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Suzuki, George

Interview

1982

(Ben Kodama)

83/115
C

Ben Kodama

January 26th 1982

George Suguki

Born in Hawaii

March 19, 1918

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Lives in San Francisco

BK: Hello?

RW: Hello, is this Mr. Kodama?

BK: Yes.

RW: This is Professor Rosalie Wax and I'm calling ^{you} because ~~Dr. Uyeda~~ told me that you had been at Tule Lake and that you might not object to ~~being~~ ^{telling} talking to me about it. I'm a retired professor and I got a ~~little~~ grant to ~~talk~~ to get life histories of people who had been there.

BK: Oh, I see.

RW: You see. I was there myself as a researcher for ^{the} University of California, ^{Study} ~~you know~~. And I went around and talked to people a lot, ~~so I really know a lot~~. It was a rough thing. I know a lot myself, but I'd like to see how people are doing now.

BK: I see.

RW: Would you mind?

BK: Oh....let me see..I was..let me see....I was drafted in 1941.

RW: Yeah, let me start even before 1941. Before the evacuation, what were you doing?

BK: I was. let me see.. 1941..I was working ^(?) at that time.. yeah. I was a barber then.

RW: Oh, you were a barber then. And let me see, I should ask when you were born, so I know how old you were when you went through this.

BK: I born 1918, March 19.

RW: Where were you born?

BK: I born in Hawaii.

RW: In ^a Hawii. Well, I'm glad to talk to a Hawaiian. I had a couple of nice friends who had come from Hawaii in Tule Lake.

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BK: I just born there and then when I was about 3 years old, my father took me to Japan.

RW: Your father took you to Japan, and then when did you come back to the United States?

BK: Then I finished high school there.

RW: About high school age, yes.

BK: ~~Yes~~ *Yes Chū Gakkō (?)*

RW: And, well that gives me a good background. And then from high school you went into doing barbering?

BK: No, no, no. At that time I was still small then in Japan. Then I finished high school there and come over here in 1935.

RW: 1935, yes.

BK: And then I went in, let me see, Continuation school..

RW: *A* What school?

BK: Continuation.

RW: Continuation school.

BK: Yes. Then about a year or so and then I went into Jr. High. Everett Jr. High and after that went into Commerce High school.

And then after that, you know, ^{we} didn't have any job here so I was, *here and there you know.* you know, went to Sacramento and you know farmer work. And then come back I went to barber school. And then I finished barber school here. And then I was barber. My father was ~~a~~ barber. Then also my father was first World War veteran too, I forgot to tell you.

RW: And then you said, did I understand you to say, that you had been drafted before?

BK: Yeah, in 1941.

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RW: You were in the army then.

BK: They draft me, so I ~~said~~ ^{say "why"} I'm going to volunteer."

RW: Good for you.

BK: So I volunteered, and at that time the Japanese community, ^(laughs) they give us a medal for that, you know. ^(laughs) But after that people..they draft so many that they don't bother anymore.

RW: (laughs) No one has ever told me that before..a number of Japanese people have told me how..~~when a young~~...before Pearl Harbor when ~~the~~ ^a young Japanese went to go into the army, why everybody in town or, you know, would come and see ~~them~~ ^{him} off.

BK: Yes, that's true; it's really nice, you know. (laughs)

RW: ~~And, gosh, what..~~

BK: And then I went before the war to Monterey. At that time.. first of all, we went into Presidio, Monterey for about a couple of months. And then we went into Fort Ord.

RW: Could you tell me how you felt when after this kind of experience..how you felt when you heard that the government was going to order all the people to leave their homes and go to assembly centers?

BK: Oh, ~~I was little~~ ^{that was later} then. Then after I went into the army, I had the education in Japan so they discharged me - honorable discharge. And right after the....so actually I was in the army for 1 year. See I went in February, then December and then the next year..following year I was discharged. So then, my wife was in Sacramento; she was a nurse. So we stayed there for a while. You know at that time, there was a zone there.

RW: I beg your pardon?

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BK: There was a zone, you had to leave earlier, you know, if you stay in San Francisco. And then from San Francisco to Sacramento was maybe 100 miles there, so that was zone 2 I think it was; something like that. Anyway then they put us in Tule Lake Camp.

RW: Oh, were you sent directly to Tule Lake and not to any assembly center?

BK: No, no, direct, because Sacramento was second zone, so I don't have to go into assembly center.

BK: Could I ask you again how you felt when you..here after you had been in the army and volunteered and how you felt when they told you that you were going to be put into a camp?

BK: Yeah, that was really an awful thing, you know. But, well, what I think is what they tell you, you have to do anyway, and let me see, and, also..I was grown up in Japan so I said well either way is fine too, you know. Well...it's really sad but (laughs) it's a pretty hard ^{to} expression, you know.

RW: I may not say it right, but "shi-ka-ta-ga-nai". ¹

BK: Yes. Shikataganai.

RW: Would that be how you felt? Because I don't want to put words into your mouth, I want you to say just what you feel.

BK: Yes, that's the exact wording in Japanese, yes.

RW: Well, so you went directly to Tule Lake..

BK: And then I was cook in the army. I went to school there and bakery school, and so I was the chief cook over there for block.

RW: Oh, chief block cook in Tule Lake. That's interesting.

BK: Yes, block 6.

RW: Block 6, yeah.

1. It can't be helped.

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BK: After that I was working in the post office..

