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Takeshita, Ben

Interviews

1981

(George Okamoto)

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Ben Tateshita

LONGITUDINAL HISTORY

George Okamoto

November 28, 1981



Born: 1930
Molino, California

(I did not set up my recorder properly, but, I discovered my error as soon as the interview was finished and I immediately replayed the tape and wrote down what I could remember of Mr. Okamoto's responses.)

Rosalie Wax: *First, I'd like to know a little bit about your life before Pearl Harbor. Thinking back to those days, before this awful event, how would you describe your life?*

George Okamoto was born in a small town in California. His father was a gardener and had eight children, five boys and three girls. George is the fourth child. A brother, two sisters and then George. He was eleven years old and in grade school at the time of the evacuation.

Rosalie Wax: *What do you remember about the first stages of the evacuation?*

(I think I will henceforth put Mr. Okamoto's responses in the first person. R.H.W.)

George Okamoto: *My most vivid memory is leaving our home with overloaded suitcases and what we could carry - and walking seven blocks with this load. When we left our house all the neighbors stayed indoors - no one came out to say "Good-bye". I felt this very strongly - as if we were being treated like traitors or criminals.*

We were sent to Tanforan. I remember how crowded we were, how we had to stuff straw into mattresses to have something to sleep on and how you had to wait in long lines to brush your teeth.

(Mr. Okamoto again spoke of the pain he felt because he was being treated as if he had done some wrong - like a dangerous criminal.)

I forgot to mention that on the train from San Francisco to Tanforan, I tried to look out the windows when we passed the town where I was born. But the M. P.'s ordered us to keep all the window shades down. So I figured it out by counting the white stones.

Rosalie Wax: *Were there any of these experiences that you feel were the worst, that made you feel the saddest?*

George Okamoto: (Emphatically) *Being treated as a criminal.*

Rosalie Wax: *I have a question here that really bears on this. How did you manage to cope with these experiences?*

George Okamoto: *Well, I was eleven, and I did have a good time playing with the other boys. But, I think I coped mostly by not thinking about it. By keeping it out of my mind.*

RH: Where were you sent from Tanforan?

GO: To the Topaz Center in Utah. It was in an old river bed and the dust was very unpleasant.

RW: Which experience do you recall most strongly in Topaz?

GO: The No-No business was the worst time. My oldest brother said No-No and the entire family was dependent on my older brother - so our parents and the seven other children went to Tule Lake. My brother felt that being asked these questions was an insult after what had been done to us. (Mr. Okamoto described the tension and anxiety caused by the Military Questionnaire, but I cannot remember the details. It appears to be one of the events he remembers most vividly.)

RW: Was your brother a No-No or did he just refuse to answer?

GO: He was a No-No - he was 19 or 20 at the time.

(Mr. Okamoto then began to talk about Tule Lake.)

GO: I didn't go to the WRA High School at Tule Lake - I went to the Dai Towa (Greater East Asia School.)¹ I learned to speak Japanese very well. I even noticed while going to Japanese school in Tule Lake that I got so I couldn't speak English so well with my English speaking friends. I felt I was developing a Japanese accent.

Sometime in the Spring of 1944 the boys were holding an undo Dai (athletic tournament.) The military police came in and arrested my brother and another young man.

It was only a few years ago that my brother told me about something that had happened to him in the stockade. The M. F.'s made by brother stand against a wall while they lined up in front of him with guns. Then they told him to smoke his last cigarette. For all these years my brother told no one about this. Subsequently my brother renounced his citizenship and went to Japan.

(Mr. Okamoto then told me in detail how hard he had worked in the Japanese school.)

RW: Was it helpful to have your family with you in Tule Lake?

GO: I didn't know people outside of my family. I did not make friends. We were all looking to my older brother for guidance.

RW: Was there any person at Tule Lake whom you very much respected - to whom you could go for guidance?

GO: (Very long pause) Not to anybody. There was no one.

1. There were three distinct language schools at Tule Lake. The Dai Towa, (Greater East Asia) was the first to be organized. In late 1944, reliable respondents told me that the teachers in this school did not approve of the Resegregationists. Early in 1945 I was told that the Dai Towa had expelled teachers and students who had joined the Resegregationist groups.

(After he left Tule Lake, in October of 1945, Mr. Okamoto worked his way through high school, but he was two years behind. His sisters found work as maids. After he finished high school, at age 21, he enlisted in the Army. During the Korean War and because of his knowledge of Japanese he was able to serve in the Army Language School. [I felt that enjoyed the irony of serving in the Military Intelligence only a few years after he and his family had been stigmatized as "dangerous criminals".] After the war he went to college on the G.I. Bill. He is now employed as Personnel Director of the Bay Area Social Work Agency.)

RW: *Looking back, what part of your experience is still the hardest to bear?*

Mr. Okamoto said that he felt most sorrow over the fate of his father who, after leaving Tule Lake, was unable to find employment, became very depressed, and died at the age of 55. He also implied that he had become alienated from his oldest brother, who had renounced his citizenship, gone to Japan and then returned to the United States. (Other respondents have told me that Mr. Okamoto's brother was an ardent member of the young men's Resegregationist group.)

Ben Takashi

LONGITUDINAL HISTORY

George Okamoto

Second Interview

March 12, 1982

Second Interview

Rosalie Wax: Good morning, this is Professor Rosalie Wax.

