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Tom Oishi

Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project

A Collaborative Project of the Regional Oral History Office,
The National Park Service, and the City of Richmond, California

Interviews conducted by
Donna Graves and David Washburn
in 2002 and 2003

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Interview with Tom Oishi

Interviewed by: Donna Graves and David Washburn

Transcriber: Sayuri Stabrowski

[Interview #01: December 12, 2002]

[Begin Audio File Oishi.T01]

1-00:00:44

Graves:

So David wants you to introduce yourself again. Your name is.

1-00:00:47

Oishi:

My name is Tom Oishi, O-I-S-H-I.

1-00:1-00:50

Graves:

I was particularly interested in hearing more about your family, your parents and how they came to Richmond? Can you tell me about that?

1-00:01:02

Oishi:

Now, since David was interested in it, I asked a lot of questions from my older brothers and my cousins. I am the youngest of the family of seven, and there's three Oishi brothers that came to the United States. The first one who came was roughly in 1895 or 1893 and I believe my father came in 1895, and then the third brother might have come in 1898 or 1899. The reason why the two other brothers was Oishis. The oldest one was Oishi. My father was second, his name was Oishi, but the third one is Sakai. The reason for that is, in the ancient days, the Sakai did not have no son, so at an early age—what they call Yoshi in Japan—maybe Mr. Sakai was only maybe fifteen or something and they figured they needed a son so they took the Sakai name. So, actually he's my real uncle. He should be. He's born in the Oishi family.

1-00:03:04

Graves:

But families would use the name Sakai. Now I'm confused, you're—.

1-00:03:15

Oishi:

The reason is, in Japan if you have no son and maybe the family has a little estate, they would like to have someone take the family name. Since the Oishis had four or five brothers, they gave the third child to Sakai, but actually he's an Oishi. Sakai is my real cousin. I think they do that in this country too. There's a lot of professional people who become lawyers and they want to keep their own name. Before they're married, maybe their name is Tanaka or something. Then they're married to a Hinoda or something, they keep their Tanaka name. But in Japan—I don't know if they have it in this country or not.

1-00:04:19

Graves:

So it was a way of allowing the Sakai family to have a male, a man, to pass their possessions down to.

1-00:04:28

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes. More so if they have a little estate.

1-00:04:32

Graves:

And, do you know what brought your father and his brothers to the United States, what they hoped to find?

1-00:04:41

Oishi:

Well, the reason why they came, my grandfather, which I never saw—he might have passed on way before I was even born. He was an educator, *Nikkei*. He's a Samurai they called him. He comes from a Samurai family. And, he saw there was no future in his little village that they were living in and I guess he read up on America—a future in America, California especially. That's why in the 1890s—3 or something like this. The year is not exact, it might be two or three different—the pioneers came into California.

1-00:05:31

Graves:

So he sent his sons to California—encouraged.

1-00:05:38

Oishi:

Well, maybe he advised or he saw maybe a future in California rather than in Japan.

1-00:05:46

Graves:

Where in Japan did they live, do you know?

1-00:05:48

Oishi:

Sasayama.

1-00:05:51

Graves:

Sosayama?

1-00:05:53

Oishi:

Sasayama.

1-00:05:54

Graves:

Sasayama.

1-00:05:55

Oishi:

But, this is from Osaka. It's in the same *ken* as Kobe. Sasayama is—from Osaka, you go like you would go from here to Auburn or Placerville. It's in the foothills and there was a little bit of {inaudible} which they lived. And they started going into Osaka or Kobe to work, maybe oblige them to come here.

1-00:06:41

Graves:

You said your grandfather was an educator. Do you know, did he teach at a local school or what?

1-00:06:49

Oishi:

I guess he did. See that is a picture of the *mon*. The Oishi family *mon*. I guess you know what a *mon* is. A *mon* is a family—.

1-00:07:03

Graves:

Crest.

1-00:07:04

Oishi:

Yes. Just recently—I have no interest in *mon* before, until just recently. Naturally, when you get to a certain age, you know, you want to see where you come from—what your roots are. At an early age, you know you have other interests—becoming a real senior citizen, you know. (laughs) You would like to find out your roots. And my cousin passed away recently, a couple years ago. He was about ten years older than me. And he's the son of my oldest uncle—he's the first one that came. And he had this in his living room. And he says, "Tom, this is *mon*. I'll get you one," he says. [laughs] "This is the family roots—*mon*. You come from Samurai family." So I started showing interest. I told Mas, "You get me a *mon* like this," see. But, he was in good health and after that, a few months later he passed on. He went to Reno and had a stroke and that was his life. But he never got me the *mon*, but I went to the house and his wife gave me—showed me a picture of the *mon*, and I borrowed it and I went to a photo shop to get it done.

1-00:08:29

Graves:

Looks good. So, how old was your father and his brothers when they came, would you say?

1-00:08:39

Oishi:

Well, I think my father might have been about twenty-three years old.

1-00:08:46

Graves:

And where did he arrive in the United States and how did he get to Richmond?

1-00:08:52

Oishi:

He landed in Seattle, maybe there was no port in San Francisco—I don't know why. He landed in Seattle, and went to Alviso. I don't know, maybe he was someplace, maybe he was in Seattle doing housework, and domestic work. And then the two brothers got together and they started something up in the flower industry in Alviso. Alviso, you know where Alviso is?

1-00:09:21

Graves:

Southern California?

1-00:09:22

Oishi:

Hayward. Hayward, {inaudible} in that area. And then, his oldest brother was very aggressive. Now, he's a leader, and he was aggressive. Maybe my father just tagged along with him.

1-00:09:41

Graves:

What was your uncle's name?

1-00:09:44

Oishi:

Oishi. It was Oishi! (laughs)

1-00:09:52

Graves:

Your father's first name was?

1-00:09:54

Oishi:

{Seizo?}.

1-00:09:54

Graves:

{Seizo?}.

1-00:09:55

Oishi:

Yes.

1-00:09:56

Graves:

And your uncle?

1-00:09:57

Oishi:

Tokutaro—

1-00:10:02

Graves:

So they came to Hayward area, Alviso, and started what kind of a flower business? What were they doing?

1-00:10:12

Oishi:

I don't know what it was. I don't think it was carnations. Maybe it was outdoor flowers or something. And they had—the Oishis had a lot to do with the California Flower Market, you know on where—on Fifth Street. They were the original, you know, on the board and maybe they started that up.

1-00:10:35

Graves:

Your father and uncle?

1-00:10:37

Oishi:

They were one of the many pioneers.

1-00:10:41

Graves:

Did they both come to Richmond?

1-00:10:47

Oishi:

I think in the latter part of 1890, maybe 18—no, 1898, roughly around there. Then they came to Richmond. They went into flower business here.

1-00:11:08

Graves:

So they, did they build the greenhouses?

1-00:11:10

Oishi:

Yes, yes. They bought property. The reason why—they were able to do it was, there was a law in California, or maybe the United States, saying that Asian immigrants can not buy property. You have to be a citizen. Well, I think immigrants from Europe—German immigrants, Italian immigrants—they were able to buy property. So, they hired a lawyer and they bought the property and put the property under a child's name. Then, the first child was born and he might have been born in 1898 or something in that area. And they were able to buy property. And they put the property under the American citizen's name.

1-00:12:24

Graves:

And was he your cousin or your older brother?

1-00:12:26

Oishi:

No, my cousin.

1-00:12:28

Graves:

Okay. So your uncle and your father started this nursery business together. Do you think they came to Richmond because there were other nurseries already, or?

1-00:12:37

Oishi:

No, I think they were pioneers in Richmond. But they didn't start it together. I think my father was more or less under him and then eventually he bought his own place.

1-00:12:51

Graves:

And what about your mother? When did she come to the United States and how did they meet?

1-00:13:00

Oishi:

In (pauses) the year—I can't have the right exact year, in 19—1904 or something, my father went back to Japan and I guess maybe they have picture bride but the family might have known each other and they recommended my father to my mother. So they came over in 1893, no 19—1903, in that area, and they came directly to Richmond. I mean, my father had something established here already.

1-00:13:51

Graves:

And what was her name?

1-00:13:53

Oishi:

Riu.

1-00:13:55

Graves:

Riu. Do you know her family name?

1-00:13:59

Oishi:

Hirano.

1-00:14:00

Graves:

Hirano. So how old was she when she came here, do you know?

1-00:14:05

Oishi:

She must have been twenty-one, twenty-two years old. She had a little education in Japan too. Most immigrants did not have education, but she had a little education and my father had a little education in Japan too.

1-00:14:23

Graves:

What does that mean? Like, up through the equivalent of high school, or?

1-00:14:28

Oishi:

No, maybe a junior high, I don't know. He might have more, I'm not sure. But he was able to read the American papers, even in the latter years. He lived to be ninety-four years old. And he would wait for the paper to come, the American paper. He was keeping up with whatever that was going on.

1-00:14:56

Graves:

So when she came, they were both in their twenties.

1-00:15:00

Oishi:

No. One—I don't know what—. She might have been in her early twenties and I think my father was fifteen years older when he got married, so he was in his thirties, thirty-five maybe.

1-00:15:22

Graves:

Did she work with him in the nursery?

1-00:15:25

Oishi:

I think as soon as they arrived in the United States, she started having a family. She was not an agricultural—in Japan her background was not agricultural. There's a lot of families from Japan that came from farming area. They were used to work. They knew how to grow different crops. But my mother and father were not in that line. So it was kind of a disadvantage to them. But they had the business knowledge and {a little bit of} schooling.

1-00:16:09

Graves:

So she started having children right away, you think. And you said there were how many children in the family?

1-00:16:16

Oishi:

There's three brothers and four sisters, and I'm the youngest. My oldest living sister is ninety-two, ninety-three years old.

1-00:16:37

Graves:

What are all their names?

1-00:16:40

Oishi:

My father came to this country, "This is America, we can't have Japanese names." So, he says, "We will have to have two names," you know, which would match in the same—. My oldest sister was named Miti-michi in Japanese. My oldest brother is named Joe and I guess there's a Jo or something in Japanese language. And my next brother was named George, Joji in Japanese is the word. That's George's, see. And my—Amy is my next sister and her name is Amy, in Japanese Emiko. And my next sister is Hannah, Hannah in English and Hanako in Japanese. And my next sister's name is Lucy, Lucy in English and {Lushi?}, {Lushiko} in Japanese. My name is Tom in English and Tomu in Japanese or something. Since he was, you know, he was very proud of—every time someone was born in the family, he figures he's the expert with names, even the grandchildren's names.

1-00:18:21

Graves:

Where do you think your father learned to read English? Did he learn any English in Japan?

1-00:18:27

Oishi:

I always wondered if he learned in Japan, but I was told that in those days they didn't have any. I don't know. (laughs) But, he might have been doing busboy or schoolboy, and naturally, since he had a little education in Japan, he was able to pick it up.

1-00:18:50

Graves:

When your mother started having children here, did she have them at home? Do you know anything about your births?

1-00:18:59

Oishi:

What they have—. In the ancient days, I don't think they had—they had what they call in Japanese *Sanbas{son}*. *Sanbas{son}* is a midwife. Maybe you don't have no education or something. They have midwife and they would deliver the baby. But I don't think that it was hospitals, or maybe one little hospital in Richmond.

1-00:19:25

Graves:

Right. So the midwife would come to the house.

1-00:19:29

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes. Maybe they have experience in that line. Maybe they had a little education too, in that line. Most child, I think in our family, was born at home.

1-00:19:49

Graves:

So, by giving you two names, it seems like your father was interested in having you comfortable, or fit in with both cultures?

1-00:20:01

Oishi:

Yes, yes. That was his idea. I guess his father told him, "This is a great country. There's a future there." Maybe he read—he would be able to read what's outside the world from Japan. Maybe a good future, the climate's good. So my father, since he married in the early 1900s, he never went back to Japan. Well, he was too busy raising the kids. He enjoyed this country.

1-00:20:37

Graves:

How important was it to your parents that all you kids that you knew something about Japanese culture? You mention a Japanese language school. Can you talk about that?

1-00:20:49

Oishi:

Well, I think our family was different than most Japanese. A lot of Japanese that was in the city, San Francisco, Berkeley, Oakland area, they were not able to buy property. They didn't have a home. They had to rent. So their future was very, you know, should we become an American citizen or should we go back to Japan? Maybe they're sending money to Japan. Maybe the kids would get to be a certain age and we better given them a good education, send them to school in

Japan. Because, Kibei-Nisei, you heard about that? They're born in this country and they see no future, they can't buy nothing and a lot discrimination, so they would study in Japan and then come back before they become an adult.

1-00:21:57

Graves:

But your family seems to have felt more confident about its future here.

1-00:22:04

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes, yes. That's why most of these families in Richmond—somehow they were in a corporation. The businesses were in a corporation and they borrowed a native American citizen child's name.

1-00:22:24

Graves:

When you say, "they." "They" formed—.

1-00:22:29

Oishi:

There was quite a few families here in Richmond, Japanese families.

1-00:22:32

Graves:

And they joined together to do this?

1-00:22:35

Oishi:

Not joined, maybe they had the same lawyer or something. And this lawyer, I believe they got us through the—. Maybe this lawyer in San Francisco was a kind man—Caucasian man—felt this was wrong, and he went out of his way to do this. Did a lot of areas in California, in the agricultural areas, some did it, some areas did not. So during the war, the name would be under Caucasian name and we come back, "This is not yours. Look, the title is mine." But actually, it's the Japanese who did a lot of, lawsuits on that.

1-00:23:17

Graves:

So, tell me a little bit about the Japanese American families that were here in Richmond. How many do you remember and what do you remember about them?

1-00:23:26

Oishi:

There was about twelve, twelve families, more or less in the nursery line—nursery or cut flowers.

1-00:23:32

Graves:

So there was Oishi and Sakai. Other names?

1-00:23:37

Oishi:

Well, I have that list here. I think we better. [laughs].

1-00:23:39

Graves:

Oh, good.

1-00:23:41

Oishi:

I think there might have been more.

1-00:23:45

Graves:

Why don't you read them? Can you?

1-00:23:51

Oishi:

{Nabeta, Honda, Oshima, Miyamoto, Maeda, Maida, Fukushima, Oishi, Sakai, Adachi, Ninomiya, Kawai, Fuji, and Katayanagi?} was in the flower business, Park Florist downtown.

1-00:24:29

Graves:

Downtown Richmond?

1-00:24:30

Oishi:

Yes. They were the original—the Katayanagi family owned the Park Florist, and then they ran it until the war years.

1-00:24:42

Graves:

Downtown on Macdonald?

1-00:24:43

Oishi:

Yes. Now it's run by Perata family. That's a big one of the better flower shops here in town. But for years, they built that up. They were on Sixteenth Street, I believe, before the war or maybe even after the war and then Perata moved it to Twentieth Street or something.

1-00:25:10

Graves:

On Macdonald, near the—okay.

1-00:25:13

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes. And {Maguchi?} had a flower shop close to El Cerrito City Hall there for a long time.

1-00:25:26

Graves:

Those are retail stores you mean? Or something.

1-00:25:28

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes.

1-00:25:30

Graves:

But the rest were more in nursery?

1-00:25:34

Oishi:

In growing different crops. Some were growing roses and carnations, half-and-half.

1-00:25:40

Graves:

All greenhouse grown?

1-00:25:43

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

1-00:25:44

Graves:

And who built the greenhouses, do you know? Would they have built them themselves?

1-00:25:50

Oishi:

I guess they hired carpenters.

1-00:25:53

Graves:

Were they mostly around this neighborhood?

1-00:25:57

Oishi:

Big part was here in Richmond. Richmond and El Cerrito. Do you know where the {Freemason's} Church is on Potrero and the freeway?

1-00:26:11

Graves:

Yes.

1-00:26:14

Oishi:

There were two nurseries there that are the Nabeta family and Honda family. And when the freeway came by, they took a portion of their place. And then they had the Kawai family in San Pablo. The Ninomiya family in San Pablo. And the Sugihara family in San Pablo.

1-00:26:45

Graves:

So all these people were growing flowers.

1-00:26:50

Oishi:

Yes.

1-00:26:51

Graves:

Did everybody know each other?

1-00:26:52

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes.

1-00:26:54

Graves:

Did you have, like, *Obon* together? Did you have different celebrations or festivals?

1-00:27:02

Oishi:

No. (laughs). The trouble with this was in the ancient days, some were Buddhist, some was Christians. And maybe they all started off as Buddhists in Japan, but when they came here, some became Christians and some were Buddhists. So we didn't go to same church. Some, they had their own Buddhist church and the Buddhist people would take active in the Buddhist *Obon* and whenever they have bazaars.

1-00:27:40

Graves:

Where was that church?

1-00:27:42

Oishi:

Well, I think in Richmond—in Berkeley and some are members, even today, some are members of Oakland Buddhist Church. There's two Buddhist church in Berkeley. It seems like the *ken* in Japan is like a state, and Hiroshima *ken* is one church and *Kyushu* is south of Hiroshima, that little island. That's the other church. There's two churches, see. So whatever part of Japan their fathers come from, that's the church they go to.

1-00:28:34

Graves:

Yes. And what about your family?

1-00:28:36

Oishi:

Our family is, I guess we were originally Buddhist. But my father's thinking was, "Be honest, be sincere. Live a long, honest life. You don't have to be in church." That was his theory. So I guess my mother friend was {inaudible} Church. And they were just a small church. They didn't even have a building or anything. They used to rent a church here in Stege, few hours, and we went to Sunday School there, as a child, at a early change of five or six.

1-00:29:21

Graves:

So they'd rent time in another Christian congregation's church?

1-00:29:25

Oishi:

Yes.

1-00:29:26

Graves:

Do you remember the street or would you be able to—where that church was?

1-00:29:31

Oishi:

The church is no longer there. Between Potrero and Cutting Boulevard, it might have been, maybe about Thirtieth Street.

1-00:29:59

Graves:

Did you have something you were going to ask?

1-00:30:04

Washburn:

No, no. You said the Stege.

1-00:30:06

Graves:

Yeah, Stege neighborhood.

1-00:30:08

Oishi:

It was a Caucasian church but a few hours every Sunday, we went there.

1-00:30:15

Graves:Right. So your family didn't participate in *Obon* festivals, but you did go to language school.

1-00:30:25

Oishi:

Yes.

1-00:30:25

Graves:

Can you talk about that, and did all your siblings go?

1-00:30:28

Oishi:

Well, where is that the picture? The picture I had here. This picture shows—this is the old language school. My older brother might have gone to this language school, and sisters, but I don't think they had it for too long of a time. I was not even born at this time, but we had another language school. We didn't call it language, we called it Japanese School. The nursery people were much more established and financially were much better off, so they put up a building at the corner of Forty-seventh Street and Wall Avenue. They had a lot, maybe fifty by a hundred, maybe it might have been about a hundred by a hundred. And the community nursery people—the few families that exist in Richmond—bought the property and put up this building that was being exterminated, and we had our Japanese School there.

1-00:31:51

Graves:

What was it like going to school there? How often would you go and how many kids?

1-00:31:56

Oishi:

I think it was only on Saturdays, I'm not sure—Saturday mornings.

1-00:32:04

Graves:

Did you learn anything there besides how to speak Japanese?

1-00:32:09

Oishi:

I think most Niseis had to speak Japanese because—in our family, my father was able to speak English and read English, but my mother was not able to read or write English, so we were forced to learn the Japanese language, which I think was to my advantage. From the age of one or two to five or six, I had to speak Japanese otherwise I couldn't communicate with my mother, so it was to my advantage.

1-00:32:45

Graves:

Yes. So when you went to Japanese School, were you learning to write—to read and write in Japanese?

1-00:32:50

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes. But I didn't get too far. (laughs) I didn't get too far on that! But I was amazed—at the age of sixty-two or something, I went to Japan. I was getting into my senior years, ready to retire. I was anxious to know where my roots were, you know. But being born in this country—Japan and United States were on bad terms. War did not just break out in 1941, this was building up for ten years before that, gradually, gradually, gradually. So it was kind of shame to be a Japanese, and towards the end of my going to Japanese School, I was kind of ashamed to learn the Japanese language. I had to hide it; that's how I felt. Going to Richmond High—like if we were in San Francisco or Berkeley, Japanese all got together, they stuck together, but here in Richmond we were integrated. We'd see different nationalities: Portuguese, Greeks, Italians, Germans, Native Americans. So I felt, you know, I was just as good as the next man. But I don't think the others really felt that way.

1-00:34:29

Graves:

Yeah, I read that—from the 1940 census—there were only about eighty-seven Japanese Americans in Contra Costa County. Eighty-seven, which would have meant they were all here in Richmond.

1-00:34:45

Oishi:

Well, maybe—there was a lot of farming done and sharecropping in Contra Costa, maybe they weren't counted. They had a lot of farmers in the, maybe sugar beets or tomatoes or whatever, they would lease the land and farm. The figure may be true, but I thought there would be more.

1-00:35:10

Washburn:

Is Brentwood in Contra Costa?

1-00:35:12

Oishi:

Yes.

1-00:35:12

Graves:

Yes.

1-00:35:13

Washburn:

There are a lot of farms out in Brentwood.

1-00:35:15

Graves:

Oh yeah.

1-00:35:15

Oishi:

Yeah, Japanese farms.

1-00:35:16

Graves:

Yeah. Did you help out in the nursery when you were growing up, and did your brothers and sisters?

1-00:35:23

Oishi:

Yes, yes. One reason was that my father was not agriculture-man. He's the son of an educator. He had to have a nice suit, nice clothes, see. [laughs] He's a good talker. But he didn't know too much about farms. So, it was to our disadvantage. We had to work hard. We had to, even at an early age, not hard, but we had to help him.

1-00:35:58

Graves:

What would you do?

1-00:36:00

Oishi:

We did everything. We did everything. Whatever could be done. But a lot of Japanese who came to this country, they came from agricultural background. Maybe as far as the education—they didn't have—but they knew how to work. The wife and the husband worked hard, they knew what work was. So financially they were able to make pretty good. In our case, it was different. So it was to our advantage, a little hardship is good for a person. You can't buy hardship, you know.

1-00:36:45

Washburn:

Well Tom, I don't exactly what goes into running a cut-flower business. At different times during the year, you'd have different duties, different jobs to do? Can you explain a little bit about, maybe, what you did in the summer compared to what you did in the fall?

1-00:37:04

Graves:

Or spring?

1-00:37:06

Washburn:

Or spring time? I mean, the tasks that you had to do?

1-00:37:10

Oishi:

Well, in the ancient days, in the 1920s, 1930s, agriculture was not as advanced as what it is today. One of the bigger jobs of nursery work—the soil. You plant a carnation plant in the soil. We had raised benches—troughs—and we would put eight inches of soil in there. And we'd plant a crop, and there's a certain amount of disease that's left in the soil. So if we plant another new crop in there, even though the plants are disease-free, since the soil was contaminated, we would have a lot of {inaudible}. So, the biggest job in growing carnations was we would have wheel all the soil out, eight inches of soil, eight by would it be three feet wide, with a wheelbarrow. Wheel it all out. We had open land so we would get soil from the outside and bring that in. So the old soil, contaminated soil, goes out and the new soil comes in. And that was the biggest job of growing carnations.

1-00:38:44

Graves:

Would you grow more than one crop a year?

1-00:38:48

Oishi:

Carnations was good—in those days, it was good for one year period.

1-00:38:52

Graves:

All colors? What colors?

1-00:38:57

Oishi:

Yes, all colors. But the colors were—we did not invent the colors, we would buy the plant. There are people in the business that just—to make a different color.

1-00:39:13

Graves:

Where'd you buy the plants from, do you know?

1-00:39:15

Oishi:

Well, in the early days or before the war, we would buy the plants—different colors—and we would propagate them ourselves. We'd get the slips and put them in sand and bring them up.

1-00:39:36

Washburn:

Take cuttings.

1-00:39:37

Oishi:

Yes, with cuttings. So we would have to make cuttings every year, for the first part of the year. I think the cuttings were taken in January to maybe March something.

1-00:39:52

Graves:

And you and your brothers and sisters would do that job too?

1-00:39:55

Oishi:

Yes, yes. We had to help in that line.

1-00:39:57

Graves:

So the girls worked in the nursery too?

1-00:40:01

Oishi:

Well, they had helped, let's put it that way.

1-00:40:07

Graves:

Did they do different jobs?

1-00:40:10

Oishi:

Well maybe they helped putting cuttings in or they helped men where to put this, taking the slips out—slips to put into the cutting next.

1-00:40:20

Graves:

Yes. So your mom did help.

1-00:40:22

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes, yes.

1-00:40:24

Graves:

So everybody worked together. Were there people who worked there, at the nursery?

1-00:40:27

Oishi:

Oh I think that we had a hired hand.

1-00:40:32

Graves:

Just one or two? Or a lot of them?

1-00:40:35

Oishi:

Yes. Well, in the summer months, we would have to hire men to bring the soil in and bring the soil out.

1-00:40:44

Graves:

And where would they come from?

1-00:40:46

Oishi:

Well, neighborhood. Portuguese and Italian immigrants, and German immigrants.

1-00:40:56

Graves:

How many greenhouses?

1-00:41:00

Oishi:

It was very small, square-foot wise. I'm just guessing, maybe thirty, forty thousand square feet.

1-00:41:11

Graves:

That sounds like a lot to me. That was one greenhouse?

1-00:41:14

Oishi:

No, no, the total amount.

1-00:41:16

Graves:

And was your nursery right next to others? Or were they scattered?

1-00:41:22

Oishi:

Well, the whole neighborhood. It was all nurseries from the Sakai nursery to San Pablo Avenue. It was all nurseries.

1-00:41:36

Graves:

And the Sakai nursery was how far west?

1-00:41:39

Oishi:

It was across the street from us.

1-00:41:41

Graves:

So around Forty-fifth?

1-00:41:44

Oishi:

Yes, yes. It starts there. And the freeway came by, and they bought the nurseries out, some of the nurseries out.

1-00:41:55

Graves:

But not your family?

1-00:41:58

Oishi:

They took a little portion of ours. But our nursery got a little bigger. They would buy the southern end of our nursery, and there would be an acre left or two acres left. And the {inaudible} freeway is built. And they put up for auction—they put up for bid—and we would buy back. And then in the north side of ours, there would be another couple of acres and we would buy it back. That's why instead of having a few acres, we would end up with about seven acres.

1-00:42:36

Graves:

So you lost some to the freeway, but then you were able to assemble other—.

1-00:42:40

Oishi:

No, we lost a very small portion, just a little corner. Might have been, I don't know, might have been not even a hundred square feet, maybe a thousand square feet.

1-00:42:52

Graves:

What about your house? The house that you grew up in, can you tell me about it?

1-00:43:01

Oishi:

The house was—. Oh, I remember, the house that we are living in now, but that did not have no kitchen. We had a little place where we had a kitchen and dining room.

1-00:43:20

Graves:

So the kitchen and dining room were a separate building?

1-00:43:25

Oishi:

From the living quarters, yes.

1-00:43:28

Graves:

But close, right behind?

1-00:43:31

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes.

1-00:43:31

Graves:

And those were right near the green yard, the greenhouses?

1-00:43:35

Oishi:

Yes. In ancient days, in my early childhood, they didn't have refrigeration, they didn't have TV, they didn't have radio. There was a crystal radio, what the heck is it called? My brother used to —. Crystal set! And my brother would go to high school, and maybe he'd learn how to make a crystal set, and that was amazing to us. And then maybe when I was six, seven years old, radio started coming on, refrigeration came out. We used to have iceman bring ice to us. No gas, we were burning oil or something else. We didn't have no gas.

1-00:44:37

Graves:

How many bedrooms in the house?

1-00:44:39

Oishi:

There was—I think a big house, it was all bedrooms.

1-00:44:45

Graves:

No living room?

1-00:44:47

Oishi:

No, living room was—we had another building where the living room is, our family was so big.

1-00:44:52

Graves:

So there were three buildings? When we go walk—.