RW: In what office?

BK: Post office. And then I was a fire inspector there. And you know people who come in from different camp, you know, they were singing "Kimi-gayo" and everything you know and.. ✓

RW: I didn't hear that - ~~they were, did you say~~ the people from the other camp were doing what?

BK: No, I mean singing "Kimi-gayo", you know..

RW: Oh yeah. ^{the} Japanese national anthem.

BK: ~~Yeah.~~ (laughs) and, ~~Let me see,~~ well people bring all kind of stuff into camp, but I pretend I didn't know anything. I just did everybody...

~~I admitted fast,~~
(127). And then we had also MP was there too.

RW: Could I ask you for the first couple of months.. ~~well there was about, let's see, this was about 1942, this~~ ^{it} was about a year or more before these other people came in. Was there anything ~~memory or~~ thing that happened that comes to you mind? before that?

BK: You mean inside the camp?

RW: Yeah, In Tule Lake, first off.

BK: Post office?

RW: Yeah.

BK: Well, a lot of people, you know, exchange packages and sometime broken something, so they have to replace it. The only thing you have to do is just get it stamped and then they can get outside. Then my wife got sick there and first they thought she was going to have a baby or something, then, you know, she had TB ~~germ~~ in the large intestine and then (?) (114) outside they could use those rays, but they don't have ^{any of} those facilities. And then that was after, ~~But~~ before I was volunteer, I went out to Montana for beet job. Then I had about 10 boys, and then my wife and I and cook, we take care of those people. And

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meantime when we live in Tule Lake..

RW: ~~I wasn't meaning~~, Did this happen while you were still in Tule Lake?

BK: Yes ~~name~~ ma'm.

RW: And then you went to Montana there..

BK: ..as a volunteer.

RW: A volunteer - and that was before ~~the resegregation?~~ pardon me ~~that was before the, yeah, they call it that when they sent the segregants there?~~

BK: Yeah, that's right, but we went out ^{then} and we did the job there. At that time the sheriff, who owned ~~the~~ ^{the} land there, farm, you know. They use to use those shotguns; they chase those birds up there, you know the pheasants, ^(laughs) And he used to tell me if you see someone and just throw ^{them} ~~into~~ ⁱⁿ the glass and see that nothing ~~is~~ happening. ^{you know (laughs)}

RW: I didn't get that sentence, I'm sorry.

BK: We went out to hunt ⁱⁿ the birds, you know. No body run the place, you know, the farm, and he said if you see someone, then ^(toss it in) just in the glass, you know. It was a really nice sheriff here you know. And they took us to movie, but people looking at you like they know ^{that} we are Japanese, so they give us dirty looks. But we used to go to the movies. Those days there was a curfew too, you can't go too far.

RW: And then after you did that, you went back to Tule Lake?

BK: Yes.

RW: Because you were a volunteer farm worker? ¹

1. Before the segregation, ~~the~~ evacuees were permitted to volunteer for farm work -- at least at some of the Relocation Centers. As I understood Mr. Kodama, he engaged in this pheasant hunting while working as a volunteer. It is significant that he remembers this occasion with much pleasure.

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2. Chūsei has no counterpart in present day English. It involved ~~unquestioning~~ unquestioning and absolute an obligation or duty to the Emperor, the law, and ~~the nation~~ the nation which can never be fully repaid and for which there is ~~no~~ no time limit.

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BK: And then her mother was there and she ^(?) ~~(181)~~

And she got bad and she went into the hospital and then when they operate, you know, In Tule Lake and she died there in camp.

RW: Oh, that's too bad. I'm sorry.

BK: She was only about 23. And then we came out from camp. We stayed, I think we were the last group to go out..

RW: Well, I was going to ask before that, were you there when the people were brought to Tule Lake from the other centers?

Those people who said "no-no"?

BK: Oh yeah. ^{There} ~~There~~ was a ^{was} ~~was~~ ^{was} ~~was~~ group, they call it,

RW: Well, I ^{mean} ~~say~~ even before..when they gave you the military this questionnaire - this "yes-yes, no-no" - how did you feel about that?

BK: Well, I was choosing ~~the~~ United States. I didn't repatriate to Japan, so I wrote Yes to everything. I mean

chusei (?) for living not in Japan but in United States.

RW: I don't think ~~maybe~~ I've said it clear enough. ~~you know,~~ It was in early in 1943 that ~~they had this~~ that everybody had to ~~say~~ answer questions: "Will you swear loyalty to the United States" and ~~did you~~ ~~did~~..you must have gone through that too, and I was going to ask how you felt about it?

BK: Oh, well, naturally, raised in Japan so...actually my mind was ^(?) I thought Japan going to win, that's what I felt, But I'm in the United States, and you can't do anything. So I thought I might as well ^{chusei} ~~say~~ in the United States.

RW: You said, "they might as well shot you in the United States," did you say?

BK: No, no.

RW: Might as well what?

1. Dip Ho!

chusei ^{integrity, loyalty,} ^{integrity,} ^{trust} ^{again}

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BK: Might as well...you know..chusa^{ai}..you know what chusa^{ai} means?

RW: No.

BK: Well, chusa^{ai} means..I'd rather...let me see..how you call those things?[?]when you..loyal, I think - loyalty.

RW: Loyalty, yes. Chusa^{ai}-loyalty

RW: And so, did you say, "yes, yes"?

BK: Yes, I did.

