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Koizumi, Kay

Interview

1982

(Ralph Jida)

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RALPH IIDA  
December 13, 1981

Mr. Iida was born in California in 1919. His parents returned to Japan when he was a small child, and he remained in Japan until he finished high school. (I was told by a mutual acquaintance that his family in Japan was wealthy and of high status) In 1937, he returned to the United States to finish his education. But he had difficulty learning English and when his funds ran out he was obliged to work in a fruit orchard. He told me that he had intended to go back to Japan, but the war broke out and he was unable to do so.

He was evacuated to the Rohwer Assembly Center and at Rohwer he married a Nisei. When I asked him about the Military Registration he responded:

Oh, at that time. . .all kind of rumor going and . . .Japan educated like me can't go outside and they restricted. People like me are unwanted.

And I never thought about loyal/disloyal to the country. I thought of nothing of it until they asked me. And then everything followed in line, and I decide.

At Tule Lake, Mr. Iida worked in the cabinet shop, "I try to learn that technique, but I'm not a carpenter." He also joined the Sokoku Beinen dan, but when I asked him if he went out and exercised in the morning, he told me:

Yes. Once in a while. Wash sho! Wash sho! (Hip! Hip!) You know, at that time I wasn't feeling to good. . .I had an operation for hernia. So, once in a while I go out, but I wasn't doing too much. I was kind of weak at that time.

Mr. Iida began spontaneously to tell me about the Resegregationists:

RI: . . . among them there was logical ones, and dumb ones, smart ones, and on that occasion even though I belonged to the group, I didn't like the way they were doing. And one time one of the newsletters, I wrote an article, you know that things going too much that I don't like, you know. For instance, they

read the newspaper, listen to the short-waved radio, and those war results, so-called war results, and all that stuff, and joining in (that shouting?) everyday, I didn't like those kind of news went around you know. And I wrote an article, I want to express myself. Both countries fighting bloody, doing bloody, fighting and then they (the resegregationists) are cussing each other. . . "If you want to go back to Japan, if you don't want to go back to Japan and stay here. . . you don't have to argue about it. . . If you want to back, keep quiet," I said. And with that article I made a lot of enemies among the group.

RW: When did you leave Tule Lake, can you remember the year and month?

RI: First time that I renounce my citizenship and taken to Santa Fe, New Mexico.<sup>1</sup>

RW: You did renounce your citizenship?

RI: Yes.

RW: How did you come to do that?

RI: Well, it was almost like fad. I mean, everyone was doing it, so I did that too. People, you know, everyone go to Japan.

RW: And then you were sent to Santa Fe?

RI: That's right. I think we were the first group of Niseis that got sent to Santa Fe.

RW: The first people were sent on December 26 or 27.<sup>2</sup>

RI: Yes, the 27th, I remember that. Yes.

RW: How did you get out of Santa Fe?

RI: From Santa Fe I went to Japan

RW: How long were you there?

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<sup>1</sup>This sentence sounds as if Mr. Iida was interned in Santa Fe because he renounced his citizenship. This could not have been so. At Tule Lake thousands of Nisei and Kibei renounced their citizenship but only members of the Resegregation Groups or, subsequently, a few Japanese school teachers were interned.

<sup>2</sup>If Mr. Iida was interned in December 1944, it is very unlikely that he was an officer of one of the Resegregation Groups.

RI: Post war, I stayed in Japan 15 years.

RW: Can you tell me anything about your life in Japan?

RI: Before the war and after the war, there is so much difference. It was a bad time. . .everything was bad and it was not pleasant to live in Japan at that time.

RW: Yes, I've talked to some people and they said they just starved for a while.

RI: Yes.

RW: They tell me Japanese would say to them, "You're an American."

RI: That's right, that's right.

RW: Did anybody say that to you?

RI: Yes. Same thing. Even though I was raised in Japan. I knew a lot of people, but they tried to segregate me. . .They can't point at me directly, but behind they did that. . .But the social standing of my family was a little bit higher than other people, so I could take it and say to myself, "So what?" I don't mind so much.

RW: Then how did you come back to the United States? After 15 years in Japan?

RI: Well, I tried to regain citizenship back.

RW: Yes, right

RI: Otherwise You can't come back here.

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

RI: Well, you regret what you did. What you went through.

RW: Where did you work when you came back to the United States?

RI: I worked as a gardener. We had a Japanese landscaper, you know.

RW: You came right from Japan to St. Louis?

RI: Yes, because my wife was here.

RW: Had you been separated for 15 years?

RI: No, for seven years. No, my wife and kid came back here first.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See interview with Mrs. Iida.

And even when I applied for regaining my citizenship back, they don't give it back right away. . . They hold me back.

RW: Oh you poor man.

RI: What can you do?

RW: And so you've been working as a gardener?

RI: Yes, that's right.

RW: I gather that you've done pretty well then?

RI: Well? No. No. Not much to speak of. But I made a living anyway.

RW: As you look back on all these experiences, which would you say has affected you the most deeply?

