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Koshiwaga, Hirishi

Interview

Jan. 1982

(Koshiro Futukawa)

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KOSHIRO FURUKAWA
January 15, 1982

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I was given Mr. Furakawa's name and telephone number by a Japanese American friend. But when I telephoned him he was, at first, very reluctant to talk to me. In consequence, when he gradually began to explain how he felt, I listened and encouraged him and did not ask him formal questions. I did not ask him when and where he was born. But since he spoke of "being about 18" before the war, he was probably 19 or 20 when he was evacuated.

After I explained the nature of my study in some detail, Mr. Furakawa asked me, "Are you writing a book or what?" I explained that I did not intend to publish anything without the advice of Japanese American friends and that I was doing this "because I think it's important."

Koshiro Furakawa: I don't want to be used by a professor who is out to, you know, to advance himself or herself.

Rosalie Wax: No, I'm 70, I'm at the end of that road.

KF: I see. So you are interested in recording it for history?"

RW: Yes.

KF: Okay.

KF: Yeah, I appreciate the fact that you are retired and you are not anxious to advance yourself, and so forth, because there are so many people, non Asian...who are in some kind of field of study and they have picked this subject and they come to us for material and I don't know. It is very personal. And I haven't really explored it for myself, so that I feel very reluctant. But I can appreciate the fact that you are, you know, doing it for history...

RW: Well, perhaps you'd be interested if I tell you a little about the general impressions I have so far. I've talked to about 15 people. One thing that is almost universal is...is the terrible trauma of having seen oneself as a citizen, as a Nisei, and expecting that you would be treated like a citizen and then being interned as if you were an enemy alien.

KF: Right.

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RW: And this is very touching.

KF: Well, in my case as I stated during the hearing, we were...our loyalty was questioned and this is what I resented and this is the cause of my trouble at Tule Lake. Because I didn't comply with the registration orders, and I was placed there and kept there and labeled a disloyal citizen of America. And I've had to live with that for all these years. That is what I tried to bring out in the hearings and so that caused a lot of problems.

RW: Yes, you know, it's only now, talking to people, that I've become aware of how deep this feeling of having been treated unjustly...how much that affected the Japanese Americans. And also,...how it distressed them to be considered guilty, dangerous and criminal.

KF: Right. The fact is that we were very loyal, we were extremely American...

RW: Yes.

KF: And this is what I really resented all these years, that I was denied to be an American - to prove that I was an American, because they questioned us. And that is the thing that really hurts. Because we were taught, we were brought up to be Americans, and then suddenly, you know, to be betrayed like that.

RW: A high proportion of the people I've talked to were either in the Army or had volunteered or even the women were preparing to be Army nurses.

KF: Right. Because some of the people...young men had been drafted and then they were rejected and sent to camp.

RE: Yes, that is quite...I'm surprised...they didn't tell me that in camp. But they tell that to me now. You know, when I ask them.

KF: I remember when some of the people were drafted, we had a young men's club and we would have a send-off party and I remember making patriotic speeches to send these people off and I was only about 18 or so, you know, but I remember making these speeches; and having little parties to send them off. Had I been of age, I would have gone, of course, willingly. But of course, being at Tule Lake it turned out to be a different story. But there is also another problem...there was this division where some people took one side and others decided that they would consider themselves loyal and there was a lot of ill feelings, you know, between the two. That has not, you know, been cleared and it still persists. That is a very painful thing even now and if we bring it up, we would still take the same sides, and...

RW: Are you saying that Japanese Americans are still split on this?

KF: Oh yes.