RW: You did. I see, ~~yes~~. I know there were many people when I got into Tule Lake who had said "yes,yes".

BK: And after that you could cross the street and you could play shogi,^{and} chess and all that. But after that, so many, you know - loyal to Japan, you know, people - ^{wa naho wa naho}~~washo~~, ~~washo~~, and they go around the block and then pray for Japan, you know.

But I was not in those kinds of groups either.

RW: I was there when that happened. I was wondering if you.. how should I say..~~the way you looked at things then--~~did you ever have any..^{wa naho}did any of the washo people ever bother you?

BK: No, they don't bother ^{us}~~me~~, they invite us but I said, "No."

Those things ^(?)~~(?)~~ you know. You just stay in the camp, I want to....

RW: And then block 6 didn't have so many washo people, it was ~~over~~ ^{often} in the Manzanar section.

BK: That's right, you're right.

RW: ..that there were so many.

BK: You know those times you were lonely in the night and you can't even cross the street-it's the curfew, you know. And then one time they chase me one time. (laughs)

RW: (laughs)

BK: I went in and ^(?)~~(255)~~ my house and that's it, you know.

he told me: "Our ~~xi~~ motive was not so much our release, but rather to prove our innocence. . . If accused, we want proof of our guilt!"

(Field Notes, September 18, 1944)

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RW: Yeah.

BK: But that was the only time I got chased. Then I went out hunting for arrow heads and stuff like ^(?) ~~that~~ ^{then} and sometime the MP would pick me up and take me up there on the OD for that day, and I told him I was in the United States ^Aarmy - he said "okay, I let you go." They were pretty good about that.

RW: Gee, they really let you outside the fence to hunt.

BK: Yes.

RW: Good.

BK: I had the dog tag with me all the time, ^(laughs).

RW: I was going to ask if there was any person in the center whom you really respected and who you felt you could go to for advise?

BK: Well, if I go into OD for the day, we sometime have captain there. They are ^{real} ~~pretty~~ nice about that.

RW: Some of them were very nice. You're the first person I've talked to who was able to do this, so I'm very glad I talked to you.

In this interviewing I've talked to everybody from people who were in the Hōkoku to people who were really in blocks where they were very afraid of the Hōkoku, you know. They really got kind of pressured. But you weren't particularly pressured you feel?

BK: No, ^{no, no.} I'm sorry I can't explain too good.

RW: I understand. I was there you know.

BK: Oh I see, oh yeah. ^{Is that right?}

RW: There was some very terrible things that happened..

✓ BK: ^{yes,} And there was some people, ^{Dan-jiki?} ~~Dan-jiki~~ you know, I don't know they went to a little place ~~on~~ outside of the fence, ^{army} ~~(299)~~ property? Then I think they loyal to Japan so they kept ⁱⁿ ~~their~~ little place up there - keep them barb wire, you know.

FOOTNOTE p. 10.

1. No women were imprisoned in the stockade. It may be that Mr. Kodama recalls that Mrs. Tsuchikawa, an ardent and outspoken resegregationist, was taken out of camp and questioned by the Internal Security. (See Fieldnotes for March 21, 1944.

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RW: Oh yeah, the stock...

BK: A friend of mine was in it.

RW: ..stockade.

BK: Stockade, you're right.

RW: And even a friend of yours was put in?

BK: Yeah.

RW: How did that happen?

BK: Well, she too much of a loyal to Japan in the camp; telling people that that ^{"Do this and that"} ~~you didn't~~ do that, you know. Then MPs took her in and they kept her for a while. ¹

RW: Yeah, that was pretty rough.

BK: You know the ^{dan jiki} "~~dan~~-ji-ki"? ^{Don jiki} "~~Dan~~-ji-ki" means they don't eat anything.

RW: Oh, the hunger strike.

BK: I remember,

RW: I was going to ask one thing always stays in my mind - when that poor young man on the farm ~~struck~~ was shot by a sentry - do you remember that? Can you tell me how you felt then?

BK: Well, I guess he didn't listen, I guess, huh? You know MPs shoot, you know. I think he was a judo man too or something.

RW: Ah-so.

BK: Then they was scared, you know. Then I think the MPs told him to halt, but he didn't stop or anything, you know. ^{sent}

RW: And then..after ^{that} ~~that there was a couple of~~ about 6 weeks or so that was this chairman of the Co-op, Mr. ^{Noma} ~~Hironi~~..he was murdered and I wondered how you felt about that?

BK: You know a friend of mine who was the fire chief there and Japanese group there you know, his name is _____ (~~is~~) and anyway he was mentioned about that, you know, but he did not

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actually - ~~he~~ ^{he} probably knew, but he never mentioned about it. But I thought, gee, that's a terrible thing to do, you know. They get killed among them Japanese, you know. But they call ^{Inu} ~~inu~~ ^{inu} "inu, inu" you know. And one time this friend of mine he said "how about going there", I say "No, nothing doing," I say, you know.

RW: Going where was that?

BK: I mean those kind of people, you know - ^{then} ~~chusen~~ ^{chusen} in the United States, ~~that the~~ ^{there} people don't like ^{ch} ~~that~~ idea and then they ~~go to~~ ^{going} violence, you know; hitting or something like that. I got a call one time.

RW: You got what?

BK: I got a call from the people, you know, "you better come around."

RW: Oh yes, I see, that was from the Hoshi Dan people?

BK: Yeah, right.

RW: Yeah, tell me about that.

