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Koisumi, Mrs.

Interview

1981

(Mary Sida)

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type
Mrs. Koizumi

November 17, 1981

Dr. Wax:

Mary Iida:

M.I.: Hello?

R.W.: Hello, is this Mrs. Iida?

M.I.: Yes.

R.W.: This is Professor Rosalie Wax and the Rockefeller Foundation has given me a little money to talk to people who were at Tule Lake, and I did talk to Mr. K. Kuchi; had a lovely talk with him, and he recommended that I might talk to your husband, who is a friend of his.

M.I.: Yes, he's busy working now.

R.W.: Oh, He's working..

M.I.: Yes, this is the end of the season, so he is quite busy right now.

R.W.: Oh. I wouldn't want to... should I wait.. how long should I wait... ~~because this thing goes on until September...~~ would you suggest before I try again?

M.I.: Let's see, he should be done this morning.. Oh, I don't know... ah, is this the only day you have?

R.W.: Oh no, I could call any time or even wait a week or two if he's very busy now.

M.I.: He's a landscape gardener, and this is ~~the~~.

~~R.W.:~~ Oh yes.

~~M.I.:~~ close to the end of the season, and he's having to do all kinds of..

R.W.: Should I maybe wait a week...

M.I.: Yes, maybe that might be, or he's always home on rainy days; can't do much outdoors.

R.W.: Oh, I see a rainy day, ^aterrible rainy day would be a good day to catch him.

M.I.: Yes, it would be, only tomorrow he said he had to take his truck in, so even if it rained tomorrow he may..

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R.W. Tomorrow wouldn't be..

M.I.: Otherwise, he should be home or we're home just about every evening.

R.W.: Yes.. I could call in the evening. What would be a convenient time?

M.I.: Oh, any evening, any time..

R.W. Is 7 too early?

M.I.: Ah, 7...I work too and I don't get home as early either, and then... maybe 7:30 would be better.

R.W.: 7:30..

M.I. Yes.

R.W.: Okay, I'll try. Were you in Tule Lake yourself?

M.I. Yes, I was there too, yes.

R.W.: Well, maybe you would be..would you have time to talk to me since I've got you..

M.I.: Well, if it won't take too much..

R.W.: Well, this takes about a half an hour, and so I could call another time if you are occupied now.

M.I.: One of our friends passed away and we have funeral home to go to..

~~R.W.: Oh, you have a funeral to go to..~~

~~M.I.: Yes.~~

R.W.: Well, why don't I then just.. I think it would be good manners of me to put it off..

M.I.: Now, if you get my husband in the evening, I'm available nighttime too.

R.W.: You prefer the nighttime, rather than the weekend?

M.I.: Yes, because we have everything left for the weekend..

Well, I do ~~and I do.~~ *prefer*

R.W.: ..the evenings.

M.I. Yes.

R.W.: 7:30 or after.

M.I. Yes, anytime from tomorrow night on.

R.W.: Anytime from tomorrow - not tomorrow night.

M.I.: No, tomorrow night ~~in daytime~~.. my husband.. we might have to go to car dealer, but after tomorrow night is ^{*all night*} ~~alright~~.

R.W.: Okay. Well, that will give me something to look forward to and I'll call any night after tomorrow. You know my own

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schedule is crazy too, so if there is a good T.V. program, I'll be tempted. (Laughs)

M.I.: Oh, you're like my husband since we got this cable T.V. in. He's watching I don't know.. I haven't got the time to watch, so I just don't watch, but he watches (laughs). He tells me, "Why don't you watch, I got one for you too. We have.. he watches one thing and he thought I might like something else, so I have my other set, but I have never watched cable T.V. or anything.

R.W.: (laughs) Neither have I. But anyway, I'm glad you're both happy and.. You see, I lived in Tule Lake for a year and a half myself.

M.I.: Oh, yes..

R.W.: I was.. I don't know you may.. of course you may be very young. I was Rosalie Hankey then and I was working for the University of California Evacuation Resettlement Study.

M.I.: Oh, I see.

R.W.: So, I really know what it was like..of course, nobody could know except the Japanese who went through it, you know.

M.I.: Well, I was not doing anything. I don't know too, too much, but I just lived there like any other.. We moved there from Arkansas camp..

R.W.: Oh, Rowher.

M.I.: Rowher, that's where we went from and my son was born in Tule Lake..

R.W.: Yes.. so then..

M.I.: And from there we went to Japan..

R.W.: Oh, you went to Japan, well then I really would want to talk to you because, well, I don't want to keep you on the phone too long now, but I just.. most people found that that business of going to Japan very, very unhappy business.

M.I.: Oh, it was.

R.W.: Yeah.

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M.I.: I had never been there; I was born and raised here.

R.W.: Yeah.

M.I.: My husband was born here, but raised there..

R.W.: Yes.

M.I.: His father had passed away and everything else, so he had quite a bit of land and all that that he had to look after. That was why we had gone back. But, it was just a terrifying experience; very bad.

R.W.: WELL, how should I say it. I know it was bad, but I ^{would} ~~want to keep a historical record and I will~~ ^{like to} talk to you and how should I say - things are not so bad now.. (laughs).

M.I.: No, for us we have been fortunate that I have a large family back in this country..

R.W.: Yeah.

M.I.: And I was the only one that had gone.. my husband had nobody here, but since I came back in ^{and} ~~and~~ then my parents were still here in St. Louis..

R.W.: Yes..

✓ M.I.: So, I came here to look after them, and so it wasn't too bad.. I guess we worked hard; we had to.. those years we had spent in Japan was a lost time.

R.W.: Yes.

M.I.: So, I guess we were very fortunate. Our son did very well in school.

R.W.: Yes, well that must be a great pleasure.

M.I.: Yes, so he put himself through university all on his own; we had never helped him one cent.

R.W.: What university did he go through?

M.I.: He went to Washington U on..

R.W.: Yes, I'm a professor there.

