

**Interviewer:**

Did your father say anything, like, "Oh, that was a stupid thing that the Japanese did," or did he---was he...

**Tenpo:**

Well, they were surprised, I'm sure.

**Interviewer:**

It's a difficult time to talk about that too, as well. See, at that time you were living in Harbor City and you were about 17 year...?

**Tenpo:**

Seventeen; uh-huh---about seventeen.

**Interviewer:**

Seventeen years of age...you were still in school. Did you go back to school the following Monday and school was still going on?

**Tenpo:**

I don't remember. **[Laughs]** I probably did go back to school. But, I don't---I didn't feel any discrimination from anybody at school.

**Interviewer:**

Really?

**Tenpo:**

I don't think so.

**Interviewer:**

No teachers said anything to you?

**Tenpo:**

No.

0H37M12S

**Interviewer:**

Principals?

**Tenpo:**

No; I don't remember.

**Interviewer:**

What about in the neighborhood or in Harbor City or anything?

**Tenpo:**

No.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; well you say your neighbors didn't react in any way?

**Tenpo:**

Uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; well, I asked you this question before, but I'll ask it again. How did your parents feel about the attack on Pearl Harbor by Japan, and did they feel anything about the loyalty toward Japan or America, or did they express any of those thoughts?

**Tenpo:**

Well, I think they were very disappointed, because you know when the war---you know, our parents were probably loyal to Japan, because they had Tenno haeka (loyalty to the emperor)

**Interviewer:**

They had the Emperor's photo?

**Tenpo:**

Uh-hm; the Emperor's photo displayed on the wall; so I believe, they were loyal.

**Interviewer:**

Of course, that was their home country; they were not allowed to become American citizens, of course.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah uh-huh; so I think they were loyal to Japan.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah; it was a difficult time. Let's see, and as far as you, yourself, are concerned, your--how did you feel about the attack? Did you feel that it was justified? Did you feel that it was a terrible thing to happen? It's something that requires a lot of thought when you're a young man of 17.

**Tenpo:**

Uh-huh; well I thought it was a terrible thing that Japan had attacked the United States.

**Interviewer:**

Did you feel that it might have some effect on your life? Well, it's too early to tell, perhaps, but....

**Tenpo:**

I don't think I had much concern. [Laughs]

0H39M40S

**Interviewer:**

I know; I understand. Well, the Executive Order 9066 was issued by President Roosevelt, and then immediately after that the posters were put up in the neighborhoods where Japanese people lived. Do you recall seeing one of those posters? It gave you instructions and what to do and where to report.

**Tenpo:**

Uh-huh; I don't quite remember.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; did--how did you and your family feel about the executive order? Did you talk about this in your family about the curfew and other issues that surrounded the treatment of the Japanese? Of course, you had the curfew...you felt that?

**Tenpo:**

Oh, yes.

**Interviewer:**

And, of course, the travel limitations, I think. There was a five-mile zone.

**Tenpo:**

Yes; five mile zone.

**Interviewer:**

Well, of course, that must have had an effect on your personal life, your family's life.

**Tenpo:**

Yes; well what happened is that we used to haul our vegetables up to LA market. Uh-huh; that kind of affected it.

**Interviewer:**

So, how was that handled then?

**Tenpo:**

I think we had somebody hauling it for us.

**Interviewer:**

Somebody collected from another---all the neighborhood, I imagine.

**Tenpo:**

Uh-hm, uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

Well, did you---well, of course, you had the---you knew what the Executive Order meant.

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

That you're going to have to...

**Tenpo:**

Evacuate.

**Interviewer:**

Leave your home; get rid of your things.

**Tenpo:**

Didn't have time to get rid of all our properties, our harvest.

**OH41M54S**

**Interviewer:**

You had to leave a lot of crops in the ground?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; in the ground, uh-hm; so we lost all that.

**Interviewer:**

You lost all that.

**Tenpo:**

Uh-huh; yeah.

**Interviewer:**

So, how much time were you given from the time you were notified until the time you had to leave---something like ten days or two weeks?

**Tenpo:**

I don't remember. [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

Were you able to store some things?

**Tenpo:**

Yes, some of the household were stored at the---a friend that had the poultry farm.

**Interviewer:**

Caucasian?

**Tenpo:**

Caucasian uh-huh; very nice lady.

**Interviewer:**

Did you discuss these things with your Caucasian friends? Did they express any feelings about it?

**Tenpo:**

Well, this Caucasian lady felt that---was sorry we had to go to the assembly center. And occasionally, she came to visit us at the assembly center.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, good.

**Tenpo:**

She was very---felt sorry for us.

**Interviewer:**

Which assembly center were you in?

**Tenpo:**

Santa Anita assembly center.

**Interviewer:**

Santa Anita; oh yes, the race track. Okay, do you remember leaving anything behind that was very special? I remember I left a pet dog. [**Laughs**] We couldn't take that.

**Tenpo:**

Oh, we had a dog. [**Laughs**] And when we were leaving the area, I guess the dog must have felt that we were leaving, you know.