BK: They had a meeting quite often, those people, and a friend of mine..mostly Kibbei, you know. They educated in Japan and they want to try and make something, you know, And they all get together in meeting and those ^(who are?) ~~loyal~~ to the United States, they call me "inu" you know; and then they ^{going to} ~~go~~ and make ^a violence or something. It was an awful thing. Actually it didn't exist too much.

RW: Gee, how did you feel when they called you "inu?"

BK: Oh, that was really something, you know. I don't mind those kind of things ^{anyway}.

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RW: I beg your pardon?

BK: I'm not ~~for~~ (370) to those kinds of things, you know.

RW: I guess you must have had friends in your block so ~~you didn't~~,
~~how should~~..you weren't scared that they would beat you up or
anything..

BK: Yeah, that's true, yes. But the good thing I was teaching
weight-lifting.

RW: Teaching what?

BK: Weight-lifting.

RW: Weight-lifting, ah.

BK: Then I know all the ~~(379)~~ people..

RW: (laughs) yes, they hesitate to beat you up.

BK: That's why .. it's nice about it.

RW: And let's see, I ~~was going to ask a little more about the~~
I think I'll ask these questions and always feel that you don't
have to answer a question if you don't like it and..it's up to
you.

BK: I don't mind.

RW: Was there anything that happened in the center that made you
feel especially sad? That made you really feel bad?

BK: Well, everything that happened in those few years. I think..
when I discharged from army I really..I tell you, it's something
that I never forget. Rest of them stayed and then they took off.
Then I was willing to fight for this country and if they were going
to send me to Italy or something, but when I was in the army, they
^(ask me?)
bring the Japanese paper, then ^{ask me?} if I can read the headlines. Then
I think that was an examination or something. Then we had to
translate just common words and they were going to send me to
Okinawa. But I told them, I sure hate the people there, so would

you mind

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send ^{my} me to another country, you know, like Italy. I'm willing to fight for this country, I told them. In meantime and that was a short one year I spend in the army - in the meantime I went to cook school and I went 3 months to bakery school.

RW: Well, I can certainly appreciate why being in the army and then being discharged, wow. I was going to ask in Tule Lake - was there anything that made you kind of angry?

BK: Angry?--well, ^{just the} curfew and stuff like that.

RW: ~~Just the curfew?~~

BK: ~~Curfew~~, you can't cross the block and I don't see why they do that, maybe the army feel probably if you cross the street and talk to someone, they don't like that. But I think why the "washo, washo" group started, that's the reason, they don't want to make it worse.... So I understand those things, you know.

RW: You think the washo, washo group started because of the curfew?

BK: Yeah, I think so. They scared you know. Even inside camp.

RW: Well, I always thought..felt..that the very start of it was from people whose relatives had been put in the stockade, kind of innocently.

BK: Yes, that's true too.

RW: Those relatives got together and that's how the thing kind of started and then it grew.

BK: Those are true and those two made ^{that} ~~it~~ up..the curfew.

RW: Could you tell me when you were having some of these tough experiences, what was the most helpful things you could do to help you through it? ~~You know, since~~ How did you kind of cope with it?

BK: Well, since my father was veteran; he went to the first world war over ~~in~~ ^{to} France and actually I was in the United States. I

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thought anything..I like ^{to} ~~chusen~~ in the United States. And that's the reason I ^{ever} volunteered myself in the army because those days really.....

end of 1st tape ~~486~~

BK: I understand that they are going to have reunion in Sacramento for Tule Lake people. So I sure looking forward..

RW: Yes, that will be nice. I'm glad to hear..because on the west coast, I hear, the Tule people who were in Tule Lake do get together, but often folks I've talked to in other parts of the country, they often have a ^{real} ~~very~~ lonely life.

BK: Yeah, you're right.

RW: And they don't know anybody.. ^{who was at...} Do you know anybody else who was in Tule Lake or if you know their phone number?

BK: I think, Joseph Takeshita, he's a professor..

RW: Oh, I've already talked to him. I had a nice talk with him.

BK: You did? He's a good friend of mine, and Tak Yamamoto and Tak and I working together,

RW: That's nice and they're still your friends.

BK: Yeah, I know Joseph's father and when I was coming to San Francisco from Japan and ever since we've been friends.

RW: That's a very wonderful thing. Now I'll ask you one more question on this and then a little ~~bit~~ more on what you did after you left Tule Lake. ←

Looking back, what was the most helpful thing ^{my}

you learned about your fellow human beings?

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Oh - human beings... (long pause)
BK: Well, you know if I can talk in Japanese, it's better. But let me see, well, the humanity really comes down to it, it's really you don't have those kind of experiences before and so.. I don't know how to put it, you know.

RW: Maybe I could ask it this way - Was there anything that happened ~~that~~ to you at Tule Lake that helped you to become a wiser or better person, would you say?

BK: Oh, I felt many times in the camp - you learn and you see the thing and ^{then} what happened there..

RW: What thing, I didn't get that?

BK: I mean all the thing that happened in camp and ^{then} some people repatriated and they going to Japan and separate with those in the family. I think actually the people ^{they} don't know what they are doing actually, they don't have time to come down to think. (long pause)
You learn a lot of thing anyway that never happened before. (long pause)

RW: ^{Well, could you just tell me} I know ~~if you tell me kind of~~ how you ~~got~~ ^{you} left Tule Lake and what you did then - anything you want to tell me.