M.I.: And then he went to University of Pittsburgh on Mellon grant _____ (92)

R.W.: Oh, great.

M.I.: And then he went to University of Massachusetts; there he had teaching grants, and I don't know what else, but he earned himself two master degrees and bachelor degree. He's a nuclear physicist now.

R.W.: Oh my goodness, that's really great.

M.I.: So, he did very well; he studying yet for another degree (laughs). He'll never quit.

R.W.: No, I know how it is with my husband; he never wants to stop working.

M.I.: No, it's just like my son; he enjoys life..

R.W.: Yeah, and it is a wonderful thing to enjoy your work that way.

M.I.: Yes, he enjoys and it gives us..Oh, we have been more than fortunate in the way that he has grown up, you know. He never gave us any trouble, never.. all through that '60's.. there was so much trouble.

R.W.: Yeah.

M.I.: Or the early 70's when he was in Pittsburgh.. the blocks of houses burning.. oh he used to come and say, "mom, I could see fire, it was burning everything." This was from his dormitory window he used to tell us, but he never got involved in anything. Oh we.. all that narcotics and all that.. he is just deathly against all that.. oh we were just fortunate.

R.W.: Yes, that was very..When I was in Kansas at the university there, they burned the students'.. they tried to burn down the student union.. some of these nutty students. But it was wonderful how the other students got together and helped the firemen and they put it out.

M.I. Yes, you hear of so many things and then when you have a child, gee, I used to be..oh, I don;t know, deep inside of me, I was frightened, although I felt that boy ought to have a little more sense and he did (laughs).

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R.W.: Oh that must be great satisfaction and pleasure..

M.I.: It is. Please feel free to call anytime during week nights; that's fine.

R.W.: That's very kind of you and I'll do that.

M.I.: All right.

R.W.: Thank you so much.

M.I.: You're welcome. Good-bye.

R.W.: Good-bye.

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January, 1982

Mary Iida

Mrs. Iida was born in Stockton, California in 1919. She is the wife of Ralph Iida, who, in 1981, was also one of my respondents.

RW: Do you remember a little about your life before the evacuation?

MI: Oh, I was born and raised in Stockton, California I went to school there and then prior to the evacuation I was working.

RW: At what were you working?

MI: I was working at a theatre, selling tickets. Box office.

RW: And how did you parents earn their living?

MI: Oh, my father used to be - well, my mother just...there were so many of us, she never did work to earn anything. She was just a plain housewife.

RW: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

MI: Eight. And I'm the oldest. Back in those days, when nothing was automatic or electric, we used to have to do everything by hand. So I would always be the one to help. My parents were from the old country where, being the oldest, I had to set the example of the younger ones. So I always had to be good, do well in school and everything else.

And because of the language difficulty, we went to the American school in the daytime and right after that, we had to go to private Japanese school. Right after American school we had to hurry home - it was two miles from where I lived - and then, right away, turn around and go to the Japanese school. It started about 5:00...So when we got home it was about 6:00, or if we had to clean the blackboard it was after 6:30.

RW: That's a hard schedule.

MI: And then they gave us lots of homework.

RW: From both schools?

MI: From both schools.

RW: If you can remember, did you have any hopes for the future, what you wanted to be?

MI: Back in those days, my father was the type who didn't believe in women working. So my mother never did work. My father was more like a, he worked on a big farm, 2,000 acres. They raised mostly potatoes and all that, and he'd be a salaried man there. And he was able to come home only on weekends of course.

And then because of the private school I went to, I do read, write, everything in Japanese. I have been able to retain what I had learned. Some people have forgotten. My sisters, all of them went, but some have completely forgotten.

RW: But, you can still read and write Japanese?

MI: Read, write, speak. But you know, because of the different dialects, when I went to Japan, they knew right away I was not one of them. (laughs)

RW: You had an American accent?

MI: That's what they told me. It was a mixture of all kinds of dialects.

RW: You can't win.

MI: No (laughs)

RW: Can you tell me how you felt when you heard the government saying that the Japanese American people had to leave their homes and go to Assembly Centers?

MI: I am a Nisei and when I first heard that, it didn't, (pause) I don't know exactly what to think or, it just didn't..Gee..to leave house and then to be herded in kind of a camp like. I said, 'It doesn't seem possible.' But if the government had to do that, they did. Well, at the time, it didn't bother me so much. But when it started to..that was a lot of work. We took a big loss. And then you had to find storage for some of the things you wanted to keep. I mean it was..that was a lot worse than when the news first came out. When we actually had to pack and then leave, and people trying to sell things and then...like the refrigerator was \$2.00 - and stuff like..that..you start to realize.

It seemed to unreal. That was about all, I thought.

RW: Well, some people have told me that when heard it and they couldn't believe it.

MI: I didn't believe it, and I said 'Well'. But then I knew when the war first broke out too. Gee, I didn't believe it, but then it was true, I said 'Well.' In the meantime we did hear a lot of rumors about the alien parents being put in one place and then we would be just like any other citizens and then not be interned. And then they said we would be taken all together and sent away to someplace. Well, all kinds of rumors fly around. But when it actually came time to evacuate, it was the families stayed together, which in most cases was for the best I guess, you know. It was hard to believe.

RW: Mary Iida and her family were sent to the Stockton Assembly Center. They had a particularly difficult time because "there were five girls and three boys", the "rooms" had no ceilings and no walls. Only dividers. "If you climbed on something, you could look over the divider. I mean it wasn't too pleasant." IN the Stockton center Mary Iida taught Sunday school and "they gave me a job like block manager. Why, I don't know."

The family was then sent to the Rohwer Assembly Center.

'In Rohwer, of course, everything was a lot more, I won't say permanent, but then it was not on a short term, temporary basis. The houses had double walls and the floors were elevated, so weeds didn't come through. We had steps and we had a big-wood-burning, coal-burning stove right in the middle of the room to keep us warm.

