

ORAL MEMOIRS OF JOSEPH ISHIKAWA

Dictated April 2, 1994  
to Jesse Ishikawa

Jesse: It's April 2, 1994. These are the memoirs of Joseph Ishikawa, and he's talking about camp.

So, Dad, was this a summer camp?

Joe: Well, when we were told we had to go to camp, it was a great disillusionment for me and for my whole family. My mother had died in 1939 and she didn't of course know about this and I thought that she of all people would have been the most disappointed, the most disillusioned among us, because she had real hope in the United States. I thought that it was a great travesty of justice and if I had been as radical as I became later, I probably would have found some way to resist going, but not being that way at that time, I of course went. I had to sell my car and because I had to sell the car I had to take the bus to the University until the University became off limits.

Jesse: What was the time from when they started relocating people and putting out orders to the time they actually shipped you out--from the time you sold your car to the time you couldn't go to the University--was it--

Joe: I think the orders came in March, it seems to me, and we had to leave sometime in April. Somewhere there are records that tell when we had to leave, but it went neighborhood by neighborhood, and there were several weeks, maybe about two or 3 months, between Pearl Harbor and the time the executive order to evacuate came, and if there was going to be any sabotage wrought, it would have happened before then, I would think, so I thought that it was especially unjust that we had to go.

I used to drive to work in 20 minutes, and when I took the bus I had to transfer twice, and it took a total of 1 1/2 hours to go from my house to the university.

Q: Was this your writing job for the Kashu Mainichi?

No job--I said to drive to school. And it was not unpleasant ridding, except that some of the transfer points were rather crowded, but it was just a pain in the neck because it took so much time. If I had an 8:00 class, that meant I had to leave the house by 6:30. Then Westwood became off limits before our neighborhood became off limits, so there was several weeks when I didn't go to school, but not having school meant that I had to get ready for the move, and we took a lot of things, like cameras had to be turned in to the police, so I gave my camera away to a friend of mine, and radios had to be turned in. Other documents had to be turned into the police, and some things had to be--well, a lot of personal belongings could be put away, and since Jitsuo and Chiyo had a house with a big garage, we stored a lot of things with them, but

in the meantime, they had to leave before we did, because that area was processed before ours, and they went to a different place. I said everyone was disillusioned, except Jitsuo thought it was a great idea because he felt threatened, being outside and of course the major difference was that he was born in Japan even though he came to the United States at the age of one, he always thought as a Japanese, so he was not as assimilated as the rest, and also, he couldn't get any work. He had been an interior designer designing homes for a lot of the Hollywood and Beverly Hills people, and he wasn't getting any more work as the result of Pearl Harbor, and so I think he was relieved to be going to camp and felt protected there.

Jesse: Could you tell about Pearl Harbor night, or about the next day?

J: First time when we heard Pearl Harbor, I thought it was another one of these Orson Welles broadcasts, the Mercury Theatre War of Mars thing, and it took several minutes to sink in that it was real, and I was really depressed that it happened, of course. In a way it wasn't really unexpected, because I could see when I was in Japan that the Japanese were planning something, but I thought they were going to make some kind of push in Southeast Asia.

Jesse: What could you see they were planning--how could you tell?

J: Well, because the navy for one thing was very uptight because the army was getting all the glory in battles in China, in Manchuria. They were rushing to China and so the navy was somewhat restless. I thought they would probably make a move in southeast Asia. When I heard about Pearl Harbor, I thought it was really a stupid move, because I didn't think Japan had the capability to carry on a war that far away, and that they would not be able to sustain any kind of offensive and that the United States, even though ill-prepared, had too much potential to become victimized by Japan in the way that China or some of the other countries that they had invaded.

Jesse: What was the name of the ship that brought you back?

J: Asamamaru.

Jesse: That had spies on it right? wasn't that the second to the last boat that came back?

J: I don't know that it had spies on it, but we had to draw straws to get on. Somehow, I don't know how, I got passage.

Jesse: Was there a lot of competition by Americans trying to get back?

J: Yeah, American citizens were mostly Nisei. There was another ship that came later, and finally we sent another ship over from the United States just to take all the American nationals back.

Jesse: After the war started?

J: No, before the war started. So in essence this was the second to the last regularly scheduled liner that came back to the U.S. but there was another ship that was sent on a special mission.

Jesse: Now that boat that you were on stopped in Pearl Harbor on the way back, didn't it?

J: Yeah, I think every ship did, because they had to refuel and stop.

Mom: Didn't it break the speed records?

J: Yeah, this is the thing--it struck me that this ship had been built to do double duty as a troop carrier or something, because it was very efficiently designed, and was a very powerful ship. It broke the record in crossing by a day -- 17 days instead of 18, or 16 days instead of 17, I don't remember, but it made the crossing a day faster than usual in spite of the fact that there were some terrible storms along the way, and it made a very swift voyage.