1-00:44:56

Oishi:

The building is no longer there. The other buildings were no longer—.

1-00:45:04

Washburn:

Okay. You're not talking about the house that's there now.

1-00:45:07

Oishi:

I'm talking that was our living quarters.

1-00:45:09

Washburn:

The house there was your living quarters.

1-00:45:11

Oishi:

Yes.

1-00:45:11

Graves:

Meaning the bedrooms.

1-00:45:13

Oishi:

Yes. We did not have no kitchen there, but latter on, I don't know, after the war, sixties, '65 or something, we added on to that house. We had a nice bigger room there, and a kitchen there.

1-00:45:36

Graves:

So your mom cooked in a separate building and then, did you eat in that building too? Is that where you ate?

1-00:45:43

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes.

1-00:45:43

Graves:

What do you remember eating? What did you like that she cooked?

1-00:45:47

Oishi:

Well, since she's Japanese, we ate nothing but Japanese food. Rice, rice. And I think of Japanese food—. You know, at my age, diet is very important. If you eat the wrong thing, cholesterol, diabetes, you know your leg would swell, your {inaudible} reading would get up there, your blood pressure go up there. (laughs) So I found out, after I became sixty-five, eating is very important. What you eat is very important. You buy all these cereals, and this packaged food has a lot of sodium; it'll kill a man.

1-00:46:32

Graves:

Yeah. So what did your mom feed you?

1-00:46:34

Oishi:

Rice and Japanese food. I think there used to be a grocery man that used to come around and he would have Japanese food in a truck. He would bring us tofu. He would bring *shoyu*, you know. (laughs) He would sell you rice.

1-00:46:53

Graves:

Fish?

1-00:46:54

Oishi:

And fish, too. Oh, fish was plentiful. Fish was plentiful. The bay was all full of fish and crabs. Italian fishermen would catch over the limit, and stuff. They would come around and sell you fish. And we could go out, out in the wharf and catch crab—dungeness of crab—here in Richmond, Point Richmond. This is no lie.

1-00:47:25

Graves:

Did you grow any of your own vegetables or fruit?

1-00:47:29

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

1-00:47:29

Graves:

What'd you grow?

1-00:47:30

Oishi:

We grew everything. We grew our vegetables and beans and beets and carrots and *daikon*. I guess you know what *daikon* is. You know, Japanese like *daikon* for *tsukemono*. You know, so we grew a lot of *daikon* too and she would pickle it.

1-00:47:53

Graves:

Was that your mom's garden?

1-00:47:55

Oishi:

No, I think my mom would more or less supervise.

1-00:48:01

Graves:

But you kids did the work?

1-00:48:02

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes. We have Mexican immigrants from Mexico, from Guadalajara—when you go towards Sierra Madre, it's a {inaudible} over there. It might be a good area, and they live off the land. They live on whatever that grows—they live off. Beans and corn, you know, sheep. *Chiva* is a goat, you know. Maybe *chiva*, maybe it's no good for cows or something. (laughs) They live off the land.

1-00:48:41

Graves:

And you're saying you guys did that?

1-00:48:44

Oishi:

Yeah, yeah, more or less. But these fellows here are healthy, they're hardworking, they're in good shape. They don't go to dentist. They don't have to go to the doctor. They eat corn and beans.

1-00:48:57

Washburn:

Tom, you mentioned that there are other Mexican immigrants who worked in the lettuce fields in north Richmond. Did you guys have any Mexican folks who worked for you in your greenhouse or in your garden or anything?

1-00:49:14

Oishi:

No, we did not use Mexicans. There weren't too many Mexicans here in Richmond. I think the Santa Fe tracks used a lot of Mexicans as—maintaining the tracks.

1-00:49:27

Washburn:

So you're not talking about Mexican folks in Mexico helped you guys in your garden, you're just comparing your life.

1-00:49:35

Oishi:

No, no.

1-00:49:36

Graves:

Doing a parallel.

1-00:49:39

Oishi:

After the war, we used a lot of Mexican help, but before the war we did not.

1-00:49:47

Graves:

I know in places like San Francisco, there would have been bathhouses that Japanese American families went to. Did you all go to any bathhouse?

1-00:49:58

Oishi:

No, we had our own bath.

1-00:50:00

Graves:

You did?

1-00:50:00

Oishi:

We had our own bath. I know the bath that we had was—maybe three or four foot long and maybe two foot wide. It's made with redwood which is maybe two feet high, and underneath, they put a copper plate—copper metal down there. And underneath there we'd burn fire, and

heat our bath—how we heat our water. It was very Japanese. You know the heat is always down there, you burn wood, and that was our duty as a child, my duty as a child to make baths everyday.

1-00:50:58

Graves:

Everyday?

1-00:50:59

Oishi:

Yes and most families here in Richmond have baths, their own baths.

1-00:51:07

Graves:

Would that be in a separate structure?

1-00:51:10

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

1-00:51:10

Graves:

It's called a *furo*—?

1-00:51:12

Oishi:

Furo.

1-00:51:13

Graves:

Furo.

1-00:51:14

Oishi:

Furo, yes.

1-00:51:16

Graves:

So that was also at your house? You had a lot of little buildings around.

1-00:51:20

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes. The *furo* naturally—you know, you burn your fire, you can't have it next to another building. We had two on our property here.

1-00:51:33

Graves:

So tell me about the bathing. That would be at the end of the day?

1-00:51:38

Oishi:

Yes, yes. The custom of a bathe, you would think it would be unsanitary. But they have rulings, you know. Before you bathe, you wash yourself real good. So not only the bath there, you would have a little section where could wash yourself, you wash yourself and take all the soap off, and then you go in. You have to respect the—another party's going to use it.

1-00:52:10

Graves:

And your parents and your siblings would all take turns, or go together?

1-00:52:16

Oishi:

No, we would all take turns.

1-00:52:18

Graves:

One by one.

1-00:52:19

Oishi:

Well, maybe the sisters would all take together.

1-00:52:21

Graves:

And the boys—.

1-00:52:21

Oishi:

And the boys would take together.

1-00:52:25

Graves:

And you'd be in charge of the fire?

1-00:52:27

Oishi:

No, in days. Maybe Joe was in his days, and George was in his days, see.

1-00:52:34

Graves:

Did you enjoy that? The bathing?

1-00:52:36

Oishi:

Yes. I think a bath is—it comes up to your neck—your water is maybe two feet deep, and where the bath is only maybe a foot deep or something and the bath is made out of cast iron. With cast iron, put hot water in there, cast iron eats up half of the heat. If you get fiberglass something, you lose all of the heat in the fiberglass. But this is a wooden tub, and it always has a fire underneath there. And the wood we'd get from scrap wood around the nursery.

1-00:53:19

Washburn:

Did your dad construct it? Do you remember who—?

1-00:53:25

Oishi:

No, I guess my dad was not too handy that way. (laughs) He was more or less, you know, maybe he was a playboy or something. His dad maybe brought him up very gently and bought him a nice suit, and nice clothing and everything. (laughs)

1-00:53:45

Graves:

So there were probably some Japanese carpenters around.

1-00:53:47

Oishi:

Oh yes. There's all kinds of people, Japanese, and they all come from different backgrounds from Japan. The persons who are Japanese came from Japan, they came farmland with very little education. They come to this country, they work hard. They did real good. But like my dad, you know—. But in the long run, he came out ahead, you know. He was able to borrow money, talk about money, give a guy a good line. And you can't pay, you give them a sad story and they go for it. (laughs). He said he thought he as much psychology. He would out think the other man. I used to laugh. (laughing)

1-00:54:34

Graves:

From what I've read, a lot of people who came from different areas of Japan would join associations, *kenjinkai*?

1-00:54:42

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes.

1-00:54:44

Graves:

Were your parents involved with one of those?

1-00:54:46

Oishi:

{*Hiyokoken?*} is Kobe. Kobe is {*Hiyokoken?*}. Naturally, from Kobe area, they didn't have to come to this country to make a living. I think most of the Japanese was maybe in the Wakayama *ken* or Fukuoka or Yamaguchi. Those three are most—big part of the Japanese come from {*Hiyokoken*}. And I think the Wakayama is more or less agricultural something. I know people came to this country and did real well in this country.

1-00:55:26

Graves:

But so your parents weren't part of one of those associations?

1-00:55:30

Oishi:

No. There was no {Yogo?} *ken* association here.

1-00:55:34

Graves:

What about the Japanese American Citizens' League? That was started in the '30s, wasn't it?

1-00:55:42

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes.

1-00:55:42

Graves:

Was your dad active?

1-00:55:44

Oishi:

No, my dad wasn't because he wasn't an American citizen. My brother was kind of active in that, at an early age, Joe.

1-00:55:54

Graves:

He was the oldest, right?

1-00:55:56

Oishi:

Well, he's ten years older than I am.

1-00:55:58

Graves:

Do you remember, where did they meet? What Joe thought of it? Did he talk about it?

1-00:56:07

Oishi:

Yes, he was active. Joe was more or less the older Niseis. Joe, when the war work broke, maybe Joe was about thirty years old. There weren't too many Niseis in their forties. I think the early ones who came, like my uncle's son, Ben, who was about, I don't know, twenty-three, twenty-five years older than me. He came to this country, and they were born here. He says he went to Stege School. He was born in 1899 or 1898, that's when he was born. And this is where he died, he was telling me. He attended school at Stege School, grammar school. I was amazed. (laughs) At that time, the parents did not establish. Maybe there in Japan, they could get a good education. So they send Ben, my oldest cousin, to Japan from age six or something. He was age six years old, born here in this country—went to Japan, graduated college in Japan.

1-00:57:40

Graves:

So he did a little bit of school at Stege and then they sent him back to Japan to finish. What about you? We haven't really talked yet about your school years here in Richmond. You went to—

1-00:57:57

Washburn:

We should change that tape.

[End Audio File Oishi.T01]

[Begin Audio File Oishi.T02]

02-00:00:00

Graves:

Let's get back to you, okay? [Laughs] So, Tom, can you tell us about the different schools you went to? Start with your grammar school, and what it was like—what you remember?

02-00:00:27

Oishi:

I went to Pullman School. I started kindergarten, all the way through sixth grade. At Pullman School, maybe three classes in one room or something. Maybe there's six grades so maybe they had three classes, first and second grade in one room. You know, there weren't enough students.

02-00:01:00

Graves:

And what do you remember about the other students? Were there other Japanese American kids?

02-00:01:05

Oishi:

No, I think Ruby, Ruby Sakai, my cousin, was the only Japanese that was in our class, our grade. But maybe my sister was in a higher grade. There might have been others here too. Part of Richmond was nurseries—a lot of them went to Stege School for some reason, and then we went to Pullman School.

02-00:01:34

Graves:

Did that just have to do with the district, were you outside or—?

02-00:01:38

Oishi:

I don't know why it was that way. I think Stege was a bigger school. Maybe Stege, for first grade, they would have one class. But Pullman was very small.

02-00:01:54

Graves:

Did you walk to school?

02-00:01:55

Oishi:

Yes.

02-00:01:55

Graves:

With your siblings?

02-00:01:57

Oishi:

Yes.

02-00:01:58

Graves:

And who were the other kids in class?

02-00:02:02

Oishi:

One of the famous, I'm proud of, is Bruno Banducci's. I don't know if you heard of him or not. The Banducci family immigrated from Italy and maybe there was quite a few brothers that came—they all had children. They were pretty good athletes. And Bruno, I believe, was born in Italy and came here, I didn't know, came here as a young child. So he was not an American citizen, I was told later on. I went to school all the way through with Bruno. He went to Richmond High. He was on the football team. I guess he was a pretty bright kid, he got a scholarship from Stanford. He played on the Stanford-Rose Bowl Team. I think in 1941 Stanford went to Rose Bowl. And Stanford plays against Cal in Berkeley, I went to see him play. I was proud [laughs] of Bruno. And then he became a pro football player, San Francisco '49ers. He was a running guard and a main persons to—when Frankie Alberts was coach. This is when the '49ers just started off in San Francisco in 1956.

02-00:03:35

Graves:

At Pullman, now if you'd been mostly speaking Japanese at home, what was it like to start kindergarten?

02-00:03:43

Oishi:

No, I was able to speak English because I had older brothers and sisters. I was the youngest of the seven kids.

02-00:03:50

Graves:

So that wasn't—?

02-00:03:51

Oishi:

No, no, that was no problem.

02-00:03:53

Graves:

Were there other kids who didn't speak English? Do you remember?

02-00:03:56

Oishi:

No. I think most of the kids was older—no, they were younger than these. These older brothers and sisters, they would've speak a little English language.

02-00:04:09

Graves:

But a lot of immigrant families?

02-00:04:11

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

02-00:04:14

Graves:

Do you remember your teachers at all?

02-00:04:15

Oishi:

Hunn. I don't know if you know the Hunn family or not. They were educators. Their father was a teacher, and I think the sons became teachers. They had aunties and uncles in the Richmond School District. She was my principal, I know.

02-00:04:34

Graves:

How do you spell Hunn?

02-00:04:36

Oishi:

H-U-N-N.

02-00:04:38

Graves:

So she was the principal at Pullman?

02-00:04:40

Oishi:

Yes.

02-00:04:40

Graves:

Do you remember anything about her?

02-00:04:44

Oishi:

I know she had brothers that was teaching junior high, maybe in high school too.

02-00:04:50

Graves:

Did you like school? What did you think of school?

02-00:04:54

Oishi:

I liked sports in school. [laughs] I wasn't much of a scholar, let's put it that way.

02-00:05:00

Graves:

So what kind of sporty things did you do in grade school?

02-00:05:04

Oishi:

Well, when we were going to school, there were the Santa Fe tracks here, remember? On the other side, north of Santa Fe tracks, the upper class lived. South of Santa Fe tracks, the immigrants lived. So most of my classmates was sons of immigrants: German, Portuguese, Greek, Italian, Czechoslovakian, and Japanese. No Chinese though.

02-00:05:43

Graves:

They were up in the El Cerrito hills.

02-00:05:46

Oishi:

No, no, they came in later. I think this {Chung Mea} home came in when I was more or less in junior high. The home was not built then. I don't like they were orphans. Maybe they were well-to-do families or something, and they'd send their kids there.

02-00:06:05

Graves:

But so kids from immigrant families played together?

02-00:06:10

Oishi:

More or less, more or less. But when we got to high school, you know, it was different—from all Richmond. If your parents worked for Standard Oil, oh, you were a big shot. [laughs]. If your folks worked for Ford Motor Company, you know—. But if you worked for Pullman, Pullman Shop, you heard of Pullman Shop, and Certainteed. There weren't too many industries here in Richmond.

02-00:06:42

Graves:

Wasn't Rheem around?

02-00:06:44

Oishi:

Yes, Rheem was around too.

02-00:06:45

Graves:

And Stauffer Chemical?

02-00:06:47

Oishi:

Stauffer Chemical, yes.

02-00:06:49

Graves:

And California Capworks?

02-00:06:52

Oishi:

Yes, yes. Oh, you know a lot of them.

02-00:06:54

Graves:

Well, I've been looking at maps.

02-00:06:55

Washburn:

What about International Harvester?

02-00:06:56

Graves:

Yes, I've seen International Harvester on the map.

02-00:07:00

Oishi:

Might have come in later. But the old one is the Pullman Shop. Pullman Shop and Standard, and Ford came in a little bit late.

02-00:07:08

Washburn:

American Radiator.

02-00:07:09

Oishi:

Yeah, American Radiator.

02-00:07:10

Washburn:

So how would you know whose parents worked for which industries?

02-00:07:21

Oishi:

[Laughs]. Well, they all say, you know.

02-00:07:24

Graves:

And this was in high school?

02-00:07:28

Oishi:

Yeah, this was in high school and junior high.

02-00:07:30

Graves:

So you went to Pullman, and on Saturdays you were going to Japanese School.

02-00:07:38

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

02-00:07:40

Graves:

I had friends who, I mean this was obviously a couple of generations later, but the girls in the Japanese American families that I grew up with often took an instrument class. They had to play that—what's it called? It starts with a K.

02-00:08:03

Oishi:

Oh yeah, yes. Something like a violin, but a big one. Maybe my teacher had no interest in music, I don't know. [laughs].

02-00:08:17

Graves:

So it was just reading and writing?

02-00:08:20

Oishi:

I think whatever teacher's interest is, is what she does. At the early part when I was going to Japanese School, we had a fellow teacher and he had an interest in kendo. You know what kendo is?

02-00:08:40

Graves:

Martial arts?

02-00:08:41

Oishi:

You put on a helmet and you have a stick. He had interest in that and he would bring equipment, and we'd {inaudible}. But he was only there for a short time, maybe a couple of years. So whatever the teacher has interest in is what we learned.

02-00:09:07

Graves:

So the teachers would sort of come and go?

02-00:09:09

Oishi:

No, I think we had two teachers in my days or three teachers in my days.

02-00:09:16

Graves:

So you went from Pullman to—?

02-00:09:19

Oishi:

Longfellow.

02-00:09:21

Graves:

Longfellow. Was that also a small junior high?

02-00:09:25

Oishi:

I believe in Richmond we might have had two junior highs: Longfellow—

02-00:09:31

Graves:

{Harry Ells?}?

02-00:09:31

Washburn:

Roosevelt. Roosevelt and Longfellow.

02-00:09:33

Oishi:

Yes. {Harry Ells?} came in later.

02-00:09:35

Graves:

Oh, okay. So that would have been bigger than Pullman?

02-00:09:40

Oishi:

Oh, yes. Longfellow might have taken four or five grammar schools.

02-00:09:49

Graves:

What do you remember about that?

02-00:09:54

Oishi:

It was a lot of fun, I felt. [laughs].

02-00:10:00

Washburn:

There were more Japanese students who went to Longfellow?

02-00:10:05

Oishi:

Yes, because the Japanese who were going to Stege School, there were quite a few Japanese that were going to Stege School. And Pullman School—we all went to Longfellow.

02-00:10:17

Graves:

And these would have been kids you knew?

02-00:10:20

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes. Some of the Richmond nursery people went to Stege School. I don't know why they went to Stege School. Maybe the Pullman School just opened or something. Maybe their sisters and older brothers didn't go to Pullman School—went to Stege School—so their younger brother went over there. I'm not sure what the deal was.

02-00:10:41

Washburn:

What do you remember about doing at lunch? Did you and your friends or relatives get together during lunch and have lunch together?

02-00:10:56

Oishi:

No. There weren't too many Japanese so we ate among our friends, whether it be Portuguese or Italian. It was mostly Italians, Greeks and Germans. I remember Bruno. My mother said, "Make sure you show the seeds of the grape, boy," you know?

02-00:11:20

Graves:

What?

02-00:11:20

Oishi:

Seeds of a grape. Oh, Bruno, he eats everything! [Laughs]. This guy literally eats everything! I was taught not to eat that thing! [Laughs]. I still remember that.

02-00:11:31

Washburn:

What food did you take to school for lunch?

02-00:11:35

Oishi:

Sandwich. We didn't bring Japanese food to lunch—to the school.

02-00:11:40

Washburn:

Why not?

02-00:11:41

Oishi:

Well, we just didn't.

02-00:11:44

Graves:

Did your mom pack your lunch?

02-00:11:49

Oishi:

Well, maybe my sister just—. In my case, I had a lot of sisters and they were, in my days, they were helpful. And they would cook, and they made pies and cakes and make the dinner and stuff.

02-00:12:02

Graves:

Did they do the laundry too, your sisters?

02-00:12:05

Oishi:

Maybe they helped. They all had their chores. You come up with a big family, we all have to cooperate. I don't know how big your family was when you were growing up? But, you know, even though you don't have material things, you have a lot of sisters and brothers and you don't need material stuff. I didn't have bicycle. I didn't have tricycles, you know. While other kids were well to do, they had bicycles and tricycles, but there were only one or two in the family. Maybe we enjoyed our childhood much more than they did. They would have a nice Buick in their car. [laughs]. We would have an old car, see.

02-00:12:45

Graves:

Did your family always have cars when you were growing up?

02-00:12:48

Oishi:

Yes, I remember the Model T days. My father was not able to drive. But he was much older than most of the Issei, so he was not able to drive. So when my brother became a certain age he had the Model T Ford, and then we went to a Model A car. I still remember the Model T Fords, had to crank them in—. [laughs] It's beyond your days.

02-00:13:22

Graves:

So, there you were going to Longfellow with all of these kids from other backgrounds, were you mostly hanging out with boys or did boys and girls hang out together?

02-00:13:33

Oishi:

Well, if you wanted to hang around girls, you could. You know, it wasn't like a Catholic school—all girls. Whoever's there, is it. If you are classified as a brainy kid, first division, second division, third division, fourth division, see. So you go into junior high and high school with your division. I don't know, maybe that's how it is, is it that way today?

02-00:14:05

Graves:

Not so overtly. You mean the school would assign you to a sort of a category?

02-00:14:10

Oishi:

Yes.

02-00:14:12

Graves:

Based on how you did in the academic side of things?

02-00:14:15

Oishi:

Yes, from grammar school, maybe they would classify you. Is it that way now?

02-00:14:22

Graves:

Not really.

02-00:14:24

Oishi:

It must be.

02-00:14:25

Graves:

Well, they test you.

02-00:14:27

Oishi:

They test you but if you're college prep course and another fellow is a shop course, see.

02-00:14:37

Graves:

Yeah, they kind of do that at high school.

02-00:14:40

Oishi:

And then if you're a college prep course—college prep you qualify for university. They give you French or Algebra or Spanish, while the other students do not get that.

02-00:14:56

Washburn:

No, they don't do that so much. You're talking about some of the students used to study more and other students used to go on more vocational kind of training? No, no they don't do that so much—not in junior high at least.

02-00:15:10

Oishi:

I think that's where they start, here.

02-00:15:12

Graves:

When you were going to school, they started that in junior high?

02-02-00:15:16

Oishi:

The I.Q. of the student, they're not all the same. Some students are much more capable of becoming a doctor, some are going to become a garbage man. So why would a garbage man—he's not qualified to take French and Algebra and Spanish and those courses.

02-00:15:43

Washburn:

Yeah, but when everybody's young, everybody has the ability to learn at the same rate. What track were you on?

02-00:15:52

Oishi:

I was in the middle. You know, I wasn't no brain, let's put it that way. I was far from a brain.

02-00:15:57

Graves:

So, what did that mean about the classes you took? Did you take other languages?

02-00:16:04

Oishi:

Yeah, I took some but I wasn't the top student, let's put it that way.

02-00:16:12

Graves:

What about your sisters and brothers, how did they do in school?

02-00:16:15

Oishi:

Oh, they were average. Yeah, but the top students like March Fong Yu, my cousin Ruby, they were on top of the class. They took Algebra and French and all the foreign languages, everything. I talked to Sam—my oldest living cousin—is about thirteen years older than me. His oldest brother went to Richmond High. His oldest brother might have been, if he were living, would be ninety-six or something. He attended Richmond High. And he took a college prep course. Soon as he graduated, the University of California accepted him, see. But his cousin did not take all the college prep courses. They didn't have no junior college so he had to go to school one year more at Richmond High to make up for the course that he didn't take.

02-00:17:33

Graves:

Which cousin is this?

02-00:17:35

Oishi:

My oldest uncle.

02-00:17:37

Graves:

Ben?

02-00:17:38

Oishi:

No, Ben's younger brother.

02-00:17:42

Graves:

So, at Richmond High, did you do sports?

02-00:17:49

Oishi:

Well, I had to kind of help out, certain times of year at home. But I used to enjoy badminton, tennis, archery, and I thought I was a pretty good football player. I just thought, but maybe I wasn't as good as I thought.

02-00:18:13

Washburn:

But you told me the first time that we met about a basketball league.

02-00:18:20

Oishi:

Yeah, yeah.

02-00:18:21

Washburn:

Can you tell us again about—what was it called? It was a Japanese basketball league, right?

02-00:18:30

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

02-00:18:30

Washburn:

Was this when you were in high school?

02-00:18:32

Oishi:

Yes.

02-00:18:33

Washburn:

And you participated in that league?

02-00:18:37

Oishi:

Yes.

02-00:18:37

Washburn:

So tell me about it. Donna may not know about this. Can you describe it a little bit?

02-00:18:45

Oishi:

Well, here in Richmond, we integrated with all nationalities. Berkeley, maybe all Japanese was stuck in one corner. Berkeley, the parents, maybe they weren't educated or something, they need to form a corporation. They could've got a lawyer and if they'd have a child, buy a house and put it in the child's name. They didn't do that in San Francisco either. So they were mostly doing domestic work and garden work.

02-00:19:25

Graves:

And their kids had these teams?

02-00:19:29

Oishi:

No, no and then we felt—my brother Joe and the head of the recreation department in the City of Richmond was good friends. I think when he was in high school, he played basketball. Major

Hill was his name, well known. Maj. Hill, old-time Richmond. He's one of the—. I don't know if you heard about him or not.

02-00:19:54

Graves:

He was the head of the city recreation department?

02-00:19:56

Oishi:

I believe he might have been a school coach and then became the head of the recreation department. Maybe Maj. Hill felt {inaudible}. So he'd lend us as a gym—the Richmond High Gym. I remember, it was a brand new gym, beautiful gym, hardwood floors, it was beautiful. It was a modern gym in those days. I don't know when that thing was built. And every Saturday, he would lend us the gym, see. And Joe would have to maintain—that you didn't damage it. He keeps it in good shape or cleans it up when he leaves. And we had a beautiful gym, and Berkeley, they didn't have much of a gym. They would have to play basketball in a yard, playground. Maybe they couldn't get the gym—Berkeley High Gym. San Francisco, the same. San Francisco, they had to use the YMCA Gym. You know something about the YMCA? So the other cities were not as kind to their Japanese immigrants families as Richmond was, we felt. I felt anyway. So we were more or less, more integrated with the city or people that lived there.

02-00:21:20

Graves:

So you guys, the sons of the nursery growers here in Richmond, had a team?

02-00:21:27

Oishi:

We had a team, but we didn't have too many people to pick from. [laughs]. Whoever's a boy, they had to play, to make up a total of ten players, or eight players. You need five to play.

02-00:21:42

Graves:

So were you any good?

02-00:21:45

Oishi:

We weren't too good, let's put it that way. We did our best, but we weren't too good. We didn't have much of a {inaudible}.

02-00:21:51

Washburn:

So, on Saturdays, tell me about how you guys would get together and play games. Who would you play and where would you play?

02-00:22:02

Oishi:

In Richmond, there were Portuguese. In San Pablo, there were a lot of Portuguese families. And there was a fellow who took an active part in the Portuguese youth. The name may come up, for a long time he did a lot for the youths of—maybe he was Caucasian. And we would play against them. But they had a much bigger choice. We only had a few families to choose from. Anybody

who was a boy, had to be a member of the team! [laughs]. We would take a bad beating from most teams.

02-00:22:42

Graves:

Would you play, like the Berkeley?

02-00:22:44

Oishi:

Yes, yes. We would the Berkeley, we would play Oakland, we would play San Francisco. And we used to go to Sebastopol to play. We used to go to Fairfield, Gilroy, Stockton.

02-00:23:00

Graves:

Did you have a name?

02-00:23:00

Oishi:

Richmond Kongo. Well, I don't know, I guess in Japanese Kongo means something. One of the Isseis sort of felt that it was a good name for our team.

02-00:23:12

Washburn:

So why did you guys organize basketball teams and not, say, baseball teams or something else?

02-00:23:22

Oishi:

Well, baseball team, it takes uniforms. Takes a lot of money to play baseball.

02-00:23:34

Graves:

And, was there a basketball team at the school?

02-00:23:41

Oishi:

Yes.

02-00:23:42

Graves:

But you guys were different?

02-00:23:44

Oishi:

Yes, we were different. But some of them, like Joe, played on the high school basketball team. And there were other fellows who was good or had time—they played on the high school basketball team or baseball team.

02-00:24:00

Graves:

But there was this Japanese American team and a Portuguese team. Was there an Italian team?