George Okamoto: Oh, Hi, Mrs. Wax, how are you?

Rosalie Wax: I'm fine and I've been really going, how should I say, full steam ahead on my interviewing; it's been very rewarding.

George Okamoto: Good.

Rosalie Wax: And also, because of the troubles of people, it's depressing, but I think this is worth recording. And, one thing, I have found that it's useful to call people twice because some people think of things that they wish they had told me.

George Okamoto: Yeah, I got your letter.

Rosalie Wax: Yes, I wondered if you have a little time now. Otherwise I could make an appointment.

George Okamoto: No, I could talk to you now.

Rosalie Wax: Oh, that's splendid. Did anything occur to you that you wished you had told me?

George Okamoto: Not really. I did think over, you know, that, really, I think I said pretty much what I felt I wanted to say or you know knew about.

Rosalie Wax: It was a very complete interview. I've made up a few extra questions, based on what I've been finding out. For some people, the camp experience helped to strengthen their families; for other people the camp experience helped to break up the families. Would you care to say what happened in your case?

George Okamoto: Okay, in my case, as you know, my oldest brother had a lot of influence in our family because he was around 18-19. And in Topaz he was very involved in the "yes-yes, no-no" activities. And to me, my father was a very quiet kind of person, so my oldest brother kind of took over the family in making decisions. And so based on his decision I have a feeling that he also influenced my second oldest brother, you know, my second oldest brother, although he was also Kibei, he wanted to study in America here. But I think through my oldest brother's influence, he answered those questions "no-no" also. And therefore my father and mother also did because they didn't want to split up the family so to speak. So we went to Tule Lake and in Tule Lake, I went to this Japanese Language School that they started, because they thought, well, we'll be sent back to Japan we better learn to speak Japanese. In that effort I and my older sisters and so on, we didn't really want to go to that school especially when the English speaking high school started. We wanted to go to English school. But it was my oldest brother who kind of forced us to go to the Japanese school. So, based on that feeling and we were in that for two years, and based on that feeling, I personally was, and I think my sisters were also very, when we came back from camp to San Mateo, we were very, I personally was very angry. And you know, I really didn't like my oldest brother. And I did a lot of things like, you know, enlisting in the Army and so on, based on trying to prove my loyalty and so on. It was not until ten years later in 1951. Let's see when did he come back, I went to Japan and saw him. .

Rosalie Wax: Oh, did he go to. .

George Okamoto: Yes, he went back to Japan from Tule Lake.

Rosalie Wax: And he renounced his citizenship?

George Okamoto: Right. And he went back to Japan about February, 1946 and he remained

GO: there and it was in 1951 that I went to Japan based on the Korean War, enlisting in the Army, and then I met him and got to know him a little better, and you know, then this strong feeling that I had for him tended to soften to a point where in 1960 when he did want to come back to the United States, he already had started a family, he asked me to be his sponsor and I was glad to do that and so on. So it took about that long, at least until 1951 when I went back and got to know him better, that I began to feel a little bit more comfortable being with him and that he was my brother.

RW: You could resume your brotherly feelings.

GO: Right. But until then I would say, me included, but my oldest sister especially, had some very strong resentments against my oldest brother for being that dominant during that period. Since then I've had no problems with him. In fact nowadays with. .since we are able to talk about the "yes-yes, no-no" problem, I begin to feel that he was one of the more brave ones to take the contrary decision at that particular time. So I have some respect for him because of the decisions he had made at the time.

RW: I've talked to other men who've said "no-no" and went to Japan and I'm sure some of them did it out of a sense of justice.

GO: Yes.

RW: They had been treated very unjustly and they weren't going to give in.

GO: Yes.

RW: That's kind of my feeling. Where does your brother live now?

GO: He came back to the United States, lived for ten years here, then he got a job through an American company to go back to Japan. So he did go back to Japan and he's there since, so he went back in 1970, I guess, thereabouts and he's living there and he's has his citizenship back. But he was until a couple of years ago working for an American company, but now I think he's on his own.

RW: Well, he's in Japan, I can't interview him.

GO: No. Our family with my sisters and so on, we've always been together and so on. So I don't think there is any effect so much from camp one way or the other, you know. It's just that they live in San Jose and San Mateo, I live on the east bay in Richmond, so there's a distance factor. But we get together when we have family get-togethers at least once or twice a year. My second oldest brother who lives in Michigan, he does a lot of flying to Asia. He drops in to see mother and whenever we try to get together, like this August we're planning a get-together when he's in town and so on. So we try to do these things when we can, especially since my mother is getting older to where we're not sure how long. . .So that's why we try to do nowadays.

RW: Do you think your second oldest brother might be willing to talk to me?

GO: He might be, yeah.

RW: Well, if you could tell me where he lives, why I could just ask him and explain and. .

GO: And explain that I referred. .I thought I gave you his address a long time ago when you first started to contact me, but let me see if I have it here; well try this address, he may have moved, but I'll give you this address, okay.

RW: I can at least ask because I find that some of the people who said "no-no" and especially people who have been to Japan, apparently have such, how should I say, such terrible experience, they don't want to talk. It's a matter of repression.

GO: That's true. Yes, it is very true and you know, many feel very guilty for doing what they did, without realizing that all this was put on by the government and that they have no reason to feel guilty. But they do, and they feel that other people don't like what whatever. So anyway, there are a lot of strong feelings amongst even the Japanese American community to this day.

