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Idemoto, Wataru

Interview + Longitudinal oral history

1981

(Juro Tokunaga)

83/115

c

Subject in example of how  
one block may  
be struck paper to the  
block at registration /  
time.

December 12, 1981

Taro Tokunaga  
Born in Hawaii  
October, 1900

Wataru  
Idemoto

TT: Hello?

ARW: Hello, is this Mr. Tokunaga?

TT: Yes?

RW: This is Professor Rosalie Hankey Wax.

TT: Who?

RW: Rosalie Wax, ~~and~~ you wrote me a letter giving me the whereabouts of ~~Asako~~  
*Lillian*  
*Noma*  
Higaki, do you remember?

TT: No, I'm hard of hearing and it's hard to understand. Will you please repeat again?

RW: Well, if you are Taro Tokunaga, you wrote a letter to Professor Rosalie Wax  
in St. Louis, ~~and~~ I had a notice in the paper that I wanted to reach ~~Asako~~  
*Lillian Noma*  
Higaki.

TT: Oh yes.

RW: Do you remember?

TT: Yes.

RW: And I did reach her, and I did want to thank you.

TT: Oh, that's okay.

RW: And I had a lovely talk with her. And if you have a little time now, I could tell you what I'm doing and ask you ~~maybe~~ for more help.

TT: Yes,

RW: It would be all right?

TT: Yes.

RW: ~~Sure~~. Okay, see I'm a retired Professor and I was at Tule Lake doing field work for the University of California.

TT: Oh, I see.

RW: And that's how I met ~~Asako~~, *Lillian* and many other people that I knew very well. And the Rockefeller Foundation has given me a little fellowship, so I can call these people and see how they are doing now, and ask ~~what~~ *them* what bothered them most when they were in the camps and ~~what~~ how they coped with their problems..and I wondered..I thought I would at least give you a ring and see if you would like to talk to me.

TT: Yes, I'd like to...

RW: ~~I beg your pardon?~~

TT: ~~I'd like to talk to you.~~

RW: ~~On the telephone?~~

TT: ~~Oh, as I say I have a bad ear..~~

RW: ~~I see.~~

~~TT:~~ <sup>a</sup> And sometime I hard to understand. That only trouble with me.

RW: Well, I understand you now. Would you like to try it, ~~it~~?

TT: Okay.

RW: ..and then if you get tired, why tell me, and I'll call again and finish it. Okay?

TT: That's okay. I have a lot of time today.

RW: Good, and if ~~if~~ you don't understand what I say, I'll try to talk slow and clear..okay?

TT: Okay.

RW: Well, now let me see, <sup>do</sup> first question would be..I'd like to know a little about your life before the evacuation..what were you doing then?

TT: Well, before the evacuation, I use to have a little fruit stand in Sacramento, <sup>doing</sup> and I also lot of..between time..like massage...and I'm doing that right now, ~~I'm doing~~.

~~RW: You're doing what?~~

~~TT: \_\_\_\_\_ you know a person with a lot of thick..person with~~

~~RW: Oh, like a massage.~~

~~TT: Yes.~~

RW: Good.

TT: Like a pain or an ache, arthritis, and those people I'm treating right now.

RW: Oh, very good.

TT: I'm very much interested in that and I'm doing that.

RW: Yes, could I ask when you were born and well..I'll ask when you were born, and then where you were born.

TT: Beg your pardon?

RW: Where were you born?

TT: Where I born?

RW: Yeah.

TT: I was born in Hawaii, 1900, October 15.

RW: Well, you are older than I am, so I will talk to you with great respect.

TT: Oh, I'm pretty old.

RW: Yes, and you are a ~~Hawaiian~~, what they used to in camp call Hawaiian Japanese. (laughs) and in, in that..1900.

~~TT: Beg pardon?~~

~~RW: You were born in 1900?~~

TT: Yes, I was born in 1900.

RW: In Hawaii?

TT: In Hawaii, and came to San Francisco in 1906.

RW: ~~1906~~ with your parents.

TT: Right after the earthquake. *R*

RW: ~~Oh, right after the earthquake. And now, then you were then doing both working at a fruit stand, and massage.~~

TT: Briefly after I came from Hawaii to California, my folks, you know, migrant workers, all around California. Finally, I think we settled in 1910 or 11 ~~around in~~ Sacramento and, what we call Davis row, so I was there, and until 1928, I believe, <sup>to</sup> the farm. My folks died in 1915 and 1920; ~~they both~~ <sup>of them</sup> died at age 42 years old.