I was happy to see the elementary school and the high school come up, so that the youngsters were able to go to school. Most of the teachers were recruited among us evacuees. They may not have had a teaching degree, but they were all college graduates, and they taught...but I still worked in the block manager's office.

While she was in Rohwer, Mary Iida was sometimes allowed to go to a town nearby the camp for shopping..."This was also with Army soldiers and with guns escorting, you know." She and the Japanese Americans with her decided to go to a movie. But the woman at the ticket box would not let them in, because all seats in the white section were taken. "In the meantime a bunch of colored people came and they went in. So we went back again and tried our luck."

And we were told the same thing. So finally one of the (Japanese American) men asked why we were not allowed to go in. Was it because we were Orientals? And the girl in the ticket box said: "No." She said in a human race you are either black or white. And then she looked at us and she said, "You people are not black." We said, "No." "But then you have to be white, and we have no open seats for the white now."

Mrs. Iida told me that the same thing happened when she and the other evacuees tried "to go to the bathroom" or tried to check out groceries at Krogers. That is, they were obliged to use the white rest room and stand in the white line, because they were not black and consequently, they must be white.

RW: You went into the black side?

MI: The short line was for colored people and the longer line was for white people. The white people line was long. They're buying everything. But we had to go there or we couldn't buy. And then if you ask them why, they say, you're either black or white. And then she said surely you're not black, we said 'No.' Then it's only white.

RW: I was going to ask in the relocation centers, whether you remember this military registration, "yes-yes, no-no" business?

MI: Oh, vaguely. By that time I was married.

RW: Oh, you married Mr. Iida in Rowher?

MI: Rowher, that's right. So my husband was going back to...he was a "No-No" so I thought, "what could I do?" So I just went along.

RW: Oh.

MI: I don't think I ever said "no-No", I don't know.

RW: And your husband said "no-No" and then did you go with him to Tule Lake and you your family stayed in Rohwer?

MI: Yes. That's why me and my husband went to Tule Lake. That's how I got there.

RW: I see. Didn't you miss you family or how did you feel at that time?

MI: You know, actually, I didn't think that, well, I don't know, I didn't think it would be a permanent thing. It was what I thought at the time. Maybe I didn't give it too much of a thought. I'm no sure what I thought.

RW: Thinking back, now you are in Tule Lake, is there anything that especially comes to your mind that happened there?

MI: Well, in Tule Lake I was was very inactive. I didn't do anything. I was just a plain housewife. Because I had my son, and our son was born there, and so the sewing maching came around once in...whatever, and when the sewing machine came, boy, you were busy, sewing in between your cutting up and everything. I never got bored. I din't have time to be bored. But I didn't do anything for the public or anything.

RW: Did you have any friends?

MI: Oh, when I got there, I didn't, no, I didn't have any friends. But I made friends.

And the children weren't that many. And then my son was just an infant and then there were so many older, like my parents' age, you know, who had nothing to do, so then they would look after my son while I went to laundry. Well, we had to use those scrub boards and do our laundry. So while we did that, there was always someone to look after the child. And I don't know. Some of the friends I made there are still very good friends of ours. It became a permanent friendship.

RW: How did it happen then that you went to Japan, you and your husband?

MI: Well, my husband said he was going so then his father had passed away.

RW: His father in Japan?

MI: In Japan. His father was in Japan, but just before the outbreak of the war he had passed away. It was before the war. And then my husband was thinking of going back to Japan because he's the oldest in his family. But then before he ever got going, the war broke out and then that was it, he couldn't go any more.

RW: Did he have brothers and sisters in Japan?

MI: He had one sister and a brother. So then my husband's parents' father had left him quite a bit. And then he had to look after his brother and sister, so we decided we'd go.

RW: How long were you in Japan?

MI: Seven years.

RW: And how did it impress you as a Nisei from America?

MI: It was...I had a very bad impression.

RW: Can you tell me about it?

MI: See, I went back when...to begin with there was no food. Now that always makes everybody more like, I mean, what I had learned and what I had heard about Japan and its people and all that was everything was very good. But once I got myself over there, everything was negative to what I had been thinking. It was very depressing.

RW: It must have been very hard...

MI: But of course I was there and I had to make the best of, you know, with what I had, but I was fortunate that I did have all my family here (in United States) and then I had a brother in occupational force in Tokyo.

RW: You were saying that people had a grudge.

MI: You see, that means another mouth to be fed. Of course that was in the beginning. Later I made many friends with the native Japanese people. Well, I didn't know, what to make of my own self too.

RW: It must have been a very difficult adjustment.

MI: Because I didn't know their customs and everything. I made many mistakes. Everything I did was backwards or wrong or I had...I put my shoes on where I wasn't suppose to and oh, I've made my shares of errors.

RW: Did...was there anything that helped you?

MI: Well, of course I had the child and regardless, I had to feed him, grow up in good health... Now that was the biggest thing on my mind while I lived there.

RW: Did he make out all right?

MI: He turned out perfect.

RW: Wonderful.

MI: He was very healthy. Aside from...when he was four years old he wanted to go to school so badly, we registered him in a church nursery school. He was four years old. He was happy. But maybe a month after he had started this little nursery school, he came home and was sick with measles. And then he got over that and went back to school for a few days. Then he came down with chicken pox.

RW: Oh my goodness.

MI: And then he went back for...finally got back and then he came down with mumps. And that did it. He wasn't going to go back no more. (laughs)

RW: (laughs) What's he doing now?

MI: He's a nuclear-physicist.

RW: Oh boy. I guess he was smart.

MI: And then when it was time for him to go to school, when he was six years old, he wasn't going to go.

RW: Yeah, with his experience. Was that in Japan?

MI: Yes, this was in Japan. He went to school for two years in Japan. Regular Japanese public school. And so I had to tell him, I said well, he had the measles, the chicken pox, and mumps, he can't have too many more. So I promised him, I said if you ever get sick again, I'll take you out of school and never go again, but try once more. Because he always wanted us to read so much to him and after a while when it gets repetitious, you try to maybe skip a page or skip a line, no, he knew what we had skipped.