Jess: We got off track. Back to Pearl Harbor again--you said that you'd been seeing preparations, so it wasn't a big surprise, so then what happened?

J: It was a surprise, because I had no idea that they would attack the United States. I know that they were angry with the United States because when I was there just overnight when the commercial treaty was abrogated, just overnight there was anti-American feeling and people would yell "Yankee boy" at me and even Japanese women, not Nisei but Japanese women with western-style hairdress would be attacked on busses by superpatriotic Japanese and it was just not a pleasant time but I didn't think that they would ever--up until that time, they seemed to think that America would side with the Axis powers and when people would suggest that to me I would tell them they were absolutely ridiculous, that there was no possible way that America would side with Mussolini and Hitler and Japan and that it was a stupid hope that they had, but there seemed to be some real expectation that the fear of Communism would be greater than the fear of fascism. I think that people like William Randolph Hearst might have given them that kind of

hope, because the Hearst newspapers were much more interested in red-baiting than they were in pointing out the Nazi menace, and as a matter of fact they seemed to feel that Mussolini got the trains running on time, Hitler was making some efficient changes in Germany and that sort of thing, and that kind of press may have helped foment that kind of hope, but I couldn't see it.

So anyway, Pearl Harbor. I guess we didn't go to church that day because it was such a shocking thing that happened, and in the evening...

Jesse: Do you remember exactly how you heard the news?

J: Yeah, on the radio. We got up and we had this old Motorola radio that brought the news of the attack, and I don't believe--someone may have told my parents or something because I'm not sure that we would have been listening to the radio on Sunday morning. And anyway, that evening, Johnny and I decided we'd go down and try to enlist, and so we went to the armory in Exposition park, and it was about dusk, getting dark, and as we were approaching, a guy hollered, "Halt! Who goes there?" and I wasn't about to say, "The Ishikawa brothers," so I said, "friends." They said, "Advance and be recognized." So we went forward, told them what we wanted to enlist, so he took us in, and they took all our information down, but essentially we were told, don't call us, we'll call you type thing.

Jesse: But why did you want to enlist--was it because you felt the country was threatened or was it more that you thought that this was kind of a good defensive thing to do to show your patriotism?

J: No, I think it was partly I thought it was needed and I of course had this kind of anti-Japanese feeling from my being in Japan, and I think it was--I felt that this was the most positive thing we could do, Johnny and I. I don't know what Johnny's thoughts were on the matter, but I think he was as griped as I was that Pearl Harbor had happened, so it wasn't that we were gung-ho patriotic or anything, it was just that we felt that this was something that should be done. And as it turned out, they didn't take any Nisei enlistments at all, and they stopped drafting Nisei, and for that matter.

Jesse: Were there some who'd been drafted up to that point?

J: Some people had been drafted. Johnny had gone up from the draft and had been declared 4F because he had varicose veins, but we figured with the war on, they're not going to be too fussy about varicose veins and that sort of thing, and that's the reason we enlisted and in hindsight, part of the reason was that he had to wear glasses. But a lot of Nisei who had been drafted were then given honorable discharges and released, so it was later that they

accepted Japanese Americans for the intelligence service and eventually the 442nd from the camps. People went from the camps. Johnny was going to try to join the 442nd and some other friends of mine who were still in the camp were going to join and I wrote a very seditious letter--Eugene Debs went to prison for saying the same thing that I wrote. I said, "Don't volunteer for a segregated army. If you're drafted, go, but don't volunteer, because its a segregated unit your'e going to go for, and that would be anathema to me. So anyway that was later on, of course, after, well, after I was out, so it was probably a year into the war. But anyway, to get into the business about Pearl Harbor, after several weeks deliberation, and General DeWitt, who was in charge of the military in the western half of the United States, or somebody decided that the Japanese on the west coast including Japanese American citizens had to be relocated away from the west coast, which was ironically the one camp that remained--let's see, there was a camp in Manzanar which was in California, but there was another camp in Tule Lake in California, and that was for hard-core Japanese sympathizers, but everybody else had to move out of California.

So we were told we had to report on such and such a date to, oh, some address, a church or something, and were then to be picked up by bus and taken to Santa Anita, which was a racetrack.

Jesse: If you'd left like a week before and had gone to New York City or something, would that have been allowed?