**Interviewer:**

What did you do with the dog?

**Tenpo:**

We just left it at the....

**Interviewer:**

I'm sure you found a home somewhere.

**Tenpo:**

I hope so.

**Interviewer:**

Anything else special that... you know I mean I'm sure you might have missed your judo practices; you might have missed some of your school friends, some of these things. What are some of these things that you remember?

**Tenpo:**

Well, a lot of our friends were Japanese, so we all went to the camps. So we didn't miss them at all. But, the American friends, I kind of missed them.

**Interviewer:**

Where did you report to be taken to Santa Anita?

**Tenpo:**

I think at first we went to San Pedro.

**Interviewer:**

San Pedro?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; I think---I'm not sure. We drove into Santa Anita.

**Interviewer:**

So you drove.

**Tenpo:**

Yes, with our own car.

**Interviewer:**

With your own car, I see---which you had to abandon later on, huh?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; I don't think we've been ever compensated for the car---I don't think so.

**Interviewer:**

Let's see; you're all in the Santa Anita Assembly Center? What were the conditions like there?

**Tenpo:**

[Laughs] Well...

**Interviewer:**

Describe what the living conditions were.

**Tenpo:**

We were put in the stable, you know, when we got there. They gave us these ticks---what do you call it, ticks... stuff---the hay in to make mattress. And we had these army cots, you know. [Laughs] And the stables, well, they had the ground asphalted, but still, the odor come through.

**OH45MM57S**

**Interviewer:**

The odor of the manure from the horse stables?

**Tenpo:**



Manure came through, and the partition between the stables; the top was open, you know---no privacy. [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

So, it's just a room?

**Tenpo:**

Just a room.

**Interviewer:**

Large enough for a horse? So tell me about your daily routine, about meals.

**Tenpo:**

Oh, the meals? Well, at first I was very uncomfortable eating together with so many people you know in a mess hall, and also taking---in the restroom toilets there was no privacy.

**Interviewer:**

Showers, as well?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; so I used to get up early in the morning and go to take shower, you know, when nobody's around. [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

So all these facilities were communal?

**Tenpo:**

Yes, really.

**Interviewer:**

Tell me the quality of the food.

**Tenpo:**

The quality; I thought it wasn't bad.

**Interviewer:**

Did you have to wait in long lines?

**Tenpo:**

Oh, yeah; we had to wait in line uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

Did you get enough to eat?

**Tenpo:**

Oh, yes. I think we had to be---let's see; I don't remember. I thought we had given the Army, what do you call it, utensils---Cups and plates, and then we were served.

**Interviewer:**

Was it mostly non-Japanese food?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; I think so.

**Interviewer:**

The cooks were mostly non-Japanese then?

**Tenpo:**

Cooks; I thought people that were in the camp was a cook.

**Interviewer:**

And what did you do for recreation and how did you while away your time?

**Tenpo:**

Well, in Santa Anita I worked in the shipping department; uh-huh. After the burlaps were made, we crated, and then we took it to the railway station in Arcadia.

**Interviewer:**

Burlap; you made burlap?

**Tenpo:**

You know burlaps to make the camouflage nets.

**Interviewer:**

Camouflage; oh so you were engaged in the war effort then?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

That's good. And you were paid, of course.

**Tenpo:**

Nine dollars I think.

**Interviewer:**

Was it hard work?

**Tenpo:**

It was pretty hard work; uh-huh; [**Laughs**] handling those boxes--  
-crated camouflage nets.

**Interviewer:**

So you did have something to keep you busy.

**Tenpo:**

Oh, yes.

**Interviewer:**

Did you have time for church or recreation or sports?

**Tenpo:**

No; I didn't do too much.

**Interviewer:**

But, were there Buddhist services of any kind in Santa Anita?

**Tenpo:**

In Santa Anita I don't remember.

**Interviewer:**

Because I imagine the priests must have been....

**Tenpo:**

Oh, yes; uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

So now we know about Santa Anita, your living quarters and your daily routine and toileting facilities, and bathrooms, and so forth. What did your parents do for---to occupy themselves in camp---father and mother?

**Tenpo:**

I don't think they did very much [**Laughs**], except talk with their friends.

**Interviewer:**

So they really had a chance to relax...

**Tenpo:**

Really; uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

... after years of work?

**Tenpo:**

Uh-hm, yeah; it was more relief for a lot of these parents that worked on the farm.

**OH50M30S**

**Interviewer:**

So, mostly, your parents' friends were probably all living in the area.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; same. Uh-huh; uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

They all had a chance to get together. Were any members of your family...I guess not---no members of your family were in the military at that time?

**Tenpo:**

No.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; did you make some friends in camp? Do you have contact with any of those friends that you met back in those days?

**Tenpo:**

No; I---no.

**Interviewer:**

Did you ever discuss conditions in camp about how you were being treated and did you feel some like protesting or...that you remember?