RW: Do you mean. . .

GO: About being in Tule Lake or being identified at Tule Lake.

RW: Being identified. .yes I've noticed that too. I plan in my report to make clear that some people have been so traumatized that there is much that they don't want to talk about.

GO: That's very true. And even to this day.

RW: Yes, even to this day, it's amazing. Do you have time for a couple of more questions?

GO: Sure.

RW: As you think back over what you have achieved in your lifetime, in what way did the camp experience help you and in what way do you think the camp experience hurt you?

GO: In terms of hurting first, it did get me behind two years in school, because I went. . I had to go to Japanese Language School instead of English School and therefore when I got out of camp, I've been two years behind. I ended up with having a slight accent you know, especially in the beginning and therefore it was a matter of feeling not self-confident, feeling that I'm two years behind my other school mates that we went to school together, they were two years ahead of me and this kind of thing. And this had a lot of effect on me for many, many years, you know, especially in my young years. But now, I don't have any feelings about it, but I do realize that it did have a bad effect on me.

RW: It was difficult during your young manhood.

GO: Right. But now in terms of looking back I feel that having participated in the family that went "no-no", having been able to learn Japanese at that time and since then I've gone to Army Language School during the Korea War and I continued to use my Japanese to the point where many people who even went to Army Language School during World War II and even the Korean War, they've forgotten their Japanese, but I've kept mine up, to where every year, I use it for my professional association when delegates come from Japan, I act as the official interpreter and people hear me speak and they think that I'm from Japan. Anyway, I feel positiveness in terms of my ability to speak Japanese; ability. .well because of that experience also I think I feel I've proven my loyalty to this country, I don't have to do that anymore. If people accuse me, I could talk back to them without feeling hesitant, without feeling you know less competent or whatever. So from that standpoint especially in today's day, where things have come out in the open where I don't have to have these guilt feelings. I feel a lot stronger now I feel, because of my experiences. To make sure this thing doesn't happen again. And I think we have something going there in that people may accuse of being disloyal and so on, but actually to me, it's harder to talk about and to make a wrong right. It's harder to do that than to just sit back and let things happen you see. So from that standpoint I feel very strongly that I'm doing the right thing.

RW: I imagine you feel that if anything like this were tried again you would really speak out.

GO: Oh, there is no question in my mind about that, regardless of what it takes, I'm not used to picketing or whatever, but whatever it takes, I would definitely. . .

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?.

GO: Yes, definitely. When we got out of camp, all of us. .the two oldest brothers were not here, in other words, my oldest brother went back to Japan, my second oldest brother he was. .he got out of camp in Tule Lake in December, January, but he decided to go to college in the Midwest, Park College in Kansas, in Kansas City, Missouri.

RW: Yes, I know where that it.

GO: Yeah, so anyway I was left as the next male, you know, I had two older sisters, but as the next male, I had the family responsibility. But all of us were still going to

- GO: high school or to school and my father was the only one earning money because my mother had high blood pressure and couldn't, and therefore, because of that, I felt the pressure and felt again because of my oldest brother forcing us to go to, you know, Japanese school and so on, all that kind of feeling I felt very resentful and also having this burden on me when there were the two oldest brothers. We were told that our oldest brothers are to be the people in the family who are supposed to take over and so on; I'm right in the middle and I end up being responsible. I had a lot of hard feelings there along that line of being very resentful in my young days. Now I feel, well, now I don't feel that strongly naturally and take it on, as oh well, it was a good experience, let's say, and let it go at that.
- RW: I had the same experience of being the oldest in the family and my father running off, but now that I look back on it, it did me a world of good. At the time it was difficult. You get a kind of maturity and self confidence. There is one more and you may have answered it, but you're a very intelligent man and you always think of something helpful to say. As you think about yourself and your sense of stability and security, do you feel that the camp experience left you with a sense of insecurity and even damage?
- GO: Yeah, I feel that, you know, had this not happened to us, we could have during the war years, you know, I hate to talk about money, but I'm talking in terms of in general, there was a lot of money made by people who stayed because of the inflationary rates and so on, and working for the defense of the country. We could have probably, my father's parents could have afforded a higher life insurance premiums, you know, of payments and so on so that they would be covered and protecting the family, and a lot of savings could have been taken, had we not been gone for four years. I do feel that I probably would have been in a better position now had this not happened. Definitely, because there are a lot of decisions I made in adult life because I couldn't get into college as soon as I wanted to, you know, we could have had better life insurance, which would have kept my mother going and so on, give her a better life to live and so on. I think we really missed out. I think in the Japanese Americans as a whole, sure, there are many people that made it since then. But they could have made it more. They could have had more monetary stability, had this not happened. Speaking for myself and for the community as a whole, I feel that definitely we lost out quite a bit, more than the amount we are even seeking.
- RW: This ought to be kind of obvious to everyone, but people don't accept. . .
- GO: Well, they keep telling us that well, everybody suffered during the war, you know, and try to brush it under just with that kind of comment, which is to me, very irritating because at least they had a choice. We didn't, and that to me is a big difference.
- RW: And they weren't stigmatized as criminals or dangerous people.
- GO: Right.
- RW: Many people I've talked to - this is very deep - how much they resent - they couldn't believe it.