02-00:24:05

Oishi:

No. Well, maybe there was, but we didn't play against them.

02-00:24:10

Graves:

What do you remember about—you've mentioned all these different kinds of people who were here in Richmond, and you mentioned Native Americans. What do you know about Native Americans who lived here in Richmond?

02-00:24:22

Oishi:

Well, there's no thing, come down to think of it. There's no native—the only native American is Indian.

02-00:24:31

Graves:

Right.

02-00:24:32

Oishi:

All the others immigrated from England or wherever they came from.

02-00:24:39

Graves:

Right.

02-00:24:39

Oishi:

But they say they're native, but actually they're not native. The only native is the Indians.

02-00:24:46

Graves:

Right and there were Indians here in Richmond, right?

02-00:24:49

Oishi:

No. I know the Indians—I remember, when going to grammar school, Pullman Reservation Indians would come and put on the uniform, you know, the feathers and everything, and they would dance for us. They would put on a good show. I don't know if they do that now or not.

02-00:25:07

Graves:

Which Indians would come?

02-00:25:08

Oishi:

I don't know, some tribe or something.

02-00:25:11

Graves:

When you were in grade school?

02-00:25:12

Oishi:

Yes. They would put on a show for us. Do they do that today?

02-00:25:18

Graves:

No, but you can go to—.

02-00:25:22

Oishi:

I know in Pullman School, you know, we read about Indians. You read about them. And maybe the teacher was very kind, maybe she had connections. She would get some Indian from a certain tribe to come.

02-00:25:36

Graves:

Because, see, we've been reading about these people from New Mexico, the Pueblo tribes, who lived out by the railroads on, near Garrard.

02-00:25:46

Oishi:

Oh, maybe.

02-00:25:47

Graves:

But you weren't aware of them?

02-00:25:49

Oishi:

No, just like the casino up there. Cache Creek. [Laughs]. They using the Indian name.

02-00:25:57

Graves:

Yes. But you knew Portuguese kids, Italian kids? Did you perceive them as different, or their families as different, or they had different customs?

02-00:26:07

Oishi:

No. They all had different diets. They all had different diets. They all was different. Like, our neighborhood, there was the Italian family. They had cows, two-three cows. Richmond was very, you know, like a country. Hay fields and open land. They have cows and it's not their property, they would stake their cows out there and eat the grass, and milk the cows and people have goats. So we used to buy all our milk from an Italian family, Johnnie {Gilletti?}. You know Johnny {Gilletti?} has that {Lib's?} Hamburger in Richmond, in El Cerrito? You know, Johnny just lived over here, in our neighborhood. And he was about my brother's age and at an early age he would have to milk the cow, feed the cow before he goes to school. Summertime, you know, go out in the fields and cut the hay by hand. [Laughs]. Cut the hay by hand!

02-00:27:20

Graves:

And one of you guys would go over there and buy the milk?

02-00:27:24

Oishi:

No, he would deliver. Johnny would deliver to us. Johnny did real good in nursery, plant business.

02-00:27:32

Graves:

Were there particular stores your mom or dad would go to buy other kinds of food, or rice? Where would you guys shop?

02-00:27:43

Oishi:

No, no, no, this grocery man used to come around and sell us different Japanese food.

02-00:27:48

Graves:

Everything, really. When you did need to go to a store to buy something, where would you go, in Richmond? Like for tools, or clothing, or?

02-00:27:59

Oishi:

We had our—I think, {CC's?} Dry Goods Store was one of them. You know Atlas Bait? Atlas Bait in El Cerrito?

02-00:28:12

Graves:

Alice Baitin?

02-00:28:14

Oishi:

Atlas.

02-00:28:14

Graves:

Atlas.

02-00:28:15

Oishi:

Across the street.

02-00:28:16

Graves:

Atlas and CC's—?

02-00:28:19

Washburn:

Atlas Bait and Tackle?

02-00:28:21

Oishi:

Yes, across the street was {CC's?} family—Italian family—had a dry goods store there.

02-00:28:27

Graves:

On San Pablo.

02-00:28:28

Oishi:

Yes. And there used to be a Moore's Drug. Mr. Moore had a pharmacist. He was a pharmacist. He had a drug store. We used to buy stuff there.

02-00:28:39

Graves:

On San Pablo?

02-00:28:40

Oishi:

Yes.

02-00:28:41

Graves:

So you guys would mostly shop on San Pablo?

02-00:28:43

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

02-00:28:44

Graves:

What about Macdonald Avenue, what do you remember about it?

02-00:28:47

Oishi:

Oh, yeah, it was good before the redevelopment came by in 1960, I believe. I think they did more harm than good. This is my opinion. It was a pretty good downtown. I guess you heard about it.

02-00:29:08

Graves:

Yeah.

02-00:29:08

Oishi:

The Winter Building, there were a lot good merchants there.

02-00:29:13

Graves:

But you mostly remember that after the war. Before the war did your family ever shop on Macdonald?

02-00:29:20

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes. I'm talking about before the war. And Park Florist was there.

02-00:29:25

Graves:

Any other places you remember, were there any—?

02-00:29:29

Oishi:

The Chinese Dollar Store, JC Penney was there.

02-00:29:34

Washburn:

You know, when you were a kid, for entertainment, would you guys go to movies nearby?

02-00:29:46

Oishi:

Yes, I think they had a movie in downtown Richmond. And we would go into—when we got our automobile, you know we got a, I think, a 1936 or something. It was the first real good automobile we had. We had a Model-T Ford before that and we would go into San Francisco and Oakland.

02-00:30:08

Graves:

Your brothers would drive you?

02-00:30:10

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

02-00:30:11

Graves:

What would you guys do there?

02-00:30:12

Oishi:

We'd go to movies or we'd go to play basketball.

02-00:30:17

Graves:

Would you be going to Japan Town in San Francisco?

02-00:30:22

Oishi:

Japan Town was not there before the war.

02-00:30:26

Graves:

In San Francisco?

02-00:30:28

Oishi:

Oh yeah, maybe the new Japan Town—there was a Japan Town there, yes.

02-00:30:33

Graves:

But there was the Y, and there were restaurants.

02-00:30:36

Oishi:

Yes, yes, we used to go to the Y and play basketball there.

02-00:30:39

Graves:

Were you interested in music?

02-00:30:43

Oishi:

No.

02-00:30:45

Graves:

But you guys listened to the radio?

02-00:30:47

Oishi:

Oh yes, but the radio I don't think came until, in fact, until I was in junior high, I'm not sure. I remember my neighbor, Fukushima family—the Fukushima family father was Fukuoka, see, and he was a hardworking man. Not hard, he was a smart man, and very clever. And he could grow plants, and he knows just when to water, when not to water, and money came easy to him.

[Laughs].

02-00:31:23

Graves:

Fukushima.

02-00:31:24

Oishi:

Fukushima. He was our neighbor, see. His wife was a schoolteacher, she didn't work too much or something and he would hire someone. Money came—he always had a new Buick in his car.

[Laughs].

02-00:31:39

Washburn:

Were you going to say, did he have one of the first radios?

02-00:31:45

Oishi:

Yeah, he had the first. When I was a little kid, his son and me were about the same age and he used to come—you know, maybe his nursery was underneath the freeway today. We were close. He'd come two, three times a day, see. We used to play together. He'd buy a radio and we'd sit—Amos and Andy are going to come on at a certain time. Radio won't be on at all hours. You know, at certain hours Amos and Andy come on and maybe there'll be another program. So we'd go over there, sit by the radio and listen to Amos and Andy. [Laughs].

02-00:32:24

Graves:

You and your friend.

02-00:32:27

Oishi:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

02-00:32:27

Graves:

What other shows did you like? Amos and Andy, and?

02-00:32:29

Oishi:

I don't think there were too many shows on the radio. Maybe at certain hours, the radio comes on. And I remember refrigeration. They bought a refrigeration. Oh, something amazing to buy a refrigerator, second television come in. [Telephone rings]

02-00:32:47

Washburn:

Do you want me to get it?

02-00:32:49

Oishi:

I'll get it.

02-00:32:52

Graves:

You're all tied up.

02-00:34:01

Washburn:

Who was it, solicitor?

02-00:34:04

Graves:

Somebody trying to sell you—?

02-00:34:05

Oishi:

No, dentist. My son has an appointment, make sure that he comes.

02-00:34:10

Graves:

In talking about things you did for fun, and you talked about radio, did you read comic books?

02-00:34:18

Oishi:

Oh yes, yes. I think everyday in newspaper was—that was our—it's different, we used to look forward to that comic books. Newspaper everyday there's a story or something, you want to follow that.

02-00:34:33

Graves:

Which ones did you follow, do you remember?

02-00:34:36

Oishi:

I don't recall. [Laughs]

02-00:34:38

Graves:

So the thirties was the Depression.

02-00:34:42

Oishi:

Thirties, yes. Maybe '29, '28, '30, those were bad years.

02-00:34:50

Graves:

What do you remember, did it affect your family very much?

02-00:34:55

Oishi:

No, I don't think so. Maybe the flower business—flower business is only as good as the transportation that you have in the state. In the ancient days, early days, maybe they were just able to sell flowers in San Francisco, Oakland, whatever close to the market. But as the cars became—they came out with Model-A's in 1936, better roads, better cars. So our flowers could go to Sacramento, could go to Fresno, could go to bigger areas. It wasn't just the local market.

02-00:35:48

Graves:

So the flowers that were grown here would go to flower markets, wholesalers, in San Francisco?

02-00:35:55

Oishi:

No, we would grow our flowers, and we would have a stall at the market, you been to the market? And our corporation that we have is the California Flower Market. There's three different corporations, but we had the interest in the California Flower Market.

02-00:36:17

Graves:

And was that primarily Japanese American

02-00:36:20

Oishi:

Yes, but now it's all integrated. And then we would cut our flowers and in ancient days, they had a man with his truck who'd come around to all the nurseries, pick the flowers up. You know, five, six nurseries or something. Pick the flowers up in his truck and bring them to the market, and put it in whatever place he's supposed to. And the seller would be my dad and my brother. They would just have to go themselves on the Key System or whatever it be.

02-00:36:59

Graves:

And that would be early in the morning, right?

02-00:37:02

Oishi:

Yes.

02-00:37:03

Graves:

Like how early?

02-00:37:04

Oishi:

I think they had to be there maybe six o'clock or something, or maybe it took time to get there.

02-00:37:07

Graves:

How would you get there?

02-00:37:09

Oishi:

They had a bus, Key System bus. If you catch a bus or something on San Pablo Avenue and I think my father, in the early days, he used to carry the basket on a bike and go.

02-00:37:24

Graves:

He used to what?

02-00:37:28

Oishi:

A basket. Maybe he didn't have too many flowers.

02-00:37:29

Graves:

Carry them himself to the flower market?

02-00:37:37

Oishi:

Carry. Put it on the back and go, or on the bus, and eventually the ferries came. The Key System was run up to the ferry line.

02-00:37:43

Graves:

So then as the nursery got bigger, this truck would come and pick up flowers and take them.

02-00:37:52

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

02-00:37:53

Graves:

And your dad would go and meet and sell.

02-00:37:55

Oishi:

No, he would have a stall. He would have a, maybe a table, ten feet long or something, and this is where he's supposed to sell. Every grower would have a different table. They'd pay rent for a year or whatever.

02-00:38:12

Graves:

And they would sell to florists?

02-00:38:15

Oishi:

Whoever comes to buy, yes. It was mostly florists. I don't think the public was able to get in. Even today, when you sell to the public, you have to sell sales tax or something. So they might get into trouble if they sell to the—unless they have a certain kind of license.

02-00:38:39

Graves:

And in the flower market, there were these different corporations? There was the California Flower Market—.

02-00:38:42

Oishi:

No, that's today, but in ancient days, maybe it was different. I know the Japanese had their own flower market. Maybe the Italians did too.

02-00:38:53

Graves:

But in the same building?

02-00:38:57

Oishi:

Maybe. Maybe different building. I think they were leasing the property before the war. This new California Flower Market originated after the war. They bought their own property and that's their building on property.

02-00:39:14

Graves:

Did you ever go help at the flower market?

02-00:39:19

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

02-00:39:20

Graves:

Did you like that?

02-00:39:21

Oishi:

Very interesting. And then what happened was, in 1936—. We're talking about your great-grandfather days! [Laughs].

02-00:39:33

Graves:

My mom.

02-00:39:34

Oishi:

Your mom? How old is your mom?

02-00:39:37

Graves:

She's seventy-seven.

02-00:39:39

Oishi:

Oh, she's not far behind me.

02-00:39:43

Graves:

But so, you were about to say, in 1936 at the flower market.

02-00:39:48

Oishi:

To me, you know, having this Model-T Ford—Model-T Ford was not ancient in those days. You were lucky to have a Model-T Ford even. We bought the 1936 Chevrolet, new one, brand new one, see. Then my brother started putting the flowers in his backseat and trunk. He takes the seat out in the back—the driver and passenger side—the seat in the back is taken out and he would load his flowers in there, start going to market.

02-00:40:27

Graves:

So then you'd bypass the truck driver? You guys took your own flowers.

02-00:40:31

Oishi:

Yes, yes. I think we were getting more production too.

02-00:40:34

Washburn:

And you'd go across the bridge at that point?

02-00:40:36

Oishi:

I think the bridge opened up in '36. When that bridge opened up?

02-00:40:47

Graves:

I should know that.

02-00:40:47

Washburn:

So did you go with your brother in the Chevrolet over to San Francisco?

02-00:40:54

Oishi:

No, no. He went by car, but he had to take the ferry. Yes, yes, he had to take the ferry. I think one ferry—the Berkeley ferry, you could put automobiles on. In Oakland, I don't know if you were able to or not. So he would have to take the Berkeley ferry and go over there and go to the market. And then 1936 or something, '38 or something, the bridge opened up.

02-00:41:42

Graves:

So that was while you were in high school?

02-00:41:47

Oishi:

The bridge opened up when I was in junior high. I remember I was in junior high. And when we went to the fair—they had a fair in Treasure Island and my brother let me drive. Maybe I didn't have a license but that was kind of reckless, you know! And he let me drive home, oh, that was a big thrill for me! [Laughs]. I drove home from Treasure Island, young kid, maybe fifteen, maybe I was sixteen. Maybe I had license, I'm not sure. I still remember as a child, you know.

02-00:42:22

Graves:

Do you remember the fair?

02-00:42:23

Oishi:

Yes.

02-00:42:24

Graves:

What did you see?

02-00:42:26

Oishi:

Well, I don't know, everything really. [Laughs].

02-00:42:34

Graves:

I don't know that much about that fair.

02-00:42:37

Oishi:

No, they spent a lot of money. They went to something in that. I think it was opened up in '36 or '39, in those days.

02-00:42:46

Graves:

Were there performances?

02-00:42:48

Oishi:

Yes, yes, everything. All over the world, I think, they came. Japan had an exhibition there. Maybe they had tempura, you know. I remember they had a place to eat. They had a big pot of

oil and there's oil burning and the cook—you order tempura or something. You get that shrimp and put a little flour on there and dip it in there and they give it to you. I thought that tempura was awfully good. You don't see that no more. You know, you have big bowl—big kettle of hot oil—he gets his Tempura shrimp and sticks inside there and put the right batter on there and give you a little rice and *daikon* and a little *shoyu*. [Laughs]

02-00:43:43

Graves:

And so what was it like to go and have all this stuff from Japan there?

02-00:43:50

Oishi:

I think every country had it, but this was before Japan and United States became hard feelings. But there was no hard feelings in those times, Japan voted to come over here. America was glad to sell them the oil, sell them the equipment to fight us back. [Laughs] He sold them all the equipment to fight us back!

02-00:44:12

Washburn:

Do you remember feeling enthusiastic to go to the fair and eat the tempura there?

02-00:44:20

Oishi:

Oh yes, yes, yes. I think, being Japanese and not knowing too much about Japan—. To me Japan was like going to the moon today. These people go on steerage. Steerage, you know what steerage is? Bottom of the boat. They have to have something down there, some weight to keep the boat below something. They put human beings down there in steerage and they didn't have too many boats. Maybe one or three, once a month or something they would go to Japan. I don't know how often. And then they had the upper class who had big money—you stay in upper class. But the average Japanese immigrants didn't have that kind of money. So they came in steerage. Maybe the bunks are ten high. I don't know what it was.

02-00:45:17

Graves:

Was that how your mom and dad came?

02-00:45:18

Oishi:

I believe so. So they became awfully ill and sick down in the bottom of the ship.

02-00:45:22

Graves:

So Japan felt like a very foreign place.

02-00:45:28

Oishi:

Like the moon to me. And you hear people going to Japan, they die, maybe food poisoning or something. They would have to dump the body off out in the ocean.

02-00:45:40

Graves:

Do you remember going to any funerals when you were a kid?

02-00:45:41

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

02-00:45:44

Graves:

Japanese American people or Japanese people?

02-00:45:47

Oishi:

We went to a lot of—the first generation people, when they died, went to a lot of those.

02-00:45:51

Graves:

What were those like?

02-00:45:54

Oishi:

If you're Buddhist, you have a Buddhist service. If you're Christian, you have a Christian service.

02-00:46:00

Graves:

Do you remember any in particular?

02-00:46:06

Oishi:

I know the custom was, you come home and you salt or something. You sprinkle salt on your hand or something before you come in the house. This ancient, ancient custom. They had all kinds of ancient customs or something.

02-00:46:21

Graves:

Did you see your parents do that?

02-00:46:23

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

02-00:46:25

Graves:

Really, I haven't heard that.

02-00:46:27

Oishi:

And then they would take a family picture—pictures of the funeral and everything else, which I thought was different—odd. But in these ancient days they used to do that.

02-00:46:38

Graves:

Take a picture of everyone with the coffin?

02-00:46:39

Oishi:

Yes, the family. They don't do that today.

02-00:46:46

Graves:

So, in the '30s, Japan invaded China, in the early '30s.

02-00:46:52

Oishi:

Yes, yes, Manchuria and all that stuff. They were going very aggressive. Japan is a little island, and they wanted to expand, which they did.

02-00:47:05

Graves:

So were you aware of that while you were in school?

02-00:47:10

Oishi:

Oh, yes, yes. But in the old days, United States and Japan was on fairly good terms. Well when I was going to high school—when I was growing up—you know, they were on bad terms. When I was going {inaudible} I always felt kind of ashamed, to go to Japanese School.

02-00:47:30

Graves:

So did you stop?

02-00:47:33

Oishi:

No. I keep going but you know what, our teacher, Mrs. Kawamoto, she comes from Berkeley. She had one son, they called him, she called him—this son was very dear to her—Yukibo. You know what Yukibo means? *Bo* means, you know, dear, *chan*, you know a girl, they call them *chan*—Fumikochan or. *Bo* {inaudible} Yukibo, you know. This boy was very dear to her. He graduated UC Berkeley and no doubt, since she was a schoolteacher, she made sure that he could read and write, speak the Japanese language right. He was in the intelligence corps—US Intelligence—bilingual, on the early part. He had a little older than I was, see. So he was drafted maybe before the war. He was sent in the intelligence corps, and he did a lot of good for this country's intelligence.

02-00:48:40

Graves:

Kumamoto?

02-00:48:41

Oishi:

Kumamoto? Yeah, yeah, something like that. Kawamoto.

02-00:48:49

Graves:

Kawamoto, and they were from Berkeley?

02-00:48:51

Oishi:

Yes. And then he didn't come back after the war. He was in Washington D.C., maybe he had a good job in Washington D.C. He was probably retired, maybe passed on now. Japanese Americans that was born in this country, and their parents sent them to Japan, they came back, they're bilingual, they're able to speak the Japanese language and the English language. They're in intelligence corps and there were all kinds of intelligence. There was a counter intelligence, there was intelligence corps, there was a language school. A lot of those boys are much more heroes than the 442nd because they were in intelligence and they did much more good for this country.

02-00:49:42

Graves:

When you said that you felt embarrassed about going to language school, or self-conscious about it?

02-00:49:52

Oishi:

[Laughs] You know, you'd read in the paper: "Japs doing this." You know, war does not break out over night. It takes a long time to break out, a war. Just like overseas, now. Oh, they want to come, they want everybody—every Arab is a suspect, he's gonna throw bomb on us.

02-00:50:16

Graves:

So you could see this tension rising? Did you feel it here in Richmond in the people you knew?

02-00:50:23

Oishi:

Yes, yes we do. No, not too much, but I know after the war—this is my country, this is the only country I got. This is the only country. I can't go to Japan, I'm American citizen. I'd be treated just like you. They won't give me a permit just because I'm Japanese. They won't maybe give me the papers to stay there.

02-00:50:48

Graves:

So you just felt a little self-conscious.

02-00:50:52

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes. Well, you could tell, you read in the newspaper: "Japs are doing this, Japs are doing this."

02-00:50:58

Graves:

Were there other things around the house that made you nervous? Did you guys have flags or any other sort of ceremonial things from Japan?

02-00:51:07

Oishi:

No. I think some families did, you know. Our family had—oh, our assets, whatever little assets that we had were invested in this country. Other families, maybe they worked hard here, they're sending their money, maybe they're buying land in Japan. Maybe they had a house in Japan. All they were doing, for their own interest. They have to look after themselves, no one's going to look after them. Since they weren't able to buy a home here, they need to know how to get around

02-00:51:40

Graves:

Like your family.

02-00:51:42

Oishi:

Yes.

02-00:51:43

Graves:

Did you date at all in high school? Did you have any girlfriends?

02-00:51:47

Oishi:

No, I didn't have no girlfriends. I thought this March Fong Yu was awfully cute! [Laughs]

02-00:51:53

Graves:

She looks like it. Your cousin looks cute too, but.

02-00:51:57

Oishi:

And then I used to play, in high school—well, among boys, it's not so bad. When you get into co-education—we used to have co-education, I don't know if you do today or not, do they?

02-00:52:11

Graves:

You mean co-education in sports?

02-00:52:14

Oishi:

Yes, in gym period, you have gym period.

02-00:52:17

Graves:

High school, I think it's different: girls and boys.

02-00:52:20

Oishi:

Gym period—you know most of the time you play among boys, and then once a week or something, you have coeducation. You play tennis and do archery. You play volleyball. You would do badminton. And me and March, at the same time, we had gym together. She was in the girl class, I was in something, maybe there was a couple times. And since she's Asian and I'm

Asian, you know, when Asian and a Caucasian girl, you know, there's little something. But among two boys, you could be Caucasian, you could be Greek or Japanese it's not so bad.

02-00:53:00

Graves:

So why would they have you—so you would play with March?

02-00:53:02

Oishi:

No, I felt comfortable playing with her, she felt comfortable playing with me.

02-00:53:10

Graves:

You chose that.

02-00:53:12

Oishi:

Maybe she did too. It was always quite an honor to know her.

02-00:53:19

Graves:

She's quite a person.

02-00:53:22

Oishi:

Yes.

02-00:53:23

Graves:

Well, you know what, her interview was done by Regional Oral History Office, just like yours.

02-00:53:29

Oishi:

Who did it?

02-00:53:30

Graves:

Same organization. So now your going to be there with March Fong Yu.

02-00:53:38

Oishi:

I'll never be with March Fong Yu! [Laughs].

02-00:53:41

Washburn:

She didn't talk much about Richmond though.

02-00:53:42

Graves:

No, I looked.

02-00:53:41

Oishi:

No, no. March Fong Yu, I believe she had a tough life. You know, Chinese immigrant. Chinese, in the ancient days, in the 1800s, they were slaves, they built the railroad.

02-00:53:57

Graves:

They were hung. They'd lynch people in Los Angeles. But I was thinking about what you said about your cousin and March Fong Yu being so smart and good at what they did and I wondered whether being a Japanese American girl and a Chinese American girl.

02-00:54:11

Oishi:

They didn't get along. My cousin Ruby thought she was smarter than her. You know, when you're smart, "I'm smarter than her." {inaudible} Ruby, "I'm smarter than her." You know, they had big egos. It doesn't have to be a Japanese, any nationality. Two white girls, they're smart, "I'm smarter than her. I'm prettier than her." [Laughs]

02-00:54:38

Graves:

Did Ruby go to college?

02-00:54:40

Oishi:

Yes, she went to CAL.

02-00:54:41

Graves:

Did any of your brothers or sisters go to college?

02-00:54:44

Oishi:

Yes they went to Armstrong and stuff.

02-00:54:46

Graves:

Who?

02-00:54:46

Oishi:

My brother Joe went to Armstrong College.

02-00:54:48

Graves:

Oh, what did he study?

02-00:54:50

Oishi:

Business course, I believe.

02-00:54:53

Graves:

He's the only one who went?

02-00:54:53

Oishi:

Yeah.

02-00:54:55

Graves:

He's the oldest?

02-00:54:56

Oishi:

He's the oldest.

02-00:54:56

Graves:

And when you were in high school, was he running the nursery with your father?

02-00:55:00

Oishi:

Well, George is the second, he's two years younger than Joe. And then I got three sisters in between, then I come. There's a ten-year difference, five generations or something.

02-00:55:20

Graves:

So did they run the nursery with?

02-00:55:23

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes. Instead of going to college or something George maybe he was a college-prep student, and he wanted to further his education but he sacrificed his education for the nursery. But in those days even if he did go to college, he'd get a degree in business administration—no one's going to hire you, unless you start your own business. If you become a dentist, you could open up your own office. If you become a doctor, you could open up your own office. But an engineer, you take an engineering course, you work in a fruit stand or laundry or work in the nursery. That's how it was.

02-00:56:06

Graves:

So it didn't seem like there was that much opportunity.

02-00:56:09

Oishi:

[Answer removed at narrator's request].

02-00:58:10

Graves:

This Chevron?

02-00:58:14

Oishi:

Yeah, Chevron in California. She was picked. Then what happened was, in our generation it was different, discrimination, but the JACL, the Japanese American Citizens' League—. Us people, we put a lot money into JACL. Membership was awfully high. Everything—we supported JACL. It is one of the stronger minority organizations, and the number of Japanese Americans in this country are very small. Maybe the city of Richmond—maybe there's 100,000 here in the states, I don't know how many. There was only about 100,000, what it is today, I don't know. Compared to the Chinese and colored. Since the 442nd and the intelligence group, that's why Japanese American—she could come out of college and be just as good as the next person, as long as she has the ability. They don't go by the color of your skin no longer.

02-00:59:33

Graves:

You know, we were going to maybe stop this part and do you want to go walk over and look at the old house and the greenhouse? Do you feel like it?

02-00:59:47

Oishi:

Yes, do you want a lunch? I could make you a little lunch.

02-00:59:51

Washburn:

Well, I want to ask you, lastly, right before we end, what some of your memories were about your graduation from high school? You graduated in December of '39?

02-01:00:00

Oishi:

I think what happened was, in January, I think they wanted to cut costs or something. We had it in January. It was supposed to be a December class or something, maybe they were {inaudible}. One graduation per year or something, it was odd.

02-01:00:19

Graves:

Why would you end in the middle of the year?

02-01:00:26

Oishi:

We had our graduation in January, but we got out in December.

02-01:00:30

Washburn:

There were June graduates and December graduates.

02-01:00:35

Oishi:

Oh, maybe, maybe.

02-01:00:37

Washburn:

I remember seeing that in the thing. Well, when you graduated, what do you remember you were going to do once you graduated? What was your idea about your life after high school?

02-01:00:52

Oishi:

I was much more Americanized than my brothers, see. They felt the discrimination. I felt, {inaudible} a man, I'm as good as the next man. I could get a job at Standard, I figure. But I was naïve! [Laughs] I could get a job at Ford. I was naïve. But that's how I felt.

02-01:01:20

Graves:

Did you go try and get jobs at those places?

02-01:01:23

Oishi:

No. Then, a buddy of mine says, "Hey Richmond is going to have a lot of shipyards." A buddy of mine, Caucasian fellow, "Let's take a welding course." So he gives a guy \$100 or I don't know, whatever he charges. He taught us how to weld vertical, flat, overhead, the complete—he gave us a good course.