**Tenpo:**

Well, yes; especially in Tule Lake.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, we're getting into that area. Yeah, that comes along here later.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; in Tule Lake uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

Did you... this is a question I'm not sure would apply; did your family grow closer or farther apart due to living in the camp?

**Tenpo:**

No; we always stayed the same.

**Interviewer:**

Because sometimes there's some political differences between the parents who might have been more sympathetic to Japan and the children who might have had sympathy for Americans--- differences.

**Tenpo:**

No; no differences.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; so after Santa Anita, of course, you went to the...?

**Tenpo:**

We went to Jerome.

**Interviewer:**

You went to Jerome; okay now we're in the re-location center or concentration camp--you might call it that. Tell me about that. You were all transferred to Jerome?

**Tenpo:**

Uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

Your life there---how did you spend your time?

**Tenpo:**

Well, I spent most of the time working in the mess hall as a cook. [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

Did you finish high school?

**Tenpo:**

In Jerome I went there.

**Interviewer:**

You finished your senior year?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah uh-huh; during time I was working in the mess hall I went to school.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, they had a high school in Jerome?

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

So you got your...

**Tenpo:**

I got my diploma.

**Interviewer:**

... diploma there.

**Tenpo:**

Uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; tell me about the work you did in the mess hall?

**Tenpo:**

Oh, mess hall; we cooked all the meals.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; of course you got paid.

**Tenpo:**

Of course we got paid and we had a very good cook which was very---he was very friendly with the commissary personnel; so anytime any fresh food or any meat that's fresh---they'd drop it off at our mess hall.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, I see. So there was something going on there...

**OH53M41S**

**Tenpo:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

So, aside from finishing your high school and working in the mess hall, did you engage in sports or social life, clubs?

**Tenpo:**

No, no; I didn't participate in any clubs or sports---anything.

**Interviewer:**

Did you have a girl friend?

**Tenpo:**

No. [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

No; a 17 or 18 year-old boy?

**Tenpo:**

No, not interested---wasn't interested.

**Interviewer:**

What about religious services?

**Tenpo:**

Not in Jerome. Well, I didn't attend any Buddhist church service at all; but in Tule, yes.

**Interviewer:**

So you weren't that... how long were you in Jerome then? You went to one year in school and then? So it's...?

**Tenpo:**

I don't know---I don't remember how long we were in Jerome.

**Interviewer:**

Well, let's see; if you went to Tule Lake---the people that went to Tule Lake, they went there I think about 1944?

**Tenpo:**

Four?

**Interviewer:**

Yeah, so maybe you were in Jerome for two years.

**Tenpo:**

Maybe a couple years, maybe...

**Interviewer:**

Well, tell me the conditions under which you went from Jerome to Tule Lake? Why did that happen?

**Tenpo:**

Because of the loyalty questions.

**Interviewer:**

Loyalty questions all right; your parents and yourself?

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

And how did you answer those two questions?

**Tenpo:**

No. No.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; were you subject to the military draft? You were 17, 18?

**Tenpo:**

No, no.

**Interviewer:**

I see; so answering these questions, you answered no and no on Questions 27 and 28 because you wanted to yourself, or because you wanted to be with your family?

**Tenpo:**

Well, I wanted to be with my family, and my parents, you know.

**Interviewer:**

You knew the significance of those two questions, if you---what it would mean if you answered no and no? They're very---well, they're questions that...?

**Tenpo:**

Well, being disloyal to America, yes.

0H56M42S

**Interviewer:**

Yes; you understood that?

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

And that the second question has to do with bearing arms?

**Tenpo:**

Uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**



Or let's see, was it bearing arms to defend the United States and forsaking your allegiance to the Emperor of Japan?

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

This is an aside, but those are stupid questions---really, both of them.

**Tenpo:**

[Laughs]

**Interviewer:**

Really, there's no right---I'm expressing my opinion, but those questions should never have been asked. But anyway, you answered the questions, you and your father and your mother, I imagine. So there were five of you in the family, am I correct? What about your brother and sister? They were too young to answer those questions?

**Tenpo:**

My two sisters were younger. They didn't---they were too young to answer the questions---my brother and myself and my parents...

**Interviewer:**

Do you recall having any discussion about how you wanted to answer those questions, or did you pretty much...?

**Tenpo:**

No, I don't think we discussed anything. More or less, they---when the questions come up said, "No. No."

**Interviewer:**

So, after having answered those two questions, what happened next?

**Tenpo:**

We were segregated.

**Interviewer:**

Did that take long?

**Tenpo:**

I don't know how long it took after they questioned.

**Interviewer:**

So they were---so you were you asked to leave...?

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

Everybody that was in Jerome, I guess, all moved at the same time?

**Tenpo:**

Yes, uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

And you were put in the Tule Lake Camp, which is a special---we call it a segregated camp.

**Tenpo:**

Segregated camp.

**Interviewer:**

Well, so how did you feel about that when you saw all these other people that felt answered the same way you did?

**Tenpo:**

Well, we felt the same, so. Let's see now; well we felt the same, so we didn't feel different from anybody else. We felt the same.