GEORGE OKAMOTO

Nov. 28, 1981

Ben Takeshita

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type.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~

Born: 1930

Moline (?), ~~California~~ California

(I did not set up my recorder properly, but, ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~
I discovered my error as soon as the interview was finished and ~~XXXXX~~
~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ I immediately ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ replayed the tape and
wrote down ~~xx~~ what I could remember of Mr. Okamoto's responses.)

RW: First, I'd like to know a little bit about your life before Pearl Harbor. Thinking back to those days, before this awful event, how would you describe your life?

GO: GO. was born in a small town in California. His father was a gardener and had eight children, 5 boys and 3 girls. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ George is the fourth child. A brother, two sisters and then ~~Ø~~ George. He was 11 years old and in grade school at the time of the evacuation.

RW: What do you remember about the first stages of the evacuation?

(I think I will henceforth ~~for~~ put Mr. Okamoto's responses in the first person. R.H. W.)

My most vivid memory is leaving our home with overloaded suitcases and what we could carry - and ~~XXXXXX~~ walking seven blocks with this *load*. ~~led~~. When we left our house all the neighbors stayed indoors - no one came out to say, "Good-bye." I felt this very strongly - as if we were ~~I was~~ being treated like a traitor or a criminal.

We were sent to Tanforan. I remember how crowded we were, how we had to stuff straw into mattresses to have something to sleep on and how you had to wait in long lines to brush your teeth. ~~XXXXX~~ (Mr. O. again ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ spoke of the pain he felt because ~~XXXXX~~ he was being treated as if he had done some wrong -- like a dangerous criminal.)

I forgot to mention that on the train from San Francisco to Tanforan, I tried to look out the windows when we passed the town where I was born. But the M. P.'s ordered us to keep all the window shades down. So I figured it out by counting the white stones.

RW: Were there any of these experiences that you feel were the worst, that made you feel the saddest?

GO: (Emphatically) Being treated as a criminal.

RW: I have a question here that really bears on this. How did you manage to cope with these experiences?

GO: Well, I was 11, and I did have a good time playing with the other ~~XXXXX~~ boys. But I think I coped mostly by not thinking about it. By keeping it out of my mind.

RW: Where were you sent from Tanforan?

GO: To the Topaz Center in Utah. It was in an old river bed and the dust was very unpleasant.

1. There were three distinct language schools at Tule Lake. The Dai
Towa, ~~Imwasmtokdyntzhanthefirstx~~ (Greater East Asia) was the first
to be organised. ~~Imwasmtokdyntzhanthefirstx~~

In late 1944, reliable respondents told me that ~~the teachers in this school~~ the teachers in this school did not approve of the Resegregationists.

Early in 1945 I was told that the ~~ExixTawa~~ Dai Towa had expelled teachers and students who had joined the Resegregationists groups.

ages, either post-high school or from age 16 on. For these ages, the choices

Q0: The No-No business was the worst time. My oldest brother said No-No and the entire family was dependent on my older brother -So our parents and the ~~seven~~ seven other children went to Tule Lake. My brother felt that being asked these questions was an insult after what had been done to us, to them. (Mr. Okamoto described the tension and anxiety caused by the ~~military~~ Military Questionnaire, but I cannot remember the details. ~~xxxx~~ It appears to be one of the events he remembers most ~~vividly~~ vividly.)

G): He was a No-No - he was 19 or 20 at the time.

GO: I didn't go ~~there~~ to the WRA High School at Tule Lake - I went to the Dai Towa Juku (Greater East Asia School.)¹ I learned to speak Japanese

1. This was a school in block 25, organized by teachers who did not support The Resegregationist Groups. ~~It was used to teach the children of the~~

very well. I even noticed while going to Japanese school in Tule Lake that I got so I couldn't speak English so well with my English speaking friends. I felt I was developing a Japanese accent.

Sometime in the Spring of 1944 the boys were holding an undo kar (athletic tournament). The military police came in and arrested my brother and another young man.

It was only a few years ago that my brother told me about something that had happened to him in the stockade. The M.P.'s made my brother stand against a wall while they lined up in front of him with guns. Then they told him to smoke his last cigarette. ~~At~~ For all ~~the~~ these years my brother told no one about this. Subsequently my brother renounced his citizenship and went to Japan.

(Mr. Okamoto then told me in detail how hard he had worked in the Japanese school.)

GO: I didn't know people outside of my family. I did not make friends. We were all looking to my older brother for guidance.

EW: Was there any person at Tule Lake whom you very much respected - to whom you could go for guidance.

GO: (Very long pause) ~~There was no one there.~~ Not to anybody. There was no one.

(After he left Tule Lake, in October of 1945, Mr. Okamoto worked his way through high school, but he was two years behind. His sisters found work as maids. After he finished ~~High~~ high school, at age 21, he enlisted in the Army . During the Korean war ~~he was in the U.S. Navy~~

~~much~~and because of his knowledge of Japanese he was able to serve in the
Army Language School. (He ^{I felt that} ~~also~~ enjoyed the irony of being~~xaxaxixaxadxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~
~~xviewxaxaxdabx bxrxhxaxuxnñhrcachoncaudcacxinnncacannnnnnnnnnnn~~

serving in the Military Intelligence only a few years after he ~~had been~~
and his family had been stigmatized as ~~XXXXXX~~ "dangerous criminals".)