BK: After ^{the} Tule Lake?

RW: Yes.

BK: ~~Well~~, We went back to San Francisco and we didn't have any home or anything, so we were staying at the Buddhist church. All the people from other camp. We stayed there and looking for a place. Then my father ^{owned} ~~got~~ a small, you don't call it an apartment, but just a flat and then he was renting each room. And we went in and about 2 weeks later the people ^{then} took out my father's place. So we went in there and let me see after.. oh yeah, ^{then} I was cook so we went out.. you know the family, I was the cook and my wife was the maid.

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RW: Did you marry again? in Tule Lake?

BK: Yes, we did, I forgot to tell you. She ^(a nurse?) ~~(25)~~ too at the time. She went back to college again. Then I've been doing that ever since, barbering. And we didn't have any children, so we adopted children. We doing pretty good right now. My son is grown up and just graduated college.

RW: Your son, this is your son by the first wife?

BK: No, we adopted him.

~~RW: I beg your pardon.~~

~~BK: We adopted him.~~

RW: You adopted a son and he's in college, well that's very nice.

BK: I did ~~what~~ the people..what they do, I mean, you know, a lot of people didn't have any kids; I thought It would be a good experience for me.

RW: I agree. Well, I've about asked all the questions, and I do thank you because you've told me things..I've studied this for so long and I was there, but you told me things I didn't know before.

BK: I'm sorry that I can't express too good..

RW: Well, I know a little Japanese so I can kind of catch on, you know and that's helpful. I do thank you and I will continue this work and I should say, I wish you much happiness now.

BK: Nice to talk to you.

RW: Thank you good-bye.

end of interview # 98

RW: Continuation school.

BK: Yes. Then about a year or so and then I went in Junior High. Everett Jr. High and after that went into Commerce High school. And then after that, you know, we didn't have any job here so I was, you know, went to Sacramento and you know farmer work. Here and there, you know. And then come back I went to barber school. And then I finished barber school here. And then I was barber. My father was barber. Then also my father was first World War veteran too, I forgot to tell you.

RW: And then you said, did I understand you to say, that you had been drafted before?

BK: Yeah, in 1941.

RW: You were in the army then.

BK: They draft me, so I say 'Why, I'm going to volunteer.'

RW: Good for you.

BK: So I volunteered, and at that time the Japanese community - they give us a medal for that, you know. (laughs) But after that people. .they draft so many that they don't bother anymore.

RW: (laughs) No one has ever told me that before. .a number of Japanese people have told me how. . . before Pearl Harbor when a young Japanese went to go into the army, why everybody in town or, you know, would come and see him off.

BK: Yes, that's true; it's really nice, you know. (laughs) And then I went before the war to Monterey. At that time. .first of all, we went into Presidio, Monterey for about a couple of months. And then we went into Fort Ord.

RW: Could you tell me how you felt when after this kind of experience. .how you felt when you heard that the government was going to order all the people to leave their homes and go to assembly centers?

BK: Oh, that was later then. Then after I went into the army, I had the education in Japan so they discharged me - honorable discharge. And right after the. . so actually I was in the army for one year. See I went in February, then December and then the next year. .following year I was discharged. So then, my wife was in Sacramento; she was a nurse. So we stayed there for a while. You know at that time, there was a zone there.

RW: I beg your pardon?

BK: There was a zone, you had to leave earlier, you know, if you stay in San Francisco, And then from San Francisco to Sacramento was maybe 100 miles there, so that was zone two I think it was; something like that. Anyway then they put us in Tule Lake Camp.

RW: Oh, were you sent directly to Tule Lake and not to any assembly center?

BK: No, no, direct, because Sacramento was second zone, so I don't have to go into assembly center.

RW: Could I ask you again how you felt when you. .here after you had been in the army and volunteered and how you felt when they told you that you were going to be put into a camp?

BK: Yeah, that was really an awful thing, you know. But, well, what I think is what they tell you, you have to do anyway, and let me see, and, also. .I was grown up in Japan so I said well either way is fine too, you know. Well. .it's really sad but (laughs) it's a pretty hard to expression, you know.

RW: I may not say it right, but "shikataganai".(1)

BK: Shikataganai.

RW: Would that be how you felt? Because I don't want to put words into your mouth, I want you to say just what you feel.

BK: Yes, that's the exact wording in Japanese, yes.

RW: Well, so you went directly to Tule Lake. . .

BK: And then I was a cook in the army. I went to school there and bakery school, and so I was the chief cook over there for block.

RW: Oh, chief block cook in Tule Lake. That's interesting.

BK: Yes, block 6.

RW: Block 6, yeah.

BK: After that I was working in the post office. . .

RW: In what office?

BK: Post office. And then I was a fire inspector there. And you know people who come in from different camp, you know, they were singing Kimigayo, you know. . .

RW: Oh yeah. The Japanese national anthem.

BK: Yeah. (laughs) and, let me see, well people bring all kind of stuff into camp, but I pretend I didn't know anything. I just did everybody. . .I admitted fast. And then we had also MP was there too.

RW: Could I ask you for the first couple of months. .it was about a year or more before these other people came in. Was there any thing that happened that comes to your mind? Before that?

BK: You mean inside the camp?

RW: Yeah, in Tule Lake, first off.

BK: Post office?

RW: Yeah.