**Interviewer:**

But did you---looking back many, many years, do you feel that what you did was the right thing?

**Tenpo:**

No; I don't think so. [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

I think you could because the way you were treated, a lot of people thought that it was...

**Tenpo:**

It was the right thing to do?

**Interviewer:**

... it was the right thing to do? It was a form of protest, isn't it?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah, it is---it was.

**Interviewer:**

How did you feel about the men that answered yes and yes and either volunteered for the military or were drafted? How did you feel about that? They went the other way.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah.

**1H00M07S**

**Interviewer:**

They were right, were they not? I think so.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; they were right.

**Interviewer:**

I think both people were.

**Tenpo:**

But under the circumstance, you know.

**Interviewer:**

Under the circumstance---absolutely.

**Tenpo:**

I can't say.

**Interviewer:**

Well, you know, I can---here again, I'm expressing my views, but really, you had... it took courage to take a stand against something that was wrong when you were being treated badly. All of your rights as an American, especially in your case were violated, and I think this is one way to show that you opposed that.

**Tenpo:**

Uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

Well, let's see, you're in Tule Lake now; it's 1944.

**Tenpo:**

Forty-four.

**Interviewer:**

And let's see, do you recall how long you were there?

**Tenpo:**

About a year.

**Interviewer:**

Now, what were things like there? Because I think the political climate was quite different.

**Tenpo:**

Yes uh-huh; they organize this Hoshidan, you know?

**Interviewer:**

Hoshidan?

**Tenpo:**

**Hoshidan;** loyal to--you know a group that were loyal to Japan.

**Interviewer:**

I see. That's h-o-s-h-i-d-a-n, which would mean?

**Tenpo:**

Hoshidan. I don't know what it means.

**Interviewer:**

But it really is a group?

**Tenpo:**

A group loyal to....

**Interviewer:**

The Emperor?

**Tenpo:**

Uh-huh; Emperor I guess.

**Interviewer:**

Did you join this?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; I was---I joined it.

**Interviewer:**

What did you guys do?

**Tenpo:**

Every morning about---early in the morning, we all get up in the morning and then put a band around head and then they exercised, and then march around the barracks.

**Interviewer:**

I see; shouting and....

**Tenpo:**

Shouting, Washow Washow you know?

**Interviewer:**

Washow Washow. [*Laughs*]

**Tenpo:**

It was stupid thing to do. [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

No, I don't think so; you were preparing for something. Were there leaders that...?

**Tenpo:**

Oh, yeah; there were leaders.

**Interviewer:**

We're talking about hundreds of people, thousands of people?

**Tenpo:**

Over a thousand, I guess, maybe---quite a big group.

**Interviewer:**

Did you have gatherings, meetings, speeches?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; every once in a while they had speeches, I guess.

**Interviewer:**

The camp authorities allowed that?

**Tenpo:**

I don't know.

**Interviewer:**

I guess they didn't stop you, did they?

**Tenpo:**

No; I don't think we had any interruption.

**Interviewer:**

Were there any acts of violence by the authorities? I think there were some... I think there were some.

**Tenpo:**

Inu Shido.

**Interviewer:**

I-n-u..., which means?

**Tenpo:**

I-n-u---like a dog or spy you know.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, I see; oh, there were those that were not in favor of what you were doing?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; I think.

**Interviewer:**

I see; how were they treated?

**Tenpo:**

Oh, brutal; there were beatings.

**Interviewer:**

They were beaten.

**Tenpo:**

But I didn't see any of that, but I heard about it you know.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah; these people---they shouldn't have belonged in---they shouldn't have been in Tule Lake, but they were there. They were trying to change your thinking to remain loyal to America; that would be very incendiary. So, what was life like other than just the protesting and...?

**1H04H18S**

**Tenpo:**

Well, I became active with the church, and I kind of taught Sunday school. See, there's a picture of a group of Sunday School teachers with Reverend Sasaki.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, so they had...?

**Tenpo:**

In Tule I remember, definitely, I used to attend the Buddhist church service.

**Interviewer:**

So there were activities going on?

**Tenpo:**

Oh, Yes.

**Interviewer:**

Educational programs?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

What---were there jobs, so forth that people did?

**Tenpo:**

Oh, to keep up the camp, you know uh-huh---well, like hospitals and catering...I mean the mess halls and truck drivers and farmers.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, you did farming?

**Tenpo:**

No; I didn't do farming. People went out farming.

**Interviewer:**

Really?

**Tenpo:**

So they grew vegetables and....

**Interviewer:**

Compared to Jerome, was life---compared to...I mean just ordinary every day life, was it that different aside from the protesting and these...?

**Tenpo:**

Oh, I think it was about the same; there was a lot of activities you know.

**Interviewer:**

Barracks; they were probably just about the same?

**Tenpo:**

Barracks were all the same.

**Interviewer:**

Showers and bathroom facilities---all about the same...food, and so forth, uh-huh?

**Tenpo:**

All about the same.