RW: Oh my..

TT: And after they die, I took care of my brother and sister and that's why I <sup>haven't</sup> ~~don't have~~ <sup>got</sup> a formal education. We were ~~all~~ very poor, so that's what I did.

~~In~~ Meantime I was a very <sup>very</sup> sick man, you know, all kind of sickness. So I got interested in massage, and finally I started doing that and I cured all my burdens.

RW: Wonderful! Can you tell me <sup>then</sup> how you felt when you first heard this govern=  
ment announcement that the Japanese ~~Americans~~ were ordered to leave their homes and report to assembly centers?

TT: Before we go to assembly center?

RW: How did you feel when you heard that you would have to leave and report to a center?

TT: Well, at that time when we had to go to assembly center, you know, after Pearl Harbor.. Well, let me tell you one more brief thing that happened. Before Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, one of the truck driver came to me and about ~~3~~ <sup>three</sup> weeks before Pearl Harbor and he predict exactly what time Japan would attack Pearl Harbor. He said December 7, Sacramento time approximately 11:00 and Japan would attack. I told him, "you're crazy." And he said, "I bet other people 3 cigars," he said. He said he liked me so well, <sup>he said,</sup> "I don't want my 3 cigars, and just remember what I say." So exactly what he predict.. I was really surprised.

*'d been told you this.*

RW: And who was this..a man you knew? I didn't understand who ~~was talking~~.

~~who if was who told you this?~~ Who was it?

TT: Beg pardon?

RW: Who was it?

TT: I forgot his name, but he was 28 years old..

RW: Oh, you forgot his name, but he predicted it.

TT: Yeah, 28 years old, a truck driver, a produce truck driver. That's what he told me.

RW: And then how did you feel when ~~it~~ <sup>this</sup> happened and you had to leave your business and everything?

TT: How did I feel?

RW: Yeah.

TT: Well, I was really surprised. I was kind of dazed. I ~~did not expect~~ <sup>never</sup> <sup>ed</sup>..and we had very much crank call and you know, lot of people attack my job..the bank and everything was frozen and we don't know what we are going to do..

RW: To which assembly center were you sent?

TT: Wallega.

RW: Wallega. Did you go with your brother and sister?

TT: Yes, brother and sister we went there. I think I'm not sure, exactly how long but maybe 2 months, maybe 3 I don't know.

RW: Do you remember anything that happened there at the assembly center?

TT: <sup>yes</sup> ~~Yeah~~, I do remember one thing. Well in our assembly center I think you heard about it..all kind of things and what we could take..just what we could carry..that's what we could take, you know? and the rest of what we had was <sup>just</sup> almost <sup>a</sup> give-away and some things, I had a couple of good friends, so ~~that~~ they took storage of my stuff out there, and we went to the assembly camp..center, and this is the funny part that happened - they told us we can't use our cash to buy things.

RW: They told you..

TT: Yeah, that we ~~had~~ <sup>have</sup> to use script..

RW: Oh my..at the assembly center?

TT: Yeah, this script book was \$2.75 and we pay that and he said, <sup>"you have</sup> ~~we had~~ to buy from the script, <sup>"</sup> like the newspaper, broom, bucket and those things, you know.

*Wallega*

RW: Yeah, was this a soldier?

TT: Yes, they sold us, you know?

RW: They told you that..

TT: WE found out, when we went to Tule Lake that the script was issued by united government for spending money..

RW: Yeah.

TT: ..instead of, you have to pay \$2.75, so in other assembly center<sup>S,</sup> they get the \$2.75 for nothing and we pay for it, see?

RW: Oh, goodness.. ~~How id.~~

TT: We found out and so we <sup>make a</sup> protest. So the project manager, they investigated and said, Now look, he said, you folks got the \$2.75 because you signed for it, and we signed it, you know. So that's how some officials there made a lot of money.

RW: Gee. Who was making this money?

TT: Beg pardon?

RW: Who was making the money?

TT: I think, at the assembly centers, some official.

RW: Yeah, some of the officials there?

TT: Yeah, I don't know who, but..

RW: It was just a graft scheme then, you know, they just wanted to make money on you, is that it?

TT: Yeah, that was it.

RW: Gee, did that make you sad or did it make you angry?

TT: WELL, I was kind of mad, you know, because they just take advantage of..we don't know nothing..they take \$2.75 script..after we left Wallega<sup>M</sup>, those script weren't worth anything. So we had to spend for it.

RW: Sure, my goodness, I never heard that.