RW: He was very bright.

MI: So then at six years old, I said if you read yourself, you won't have to ask me, you won't have to wait until the dishes are done, until the meal was over with, you could read anytime you feel like. Oh that he liked. So I told him to go to school. Mommy can't teach you, but the teachers will. So then he decided, Mommy, you always promise something and you keep it. Now he remembers that I never broke a promise to him. So he says, 'Mommy, you promised me you would take me out.' So he was going, so he went and he hasn't stopped yet.

MI: He went to school and he liked it. He would come running home, then eat, go running back, you know for the two years he was there, he was on the honors role.

RW: That's wonderful. Can I ask how it was then that you came back to the United States?

MI: When we first came back?

RW: How it was that you decided to come back?

MI: Well, the boy had to go to school. See, he was an American citizen and then I thought, well gee...had I stayed there forever, I didn't know enough...

MI: I guess I would get by, but I thought, to me, my family was here (in United States) and this is my...I was born and raised here. There was always this desire that I would like to come back. So then the chance came, so my son and I, we just decided to come.

RW: And how did you come to St. Louis then?

MI: You see, after Rowher, my parents decided that they weren't going back to California. And so they started moving out with many other families. When they came up to St. Louis, I guess quite a few families decided to stay here. That's why they bought a house, they did everything...Then when I was coming back to this country, my mother had wrote me that she was ill. So, then my sisters all thought if I came back, I could look after my mother. So that was the reason I came to St. Louis. People asked me, 'Boy, you were a native Californian, why did you come all the way out here?' Well, that was the reason, and I had my mother until she passed on. She was ill for six and a half years and she passed on.

RW: My goodness...When I talked to your husband, I think he said, didn't he stay in Japan longer?

MI: He stayed, yes.

RW: How many years was he there before he came here?

MI: Seven more.

RW: Seven more years. Why was that? Was it hard to get his citizenship back or....?

MI: Yes, that was part of the reason. See, mine was...I just packed along so it wasn't...mine was nothing I guess.

RW: But then he had to wait and get his citizenship back.

MI: For the clearance, yes.

RW: That must have been hard to be separated.

MI: You see, that's why I came to live with my parents. And then my mother was ill, and then I still had a brother that was still going to school. My youngest brother was still going to school.

RW: Your son is a nuclear-physicist?

MI: He's a Washington University graduate too.

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MI: My son went there and then to Pittsburgh, and then to Massachusetts. Now he's getting this video education or whatever from Illinois IIT, that's where he's studying for another Masters.

RW: Gee, I'm very happy to hear that and...

MI: Professionally, he is a nuclear-physicist.

RW: And for yourself here, what kind of work are you doing now?

MI: I do heavy accounting.

RW: You do what kind of account?

MI: Heavy, detailed. Banking, interest, all that.

RW: Good for you.

MI: Lots of other people's money. Millions of other people's money. But when I first came back here (from Japan)...what hit me the most how abundant everything was. My son has never forgotten that either.

RW: Compared to what Japan was like.

MI: Of course, now Japan has everything in abundance right now. But when I came back in 1953 they were just getting back on their feet. So when we came back here and all these supermarkets were stocked so much, it was a good feeling to know that now you could buy whatever you felt like. Not have to take what they gave out. And then pay for it. Things at the beginning it was rationed, and sometimes the food, you would just didn't like or didn't know what to do with it, so you didn't want, but then if it's rationed you just had to take your share.

RW: Well, I'm sure glad you came back.

MI: Oh, I am too. One of these days' we might, my husband like to go back. In a few years, I'll retire and then we will have all the time.

RW: That will be nice. Well, I want to thank you very much. You spoke very honestly and clearly and to the point. You sound like you have the intellect of a mother who has a son who is a nuclear-physicist.

MI: Well, today I never forgot that I am a mother. Like one thing at work, I tell people, I said, I would never do anything that I can't do in front of my sone. That I'm pretty firm.

January, 1982

MARY IIDA

Mrs. Iida was born in Stockton, California in 1919. She is the wife of Ralph Iida, who, in 1981, was also one of my respondents.

R. Wax: Do you remember a little about your life before the evacuation?

M. Iida: Oh, I was born and raised in Stockton, California. I went to school there and then prior to the evacuation I was working.

R. Wax: At what were you working?

from here
RW. M. Iida: I was working at a theatre, selling tickets. Box office.

M I. R. Wax: And how did your parents earn ~~their~~ their living?

M. Iida: Oh, my father used to be - well, my mother just. . . There were so many of us, she never did work to earn anything. She was just a plain housewife.

R. Wax: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Eight. And I'm the ~~eldest~~ eldest. Back in these days, when

nothing was automatic or ~~electric~~ electric, we used to have to do everything by hand. So I would always be the one to help. My

parents were from the old country where, being the eldest, I had to set the example of the youngsters. So I always had to be good, do well,

in school and everything else.

And because of the language difficulty, we went to the American

school in the daytime and right after that, we had to go to

private Japanese school. Right after American school we had to

hurry home - it was two miles from where I lived - and then,

right away, turn around and go to the Japanese school. It started

about 5:00. . . So when we got home it was about ~~6:00~~ 6:00, or

if we had to clean the blackboard it was after 6:30.

R. Wax; That's a hard ~~schedule~~ schedule.

M. Iida ; And then they gave us lots of homework

RW: From both schools?

MI: From both schools.

RW: If you can remember, did you have any hopes for the future, what you wanted to be?

MI: Back in those days, my father was the type who didn't believe in women working. So my mother never did work. My father was more like a, he worked on a big farm, 2,000 acres. They raised mostly potatoes and all that, and he'd be a salaried man there. And he was able to come home only on weekends of course. ~~See we lived in the city. My father also didn't like the country schools.~~

RW: ~~You lived in the city and your father would go out to work. I haven't talked to anyone who had that kind of experience before.~~

MI: And then because of the private school I went to, I do read, write, everything in Japanese. I have been able to retain what I had learned. Some people have forgotten. My sisters, all of them went, but some have completely forgotten.