**Interviewer:**

You were out of high school already, but were there regular schools for the kids?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah uh-huh; grammar schools, elementary schools.

**Interviewer:**

That was a big camp, as I recall 17,000 people.

**Tenpo:**

Oh, yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Much larger than Jerome. So, you were there you say for...?

**Tenpo:**

About a year, maybe, and then in '45...around the first part of '45, I think, I was transferred to Santa Fe, New Mexico because I belonged to Hoshidan, you know.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, a different camp you went to? Oh, I didn't know about that.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; and I was there until around December '45---about a year.

**Interviewer:**

So, a group of you---how many were you talking about here sent to Santa Fe?

**Tenpo:**

I don't know how many.



**Interviewer:**

Let's see, that was a Justice Department camp.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Quite different; so you were selected because of your membership in this organization?

**Tenpo:**

Yes; probably as an agitator.

**Interviewer:**

How did you feel about that?

**Tenpo:**

Oh....

**Interviewer:**

I guess you kind of expected something like would happen?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; we expected we would be taken into Santa Fe, because of this group.

**Interviewer:**

So you went to Santa Fe; how long were you in Santa Fe?

**Tenpo:**

About not quite a year.

**Interviewer:**

Not quite a year.

**Tenpo:**

And Santa Fe camp, there were people from Hawaii, you know, like, ministers and school teachers and business men, you know.

1H07M55S

**Interviewer:**

People who were considered dangerous?

**Tenpo:**

Considered dangerous personnel and a lot of... so we had a chance to educate ourself. Whatever we wanted to learn; whether

we wanted to learn business... there were business men who taught business.

**Interviewer:**

Were there any political activities?

**Tenpo:**

No, no, no; yeah, so we made good...

**Interviewer:**

Are you talking about yourself or members of your family?

**Tenpo:**

The whole---well, just my brother, myself, and my father were sent to New Mexico. And my mother and two sisters were left in Tule Lake.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, my goodness.

**Tenpo:**

So we went---and so brother, my father and myself went to Japan together, and my mother and two sisters came back later.

**Interviewer:**

I see, okay; let's get this straight. Let me back up; how did the family feel about being split? You going to Santa Fe and your mother and sisters remaining in Tule Lake---that must have been difficult?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; we didn't know whether we were going to get together or not, because we corresponded, but the letters were all censored, you know. So anything that pertained to politics or anything like that it'd be all cut open.

**Interviewer:**

So, here we are. So, you and your father and your brother are keeping busy learning different courses, etc., and your mother and sisters remaining behind in Tule Lake, I guess. Your sisters probably were going to school then---they were younger then.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; much younger.

**Interviewer:**

Let's see, I'm trying to get a fix on the time here. About a year in Santa Fe and then... do you recall about when you received the order that---or did you have a chance to express your wishes to repatriate?

**Tenpo:**

Yes; when we got to Seattle port, personnel asked us why do we want to return---go back to Japan, because Japan had lost the war, and living was very difficult, you know.

**Interviewer:**

And so they warned you, then?

**Tenpo:**

They warned us. They said stay back, but, you know, parent says, no, Japan can't lose the war. [**Laughs**]

**Interviewer:**

They still thought that...?

**Tenpo:**

They say Japan will win[**Laughs**] and so they insisted on going.

**Interviewer:**

They still felt that it was...?

1H11M11S

**Tenpo:**

They felt that Japan at war; and then when they got the **victory** they felt that they would be all welcomed with flags, you know. [**Laughs**] It was just a dream.

**Interviewer:**

So you all repatriated together, the family, did you say---your mother, your sisters, your brothers and your father, all of you?

**Tenpo:**

We repatriated, but we went back at a different time.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, I see. So you went first.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah, my father, my brother and myself went back first from Santa Fe, and then my mother and two sisters came back later.

**Interviewer:**

So you all joined each other in Hiroshima. This would make it about 19...?

**Tenpo:**

1945.

**Interviewer:**

And then at the end of the war, you were all in Hiroshima, then?

**Tenpo:**

Yes uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

And how did you feel about that?

**Tenpo:**

Oh, well no; it was terrible when we got to Hiroshima.

**Interviewer:**

Tell us about that; how they treated you.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; the relatives were very unfriendly, very cold.

**Interviewer:**

Why was that?

**Tenpo:**

Because there were a lot of shortages---food, everything, you know; and everybody was having a hard time just to make a living.

**Interviewer:**

And you were not welcome because you would be taking some of their food and...?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; and a lot of people had to do black market, you know. And there were no order---disorders, you know. Like on the trains, oh, there---no order at all; everybody try to get on the train through the windows, you know, with all the---these, they call it---looks like these bags that you carry on your back full of rice they purchased from the farmers you know trying to go back to the city.

**Interviewer:**

Did you live in a farming community in Hiroshima?

**Tenpo:**

Yes uh-huh; yes.

**Interviewer:**

So was there sort of a breakdown of traditional ways of doing things?

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

That's too bad; and the old values... when there's a war and conditions get so bad, people just don't....