J: Oh yeah, sure. A lot of people went to say, Salt Lake and to Idaho and got jobs picking sugar beets and farming jobs or something. Some people had relatives in other parts of the country. They were free to travel out of the west coast. On the other hand, we had a restricted radius of 50 miles to go. I remember the conference wrestling meet was to be in California which was 400 miles away and I tried to get released to go, and they said absolutely no. Ray Richards, who was the coach, tried to get permission, and I think he should have gone down personally. I think he phoned. If he'd gone down personally, he was this great big guy who was 6'4" and weighed 280 pounds and they might have said OK, but he phoned and they said no, so I couldn't go, which was a big disappointment to me, because that was the only year I was undefeated, so I thought I had a chance to get a medal. But anyway, so, eventually we wound up in camp, and I must say that the camp--

Jesse: You were at Santa Anita before. What happened after Santa Anita? Was that just for the round up?

J: Santa Anita, and Tanfran, another racetrack up north, were assembly centers, and there was on in Fresno, I think, assembly centers where people brought in and processed and then as camps were built in the interior of the country they were moved on. But Santa Anita was the assembly center for us, and I think maybe

Manzanar was all ready, so they were able to move directly to Manzanar without an assembly center, like Chiyo and Jitsuo went there. Santa Anita, being a racetrack, they had a lot of stables that were rather spacious, and they became the most desirable living quarters for people because they had more room and the buildings were more permanent. They made barrack type buildings for the rest of us who came later, and that that's where Tochan and Johnny and I stayed. One thing: having decided that the Japanese Americans had to be moved, they tried to do it as humanely as possible. They didn't break up families. They didn't segregate by male and female and separate families that way. If Kachan had been alive, she would have moved with us. And it's true we had just one room, but at least we were together. Within the camp, movement was unrestricted. We couldn't go outside of camp except when I had to get glasses, I was taken in a truck and went out to the doctor who examined me and prescribed glasses for me and eventually got me glasses, but other than that there was--I think it was a concentration camp only in the sense that we were concentrated there, but there was none of the inhumane treatment that people normally described as "concentration camps." As a matter a fact, somebody told me after the war that she remembered hearing some women waiting in these long lines to get into the mess hall and they were saying--these were little, gnarled old women, who were saying how wonderful it was to be able to go to a mess hall and be fed food that they didn't have to prepare, that was prepared for them, that they didn't have to wash dishes afterwards, and they felt quite liberated. These were women who in essence had been slaves of their families, probably picture brides who came over to marry a stranger, and who were treated as chattel, pretty much, and I could see how they might feel that they were liberated. It was Ruth Korada who mentioned this to me, and Ruth was kind of radical and she thought this was kind of a strange attitude, but she also hadn't thought of that, but stated the way it was, she could understand how these women felt. And so they felt liberated, and they could go to sewing classes, there were all kinds of recreational programs.

Jesse: Didn't you have a piano class there?

J: That's right. I did have a piano class--who told you I had a piano class?

Jesse: Remember you told me when I was about 4 or 5 years old that you had some piano that was made out a cardboard box that had keys that were cut out?

J: No, no, no. There were real pianos. Garrett Olson had a piano board that he practiced on whenever he went on concert. But no, they had real pianos and stuff. I learned to play chess in camp, but generally I did the least. I was in a blue funk most of the time, so when they wanted me to help at the newspaper, I refused, because I didn't want to do any intellectual work, and so I worked in the post office as a laborer, and then I found that the

people who got the best food were people who worked in the mess hall. They ate better than everybody else. So when we moved to Amache, Colorado I applied for a mess hall job, which was a laborer job. As a postal worker, I was a professional and got something like \$12 a month. In the mess hall I got \$8 a month, in scrip, and it was worth it because I ate better.

Mom: Eating was always important to Joe.

J: Otherwise, I couldn't do anything productive.

Jesse: Did you read a lot of books?

J: No, I wrote letters trying to get out. I wrote letters to universities, wrote to the agency that was providing a means of contacting universities and whatnot. I applied to several universities. I kept that part. And to the War Relocation Authority, because other people were leaving and getting permission to go out to school, and I wasn't, and I figured that one of the reasons was that I had been in Japan, so I wrote them and told them what my experience was in Japan, that I was persona non grata for having written an article criticizing Japan for being in China, saying that Japan should get out of China, and so eventually I got out but not until I was in Colorado, which turned out to be a blessing, because if I had been released from California I would have had to pay my own way to Nebraska. I had to pay my own way but it was from Colorado which was much closer to Nebraska than it would've been from California. So that was kind of a blessing, but it did mean that I enrolled late, but at least I did eventually get out. While I was in Santa Anita, there were a couple of ugly incidents. Well, first of all, the food at Santa Anita was really pretty miserable, and it turned out that the project director had been stealing the food and selling it on the black market, because everything was rationed, meat was rationed.

Jesse: Was this project director a Nisei?