TT: Beg pardon?

RW: I had never heard that.

TT: Never heard that?

RW: No one told me that.

TT: I think Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ would remember that ( ? ) maybe talk about it to them, you know? Some people buy maybe 10 books because they have the money. We didn't have the money so, we just bought what we could afford to.

RW: Can you remember how you felt when they told you ~~where you're going~~, that you were going to be sent to Tule Lake?

TT: We didn't know where we were going to, <sup>B</sup> but we find out we going to Tule Lake, and we settled there; and I got a job as a dish washer, but I didn't like it, you know. So I quit in 3 days. Then I went back to my own block <sup>manger</sup> Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, block 29, and I became the janitor and boiler man.

RW: Janitor and boiler man, block 29..

TT: And then I start to , , , up and I got a miracle on that too..

RW: I didn't ~~get~~ catch that..you got what?

TT: ..a miracle on my work, you know?

RW: A miracle?

TT: Yeah.

RW: How?

TT: So then I work on ( ? ), then I work in coal crew and some way or ~~another~~ they push me to the senior foreman, which job I couldn't I said I ~~could~~ couldn't do it, because I'm not formally educated.

RW: You're not what?

TT: Because I'm not educated..

~~RW: ECC headed. oh,~~

TT: <sup>So</sup> Well, finally they push me into it, so I became the senior foreman, and people work under me about 375 man, and some way I last <sup>in</sup> about 8 months and what happened is, after 8 months, you know, some trouble come in, so I overwrite, where my supervisor go direct to the project director and that was my fault and I got fired.

RW: Oh my goodness.

TT: <sup>So</sup> And the project manager ~~said~~ I'm sorry that I have to fire you, but because you do the overwrite ~~of the~~ other person, it forces me to fire you.

RW: Gee, what was the name of that ~~P~~ project ~~D~~ director?

TT: Project ~~D~~ director was Mr. Best.

RW: Mr. Best at that time.

TT: <sup>At</sup> At same time, and he was very nice, and he gave me a merit card, he said I did a wonderful job and after the war <sup>to</sup> ~~just~~ bring this merit card wherever you work and show to us.

RW: Did this happen before the segregation, you know, before the other people came into Tule, or did it happen after? that you were fired like this?

TT: Oh, after I got fired?

RW: ~~What~~ Did you get fired before the segregation?

TT: No, after the segregation.

RW: What I meant..you said 8 months after you got to Tule Lake, Well that was before the people came in from all the other centers.

TT: Yeah, that's right. I was there from first almost to the last.

After that, you know, I worked for canteen for 2 months, and <sup>then</sup> I got another draft for the block manager, you know, for block 29; and I also refused, but they finally put me in.

RW: Were you then block manager?

TT: <sup>Req</sup> ~~Req~~ pardon?

RW: Were <sup>1</sup> you then block manager then?

TT: Yeah, for about a year and a half.

~~RW: a year and a half.~~

~~TT: And my sister, you know, she was my secretary. And so until I moved to Cleveland, I was there and she was secretary and I had an office down there.~~

RW: ~~Gee, was there anything that happened at this period..let's see.. I'm..~~  
In Tule Lake, you had your brother and sister with you?

TT: Yes. And I had my brother. My brother <sup>is</sup> was in the next block, block 27; later on they came and move into our block; my sister and my brother and me. So later on, you know, we were in the same block.

RW: I was wondering, ~~if you~~ could tell me anything about how you felt at the time of the military registration?

TT: Well, the military registration, you know, that one is a very strange thing.

RW: Yes.

TT: You know what they call the..sign the paper. <sup>?</sup>

RW: Yes.

TT: Well, I see the paper come in. I didn't if it was 27 or 28, but I see <sup>The purpose</sup> is an application for leave clearance. And they instructed us, you know, and if you want to sign the paper..then sign it, he said, <sup>and</sup> and if you don't want to sign it..it's ~~not~~ necessary to sign it, <sup>So</sup> tomorrow the registration..

TT: (~~cont~~) So I read the application, <sup>so, ↓</sup> and told the people, you know, if you want to leave the camp, you can sign it; if you don't want to leave the camp or you don't know what's going to happen yet - if you worry about it, I think best thing is not to sign it. And if you sign it, the way I look at it - even they could force you to ~~kick the camp~~ out from the camp, you know. So, we had a little meeting ourselves and I think one of the Higaki's <sup>Lillian's</sup> <sup>1</sup> brother-in-law; Asako sister..the husband is a highly educated man.