02-01:01:58

Graves:

We'll start there next time.

[End Audio File Oishi.T02]

[Begin Audio File Oishi.T03]

3-00:00:00

Graves:

Before the war, when you were growing up, what was this area right here?

3-00:00:06

Oishi:

This was a nursery.

3-00:00:06

Graves:

So there were lots of greenhouses here

3-00:00:08

Oishi:

Yes, yes. This and that wasn't there. This plot was {inaudible}.

3-00:00:10

Graves:

Were they your family nursery or other people's nurseries?

3-00:00:19

Oishi:

Other people. Italian family, I believe, this and that one there.

3-00:00:23

Graves:

An Italian family, do you remember their name?

3-00:00:25

Oishi:

Mata.

3-00:00:24

Graves:

Mata.

3-00:00:30

Oishi:

Mata. Mata family. They were old timers.

3-00:00:30

Graves:

M-A-T-T? M-A?

3-00:00:34

Oishi:

Masa.

3-00:00:38

Graves:

Masa, okay. So that was just south of yours.

3-00:00:38

Oishi:

Yes.

3-00:00:43

Graves:

You guys were there, they were here.

3-00:00:45

Oishi:

And they're, they were old time—they might have been the first nursery people in this area.

3-00:00:52

Graves:

And what were they growing?

3-00:00:53

Oishi:

They were growing roses. They were a lot of brothers, they were in the First World War and then I think one of the brothers died so every Memorial Day, he would have flags and {inaudible}.

3-00:01:17

Graves:

Flags here at the nursery?

3-00:01:20

Oishi:

Yes.

3-00:01:21

Graves:

Well let's walk up to your place.

3-00:01:28

Washburn:

All of this used to be your place?

3-00:01:29

Oishi:

Yeah, up to right up to here or something. That way. One acre.

3-00:01:40

Washburn:

Recording on the road. [Laughs] So all these houses here, they were fields right?

3-00:01:56

Oishi:

Yeah.

3-00:01:52

Washburn:

And greenhouses?

3-00:01:58

Oishi:

No, no greenhouses. They were bare land, not hay, just natural grass, mushrooms—we'd come out here, winter time, get all the mushrooms you want. After the rain, you go out there and you get nice mushrooms.

3-00:02:20

Washburn:

So here we are coming up on the greenhouses right?

3-00:02:54

Oishi:

They had goats. This kid, his duty was to stake out the goats before he goes to school. I was a little kid, little kid. So before we go to school, we had to stake out the goats. In the evening, he had to take the goats in. Mushrooms— soon as it rains, mushrooms comes out. Oh, we all {inaudible}, get all the mushrooms we want.

3-00:03:22

Graves:

And bring them home to your mom?

3-00:03:24

Oishi:

Yeah, yeah. Ancient days, it's like Mexican workers—they live off the land. We could go out there and catch fish. We were able to get crabs. The crabs, I think the red ones or something, couldn't keep. And certain color you had to throw back and certain colors you were able to keep, and there was a size limit too.

3-00:03:46

Graves:

Who was the family that had the goats? Do you remember their name?

3-00:03:50

Oishi:

I don't know, Cadero. But they weren't Japanese, they were, I don't know, from Europe.

3-00:03:56

Graves:

Italian maybe? Cadero.

3-00:03:57

Oishi:

No, they weren't Italian. Australian or something.

3-00:04:02

Graves:

So your greenhouses—.

3-00:04:06

Oishi:

Like I said, we had a small acre {inaudible}. We had maybe four acres or three acres or something, and then we added on when the freeway came and they had the additional land for sale, the leftover land. That's our cousin Sakai.

3-00:04:28

Graves:

So that's your uncle's family's nursery right next to yours?

3-00:04:35

Oishi:

Yes.

3-00:04:36

Graves:

Next to Oishi. And then there were the Masa nursery just south?

3-00:04:43

Oishi:

Yes. No, in between there there was the Maeda family, the Maeda family—Fukushima family was there and the Maeda family—Fukushima family, Adachi family, Maeda family, Miyamoto family, Oshima family was in this area. But the Nabeda and—.

3-00:05:14

Graves:

Ninomiya?

3-00:05:16

Oishi:

Honda, Ninomiya was in a different area.

3-00:05:19

Graves:

Where were they?

3-00:05:19

Oishi:

They were in San Pablo.

3-00:05:27

Graves:

So maybe before we go, you could just draw a little—I'll get you to draw a little map where everybody was.

3-00:05:32

Oishi:

Well, Honda and Nabeda—Potrero Avenue and East Shore Freeway, I guess. They were right on the corner there, on the west side.

3-00:05:52

Graves:

So that's kind of close, that's not far.

3-00:05:49

Oishi:

Yeah, yeah.

3-00:05:53

Graves:

Okay. You mean near San Pablo Avenue. What about Ninomiya?

3-00:05:53

Oishi:

Ninomiya, Third Street and Brookside Drive. They're still there. The Ninomiya and the Kawai, and there's quite a few nurseries there.

3-00:06:09

Graves:

Kawai?

3-00:06:14

Oishi:

Kawai. No, Kawai is no longer in business, but they were ancient pioneers.

3-00:06:21

Graves:

And Fukushima.

3-00:06:22

Oishi:

Fukushima was east of us.

3-00:06:25

Graves:

And Maeda.

3-00:06:28

Oishi:

Maeda was south of Fukushima. And then there's two Maeda's and the other Maeda was next to the other Maeda, east. And then the Miyamoto was east of Maeda.

3-00:06:45

Graves:

Miyamoto?

3-00:06:46

Oishi:

Yes.

3-00:06:47

Graves:

So that would have been over closer to San Pablo?

3-00:06:49

Oishi:

Yes and then Oshima was hugging, was close to San Pablo Avenue.

3-00:06:53

Graves:

Say the last name again.

3-00:06:55

Oishi:

Oshima.

3-00:06:55

Graves:

Oshima.

3-00:06:56

Oishi:

They're the owner of the Honda—you know Honda property, dealership?

3-00:07:00

Graves:

Yes.

3-00:07:04

Oishi:

They own that property.

3-00:07:05

Graves:

Oh. So when you were—were you born in that house?

3-00:07:18

Oishi:

I think so. Maybe in my days we had a doctor, Dr. Cunningham, well known. I don't know if you came up with {inaudible}. Cunningham. He was very kind to the—. There might have been only about two doctors in the city of Richmond.

3-00:07:37

Graves:

But when you guys needed to see a doctor, you saw Dr. Cunningham.

3-00:07:39

Oishi:

Yes, it was Dr. Cunningham. He was younger, much younger than my father. Maybe my mother's age.

3-00:07:44

Graves:

Really. There weren't any Japanese American doctors to see?

3-00:07:51

Oishi:

No, in Berkeley, later on, there were.

3-00:07:54

Graves:

Should we go in?

3-00:07:57

Washburn:

Sure.

3-00:08:20

Oishi:

This house was the old Japanese School.

3-00:08:27

Graves:

Oh, so this is the house in that building, I mean the building in the photo and it was moved here.

3-00:08:32

Oishi:

Yes, the picture, the picture. But my father put a basement see. But this, by rights, was a one story building, and then he put a basement or maybe he made it eight foot higher.

3-00:08:46

Graves:

And where was it before?

3-00:08:49

Oishi:

This was probably closer to over there.

3-00:08:52

Graves:

So not very far?

3-00:08:53

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

3-00:08:54

Graves:

Why did he move it down here then?

3-00:08:53

Oishi:

I don't think we owned the property at that time, where this building was on. I'm not sure. This is ancient, before I was born. Like those pictures there, you know they look like they're ten years old boy, and they're ten years older than me. So maybe I wasn't even born in those days!
[Laughs].

3-00:09:22

Graves:

But that was your mother in that picture?

3-00:09:25

Oishi:

Yes, that was my mother.

3-00:09:25

Graves:

{Ryu?}

3-00:09:26

Oishi:

Yeah. She's young lady.

3-00:09:30

Graves:

Yeah.

3-00:09:38

Oishi:

I just built those {inaudible}.

3-00:09:48

Graves:

Wait just a second so David can hear you, okay?

3-00:09:51

Oishi:

This building was ancient building, one of the original buildings.

3-00:09:59

Graves:

What was it used for?

3-00:09:59

Oishi:

Well, I think we used grade flowers on there, inside that building.

3-00:10:02

Graves:

That small one there?

3-00:10:07

Oishi:

No, most of those buildings. And then this is our—we had a tank on top.

3-00:10:14

Graves:

A water tank?

3-00:10:15

Oishi:

Water tank, maybe twenty-six feet high.

3-00:10:20

Graves:

That's what that structure there is for?

3-00:10:22

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes. This is ancient times we're talking about.

3-00:10:26

Graves:

Yeah. So in the water tank.

3-00:10:21

Oishi:

The water would be—they would pump the water into this tank and since it's so high, we didn't have to have a booster. The height of the water would push the water out to the nursery to irrigate.

3-00:10:47

Graves:

So that water was used for both the nursery and your house, or just the nursery?

3-00:10:53

Oishi:

I think we were drinking this water as {inaudible}.

3-00:10:55

Graves:

So that's where you would grade flowers, sort them?

3-00:10:59

Oishi:

Maybe in the ancient days, before this building was there, they would even—they were maybe even sleeping there.

3-00:11:08

Graves:

Oh, okay.

3-00:11:09

Oishi:

Before this house was built. Maybe there might have been another building over here and then we had a dining room and a kitchen over in that building there.

3-00:11:23

Graves:

So David did you get this building?

3-00:11:29

Oishi:

And then we had a Japanese pump.

3-00:11:31

Washburn:

Could you describe one more time, Tom, what the building was?

3-00:11:37

Graves:

Can you just say once more what this building was?

3-00:11:42

Oishi:

Oh, this building, we might have been sleeping there, I'm not sure.

3-00:11:46

Graves:

But then it was used for sorting and grading flowers?

3-00:11:50

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes.

3-00:11:50

Graves:

And so then they moved the language school building here, and your dad raised it up. And that was where the bedrooms—.

3-00:11:58

Oishi:

Yes, that's where we all slept.

3-00:12:01

Graves:

And no living room, just bedrooms?

3-00:12:03

Oishi:

No, no, no living room. No, maybe we had a living room, I'm not sure, yes we had a living room.

3-00:12:07

Graves:

And where was the kitchen and dining room?

3-00:12:10

Oishi:

Kitchen, we had a building roughly in this area—pretty big building. And we had our dining room and then our ancient boiler house would sit right here. Ancient boiler, we had to burn coal and this—our pump was all steam run. Maybe they had—you know have, like a train, ancient steam pumps.

3-00:12:44

Graves:

And then the bathhouse was right there where that metal building is?

3-00:12:49

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes, about there.

3-00:12:51

Graves:

And what about your vegetable garden?

3-00:12:51

Oishi:

Oh, any place with open land.

3-00:12:56

Graves:

Just little pieces.

3-00:12:57

Oishi:

Yes. No, I think—we had quite a bit of land before the war, which is vacant, because we had to get soil from this vacant land and put in new soil inside the greenhouse. So we had to have—say, this soil here would be sitting here for two years or something and then we would get this soil and put it into the greenhouse for a new crop.

3-00:13:26

Graves:

And you'd let it sit there so those bacteria would die?

3-00:13:29

Oishi:

Yeah. And then, next year we would put the old soil back there. But after the war, I think they went into steam sterilization. See, we leave the old soil there and then sterilize it, just like a hospital would sterilize their medical equipment.

3-00:13:50

Graves:

And where would you do that?

3-00:13:51

Oishi:

We would do it right in the beds.

3-00:13:53

Graves:

Right in the greenhouse.

3-00:13:54

Oishi:

Yeah.

3-00:13:55

Graves:

So there'd be the house, the kitchen, the bath and greenhouses all around?

3-00:14:03

Oishi:

Yeah, but these greenhouses was rebuilt when my brother took over. After '36, in the thirties, we rebuilt the greenhouses, much more modern greenhouses.

3-00:14:21

Graves:

How did they look different? How did they look different now than the first?

3-00:14:25

Oishi:

I think they were much lower and when it gets hot, it would get much hotter and the earth, I think, wasn't as good.

3-00:14:30

Graves:

The older ones?

3-00:14:35

Oishi:

Yes.

3-00:14:35

Graves:

Okay, so the older ones were more squat.

3-00:14:34

Oishi:

Yes, yes. And then we used the bigger sized glass too. The size of the glass is much bigger now than they used in the old days.

3-00:14:50

Graves:

But it's still wood frame right?

3-00:14:52

Oishi:

Yes.

3-00:14:52

Graves:

And it would have been wood frame then, the first ones too right?

3-00:14:55

Oishi:

And maybe the first ones did not have concrete on the poles—every poles have their something. Maybe they didn't need the concrete.

3-00:15:07

Graves:

Is the wood just sitting on the ground?

3-00:15:10

Oishi:

No, the wood is buried in a hole. You have a hole, you may go down two feet or foot and a half, and the post sticks there, you poke up, either one of them.

3-00:15:21

Graves:

Just around the post?

3-00:15:27

Oishi:

Yeah, just around the post and the bottom.

3-00:15:28

Graves:

So the rest of the wood is sitting on the ground, or is there a concrete slab underneath?

3-00:15:33

Oishi:

You have a hole here, you put a little cement inside the hole, put a post, a four by four pole inside there and then you put concrete around it.

3-00:15:45

Graves:

Yes, but what about the wall, the wood that's the wall?

3-00:15:48

Oishi:

No, that's just nailed onto the pole.

3-00:15:52

Graves:

Posts. And it meets the ground. Did your brother build the greenhouses?

3-00:15:59

Oishi:

No, I was more or less on the construction end of it.

3-00:16:02

Graves:

Oh, you did it?

3-00:16:03

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

3-00:16:04

Graves:

Oh, wow.

3-00:16:00

Oishi:

Out of high school, I built this boiler house, soon as I got out of high school.

3-00:16:09

Graves:

That's a boiler house?

3-00:16:10

Oishi:

Yeah, used to be a boiler house, used to be.

3-00:16:14

Graves:

Yes, and that's the boiler to run?

3-00:16:16

Oishi:

To heat the greenhouses in the winter months.

3-00:16:22

Graves:

So you'd use coal, you said, for that?

3-00:16:27

Oishi:

No, in those days, in the early days they used coal. But eventually, they used oil, heavy oil. Now we're in gas.

3-00:16:42

Graves:

So there's pipes that go from under that—no, that's it, those are the pipes.

3-00:16:45

Oishi:

That's the steam line. We have a boiler there and the steam runs through there.

3-00:16:54

Graves:

And it heats up the greenhouses? Wow, and what about those tanks?

3-00:16:59

Oishi:

The tank is—. Here's our well. We pump the water out of the well into this tank and from that tank, we use pressure and we run it out to the nursery at maybe sixty, seventy-pound pressure or something.

3-00:17:50

Graves:

Are you still using—you're not using well water now are you?

3-00:17:53

Oishi:

Yes, we're using well water today.

3-00:17:55

Graves:

Wow, that's amazing.

3-00:17:59

Oishi:

But, the well water will only give you so much—so many gallons per minute, while this here would do maybe three times more. So when we quit work we would have to pump water into this tank, which might take, depending on how much they used it, may take twenty-four hours to fill it up. But with this booster system—our men could empty this tank in eight hours time.

3-00:18:30

Graves:

So is your operation not tied in to the city water supply, now?

3-00:18:38

Oishi:

No, we have city water in case we're short of the well water we would use city water. And then certain times of year your salts would build up too high—the well water—and we'd have to dilute it with city water.

3-00:18:52

Graves:

Do you think your dad and your uncles used well water?

3-00:19:00

Oishi:

Yes.

3-00:19:01

Graves:

From the very beginning, they built their own sort of irrigation system like this.

3-00:19:06

Oishi:

Well water, yes. And that machine there, under the hood there, that's what you call a {Fertiljet?}. A {Fertiljet} is—to every, say, hundred gallons of water, it pumps into the line maybe one gallon of fertilizer. So everything that's fed on the greenhouse is being fed. It's just like a little bit at a time. But in case it comes summer time, you need more nitrogen, we'll add more nitrogen into our solution. And in the winter months, you don't need as much nitrogen so we would add more potash into our solution.

3-00:19:53

Graves:

Before you had this kind of system, how did you or your father or your older brothers fertilize the plants?

3-00:20:00

Oishi:

You know what, they had another tank besides the one here which was lower, maybe fifteen feet high. And instead of being ten thousand gallons or something, it would be maybe a thousand gallons. And they would put water inside there and buy fertilizer, organic fertilizer, and put that inside the tank. And they would water that way. And that's one way of doing it, but they could easily feed it now to each carnation {inaudible} by hand. But in this way here, every time you water, there's a certain amount of fertilizer, nitrogen or potash would go in. We have a lab that comes and tests us every so many weeks and they determine what to put in, what not to put in.

3-00:21:12

Graves:

Where would your dad and you brothers buy the fertilizer?

3-00:21:16

Oishi:

Oh, there were different dealers in the Bay Area.

3-00:21:28

Graves:

But you didn't use the goat manure from across the street?

3-00:21:31

Oishi:

No, no, no.

3-00:21:36

Washburn:

Do you want to go into one of the buildings?

3-00:21:36

Graves:

Yeah.

3-00:21:39

Washburn:

Hey, Tom, you know, your—this thing isn't attached. See this thing, it's hanging loose.

3-00:21:44

Oishi:

Oh yeah, yeah. I don't know. {Inaudible}

3-00:22:02

Graves:

So you said that front—small one used to be, and then when did you build this?

3-00:22:07

Oishi:

When we got bigger, we expanded after the war, so we had to get a bigger boiler. [Saw heard in background] This is aluminum tubing—we have holes—one-fourth of an inch in diameter holes—every eight inches or something, throughout, and then we'd shoot steam through there, and that's how we sterilize our soil.

3-00:22:42

Graves:

So the boiler is used for sterilizing the soil and for heating the greenhouse?

3-00:22:48

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes. But the cost of fuel has gone up so high. Utility tax—city of Richmond takes seven per cent utility tax. Maybe other cities and counties don't charge that, see. And we're competing with other counties, other cities, other countries. Yes, so it's hard to make ends meet.

3-00:23:13

Graves:

Could we go look in a greenhouse?

3-00:23:14

Oishi:

Sure. —To the point where we couldn't keep our help. They had no place to stay.

3-00:23:32

Graves:

Couldn't keep your health? Your help.

3-00:23:33

Oishi:

Help, help.

3-00:23:34

Graves:

Oh, okay. Your employees.

3-00:23:37

Oishi:

So we had to furnish housing for them, so this is one of the ways and we have other cottages that we rent today.

3-00:23:44

Graves:

Oh, when did that start?

3-00:23:41

Oishi:

Oh, right after the war. Maybe in the sixties or something, rent was so high and everything in Richmond and housing was short.

3-00:23:58

Graves:

Who was working for you then?

3-00:23:59

Oishi:

I think after the war, we used Latin help mostly.

3-00:24:06

Graves:

Mostly people from Mexico?

3-00:24:07

Oishi:

Yes, but we were getting students and local high school graduates and stuff. But they got {inaudible}. They were high school graduates, they got better opportunities.

3-00:24:26

Graves:

Wow, these are big. That's beautiful.

3-00:24:44

Oishi:

It's not much of an operation now. It's rundown, nursery business is very depressing. But at one time, I was proud of our production that we had here. And we would ship it into any Seattle market or Canada, Chicago, San Antonio. And our quality year round, you know, we thought was, on the average, better than others. That wasn't because we were good growers, we were located in the city of Richmond and we had this ideal growing conditions. Maybe other time of the year, certain months, their flower's better. But as a whole, throughout the whole year, we were told it was true. It doesn't cost the City of Richmond, we just pay the City of Richmond taxes. We don't get nothing out of it. All they're doing is taking, not giving. We grow the flower. We pay the help. We buy the supply. We pay sales tax. That's {inaudible}. When we were building up here, that's {inaudible}. We pay utility tax. And they figure that every bunch of flowers that we grow, there's so many other people that's making money off of you. Your city gets taxes, everything. The airline makes money. We buy gasoline. We buy supplies. All the city does is take, don't give nothing. It should be a big profit for the city. A lot of industries are something they just take from the city. We just give to the city. Take nothing out of it.

3-00:26:48

Graves:

When you said Richmond was an ideal place to do—.

3-00:26:51

Oishi:

No, climate-wise. It would have been much better if we didn't have Stauffer Chemical south of us, Standard Oil west of us. Our flowers would have been much better.

3-00:27:05

Graves:

Okay.

3-00:27:09

Oishi:

In the ancient days, or in the sixties or something, air pollution was, you know, you could throw anything out of the stack. Stauffer Chemical was south of us. We don't know what they were throwing out of the stack. Standard Oil was west of us. If the wind blows west, we don't know what's coming out. We would send flowers, good quality flowers, to say, Chicago, and for a long time, no kick back. "Hey, your flowers are going bad." We don't know what it is. We can't pin it on Stauffer Chemical. We cannot pin it on Chevron. It could have been the smog.

3-00:27:57

Graves:

So the flowers weren't lasting?

3-00:27:59

Oishi:

Yes. It could be the smog in between here and San Francisco. It could be the airport. The air cargo is all open and the jet is there, and the all the fuels go right through the whole building. It could be that. Now I think a lot of it was caused by the different industries here. Richmond is known for its chemicals. I worked in Chicago for two years—two or three years during the war years—and most of the chemicals spray comes from Richmond, California. You have your

Niagara. You have your Ortho. You have your Stauffer Chemical. All the space—made in Richmond.

3-00:28:53

Graves:

And there you were in Chicago, during the forties.

3-00:28:57

Oishi:

Yeah, {inaudible}.

3-00:28:57

Graves:

When you look down this greenhouse and see the way these carnations are growing, does this look the same as when you were growing up?

3-00:29:08

Oishi:

Yes, more or less the same principle. But there's a lot of automation. We thought we had a pretty modern nursery. We had the automatic watering system, before we used to do it all by hand. We had this ventilation system. There's a thermostat, it closes the vent, opens the vent. And we had the pads. The pads that we have here, we spent a lot of money on. When the temperature comes to a certain temperature, the fan would kick on. And then on both ends we would have padded area, and then the water would drip down on this pad and build the humidity up. So we would have the right humidity and the right temperature. So it was more or less automated. I was proud of our operation but today it's—you know, it doesn't pay for us to do all this.

00:30:16

Graves:

When you were a child, how were things like humidity and watering and temperature and air flow controlled?

3-00:30:29

Oishi:

Well, this here has come up in the sixties, this is recent times. It wasn't invented by us. It was all done by—well, in this country. Every state has their research.

3-00:30:44

Graves:

But I'm asking how it was different when your dad and your brothers were running the greenhouse?

3-00:30:49

Oishi:

They had no research. They had to do whatever they felt was right. They had no knowledge of—University was not doing research on it, so they did what they learned in the old country.

3-00:31:07

Graves:

Like?

3-00:31:08

Oishi:

Like the manure and stuff. They would buy manure from cattle ranches, and {inaudible}, and plow it under. And that manure field—the dirt we would bring it to the greenhouse and grow our crop.

3-00:31:30

Graves:

And you'd water by hand?

3-00:31:33

Oishi:

Water by hand.

3-00:31:33

Graves:

Was there any way you'd try to keep the humidity up?

3-00:31:37

Oishi:

Oh, I think in Richmond, it was natural. It was natural. Maybe in the winter months, we don't have as much sun as we would like, and our temperature does not drop as much as we would like it to. If it may change, the greenhouse would like to have a temperature routine—forty-eight, fifty or something. But the natural Richmond temperature might be fifty and there's too much humidity in there and the only way to get the humidity out is by running a boiler. But as you run the boiler, temperature gets too high and your quality of flowers would get very weak. So there was a lot of disadvantage and we had a lot of advantages here too.

3-00:32:28

Graves:

When you were a kid, did you guys have this kind of structure that the flowers would grow up through?

3-00:32:33

Oishi:

Yes, yes, same way.

3-00:32:34

Graves:

Is this the way all the other nurseries do it too, with the wire and the string?

3-00:32:39

Oishi:

No, some use bamboo in between there.

3-00:32:41

Graves:

Did you use bamboo when you were a kid?

3-00:32:44

Oishi:

No. Well, bamboo came in after the Second World War.

3-00:32:50

Graves:

So was it your job to do the string?

3-00:32:54

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes.

3-00:32:55

Graves:

You and your sisters and brothers. That must have been a big job.

3-00:32:59

Oishi:

Yeah. Well, the nursery wasn't as big. Maybe it was only one-third or maybe one-fourth of this size.

3-00:33:10

Graves:

So how many greenhouses this size did you all have when you were a kid?

3-00:33:15

Oishi:

Not many.

3-00:33:16

Graves:

More than one?

3-00:33:18

Oishi:

Yes, yes, maybe we had six, seven.

3-00:33:26

Graves:

That's a lot to do.

3-00:33:29

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

3-00:33:35

Graves:

Wow.

3-00:33:35

Oishi:

I'll show you some newer greenhouses. Like this here is a pad. In the summer months, we used this pad here. But on the end, we used to put water on the pad. We had a pump, and the water come to a certain {inaudible}. And we would recycle the water, keep the certain humidity in the greenhouse.

3-00:34:11

Graves:

What's the material between the wiring?

3-00:34:16

Oishi:

That was supposed to be—. Since we don't use the pad and water system, we open up holes here.

3-00:34:28

Graves:

But what is this?

3-00:34:29

Oishi:

Oh, I don't know. It's the same thing they use in air conditioner, water cool units.

3-00:34:35

Graves:

Oh, so it's not a plant material, it's some artificial—.

3-00:34:39

Oishi:

No, no, no. Yes. They bring it in from Minnesota or something. I used to go up to Sacramento and buy this stuff.

3-00:34:49

Graves:

Should we look in this one?

3-00:35:03

Oishi:

The carnations look pretty good.

3-00:35:05

Graves:

They look beautiful.

3-00:35:06

Oishi:

Pretty healthy looking. It's all according to the weather we have.

3-00:35:11

Graves:

So how old are these plants, when were they planted?

3-00:35:15

Oishi:

These may be two years old, but usually when we were in our prime, our lifetime of plant was two years. These may be three years—a lot of these plants here may be three, four years.

3-00:35:32

Graves:

They look really good. Tom, what was growing here?

3-00:35:44

Oishi:

I don't know, this is some crop, {Luciansis?} or—.

3-00:35:51

Graves:

What?

3-00:35:52

Oishi:

Seasonal crop. The crop is over.

3-00:35:56

Graves:

A flower?

3-00:35:58

Oishi:

Yes, yes. This is a greenhouse they manufacture in the east, Midwest, and they put it on a truck and we brought it here. We put it up ourselves. While the other ones—we bought the lumber and everything here. Went to a yard and bought the lumber. But this is a manufactured greenhouse.

3-00:37:07

Graves:

When did you buy this one?

3-00:37:10

Oishi:

This was, maybe in the early-seventies.

3-00:37:15

Graves:

It's a lot bigger. Twice as big?

3-00:37:18

Oishi:

Yes, yes. But there's advantage. It looks good and everything, the little houses—. This has two vents for maybe thirty-five feet wide and those other houses are thirty feet wide and they have two vents. So those houses are better in growing. Temperature would stay cooler. This house would get much hotter, vents is much more airtight.

3-00:37:50

Graves:

Is the metal harder to maintain?

3-00:37:57

Oishi:

No, the metal is—. You have to get in and paint the bars, which is wood. And that's the fan. And then we would have a padded area on this end and the fan would kick on and the water kick on the pad, and we would get a cool breeze comes through the greenhouse. All we're trying to do is keep our plants happy.

3-00:38:28

Graves:

Do you use a lot of chemical fertilizers and pesticides and stuff?

3-00:38:32

Oishi:

Yes, yes. The whole thing is chemical. We used to use organic fertilizer, but now it's all-chemical fertilizers put through the {Ferberjet}.