J: No, no. A civil servant. And he had taken--we kept--the meat that I remember were things like heart, that sort of thing, and he had been selling it on the black market. Well, that was one bad incident. The other bad incident was when the police came rolling through the rooms, everybody's room. It was an unauthorized thing. They picked up jewelry and, you know, stole things from people. We didn't have anything valuable for them to steal, but this did happen in the camp, and one of the rumors came was that one guy who was responsible for this was an informer who was a Korean and so they cornered this guy and attacked him and I don't know why he wasn't killed, because somebody I saw later that somebody had gotten a typewriter and was pummeling him with this typewriter and the only thing that I think could have saved his life was he was in a corner so the guy was hitting the side of the walls as much as hitting--

Jesse: Your father was a civil servant of some sort in Japan?

J: I think so. I don't know - theres a picture of him somewhere with some kind of uniform and a little sword or whatever, which is kind of a ceremonial thing, with Kachan at his side.

Jesse: He had worked in Formosa too, hadn't he?

J: This was in Formosa, where he was.

M: Chiyo said that he left Kachan and Fusae in Formosa for five years while he came to the United States and one of the relatives there said that in Japan, Hiroshima, that there was a time when he cooked on a boat. She had no detail about it but she said he would write back to the family that he was cooking as a cook on a boat and after five years, whatever other jobs he had I don't know, but then he sent for Kachan and Fusae and it was after that that Chiyo was born, and so Chiyo said there was this 5-year difference between her and Fusae, and so they could never be real close because there was such a big age gap but that the reason for it was that Kachan was waiting in Formosa for him to send for her.

Jesse: Did you know any of that Dad?

J: No, I don't what mother picks up from Chiyo.

Jesse: Did Tochan ever tell you why it was he came over here?

J: No, but I mentioned this to Chiyo my sister and she's unsure of it and doesn't think so, but I think it was because having a girl child, and my father was always interested in learning, even though he probably had a minimum of education, he -- I think he thought that there was no hope of girls getting a decent education so he came to this country when he was 40 or 41 and then he was also the oldest boy in his family and it was just unheard of that that would happen, that he would go to Formosa and work when he was the head of the family, he was expected to be around, and another thing was, he had no intention of going back to Japan. A lot of people he came over with, for instance, their intention was to make money and go back to japan and my father never intended that, and as a matter of fact, he worked on a farm for a time and everybody that he worked with eventually got a farm for their own became rather wealthy. If they had children, they could get land in their childrens' name, but my dad, after being on a farm for awile, he realized how bad the schools were. That's the reason I think that education was important to him. Because he said that if his child in order to get a decent education he had to move to the city, so he moved to LA and then took a job, a very menial job, but he stayed with it for 35 years or so.

Jesse: Did he stay at that job right up until the time you graduated?



J: No, he retired, he was almost 70 I guess, he was old enough--well, lets see. He ironically enough in our family was the only one who didn't have to go to camp. They said that he was of an age where he wouldn't be any danger--security danger. And it wasn't just strictly age, because there were people his age and older who had started Japanese language schools or had done other kinds of things like that that the government didn't trust but Tochan kind of worked. He posed no threat. He had no association with any Japanese organizations, other than the church he belonged to, and so he was not compelled to go. He came because of the children. And his employer, his former employer, George Hyland, who had a very nice house in Beverly Hills, invited him to live with them, and he said, no, he wanted to stay with the family. So he comes to camp and the family abandons him. Poor guy. (Laughter.)

Jesse: When did you take him into your place in Lincoln?

J: Well, he had stayed with Hank for awhile, he had stayed with Chiyo for awhile, and I thought, well, gee, my turn.

Jesse: Did he stay in Cincinnati with Hank or in California?

J: No, in California . Then I don't think he stayed with Johnny, but he visited Johnny out there, because I remember they were worried about him one time, because he had gone off in the morning and they didn't know where he was. Finally he came home, it was at night, not real late but after dinner or something, so they asked him where he had gone, he said, well, he'd gone to Coney Island because he had put his feet in the Pacific but had never put his feet in the Atlantic. He did that to us too. He disappeared one day, and I didn't know where the heck he had gone, and finally I was getting really worried. I asked around and nobody had seen him. Pretty soon I found him and he said, well, he should go and see what O-MaHa was like. I don't know how he got there calling it O-MaHa. Omaha means "big beach" in Japanese. So he had gone to Omaha and walked around there for awhile.

Jesse: Wasn't there also a story about him in Lincoln when they had some big flood?