RW: He's a what man?

TT: His name is Atsuki, <sup>Sasakiki.</sup>

RW: Oh yes, <sup>Sasakiki</sup> Atsuki, I remember him..

TT: ..and he read about it a couple of times.."Oh, oh, he said, you know this (?) ~~say~~ the 27, 28; so that was the start and so we had all the <sup>bulletins out,</sup> ~~was,~~ and he said to be sure that we read it over and sign it. ↗

RW: He told people to sign it?

TT: And next day, you know, something got <sup>all</sup> mixed up..everybody got mixed up, you know. No body <sup>wanted</sup> go to register, and <sup>the</sup> administration they sent a message-- they started to threaten us.

RW: To start what?

TT: They threatened us..if you don't sign it, we going to send you..repatriate you to Japan, you know.

RW: Yes.

TT: "So, if you don't want to sign it, sign the repatriate paper back to Japan, and then you don't have to sign it. So the most people who went to registration <sup>just</sup> they tried to sign the repatriation paper, you know, and they shut down the gate. And if you don't sign the application and declare loyalty, we will not issue <sup>the</sup> repatriation to Japan. So that's what makes all the confusion, you know.

<sup>There's</sup> Something funny; so we are not going to sign. So that was <sup>(?)</sup> the big trouble ~~that~~ <sup>comes</sup> ~~came~~ out.

RW: Gee, my goodness.

TT: Some of them signed it and at that time a lot of them moved out of camp; and other camp, <sup>and that's</sup> what they called <sup>"</sup>disloyalty<sup>"</sup>, as you know.

RW: <sup>"Loyalty" yes.</sup> Then they called those who didn't sign it..the disloyal..isn't that right? ~~And the ones who signed it were..I forget how that goes.~~

TT: ~~Beg pardon?~~

<sup>in-law</sup>  
1, Lillian Noma, with whom I have already talked, is the sister/ of Milton Sasaki, who, at Tule Lake, was ~~chairman of the Coordinating Committee~~ subsequently to become chairman of the Coordinating Committee at Tule Lake

RW: ~~Well, that's what you said, this was a matter of people being called loyal or disloyal.~~

AT: Loyal and disloyal, you know. *they call them.*

RW: <sup>"</sup> <sup>"</sup> <sup>"</sup> <sup>"</sup> No, no and yes, yes.

TT: But actually most people is loyal to United States, but we didn't have no voice, <sup>you know,</sup> whatever you do, <sup>and</sup> they put us the stockade; <sup>they</sup> so forth, that kind of thing happened. A lot of people..you don't know, <sup>they</sup> get confused about it. ~~Higaki~~ *Noma* family too, they got very <sup>much</sup> confused about it too.

RW: Yes, yes. ~~Let me see. Was there anything that happened..~~ There were many things that happened at Tule Lake even while I was there, you know, <sup>Noma</sup> this poor man, Mr. ~~Higaki~~ got murdered and then later on there were these groups of young <sup>e</sup> man who went around saying, "Washo, Washo."

TT: Yes, yes.

RW: You remember that. But what I'd like to know is of all these things, was there anything of it that really made you mad or you thought was sort of stupid?

TT: No, I can not make out what you just said.

RW: Perhaps I should say.. of the various things that you experienced in Tule Lake, which made you the most angry?

TT: Most angry?

RW: Yes.

TT: Well, most angry was..this is one of the <sup>happens</sup> ~~happen~~ just now..someway or another I was representative of the ward 2, that is 9 block square, you know. I was a representative..

RW: <sup>the</sup> A block manager?

TT: Not block manager, but they have <sup>after segregation,</sup> ~~(400)~~ you know, and I was the representative of ward 2 to go to meetings and see all kind of discussion of the other center people come in and me and another fellow from representative went over meeting, you know, and I didn't like the meeting. They had the 24-25 resolution <sup>S</sup> and the first resolution they had, you know, they wanted to kick the old former <sup>Tule Lake</sup> ~~Tule Lake~~ <sup>men</sup> out immediately, <sup>and</sup> because all of Tule Lake <sup>S</sup> is all <sup>in</sup> ~~one~~. And second one, they want to kill all the dog and cat immediately, because they are unhealthy. <sup>And</sup> they had another part, but I remember those two things particularly, you know. So that <sup>day</sup> ~~thing~~ I didn't say anything. The second time I met them, I started talking, you know. "You folks came from the other center; whatever we live in Tule Lake is nice and quiet people and if you want <sup>(?)</sup> ~~(504)~~ and kick ~~wright~~ out, then you folks is a damn fool. You don't know nothing, <sup>and</sup> killing dog and cat; those who have pets in the home.