After the war he went to college on the G.I. Bill. of Rights. He is now employed as Personnel Director of the Bay Area Social Work Agency.

FW: Looking back, what part of you experience is still the hardest to bear?

Gox

Mr. Okamoto said that he ~~fxe~~ felt most sorrow over the fate of his father

who, after leaving ~~Tubex~~ Tule Lake, was unable to find employment, became

very depressed, and died at the age of 55. He also implied that he had

become alienated from his oldest brother, who had renounced his citizenship,

gone to Japan and then returned to the United States. (Other respondents

have told me that Mr. Okamoto's brother was an ardent member of the

young mens' Resegregationist group.)

15- 235 - 8182
 Office - ~~415-375-8182~~ Home
 Office - 415-676-4000

First, I'd like to know a little bit about your life before Pearl Harbor. Thinking back to these days, before this awful event, how would you describe your life?

Went to Japan for six months when Ben a small ^{four years old} child / older brother stayed there for several years.

Most vivid memory is leaving with overloaded suitcases and what they could carry - and walking seven blocks with this load - Also remembers feeling like ~~xxx~~ he was being treated like a criminal

Remembers how crowded, - how had to stuff straw into mattresses to be able to sleep - wait in long lines to brush your teeth - Again mentions sadness a pain at being rejected as xx a criminal -

His brother said No-No- and, I gather urged other young men to do so.

Entire family ~~was~~ dependent on older brother - he really led them -
So, since he was NoNo - ~~all~~ the parents and 8 children went
to Tule Lake.

RW. Which experience would you recall most strongly in Tepez -
The No No business was worst time -

Bother No no see previous page.

Felt that being asked these questions was an insult after what had been done to them.

(very long description here - alas -

evidently much angry discussion - among people at Tosaz -

RW Did this make you feel anxious or was it just that you sensed that this general tension?

RW Was a brother a No-No or did he just refuse to answer?

BT - He was a No-No.

Borther was 19 or 20 at this time.

Then tell me that did not go to WRA high school but to
the ~~DAI TOWA YUKU~~ Dai Towa Yuku (Greater East Asia School)

box - where he learned to speak Japanese very well -

even noticed in Tule Lake that he ~~couldn't~~ ~~after~~ as he attended this school he could not speak English so well with his English speaking friends - felt he developed a Japanese accent -

Story of what happened to his brother -

Sometimes in ~~xxx~~ Spring of 1944 ~~wxnamahh~~ boys were holding an

undau kai (athletic tournament)

military police came in and arrested his older brother and another young man -

Only a few years ago - his brother told ~~ix~~ him that MP's had stood him against a wall, told him to smoke his last cigarette, ... ~~(evidently~~ ~~taxfixix~~ while they lined up with guns - (why they did this Mr. T. did not say) - this brother subsequently renounced his citizenship and went to Japan.

(Berther ~~XXXXX~~ evidently told no one about this - for all these years.)

RW. Yes, and it affected him so much that he didn't tell you until a few years ago.

Seems to have spend most of his energy in Japanese school.

RW Who were the other members of your family at Tule Lake?

Father mother - brothers and 3 sisters

RW. Was it helpful to have your family with you?

Explain that he did not know people outside his family -
did not make friends.

Explains more upon how dependent they all ~~XXXX~~were on elder brother for guidance.

RH. Was there any person at Tule Lake whom you very much respected?

xxx BT (Thinks a long while and exclaims that there was no one.

~~Rxxx~~ Sad picture of isolation.)

RW. - Were there any of the teachers in the Japanese school.. .

I guess, ~~xxxx~~ what I'm asking is who would you go to for advice in a serious ~~sitaskox~~ ~~sitaskiox~~ thing at your age?

BT - said he had none.- "Not to anybody" .

Takeshita

3.

3.

Now told me how, after he left Tule Lake in October of 1945, he went to high school but was two years ~~back~~ behind, because of his ~~staying~~ going to Japanese school at Tule Lake. After finishing High School, he enlisted in the army and served during the ~~Korean~~ war with Korea - he also served in the U.S. Army language school, where his knowledge of Japanese was of great help. Was 21 when he began to serve in Korean war.

After the war he went to college on the G. I. bill.

He is now ~~now~~ working as director of a social work ~~now~~ agency, I ~~now~~ can't remember the name, but it sounded pretty impressive. ~~After~~ After long discussion of his ~~now~~ present community serving work, I ~~now~~ asked:

RW? Looking back, what ~~part~~ part of your experience is still the hardest

to bear. Mr. Takeshita said that he ~~was most~~ ^{felt most} ~~xx~~ disturbed by the fate of his father in the years after the family left Tule Lake. His father was unable ~~to find~~ to find employment, became very depressed, and died at the age of 55. (He had also told me previously how, immediately after the

war, he worked his way through school and ~~now~~ that his sisters had worked as live in maids, so as to ~~be able~~ ~~xx~~ to be able to continue their education.

Served in Korean war -

Two years Japanese School - behind two years when started high - then war service - then college on GI. bill of rights -

trouble with brother
saw our father -

Japan school

in prison

brother's experience - near - arrested - but
didn't go to prison -

more Oct - 1943 Left Oct 1943 -

sister used as line in ~~the~~ mail.