3-00:38:44

Graves:

What about bugs and other diseases, do you use a lot of chemicals for that?

3-00:38:50

Oishi:

Yes, we always spray, yes. That's why we bought off of Niagara and {CalSpray}.

3-00:38:58

Washburn:

So how many blooms do you get per year on these plants?

3-00:39:03

Oishi:

Well, I think we can get about fifteen blooms to a plant. That's in its prime, but when you get older and stuff, maybe the production goes way down. That's what we were averaging.

3-00:39:16

Washburn:

So when you were younger, did you used to cut flowers every month?

3-00:39:21

Oishi:

Oh yes, everyday. We'd cut every other day.

3-00:39:24

Graves:

After school, you'd come in and cut?

3-00:39:27

Oishi:

Oh, you mean, smaller. I don't think, we didn't have to do that. Maybe we had to put string on and other odd jobs. They didn't abuse us, you know! [Laughs]

3-00:39:43

Graves:

Well, or maybe trust you! [Laughs]

3-00:39:44

Oishi:

No, no, no!

3-00:39:46

Washburn:

Before the war, who came in and cut the flowers?

3-00:39:50

Oishi:

I was out of high school a little before the war.

3-00:39:57

Graves:

So maybe your brothers and your dad did the flowers?

3-00:39:59

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

3-00:39:59

Graves:

Where would you cut a flower? If you were coming through here and you were going to trim.

00:40:02

Oishi:

It would have to be an open bloom. These looking {inaudible}. Maybe that one there will be ready Saturday, that bloom. But you could see in the Albertson's or Safeway, they cut them tight in Ecuador or Colombia and they're more or less that size there when they're in the market. But we cut them much more open.

3-00:40:37

Washburn:

So how would you go up and cut that?

3-00:40:39

Oishi:

About there. You might want to cut it closer to the eye here, it's possible. Then next year it could come up.

3-00:40:54

Graves:

Besides the house, are the other greenhouse buildings we should see?

3-00:41:00

Oishi:

This is, you know, plastic vine that was there. All the water comes through here so we get maybe seventy-pound pressure here and we could water maybe four benches at one time. So we're saving a lot of labor costs which we had to.

3-00:41:21

Washburn:

Let's go check out the house, yeah?

3-00:41:23

Graves:

Tom, can we go look at your house now?

3-00:41:27

Oishi:

I'll show you this aluminum house.

3-00:41:30

Graves:

Okay.

3-00:41:30

Oishi:

Which I'm proud of. This is the most modern greenhouse around. See, the whole thing is aluminum. Your bars and the {inaudible}. It has a big glass in there, too which is double strength. It gives a lot of light out. It's an eastern greenhouse, one of the most modern greenhouses around.

3-00:42:09

Graves:

When did you put that one up?

3-00:42:12

Oishi:

This was built in 1960.

3-00:42:14

Graves:

And those are the same down there?

3-00:42:18

Oishi:

That's the Sakai's. They grow roses there.

3-00:42:24

Graves:

And the Sakais, are there members of that family that we could talk to?

3-00:42:32

Oishi:

Well, maybe the third generation, I'm not sure.

3-00:42:37

Graves:

But nobody your age.

3-00:42:39

Oishi:

No, Sam is ninety-three. I don't know if he would do a good interview or not.

3-00:42:46

Graves:

And Ruby is in L.A.?

3-00:42:51

Oishi:

Yes, I don't think Ruby is capable.

3-00:42:55

Graves:

And were there just those two?

3-00:42:58

Oishi:

No, they passed on. You get to be in the nineties, you start going when you're sixty. [Laughs]

3-00:43:03

Graves:

Yeah, you lose them. Yes. Well, let's shut all these doors. You know, I've driven by these for years and it's a privilege to finally—.

3-00:43:15

Oishi:

Her English has not improved at all, and my Japanese hasn't improved. Even when I was a child, I was forced to speak the Japanese language and as I got a little older, you know, it faded away. I went in the Army, everything else until I came back, and then she came twenty-seven years ago. So my Japanese has come back.

3-00:43:41

Graves:

Is she your only Japanese employee?

3-00:43:43

Oishi:

Yes, from Japan. So when I went to Japan I had cousins—. Gordon, I want you to meet—.

3-00:43:59

Graves:

Hi, I'm Donna, nice to meet you.

3-00:44:02

Oishi:

And David. This is what's his name's friend.

3-00:44:05

Washburn:

Nat's friend.

3-00:44:06

Oishi:

Nat's friend, yes. And when I went to Japan, you know, I'm just like you. You going to Japan, I'm no different than you, see. What am I going to talk to these people. Could I understand these

people? What subject we going to talk about? [Laughs] And naturally, they're they are our relatives. Grandpa is the same grandpa. My father and my uncle are their uncles, so we had a lot to talk about. And they were surprised that the Japanese language that I was able to speak. They were amazed. Thanks to {Miyokasan}. {Miyokasan} is this girl here.

3-00:44:57

Graves:

And your language teachers, and your parents, thanks to them.

3-00:45:00

Oishi:

Oh yeah, yeah. My parents had a lot to do with it. Well, they were from two different parts of Japan. Well, more or less the same something, but they spoke different dialects and one was awfully rough and one was very {inaudible}, you know.

3-00:45:20

Graves:

But your parents' families knew each other, right? Didn't you think your dad—?

3-00:45:27

Oishi:

Yeah, might have been little {inaudible}, might have been, I'm not sure. That we don't know. You know, being over 150 years ago or something, it's just more or less guesswork. Just like our son would guess about their grandpa. So that's amazing to me, just like you people are guessing about Richmond.

3-00:45:53

Graves:

So this was the language school, the original one. But is this the front?

3-00:45:57

Oishi:

Yes, yes. They added on that addition there. But this building here was recently built, maybe twenty, thirty years ago, this addition.

3-00:46:12

Graves:

The addition is from the right hand side.

3-00:46:15

Oishi:

From the blue right, is the new addition. But the old building is from there down. And there was one story building instead of two-story building. And it extended out when they moved the house over.

3-00:46:36

Graves:

Can we go in?

3-00:46:39

Oishi:

Yes. Oh, I have to find a key.

3-00:46:41

Graves:

[Viewing refrigeration of flowers] It's so colorful. It's beautiful.

3-00:47:15

Oishi:

A signal. {inaudible}.

3-00:47:23

Graves:

Emergency release?

3-00:47:26

Oishi:

{Inaudible} I don't have my right glasses. {Inaudible} Would you turn on the light?

3-00:47:49

Graves:

Yes.

3-00:47:55

Oishi:

Now maybe you would have to come here and read the—.

3-00:47:57

Graves:

We're looking for Kobe to start with.

3-00:48:05

Oishi:

No, Osaka. Osaka's some place around there.

3-00:48:07

Graves:

There's Osaka.

3-00:48:09

Oishi:

Oh, probably that's the place. That's the route, see. And then there's a big mountain that goes over and then it comes back to sea level. They're both sea level, right? And there's a big mountain in between there. There in the foothills of the mountains, like Placerville or Auburn would be.

3-00:48:31

Graves:

What's the name of the village?

3-00:48:35

Oishi:

Sasayama. I believe it's on there. I don't know if it's on this map, it could be on this map here. I went to Japan '82 or something, twenty years ago. And I told the agent, "I just intend to go one time, show me as much as possible. I don't care about the cost." And this agent got me a good trip. All the national monuments, national parks, all the things that you should see he bought me. We went from Niko—went down to Kyushu, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Benpo, Amanohashidate is another one. Do you know about that? It's near my mother's place. It's a well-known national park but the American tourists don't go there. Natives go there.

3-00:49:38

Graves:

Hashidate?

3-00:49:37

Oishi:

Yes, Amanohashidate. It's well known. My mother comes from more or less on the Japan Sea, close to the Japan seaside. One is {Hyogoken} and the other is Kyoto—{Kyotofu}. I guess the Kyoto went that way or something, {Hyogoken?} runs this way.

3-00:50:04

Graves:

And so you went to both of those places?

3-00:50:08

Oishi:

Yes, I went to both.

3-00:50:10

Graves:

Were there relatives there?

3-00:50:12

Oishi:

No, my mother's side I didn't meet, but my father's side I met quite a lot. I was surprised. It was good to meet them. But a lot of my uncles—they're all passed on—but my cousin was still alive. Eighty years old, I didn't know how old they are, maybe they might have been ninety years old. I was in Osaka hotel, I called him up by telephone, "We'll meet here." You know, I didn't know what kind of people they were. I was naïve and I see these two old ladies there waiting, I think, "Geez, I hope that's not them." [Laughs] To get old ladies to come down, ask them to come hotel and meet you, that's not etiquette. Sure enough, it was them. [Laughs] But we had a good time, we spent maybe two three hours, we had lunch there and that made my trip to Japan. We talked about ancient grandpa days and everything else.

3-00:51:07

Graves:

That's great.

3-00:51:11

Oishi:

Yeah.

3-00:51:11

Graves:

Well, David needs to get to another appointment.

[End Audio File Oishi.T03]

Interview with Tom Oishi

Interviewed by: Donna Graves and David Washburn

Transcriber: Sayuri Stabrowski

[Interview #02: December 19, 2002]

[Begin Audio File Oishi.T04]

1-00:00:02

Oishi:

There weren't too many. Our industry was very small throughout the whole United States, people growing carnations.

1-00:00:10

Graves:

This is Mrs. G. Kawai of Richmond.

1-00:00:13

Oishi:

Yes, yes. They're in north Richmond there, you know, on Brookside Drive. She is one of these girls {inaudible}. One of them is Mrs. Oshima, she married into Oshima family now, Honda-Oshima.

1-00:00:33

Graves:

Oh, okay.

1-00:00:36

Oishi:

She's a Honda! [Laughs] {inaudible} She's a wealthy woman today. She owns the Honda property. She owns part of the Home Depot property.

1-00:00:49

Graves:

Hey Tom, are there any lights? What can I do to make it a little bit lighter in here?

1-00:00:56

Oishi:

Maybe David can open—. Me and my son, this is ancient times. Just like I'm feeling interest in my grandfather in Japan, he might have passed on before my father came to this country. We're just presuming now.

1-00:01:14

Graves:

Yeah.

1-00:01:13

Oishi:

We don't know.

1-00:01:15

Graves:

We don't know, yes. But you'd like to find out?

1-00:01:18

Oishi:

Yeah, yeah. Some things. Did I tell you, my sister in—.

1-00:01:28

Graves:

She's the one in Berkeley right?

1-00:01:31

Oishi:

Oh, you got a memory! [Laughs]. I better be awfully careful what I say! [Laughs]. There's not many people that have memories like you! [Laughs]. I have a stockbroker—

1-00:01:43

Graves:

Who's a stockbroker?

1-00:01:45

Oishi:

No, no, I have a stockbroker.

1-00:01:47

Graves:

Oh, you do? Yes.

1-00:01:47

Oishi:

Dean Witter. Oh, sharp man.

1-00:01:48

Graves:

You guys are like this?

1-00:01:51

Oishi:

Yeah, yeah. Things I talked to him maybe ten years ago, he still remembers.

1-00:01:57

Graves:

Wow.

1-00:01:56

Oishi:

If I asked him, he'll help me come—careful if I commit myself, I say I'm going to buy a stock offers. Oh, he remembers me. He's sixty-five years old but—.

1-00:02:09

Graves:

So that's fresh brain, right?

1-00:02:10

Oishi:

Oh, he has a good memory, amazing. Some people are that way, maybe you're one of those—.

1-00:02:16

Graves:

Some details stick with me. I never remember the rules to card games. When I play, like, poker with my sisters, I go, “Okay, what is it?” And they go, “One pair, two pair.” And when they get to whatever my hand is, I go, “Okay.” So I let them all know what I have. So wait ‘til he tells you to go, okay?

1-00:02:43

Oishi:

[Looking at old photographs] I’ve got to find a {inaudible}.

1-00:02:47

Graves:

Oh, you have more in back.

1-00:02:48

Oishi:

Yeah, oh yeah. I went through a lot of trouble.

1-00:02:52

Graves:

Oh, thank you.

1-00:02:53

Oishi:

See, like this here is a local photo so it’s not too good. But we had some good—.

1-00:02:58

Graves:

That’s a nice one.

1-00:02:57

Washburn:

Okay, we’ve got to do one clap here again so this is on track three.

1-00:03:03

Oishi:

Wait, wait. And this is a Japanese School. The Japanese School is different here, not the ancient one.

1-00:03:11

Graves:

Right. The one—.

1-00:03:14

Oishi:

The one I went to.

1-00:03:16

Graves:

Right, right, at Wall and Forty-second.

1-00:03:18

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

1-00:03:18

Graves:

Are you in there? Who's in there?

1-00:03:22

Oishi:

I'm not sure. You can pick me out.

1-00:03:32

Graves:

So Tom, do you want to start with these photos?

1-00:03:36

Oishi:

I don't know. Oh, this one my father was awfully proud. He brought these back from Japan. Maybe, I don't know—. And *takeji* this is. You know what a *takeji* is?

1-00:03:45

Graves:

The scroll?

1-00:03:48

Oishi:

What?

1-00:03:49

Graves:

No, what is it?

1-00:03:50

Oishi:

Takeji is—this is a *takeji*.

1-00:03:50

Graves:

Okay. *Takeji*.

1-00:03:54

Oishi:

Yeah.

1-00:03:56

Graves:

And your father brought those from Japan?

1-00:03:57

Oishi:

Yes, from his house, I think.

1-00:04:00

Graves:

When he first came over?

1-00:04:01

Oishi:

I don't know if when he first came over or when he got married. And he was awfully proud of these pictures, so every time, if you have a little party—Flower Market would have a party—we would bring this over there and that would be at a hotel, it would be at a restaurant.

1-00:04:15

Graves:

So they wouldn't be hung all the time, just for a special occasion?

1-00:04:19

Oishi:

Yeah, special occasion. He was awfully proud.

1-00:04:20

Graves:

And is that your father?

1-00:04:22

Oishi:

That's my father on the end there—youth.

1-00:04:24

Graves:

Do you know anything about those pictures? I mean, do they have any special meaning to you?

1-00:04:32

Oishi:

Well, in Japan, every year, like this year or something—every ten years or something, maybe a tiger is one year, maybe this eagle is another year, next year is monkey or something.

1-00:04:49

Graves:

Like China?

1-00:04:52

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes. So every year, they have one of these animals as the year.

1-00:05:05

Graves:

And what's he holding on to? What's right there? Can you see?

1-00:05:14

Oishi:

I don't know what that is. I don't think this was at home. This might have been at some restaurant or something, I'm not sure.

1-00:05:22

Graves:

Where would these dinners have been?

1-00:05:28

Oishi:

He was very active in the flower industry and he liked parties let's put it that way, see. He didn't like to work too much. [Laughs]. But he liked parties, and he would put on his good suit and go to these parties.

1-00:05:53

Graves:

And they were flower market or nursery.

1-00:05:54

Oishi:

Yeah, mostly flower industry.

1-00:05:57

Graves:

Okay. Here, let me move this one so—.

1-00:06:06

Oishi:

Oh no, you don't want this.

1-00:06:07

Graves:

Oh, what a handsome man!

1-00:06:09

Oishi:

This is my Army days. [Laughs]

1-00:06:11

Graves:

Tom, wait a minute! Tom, look at you.

1-00:06:17

Oishi:

I would think to take these out of there before someone raids the—.

1-00:06:21

Graves:

Move that one, move that. Can you get it Dave? Oh it's just wonderful! You were so handsome.

1-00:06:30

Oishi:

I don't know. Yeah, yeah, compared to now. I'm—.

1-00:06:34

Graves:

No, you're still a good-looking man. So this was 1945 it says.

1-00:06:39

Oishi:

Does it say '45?

1-00:06:40

Graves:

Yeah, right down at the bottom.

1-00:06:42

Oishi:

This was in Virginia.

1-00:06:44

Graves:

Yes. Did they take photographs like this of everyone or was this a special portrait you had done?

1-00:06:52

Oishi:

No, I guess we all had to take it or something. I don't know, I didn't have no money to take pictures {inaudible}.

1-00:06:58

Graves:

Yeah, that's a fancy one too. Chicago, it says Chicago.

1-00:07:04

Oishi:

Does it?

1-00:07:04

Graves:

Yeah, would you have had that done in Chicago?

1-00:07:07

Oishi:

I don't think so, I don't know. Might have been done, maybe in Chicago. This is my platoon, Second Platoon. This is in Fort Lee, Virginia.

1-00:07:21

Graves:

Right. Where are you?

1-00:07:23

Oishi:

I don't know where I am. Right there maybe. I don't know where.

1-00:07:27

Washburn:

Yeah, that looks like you.

1-00:07:30

Graves:

I can't see. Do you remember, is your commander, whatever you would call them—. Being so militarily up on it. [Laughs]

1-00:07:44

Washburn:

Right, exactly. You know everything. I feel like I have to sync this really quickly here. I need to another one of these claps. Sorry, you guys. Clap! That was track three.

1-00:08:00

Oishi:

Why did he have to clap for?

1-00:08:02

Graves:

Well, since the sound is there and the picture is there, when they want to put them together, they have to be able to start them at the same moment together.

1-00:08:14

Oishi:

I'm right there, I believe.

1-00:08:13

Graves:

Oh, okay. Yeah.

1-00:08:18

Washburn:

Does it list your name there, Tom? Yeah, it does. Oishi, T.

1-00:08:22

Oishi:

Yeah, yeah.

1-00:08:22

Graves:

Yeah. Were you the only Japanese American?

1-00:08:26

Oishi:

Yes. In those days, the black had their own camp. But here in California, when you were inducted, there weren't too many blacks. We were all together. But when we lived back East, there's a black camp and a white camp.

1-00:08:52

Graves:

Really? But here, you were inducted together, everybody, and trained—.

1-00:08:57

Oishi:

They didn't have no black camp in California, I don't think.

1-00:09:00

Graves:

Really? Did you have training here too or you just were inducted?

1-00:09:04

Oishi:

No, no, I was just inducted here.

1-00:09:06

Graves:

What's this?

1-00:09:07

Oishi:

This is a good picture, see?

1-00:09:10

Graves:

Yeah.

1-00:09:13

Oishi:

Look there, this is my cousin.

1-00:09:17

Graves:

What's his name?

1-00:09:18

Oishi:

Mas Oishi. Is he taking a picture?

1-00:09:20

Washburn:

Yeah, I'm taking a picture, yeah.

1-00:09:22

Oishi:

This is Ta Oishi, they're brothers.

1-00:09:26

Graves:

Yes, where did they live?

1-00:09:29

Oishi:

Mas passed on, he lived in Oakland.

1-00:09:31

Graves:

Were they both nursery people?

1-00:09:34

Oishi:

They were nursery in the early part but their dad went into something else. He was in retail flower and then he couldn't stick to one occupation. He had all kinds of ideas. He's always moving around.

1-00:09:52

Graves:

So Mas and what was his brother's name?

1-00:09:55

Oishi:

Ta.

1-00:09:55

Graves:

Ta.

1-00:09:56

Oishi:

Ta was educated in Richmond. He went to Richmond High School.

1-00:10:04

Graves:

Yes, is he older—he was older than you right?

1-00:10:06

Oishi:

He might be sixteen years older than I am. So you picture sixteen years older than I am. He got his high school diploma at Richmond High School.

1-00:10:20

Graves:

In the early '20s.

1-00:10:23

Oishi:

And then he went to the University of California. Then he wanted to become an airplane engineer or something, so he transferred to Stanford. In those days, there wasn't too much discrimination, I don't think, because the war was not coming on. So he thought he was it. [Laughs]. He thought he was it. He would box, fight and he was a brain. He came out with a Stanford degree, engineering. He went looking for a job. He was surprised someone gave him a job, no one gave him a job. He was very depressed. So he had to work at Adachi's. Mrs. Adachi gave him a job. Then his uncle says, "Well, Ta why don't you come to Japan? We have family—good roots or something. Get you a job at Mitsubishi." So he went to Japan and got a job at Mitsubishi.

1-00:11:37

Graves:

As an engineer?

1-00:11:38

Oishi:

Yeah, and he was an engineer. And then, when the war broke out or something, Japan says, “This guy, here might be a spy.” He might be American spy, see. They had agents on him at all times.

1-00:11:58

Graves:

Wow. Was he married, did he have a family?

1-00:12:01

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes. He got married late. He got married in Japan.

1-00:12:05

Graves:

In Japan? Yes.

1-00:12:05

Oishi:

He might have been twenty-five, thirty years old or something, when they went to Japan.

1-00:12:10

Graves:

Is your wife in here?

1-00:12:12

Oishi:

She’s not in this picture.

1-00:12:19

Graves:

So where was this taken, do you know?

1-00:12:21

Oishi:

This is Mas and Ta—Ta came all the way from Japan because his father was having an eightieth birthday or something at Tokyo—at Sukiyaki in Fisherman’s Wharf. Tokyo Sukiyaki, you know, right on fisherman’s wharf. They had a big party there, so he came for that occasion. This all might have been in 1952, 1951 or something.

1-00:13:04

Graves:

Is that his father back there?

1-00:13:05

Oishi:

No, that’s not his father, it’s someone else.

1-00:13:06

Graves:

Any other Richmond people?

1-00:13:09

Oishi:

This is Sam, my cousin. Lives across the street from me.

1-00:13:13

Graves:

Now?

1-00:13:15

Oishi:

Yes.

1-00:13:15

Graves:

What's his last name?

1-00:13:16

Oishi:

Sakai.

1-00:13:19

Graves:

Oh.

1-00:13:20

Oishi:

That's my brother George. He's in between Joe and me. And that's my brother in law, {Harley}. He's married to my sister, but he's passed on.

1-00:13:31

Graves:

Which sister?

1-00:13:33

Oishi:

Sister next to me, Lucy. Lucy and {Harley} passed on. And this is the same party. That's my wife.

1-00:13:51

Graves:

Oh, okay. What's her name again?

1-00:13:52

Oishi:

Kate Shizae.

1-00:13:55

Graves:

Shizae.

1-00:13:55

Oishi:

And that's my sister Amy in Berkeley. That's my sister Hannah in Richmond here. That's Fumi, that's my brother's wife, George's wife.

1-00:14:14

Graves:

What was her last name before she married?

1-00:14:15

Oishi:

Nabeta. She's {inaudible}.

1-00:14:16

Graves:

So she was here in Richmond, Nabeta.

1-00:14:20

Oishi:

Her picture's there. They were pioneers, her folks. And that's Joe's wife. Joe, my oldest brother's wife.

1-00:14:28

Graves:

What was her name?

1-00:14:29

Oishi:

Masako.

1-00:14:31

Graves:

Masako what?

1-00:14:32

Oishi:

Matoi.

1-00:14:34

Graves:

Was she from Richmond, her family?

1-00:14:36

Oishi:

No, she's from San Francisco. And that's my oldest sister Miti, she's in Sacramento.

1-00:15:01

Graves:

Dave would it help if the pictures were—if we folded the book on his lap and laid the pictures on them so they were more still and flatter. Or does it not matter?

1-00:14:56

Washburn:

Yeah, no. That would be nice.

1-00:14:58

Graves:

Okay. Yeah, why don't you do that Tom. I'll just you hand you some, okay.

1-00:15:10

Oishi:

See, that's my father and mother. I don't know what year must have been.

1-00:15:16

Graves:

And their names again?

1-00:15:19

Oishi:

Seizo and Ryu Oishi.

1-00:15:22

Graves:

Where do you think that picture is?

1-00:15:28

Oishi:

I don't know. I have no idea. It's not at the nursery. This must be before the war.

1-00:15:43

Graves:

Because of the clothing?

1-00:15:46

Oishi:

Well, his posture is much better. It was pretty good there, but in the latter years, his posture was very bad.

1-00:15:58

Graves:

Was the posture because he had a physical thing?

1-00:16:04

Oishi:

No, no, it was age. He was fifty years older than I am. When I was born, he was fifty years old.

1-00:16:13

Graves:

Wow. And your mother was how old?

1-00:16:19

Oishi:

My mother was about thirty-five years old when I was born.

1-00:16:27

Graves:

Do you want to look at this one? Does this bring back any other memories of your—?

1-00:16:37

Oishi:

No. This picture, just by my looks there, I might have been twelve years old, fourteen years old.

1-00:16:51

Graves:

You look more like a teenager there. You're the second one right?

1-00:16:55

Oishi:

Yeah, that was me.

1-00:16:57

Graves:

Yeah, with the open sweater. Handsome.

1-00:16:59

Oishi:

Yes, and there's our Japanese School teacher.

1-00:17:03

Graves:

What was her name?

1-00:17:04

Oishi:

Kawamoto.

1-00:17:06

Graves:

Tell us about the language school, which one that is.

1-00:17:11

Oishi:

Her son was about a year older than I was, but he didn't come to this something. They lived in Berkeley and she taught her son the proper way to speak and to write in Japanese. I guess he was pretty smart man, he listened to her. And when he became adult, he went into the language school and I think he played a big part in Japan as an interpreter during the war years, maybe when MacArthur went over there.

1-00:17:53

Graves:

Oh, after the war.

1-00:17:54

Oishi:

Yes. So he was in there before the war, in the army. He wasn't like me. He was drafted, maybe right out of college. He didn't go to camp, see.

1-00:18:05

Graves:

So this is the school that replaced the first one that became your home?

1-00:18:12

Oishi:

Yes. This was roughly built '27 and this picture was maybe '35, this picture might have been taken in '35.

1-00:18:31

Graves:

How big of a building—how many rooms in there?

1-00:18:34

Oishi:

It was only the one big room. We had a kitchen and we had maybe two bathrooms, that's about all. The room was maybe, I don't know, twenty, twenty-five by forty or something.

1-00:18:55

Graves:

That's pretty big.

1-00:18:55

Oishi:

And they used that as kind of an auditorium too.

1-00:19:00

Graves:

That's why I was going to ask because you said they had a kitchen, so there would be parties and—

1-00:19:05

Oishi:

Yes, well, when we have any social—. But the neighbors—the nursery people, they bought the land. They bought the land and the put up the building themselves.

1-00:19:15

Graves:

What kind of parties do you remember there? New Year's?

1-00:19:20

Oishi:

No, no. Because Richmond was—there were Christians and Buddhists, see. So the Buddhists stuck to themselves, and the Christians would have their everything. They were more or less separated that way. But in Japanese School, it wouldn't be a Buddhist or a Christian, we all came at that age.

1-00:19:44

Washburn:

So birthday parties, Tom?

1-00:19:46

Oishi:

Well, maybe in Japanese School they would have a little birthday—but we used to have movies, Japanese movies.

1-00:19:54

Graves:

At the school?

1-00:19:54

Oishi:

Yes, somebody would come around with a film or something. Maybe it was fundraising. And the committee would get together and see the Japanese movies.

1-00:20:10

Graves:

So everyone would come, the kids and the adults?

1-00:20:12

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

1-00:20:12

Graves:

Fundraising for something in the community?

1-00:20:16

Oishi:

Yeah, maybe fundraising for repair or making payments for the school. I think they were pretty well—I think they all chipped in to buy a lot of land and put up the building.

1-00:20:31

Graves:

Do you see any other people in there you recognize?

1-00:20:34

Oishi:

I recognize all of them.

1-00:20:35

Graves:

Everybody. Were they all nursery family kids?

1-00:20:38

Oishi:

Mostly. Mostly nursery. I think all the pictures in this book here, nursery people would be in there.

1-00:20:46

Graves:

Was that picture in this book or was it separate?

1-00:20:50

Oishi:

No, no.

1-00:20:50

Graves:

No, that was your own picture.

1-00:20:52

Oishi:

Yes. That I got from grandma's house, my mother's house.

1-00:20:57

Washburn:

Is that the teacher there in the middle?

1-00:21:00

Oishi:

This is the teacher there.

1-00:21:01

Graves:

Yeah, the seated.

1-00:21:02

Washburn:

What's her name?