1. Not related to Lillian Noma.

TT: (con't) There is just like their home...I mean their kid..that's why they have, <sup>so</sup> and you want to kill dog and cat is against my will. I started to argue <sup>like</sup> and everything, you know. Finally, I got so damn mad, you know, I got out of my chair and stand up and <sup>g</sup> said, "This is a ridiculous meeting. I am a representative of ward 2 and you think that I could go back and tell my people about what you folks have been talking about, <sup>?"</sup> So I stand up and had a chair and <sup>+</sup> throw at the table and I walked out. It was the most time I got mad about it. And they also threaten to kill me too.

RW: <sup>They</sup> THEY did? Could you tell me about that?

TT: Well, I don't know; they send a message to me, <sup>same (tough?)</sup> from other people and he said, "I'm going to, <sup>kill</sup> ~~kill~~ you..we going to kill you." I said, "well, if you want to kill me, go ahead." <sup>4</sup> I won't run away or nothing. I live in block 29, barrack <sup>5</sup> 13, you know. " But they didn't come and get me.

RW: Well, that took a lot of courage. I was there at that time. I really respect you for standing up like that way. Gee.

TT: <sup>yes, and</sup> You know, that is a lot of Washo people, at that time I was (??).

(542) you know, I use to talk about it. I said, "well, if you're loyal to Japan, that's fine. And at the same time, if you are not loyal to Japan or like you talking about the ? (547) the United States; in case you go back to Japan, Japanese government won't accept you; and same time United States government won't accept you too, like ? (551). So I said, I would like to see you folks be quiet and be just like real Japanese, and if you want to go back to Japan, be like <sup>a</sup> Japanese and <sup>until</sup> tell all the American people. <sup>[say] oh, three</sup> All those Japanese people..wonderful people, we hate to see them go. I like to feel the American people feel like that to you, please be quiet. " That's what was on my mind. I talk about quite often.

RW: Now, I'd like to ask a different question - was there anything that happened there at Tule Lake, that makes you feel good today..when you think about it?

TT: Oh, good today?

RW: Yeah, was there anything that happened that makes you feel good?

TT: Well, I was thinking about the good thing about it, you know. Well, this is what happened if you don't mind to hear me.

RW: Yeah. <sup>Yes</sup>

TT: When I was a block manager and one fellow bought me the book called "Buddha". That was very hard, but I read over 3 times, you know. And all of a sudden in the third time I read, I got the answer, somehow or another you know, in Japanese we call "satori", yeah, you know?

RW: Yes..

TT: It means something like enlightenment.

RW: Yes.

TT: So I had that feeling of <sup>that the</sup> enlightenment coming in while I was in office, you know; and everything started to look to me - bright looking and at that time my mind was very clear and everything that I hear or what I do, <sup>is</sup> you kind of more happy, you know, nothing <sup>to worry</sup> worried me. And in my office, when I went to open the office at 8:00, my office was all clean; and the people come in <sup>after</sup> ~~at~~ breakfast - young people come in; then young people goes out and girls come in and girls <sup>goes</sup> come in; old ladies come in; old ladies goes out; old men come in and all day long I couldn't close my office till 10:00 at night. Always people come around..gather around and talk and we had a very <sup>happy</sup> in my office..

RW: So, would it be correct to say that you not only got strength from the book, but ~~from~~ <sup>it</sup> help you have all these people who were your friends? Am I getting it straight? That these people.. people who came to see you were also reading or working in Satori?

TT: Yes, satori feeling this is what I found out; really <sup>n</sup> funny thing about this, you know. As I told you, I'm not educated man; I only go to American school for about 6½ years and Japanese school only 1 year, but when I had that feeling, the people <sup>people</sup> somehow or another followed me around and listened to what I talk. So that was wonderful feeling I had.

RW: See, that is very nice. Could you tell me now..I'm glad..I tell you because so ~~many~~ a number of people I've talked to..~~kind of~~ lived very much alone in Tule Lake, you know, they didn't dare to talk to anybody, <sup>B</sup> but it must have been great ~~strength~~ strength for you to have these people who were in satori with you. Is that so?

TT: Satori..like Buddhism.

RW: Like Buddhism?

TT: In English, they call it <sup>the</sup> enlightenment and that is very hard to get and yet is a very simple thing to get. Now when I read about it, what I understand, you know, when you put <sup>in</sup> all what I read about in one nutshell, mean is freedom from want.