BK: Well, a lot of people, you know, exchange packages and sometime broken something, so they have to replace it. The only thing you have to do is just get it stamped and then they can get outside. Then my wife got sick there and first they thought she was going to have a baby or something, then, you know, she had TB germ in the large intestine and then ? outside they could use those rays, but they don't have any of those facilities. And then that was after. But before I was volunteer, I went out to Montana for beet job. Then I had about ten boys, and then my wife and I and cook, we take care of those people. And meantime we live in Tule Lake..

RW: Did this happen while you were still in Tule Lake?

BK: Yes ma'm.

RW: And then you went to Montana there. .

BK: . . as a volunteer.

RW: A volunteer - and that was before they sent the segregants there?

BK: Yeah, that's right, but we went out and then we did the job there. At that time the sheriff, who owned that land there, farm, you know. They use to use those shotguns; they chase those birds up there, you know the pheasants, (laughs). And he used to tell me if you see someone and just throw them in the grass and see that nothing happens, you know (laughs).

RW: I didn't get that sentence, I'm sorry.

BK: We went out to hunting the birds, you know. Nobody run the place, you know, the farm, and he said if you see someone, then just toss it in the grass, you know. It was really nice sheriff here you know. And they took us to movie. but people looking at you like

BK: they know that we are Japanese, so they give us dirty looks. But we used to go to the movies. Those days there was a curfew too, you can't go too far.

RW: And then after you did that, you went back to Tule Lake?

BK: Yes.

RW: Because you were a volunteer farm worker?(1)

BK: And then her mother was there and she _____. and she got bad and she went in the hospital and then when they operate, you know, in Tule Lake and she died there in camp.

RW: Oh, that's too bad. I'm sorry.

BK: She was only about 23. And then we came out from camp. We stayed, I think we were the last group to go out. .

RW: Well, I was going to ask before that, were you there when the people were brought to Tule Lake from the other centers? Those people who said "no-no".

BK: Oh yeah. There was a wa-ssho wa-ssho!(2) group, they call it.

RW: Well, I mean even before. .when they gave you the military this questionnaire - this "yes-yes, no-no" - how did you feel about that?

BK: Well, I was choosing United States. I didn't repatriate to Japan, so I wrote Yes to everything. I mean chu:sei(3) for living not in Japan but in United States.

BW: I don't think I've said it clear enough. It was in early in 1943 that everybody had -- answer questions: 'Will you swear loyalty to the United States' and you must have gone through that too. I was going to ask how you felt about it?

BK: Oh, well, naturally, raised in Japan so. . .actually my mind was (?) I thought Japan going to win, that's what I felt. But I'm in the United States, and you can't do anything. So I thought I might as well chu:sei in the United States.

RW: Might as well what?

BK: Might as well. . .you know. . chu:sei. .you know what chu:sei means?

RW: No.

BK: Well, chu:sei means. .I'd rather. .let me see. .how you call those things? When you. . loyal, I think - loyalty.

RW: Loyalty, yes. Chu:sei - loyalty. And so, did you say, "yes, yes"?

BK: Yes, I did.

RW: You did. I see. I know there were many people when I got into Tule Lake who had said "yes, yes".

BK: And after that you could cross the street and you could play shogi, and chess and all that. But after that, so many, you know - loyal to Japan, you know, people - wa ssho wa ssho, and they go around the block and then pray for Jpaan, you know. But I was not in those kinds of groups either.

[1. Before the segregation, evacuees were permitted to volunteer for farm work - at least at some of the Relocation Centers. As I understood Mr. Kodama, he engaged in the pheasant hunting while working as a volunteer. It is significant that he remembers this occasion with much pleasure.]

[2. Hip ho]

[3. Chu:sei has no counterpart in present day English. It involved an unquestioning and absolute obligation or duty to the Emperor, the law, and the nation which can never be fully repaid and for which there is no time limit.]

- RW: I was there when that happened. I was wondering if you. how should I say. did you ever have any. did any of the wa sscho people ever bother you?
- BK: No, they don't bother us, they invite us but I said, 'no.' Those things ? you know. You just stay in the camp, I want to. . .
- RW: And then block 6 didn't have so many wa sscho people, it was over in the Manzanar section.
- BK: That's right, you're right.
- RW: . . .that there were so many.
- BK: You know those times you were lonely in the night and you can't even cross the street - it's the curfew, you know. And then one time they chase me one time. (laughs)
- RW: (laughs)
- BK: I went in ? my house and that's it, you know.
- RW: Yeah.
- BK: But that was the only time I got chased. Then I went out hunting for arrow heads and stuff like ? and then sometime the MP would pick me up and take me up there on the OD for that day, and I told him I was in the United States Army - he said 'okay, I let you go.' They were pretty good about that.
- RW: Gee, they really let you outside the fence to hunt.
- BK: Yes.
- RW: Good.
- BK: I had the dog tag with me all the time. (laughs)
- RW: I was going to ask if there was any person in the center whom you really respected and who you felt you could go to for advise?
- BK: Well, if I go in to OD for the day, we sometime have captain there. They are real nice about that.
- RW: Some of them were very nice. You're the first person I've talked to who was able to do this, so I'm very glad I talked to you. In this interviewing I've talked to everybody from people who were in the Ho:koku to people who were really in blocks where they were very afraid of the Ho:koku, you know. They really got kind of pressured. But you weren't particularly pressured you feel?
- BK: No, no, no. I'm sorry I can't explain too good.
- RW: I understand. I was there you know.
- BK: Oh I see, oh yeah. Is that right?
- RW: There was some very terrible things that happened. .
- BK: Yes, and there was some people, Dan jiki(1) you know, I don't know they went to a little place outside of the fence, army property? Then I think they loyal to Japan so they kept in little place up there - keep them barbwire, you know.
- RW: Oh yeah, the stock. . .
- BK: A friend of mine was in it.