**Tenpo:**

They're all for themselves; no respect for other people.

**Interviewer:**

That's too bad.

**Tenpo:**

It was terrible.

**Interviewer:**

So, tell us about your life in Japan there where you didn't have much food and...?

**Tenpo:**

Uh-huh; but all the Nisei, all the people that went back were very fortunate because of the Occupational Force you know. They all work for the Occupational Force.

**Interviewer:**

So your being in Hiroshima, you heard about some jobs?

**1H14M50S**

**Tenpo:**

Yes uh-huh; I work under Japanese railway, but I was doing the liaison work at the railway station in Kudai.

**Interviewer:**

Kudai, which is...?

**Tenpo:**

Kudai, oh, north of Hiroshima on Tokaido line.

**Interviewer:**

So that provided you with an income to help your family?

**Tenpo:**

Yes; of course, we were paid from the Japanese rail company, so we were paid in Japanese yen. So, monetarily, it wasn't too bad.

**Interviewer:**

Was your family with you when you were working?

**Tenpo:**

My family?

**Interviewer:**

Yeah; your mother, father...?

**Tenpo:**

Oh, my father and my mother, they start making tofu.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, they started a small business.

**Tenpo:**

A small business; uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

Right there in Hiroshima?

**Tenpo:**

Hiroshima---in the country.

**Interviewer:**

And your brothers and sisters?

**Tenpo:**

My brother also worked for the Occupational Force. So we all had jobs.

**Interviewer:**

You could all speak Japanese and English.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; so it was very fortunate.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; I think at this point, we'll just stop this particular recording and then we'll continue on with the next one.

**Tenpo:**

Oh okay.

**[End George Tenpo CD1; Begin CD2]**

**Interviewer:**

It is time---it is 12 noon on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April, 2002. This is a continuation and the second CD of the interview of Mr. Tenpo on the same date being conducted by me, Ike Hatchimonji of the South Bay Oral History Project. The audio and catalog persons remain the same.

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Let's continue the interview.

Okay; when we left off you still had repatriated to Japan. You told me about your activities in Japan, some of the difficulties that you had. Also, did we get on that last recording the work you did? You say you found a job with the...

**Tenpo:**

Occupational Force as interpreter.

**Interviewer:**

Yes sir, go ahead.

**Tenpo:**

Uh-hm yes; we were very fortunate, because the Occupational Force had jobs for us and a lot of people worked as an interpreter.

**Interviewer:**

Because of your language school?

**Tenpo:**

Language---because of our bi-lingual language.

**Interviewer:**

And then you took---describe your job and where it was at and so forth.

**Tenpo:**

Well, my job at Kudai station---well, we were liaison. Whenever a troop, the occupational had to move troops from one location to another, we had to arrange for the coaches, the number of coaches they needed---required---coaches and sleepers and diners, and we would get all the train ready for them on a date specified.

**Interviewer:**

There were actually railroads running in those days...

**Tenpo:**

Oh, yes.

**Interviewer:**

... because of all the bombings?

**Tenpo:**

The Occupation has priority on the rail system. They had their own rail schedule from Osaka, I mean from Tokyo down as far as Kikura-Kioshu.

**Interviewer:**

And you worked on one phase of that.

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

Now let's see; the rest of your family was your mother, your sisters and your brothers... I believe you mentioned that your brother also worked?

**Tenpo:**

Yes; he worked at the Tokyo Central Railway Station.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, so... and then the rest of your family, your father, your mother?

**Tenpo:**



My mother and father, they started a tofu business; in the village in Hiroshima.

**OH03M36S**

**Interviewer:**

Start off from scratch.

**Tenpo:**

Yes, they started off with scratch, but it was very prosperous.

**Interviewer:**

Okay so let's see; I'm trying to get a fix on time here. You were working, your parents were working---everybody was busy until what time when you returned to the United States?

**Tenpo:**

Oh, let's see; I returned to the United States in 1954.

**Interviewer:**

So you were actually there in Japan, then for...?

**Tenpo:**

About nine years.

**Interviewer:**

All this time, did you work with the railroad?

**Tenpo:**

No; after I quit the railroad, I went to Yokohama and I worked for the U.S. Army Occupation Force. They had an ammunition depot in Kudai Japan.

**Interviewer:**

I see.

**Tenpo:**

And I work as an office clerk. And I worked until I was ready to come back to USA.

**Interviewer:**

Now, let's see; this is the period in which you got married?

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

Your wife joined you in Yokohama?

**Tenpo:**

In Yokohama.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; and in the meantime your parents are still operating their small business?

**Tenpo:**

Uh-huh; yes.

**Interviewer:**

And your brother and sisters?

**Tenpo:**

By then, two of my sisters were back in the USA and my brother was still working at the railway station in Tokyo.

**Interviewer:**

Now about your legal status; you mentioned during the break that when you repatriated, you renounced your American citizenship; so by doing that you became a Japanese citizen.

**Tenpo:**

Well, I had a dual citizen---I was a dual citizen.