J: Oh yeah, they had a meeting at school when we were really up in arms about the stupid chairman and so at the meeting, it lasted until 11:00 o'clock, and I come home and the place was flooded out, everything was under water, and I wondered where my father was and finally I went to the school where the shelter was. I couldn't get to the house. And so I called at the school. We had to stay there until we could get back to the house. That's right--he walked into town one day because he thought if he stayed at the school he should get a necktie. He walked, like 30 blocks.

Jesse: Wasn't he trying to learn German when he was in Lincoln?

J: Yeah, he was. First of all, he started going to church in the neighborhood there. The neighborhood was called "Russian bottoms" because a lot of the settlers there were from Russia, but they were German Russians, people who Catherine the Great had had imported into Russia to help with something or other. And then instead of going back to Germany, they came to the United States. And there were four groups of Germans from Russia in Lincoln, all Congregationalists, not Lutherans, all mutually antagonistic, because our church tried to do something, the young people tried to do something, and we could do things with individual churches, but to try to get them together, there was no way to do it, but anyway, there was one of these Congregationalist churches there. I told him, why didn't he come to church with me, but he thought, this was a neighbor church, so he would go, and I said, but the services are in German. And he says, well, it didn't matter, because God's word was universal, and besides, he couldn't hear anyway, so it didn't matter, but however, he thought that as long as he was going there, he should study German, so he went down to a used bookstore and came back with what he thought was a German bible, and he said, he couldn't make head nor tail of it, so I said, well let me look at it, and here was this Bible in German script, and I could read a word in it here and there, but it made no sense to me, and so I looked in the by-leaf, and it was a Danish Bible in Germanic script. But he got a grammar somewhere and started writing things and translating things and asked me if Livvie spoke German and I said, yeah, she spoke it, and he said, he thought he could get along better with her in German than in English, so I said, let's hear some of your German, and he would translate broken German into broken English, and I kept a straight face until he said, "Wasu istu rosso? Wassu matta?"

J: Was his English pretty bad?

J: It was nonexistent because he was very bashful, very shy and of course he started late. He was the only Japanese in the place where he worked, but he could understand everything. He read. He could read, but his conversation consisted of "yes" or "no." And when he would say something, he would have "ands" about every third word.

Jesse: That's where Barry got it.

J: So he was, as I say, very shy. My mother, who was more extroverted but not as educated, got so she could communicate fairly well--the green grocer, the bread man, the fish man was Japanese, so that was no problem, --the milk man. She was very friendly with the ice man. Sounds like a dirty story, but she thought he was a nice person and when had a heart attack and died on his ice wagon about a block from us she felt really bad. She didn't speak English any better but she wasn't afraid of people laughing at her or making fun of her. I don't believe people made fun of her. She kind of made fun of her Japanese friends, one

woman who kept calling "Broadway" "Budoruway," who got the "d" and the "r" transposed.

Jesse: You guys must have spoken Japanese in the home, didn't you?

J: I think Chiyo spoke pretty well and Hank spoke OK and I think Johnny a little less, and I, very little.

Jesse: Did you understand your parents?

J: Yeah, I suppose, except what I spoke was a child's version of Japanese, I suspect, because if there was a conversation going on between my mother and a friend of hers which I probably wouldn't have gotten much of, but I was never much for listening anyway. Tochan tried to teach me Japanese before I went to Japan. He never insisted that I go to Japanese school, but I did go briefly a couple weeks. I met Hiro and his wife there. She said that [Kachan] she was very entertaining, that when she and her friends would get together she'd be the life of the party. Well, I knew this because she was very clever, she was good at mimicking, and she was like Kimi in that way, she could imitate people's voices. One time when I had done something bad, she put on this voice, and I didn't recognize it was my mother's voice.

Jesse: You mean like a boogey-man or something like that?

J: No, something like the wall. Well anyway, well, it could have been something like the boogieman, I think I was four at the time. Yeah, my mother was very gregarious, an outgoing person and she got to the point where she did all the accounts for the household expenses and had a budget and everything, which we had to have because we were very poor, and she did this all on the abacus, but she would write to the milkman, you know, two bottles of milk, a pound of butter, and this sort of thing, a loaf of bread, two loaves of whole wheat, a loaf of raisin bread, that sort of thing she could do. And she would take some other Japanese ladies shopping because she knew how to get around and they didn't so she'd be helpful that way.

Jesse: Did you guys have a car or take streetcars everywhere?

J: We had a car. 1928, the same year your mother's family got their car.

Jesse: What did you have--a Model T?

J: It was a Chevrolet which I think is also what you got?

Mom: We had a '28 Chevy, yeah.

J: Hank drove it. Hank was more the driver. He was born in 1911 I guess, and so a '28 Chevy, he was 16 when he learned to

*Johnny lied  
about his age.  
got a license  
at 13 drove license at 14*

drive, and we went everywhere. I remember going to Yosemite the first year we had the car, we went up to Yosemite, Hank got to drive.