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- RW: Those who were not at Tule...those who said yes-yes, still are, how should one say, steer away from...
- KF: Right. And they are planning a Tule Lake Reunion in Sacramento this summer and when I saw the program I didn't want to register, because I know they are trying to be very, what do you call, ecumenical or what, trying to include everyone who went...had went to Tule Lake and that would include a lot of people who were there and then went out as loyal American Citizens. But you know, even at this date, I don't know them and I don't wish to meet them socially, you know. I don't know, maybe it's something that I carry within myself, but if this was a reunion of those who remained at Tule Lake, then I would go, but I don't think...I don't want to spend money to be dancing and having a great time with these other people, with whom I don't hold similar political views. I think our politics is affected by what we experienced during the camp.
- RW: In what way? I would be interested.
- KF: Well, I think those who declared themselves loyal would be more conservative, more successful, perhaps, materialistically, you know, would be more pro-Reagan, maybe, you know, and I don't like those people.
- RW: They are, how should we say, right-wingers?
- KF: Right. More conservative, more republican, more establishment. And I don't have friends like that. I don't associate with people like that. And I don't know, this is only my point of view. I feel that the same way as I did in Tule Lake, even now. We have three boys and I certainly do not want them to be drafted. And they have to register and maybe they should, especially since Reagan has now said he is going to carry on the draft. I don't believe in wars and I don't believe in people you know, fighting for Reagan and his policies and so, it still carries on, I'm still the same I must admit.
- RW: Well, I can't speak with any authority here, but I've gathered that that feeling persists more strongly in California, around the West coast.
- KF: Oh, probably.
- RW: I was startled here in St. Louis. I interviewed...first I interviewed a man who had been a very...he said his best friend at Tule Lake was Mr. Best, the project director, you know. And I was astonished. And he was supposedly so pro-administration that he was second on the list of inu after Hitomi, you know, who was killed. And then he helped the administration making speeches to the people, "get out - get out." This gentleman interestingly though, he recommended a friend of his who plays mah jong with him, and I interviewed the friend and I found out, that the friend had been a member of the Sokoku Seinen dan.
- KF: Oh, is that so?
- RW: And had repatriated to Japan for seventeen years and then come back here. And I thought, my goodness, such opposites becoming friends. Isn't that interesting?

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- KF: That's very interesting. And you know, we heard about inu and we heard about, you know people hating the inu and we weren't really sure. We thought it was more hearsay or rumor...there was so much rumor in camp, and yet, you know, later we find there were a lot of people who cooperated with the administration and spied on us and all this stuff that we find later. So that the situation was...well, you know, we were up against a lot of things...During the registration that was such a trauma. We weren't sure what was right or wrong and I don't know, we just followed how we felt, and also we wondered what some of our friends were doing and you know, mainly we just went with how we felt. And my father was outside and he wished that we would register and we would leave the camp, because he himself was at the mercy of white nurses and doctors, because he was outside.
- RW: How did that happen?
- KF: Well, he had TB.
- RW: Oh, I see, and so he wasn't evacuated.
- KF: He wasn't evacuated and he was there and I think people knew that his family was in Tule Lake, and in California and around where we were, you know, word was out that Tule Lake was the camp for disloyal Americans. And so I'm sure that he really suffered because of this.
- RW: Were you sent to Tule Lake right away or were you at another center?
- KF: No, we were at Tule Lake from the very beginning.
- RW: From the very beginning?
- KF: No, we were out from the country. And we were in the Assembly Center and from there we went to Tule Lake. We were there all during the duration, and we even went through the renunciation and that was another, you know, stupid thing that we got caught into doing, and partly it was our stupidity, but it was also, you know, forced on us by the, you know, the Congress and the people in power.
- RW: When I was there, I got the impression that the stupidity of at one time saying people were able to renounce...citizenship...and starting hearings and at the same time the WRA heads announcing that they are opening the coast and that people should relocate; that people got terribly scared. They thought that if they went out, they would be assaulted and killed. And I know some people renounced their citizenship, just to be able to stay in camp.
- KF: Yes, after so many years in camp, you know, one becomes a different person. Because only after we came out of camp, did we realize how different it was outside and wished that we had left camp, because camp was a very different place from the outside. And I know that psychologically we were not normal. And whenever we were up against some kind of problem, you know, the environment affected the way we make decisions and we reacted.

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We sort of accepted the situation, because we couldn't do otherwise. And we had to live day after day, live in that condition and those dust storms...

RW: ...and the mud.