RW: But, you can still read and write Japanese, [?] that's ~~very~~ good.

MI: Read, write, speak.

RW: ~~I only learned a very little in the centers, but you know I was really working too hard to learn very much Japanese, but I got so, I could kind of understand what people said.~~

MI: But you know, because of the different dialects, when I went to Japan, they knew right away I was not one of them. (laughs)

RW: (laughs) You had an American accent?

MI: That's what they told me. It was a mixture of all kinds of dialects.

RW: ~~Yeah, I can see that. You can't win.~~

MI: No (laughs)

R. Wax:

return to
complete interview

RW: ~~But then it's good to have a regular job, I find. Anyway, I should get back to the interview now, let me see. I'd like to ask now about some of the first stages of the evacuation. Can you tell me how you felt when you heard the government saying that the Japanese American people had to leave their homes and go to Assembly Centers?~~

MI: ~~We were to leave for the Assembly Centers, well. . .~~

RW: ~~How did you feel when you heard that?. You were a Nisei.~~

MI: ~~Yes, I am a Nisei and when I first heard that, it didn't, (pause) I don't know exactly what to think or. .it just didn't. .Gee. . .to leave house and then to be herded in kind of a camp like. I said, 'It doesn't seem possible.' But if the government had to do that, they did. Well, at the time, it didn't bother me so much. But when the actual registration started to take place and we had to be registered and everything else and then we had to get rid of our belongings - that's when it started to. . that was a lot of work. We took a big loss. And then you had to find storage for some of the things you wanted to keep. I mean it was. .that was a lot worse than when the news first came out. At that time I was still living at home, not married or anything. I don't know how my parents actually took - to me. .at the time I said, 'Well,' and that was about it. But like I said, when we actually had to pack and then leave, and people trying to sell things and then. . .like the refrigerator was \$2.00 - and stuff like. .that. .you start to realize.~~

RW: ~~Oh boy, that must have been a shock.~~

MI: ~~It was, but until then it didn't. .it seemed so unreal. That was about all, I thought.~~

RW: ~~Well, some people have told me that when heard it and they couldn't believe it.~~

MI: ~~I didn't believe it, and I said 'Well'. But then I knew when the war first broke out too. Gee, I didn't believe it, but then it was true, I said 'Well.' In the meantime we did hear a lot of rumors about the alien parents being put in one place and then we would be just like any other citizens and then not be interned. And then they said we would be taken all together and sent away to someplace. Well, all kinds of rumors fly around. But when it actually came time to evacuate, it was the families stayed together, which in most cases was for the best I guess, you know.~~

RW: ~~Oh yes, I think so.~~

MI: ~~It was hard to believe.~~

RW: ~~Which Assembly Center were you sent to then?~~

MI: ~~Stockton. It was actually a county fairgrounds, Stockton County Fairgrounds.~~

RW: ~~Do you remember anything that happened there that. . .~~

MI: ~~Well, after we got settled there, I still taught Sunday School. They gave me, I still had a job like block manager - that's the kind of job they gave me, why I don't know, but I was assigned to that kind of job all the way.~~

RW: ~~Is there anything that happened in the Assembly Center that makes you feel good when you think about it today?~~

MI: ~~No. There is nothing. I used to feel sorry for these single young men, that were put into the actual horse stables.~~

RW: ~~Yeah, I've talked to some of them - with grass growing up under their feet.~~

MI: ~~The houses that we had did have a floor, but the weeds came through.~~

RW: ~~Yeah, that's what I heard.~~

MI: ~~So the houses were, had that tar paper, but the people poked holes and so there were families with girls like my family, there were five girls and three boys. My parents weren't too happy. And then, we didn't have a ceiling either. It was just a room divider in this army barrack type. So then there were five, I think five or six families got into one. .it was partitioned off, but then if you bought something and then climbed~~

[illegible]

4 In Rohwer, of course, everything was a lot more, I won't say permanent, but then it was not on a short^{er} term, temporary basis. The houses had double walls and the floors were elevated, so weeds didn't come through. We had steps and we had a big, wood-burning, coal-burning stove right in the middle of the room to keep us warm.

I was happy to see the elementary school and the high school come up, so that the youngsters were able to go to school. Most of the teachers were recruited among us evacuees. They may not have had a teaching degree, but they were all college graduates, and they taught. . . But I still worked in the block manager's office.

While she was in Rehwer, ~~XXXXX~~ Mary Iida was ~~fortunate enough to be~~ ^{some times} allowed to go to a town nearby the camp for shopping. . . "This was also with Army soldiers and with guns escorting, you know." She and the ~~XXXXXX~~ Japanese Americans with her decided to go to a ~~XXXX~~ movie. But the ~~XX~~ woman ~~xxx~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ at the ticket box would not let them in, because all seats in the ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ "white section" were taken." In the meantime a ~~XXXXXX~~ bunch of colored people came and they went in. So we went back again and tried our luck."

And we were told the same thing. So finally one of the (Japanese American) men asked why we were not allowed to go in. Was it because we were Orientals? And the girl in the ticket box said: "No." She said in human race you are either black or white. And

then she looked at us and she said, "You people are not ~~black~~ black."
We said, "No."

"But then ~~you~~ you have to be white, and we have no open
seats for the White now."

Mrs. Iida told me that the same thing happened when she and the other
evacuees tried "to go to the bathroom" or tried to check out ~~xx~~ groceries
at Krogers. That is, they were obliged to use the White rest room and
stand in the White line, because they were not Black and consequently, they
must be White.

RW: You went into the black side?

MI: So then we weren't given anything. They just shooed us out without saying anything, just like chasing some kids out, you know, we just came out - we were too timid to say anything.