Jesse: Your dad didn't drive?

J: No my dad didn't learn to drive, nor did my mother. That's why we waited until Hank was old enough to drive to get a licence.

Jesse: When I saw your dad's passport, you guys had all been down to Baja California once or something or other?

J: Yeah, my father had a friend there who had gone to Mexico and couldn't get back in, and so we went down to the city one time, and I remember Hank must have been in college by this time and Johnny was in high school and they had both had junior high school and high school spanish and they couldn't make themselves understood, and my dad would kind of pick up stuff from their textbooks, started talking, he got along fine. Part of it is the phonetics. Phonetics are vry much like Japanese.

Jesse: This guy was Mexican?

J: Yeah. I thought it was just from his picking up kids' textbooks, but he told me later that before he came to the United States, he had studied some Spanish.

M: This friend, though was Japanese. He spoke Spanish to some Mexicans.

J; Yeah.

M: Your dad did some cooking at home, too, didn't he? Which makes me think that it was probably plausible that he was a cook.

J: I knew that he had been a cook somewhere but I didn't realize it was a boat, but he did the Sunday roast, and I remember the way he would baste it, and it was always excellent, excellent roast. He did the baking. My mother never baked. My dad always baked cakes, mostly. If there were pies, I guess I did the pie baking in the family.

Jesse: We're going to start playing (pinochle) now. This tape took almost the entire 90 minutes.

Mom: What was a Korean doing there?

J: Well, he apparently was indeed an informer, but--

Jesse: Passing for Japanese?

J: I think he wasn't passing for Japanese, I think everybody knew he was Korean, but anyway that was one of the bad things that happened, and it's very interesting because when we were told we had to go to Amache, there was a group from Tulare County, which is in Central California toward Sequoia and they petitioned the War Relocation Authority not to let us come there because they were afraid of the Southern California Nisei, the Los Angeles Nisei, and part of it was the conflict between rural and urban, because these were mostly farmers and farm people and lived very sheltered lives, and they thought that this incident meant that they were all troublemakers from Amache and so they petitioned the War Relocation Authority not to let us come.

Jesse: Was this Amache or the racetrack?

J: No, from Santa Anita to Amache, Colorado. Amache was the name of the camp, but it was just north of LeMars, Colorado, on the Arkansas river.

Jesse: Oh, I see. But they were worried that some of them might be sent to Tulare?

J: No, no. These were people who had come from the Tulare assembly center and were the first settlers in Amache, and they didn't want the Los Angeles Nisei to come there, and I think that they probably had reason--in Los Angeles there were probably gangs, that sort of thing. Not the gangs you see in Los Angeles now, or in New York or Chicago, but they were probably locals who were trouble makers. But I think it was the incident of the Korean being beaten up that made them worried. How they got the news I don't know except there must have been some kind of undercurrent or maybe people riding back and forth.

Jesse: Were there any unpleasant incidents between the time of Pearl Harbor and the time you actually went into camp? Could you detect much anti-Japanese sentiment?

J: I'm sure there was some, but not for me. As a matter of fact, well I know my father said I couldn't go skiing, because people might attack me or something, and I thought that was an unreasonable thought, but I didn't go skiing anyway. But the other thing was I had applied for a job at the post office for Christmas. The Christmas after Pearl Harbor. They always hired University kids to work during the holidays because they needed a lot of help, and I took the exam for that and got the job and so I remember parking a car and going to the post office and a man approached me in a very friendly way and said, "Hello, Yankee," not sarcastically

or anything, but in a very friendly way, meaning, "I think you're OK," that sort of thing, and that made me feel good, because the only previous time I'd been called "Yankee" was in Japan when I was called, "Yon-kee boy," and that was pejorative. Oh yeah, I should say, the day after Pearl Harbor I was down at the Moby Dick bookstore, near the LA library, on 6th Street or Wilshire, I'm not sure, 6th Street, I guess. It was a used bookstore. And I was browsing around, and a man came back, kind of big florid guy, and he kind of said, out of the corner of his mouth, "Ve Germans must stick together." So I got the hell out of there, and I probably should have informed the FBI about this or something, but it probably wasn't necessary, because later the place, several weeks later the place was raided as being a Nazi Bund front. Fritz Kung of the Nazi Bund.

Jesse: You had some story about how you went out and started doing christmas shopping or something?