Dai Towa - Sally Yamahiro, wife of a Japanese school teacher told me that the Dai Towa (Greater East Asia) school - The Dai Towa (GEA). This is the school of block 25 of which George Kunitani is supposed to be principal. This school has kicked out all Hokeku people and will not have them as teachers or students. This is the first Japanese school founded in Tule Lake. After Norden's last visit the name was changed to Tule Lake Gakuen (Educational Institution). This school is independent from the very large camp-wide school. Fieldnotes - Feb. 14, 1945.

George Okamoto

#155 Second Interview
March 12, 1982

Ben Tideshita

RW: Good morning, this is Professor Resalie Wax.

GO: Oh, Hi, Mrs. Wax, how are you?

RW: I'm fine and I've been really going, how should I say, full steam ahead on my interviewing; it's been very rewarding, and also, ~~how should I say~~, because of the troubles of people, it's depressing, but I think this is worth recording. And..one thing, ~~that I had~~ found that it's useful to call people twice because some people think of things that they wish they had told me.

GO: Yeah, I got your letter.

RW: ~~I tried, but you seemed to have gone out of town.~~

GO: ~~Yeah.~~

RW: Yeah, I wondered if you have a little time now. Otherwise I could make an appointment.

GO: No, I could talk to you now.

RW: Oh, that's splendid. Did anything occur to you that you wished you had told me?

GO: Not really. I did think over, you know, that, really, I think I said pretty much what I felt I wanted to say or you know knew about.

RW: It was a very complete interview. Then I've made up a few extra questions, based on what I've been finding out. For some people, the camp experience helped to strengthen their families; for other people the camp experience helped to break up the families, and would you care to say what happened in your case?

GO: Okay, in my case, as you know, my oldest brother had a lot of influence in our family because he was around 18-19, and in Topaz he was very involved in the "yes, yes, no-no" activities. And to me, my father was a very quiet kind of person, so my oldest brother kind of

took over the family in making decisions, and so based on his decision I have a feeling ^{that} he also influenced my second oldest brother, you know, my second oldest brother, although he was also Kibei, he wanted to study in America here. But I think through my oldest brother's influence, he answered those questions "no-no," also, and therefore my father and mother also did because they didn't want to split up the family so to speak. So we went to Tule Lake and in Tule Lake, I went to this Japanese Language School that they started, because they thought, well, we'll be sent back to Japan we better learn to speak Japanese. In that effort I and my older sisters and so on, we didn't ^{really} want to go to that school ~~really~~ especially when the English speaking high school started. We wanted to go to English school. But it was my oldest brother who kind of forced us to go to the Japanese school.

~~RW: So, that is, he kept you from, it was for him only the Japanese school and no English school.~~

GO: So, based on that feeling and we were in that for ^{two} 2 years, and based on that feeling, I personally was, and I think my sisters were also very, when we came back from camp to San Mateo, we were very, I personally was very angry. And you know, I really didn't like my oldest brother. And I did a lot of things like, you know, enlisting in the Army and so on, based on trying to prove my loyalty and so on. It was not until 10 years later in 19⁵¹. let's see when did he come back, I went to Japan and saw him..

RW: Oh, did he go to..

GO: Yes, he went back to Japan from Tule Lake.

RW: And he renounced his citizenship?

GO: Right. And he went back to Japan about February, 1946 and he remained there and it was in 1951 that I went to Japan based on the Korean War, enlisting in the army, and then I met him and got to know him a little better, and you know, then this strong feeling that I had for him tended to soften to a point where in 1960 when he did want to come back to the United States, he already had started a family, he asked me to be his sponsor and I was glad to do that and so on. So it took about that long, at least until 1951 when I went back and got to know him better, that I began to feel a little bit more comfortable being with him and that he was my brother.

RW: You could resume your brotherly feelings.

GO: Right. But until then I would say, me included, but my oldest sister especially, had some very strong resentments against my oldest brother for being that dominant during that period. Since then I've had no problems with him. In fact nowadays with..since we are able to talk about the "yes-yes, no-no" problem, I begin to feel that he was one of the more brave ones to take the contrary decision at that particular time. So I have some ~~other~~ respect for him because of the decisions he had made at the time.

RW: I've talked to other men who've said "no-no" and went to Japan and I'm sure some of them did it out of a sense of justice. ^{GO: Yes. RH:} ~~if you~~ see what I mean, that ^{GO: Yes. RH:} they had been treated very unjustly and they weren't going to give in. [^] That's kind of my feeling. Where does your brother live now?

GO: He came back to the United States, lived for 10 years here, then he got a job through an American company to go back to Japan, ~~So~~ he did go back to Japan and he's there since, so he went back in

1970, I guess, thereabouts and he's living there and he's has his citizenship back. But he was until a couple of years ago working for an American company, but now I think he's on his own.

RW: Well, he's in Japan, I can't interview him.

GO: No.

~~RW: Well, I'm very happy to hear...professional men especially I've interviewed, their families are still split. And they feel very, very badly about this.~~

GO: Our family with my sisters and so on, we've always been together and so on. So I don't think there is any effect so much from camp one way or the other, you know. It's just that they live in San Jose and San Mateo, I live on the east bay in Richmond, so there's a distance factor, But we get together when we have family get-togethers at least once or twice a year. My second oldest brother who lives in Michigan, he does a lot of flying to Asia, He drops in to see mother and whenever we try to get together, like this August we're planning a get-together when he's in town and so on. So we try to do these things when we can, especially since my mother is getting older to where we're not sure how long, So that's why we try to do nowadays.