RW: Do you think they were telling you the truth or were they really just lying?

MI: No, no, later on it was like that. So we want to go to bathroom, so they said hotel so and so, but there too the door said "black" and "white" and you had to go in the white side. And then before going home we decided to go shopping and at the department store we couldn't tell too much, but we went to Kroger and we bought a little sugar, and I don't know what else we bought, but it wasn't much, but we went into Kroger and then we knew it was time for us to leave. See we had a set time, so we got into this line to check out. There were only two lines. It was a small Kroger store. I mean that was the first time I ever saw Kroger. I didn't even know that was a supermarket or anything, but anyway, it said Kroger. We tried to check out, and then the girl said 'No,' you have to get in the other line.

RW: Gosh.

MI: The short line was for colored people and the longer line was for white people. The white people line was long. They're buying everything. But we had to go there or we couldn't buy. And then if you ask them why, they say, you're either black or white. And then she said surely you're not black, we said 'No.' Then it's only white, so you have to get...

RW: I was going to ask in the relocation centers, whether you remember this military registration, "yes-yes, no-no" business?

MI: Oh, vaguely. By that time I was married.

RW: Oh, you married Mr. Iida in Rowher?

MI: Rowher, that's right. So my husband was going back to... he was a "No-No" so I thought, what could I do? So I just went along. That was about it.

RW: Oh.

MI: I don't think I ever said "No-No", I don't know.

RW: And your husband said "No-No" and then did you just go with him and your family stayed in Rowher?

MI: Yes. That's why me and my husband went to Tule Lake. That's how I got there.

RW: I see. See, didn't you miss your family or how did you feel at that time?

MI: You know, actually, I didn't think that, well, I don't know, I didn't think it would be a permanent thing. It was what I thought at the time. Maybe I didn't give it too much of a thought. I'm not too sure what I thought.

RW: Well, as a young woman just married, why I can appreciate that, you know.

MI: So I just went to Tule Lake.

RW: Thinking back, now you are in Tule Lake, is there anything that especially comes to your mind that happened there?

MI: Well, in Tule Lake I was very inactive. I didn't do anything. I was just a plain housewife. Because I had my son, and our son was born there, and so the sewing machine came around once in... whatever, and when the sewing machine came, boy, you were busy, sewing in between your cutting up and everything. I mean I never had, I never got bored. I didn't have time to be bored, but I didn't do anything for the public or anything.

RW: Did you have any friends?

MI: Oh, when I got there, I didn't, no, I didn't have any friends, but you, well these Nisies, you got to be friends, you know, your neighbors from here and there and you talk

MI: ^{But} ~~about where are you from. . . I made friends, but quite a few people they were from Southern California.~~

RW: ~~A few people that I talked to have really led very solitary lives in Tule Lake. They just hardly talked to anybody. This is sometimes married couples, but in your case, you did have friends you could talk to.~~

MI: ~~Oh, friends, yes, and the children weren't that many, and then my son was just an infant and then there were so many older, like my parents' age, you know, who had nothing to do, so then they would look after my son while I went to laundry. Well, we had to use a scrub, those scrub boards and do our laundry. So while we did that, there was always someone to look after the child. And I don't know. Some of the friends I made there are still very good friends of ours. It became a permanent friendship.~~

RW: Yes, are they here in St. Louis?

MI: No, in Los Angeles.

RW: But you still correspond? That's very nice.

MI: Last time we visited them.

RW: That's unusual, you know. Many people I ask if you know anybody else who was in Tule Lake and they say "No". I think it's healthy to have kept . . .

MI: Well, when we went to Japan, the people that went to Japan, now there weren't too many that I knew. You know, the friends that I had made in Tule Lake, they stayed behind or I don't know where they went, but they weren't there. Only a few families that I knew went on to Japan. So I don't know, it wasn't that solitary, I guess.

RW: I understand. You did have friends at Tule Lake. These old people would watch the baby.

MI: As far as amusement went, well that we didn't have too much there. In Rowher we did have a central place where everybody got together and had all kinds of entertainment among ourselves, you know.

RW: Yes, I know some of it was very nice, but Tule Lake was always having kind of trouble.

MI: So we just stayed sort of close to home.

RW: Was there any person in Tule Lake whom you very much respected; to whom you felt you could go to for advice?

MI: Gee, some of the older people have passed away now. No, I don't know. Gee, I can't think of. . . At the time maybe I did but now. . .

RW: I didn't want the name, I just wondered if you have that kind of nice relationship.

MI: I would get along with anybody, so I never was lacking for friends.

RW: You sound like a very out-going person.

MI: ~~Everybody helped me, everybody wanted to do this or that, and then. . .~~

RW: How did it happened then that you went to Japan, you and your husband?

MI: Well, my husband said he was going so then his father had passed away.

RW: His father in Japan?

MI: In Japan. His father was in Japan, but just before the outbreak of the war he had passed away. It was before the war. And then my husband was thinking of going back to Japan because he's the oldest in his family. But then before he ever got going, the war broke out and then that was it, he couldn't go any more.

RW: Did he have brothers and sisters in Japan?

MI: He had one sister and a brother. So then my husband's parents' father had left him quite a bit. And then he had to look after his brother and sister, so we decided we'd go.

RW: Well, that makes very good sense. After all he did have that obligation to his family.
MI: Now they are both gone, but then at the time he did have. . .so. . .

RW: Let's see, how long were you in Japan?
MI: Seven years.

RW: And how did it impress you as a Nisei from America?
MI: It was. . .I had a very bad impression.

RW: If you can tell me about it?

MI: See, I went back when. . .to begin with there was no food. Now that always makes everybody more like, I mean, what I had learned and what I had heard about Japan and its people and all that was everything was very good. But once I got myself over there, everything was negative to what I had been thinking. It was very depressing.

RW: It must have been very hard. . .