1-00:21:02

Oishi:

Kawamoto.

1-00:21:08

Graves:

All right, do you have any siblings in that picture?

1-00:21:11

Oishi:

Yes, but it's hard to {inaudible}. This picture here is a picture that's supposed to be in here, but maybe we have another photo of it.

1-00:21:34

Graves:

So this is your family?

1-00:21:35

Oishi:

This is our family. That's Lucy, she's two years older than I am. That's my mother. That's Hannah, which is two years older than Lucy. And there's Amy, two years older than Hannah and George is roughly two years older than Amy, and there's Joe. That's my father, my mother.

1-00:22:04

Graves:

And you.

1-00:22:04

Oishi:

And me. Maybe I was, I don't know, ten years old, I'm not sure.

1-00:22:10

Graves:

And is that in front of your house?

1-00:22:12

Oishi:

This is in front of the house. This house here is the old Japanese School.

1-00:22:17

Graves:

Right. So there were stairs up to the second level on that south face.

1-00:22:23

Oishi:

Yes.

1-00:22:24

Graves:

And what's planted around there, what are those—do you know?

1-00:22:27

Oishi:

That's the old garden. My mother, she had a lot of interest in plants. And this tree here, when I was born, I was told he planted this tree on both sides of the house, on this side of the porch and then on the other side of the porch. And when I was, roughly 1980s, tree was way up there, maybe thirty feet high, hazard, you know. So I got in there and I got my men and we chopped both of those trees down.

1-00:23:05

Graves:

Were they planted to mark your birth?

1-00:23:07

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

1-00:23:09

Graves:

Oh. What kind of tree is that? Do you know?

1-00:23:10

Oishi:

I don't know what the name of tree is. Like a Christmas tree.

1-00:23:17

Graves:

Some kind of pine.

1-00:23:18

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

1-00:23:20

Graves:

And is that, what's that, oleander?

1-00:23:23

Oishi:

I don't know what that is. Might be camellia, might be a lemon tree. This is in thirty-two.

1-00:23:32

Graves:

Yes. So your mother liked to garden?

1-00:23:36

Oishi:

Yes.

1-00:23:36

Graves:

For beauty as well as vegetable garden?

1-00:23:39

Oishi:

Well, she liked plants and I think that was her way of letting frustration out. You know, she had a lot of kids, and a hard time feeding them, stress and she used the garden. When she passed on, she had a nice garden. She had all kinds of different plants. Her good friend was Oshima and Oshima had a retail nursery on San Pablo Avenue, where the Home Depot was. They had a retail plant nursery and her and Mrs. Oshima were good friends, and they would go over there and they'd get a new plants and bring it home and plant it.

1-00:24:30

Graves:

Did you have any water in the garden, like with koi or anything like that?

1-00:24:35

Oishi:

No, we had no fish in our garden.

1-00:24:43

Graves:

Do you remember having that picture taken? It looks so formal.

1-00:24:48

Oishi:

I think this picture was taken—maybe the nursery people hired a photographer and he came, and maybe he took the picture.

1-00:25:03

Graves:

So should we look through the book a little bit now?

1-00:25:06

Oishi:

Should if we just pick out the—. {Inaudible} picture there.

1-00:25:16

Graves:

Who's that?

1-00:25:23

Oishi:

That's my father, my uncle, Mr. Sakai. I don't know who this fellow is.

1-00:25:38

Graves:

These are so great. So tell us again about this book.

1-00:25:50

Oishi:

This book was the California Flower Market—I guess they decided on making a book for the flower industry—families of flower industry—because we didn't know one another. Maybe like my father knew all the people there, but the families themselves never met one another. So they decided on making a book. Maybe they hired a photographer, went to every nursery that was connected with the California Flower Market—had shares in the California Flower Market. They went to individual homes and took pictures of them and this was the book they came up with.

1-00:26:44

Graves:

So it was a way of kind of reinforcing the whole nursery community, the flower community.

1-00:26:47

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

1-00:26:52

Graves:

So that—.

1-00:26:52

Oishi:

And this is the—I'm just going to pick out the Richmond nursery people. This is Adachi, Adachi family, and they were one of the pioneers that came into Richmond. Mr. Adachi, Sono Adachi, Ruby Adachi, the mother, Toshio Adachi and {Ryu} Adachi. But they have another older sister,

maybe when the picture was taken, she might have gone to Japan. Her name was Elsie Adachi. But now, the sisters, they were married and her name was—I don't recall.

1-00:27:40

Graves:

Where was their nursery?

1-00:27:41

Oishi:

They were on San Pablo Avenue. Home Depot is located on their nursery now.

1-00:27:49

Graves:

And what—you were telling us about their nursery and how well it was regarded.

1-00:27:55

Oishi:

Well, in the—these pictures were taken in, does it say?

1-00:28:05

Graves:

I don't think so, you were guessing thirties, early-thirties.

1-00:28:11

Oishi:

Yes. Adachi started off with {bedding} plant nursery. I don't what year they started off with. And then they went into retail cut flowers and Adachi family, Mrs. Adachi was very neat and particular. Maybe in Japan she learned flower arrangement, and she put out real good work and the whole Bay Area knew Adachi's funeral work and flower arrangements and something. They had a real good name. They had a real good business here in Richmond.

1-00:28:59

Graves:

So when they moved to cut flower, did they continue to maintain the nursery?

1-00:29:03

Oishi:

Yes, they had a cut flower—.

1-00:29:07

Graves:

So both.

1-00:29:05

Oishi:

Yes, they had a cut flower gift shop and they had a big retail outlet there.

1-00:29:13

Graves:

So these—this is Damoto in Berkeley?

1-00:29:16

Oishi:

Damoto, I don't know too much about them but I hear they were the pioneers that came to California from Japan, early pioneers.

1-00:29:26

Graves:

None of the rest of these say Richmond, but San Francisco.

1-00:29:490

Oishi:

This is Damoto Hayward, I guess that there. Same {Damoto}. No, this is a K. Damoto, and that's M. Damoto.

1-00:30:01

Graves:

Okay. Fujita in Berkeley, Hayward.

1-00:30:09

Oishi:

This Fuji, I believe, it says Berkeley but they might became Richmond, to San Pablo.

1-00:30:23

Graves:

This says Fukushima.

1-00:30:25

Oishi:

Fukushima was our neighbor.

1-00:30:27

Graves:

Where?

1-00:30:29

Oishi:

Just east of our nursery. Taro and Sab was the other two boys. Taro and Sab and there's their father, {inaudible}. They were real good carnation growers. Father was a good grower.

1-00:30:48

Washburn:

So this is the greenhouse right there, right by yours there at the end of Thirty-seventh?

1-00:30:53

Oishi:

No, I think this one here. I don't know where this one here is taken.

1-00:31:02

Washburn:

It says there, up there, F. Fukushima, Richmond.

1-00:31:08

Oishi:

Yes.

1-00:31:08

Graves:

Or S.

1-00:31:09

Washburn:

S. Fukushima.

1-00:31:10

Oishi:

Taro was a good pitcher in the high school days, Richmond High School.

1-00:31:17

Graves:

Baseball pitcher?

1-00:31:18

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes. He played with Lloyd Christopher. Lloyd Christopher played professional baseball, Philadelphia or something, major league baseball. Lloyd was the outfielder and Taro was one of the pitchers. And Taro and I used to carry Taro's bat. You know, we were young kids and he would carry his bat. Taro would let me carry his bat. [Laughs] Go down to the baseball game or somewhere, we'd carry it there, and we'd go to Nichols Park to see the baseball game.

1-00:31:54

Graves:

These were high school games?

1-00:31:56

Oishi:

High school games. Yeah, he played American Legion baseball too. American Legion is junior high school, I believe. They had a pretty good team, they had some good players on that team.

1-00:32:09

Graves:

Was this all Japanese team?

1-00:32:12

Oishi:

No, no, this was Caucasian. Taro was probably the only Japanese on that team.

1-00:32:25

Graves:

This is Hoshi, Richmond?

1-00:32:26

Oishi:

Hoshi, yes. This is the Hoshi family, they had a nursery north of us. They were good carnation growers. Mr. Hoshi and his two children.

1-00:32:42

Graves:

So did you go to school with either of those girls?

1-00:32:45

Oishi:

I think the girls were a little younger than I was.

1-00:32:48

Graves:

You know, you told us about that string when we were in the greenhouse, can you describe it so that?

1-00:32:57

Oishi:

Well, the string for the carnation is to keep the carnation in line so that it grows up straight.

1-00:33:04

Graves:

It's like a grid, a vertical grid.

1-00:33:12

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes.

1-00:33:22

Graves:

And that was one of your chores when you were a kid?

1-00:33:24

Oishi:

Yes, yes. My sisters and I, we had to put string on, you know. We were kept busy. We had a big family but, come down to think of it, we got along. You know, with a big family, you all have to learn to share. Or like a little family, they get very independent and. We had to struggle, let's put it that way, which is good for us. A little struggle and hardships is good for a person. Person have nothing but leisure, luxuries throughout their whole life, they're born that way. Throughout their whole life, they set their mind that way. But when you have a big family, you have to share everything, you used to have a little amount money. They share whatever you got. We {inaudible} one another. This is the Honda family. Honda family—there's May, Sachi, June, mother, father, Sue Honda. They grew carnation here in Richmond. But they—.

1-00:35:04

Graves:

Where was their greenhouse?

1-00:35:05

Oishi:

Their greenhouse was Potrero Avenue and San Pablo Avenue, south of Potrero. That's where the furniture store used to be now. I believe the freeway came by and bought most of their place out.

1-00:35:31

Graves:

And this was a related Honda?

1-00:35:33

Oishi:

Yes, this was related. That's their brothers.

1-00:35:38

Graves:

You know, you told me something, I think about this family, earlier, what happened during the war?

1-00:35:44

Oishi:

Yes.

1-00:35:44

Graves:

Can you tell that story again?

1-00:35:46

Oishi:

Oh, the Hoshi family, maybe they owed money on their property when the war broke out and they were not able to pay for the land so the bank took their property away. So when we came back, the Hoshi family was not able to come back because it was no longer their's.

1-00:36:15

Graves:

So they didn't come back to Richmond at all?

1-00:36:18

Oishi:

No, they didn't come back to Richmond. This coming back was 1945.

1-00:36:26

Graves:

So these are more—.

1-00:36:29

Oishi:

Hondas had their own property—they came back to their own property and they built it up. When they came back, most of the glass in their greenhouses was broken. They had a lot of damage done to their nursery. So they had to come back and pick up every glass and put new glass on. It was a big—lots of work for them. It took them quite a few years to get back to normal.

1-00:36:55

Graves:

Why do you think that happened to their nursery and not yours?

1-00:37:00

Oishi:

It depends on who was leasing your place. In our case, I think we just about told a man to take care of this place and make sure no damage was done, and so he took care of it. But in their case, maybe they were getting lease or something, and the person who leased it, maybe wasn't able to maintain it and then you give the lease up.

1-00:37:43

Graves:

These are Redwood City.

1-00:37:47

Oishi:

Yes, Redwood City.

1-00:37:46

Graves:

More peninsula. San Leandro. Did you want to look at something a little more?

1-00:38:05

Washburn:

Tom, can you flip back one page? All of these greenhouses, like this one, they all use the same system of growing carnations. So who taught everybody to do this? People have traditions but when new techniques come about, how do people share the kind of ways of growing the flowers?

1-00:38:30

Oishi:

I think this is not the Japanese way. This is a nationwide or United States-wide, in our case. I don't think it was nationwide. But New England states, Denver, Colorado and then Ohio State and stuff, they were growing carnations there and we would get books from there. They had books on how to grow carnations and we would follow that.

1-00:39:05

Graves:

Did they use that string grid?

1-00:39:07

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

1-00:39:07

Graves:

Oh, okay. So you learned a lot of it from books?

1-00:39:10

Oishi:

Yes, yes. The heating system and everything was more or less from the books. And these different universities would come up with books on it. Mostly it was New England states and Ohio State and Michigan State.

1-00:39:26

Graves:

So these would be like university agricultural extension publications?

1-00:39:31

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes.

1-00:39:31

Graves:

And when you started to use more packaged fertilizers and pesticides you would get it all from —.

1-00:39:39

Oishi:

It wasn't our idea, it was researched work. State of California didn't have any research out on cut flowers or anything. They came out after the war. But mostly it was New England states and I think there was Boston area, and maybe it was good growing conditions in Boston area. And Colorado was there too.

1-00:40:09

Graves:

That's really interesting.

1-00:40:10

Oishi:

Flower industry, you know, there's not too many in the United States that's in the flower industry. You break your people who grow carnations, just grows carnations. People who grow roses just grow roses, see. So it's a different something altogether. People who grow bedding plants, you know mums are in their own association. So it's a small—not many people in the United States are specializing in wholesale cut flowers.

1-00:40:52

Graves:

Who put these on? Do you know?

1-00:40:54

Oishi:

I don't know.

1-00:40:58

Graves:

So they weren't notes that you came up with. Boy, that's pretty isn't it? With the mountains behind?

1-00:41:06

Oishi:

{Inaudible} Half Moon Bay. That's Half Moon Bay isn't it?

1-00:41:16

Graves:

That's what it says. More peninsula, look at those chrysanthemums.

1-00:41:26

Oishi:

All these people we don't even know—I don't even know.

1-00:41:36

Graves:

Redwood City. Oakland. Richmond, Kawai.

1-00:41:40

Oishi:

Kawai. Kawai was in north Richmond on Brookside Drive. Mrs. Kawai, that's Dorothy Kawai. One of the sisters, I don't know her name. This is Hide Kawai—no, this is, one of these is Hide Kawai, now she's Mrs. Oshima. That's Henry Kawai.

1-1-00:42:11

Graves:

A family like that with one son and a bunch of daughters.

1-1-00:42:18

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

1-1-00:42:17

Graves:

What—?

1-1-00:42:19

Oishi:

Well, Kawai eventually sold off to the Ninomiya family.

1-1-00:42:26

Graves:

After the war?

1-1-00:42:28

Oishi:

After the war, yes. Henry was running it.

1-1-00:42:30

Graves:

Now would people have felt like those parents were unfortunate in a way?

1-1-00:42:36

Oishi:

Yes, I guess they did.

1-1-00:42:39

Graves:

Because they couldn't continue the family business in the same way.

1-1-00:42:42

Oishi:

Yes, yes. They lost their father when they were fairly young.

1-1-00:42:49

Graves:

Before the war?

1-1-00:42:51

Oishi:

Yes, before the war.

1-1-00:42:52

Graves:

Oh, so she kept that business going with her daughters and son. But after the war couldn't sustain?

1-00:43:00

Oishi:

No, after the war, Henry took over and he built it up, and he went into Salinas to expand the operation.

1-00:43:09

Graves:

Wow. Do you know the mother's first name?

1-00:43:12

Oishi:

No. San Pablo was quite a distance from Richmond. You know, that's pretty far {inaudible}.

1-00:43:23

Graves:

Right. These are San Francisco and the peninsula. Here's Richmond, Maeda.

1-00:43:33

Oishi:

Yes, Maeda. This is Maeda family. They were close by. Fukushima was east of our nursery and Maeda property kind of touched our nursery. We had a little there—southeast of us. That's the grandpa Maeda and that's Mrs. Maeda, Asako, the mother, Junko and Meriko. They grew rose at first and then they converted into carnations.

1-00:44:21

Graves:

Now, did the grandfather and the son come from Japan or just the grandfather, do you know?

1-00:44:27

Oishi:

I think the grandfather came from Japan and I think this is the Yoshi case too. The grandpa was Maeda and she was a Maeda, and then she got a Yoshi from Japan.

1-00:44:53

Graves:

Hey, would that be Fred Korematsu's family?

1-00:44:57

Oishi:

Yes.

1-00:44:59

Graves:

Is he in there?

1-00:45:00

Oishi:

I believe that's Fred there.

1-00:45:05

Graves:

Can you talk about Fred Korematsu?

1-00:45:06

Oishi:

Well, Fred Korematsu, I don't think he was even growing carnations or not. I believe they were carnation growers in San Leandro.

1-00:45:16

Graves:

This says Oakland.

1-00:45:17

Oishi:

Oh, Oakland, yes. And Fred was next to the youngest. He had two older brothers and he had one younger brother. They operated a nursery. His father and my father were—maybe they grew carnations, they knew each other in the flower market. And Fred, like me—he was about my age—he was very Americanized, I believe. And he didn't know what discrimination was. So he became a welder. He became a welder.

1-00:46:03

Graves:

Do you know where?

1-00:46:02

Oishi:

In the Oakland somewhere. Maybe he worked in the shipyards. I guess he was making good money and the war broke out. I think he had a Caucasian girlfriend and the war broke out and, you know, he was maybe naïve. He didn't know about discrimination. He thought he was an American citizen and he didn't go into camp and the FBI got him. He was {inaudible}, put in jail

and stuff and for two, three years, Fred was kind of ashamed to go with the rest of us. We all went at the government's command, "Let's go to camp," we all went. Fred refused to go.

1-00:46:49

Graves:

He tried to sue, didn't he? Didn't he bring a lawsuit?

1-00:46:51

Oishi:

No, no. Then throughout the whole country, we thought Fred was different. But Fred turned out to be a hero. He has enough guts to say, "I'm an American citizen. I'm entitled to stay here. You have no business putting me into camp." He refused to go. And maybe fifty years later, he won his case. That's Fred Korematsu. I met him just the other—we had a Topaz reunion in San Jose about three years ago and Fred was there. He was honored. But, in the war years, it was kind of shame because Fred refused and he was put in jail. It was kind of shameful for the Japanese because Fred's name always came up.

1-00:47:53

Graves:

Is that the way you felt about it too?

1-00:47:56

Oishi:

No, I didn't. I did not. I thought Fred had a lot of courage, but a lot of other people did not because we tagged along. Government says, "Come on there," we go there. Government says, "Eat this," we eat that. Government say, "Go inside here, we're going to have guards around you, shoot to kill." We accepted it. Every time we go into camp, they search our lunch, they search our pockets, everything. We were like prisoners.

1-00:48:27

Graves:

Did you know Fred before?

1-00:48:28

Oishi:

Yes, we played basketball. No, we used to play basketball. Richmond—our entertainment was we played basketball against different cities—San Leandro. Well, it says Oakland, but I think they were in San Leandro. They didn't have too many people to choose from. Maybe they were one of the teams that was more or less comparable to our team, so we played against one another quite often. And I said {inaudible}, you know, I didn't see Fred for fifty years and I met him there and we had a good long talk. Fred is old, he's getting old, but he's sharp yet.

1-00:49:09

Graves:

So he didn't go, he refused to go but his family went to Tanforan?

1-00:49:14

Oishi:

His father—yes, yes.

1-00:49:16

Graves:

Were you there with—?

1-00:49:16

Oishi:

No, I knew his brothers, and I knew the father—I knew who the father was. And he had, Toy and what's the other called—. He was in wholesale flower shop. He used to—maybe one of the brothers {Randy} nursery after the war and one was in wholesale flower shop and he used to buy flowers from the grower and sell it. He used to ship flowers out.

1-00:49:57

Graves:

These—.

1-00:50:01

Oishi:

This is Maeda family.

1-00:50:02

Graves:

And it's spelled differently than that?

1-00:50:05

Oishi:

Well, I guess—.

1-00:50:06

Graves:

Same family then?

1-00:50:07

Oishi:

I believe. He was the grandpa of maybe their mother or father or something. I think they're cousins anyway.

1-00:50:19

Graves:

Yes. And where was their—?

1-00:50:20

Oishi:

They were next to them. They were on Wall Avenue, south of this Maeda here.

1-00:50:28

Graves:

Wall and?

1-00:50:32

Oishi:

Wall—Well, their nursery was bought out by the freeway. When the freeway came by, they were bought out.

1-00:50:43

Graves:

So closer to San Pablo?

1-00:50:43

Oishi:

No, it was not as far as San Pablo. It was more or less the middle of the freeway. This is Maeda. Elsie is the youngest daughter and then the oldest daughter, Harry and Ben, and Maria. Ben fought in the 442, you know. When he came back, oh, he loved to talk about the 442. What a hero he was, see. [Laughs] Maybe he was a truck driver or something, I don't know if he had a gun or not. But he was very proud of whatever he did over there.

1-00:51:22

Graves:

So both of these families came back after the war?

1-00:51:25

Oishi:

Yes, both came back but this family was bought out. This family, part of their nursery is still there. You go right straight down, that's their—you know that big house right straight down, that was their house.

1-00:51:43

Graves:

Oh ok.

1-00:51:45

Washburn:

Tom, would you guys—did you follow what was going on with the 442?

1-00:51:50

Oishi:

Did I follow?

1-00:51:53

Washburn:

During the war, did you follow the movements and different things that were happening?

1-00:51:55

Oishi:

Yes, because my brother—I was in Chicago in those days and my brother used to write to me. When I first went to Chicago, he was stationed in—my brother George—he was stationed in Fort {Custer}, Michigan. He was in the medics. And I remember him coming to see me—see how his younger brother was doing, see if I had enough money. [Laughs] I don't know if he would have given me money or not! And from Fort {Custer}, Michigan—.

1-00:52:31

Graves:

Which brother is George? If you could point to him.

1-00:52:34

Oishi:

That's George there.

1-00:52:35

Graves:

And he was in the 442?

1-00:52:38

Oishi:

Yes. He was in the 442. But what happened was he was in the medics and he was in Fort {Custer}, Michigan and the 442 was formed maybe halfway through the war. It wasn't formed from the early part of the war. And then all the Niseis that was in different camps throughout the United States was—they formed the 442, they trained in Shelby in Mississippi, I believe. And then he used to write to me when he was sent overseas, "He landed here." You know, I think he came from southern Italy, he came all the way into France. And I used to get cards—letters from him as the movement.

1-00:53:50

Graves:

Could you follow any of that in the papers too, or just through your correspondence with him? What was going on?

1-00:53:56

Oishi:

You were able to—I was putting the papers and the letters together. I was a young kid, twenty, twenty-one years old, and he's about eight years older than I am.

1-00:54:12

Washburn:

Tom, was the reputation of the 442, at least in the Richmond Japanese community, was it—did people know of it even while they were in, say in Topaz, in a camp in Topaz, and followed it then and was it a source of pride then or did it—was it something that became a source of pride after the war?

1-00:54:36

Oishi:

I think the pride is, among the Japanese, maybe the City of Richmond was not proud, I don't know. The City of Richmond, I thought, was—you know, it was a defense area. They didn't want Japanese in the City of Richmond. Maybe the government {inaudible} them, maybe it wasn't the city. We had refineries here. We had shipyards here. It was a vital area, very vital to this country. We had chemical plants. We had oil refineries. We had one of the biggest shipyards in the United States. And it was a vital area so—.

1-00:55:26

Graves:

But among the families that we've been looking at, how did they feel about sons or relatives being in the 442nd?

1-00:55:38

Oishi:

Well, I don't know. I guess everyone—there were different opinions. I guess most of them felt they were proud of their boys.

1-00:55:48

Washburn:

What did your family talk about?

1-00:55:50

Oishi:

Oh, my father was—well, when we were in camp, you know, some—. When I was in camp before I left for Chicago, some youths or some people thought, “Jesus, this is my country, I'm going to volunteer.” They were volunteering. And some families felt, “This is wrong. They pulled us out of here, and this is not right to volunteer. We're persons without a country.” We were. We're not American citizens. We're not Japanese citizens. I'm just like you if you went to Japan. And I went to Japan, we're treated the same, even though our appearance is different. I felt like a man without a country. And then George kept writing me. When he was writing me, you know, a lot of casualties, a lot of people died. He was in the medics, so he had a red something. Legally speaking and they're not supposed to shoot at him. Enemy is not supposed to shoot at him. He's a medic, see. He don't have no rifle.

1-00:57:21

Graves:

So he was getting shot at?

1-00:57:21

Oishi:

I don't know. He was injured. He was injured.

1-00:57:27

Graves:

When we can really film you, I really want to get into all of this more.

1-00:57:37

Oishi:

And what he said was, he wrote me, “Tom, if you're drafted, you can't do nothing about it. Make sure you don't volunteer.” His younger brother—he wanted to look after his younger brother. So he saw a lot of casualties over there, his buddies getting kill and shot-up.

1-00:58:05

Graves:

Are you hungry? I brought bread and cheese and apples. Are you hungry or do you want to keep going for a while?

1-00:58:20

Oishi:

Now, poor George, he has a bad case of arthritis. Maybe he's got old memories, I don't know.

1-00:58:29

Graves:

Does he live here in Richmond?

1-00:58:31

Oishi:

He's here in Richmond and his wife—he can't stand up.

1-00:58:34

Graves:

He can't?

1-00:58:36

Oishi:

No.

1-00:58:37

Graves:

Oh. So she takes care of him?

1-00:58:43

Oishi:

Yeah, she takes care of him.

1-00:58:46

Graves:

That's hard. You still need to change it? Ok, David's going to change the film. So maybe we can—.

1-00:58:54

Oishi:

By rights, I think this picture is supposed to be in there.

1-00:58:57

Graves:

Yeah. Wait, it's got a little—. Fuji Studio, Oakland. So it's Suji photo studio on Franklin.

1-00:59:09

Oishi:

Yeah, yeah. So it's a different one. See, this one here, the picture that was supposed to be in this book, someone took it home.

1-00:59:17

Graves:

Yeah, your cousin?

1-00:59:18

Oishi:

Yeah, I think so. I'm not sure. It's not here anyway.

[End Audio File Oishi.T04]

[Begin Audio File Oishi.T05]

2-00:00:00

Oishi:

We thought we were just as good as the next man. Joe, when he goes, he has to go with a Japanese group. He's gone {inaudible} tour or something. He would have to go on a Japanese group. Me, my wife, my kids, I give them a car, we go around {inaudible}.

2-00:00:20

Graves:

So you feel like the army experience gave you that sense of—?

2-00:00:24

Oishi:

Yes, yes, and that was part of the government.

2-00:00:36

Graves:

So we're going to talk about all that stuff more when we have more daylight. But wait, was this page or, no, it was back one.

2-00:00:43

Oishi:

Oh, Maeda, you wanted the Maeda picture.

2-00:00:46

Graves:

No—here it is. We've passed it.

2-00:00:51

Oishi:

M, M, M, N.

2-00:00:54

Graves:

Oh, I hadn't even noticed these were alphabetical. Here we are.

2-00:01:01

Oishi:

Well, we were talking about Ben. You know, good old Ben. Well, I guess he was proud. He was proud of the 442.

2-00:01:14

Washburn:

Which one's Ben again?

2-00:01:17

Oishi:

Ben. Ben was a brother of Harry and then {Min?} was oldest. They lost a father when they were very young. They struggled through life. But Ben is gone. They're all gone. They all passed on. Elsie is still living and Maria is still living too.

2-00:01:41

Graves:

After they sold the nursery, do you know what they all did?

2-00:01:44

Oishi:

No, they sold the nursery—.

2-00:01:46

Graves:

Oh, because of the freeway.

2-00:01:46

Oishi:

No, the freeway took the nursery, every bit of it. They moved to San Pablo, on Giant Road.

2-00:01:57

Graves:

And did they do more nursery work there?

2-00:02:00

Oishi:

Yes, yes, they had acreage over there. And then maybe ten, fifteen years ago, they sold it to a developer and sell homes there, see.

2-00:02:10

Washburn:

Tom, I wanted to ask you a question about all the greenhouses. And all the glass that you have—there's so much glass that is used in all these greenhouses. Where did Japanese nurseries buy their glass during that time?

2-00:02:28

Oishi:

Well, the glass is not Japanese. The glass is eastern stores. At first, when we first—my father's days, the size of glass was maybe twelve-by-twenty, twelve-by-eighteen. And then my other part was twenty-eight inches wide by twenty-eight inches wide, see. So we had less bar, sash bar, and it would give you much more light. The newer greenhouses are like the ones I showed you, the aluminum house, they're two feet wide by maybe twenty-six inches wide. So, it has less sash bars and they use an aluminum bars instead of wooden bars, which is maybe one-fourth the size of the wooden bar, so it would give you much more light.