[1. Dan jiki can be translated as "hunger strike". Literally, however, it refers to the periods of austerity practiced by the members of certain religious orders who abstain from food, sleep and sex in the hope of receiving a transcendental revelation. When Mr. Kunitani and I discussed the hunger strikes in the stockade, he told me: "Our motive was not so much our release, but rather to prove our innocence. . .If accused, we want proof of our guilt." (Fieldnotes, September 18, 1944)

RW: . . .stockade.

BK: Stockade, you're right.

RW: And even a friend of yours was put in?

BK: Yeah.

RW: How did that happen?

BK: Well, she too much of a loyal to Japan in the camp; telling people that that 'Do this and do that,' you know. Then MPs took her in and they kept her for a while. (1)

RW: Yeah, that was pretty rough.

BK: You know the "dan jiki"? "Dan jiki" means they don't eat anything.

RW: Oh, the hunger strike.

BK: I remember.

RW: I was going to ask one thing always stays in my mind - when that poor young man on the farm truck was shot by a sentry - do you remember that? Can you tell me how you felt then?

BK: Well, I guess he didn't listen, I guess, huh? You know MPs shoot, you know. I think he was a judo man too or something.

RW: Ah-so.

BK: Then they was scared, you know. Then I think the MPs told him to halt, but he didn't stop or anything, you know.

RW: And then. .after about six weeks or so that was this chairman of the Co-op, Mr. Noma he was murdered and I wondered how you felt about that?

BK: You know a friend of mine who was the fire chief there and Japanese group there you know, his name is _____ and anyway he was mentioned about that, you know, but he did not actually - probably he knew, but he never mentioned about it. But I thought, gee, that's a terrible thing to do, you know. They get killed among them Japanese, you know. But they call "inu, inu" you know. And one time this friend of mine he said 'How about going there', I say 'no, nothing doing,' I say, you know.

RW: Going where was that?

BK: I mean those kind of people, you know - they chusen in the United States. Those people don't like the idea and then they going violence, you know; hitting or something like that. I got a call one time.

RW: You got what?

BK: I got a call from the people, you know, 'you better come around.'

RW: Oh yes, I see, that was from the Ho:shi Dan people?

BK: Yeah, right.

RW: Yeah, tell me about that.

BK: They had a meeting quite often, those people, and a friend of mine. .mostly Kibei, you know. They educated in Japan and they want to try and make something, you know. And they all get together in meeting and those (who are?) loyal to the United States, they call me "inu" you know; and then they going to make a violence or something. It was an awful thing. Actually it didn't exist too much.

[1. No women were imprisoned in the stockade. It may be that Mr. Kodama recalls that Mrs. Tsuchikawa, an ardent and outspoken resegregationist, was taken out of camp and questioned by the Internal Security. (See Fieldnotes for March 21, 1944.)

RW: Gee, how did you feel when they called you "inu"?

BK: Oh, that was really something, you know. I don't mind those kind of things anyway.

RW: I beg your pardon?

BK: I'm not for those kinds of things, you know.

RW: I guess you must have had friends in your block so, you weren't scared that they would beat you up or anything.

BK: Yeah, that's true, yes. But the good thing I was teaching weight-lifting.

RW: Teaching what?

BK: Weight-lifting.

RW: Weight-lifting, ah.

BK: Then I know all the people. . .

RW: (laughs) yes, they hesitate to beat you up.

BK: That's why. .it's nice about it.

RW: And let's see, I think I'll ask these questions and always feel that you don't have to answer a question if you don't like it and. .it's up to you.

BK: I don't mind.

RW: Was there anything that happened in the center that made you feel especially sad? That really made you feel bad?

BK: Well, everything that happened in those few years. I think. .when I discharged from army I really. .I tell you, it's something that I never forget. Rest of them stayed and then they took off. Then I was willing to fight for this country and if they were going to send me to Italy or something, but when I was in the army, they bring the Japanese paper, then (ask me?) if I can read the headlines. Then I think that was an examination or something. Then we had to translate just common words and they were going to send me to Okinawa. But I told them, I sure hate the people there, so would you mind sending me to another country, you know, like Italy. I'm willing to fight for this country, I told them. In meantime and that was a short one year I spend in the army - in the meantime I went to cook school and I went three months to bakery school.

RW: Well, I can certainly appreciate why being in the army and then being discharged, wow. I was going to ask in Tule Lake - was there anything that made you kind of angry?

BK: Angry? -- Well, just the curfew and stuff like that. You can't cross the block and I don't see why they do that. Maybe the army feel probably if you cross the street and talk to someone, they don't like that. But I think why the "washo, washo" group started, that's the reason, they don't want to make it worse. . . So I understand those things, you know.

RW: You think the washo, washo group started because of the curfew?

BK: Yeah, I think so. They scared you know. Even inside camp.

RW: Well, I always thought. .felt. .that the very start of it was from people whose relatives had been put in the stockade, kind of innocently.

BK: Yes, that's true too.

RW: Those relatives got together and that's how the thing kind of started and then it grew.