J: Oh, yeah, I was working on the newspaper, which was a full time job during the Christmas holidays. I worked for the post office and it was for three days but I was asked to stay on. A lot of people were temporary help and let go, but I was asked to stay on and later I discovered that they had a walkway where they could survey the workers and keep tabs on them, and the guy next to me would read all the postcards, and say, "Ha, look at this!" But I worked as I normally did, as fast as I could, because if you're going to work, you might as well do it right, and so a lot of people who were apparently just goofing off didn't stay on but I stayed on an extra day or so so I worked 4 or 5 days and then about that time, it's a long story about the company that Hank worked for which was a Japanese import company, having been set fire to, and the place burned, and so they needed salvage workers, and so I worked for the salvage company there, and I worked for the newspaper, so I had three full-time jobs for a period of about 4 or 5 days, which meant just little snatches of sleep here and there, because each was an 8 hour job. Of course I had more flexibility with the newspaper because if I finished the work early, I could take off and do one of the other things. But anyway, I wound up at the end of the week Christmas Eve with a lot of money from three jobs and up until this time I was completely outside of the Christmas spirit because Pearl Harbor was such a downer and I didn't feel like celebrating Christmas but then I thought, well, I'd better go get some presents for, like, you know, Alice, my niece and all the kids. And so I went up to Bullocks and started at the top floor and walked down and began buying stuff and getting more and more in the Christmas spirit. By the time I got down to the bottom floor the clerk had to help me tie up all these various presents that I had gotten and generally I had spent everything I made. For that Christmas it did turn out to be kind of a Christmas day for me. I don't remember anything else about that Christmas. Just that crazy shopping spree.

Jesse: Is that the Bullocks on Wilshire?

J: No, this was downtown.

Jesse: Say, you were saying that in camp it sounded like you were in kind of a funk the whole time.

J: Yeah, I was just writing letters.

Jesse: Did you want to get out real bad, was that it?

J: Oh yeah. The easiest way to get out was to either go pick sugar beets, and a lot of people left on sugar beet trips, and I suppose they would then be permitted to go back to, but getting away from there was my foremost thought and getting into school was a possible way. Getting away for work elsewhere would have done the same thing and Hank eventually went to Cincinnati to work and Johnny went to New York to work.

Jesse: I thought Johnny was in there the whole time.

J: No Johnny--if you had some sort of connection--Hank had a friend who knew Hank who needed someone to run the business end of his thing which was somehow associated with a jewelry company, making signs for a jewelry company or whatever, and so Hank and Fuzzy got out to Cincinnati.

Mom: Where had they been in camp?

J: They were in Santa Anita too so we would see them and so when we, well anyway, so we went to camp at the same time but they were a different family unit. My dad and Johnny and I were another family unit.

Jesse: So the three of you were all together in Colorado?

J: Yeah, we went to Colorado together too. And I don't know whether Hank was out by that time or went to Amache--I forget. Because I was in Amache only three weeks.

Jesse: Oh really.

J: Yeah, cause it was shortly after I got to Colorado that I got released.

Jesse: Would you have gone onto grad school...

J: If I'd stayed in LA?

Jesse: Yeah, if there hadn't been the camps or anything. Would you have...

J: Probably not. I probably wouldn't have--I was a terrible student as you know from sneaking looks at my transcripts. I was just not a good student, basically lazy, I think. My profs thought I was smart enough.

Jesse: Wasn't the choice between Nebraska and Cornell?

J: I wanted first of all to go to Iowa because they had a writing program. Iowa was the first school to give a masters degree in creative writing, and I think Yale eventually did. And also Colorado's summer writing workshop. And so I applied first to Iowa, and to Colorado. Iowa wouldn't take any Nisei because of having a preflight program, which was a Navy program, and Colorado had a quota system. They would take Nisei, but on a quota basis, and there were enough Nisei in the Denver area, Longmont and Mom's birthplace, Brighton, had a lot of Japanese families, and so the quota could easily be filled by Colorado citizens, and so it was almost impossible that I could fit into the quota, so I gave that up and schools that accepted me were Cornell and Nebraska. And I always liked the idea of Cornell because of their alma mater song. Great alma mater song. The famous alma mater song in the country, I guess.

Jesse: I never heard of it. Could you hum a few bars?

J: Come on. Anyway, I decided I would go to Nebraska because I figured I could get work more easily than in Ithaca because Ithaca is strictly a university town, and because Nebraska is a capital and so forth, and also Ray Richards, my wrestling coach, had been an all-american football player at Nebraska and said, "I can get you a scholarship there," and I said, "Ray, I've used up my eligibility." And so I said, "You know, the thing I would miss most around here are mountains. Are there mountains around Lincoln?" And Ray wasn't sure. He was an all American tackle, a lineman, so he didn't look around much. He was from Ponca, well, you know, across from Sioux City, and there are little hills there. He



29Xdidn't

know. So Bertie Masterson was nearby. And Bernie had

been an all-American quarterback, and he started the T-Formation for the Chicago Bears and introduced it to Stanford and was doing that in UCLA and was the assistant football coach, and so Ray asked Bernie, he said, "Say, Bernie, are there mountains around Lincoln?" And Bernie, who had gone to Lincoln High School and had grown up in Lincoln, without any hesitation, said, "Yup!"