**Interviewer:**

So you really...?

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

So now, all this time that you were working for the Occupational Forces you were considered a Japanese citizen?

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

So when you left Japan to come to the United States, what sort of legal problems did you have to make that transition back to becoming an American citizen again?

**Tenpo:**

Well, I had no problem. I came back as a Japanese citizen, and after I came back to the USA, I applied for my US citizenship; and there was no difficulty, because I had my US birth certificate.

**Interviewer:**

So, it wasn't very difficult then?

**Tenpo:**

No.

**Interviewer:**

I see.

**Tenpo:**

I didn't even have to go to court or anything like that.

**Interviewer:**

How did you feel about becoming...?

**Tenpo:**

Oh [*Laughs*], I felt relieved to be American citizen again.

**Interviewer:**

So you came back and you came---where?

**Tenpo:**

I came back and worked for Miyagi Nursery.

**Interviewer:**

Where is that?

**Tenpo:**

In Hawthorne.

**Interviewer:**

I see.

**Tenpo:**

He was raising celery plant, and I worked for him as a truck driver, and we used to deliver celery plant to Orange County, Oxnard.

0H07M46S

**Interviewer:**

Yeah; that was a very difficult period because everybody was returning from the camps and re-settling.

**Tenpo:**

Yes, so financially, I was not in good position. So at Miyagi Nursery they furnished a house...

**Interviewer:**

For you and your wife?

**Tenpo:**

... for my wife, so it was very nice to get started; yes.

**Interviewer:**

So, let's see, how long did you do that, then?

**Tenpo:**

Let's see, 1954 until 1960.

**Interviewer:**

Six years, then.

**Tenpo:**

And then after that, in 1960 I moved to Torrance, and we bought the property.

**Interviewer:**

I see.

**Tenpo:**

And we got started and established our estates.

**Interviewer:**

Good; going back just a bit, what happened to your parents? Did they remain in Japan?

**Tenpo:**

No; they came back later. What year was it---1950...? I can ask my wife... mom---Helen, mom? **Japanese Phrase?**... '57? No, you came back '57---'55; I came back in '54---'57.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, I see, you came back separately?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; I came before her.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; your parents came back to this area?

**Tenpo:**

Uh-hm---no; they moved into Little Tokyo.

**Interviewer:**

Little Tokyo.

**Tenpo:**

They worked for...what was the name of the hotel---Mikado Hotel  
No, no, my mother worked for Mikado Hotel and my father worked  
for the hospital---Japanese hospital in LA.

OH10M24S

**Interviewer:**

So, by that time, most everybody was back together?

**Tenpo:**

Yes, we were all back except my brother, and he remained in  
Japan. He got married in Japan. Yeah; he passed away in 1953.

**Interviewer:**

Oh my.

**Tenpo:**

He was only 26 years old. [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

Oh, my.

**Tenpo:**

That's time when no food, no drugs, no medical...there was no  
penicillin; he had TB, see.

**Interviewer:**

I see.

**Tenpo:**

He went---he was in and out of the hospital, but---and he  
couldn't make it.

**Interviewer:**

That's too bad.

**Tenpo:**

Too bad; uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; well do you recall when you came back, what the climate was towards you as a Japanese person...of Japanese ancestry? What--did you feel that you were not wanted? Did you experience any incidents of racial discrimination?

**Tenpo:**

No; for me I didn't feel any discrimination at all.

**Interviewer:**

What about---didn't you feel that you were excluded from certain kind of work?

**Tenpo:**

Well, I never did apply for any jobs at the factory, or stores, or---so, I didn't feel any discrimination. Because I worked for the nursery, you know, among the Japanese, and I started my own gardening business, and the customers were very good me. Some of my customers treated me like one of their family.

**Interviewer:**

So this is after you left the nursery, you started gardening?

**Tenpo:**

Yes; after I left the nursery I started my own gardening business, and all my customers were Inglewood and Hawthorne, and they were all good to me.

**Interviewer:**

That's good. So, by this time you must have had one or two children?

**Tenpo:**

Yeah, at Miyagi Nursery, my son born. So I had two children.

**Interviewer:**

Did you move... you said you found another home after you left the nursery, didn't you?

**Tenpo:**

Yes; we moved in 1960--- we move here in Florence on 237<sup>th</sup> Street...

**Interviewer:**

Oh.

**Tenpo:**

... right close by. [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

Oh, really close.

**Tenpo:**

See I was going to start a nursery, so we bought property. See, on 237 there was a house and the back was empty lot, so we purchased that lot there, you know. But, I never did start a nursery. But we built a new house there in back.

**Interviewer:**

So this is your second home then?

**Tenpo:**

No, this is one... we built 237, 235<sup>th</sup>, and this house, that house, and that house.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, I see; oh well---interesting.

**0H14M05S**

**Tenpo:**

These three houses we built at the same time.

**Interviewer:**

I see; let's see you were a gardener then until...?

**Tenpo:**

1995.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, so you were a gardener for...?