00:03:39

Graves:

And where would you buy the glass, back before the war? Do you have any idea?

00:03:45

Oishi:

I guess we'd get it from the east, I'm sure.

00:03:47

Graves:

So you'd order it and it would be shipped?

00:03:50

Oishi:

Maybe they would have dealers in this area.

2-00:03:53

Washburn:

Because you mentioned the one family whose greenhouses was damaged during the war and they had to buy a bunch of new glass.

2-00:04:04

Graves:

Wasn't that them?

2-00:04:07

Oishi:

Yes.

2-00:04:07

Washburn:

Who was it? That wasn't them.

2-00:04:07

Oishi:

No, it was the Honda, Honda family.

2-00:04:07

Washburn:

The Honda family.

2-00:04:18

Graves:

Thanks, you guys, for pointing out it's alphabetical. [Laughs]

2-00:04:27

Oishi:

Yeah, Honda family.

2-00:04:27

Washburn:

So where did the Honda family buy their glass once they returned to Richmond?

2-00:04:33

Oishi:

I think they were able to buy—. Well, they had a Lord and Burnham Company which supplies greenhouse supplies, like the ventilation and lot of supplies.

2-00:04:50

Graves:

Say the name again?

2-00:04:52

Oishi:

Lord and Burnham.

2-00:04:54

Graves:

Lord and Burnham.

2-00:04:56

Oishi:

And maybe they bought it off of them, they're an eastern firm.

2-00:05:00

Washburn:

And how, when they came back, would have the Honda family had the money to reinvest in their greenhouse? I mean, can you explain, how after being out of business for a few years while at the camps, did they have the money to reinvest?

2-00:05:23

Oishi:

It was a struggle. All these girls, three girls, mother and father, they got in there and picked up all the glass. You know, little by little, you can't do the whole thing overnight. Maybe in daytime, you might do a thousand square foot, doesn't take too long to do a thousand square foot, if you work seven days a week, you can get thirty thousand square foot in a months time. You'd have, see. Pick it up, {inaudible}. They didn't hire, they didn't have the money to hire. And Juh was in the army. Juh was drafted in the army. He's a little younger than I was, and he was drafted in the army from Chicago.

2-00:06:12

Graves:

After the war?

2-00:06:13

Oishi:

Wartime. Because I registered here in California. Since {Judin} was too young to register here in California, when he got to Chicago he registered. So soon as he registered, they grabbed him and he was in the 442 towards the end. So he was there just about when the war was over. But these three sisters, well, five of them pick up a few glass at a time. You get five adults you can pick up a lot glass! If you're determined enough.

2-00:06:49

Graves:

But then, how did they raise the money to replace all that glass?

2-00:06:56

Oishi:

Maybe they had a few dollars in savings.

2-00:07:03

Washburn:

That's the question I wanted to ask you guys.

2-00:07:14

Oishi:

Looking for Richmond.

2-00:07:18

Graves:
Yeah.

2-00:07:18

Washburn:
Wow, I told you there was going to be a storm today, you guys.

2-00:07:23

Oishi:
So these pictures are fairly new, compared to pictures that we have of our family here. See, Fumi is my sister-in-law. She married George. Fumi is pretty old so this picture must be—she looks like she's eighteen years old, see. And on that picture, I'm ten years old. So this is eight years after that picture there.

2-00:07:56

Graves:
So this is late-thirties, this is, like, right before the war.

2-00:08:01

Oishi:
Yes, might have been a few years before the war.

2-00:08:03

Graves:
Because that said '32.

2-00:08:08

Oishi:
That's Fumi, near {Yo}, younger sister, the mother, Tosh. Tosh was my buddy and he's the same age as I, a little older than I am. And that's his father that's the grandma.

2-00:08:27

Graves:
And where in El Cerrito was their nursery?

2-00:08:33

Oishi:
On the corner of Potrero—you know where the church is? Japanese {Free Masses Church}? Right there. They had the whole nursery was bought out and a little portion was left over and that's where the church was started.

2-00:08:48

Graves:
So it's east of San Pablo? Potrero—.

2-00:08:52

Oishi:
Yes. No, no, San Pablo—it would be west of San Pablo.

2-00:08:57

Graves:

The church is west?

2-00:08:58

Oishi:

The church is on Potrero Avenue and Eastshore Freeway. San Pablo is maybe a block—.

2-00:09:06

Graves:

East.

2-00:09:06

Oishi:

Yes.

2-00:09:09

Graves:

So which brother did she marry? She married—.

2-00:09:11

Oishi:

George, the one that was in the army. He was a big hero, see. Oh George was a 442 hero, see. [Laughs] {Inaudible} “Oh, I’ve got to marry. I’ve got to get married.” No, they were right back during wartime, during the war years.

2-00:09:34

Washburn:

She marry George, right?

2-00:09:37

Oishi:

There’s a difference in picture. This is thirty-two and this might have been ten years difference.

2-00:09:45

Graves:

Can you point to George and his wife again?

2-00:09:50

Oishi:

There’s Fumi. Fumi was here at George’s wedding. You know, she’s my sister in law, we would barch flowers together. And she’s more or less the only—I had three brothers, and she’s the only—my wife is gone, Joe’s wife is gone. She’s the only one left.

2-00:10:11

Graves:

And she married—can you point to George?

2-00:10:12

Oishi:

George.

2-00:10:16

Graves:

So you said you guys—you saw her this morning?

2-00:10:19

Oishi:

Yes. I see her everyday, just about.

2-00:10:22

Graves:

Does she work in the nursery with you?

2-00:10:24

Oishi:

She helps. She has to look after George, but she comes in and helps.

2-00:10:32

Graves:

Oh.

2-00:10:34

Oishi:

They got married in 1945. I was in the army then. Soon as he came back, I think they got married. Maybe '46, I don't know.

2-00:10:46

Graves:

So, they were at Topaz with your family?

2-00:10:51

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes. Tosh is my buddy. We were in Chicago together. We came back from the war and we used to chum around in Chicago.

2-00:11:02

Graves:

Did Tosh go to Chicago and work in nurseries just like—?

2-00:11:05

Oishi:

He was in nursery, not the same nursery with us. He was in another nursery.

2-00:11:10

Graves:

So, how did you both hear about—can you talk about how you both ended up in Chicago?

2-00:11:18

Oishi:

What happened was one of my cousins was a UC Berkeley graduate, you know, Jun Agari. Jun Agari went to Cal, no, went to Richmond High. He's about four years older than I am, and he's a pretty good public speaker. So, his graduating class, the teacher recommended him being the

commencement speaker, you know, quite an honor to him, see. So he became a commencement speaker. {Inaudible}.

2-00:11:55

Graves:

At Richmond High—.

2-00:11:57

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

2-00:11:57

Graves:

In 1935?

2-00:12:02

Oishi:

I don't know.

2-00:12:01

Graves:

You said he was four years older?

2-00:12:03

Oishi:

Yes, yes, I got out '40—.

2-00:12:07

Washburn:

In December of '40, no?

2-00:12:08

Oishi:

Yeah, yeah

2-00:12:08

Graves:

And what was his name again?

2-00:12:10

Oishi:

Jun Agari.

2-00:12:11

Graves:

Agari.

2-00:12:14

Oishi:

And then he went to UC Berkeley and he had a diploma in his pocket and gets him to work. And he was one of the early ones being drafted, early ones. They started to draft in nineteen, I don't know, forty or forty-one or something. And he picks an early number. So he was drafted. But he

was pretty smart and stuff so he had a pretty good job in Fort Ord or something. You know, maybe he was company clerk or something, I don't know. And then the war broke out. My brother George was in Michigan when the war broke out. He was in before the war, but Jun was at Fort Ord, "Gee, war broke out, what are we going to do with Jun?" So they released him, the army released him. You know, gave, I don't know what they call it.

2-00:13:15

Graves:

Honorable Discharge?

2-00:13:17

Oishi:

No, he's on reserve. They released him, he didn't have to—then he came back.

2-00:13:24

Washburn:

So how does this—does he know Tosh?

2-00:13:26

Oishi:

Who?

2-00:13:29

Graves:

Did your cousin let you know about the opportunity in Chicago? Is that how you brought him?

2-00:13:32

Oishi:

No, no, then Jun came out, and he was just like me. He had to go into camp. You know, he looked in the flower book, their magazine—help wanted. So you know, he could write pretty good and stuff. He wrote them a letter. And they responded: "Jun, come down here." There's {inaudible} Melrose Park, Illinois. Do you know Illinois?

2-00:14:02

Graves:

Only a little.

2-00:14:03

Oishi:

Melrose Park, Illinois where's the nursery is. There's 150,000 square foot {inaudible}. We're having a hard time out there. Jun maybe flew down there.

2-00:14:15

Graves:

Was that—?

2-00:14:17

Oishi:

This is all through writing. Jun was in camp.

2-00:14:20

Graves:

Right, what was the name of the nursery?

2-00:14:22

Oishi:

Premiere Rose Garden.

2-00:14:23

Graves:

Premiere Roses. But they weren't Japanese Americans.

2-00:14:27

Oishi:

No, they were German. This is a German corporation. That is one of the biggest in the Midwest. One of the biggest outfits in the Midwest. They had three different places, and this one that we worked on was the original Premiere. This family had it, Premiere bought them out and then they expanded, expanded, expanded. And this one—the original one was the oldest, and they had a hard time operating that them. So Jun wrote them a letter and said, "I'll go over there and I'll get a {inaudible} and, you know, little engineers, little carpenters and growers." And so he asked me if I want to go, so I went, see.

2-00:15:20

Graves:

And Tosh went too?

2-00:15:22

Oishi:

No, No. And then , we were there, and then the neighbors I think are growers, "Hey, where'd you get these guys?" And this {Houzaman}. Tosh work for {Houzaman}, they're good gardenia grower

2-00:15:34

Graves:

Work for who?

2-00:15:36

Oishi:

{Houzaman}. They're top gardenia growers in the Chicago area. {Houzaman} told Jun, "{Inaudible} help here too." Tosh, you want to go over there. {Inaudible} Tosh came. So a lot of nurseries in that area hired the Japanese out of camp.

2-00:15:57

Graves:

Do you think that because they were German American and might have felt some—?

2-00:16:06

Oishi:

In the West Coast, there was a lot of discrimination. They were killing off Japs. "Oh, Japs are guilty. They found flags in there {inaudible}. They found a camera." You could have a flag in your house, you know. And this is propaganda. They had to do it. This is an easy way of getting

the public all riled up. This is wartime. We've got to do anything possible to beat those Japs and the Germans.

2-00:16:42

Graves:

But it was different in the Midwest?

2-00:16:44

Oishi:

It was different in the Midwest. Maybe if you were in the Salinas area or if you were in more, it wouldn't matter. But we were on the West Coast, they have to get us out of here.

2-00:16:58

Graves:

Would you like some water?

2-00:17:01

Oishi:

No, that's alright.

2-00:17:05

Graves:

Ok.

2-00:17:05

Oishi:

So Tosh went over there. Me and Tosh, we buddied around. And our kids were the same age when we came back and we were on the pee wee baseball, our kids played basketball and everything.

2-00:17:19

Graves:

Weren't you saying that that name, Nabeta?

2-00:17:22

Oishi:

Nabeta. Nabeta I don't have the—. His father came—he was original, him and Domoto. He was original something in Berkeley and Richmond, his grandfather. He came before the Oishis, so they're pioneers, Nabeta family. Nabeta and Honda are kind of relatives. They came from Wakayama. You know where Wakayama, Japan is? That's where a big part of the Japanese comes from.

2-00:17:57

Graves:

Yeah.

2-00:18:06

Oishi:

See, this is where this Oishi is supposed to be.

2-00:18:10

Graves:

But look it's—.

2-00:18:11

Oishi:

But this is different. This and these are different. Here might be ten years different.

2-00:18:17

Washburn:

So where did that Oishi photo go?

2-00:18:19

Graves:

His cousin, the one who came and took everything.

2-00:18:21

Oishi:

Well, I don't know if my cousin took it or not, it's not there anyway.

2-00:18:24

Graves:

Yeah. Oh, here are the Ninomiyas.

2-00:18:28

Oishi:

Yeah, Ninomiyas.

2-00:18:28

Graves:

Can you tell a little about them?

2-00:18:31

Oishi:

Ninomiya, you know the Ninomiya family?

2-00:18:32

Graves:

I know a little bit about them but why don't you tell about them?

2-00:18:38

Oishi:

Well, I think that's the father—that's the grandpa. That's grandpa Ninomiya and that's the father Ninomiya. He might have been, I don't know if he was born in this country or not. I think he's a Cal graduate, Mr. Ninomiya. He might have come from Japan at a young age and then went to school. And these are the Ninomiya's kids, that's the wife. Husband and wife, see. These are their kids.

2-00:19:14

Graves:

Where was their nursery?

2-00:19:16

Oishi:

On Brookside Drive.

2-00:19:17

Graves:

So north Richmond?

2-00:19:19

Oishi:

Yeah, north Richmond. They had one of the bigger nurseries there, in Brookside Drive. They were leasing it to Cutter's Flower. Cutter's Flower, they retail bedding plants.

2-00:19:32

Graves:

Now?

2-00:19:34

Oishi:

Yeah.

2-00:19:35

Graves:

I had heard about them because I'd heard that their neighbors, the Aebis, some Swiss Americans, cared for their nursery during the war and saved all of the proceeds and gave it to them when they got back. We got the Parks Service to interview I think their children, there weren't—

2-00:19:57

Oishi:

Yes, Aebi family.

2-00:19:57

Graves:

Did you know the Aebi?

2-00:19:59

Oishi:

Yes, oh, yes, very good. Mr. Aebi, I don't know, ninety-five years old or something. He's up there in age, sharp.

2-00:20:11

Graves:

That was an unusual story though? Rather than leasing their property—?

2-00:20:19

Oishi:

Well, maybe they had leased it or something, I don't know if they—something. But maybe their place was in fairly good condition, I'm not sure. Like the Sakai brothers, my cousin had roses. But a rose plant is good for four—it can grow as far as ten years. But usually a grower keeps it for four or five years. Without planting, grows for four or five years. A carnation plant, in our days, was only good for one year. So Sakais leased it out to—

2-00:20:55

Graves:

Here let's get to the Sakais and then you can tell us. Oh wait, here's a Oshima?

2-00:21:05

Oishi:

This is Oshima. Mr. Oshima, well educated from Japan. Maybe a Waseda graduate.

2-00:21:15

Graves:

A what graduate?

2-00:21:16

Oishi:

Waseda. It's a well-known university in Japan. They're the Home Depot property and they had the Honda property.

2-00:21:29

Graves:

And this was the nursery family where they sold plants and your mother was friends with—.

2-00:21:34

Oishi:

Yes, yes. Her and my mother were good friends. My father and him was good—they used to socialize a lot, let's put it that way. [Laughs] You know, in a kind way.

2-00:21:50

Graves:

What did they drink?

2-00:21:52

Oishi:

A good amount of liquor and passed out! No, no, no. [Laughs]

2-00:21:56

Graves:

And did you know the boys?

2-00:21:59

Oishi:

Yes. Well, this is Heizo. See Heizo lived—he must have passed on about ten years ago. He wasn't too strong of a man but since he had defects, you know, maybe a weak heart or something, he used his head and he's the one who built up the Home Depot. There's a packinghouse there before, remember the packinghouse under the grocery chain? He had the lease for a long time.

2-00:22:40

Graves:

So he ran those? Or he leased the land out?

2-00:22:42

Oishi:

He was the brain behind that and he bought additional property around there. But Fred was the oldest boy, he was a Cal graduate. He's about Joe's age, a little younger than Joe. But here's the different between Fred and I. We're ten years difference. Me, I'm a cocky old kid—chip on my shoulder. They have no right to do this to me. My history teacher told me. [Laughs] But Fred was a little older. He saw it a different way. This is war, you've got to expect this. Japan and United States is at war. We live in a vital place. They chase us out, we've got to accept. So when he went into camp, he said, "We've got to do something for Japanese, this is shame what they're doing." So he raised his hand, "I'm going to volunteer."

[PHONE RINGS]

2-00:23:47

Washburn:

Do you want me to get that Tom?

2-00:23:48

Oishi:

Yes. Maybe it's an advertisement. Answer it.

2-00:24:00

Washburn:

Hello.

2-00:24:02

Oishi:

Yeah, advertisement.

2-00:24:14

Graves:

So, it's interesting, this photo is in their living room instead of their nursery. The rest of these are mostly.

2-00:24:22

Oishi:

Yes, yes. And like Fred, he volunteered, raised his hand. Even though he was a Cal graduate, the army didn't excuse {inaudible} education. They should have made him an officer, a commissioned officer. So he went over there, and then he fought. He was a field artillery. When he came back got married and had two kids and within ten year's time, he was gone. He died of cancer, something.

2-00:24:58

Graves:

Oh.

2-00:24:59

Oishi:

He was a good man. There was a YMCA next to Nichols Park.

2-00:25:02

Washburn:

I have a question about—what's this here, hanging there the room?

2-00:25:08

Oishi:

I don't know I guess it has some meaning to it. He raised money for the YMCA fund. And I think this is after the war. Maybe he did it before the war. He was kind of active in—.

2-00:25:25

Graves:

The community.

2-00:25:27

Oishi:

And he felt it's good cause, YMCA. He was raising funds for them, got money from all the nursery {inaudible}—throw in.

2-00:25:42

Graves:

Here's Sakai.

2-00:25:45

Oishi:

Yeah, there's Sakai. That's my uncle, my father's brother. This is Tetsuma, the oldest. Tetsuma might be sixteen years older than I am. That's in my—that's Sam. Sam lived across—he's the only one living now. No, at the nursery. He was thirteen years older than I am. He's Roy, ten years older than I am. See what—Roy is gone, Tetuma is gone, she's gone. Ruby. Ruby is the same age as I am. So you can see how old this is. Ruby went to school with us—March Fong. She used to compete against March Fong. She thought she was smarter than March Fong. You know, these pretty girls, they got a big ego. [Laughs] And she went to Cal. That {inaudible} something she's got, but she never got a job.

2-00:27:01

Graves:

She went to Cal after the war?

2-00:27:02

Oishi:

Yeah, she got her diploma after the war. She was gone before the war, too. That's Jun Agari.

2-00:27:13

Graves:

Oh, the cousin you were talking about.

2-00:27:16

Oishi:

Yes. He's the guy, you know, good talker.

2-00:27:20

Graves:

Wait, but what's his relation to the Sakais?

2-00:27:22

Oishi:

He's the—Sakai has one older sister and he's the son of the older sister.

2-00:27:33

Graves:

And their nursery was where?

2-00:27:37

Oishi:

It was across the street from us.

2-00:27:37

Graves:

Just to the west?

2-00:27:39

Oishi:

West of us. Little bit northwest. He had maybe seventy to eighty acres. This is same Sakai.

2-00:27:55

Washburn:

Tom, is this their—is this like the thing you have hanging here in your house? Is that their family symbol?

2-00:28:05

Oishi:

I don't know. No, this is an old one, this is an ancient one, see. This is Ruby here, that's Ruby there.

2-00:28:19

Graves:

Yeah, I was going to say that if she was the same age as you, look at you here in '32.

2-00:28:25

Oishi:

Yeah. But this maybe doesn't belong in this album. This one belongs in the album.

2-00:28:31

Graves:

Yes.

2-00:28:31

Washburn:

So describe those people once again there. That's Ruby.

2-00:28:36

Oishi:

Ruby, yeah, good old Ruby.

2-00:28:39

Washburn:

She's really pretty.

2-00:28:40

Oishi:

She's in the yearbook. You know, the yearbook, the Richmond High yearbook?

2-00:28:46

Graves:

Who's the little baby?

2-00:28:49

Oishi:

Where's the baby?

2-00:28:50

Graves:

The little—whoops, sorry—the little girl here.

2-00:28:53

Oishi:

Oh, that's {Tetuma's} daughter. Oh, she's not little no more. She might be sixty-five today.

2-00:29:03

Graves:

And that's taken outside their home at the nursery?

2-00:29:06

Oishi:

I guess so.

2-00:29:07

Washburn:

And look, there's the hills in the background.

2-00:29:10

Graves:

Yeah. What's that hole?

2-00:29:13

Oishi:

I don't know. She came from the same part as my father, Sasayama. She's a farmer's daughter. They had no schooling. They learn on the ranch, that's their schooling. So when she came over she knew how to work. She knew value of a dollar. Not like my mother. My mother [laughs] went to school and she didn't know how to work. She's so far away from it, far away from cooking and trust me, you {inaudible}. She was born on the farm, you know.

2-00:29:54

Graves:

Where did your uncle and she meet, do you know?

2-00:29:58

Oishi:

Well, they were like I told you, they're *Yoshi*. Her people—her family had no sons. So when my uncle was young man, he went over there then.

00:30:17

Graves:And the term is *Yoshi*?

2-00:30:22

Oishi:*Yoshi*, yes.

2-00:30:23

Graves:

That's beautiful.

2-00:30:23

Oishi:

Half Moon Bay is beautiful.

2-00:30:28

Graves:

Do you know Sakurai? That's Richmond.

2-00:30:33

Oishi:

Oh, yeah. {Inaudible}. I think what happened—. Sakurai they took the Fukushima—might have moved to San Pablo. They took over the Fukushima nursery, follow me? Fukushima nursery was next to us.

2-00:30:54

Graves:

East.

2-00:30:58

Oishi:

East of us. And then they expanded to San Pablo. And then they sold their place to Sakurai.

2-00:31:04

Graves:

When?

2-00:31:07

Oishi:

Little before the war, maybe about the time—this was taken about the time that they sold it.

2-00:31:13

Graves:

They didn't have kids?

2-00:31:15

Oishi:

No. They were from the city, San Francisco.

2-00:31:21

Graves:

Was it a lot harder to keep a nursery going if you didn't have kids to work for you and stuff, or with you?

2-00:31:28

Oishi:

If you were smart. If you come from an agricultural community in Japan, you know, they were able to make money real easy. But if you come from a city or something, no agricultural background, like my father, it was tough. [Laughs]

2-00:31:49

Graves:

Yes. But they did okay?

2-00:31:50

Oishi:

These people? No, they were city people so I don't think—I think they lost it. During the war years I think they lost their place. {Inaudible} took over. You know, when you came back, Italian family was running it.

2-00:32:06

Graves:

Do you remember the name of that family?

2-00:32:09

Oishi:

No. There was two nurseries, east of us and north of us. They lost their nurseries during the war years.

2-00:32:21

Graves:

The Hondas? No, not the Hondas.

2-00:32:23

Oishi:

Hoshi.

2-00:32:23

Graves:

Hoshi.

2-00:32:24

Oishi:

Hoshi and Sakurai. But Sakurai might have taken over two, three years before the war. [pauses] Shibata, that's well-known family.

2-00:32:44

Graves:

Mt. Eden, where's that?

2-00:32:46

Oishi:

San Mateo Bridge. They're supposed to have a beautiful Japanese garden and they tore all the nurseries down. It's a well-known family in the rose garden industry.

2-00:33:06

Graves:

That's the first one where I've noticed a kimono.

2-00:33:08

Washburn:

Why were they well-known, Tom?

2-00:33:12

Oishi:

Well, he did real good, {inaudible} did real good {inaudible}.

2-00:33:22

Graves:

Were they like the Adachis? They just did really fine work?

2-00:33:26

Oishi:

No, no. They were in wholesale flowers they would ship all over the United States and even into foreign countries. And he was very aggressive, smart. And the Ninomiyas, and Sugiharas, and he sold all their flowers after the war. He had a big diesel truck over there, picked-up the flowers growers with a refrigerated truck and pick up the flowers and bring it into Mt. Eden, and he would ship it all over the country.

2-00:34:02

Graves:

Did he buy yours?

2-00:34:04

Oishi:

No, we were independent. We did it on our own. We did it on our own but he was in the big league.

2-00:34:14

Graves:

So he was like a broker?

2-00:34:15

Oishi:

Yeah, like a broker.

2-00:34:19

Graves:

Are we out of tape?

2-00:34:22

Oishi:

Sugihara, see. Sugihara is next to Ninomiya and Kawai.

2-00:34:32

Graves:

In north Richmond?

2-00:34:34

Oishi:

Yes.

2-00:34:35

Graves:

And did the north Richmond families settle later than the families around here?

2-00:34:41

Oishi:

I think so, yes.

2-00:34:43

Graves:

So who do you know in that picture?

2-00:34:45

Oishi:

All of them. Yuri is the oldest, Fumi. Fumi she graduated from college before the war, she had teacher's diploma in her pocket, but she never got a job, this is before the war. You have a teacher diploma might have to go to an Indian reservation to get a job or something. So maybe she taught in camp, and that's where she maybe first taught. She never was able to teach.

2-00:35:14

Graves:

Would they have been in Topaz with you?

2-00:35:16

Oishi:

They were in Topaz with me.

2-00:35:17

Graves:

Are any of them still around, do you know?

2-00:35:20

Oishi:

She's around.

2-00:35:22

Graves:

Here in Richmond?

2-00:35:24

Oishi:

No, in San Leandro. She's around and this boy here is around some place, the rest of them are all gone.

2-00:35:33

Graves:

Did they grow carnations?

2-00:35:36

Oishi:

They grew roses.

2-00:35:37

Graves:

Was most of north Richmond roses and here was carnations?

2-00:35:42

Oishi:

Yes.

2-00:35:43

Graves:

And did that have to do with climate or just—?

2-00:35:45

Oishi:

No, no. She married into a—they bought an old place after the war—old nursery in San Leandro. And they struggled and they start growing roses and they bought additional land. Marina Boulevard in San Leandro. Do you know Marina Boulevard? You know where the Marina Boulevard and the BART track? Right there, they own ten acres of land or something. And they sold for real big money, real big money. That nursery was there.

2-00:36:30

Graves:

Yes, yes. What was her married name?

2-00:36:32

Oishi:

Yukota. And they're going to make their area—Marina Boulevard is known for car dealerships and San Leandro figured, "Geez, man," we'll get this ten acres or twenty acres or something, we're going to make it into more car dealerships. Big money in car—sales tax. Any time there's sales tax, you sell a car, seven percent, city gets, I don't know, maybe half of it. And they he put a lot of {inaudible} these guys are going to sell a lot car, they got the money—city {inaudible} the money! They gave them big money for the place.

2-00:37:12

Graves:

When was that?

2-00:37:13

Oishi:
Recent.

2-00:37:13

Graves:
Oh.

2-00:37:14

Oishi:
They tore the greenhouses down but did not do nothing {inaudible}. So you go over there—
Marina Boulevard and it would be west of—.

2-00:37:27

Graves:
The freeway.

2-00:37:28

Oishi:
No, west of BART. And then from Marina Boulevard, it would be on the south side.

2-00:37:43

Graves:
Now, would they have come to the Japanese language school down here? The kids who were
living in north Richmond?

2-00:37:49

Oishi:
No, they did not come for some reason—they did not come.

2-00:37:54

Graves:
Did any of the other ones?

2-00:37:56

Oishi:
{inaudible}

2-00:37:56

Graves:
The other families that live in north Richmond, lived there, did they send their kids to the
Japanese school down here?

2-00:38:02

Oishi:
No, I don't think so.

2-00:38:03

Washburn:
Let' leave that. I want to get one shot of this over here, this one family's great.

2-00:38:10

Graves:

This one?

2-00:38:10

Washburn:

Yeah, can you hold it down a little bit? Yeah, just like that.

2-00:38:13

Graves:

Takahashi.

2-00:38:22

Washburn:

He's got kind of an old style wheelbarrow there, huh?

2-00:38:28

Oishi:

Yeah. I think he was an educator or something.

2-00:38:32

Graves:

Oh really?

2-00:38:33

Oishi:

But he was in agriculture. I think he's take in orphan boys and troubled boys and stuff.