BK: Those are true and those two made that up. .the curfew.

RW: Could you tell me when you were having some of these tough experiences, what was the most helpful things you could do to help you through it? How did you kind of cope with it?

- BK: and actually I was in the United States. I thought anything. .I like to chusen in the United States. And that's the reason I ever volunteered myself in the army because those days. . .I understand that they are going to have reunion in Sacramento for Tule Lake people. So I sure looking forward. . .
- RW: Yes, that will be nice. I'm glad to hear. .because on the west coast, I hear, the Tule people who were in Tule Lake do get together, but often folks I've talked to in other parts of the country, they often have a real lonely life.
- BK: Yeah, you're right.
- RW: And they don't know anybody who was at. . .Do you know anybody else who was in Tule Lake or if you know their phone number?
- BK: I think, Joseph Takeshita, he's a professor. . .
- RW: Oh, I've already talked to him. I had a nice talk with him.
- BK: You did? He's a good friend of mine, and Tak Yamamoto and Tak and I working together.
- RW: That's nice and they're still your friends.
- BK: Yeah, I know Joseph's father and when I was coming to San Francisco from Japan and ever since we've been friends.
- RW: That's a very wonderful thing. Now I'll ask you one more question on this and then a little more on what you did after you left Tule Lake. Looking back, what was the most helpful thing you learned about your fellow human beings?
- BK: Oh - human beings. . .(long pause) well, you know if I can talk in Japanese, it's better. But let me see, well, the humanity really comes down to it, it's really you don't have those kind of experiences before and so. .I don't know how to put it, you know.
- RW: Maybe I could ask it this way - was there anything that happened to you at Tule Lake that helped you to become a wiser or better person, would you say?
- BK: Oh, I felt many times in the camp - you learn and you see the thing and then what happened there. . .
- RW: What thing, I didn't get that?
- BK: I mean all the thing that happened in camp and then some people repatriated and they going to Japan and separate with those in the family. I think acutally the people. . . they don't know what they are doing actually, they don't have time to come down to think. (long pause) You learn a lot of thing anyway that never happened before. (long pause)
- RW: Well, could you just tell me how you left Tule Lake and what you did then - anything you want to tell me.
- BK: After the Tule Lake?
- RW: Yes.
- BK: We went back to San Francisco and we didn't have any home or anything, so we were staying at the Buddhist church. All the people from other camp. We stayed there and looking for a place. Then my father owned a small, you don't call it an apartment, but just a flat and then he was renting each room. And we went in and about two weeks later the people they took out my father's place. So we went in there and let me see after. . oh yeah, then I was cook so we went out. .you know the family, I was the cook and my wife was the maid.
- RW: Did you marry again in Tule Lake?
- BK: Yes, we did, I forgot to tell you. She (a nurse?) too at the time. She went back to college again. Then I've been doing that ever since, barbering. And we didn't have any children, so we adopted children. We doing pretty good right now. My son is a nurse and

BK: *up and just graduated college.*

RW: *Your son, this is your son by the first wife?*

BK: *No, we adopted him.*

RW: *You adopted a son and he's in college, well that's very nice.*

BK: *I did the people. .what they do, I mean, you know, a lot of people didn't have any kids; I thought it would be a good experience for me.*

RW: *I agree. Well, I've about asked all the questions, and I do thank you because you've told me things. .I've studied this for so long and I was there, but you told me things I didn't know before.*

BK: *I'm sorry that I can't express too good. . .*

RW: *Well, I know a little Japanese so I can kind of catch on, you know and that's helpful. I do thank you and I will continue this work and I should say, I wish you much happiness now.*

BK: *Nice to talk to you.*

RW: *Thank you good-bye.*

Ben Kodama
~~Ben Kodama~~ Suzuki, age 24, ~~was~~ is a Hawaiian born Japanese, who ~~still~~
 has difficulty in expressing himself in English. ~~He is also an Old Tulean.~~
 He is also an ~~Old Tulean.~~
 When I asked him about the Military Questionnaire, he told me, "I thought Japan going to win. . . but I'm in the United States. . . so I thought I might as well chusei¹ in the United States."
 I asked: "And so did you say, "Yes-Yes?"
 Mr. Kodama: "Yes, I did."

1. Chusei involves unquestioning and absolute obligation or duty to the Emperor, the law, and the nation which can never be fully repaid and for which there is no time limit.

^{then}
 I asked whether he remembered the murder of Mr. Nema^h. He replied:
 "I thought, 'Gee, that's a terrible thing, you knew?' But they call, ~~CCG~~ "inu, inu," you know I get a call from the people, 'you better come ~~xxxxx~~ around.'

R. Wax: Was that from the Hoshi Dan people?

Mr. Kodama: Yes, right? . . . They had a meeting quite often, those people . . . mostly Kibei, you know. They educated in Japan and want to make something . . . and they all get together in meeting.

These loyal to the United States, they call. . . ~~xxxxxx~~
 (inu?).. they call me inu. . . and then they going to make a violence or something. It was an awful thing.

R. Wax: How did ^yyou feel when they called you inu?

Mr. Kodama: Oh, that was really something, you know. . . I'm not for these kinds of things, you know.

R. Wax: I guess you must have had friends in your block .So you ~~w~~ weren't scared that they would ~~be~~ beat you.

Mr. Kodama: That's true. Yes. But the good thing, I was teaching weightlifting. Then I know all the people. . .