RW: Freedom of what?

TT: Freedom of want.

RW: Freedom of want.

TT: So, if you have that state, my way of thinking is kind of batori. And people respect you and you don't get no fear; no anger, and just like talk a common language and people gather around you. I don't know why.

RW: That's wonderful.

TT: Yes, wonderful feeling.

RW: Gee, could you now..wonderful..could you now tell me what you did right after you left Tule Lake?

TT: What did I like in Tule Lake?

RW: No, well you already told me about this wonderful thing. I was going to say, when you left Tule Lake, ~~what was~~..what happened?

TT: Problem?

RW: Yes, how did you feel about leaving?

TT: Oh, what I feel when leaving?

RW: <sup>Yes</sup> ~~Yeah~~, when leaving Tule Lake.

TT: Well, it was kind of mean to see some friends behind, but we know we have to go out, so my brother had a job in Cleveland. So I thought I have got no place to go, so I followed my brother. And I still remember those Tule Lake, the days I had, you know, very tranquil life, what I was there, you know about a year and a half. I still remember. I still <sup>think about it and sometimes I still</sup> dream about it.

RW: What kind of work did you do in Cleveland?

TT: In Cleveland for one year I worked in a factory and after that I worked in a massage parlor. And at that time, the first time, I became a professional. And I worked in a massage parlor for 12 years. And when I quit the massage parlor, I was very sick, you know, I didn't go back, but I had work at home, and people starting coming to see me; all kind of ailments, and after.. my sister's husband died in Berkeley. I came down for the Berkeley funeral and I never went back again and I stayed here.

RW: In Berkeley.

TT: And I'm still doing and also teaching, my simple how to help the people emotional or a pain or ache, and those kind of things. And I am enjoying what I'm doing right now and I've helped a lot of people, and also when the people come in I try to take a lot of time and explain it to them....

RW: I'm enjoying this. ~~because~~

~~TT: Second tape, huh? (laughs)~~

RW: ~~I'm enjoying this.~~ I'm 70 myself and you know, to have gotten this fellowship and work when I'm retired is really such a blessing, and do you know that people like you when I talk to you..it just makes me feel good.. wonderful.

TT: Thank you very much.

RW: Let me see if there is..when you look back at Tule Lake is there anything.. maybe I should ask this...what do you think was the most important thing you learned about your fellow human being?

TT: In Tule Lake?

RW: Yes.

TT: Well, the most important thing, you know, is that I tried to help people and people gathered, you know, and that way I learned what..the most important thing I learned is kind of satori feeling. And even one technical sergeant, you know, Caucasian technical sergeant, I met and talked just like plain language, even a little (?) (B) and this person he said that " You must be very high educated man." I said, "Hell, no I'm not very educated man, you know." Well, he said, "I gathered you are a priest." He said I talked like a priest, but I never thought I talked like a priest. (laughs).

RW: And here is a sadder question. Looking back today at what happened in Tule Lake..

TT: Beg pardon?

RW: When you look back today at Tule Lake, what thing that happened there..or what part of your experience is the hardest to bear..is there anything that makes you very sad?

TT: Oh, makes me sad?

RW: Yes, makes you sad.. about Tule Lake.

TT: I don't know what to say. A lot of people I see and quite a few I talked to them and they don't know what they going to do and what in the future, they dont know; everybody don't know what the future be; even God doesn't know.

So I say, "Just let nature take care and don't worry about it."

RW: I didn't get that wise saying, would you repeat it?

TT: I said "just let nature take care.."

RW: Nature take care?

TT: Yeah, you know, don't try to force yourself, but do like that kind of thing, that's what I mean. If it come, it come; if it don't come, it don't come. So not to worry.

RW: Not to worry.

TT: And ~~if you want~~. I would talk to people. <sup>(and say)</sup> "Don't be like, yo u know, a smart man, play dumb. That way you get along with people with better," that kind of things I talked about quite a bit. And the saddest people, you know, Oh, I don't know how to say..but I see a lot of people that ~~we~~ feel very sorry for themselves, and that kind of thing, for me, when I was in there I didn't feel sorry for myself. I was looking for the best things..

RW: Did many younger people come to you for advise ~~and~~?

TT: Not too many people come for advise, because ~~I~~ I was a dumb guy..

RW: I see..

TT: Bakka, you know..

RW: Yeah, ~~you're~~ <sup>Bakka...</sup> ~~back~~ <sup>on</sup>, yeah (laughs) Well, is there anything else you would like to tell me about this experience?