RW: Do you think your second oldest brother might be willing to talk to me?

GO: He might be, yeah.

RW: Well, if you could tell me where he lives, why I could just ask him and explain and..

GO: And explain that I referred..I thought I gave you his address a long time ago when you first started to contact me, but let me see

if I have it here; well try this address, he ^{may} ~~might~~ have moved, but I'll give you this address, okay. His name is..his last name is the same, but Yuzuru and his English name is John. Now he used to be at 816 Patricia Avenue, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48103. The phone number is area code 313-761-4026. omit

RW: I can at least ask because I find that some of the people who said "no-no" and especially people who have been to Japan, apparently have such, how should I say, such terrible ~~ex~~ experience, they don't want to talk. It's a matter of repression.

GO: That's true. Yes, it ~~is~~ very true and you know, many feel very guilty ~~for~~ doing what they did, without realizing that all this was put on by the government and that they have no reason to feel guilty, ~~but~~ they do, and they feel that other people don't like what whatever. So anyway, there are a lot of strong feelings amongst even the Japanese American community to this day.

RW: Do you mean..

GO: About being in Tule Lake or being identified at Tule Lake.

RW: Being identified..yes I've noticed that too. ~~But how should I say, I'm not going to skip this.~~ I plan ~~to~~ in my report to make clear that some people have been so traumatized that there is much that they don't want to talk about.

GO: That's very true. And even to this day.

RW: Yes, even to this day, it's amazing. Do you have time for a couple of more questions?

GO: Sure.

RW: As you think back over what you have achieved in your lifetime, in what way did the camp experience help you and in what way do you think the camp experience hurt you?

GO: In terms of hurting first, it did get me behind ^{two} 2 years in school, because I went..I had to go to Japanese Language school instead of English school and therefore when I got out of camp, I've been ^{two} 2 years behind. I ended up with having a slight accent you know, especially in the beginning and therefore it was a matter of feeling not self-confident, feeling that I'm ^{two} 2 years behind my other school mates that we went to school together, they were ^{two} 2 years ahead of me and this kind of thing. And this had a lot of effect on me for many, many years, you know, especially in my younger years. But now, I don't have any feelings about it, but I do realize that it did have a bad effect on me.

RW: It was difficult during your young manhood.

GO: Right. But now in terms ~~in~~^{of} looking back I feel that having participated in the family that went "no-no", having been able to learn Japanese at that time and since then I've gone to Army Language School ~~in Korea~~ during the Korea War and I continued to use my Japanese to the point where many people who even went to Army Language School during World War II and even the Korean War, they've forgotten their Japanese, but I've kept mine up, to where every year, I use it for my professional association when delegates come from Japan, I act as the official interpreter and people hear me speak and they think that I'm from Japan. Anyway, I feel positiveness in terms of my ability to speak Japanese; ability..well because of that experience also I think I feel I've proven my loyalty to this country, I don't have to do that anymore. If people accuse me, ~~I have a back~~..I could talk back to them without feeling hesitant, without feeling you know less competent or whatever, So from that standpoint especially in today's day, where things have come out in the open where I don't

have to have these guilt feelings. I feel a lot stronger now I feel, because of my experiences. To make sure this thing doesn't happen again. And I think we have something going there in that people may accuse of being disloyal and so on, but actually to me, it's harder to talk about and to make a wrong, right. It's harder to do that than to just sit back and let things happen you see. So from that standpoint I feel very strongly that I'm doing the right thing.

RW: I imagine you feel that if anything like this were tried again you would really speak out.

GO: Oh, there is no question in my mind about that, regardless of what it takes, I'm not used to picketing or whatever, but whatever it takes, I would definitely..

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?

GO: Yes, definitely. When we got out of camp, all of us..the two oldest brothers were not here, in other words, my oldest brother went back to Japan, my second oldest brother he was..he got out of camp in Tule Lake in December, January, but he decided to go to college in ^{the} Midwest, Park College in Kansas, in Kansas City, Missouri.

RW: Yes, I know where that is.

GO: Yeah, so anyway I was left as the next male, you know, I had ^{two} 2 older sisters, but as the next male, I had the family responsibility. But all of us were still going to high school or ^{to} school and my father was the only one earning money because my mother had high blood pressure and couldn't, and therefore, because of that, I felt the pressure and felt again because of my oldest brother forcing us to go to, you know, Japanese school and so on, all that kind of feeling I felt very resentful and also having this burden on me when there were the

two oldest brothers. ^{Wa} We were told that our oldest brothers are to be the people in the family who are supposed to take over and so on; I'm right in the middle and I end up being responsible. I had a lot of hard feelings there along that line of being very resentful in my young days. Now I feel, well, now I don't feel that strongly naturally and take it on, as oh well, ^{it was} ~~it's~~ a good experience, let's say, and let it go at that.

RW: I had the same experience of being the oldest in the family and my father running off, but now that I look back on it, it did me a world of good. At the time it was difficult. You get a kind of maturity and self confidence. There is one more ^{and} ~~that~~ you may have answered it, but you're very intelligent man and you always think of something helpful to say. As you think about yourself and your sense of stability and security, do you ^{feel} ~~think~~ that the camp experience left you with a sense of insecurity and even damage?