MI: But of course I was there and I had to make the best of, you know, with what I had, but I was fortunate that I did have all my family here [in United States] and then I had a brother in the occupational force in Tokyo.

RW: One of your brothers was in the army? So you did have that kind of contact. I have been told by Japanese, is from Japan, that often people who went to America and come back to Japan, why the Japanese say they are really American, they don't really accept them.

MI: Well, my case, I had never been to Japan and then I had gone there after the war was lost and food wasn't there and then going to Japan from the United States people, some people, really had a grudge.

SIDE 3

RW: I got it going now, would you go back to the last sentence, so I don't miss it.
MI: Now I forgot what. . .

RW: You were saying that people had a grudge, they felt there was so little and you had come there.

MI: You see, that means another mouth to be feed. Of course that was in the beginning, later on it was, I had made many friends with the native Japanese people. Well, I didn't know, what to make of my own self too.

RW: It must have been a very difficult adjustment, now that I think of it and I congratulate you on doing it.

MI: Because I didn't know their customs and everything. I made many mistakes. Everything I did was backwards or wrong or I had. . .I put my shoes on where I wasn't suppose to and oh, I've made my shares of errors.

RW: Did. . .was there anything that helped you?
MI: Well, having your husband and child there, maybe I should ask this, what was the help to you in this kind of thing?

MI: Well, of course I had the child and regardless of what, I had to feed him, grow up in good health, now that was the biggest thing on my mind while I lived there.

RW: Did he make out all right?
MI: He turned out perfect.

RW: Wonderful.

MI: He was very healthy. Aside from. . .when he was four years old he wanted to go to school so badly, we registered him in a church nursery school. He was four years old, he was happy. But maybe a month after he had started this little nursery school, he came home and was sick with measles. And then he got over that and went back to school for a few days then he came down with chicken pox.

RW: Oh my goodness.

MI: And then he went back for. .finally got back and then he came down with mumps. And that did it. He wasn't going to go back no more. (laughs)

RW: (laughs) What's he doing now?

MI: He's a nuclear-physicist.

RW: Oh boy. I guess he was smart.

MI: And then when it was time for him to go to school, when he was six years old, he wasn't going to go.

RW: Yeah, with his experience. Was that ~~even~~ in Japan yet?

MI: Yes, this was in Japan. He went to school for two years in Japan. Regular Japanese public school. And so I had to tell him, I said well, he had the measles, the chicken pox, and mumps, he can't have too many more. So I promised him, I said if you ever get sick, again, I'll take you out of school and never go again, but try once more. Because he always wanted us to read so much to him and after a while when it gets repetitious, you try to maybe skip a page or skip a line, no, he knew what we had skipped.

RW: He was very bright ~~evidently~~.

MI: So then at six years old, I said if you read yourself, you won't have to ask me, you won't have to wait until the dishes are done, until the meal was over with, you could read anytime you feel like. Oh that he liked. So I told him to go to school. Mommy can't teach you, but the teachers will. So then he decided, Mommy, you always promise something and you keep it. Now he remembers that I never broke a promise to him. So he says, 'Mommy, you promised you would take me out.' So he was going, so he went and he hasn't stopped yet.

RW: Well, he reminds me a little of me. I. .when I was read to as a child, I liked it so much that believe or not, I taught myself to read before I went to school.

MI: That's why you can't even leave out a few lines, you know. He'll say, 'Mom that's not it.' Then he told me what's supposed to be there. Oh, everyday, this would be everyday and I said, 'Oh my.'

RW: He was very, very intelligent.

MI: He went to school and he liked it. He would come running home, then eat, go running back, you know for the two years he was there, he was on the honor role.

RW: That's ~~was~~ nice. Can I ask how it was then that you came back to the United States?

MI: When we first came back?

RW: How it was that you decided to come back?

MI: Well, the boy had to go to school.

RW: Oh, I see.

MI: See, he was an American citizen and then I thought, well gee. .had I stayed there forever, I didn't know enough. .I guess I would get by, but I thought, to me, my family was here [in United States] and this is my. .I was born and raised here. There was always this desire that I would like to come back. So then the chance came, so my son and I, we just decided to come.

RW: And how did you come to St. Louis then?

MI: You see, after Rowher, my parents decided that they weren't going back to California, and so they started moving up with many other families. Let's see, I wasn't here, I was already in Japan about when. When they came up to St. Louis, I guess quite a few families decided to stay here. More went north to Chicago, Michi. .Cincinnati, there quite a bit in this area further north, but my parents decided to stay here. That's why they bought a house, they did everything. .Then when I was coming back to this country, my mother

- MI: had wrote me that she was ill. So, then my sisters all thought if I came back, I could look after my mother. So that was the reason I came to St. Louis. People asked me, 'Boy, you were a native Californian, why did you come all the way out here?' Well, that was the reason, and I had my mother until she passed on. She was ill for six and a half years and she passed on.
- RW: My goodness. . . When I talked to your husband, I think he said, didn't he stay in Japan longer?
- MI: He stayed, yes.
- RW: How many years was he there before he came here?
- MI: Seven more.
- RW: Seven more years. Why was that? Was it hard to get his citizenship back or[?] . . .
- MI: Yes, that was part of the reason. See, mine was. . . I just packed along so it wasn't. . . mine was nothing I guess.
- RW: But then he had to wait and get his citizenship back.
- MI: For the clearance, yes.
- RW: That must have been hard to be separated.
- MI: You see, that's why I came to live with my parents. And then my mother was ill, and then I still had a brother that was still going to school. My youngest brother was still going to school.
- RW: Your son is a nuclear-physicist?
- MI: ~~New~~ my son. He's a Washington University graduate too.
- RW: ~~I was teaching there until I retired and my husband is still a professor there.~~
- MI: My son went there and then to Pittsburgh, and then to Massachusetts. Now he's getting this video education or whatever from Illinois IIT, that's where he's studying for another Masters.
- RW: Gee, I'm very happy to hear that and. . .
- MI: Professionally, he is a nuclear-physicist.
- RW: And for yourself here, what kind of work are you doing now?
- MI: I do heavy accounting.
- RW: You do what kind of account?
- MI: Heavy, detailed.
- RW: ~~Oh detailed, heavy accounting.~~
- MI: Banking, interest, all that.
- RW: Good for you.
- MI: Lots of other people's money. Millions of other people's money. But when I first came back here (from Japan). . . what hit me the most how abundant everything was. My son has never forgotten that either.
- RW: Compared to what Japan was like.
- MI: Of course, now Japan has everything in abundance right now. But when I came back ~~to Japan~~ in 1953 they were just getting back on their feet. So when we came back here and all these supermarkets were stocked so much, it was a good feeling to know that now you could buy whatever you felt like. Not have to take what they gave out. And then pay for it. Things at the beginning it was rationed, and sometimes the food, you would just didn't like or didn't know what to do with it, so you didn't want, but then if it's rationed you just had to take your share.