TT: What experience?

RW: Is there anything..any important question ~~that~~ I haven't asked, you know, that you would like to tell me?

TT: Oh, oh, well, about the question about <sup>renouncing the</sup> ~~renunciation~~ of American citizen - that one kind of confused me, but I never renounced my citizenship and like I think Lillian ~~she~~ renounce American citizenship..

RW: Oh, I didn't know that.

TT: I think that there are, you know. They're friend one of the...<sup>she</sup> ~~she~~ is <sup>the</sup> block manager next to us and she is very much anti-American, you know, at least whatever you share about them, and she is a highly educated and <sup>then</sup> they talk .. a lot of people.. renounce American citizenship. So I believe most of the young people renounced American citizen, and that I was very sad about. I said, "You don't renounce American citizen, keep it." But most of them don't listen to me.

RW: Were they listening to somebody else?

TT: Beg pardon?

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1. Here Mr. Tekunaga is referring to Lillian Noma. See longitudinal oral history with Lillian Noma.

RW: Were they listening to somebody else?

TT: Yeah, <sup>they're asking somebody else...</sup> those radical guys..

RW: Radicals, ~~you~~ older..

TT: Usually <sup>a</sup> better speaker, and you know, the one who told them to renounce their citizen. You know the block manager in my next block, ~~and~~ I thought he would renounce <sup>A</sup> American citizen. But he didn't.. He forced other people to renounce <sup>that</sup> and he keep it, and they don't want <sup>to</sup> I find out. And I thought that was pretty damn dirty trick.

RW: I know a man like that too. ~~That you know, he hold everybody to renounce, But he..~~ Okay, unless you have something else to say, may I just thank you and express my appreciation. And I'm so happy to hear that you received this help. Could you tell me.. I don't have a pencil.. How you spell this .. my Japanese is not too good.. this satori.. this enlightenment.. what is this enlightenment in Japanese?

TT: In Japanese.. sator<sup>u</sup>i?

RW: S-A-T-U-R-I?

TT: SATURI

RW: I had it, thank you. And well, it.. is a great privledge to talk to someone as serene as you and I just wish.. ~~I have~~.. you have my best hopes that this continues for you.

TT: Well, it's very nice to talk to you and it's very nice ~~for~~ you to hear me. That makes me very happy.

RW: Thank you. That's very fine. Well, I do thank you. If you know of anyone else who lived.. who <sup>was</sup> at Tule Lake, who would be willing to talk to me.. would you write me again?

TT: Yes, if I see..

RW: Yes, if you see anyone, because I'm supposed to talk to many different people and it's a very interesting, if sometimes sad.. <sup>interrupts</sup>

TT: I understand that they are going to have a Tule Lake Reunion <sup>here</sup> next year.

RW: Yes, I heard about that.

TT: Oh, you heard that.

RW: Yeah.

TT: Maybe you could drop in, maybe you have a lot of information.

RW: If in the next few months or weeks you see anyone who was there who wouldn't mind talking, why let me know, like you did about ~~Acate~~ <sup>Lillian</sup>.

TT: Okay, if I see it.

RW: Thank you.

TT: But I haven't got your address now.

TT: (cont) If you don't mind, maybe you could drop me your address again.

RW: Oh, I see.

TT: I had it about a couple days ago, here, but I thought oh well, maybe, I don't need it no more and I just threw it out. In case some people may want to talk to you.

RW: Do you have a pencil handy or should I mail it to you?

TT: Yes, mail it to me.

RW: I'll mail it to you and you'll have it and I'd appreciate any names.

TT: And by the way, did you hear from ~~Annie~~ *Lillian*?

RW: ~~From who?~~ Oh yes.

TT: Oh, you did.

RW: Yes, I talked to her. I had a very lovely talk.

TT: Oh, that's nice.

RW: Very moving and I was very grateful to you, that's why I called you.

TT: Oh, I see.

RW: She seems to be doing much better, you know.

TT: Oh yes, she 's doing pretty good now.

RW: Okay, I'll drop you my address.

TT: Okay. Thank you very much for listening to me.

RW: Well, it was a pleasure.

TT: I was very happy to hear about you.

RW: Thank you. Good-bye.