KF: Yeah, but the dust storms that I can remember, that was so miserable. There was nothing we could do about it. It's like the rain and mudslides now, here. We would plan on something exciting for a day and all of sudden we would have these tremendous dust storms and everything would be ruined.

RW: You couldn't breathe.

KF: Frankly I think I should have left early, but when I applied for relocation, the students were the first to go. But when I applied, they told me that I had to have a thousand dollars.

RW: Really!

KF: Yes, because they wanted to be sure that I would be able to take care of myself, and so...

RW: This was the administration told you that? My gosh.

KF: Yes, the people who were in charge of student relocation. They said, "Do you have a thousand dollars in your account?" And I said, "No." Then he said, "Well, we can't even encourage you to go." And so I took that as a fact and decided that was out for me, you know, I was young, I was college material, and so I was ambitious and I wanted to go out, but then when I was told that...all my ambitions were dashed.

RW: How did you manage to get out then?

KF: I didn't. I was in camp until they let me out.

RW: You wanted to relocate...

KF: I wanted to relocate.

RW: At what time was that?

KF: This was very early

RW: And they wouldn't...

KF: Yeah, not unless you had money, you know, to take with you.

RW: Yes, that's right and then at the end they were pushing everybody out.

KF: In the end they tried to push everybody out. But at first they were very cautious, because it was sort of an experiment, to send the students out - to see how they were accepted and so forth. Of course, you know, I didn't have that kind of money and we came from a farm... A thousand

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dollars was big money then.

RW: Yes. It would be like five thousand now.

KF: Yes, for us, there were several others in the family. And then also another thing is, I had training in Japanese language, more so than a lot of the people who served in the language services, MIS and those things. At that point I was better trained than they were. Almost to a point where I could instruct others, and so I could have used that training and ability as, you know, in that service, but all this came to me much later after I had done all these other things, which had disqualified me from going out. I don't know, I don't regret what I did, but I don't know, maybe it could have been better.

RW: You know, I am curious how then did you manage when you did go out?

KF: Well, when I finally came out I came out without my citizenship. And so some things were closed to me unless I lied. And in some cases I lied. But I was able to go to UC in California, because the President, Gordon Sproul, I think was very pro-Japanese American...

RW: Yes, he was one of the few people who came out and protested the evacuation, you know.

KF: So I think I was able to go, pretending I was a regular student, otherwise, if I said I had no citizenship I would have to pay non-resident fee, in which case I wouldn't have been able to go. But because of Sproul, that was open, but there were other things I was interested in -- Foreign Service that was closed to me without citizenship and of course they would check on my records. And there were all kinds of other things. Even though I graduated from school, UCLA, I felt that, you know, jobs in teaching or other jobs were closed. So I came to Berkeley to, you know, bide my time, because at the time there was a law suit going where we were trying to recover our citizenship and so I spent several more years until I finally recovered my citizenship, and then I was free to pursue my career or whatever. But I felt that I wasted some time there.

RW: That really is kind of outrageous. Gosh.

KF: Yeah, but. . . (laughs)

RW: (laughs) Well, I...how should I say...I do thank you for what you have told me here.

KF: Well, I've told you just about everything anyway, but you know with the preface that I didn't really want to tell you. (laughs) But, yeah, I mean, if you feel that I still feel bitter about it, I do. And yet, you know, I've been able to live with it and make adjustments. I'm a professional librarian and I have been able to support a family and also pursue my interests as a writer, actor, and playwright.

RW: That's fine.

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KF: Yes, so I don't feel too bad. I've gotten my education enough that you know, I went to UCLA and then I went to Cal. and went back to get my library degree, so that I could get a job. And I don't feel that I want to go anymore. I didn't really care for the academic life, so being more of an artist, I feel pretty good. I feel good about my family and so it is all right.

RW: Okay. I do thank you. Every person I...one wonderful thing is that you might be interested in this - You know as social scientists one should look for generalities and you know, it's like a lovely piece of pottery. Each one has its own individuality and they are human beings. And so if I do write anything on it, this is what I'm going to emphasize.

KF: Oh good. I wish you a lot of luck.

RW: The same to you and thank you kindly.