RI: In what way?

RW: Is there any experience that keeps coming back to you?

RI: Well, the one thing I can say. . .when I came back here first in 1937, when I was going to school, I was with a Caucasian family in Los Angeles, and they did help me quite a bit. I tried to learn the English and they tried to teach me; but I'm not a good student. So I can't even speak very well up to now. But they were nice to me. . . . All this time, I try to keep up the correspondence. Even if I don't write, I try to send Christmas cards anyway. . . . In this world not everybody bad. Some people are good. (I had expected to close the interview at this point, but Mr. Iida proceeded to tell me more about the resegregationists.)

(On January 15, 1982 I talked to Mr. Iida again, and again, he began to criticize the Resegregation Groups.)

RI: To make noise or fighting - all that doesn't made sense. . .Sometime, even though you were in same group, something you don't like you have to say something - "I don't like it."

RW: There's a wonderful saying: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing.

RI: Oh boy, that. . . (laughs appreciatively).

RW: There's something I would like your opinion because you've been to Japan and you know it well. I felt that a lot of the people in the Hōkoku and the Hōshi-dan - they were kind of desperate. A Japanese from Japan told me last year that in Japan, if a person immigrates to America and stays there - then the Japanese people often regard that person as an outsider.

RI: Yes. That's true.

RW: And I sometimes wonder if these desperate people really knew this, and, like little children, they were trying to make enough noise so that they would be recognized in Japan.

RI: That's right. There was a rumor going on something like that at that time too. If you do that, the Japanese government going to recognize you and all that stuff. That was going on at that time. If you go back (to Japan) to live among them, they kind of shy away.

Let me say this though. When I went back I had a big house and I had good property and then even though they did that, I didn't feel it directly. But my wife did. . . Once in a while she used to tell me about it. But I thought nothing of it because I grew up among them, see?

We began to discuss the Hōkoku again and Mr. Iida said:

I didn't like it, making noise. You don't have to make noise!

. . . And you know especially I felt when I was in Japan and those Communist people did the same thing.

RW: I don't understand.

RI: Those Wash sho you know, that stuff, they march and then they wash sho, wash sho you know that? . . . They did the same way in Japan when Communist did protest of something like that, demonstration, you know. I felt awfully awfully funny about it. . . I felt that among that group (the Resegregationists)

there was some Communist<sup>1</sup> people . . . I begin to wonder at that time. But I didn't like that.

RW: It's very sad. But it's important to get as clear a picture as possible, I think. That's why I talk to the Japanese.

RI: Well, I see myself -- I'm not covering up for myself. I was one bad boy, I suppose. But things went on like that. . .almost like drift, wood drift on river. If I recall back, I did a lot of foolish things. I see now, but too late to think about it. But that's the way it was.

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<sup>1</sup>When I was at Tule Lake, I found that being called a Communist was worse than being called an inu (informer). It was the ultimate insult.

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OCTOBER 31 1944

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RW: Then how did you come back to the United States? After 15 years in Japan.

RL: Well, I tried to regain the citizenship back. . . Otherwise you can't come here. . . And even when I applied for regaining my ~~citizenship~~ citizenship back, they don't give it back right away. 4

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~/no formal education, Mr. <sup>Iida</sup> ~~Keizumi~~ has worked as a gardener ever since <sup>e</sup> his return to the United States. <sup>9</sup> If you think back on your lifetime, do you feel that the camp experience helped you or that it sort of ~~work especially hard in your life in order to make up for the years you spent~~ <sup>hurt</sup> ~~hurt~~ you or handicapped you?"  
##### He responded:

In a way, what I went through, I mean, camp life. . . why, after the war is over, the experience something help me. . . I can ~~take~~ take more pressure than before.. Besides, I went to ~~Japan~~ Japan - a lot of things I never think before. I mean experience-wise . And so you are stronger than before. Of course you get aged, you get more experience. But really, that camp life was something altogether different experience.

RW: Do you feel that you've had to work especially hard in your life in order to make up for the years you spent in camp?

RI: I think so, yes.

RW: In what way?

RI: Well, one thing, I stay away from politics. . . The newspapers or media, even though I see, I try not to pay attention to the politics and those kind of activity. And more - I got interested in

1. Subsequently, Mrs. Iida told me that she and her son had returned to the United States in 1953 to join her family. ~~Mr. Iida was not permitted to return to the United States until 1960.~~ Since he had renounced his American citizenship, Mr. Iida was not permitted to return to the United States until 1960.

nature. And I feel that sometime you can't trust the people, but I can trust the nature. I'm working in landscape, you know. Anyway,

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nature responds to you if you treat them good. . I got more feeling .  
. . it's hard to say. But anyway - I got interested in nature  
more than importance of people.

At the end of our second talk, Mr. <sup>Iida</sup> ~~Koizumi~~ told me:

Well, I myself, I'm not covering up for myself. I was one  
bad boy, I suppose. But things went on like that, you can't help,  
almost like drift, wood drift on river, you know. I did a lot  
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