GO: Yeah, I feel that, you know, ^{this} ~~if this~~ had not happened to us, we could have during the war years, you know, I hate to talk about money, but I'm talking in terms of ⁱⁿ general, there was a lot of money made by people who stayed because of the inflationary rates and so on, and working for the defense of the country. We could have probably, my father's parents could have afforded a higher life insurance premiums, you know, of payments and so on so that they would be covered and protecting the family, and a lot of savings could have been taken, had we not been gone for ^{four} ~~4~~ years. I do feel that I probably would have been in a better position now had this not happened. Definitely, because there are a lot of decisions I made in adult life because I couldn't get into college as soon as I

wanted to, you know, we could have had better life insurance, which would have kept my mother going and son on, give her a better life to live and so on. I think we really missed out. I think in the Japanese Americans as a whole, sure, there are many people that made it since then. But they could have made it more. They could have had more monetary stability, had this not happened. Speaking for myself and for the community as a whole, I feel that definitely we lost out quite a bit, ^{more} ~~but~~ than the amount we are even seeking.

RW: This ought to be kind of obvious to everyone, but people don't accept..

GO: Well, they keep telling us that well, everybody suffered during the war, you know, and try to brush it under just with that kind of comment, which is to me, very irritating because at least they had a choice. We didn't, and that to me is a big difference.

RW: And they weren't stigmatized as criminals or dangerous people.

GO: Right.

RW: Many people I've talked to - this is very deep - how much they resent - they couldn't believe it.

END OF INTERVIEW #

George Okamoto, age 11;

5.T.
My most vivid memory is leaving home with~~o~~ overloaded suitcases and what we could carry - and walking seven blocks with this load. When we left our house~~d~~ all the neighbors stayed indoors - no one came out to say, "Good-bye". I felt this very strongly - as if we were being treated like traitors or a criminal.

Keshiro Furukawa, ~~xxxxxxx~~ ^{age} ~~xxxxxxx~~ 18 ~~or older.~~

5.T.
also
P-11's
and
conf
Our loyalty was questioned and this is what I resented, and this is the cause of my trouble at Tule Lake. Because I didn't comply with the registration orders, and I was placed there and labeled a dis-loyal citizen of America. And I've had to live ~~with~~ with that for all these years. . . The fact is that we were very loyal, we were extremely

INJUSTICE, INSECURITY, ~~XXXX~~ STIGMA

Most respondents made statements that ~~consciously~~ reflect an abiding sense of injustice -- they have ~~suffered~~ suffered a great wrong that has never been righted. /Intimately related to this conscious sense of injustice is ~~an~~ a haunting sense of insecurity. No person confined in the camps can ever ~~be~~ feel completely sure that ~~this experience~~ the painful and humiliating experiences of evacuation and detention may ~~be~~ not once again be forced upon them. ~~And furthermore~~ And for three or four years they were obliged to live in a situation where they were treated, day in and day out, as if they were criminals or "dangerous people".

Arthur ~~Kikuchi~~ Kikuchi, a Nisei, age 15:

After we were evacuated and all, citizenship no longer meant anything. So we no longer would be surprised with any move that the government would make. The citizenship was worthless. From that standpoint, we thought we would not be given a day in court . . . I'd still like a proper hearing. . . The fact of the bleakness of the future - not knowing what did lie ahead. *Should not - p. 3.*

~~Lillian Nema, a Nisei, age 19:~~

Lillian Nema, a Nisei, age 19:

Because I noticed when the war started my classmates stopped talking to me. On the street they didn't even see me . . . Even now, people. . . just because of your Oriental features you're not considered American.

Jennifer Chan, a Nisei, age 16:

(in California)
The principal at High School asked us not to come to school anymore because we were Japanese American. . . It is still a "nightmare" for me to think that we were put in concentration camp in American when we are American citizens by birth. It happened to us 40 years ago. . . but every once in a while it came back to me. I ~~don't~~ don't think I will forget it completely.

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old Mrs. Oda had

*old
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there*

American. And this is what I really resented all these years/: that I was denied to be an American. Some of ~~xxxxx~~ the young men had been drafted and then they/ were rejected and sent to camp. who left Tule Lake on December 25, 1945 and expatriated to Jennifer Chan, age 18, ~~who in 1946~~ accompanied her parents and six ~~siblings~~ Japan with her parents and six siblings. never I would ~~not~~/like to see any American citizen being sent to camp without a hearing and being locked up for almost four years because we were of Japanese ancestry. We had a very hard time starting all over again ~~and our family were~~ and our family were all separated. After Tule Lake we never got together as a family, and many nights I cried myself to sleep. In Japan, we were hated by the Japanese.

Arthur Kikuchi, age 19:

In answer to the question, "What part of the experience ~~xx~~ is still hardest to bear, Mr. Kikuchi respondend:

I rhink the incarceration without a hearing; and I still wake up at unpredictable times and I'm still in camp, and I wake up in a pool of ~~saw~~ sweat. . . That has been the toughest. . . To this day I'm ~~xxx~~ still in camp. So that's a nightmare, a recurring nightmare. . . I think if I were paying for a crime, you'd say to yourself, "Well, I deserve to be put there; but if it isn't, then the anguish, the mental anguish. . .