Jesse: How were you in touch with these guys? You were in Colorado all this time, weren't you?

J: No, no no no, this was before--I was starting to write letters before I left.

Jesse: To get ready to get out even before you got in.

J: Right. And so anyway, Ray--well, this is after the camp thing, but when I arrived there in Lincoln, I arrived in the middle of the night, and they had a very good relocation program in Lincoln. People met me at the train and took me someplace to sleep, I don't even know where. And so the next day I'm out early, looking for the mountains, and there were no mountains, so I climbed to the top of the Capitol which is a beautiful Capitol building, tall skyscraper there, and I looked around and I walked around the walkway there, and I felt that we were in the middle of a big platter, round platter, and that the earth dropped off. I couldn't see any mountains or anything that looked like mountains, so that was my introduction to Lincoln, Nebraska.

Jesse: Did you ever have any contact with those guys again?

J: Well, Bernie came to Nebraska to coach football there one year, or a couple years, and had a terrible record.

Jesse: Was he the head coach?

J: Yeah, he was a good backfield coach but was a terrible head coach. And I was always going to point it up to him--but no, I didn't know Bernie that well anyway. Ray I knew very well. And I never kept in touch with him though. Yeah, he was kind of just taking over the wrestling. Our regular coach joined the army as soon as he could so that left Ray to be coach. He had been a professional wrestler. I guess he wrestled in college, but he didn't know too much about college rules, and he was teaching us all kinds of professional things that were illegal.

Jesse: Forearm smashes and body slams?

J: He would always demonstrate holds on me, because I was always handy, and he'd grab me and say, "Now this way do it," and he'd put his 265 pounds on me and pull my arm out of its socket, and all my teammates would be sitting around laughing like mad, and he'd say, "now tell me if it hurts, holler if it hurts," and I'd go "RRRt! RRRt!" I couldn't say anything of course. It made for a lot of laughs, but I was pretty much a wreck whenever he demonstrated...

Mom: Where was Tochan Johnny went to New York and you went to Nebraska?

J: He stayed in camp by himself and I know Dorothy Murakishi scoffed when I said that they had the run of the place and that Tocahn would go down Granada--Granada was the name of the town, that's right, LeMars was the nearest big town but Granada was the one that had a whistle-stop on the Acheson-Topeka and the Santa Fe down on the Arkansas river and a lot of people would go down there and fish and stuff, and it's about two miles down there, and Tochan would walk down and walk back or maybe get a ride back on the camp truck or whatever, and he just had the kind of a life of a retired

gentleman living in the country. Dorothy Murakishi said, "I've never heard of such a thing!" But it's true that some of the old guys would go down and fish on the river.

Jesse: Probably the most peaceful time he had in his life.

J: Yeah. And the camp itself was built out of sagebrush and it was all desert country there on the east of the Rockies and he would--I mean, there were rattlesnakes and stuff around, but I don't think they bothered--it was a sport for young people to go out and round up rattlesnakes.

Jesse: Well didn't Uncle Johnny have a pretty good time in camp?

J: Well, Uncle Johnny at Amache, I remember, became a recreational leader and he was really pretty good. He would organize dances, parties and things and he had a lot of friends in camp.

Jesse: That's how he met Uncle Ken and Aunt Yuki, isn't it?

J: No, no, Uncle Ken had been a friend of Hank's in L.A. and they may have met in camp, I don't know, but I know that when Ken went out to New York he went to work in a dental lab and I think invited Johnny to come and got him a job in the same place. And then after the war, when Bank of Tokyo opened an office there, Ken had worked in the bank of Tokyo in LA before the war, so got a job there and got Johnny a job there. So that's how all that happened. But Ken was really a person who Hank knew better than Johnny before. I don't think that they were close friends or anything but acquaintances, anyway.

Jesse: How did Tochan and Kachan meet each other? Was it an arranged marriage?

J: I'm sure that it was an arranged marriage, because all Japanese marriages of that generation were arranged marriages. There was no way that people would meet each other. Kacahn may have been very young, for that matter. She was 13 years younger than Tochan and so . . .

Jesse: You don't know how old he was when he got married, do you?

J: 1865 was when he was born, I believe, and he was born in 1865, Kachan was 13 years younger, she was born in 1878, and Fusae must have been born about 1900 or something like that...

Jesse: Kachan would have been about 22 or so. . .

J: Maybe she was born earlier, I don't know.