R. Wax: Well, I'm sure glad you came back.

M. Iida: ~~xix, xi xixixix~~ Oh, I am too. One of these days' we might, my husband likes to go back In a few years, I'll reture and then we will have all the time.

R. Wax: That will be nice. Well, I want to thank you very ~~xxxx~~ much. You spoke very honestly and clearly and to the point. You sound like you have the intellect of a mother who has a son who is a nuclear-physicist.

M? Iida: Well, ~~xxxxxx~~ today I never forget that I am a mother. Like one thing at work, I tell people, I said, I would never do anything that I can't do in front of my son. That I'm pretty firm.

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~
~~XXXXXXXXXX~~
Mary Iida

Mary Iida, who ~~was~~ was 21 at the time of the evacuation, met and married Raph Iida~~in~~ in the Rohwer Relocation Center. She told me that she could not remember whether she had said Yes or No ~~whether~~ at the time of Military Registration. She accompanied her "disloyal" husband to Tule Lake, leaving her "loyal" ~~family~~ family in Rohwer. She was not to see ~~them~~ ^{her} ~~again~~ ^{family} for many years. I asked her: "How did it happen that you went to Japan, you and your husband?" She replied:

His father was in Japan. But just before the outbreak of ~~the~~ the war he had passed away. And then my husband was thinking of going back to Japan because he's the oldest in his family. But before he ever ^{to} go going, the war broke out. And then that was it. He ^a couldn't go anymore.

So then my husband's parents' father had left him quite a bid.

And then he had to look after his brother and sister. So we decided to go.

RW: How long were you in Japan?

MI: Seven years.

Mary Iida

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RW: ~~Well, that makes very good sense. After all he did have that obligation to his family.~~

MI: ~~Now they are both gone, but then at the time he did have. . . so. . .~~

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RW: And how did it impress you as a Nisei from America?

MI: It was. I had a very bad impression.

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~~more like, I mean, what I had learned and what I had heard about Japan and its people and~~
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MI: But of course I was there and I had to make the best of, you know, with what I had, but I
was fortunate that I did have all my family here [in United States] and then I had a
brother in the occupational force in Tokyo.

RW: ~~One of your brothers was in the army? So you did have that kind of contact. I have been~~
~~told by Japanese, from Japan, that often people who went to America and come back to~~
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MI: Well, my case, I had ~~never~~ been to Japan and then I had gone there after the war was
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people really had a grudge. . .

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happy, but maybe a month after he had started this little nursery school, he came home
and was sick with measles. And then he got over that and went back to school for a few
days then he came down with chicken pox.

And when he ~~xxx~~ went back he came down with mumps. And that was it.

He wasn't going to go back no more. (~~CCCC~~ (laughs)

Mrs. Iida, however, promised her son that if he became sick once more, she ~~CCCCCCCC~~ would take him out of school. Accordingly, he was enrolled in the ~~xxx~~ "regular ~~XXXX~~ Japanese public school".

He went to school and he liked it. He would come running home, then eat, go running back, For the two years he was there he was on the honor role.

RW: How was it that you decided to come back?

MI: Well, the boy had ~~to~~ go to school. He was an American citizen and then I thought, ~~well gee~~. had I stayed there forever. . I guess I would get by. But I thought, to me, my family was here (in United States) and ~~it~~ is my. . .I was born and raised here. There was always this desire ~~that~~ desire that I would like to come back. So then, the chance came, so my son and I, we just decided to come.

Then when I was coming back to this country, my mother wrote me that she was ill. . .I had my mother until she passed on. She was ill for six and a half years.

RW: When I talked to your husband, I think he said, didn't he stay in Japan longer?

MI: He stayed, yes.

RW: How many years was he there before he came here?

MI: Seven more.

RW: Was it hard to ~~xxx~~ get his citizenship back?

MI: Yes. that ~~xx~~ was part of the reason.. for the ~~channanga~~ clearance.

RW: That must have been hard to be separated.

MI: You see, that's why I came to ~~xx~~ live with my parents. My mother was ill, and then I ~~xxxx~~ had a brother that was still going to school.

Mrs. Iida ^{then} gave me a detailed account of the universities her son had

~~and told me that~~
 attended ~~and that professionally,~~ he is now a nuclear-physicist.

She herself, she said, is employed doing "heavy accounting, "banking, interest, and all that". At the end of the interview, she ~~told me:~~ ^{said}

When I first came back (to the United States) in ~~1952~~ 1953, what ^{the} hit me/most was how abundant everything was. . When we came back here, and all those supermarkets were stocked so much. It was a good feeling to know that now you could buy whatever you felt like. Not have to take what they gave out, and then pay for it. Things at the beginning, it was rationed, and sometimes the food.. you ~~just~~ wouldn't like it or you didn't know what to do with it, , if it's rationed, you just had to take your share.

And as a final word, she said:

Today I never forget that I am a mother. At work, I tell people, "I would never do anything that I can't do in front of my son."
 That I am pretty firm.