KF: You're welcome. It's been a pleasure.

RW: Good night.

Koshiro Furakawa

Koshiro Furakawa was 19 or 20 years old at the time of the evacuation.

He was, at first, reluctant to talk to me, explaining: "I don't want to be used by a professor who is out to advance himself or herself." I thereupon offered to tell him some of the general impressions I had gained from my previous interviews. ~~As a result of this conversation~~ He agreed with all of them, and, as we conversed, he began to tell me about some of his experiences. He told

~~me that soon after his arrival at Tule Lake, he had tried to relocate. But the people in charge of student relocation~~

~~relocation~~ had asked him, "Do you have a thousand dollars in your account?"

He said, "No." They said, "~~That's all right~~ Well, we can't even encourage you to go." At the end of our talk, I asked him, "You know, I'm curious, ~~how~~ how did you manage when you did get out. He replied:

KF: Well, when I finally came out I came out without my citizenship. And so some things were closed to me unless I lied. And in some cases I lied. But I was able to go to UC in California, because the President, Gordon Sproul, I think was very pro-Japanese American. . .

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KF: Oh good. I wish you a lot of luck.

RW: The same to you and thank you kindly.

KF: You're welcome. It's been a pleasure.

RW: Good night.

Lillian Noma

Miss Noma was 21 years old at the time of the evacuation, ^{and she was} ~~was~~ ~~was~~, at ~~that time~~ ^{she was} employed at the state capital. After ~~Pearl~~ Pearl Harbor she received a letter "saying that my presence was very upsetting to my co-workers because of my Japanese descent and that hereby ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ they were terminating my employment." She and her family were sent to the Tule Lake Relocation Center. At Tule Lake she was married. Early in 1946 she and her ~~xx~~ husband relocated to New York City, where her husband had been promised a job by the War Relocation Authority.

We went to New York City, ~~xxx~~ and, of course, I could find a job. But he was promised a job that never ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ materialized. That was WRA. They wanted you to get out of camp.

Well, I found an ~~office~~ office job right away, but ~~xxxx~~ what could he do with a Japanese college education - he became a bus boy. He did lapidary work for a ~~xxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxxx~~ while, but that was dying out. So he did restaurant and bus boy work. And then, he checked around with the Japanese Buddhist Temple and found they wanted domestic work.

I wasn't feeling well yet from my operation and the fact that I couldn't have children was a psychological. . . emotional thing.

So he took ~~xxxxxxxx~~ domestic work and ^{we} went to Fall River, Massachusetts. And the work was too heavy. I had to cook for a family of 5 children and a couple, and they brought home a mother from an insane asylum. And then, the children were college students who would bring home guests. So, since my brothers had relocated to Cleveland, we came here because my ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ parents were here.

And then, my marriage didn't work out, and I was divorced. After 7 years I remarried and I have been married for the past 20 years. My husband is an engineer, and I have worked as a secretary all these years. This is my 35th year.

* * * * *

RW: Well, (pause) . . . I'll ask another question. Looking . . . This is a wierdo. Looking back, what was the most helpful thing you learned about your fellow human beings through all this experience, would you say?

LN: Oh golly, I don't know. . . .

RW: Well then, we'll just skip that. . . .

Jan

LN: ~~Because~~ I noticed when war started my classmates stopped talking to me; on the street they didn't even see me. They saw right through me. And then trying to find a place to live. Why, if you were a Japanese, the vacancy sign didn't mean anything. But on the whole, I think people have been kind, especially the ethnic groups.

RW: Yes, and this is in Cincinnati?

LN: Cleveland. . .

RW: Pardon me, in Cleveland.

LN: Right.

RW: And which ethnic groups especially have been. . . ?

LN: Cleveland is a mixture. I've made many Irish friends, Slovenian friends, Slovenians and Bohemians.

LN. I'm sorry I didn't respond when ~~xxx~~ Wataru wrote to me. . . even now, people just because of your oriental features, you're not considered an American.

RH: Well, by me you are. (laughs)

LN: (laughs) Well, by ~~me~~ you are. that's the way it goes.