**Tenpo:**

Thirty... was it... from '60 to '95---thirty-five years.

**Interviewer:**

So, with that you were able to settle in with your family, your wife.

**Tenpo:**

Yes; we got established pretty well.

**Interviewer:**

Let's see, your children received their educations at local schools, and they went on to their careers, I imagine. Did you, your spouse, your family members get active again in community organizations?

**Tenpo:**

Yes; mostly in Buddhist churches uh-huh. My wife is very active with the women's association, and I'm with the church, too.

**Interviewer:**

And your children---are they active in some?

**Tenpo:**

Yes, my daughter is active with the church flower arrangement. She teaches flower arrangement.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, yes; I saw some of the beautiful flowers. And they all received good educations, I imagine.

**Tenpo:**

Yes; my son went to---graduated UCLA; and my daughter graduated from Santa Barbara.

**Interviewer:**

Good, good; this is a kind of a question that maybe take a long-range view on, but describe how the community you left and returned to changed during the time you were in camp. In other words, from the time you were evacuated to Tule Lake---I mean Santa Anita until your time---well way back, until after Japan, describe how---well the changes that you've seen.

0H16M25S

**Tenpo:**

Well, the environment really had changed. **[Laughs]**

**Interviewer:**

Yes; of course.

**Tenpo:**

Because before when we left it was like a country, you know. Just like you go on freeway on Highway 5 going to Las Vegas, you only see the scattered houses, you know and mostly open fields; it was like that around here, you know. But after we come back



from Japan, oh, more houses, more shopping areas, you know. It was quite a difference.

**Interviewer:**

Well, I guess you kind of think about the good old days.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah, uh-huh. [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

Well, it's hard to see. Did your family have any ill feelings toward the non-Japanese community? You said you didn't actually feel any resentment about your being a Japanese-American, but did any---maybe some of your children---did they have experience with this?

**Tenpo:**

I don't think they feel any resentment at all.

**Interviewer:**

But they do know what happened to you during the war and why.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; you have some grandchildren?

**Tenpo:**

No; both of my kids are not married.

**Interviewer:**

Not married yet... well.

**Tenpo:**

I like to have grandchildren. [*Laughs*]

**Interviewer:**

Oh, yes; it's great.

**Tenpo:**

No possibility at the present time.

**Interviewer:**

Well, okay; just keep hoping. And your children all living close by?

**Tenpo:**

My daughter lives with us. And my son lives up in Mountain View and he works in Palo Alto.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; let's see, you're active in the Buddhist church in Gardena, and your wife as well, and your daughter? And do you and your children, once in a while, talk about your experiences, well, from the time you grew up until the war years, and your years in Japan?

**Tenpo:**

Well, they were interested in what our life was like, you know up to the present time.

0H18M57S

**Interviewer:**

Yeah; because we hope that some of this that we're recording today will be in their hands, so later on they can listen to it.

**Tenpo:**

Yeah; uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

Because they're third generation children now, and sometimes they tend to not take too great an interest in the old days, but I think they should, because it's really what...?

**Tenpo:**

I think so; uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

Interest in their family.

**Tenpo:**

Because I don't know anything about our parents; they never told us anything. I never asked them, so... too bad. But keeping a record like this, you know is a good thing.

**Interviewer:**

You know, it's partly cultural—the Japanese don't like to talk about themselves very much...draw attention to themselves. Yeah, I had a similar experience with my parents. Wished I knew more, but... But you really feel that what we're doing here is important; it's---not only for your family, your children, but...

**Tenpo:**

Oh, yeah; I think it's a good thing for all the Japanese.

**Interviewer:**

... the community. I think it's something you can be proud of starting with your parents; coming here with nothing and being treated the way they were in World War II and all the hardships they had to endure, and then coming back and resettling and pulling yourself up by the bootstraps.

**Tenpo:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

You have done well, and I think that's something you can be very proud of...that you did it on your own.

**0H20M49S**

**Tenpo:**

I'm blessed. I'm grateful that I am blessed.

**Interviewer:**

I think it took a lot of fortitude on your part to achieve what you have.

**Tenpo:**

Well, and also my wife, Helen.

**Interviewer:**

Yes, I think so. I think we can all say that about our wives.

**Tenpo:**

Uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

I think at this point we've covered everything we wanted to cover unless you have some additional comments that you'd like to make.

**Tenpo:**

I can't think of anything else that I want to speak of.

**Interviewer:**

Looking over here... some of the questions that... okay; well, at this point I think we can conclude our interview today. We appreciate your time and attention to this.

**Tenpo:**

You're welcome.

**Interviewer:**

We'll be in touch with you about the transcript and the---any further action we'll be taking. You'll get copies of all this and you'll have the opportunity to make any corrections or additions, perhaps, if you want to, because sometimes, afterwards, you may think, "Gee, I wish I'd mentioned such and such." You can still put that in.

**Tenpo:**

Thank you.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; at this point, we'll end the interview. Thank you very much.

**Tenpo:**

Oh, thank you.

[End George Tenpo CD 2]