TT: GOOD-bye

end of interview 128

TARO TOKUNAGA  
December 12, 1981

Mr. Tokunaga was born in Hawaii, in 1900. His family came to California in 1906 as migrant workers "all around California." His father and mother died in 1915 and 1920 "and after they die, I took care of my brother and sister and that's why I haven't got a formal education." He and his siblings were evacuated to Walerga, and from there to the Tule Lake Relocation Center. At Tule Lake, he worked as a dish washer and then as a janitor and boiler man. After the segregation he was asked to take the position of block manager, but he refused. "But they finally put me in, for a year and a half." Though he said a great deal about the confusion at Tule Lake during the period of Military Registration, he did not tell me how he answered. I suspect that he answered "Yes Yes" and became one of the "loyal" who remained at Tule Lake.

When I asked him whether there was anything that happened at Tule Lake that made him feel good, he told me that he had experienced satori, that is Buddhist enlightenment.<sup>1</sup>

So I had that feeling of the enlightenment coming in which I was in (block manager's) office; and everything started to look to me - bright looking. And at that time my mind was very clear and everything that I hear or what I do, is kind of more happy. Nothing to worry me. . . And all day long I couldn't close my office till 10:00 at night. Always people coming around. . . gather around and talk and we had a very happy in my office. . . . So if you have that state, my way of thinking is kind of satori. And people respect you and you don't get no fear; no anger, and just like talk a common language and people gather around you. I don't know why.

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<sup>1</sup>See Rith Benedict, "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword," pp. 238-247.

RW: That's wonderful.

TT: Yes, wonderful feeling.

RW: Could you now tell me what you did right after you left Tule Lake?

TT: . . . Well, it was kind of mean to see some friends behind. But we know we have to go out. So my brother had a job in Cleveland. So I thought I have got no place to go, so I followed my brother. And I still remember those Tule Lake, the days I had, you know, very tranquil life. I was there about a year and a half. I still remember. I still think about it and sometimes I still dream about it.

RW: What kind of work did you do in Cleveland?

TT: In Cleveland for one year I worked in a factory and after that I worked in a massage parlor. And at that time, the first time, I became a professional. And I worked in a massage parlor for 12 years. And when I quit the massage parlor, I was very sick, you know, I didn't go back, but I had work at home. And people starting coming to see me; all kind of ailments, and after. . . my sister's husband died in Berkeley, I came down for the Berkeley funeral and I never went back again. And I stayed here.

RW: In Berkeley.

TT: And I'm still doing and also teaching, my simple how to help the people-- emotional or a pain or ache, and those kind of things. And I am enjoying what I'm doing right now and I've helped a lot of people. And also when the people come in I try to take a lot of time and explain it to them. . .

RW: When you look back at Tule Lake. . . what do you think was the most important thing you learned about your fellow human beings?

TT: In Tule Lake?

RW: Yes.

TT: Well, the most important thing, you know, is that I tried to help people and people gathered, lyou know, and that way I learned what. , ,the most important thing I learned is kind of satori feeling.



RW: ~~Freedom of want.~~

TT: So, if you have that state, my way of thinking is kind of satori. And people respect you and you don't get no fear; no anger, and just like talk a common language and people gather around you. I don't know why.

RW: That's wonderful.

TT: Yes, wonderful feeling.

RW: ~~Gee, could you now... wonderful... could you now tell me what you did right after you left Tule Lake?~~

TT: ~~What did I like in Tule Lake? . . .~~

RW: ~~No, well you already told me about this wonderful thing. I was going to say, when you left Tule Lake, what happened?~~

TT: ~~Problem?~~

RW: ~~Yes, how did you feel about leaving?~~

TT: ~~Oh, what I feel when leaving?~~

RW: ~~Yes, when leaving Tule Lake.~~

TT: Well, it was kind of mean to see some friends behind, But we know we have to go out, so my brother had a job in Cleveland. So I thought I have got no place to go, so I followed my brother. And I still remember those Tule Lake, the days I had, you know, very tranquil life, what I was there, you know about a year and a half. I still remember. I still think about it and sometimes I still dream about it.

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RW: I'm enjoying this because I'm 70 myself and you know, to have gotten this fellowship and work when I'm retired is really such a blessing. And do you know that people like you when I talk to you. . . it just makes me feel good. . . wonderful.

TT: Thank you very much.

RW: ~~Let me see if there is. . . When you look back at Tule Lake is there anything. . . maybe I should ask this. . . what do you think was the most important thing you learned about your fellow human being? 5?~~

TT: In Tule Lake?

RW: Yes.

TT: Well, the most important thing, you know, is that I tried to help people and people gathered, you know, and that way I learned what. . . the most important thing I learned is kind of satori feeling. And even one technical sergeant, you