2-00:38:41

Graves:

Did a lot of people wear the scarf around their head like that?

2-00:38:47

Oishi:

No, I guess {inaudible} were a little different. [Laughs]

2-00:38:53

Washburn:

Tom, you know, you kind of said you know who that guy is and that he was an educator and you mentioned things about other people, were all these families—?

2-00:39:08

Oishi:

No, I don't know these people. Well, I kind of know these people, see.

2-00:39:15

Washburn:

No, but I wanted to ask you about whether all of these families went through Tanforan.

2-00:39:22

Oishi:

No.

2-00:39:23

Washburn:

All being in the bay area, I'm just—.

2-00:39:26

Oishi:

San Mateo—some of them did not all come to the same camp as we did.

2-00:39:31

Washburn:

They didn't all go to—but did people who were assembled in Tanforan go to other—?

2-00:39:37

Oishi:

Mountain View, and maybe Palo Alto or something, there's a border, maybe San Mateo did not come. Maybe San Francisco came, maybe San Leandro, Hayward, and Richmond.

2-00:39:48

Graves:

Yeah, I think there might have been an assembly center in San Jose area, right, that would have drawn from south bay?

2-00:39:54

Oishi:

They might have gone to different place. There might have been ten different assembly centers.

2-00:39:59

Graves:

Well, I don't think there were that many.

2-00:40:03

Washburn:

Maybe in the whole state. And then from Tanforan, they went to different camps?

2-00:40:08

Oishi:

The reason why the Oshimas did not come to our camp was their youngest boy had heart problems and the father felt maybe a drier climate or something.

2-00:40:25

Graves:

Wait, here, let's find them and can you tell the story while you point to them?

2-00:40:32

Oishi:

Yeah. He had heart problems but he lived a long life. So they decided for their son to go to Arizona or something, so they didn't come to our camp.

2-00:40:47

Washburn:

Did they go to Arizona to live?

2-00:40:52

Oishi:

No, camp in Arizona.

2-00:40:54

Graves:

So, the one in Poston, or whatever.

2-00:40:57

Oishi:

Yeah, one of those. But I respect this man here today, you know. Richmond High maybe he was on the student body. He's a golden boy, you know. [Laughs]

2-00:41:14

Graves:

And his name was Fred.

2-00:41:15

Oishi:

Fred. He went to Cal. And after the war, the YMCA wants funds he collects money for them. He's very active in civic affairs.

2-00:41:27

Graves:

But he died really young, right?

2-00:41:28

Oishi:

Yeah, died young. I went to his wife's funeral the other day.

2-00:41:33

Graves:

Look at those little girls, this seems out of place with the rest of the book too. Who are they, do you know Tom?

2-00:41:40

Oishi:

I don't know.

2-00:41:40

Washburn:

Cute little girls.

2-00:41:43

Oishi:

These are mum growers. They're the same industry but we hardly know them.

2-00:41:48

Graves:

Really different.

2-00:41:49

Oishi:
Yeah.

2-00:41:50

Washburn:
Wow, those are big mums.

2-00:41:52

Graves:
Yeah, look at that.

2-00:42:09

Oishi:
They did pick-up from Belmont and San Leandro and Redwood City.

2-00:42:25

Graves:
Look at him.

2-00:42:33

Oishi:
And this is a good crop of carnations. He must have been a good grower. Look at all the blooms {inaudible}. He ain't cut a flower before they took the picture! [Laughs] He told his men, "Don't cut the flowers, take a picture!"

2-00:42:53

Washburn:
Tom, are they about to cut all those flowers?

2-00:42:58

Oishi:
Oh, they're overdue.

2-00:43:00

Washburn:
Yeah, they're overdue.

2-00:43:01

Oishi:
Yes, yes, but he didn't want to cut them.

2-00:43:03

Washburn:
But they look good for the photo?

2-00:43:04

Oishi:
Yeah, yeah. They were one of the aggressive carnation growers.

2-00:43:10

Graves:
You know them or your guessing from the picture?

2-00:43:14

Oishi:

No, the family, but I don't know the—.

2-00:43:16

Graves:

Yonemoto?

2-00:43:17

Oishi:

Yes, I know a few of them, yes.

2-00:43:21

Graves:

So how would you get to know these people? At the flower market?

2-00:43:24

Oishi:

Flower market and we used to have the—the flower cutter grower was—like one association like, we would have a picnic, *undoukai*. You know what a *undoukai* is? *Undoukai* is you have racing and stuff, you know.

2-00:43:43

Graves:

Oh yeah, and you bring *bento* boxes?

2-00:43:46

Oishi:

Yeah, you bring *bento*, you bring sushi, you bring your *bento*, and you have racing and everything else, see. That's what we used to have—the flower industry people. And they would have a fishing contest.

2-00:43:58

Graves:

Where would they do it?

2-00:43:59

Oishi:

Well, where the fishing {inaudible}? They would have fishing contests, all the adults, the fishermen would get together and the president, the guys on the committee would go around, gathering prizes, you know, donation prizes and we would go fishing in Pittsburgh or would it be San Pablo Bay or {inaudible} or something.

2-00:44:20

Graves:

Where would you have the picnics?

2-00:44:22

Oishi:

Oh, fishing contests and picnics are two different places.

2-00:44:26

Graves:

Right, right.

2-00:44:26

Oishi:

I know they had it at Eastshore Park one time.

2-00:44:27

Graves:

Eastshore Park?

2-00:44:29

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes.

2-00:44:30

Graves:

And I've heard that those were fun for the kids because the adults would kind of let loose.

2-00:44:35

Oishi:

Yes. They thought they were big shots, you know, they thought they were big shots. [laughs]

2-00:44:39

Graves:

The adults?

2-00:44:45

Oishi:

Yeah. They were probably owner or businessman. They weren't domestic help workers or anything, see.

2-00:44:49

Graves:

So what would they do at these picnics that gave you a different sense of the adults?

2-00:44:56

Oishi:

Well, picnic is more or less for the youths. You know, they would have hundred dash or relays. Little sumo and stuff—they had sumo guys inside there.

2-00:45:09

Graves:

Would the mothers do it too?

2-00:45:11

Oishi:

Mother would come, yeah.

2-00:45:13

Graves:

Would she be in a race?

2-00:45:15

Oishi:

No, no, no, more the youths.

2-00:45:17

Graves:

Just the men? Oh, the kids, oh, okay. Who's that?

2-00:45:30

Oishi:

Oh, this is a flower market, maybe, people connected with the flower market.

2-00:45:40

Graves:

Do you know them?

2-00:45:42

Oishi:

Well, some of them. There's—.

2-00:45:50

Graves:

No Richmond people there?

2-00:45:54

Oishi:

No.

2-00:45:54

Washburn:

That's at the flower market?

2-00:45:59

Oishi:

Yes, I think that's at the—.

2-00:45:59

Graves:

How can you tell?

2-00:46:02

Oishi:

Well, the persons there.

2-00:46:03

Graves:

What?

2-00:46:03

Oishi:

Moriwaki, {inaudible} Moriwaki, see. He's well educated man and he might be ten or fifteen years older than I was.

2-00:46:12

Graves:
Moriwaki?

2-00:46:13

Oishi:
Yeah, I think his name was Moriwaki. And he volunteered too. He volunteered—raised his hand. He felt, “We have to do something. Us Japanese have to do something.”

2-00:46:25

Graves:
Before war was declared?

2-00:46:28

Oishi:
No, no, after war was declared, they asked for volunteers for 442nd.

2-00:46:32

Graves:
In the camp.

2-00:46:34

Oishi:
And the older people were educated, “Geez, we have to do something.” He was one of them who raised his hand and went over there and fought.

2-00:46:45

Graves:
Say his name again.

2-00:46:47

Oishi:
Moriwaki. Moriwaki. Sim Nambu. He was good buddy of mine. He was a great golfer, one of the top golfers within the Japanese community.

2-00:46:58

Graves:
Namu?

2-00:46:58

Oishi:
Nambu.

2-00:46:59

Graves:
Nambu.

2-00:47:03

Oishi:
And this guy here, I believe, he was an interpreter. Sim, I believe, was an interpreter. You know, he had maybe a good schooling in Japan, maybe a good schooling here and he was interpreter, maybe army or private during the war years.

2-00:47:23

Graves:

And these are all flower growers?

2-00:47:26

Oishi:

Well, they were connected. He might have been insurance. What happened was, when we came back, I know before I went into the army, we tried to get insurance for our car. We had a good car. And we couldn't get insurance.

2-00:47:47

Graves:

Before the war?

2-00:47:48

Oishi:

After the war. You know a Japanese man, you get in a wreck, you go to court, you're going to lose.

2-00:47:54

Graves:

So you couldn't get insurance because of discrimination?

2-00:47:58

Oishi:

Yeah.

2-00:47:58

Graves:

For your car.

2-00:47:59

Oishi:

No, no, you can't blame the insurance company. Say you're the insurance company, I'm insured from you. I go to court. I'm wrong. Whatever I do, I'm wrong, see. So him and other something before him, they—insurance company, they talked to insurance company, certain insurance companies or they formed their own company or something. They sold insurance to the Japanese community. Maybe their rates was higher, at least we were able to get insurance.

2-00:48:38

Graves:

So you got your insurance through them?

2-00:48:39

Oishi:

Yes, through him.

2-00:48:40

Graves:

Through him?

2-00:48:40

Oishi:

Yes. He was connected with the flower market plus the insurance.

2-00:48:46

Graves:

And that would have been business insurance?

2-00:48:48

Oishi:

Car insurance.

2-00:48:49

Graves:

Just car?

2-00:48:50

Oishi:

Yeah, {inaudible}. And he was the secretary of the flower market.

2-00:48:57

Graves:

What's his name?

2-00:49:02

Oishi:

Korematsu.

2-00:49:06

Graves:

He's got quite a smug—.

2-00:49:09

Oishi:

Yeah, he's well educated. {Inaudible} to Japan. He's a good friend of my father, even though he was much younger.

2-00:49:18

Washburn:

Tom, how do you know this is at the flower market?

2-00:49:21

Oishi:

By the face.

2-00:49:23

Washburn:

By the faces of the people who are there?

2-00:49:25

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

2-00:49:26

Washburn:

Because what is—I've never been to the flower market so I don't have a sense of what the—.

2-00:49:33

Graves:

Building.

2-00:49:34

Washburn:

Building is like.

2-00:49:34

Oishi:

This is ancient time, this might have been when they were still leasing the place. The flower market after the war, they bought land and they had their own place.

2-00:49:47

Graves:

Built.

2-00:49:49

Oishi:

Yes, but before the war—might have been ten years after that we built our own building and bought our property. Before that they were leasing this building in Fifth Street, pretty close to Market Street there.

2-00:50:03

Graves:

But you think this photo is after the war?

2-00:50:06

Oishi:

Yes, I think this photo is after the war.

2-00:50:08

Graves:

But before they built the new building?

2-00:50:12

Oishi:

It might have been before, yes.

2-00:50:16

Graves:

And what's this photo?

2-00:50:25

Oishi:

I guess this one of the parties they had, the first generation people.

2-00:50:29

Graves:

So these are all the Issei?

2-00:50:31

Oishi:

Yes. Frustration, you know, so they have big party. [Laughs]

2-00:50:38

Graves:

So that's your dad, I recognize.

2-00:50:43

Oishi:

There's my father there. He liked to put on a good suit.

2-00:50:48

Graves:

Who's that?

2-00:50:51

Oishi:

I don't know.

2-00:50:51

Graves:

It's just one woman.

2-00:50:53

Oishi:

Maybe she's a geisha girl, I don't know. [Laughs] I don't know! Ancient times.

2-00:51:01

Graves:

What are the sticks? What's the stick your dad's holding?

2-00:51:04

Oishi:

What is this? I don't know. Maybe they're planting a tree or something. Maybe a big celebration, they're going to plant a tree. They liked to plant trees. It's a good thing, just like you, they'll plant a tree and maybe fifty years from now, there's something behind that tree. Tree never dies. You know, we die after eighty years.

2-00:51:38

Graves:

So the Issei liked to do that?

2-00:51:41

Oishi:

Yeah. When you have cancer, plant a tree.

2-00:51:46

Graves:

When you have a cancer?

2-00:51:48

Oishi:

When you have cancer, plant a tree for a memorial service. A tree's going to keep on going for a hundred years.

2-00:51:54

Graves:

Oh, yeah. So who else—?

2-00:51:59

Oishi:

Like my father, before he left Japan, he planted a tree. So one of our friends went over there, he's telling him, "Go over there—certain part of the yard. He planted a tree. See how that tree is doing."

2-00:52:15

Washburn:

Tom, where is this picture? I see—it looks like maybe San Francisco or something like that, because I see Cypress, are those Cypress?

2-00:52:24

Oishi:

This might have been in—they used to like to go to Gilroy hot spring.

2-00:52:27

Graves:

Oh yeah, yeah.

2-00:52:29

Oishi:

You've been there?

2-00:52:29

Graves:

No, but I've read about it.

2-00:52:30

Oishi:

Yeah, it was owned by Japanese. I don't know if it is now or not.

2-00:52:34

Graves:

When I looked into it, about five years ago, I think it still was owned by a Japanese family.

2-00:52:41

Oishi:

Oh, and then the road going over there, you know.

2-00:52:46

Graves:

I've never been.

2-00:52:46

Oishi:

To maintain that road, that was just quite a bit for the county to maintain.

2-00:52:51

Graves:

Yeah. But so—

2-00:52:52

Oishi:

They used to like to go to Gilroy hot springs, and live it up.

2-00:52:56

Graves:

The families?

2-00:52:56

Oishi:

No.

2-00:52:57

Graves:

Or just the parents?

2-00:52:58

Oishi:

No, not the parents, the men! [Laughs]

2-00:53:02

Graves:

[Laughs] Duh!

2-00:53:04

Washburn:

Like a retreat or something, right?

2-00:53:06

Graves:

Like a boy's weekend out, right? So maybe she was a geisha. [Laughs]

2-00:53:13

Oishi:

[Laughs] I don't know whether that {inaudible} a geisha.

2-00:53:15

Graves:

So they'd go for the weekend?

2-00:53:17

Oishi:

Well, maybe a week or something.

2-00:53:20

Washburn:

No, she's got a kid there.

2-00:53:22

Graves:

Yeah, I know I'm kidding. So these would have been little cabins?

2-00:53:25

Oishi:

All these parties that we showed here around here, all the men are there. The wives are taking care of the kids, that's the old Japanese custom. Kids, they ain't going to change now.

2-00:53:38

Graves:

But there were cabins, so they'd go stay at cabins?

2-00:53:43

Oishi:

They had cabins up there, I know I used to take my father up there in the latter years. Oh, maybe for ten years, I took him up there once a year, twice a year, to Gilroy hot spring.

2-00:53:52

Graves:

When was the last time you were there?

2-00:54:00

Oishi:

Oh, well, he died in '84 or something. So I haven't been there from '82—maybe from '50 to '82, I took him every year, maybe twice a year. And then over there, they had cooks and they would—you know, Japanese food, the cooks would make. They have a little {inaudible} hot springs, real hot springs.

2-00:54:27

Graves:

What's that, with the writing on it, do you know?

2-00:54:33

Oishi:

I don't know. Maybe they're planting a tree there. This is shovel, see. They liked to plant trees.

2-00:54:40

Graves:

But if you were planting a tree, you'd have a stake with something written on it?

2-00:54:44

Oishi:

I don't know, maybe.

2-00:54:47

Graves:

You talked about your dad planting trees when you were born and in Japan before he left, are there other times?

2-00:54:52

Oishi:

I don't know, maybe every time they have a party, they plant a tree, I'm not sure. [Laughs] See he doesn't tell you what he's doing!

2-00:55:01

Graves:

Well, no, but you know, you remember some of them.

2-00:55:05

Oishi:

This is pretty old because look how young he is. He was might of been forty years old, thirty-five years old.

2-00:55:14

Washburn:

So we looked at everything except for that one there?

2-00:55:16

Graves:

No, we did look at this one but let me—are there other Richmond men you recognize in that photo?

2-00:55:20

Oishi:

There's my uncle. Uncle there. There's—.

2-00:55:37

Graves:

Sakai?

2-00:55:37

Oishi:

No, this is Sakai. This is Shinoda.

2-00:55:43

Graves:

Where's he from?

2-00:55:44

Oishi:

San Leandro. There's a hospital, San Leandro Hospital or something, they have property there and they sold it to the hospital, I believe.

2-00:55:58

Washburn:

Point to your uncle once more, Tom?

2-00:56:01

Oishi:

My uncle's there.

2-00:56:03

Washburn:

That one with the tie?

2-00:56:05

Oishi:

Yeah, with the tie.

2-00:56:11

Washburn:

Everybody looks dressed up, looks like it was a special time.

2-00:56:12

Graves:

Yeah, ties, and look at that fancy collar.

2-00:56:15

Oishi:

Yeah, yeah. They thought they were big shots.

2-00:56:18

Graves:

Well, they were.

2-00:56:22

Oishi:

They felt {inaudible} working hard, you know.

2-00:56:24

Graves:

And they're off partying.

2-00:56:28

Oishi:

These people, lot of these people, they didn't come from farm—agriculture life. They come from fairly well to do families over there. They didn't even know what work was. But these Wakayama people, you know, a lot of them—Wakayama is agriculture land, they knew how to work. My auntie, Sakai, she comes from farm. And these people here, they're a bunch of playboys, I thought.

2-00:56:59

Graves:

And David wanted to look at that one again.

2-00:57:03

Oishi:

This one might have been in Gilroy too. Does it have the date?

2-00:57:06

Graves:

It doesn't have a date, it just says, "Mother and Dad Oishi."

2-00:57:11

Oishi:

So we don't have many pictures of my father and mother. I looked through there, I thought I'm going to find a whole mess of good pictures. See, old picture like that that fade away, he did take. All the good pictures, he took. I'm going to write that guy. He borrowed the heck out of them. What in the heck is going on here?

2-00:57:37

Graves:

How long ago did he take them? Was it a while ago?

2-00:57:41

Oishi:

He must have been there couple years ago. He came two, three times, maybe five times.

2-00:57:49

Graves:

Yeah, you better tell him.

2-00:57:52

Oishi:

Someone gave him permission. He didn't just rob it, so he got permission.

2-00:58:02

Graves:

Oh yeah, yeah.

2-00:58:06

Oishi:

From somebody. But coming on as I'm getting older, my kids, "Where's Grandpa? There's no picture of Grandpa. Where's Grandma? No picture of Grandma. Where's all the ancient pictures you left?" Not there. That's same as me going to Japan and trying to look up my grandfather in Japan, something old. He died—since he died in '49. I don't know when he died.

2-00:58:39

Graves:

Do you know how to read Japanese well enough to look in, like if there were a city records. Would there be?

2-00:58:47

Oishi:

I don't know if it's in there or not. I hear in Japan, my uncle, my father's oldest brother, used to write to the Sasayama recording office, or something like Martinez that we have here. And he would write, so and so got married here, guy was of this fisherman's family or something, and the {inaudible} come from a certain parts of Japan. So an so got married here, ninety-five years—. He was writing right to the recording office, say here Martinez, and they have records—what he used to write.

2-00:59:36

Graves:

About the family members that lived here? And they'd put it into records there?

2-00:59:40

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

2-00:59:41

Graves:

Oh, how interesting.

2-00:59:42

Oishi:

That's what this doc told me. My doc, he's maybe twelve years younger than I am. And now he has a good practice in Japan, thinks he's a big shot, which is {inaudible}. I pick him up at the airport and take him back—.

2-01:00:10

Graves:

Should these go in the book Tom? So Tom we'll research about a scanner and try to come back and scan some of those.

[End Audio File Oishi.T05]

Interview with Tom Oishi

Interviewed by: Donna Graves and David Washburn

Transcriber: Sayuri Stabrowski

[Interview #02: January 17, 2003]

[Begin Audio File Oishi.T06]

1-00:00:00

Oishi:

She flopped over, she was walking and everything. She was going to go to a—with a girl with brown hair they're going to have their little luncheon thing. She's all {heped}. She had her hair done and everything. Whoa, she fell down, "Tom," she says, "Tom!" I go over there, she said—.

1-00:00:18

Graves:

Did she have a stroke?

1-00:00:20

Oishi:

She had a stroke.

1-00:00:23

Graves:

And then how long did that last?

1-00:00:26

Oishi:

Well, it last a long time.

1-00:00:28

Graves:

That's hard. Well, I want to talk about your wife later but when we get started, I think we've done a good job going over your family and growing up and high school, and then we wanted to start today at the end of high school.

1-00:00:52

Oishi:

The end of high school.

1-00:00:53

Graves:

Yeah, when you started working at the dredging company and stuff.

1-00:00:55

Oishi:

Oh, you're—boy, you got a memory alright! [Laughs].

1-00:00:59

Graves:

Well, I also wrote things down.

1-00:01:01

Oishi:

Oh, oh, oh.

1-00:01:20

Graves:

Can you say your name?

1-00:01:24

Oishi:

Tom Oishi, O-I-S-H-I.

1-00:01:29

Graves:

Okay. So we were going to start with graduating from high school and what you did when you got out of high school. Can you talk a little bit about the end of high school?

1-00:01:38

Oishi:

Well, after graduating from high school, the first thing I did was—our nursery, we were expanding a little bit. Our nursery was expanding—my two older brothers running the nursery. And we bought a boiler. You know, we had a little boiler, but we had to get a bigger boiler because we had more greenhouses. And the first thing I did was—. I took shop in school—woodshop. And I thought I was a pretty good, you know, cabinetmaker or something. And we had pretty good teacher there, and he showed a lot of interest in me. And you know, I was his number one student maybe. So I came back and we needed a boiler house and I took mechanical drawing and stuff at the high school. So I had to submit a plan first, the plot plan of where this building is going to be: plot number and lot number and everything else, you know, and the location and everything. I had to submit a plan—the foundation and what kind of building it is, and since I took mechanical drawing in high school, I was able to do it. And I brought it up to city hall, you know. We got a permit. And I put up the building myself. I was awfully—it's still up there. I'm awfully proud of that little building.

1-00:03:13

Graves:

I bet.

1-00:03:13

Oishi:

It's over sixty years old. No, I'm twenty, eighty, that's over sixty years old, maybe I was eighteen years old at that time.

1-00:03:24

Graves:

And the boiler was used for?

1-00:03:27

Oishi:

To heat the greenhouses. I don't think we spent a lot of money on the boiler, but we put in a lot of modern equipment. Before, all boilers would run this steam—we had steam pumps and

everything. But this one here is electric and it's much modern. The burner was new and a little fancy. We never did get the boiler going, then the war broke out.

1-00:04:07

Graves:

So you all bought the boiler and you constructed that building in '39?

1-00:04:14

Oishi:

'39, about there. I remember my brother Joe and I went to San Francisco, some dairy or something, they had a boiler. The boiler was sitting there and we had broker in between and, "Want to buy the boiler? That's a good boiler," he says. So we bought it. See we bought it and they says, "Well, we got to move this boiler to Richmond." So Joe and I, we went over there to San Francisco, we knocked the bricks off and got someone to put the boiler on a truck. We hired a truck and we brought it home. And we set it up at home, see. And by the time we set it up and by the time we had it going, but we didn't have it going real good. And then the war broke out.

1-00:05:06

Graves:

You also had some other jobs after high school, can you talk about them?

1-00:05:14

Oishi:

Then after that, a buddy of mine says—this might have been in '39 or something, '40. They were just thinking about shipyards in Richmond. Maybe shipyards was started in very small way. This fellow in business—this was his private business—he's going to open up a school. They need welders, he's going to charge so much. I had to come up with, I don't know, a couple hundred dollars or something. You give the man, and he taught us how to weld. And not only flat welding, vertical, over head. And he bought us—no, we had to buy the welding mask and gloves and leather jacket, leather suit. And we took a course, I don't know how long the course was, couple months I guess.

1-00:06:14

Graves:

Every day?

1-00:06:15

Oishi:

Everyday for maybe one month or two months or something.

1-00:06:19

Graves:

How many other students were in this school?

1-00:06:28

Oishi:

Well, maybe he had about ten booths. Maybe every student don't go all day long, maybe they just go four hours a day. He might of had three different shifts going.

1-00:06:38

Graves:

So, if the classes were just a few hours a day, were you working another job?

1-00:06:43

Oishi:

Well, I used to help at home.

1-00:06:50

Graves:

And you were taking the welding classes because you thought maybe you'd make more money than working in the nursery?

1-00:06:57

Oishi:

No, I don't know, I think a buddy of mine recommended it to me, see. And I was naïve, I didn't—I thought I was American citizen, I took civics and I figured, you know, I was born here. But my brothers and them, they were older, they knew, they knew they were Japanese, there would be discrimination—they accepted it. But I did not accept it. So I got burned. That's how Korematsu was. You know Korematsu? He was a welder too. He didn't accept it. He said, "No, our civics teacher said, 'We have our rights.' Born here, you're an American citizen."

1-00:07:44

Graves:

So, you were taking the welding class, thinking that you were going to maybe contribute to the war effort and this was your naivete.

1-00:07:50

Oishi:

Yes. And then I think my brother George, he might have twenty-six, twenty-seven years old. They started a draft, just like now they're talking about starting a draft. Now they came up, well we're going to start drafting, we need men for the war, might be a war. So he was kind of early one to leave, picked up. They choose numbers or something and he had to go into the service.

1-00:08:25

Graves:

Around '40, '41? I can't remember when the draft started then. Before Pearl Harbor.

1-00:08:31

Oishi:

He was in the army before Pearl Harbor.

1-00:08:34

Graves:

Okay. So when you got out of this welding class, what did you do then?

1-00:08:39

Oishi:

Then the welding class, they weren't hiring too many in the shipyards then. So there was big demand—I believe the name was San Francisco Bridge Company. It was one of the bigger

dredging companies in the West Coast. They might have had yards in Los Angeles, in Seattle. They had a big yard in Richmond here. And I started welding there.

1-00:09:06

Graves:

What were you making?

1-00:09:08

Oishi:

Well, they had these big pipe, might have been three or four foot diameter, twenty feet long, steel pipe, maybe half-inch, one-fourth-inch in thickness. And as they use them, they wear out and you would have to mend them—mend the pipe—with the hose inside there. Had to mend them more so on the ends—both ends of the pipes would be damaged more than others.

1-00:09:44

Graves:

Would you go where those pipes were and mend them or—?

1-00:09:46

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

1-00:09:47

Graves:

So not in Richmond in the yard?

1-00:09:49

Oishi:

No, in Richmond. Richmond had a big yard, they had thousands of these pipes.

1-00:09:56

Graves:

What were they used for?

1-00:09:58

Oishi:

A dredge is like a ferry boat. It has a boiler. And everything is done by steam, I don't think {inaudible} steam there. So all the pumps are done by steam. And when they dredge, they would stir up the ground in half water and half dirt, and they would transfer this dirt many miles away. That's what they were being used for. Just half water and half dirt, and they would pump this liquid to wherever they wanted to fill up. Or if they wanted to dredge the bottom of the bay, they would have to do that.

00:10:48

Graves:

Did you know other people who were working there?

1-00:10:52

Oishi:

No. And then the good thing is—build my ego up. Here, I'm a kid, nineteen years old, eighteen years old, there's a yard foreman, you know {inaudible} all the time. There's a machinist, fifty,

sixty years old, good machinist. There's a blacksmith man, you know, blacksmith. And then there's a bookkeeper, and me. Maybe I was getting more money than those guys because the demand for welders was so high. Here's a young kid! [Laughs]

1-00:11:35

Graves:

You must have been a good welder!

1-00:11:36

Oishi:

No, I don't know, I thought I was good. You know, I have to think I'm good. Well, there's a shortage of welders. Do you need a welder? And I worked for them, I don't know, I might have worked six months.

1-00:11:51

Graves:

So there were only five people—?

1-00:11:52

Oishi:

Five people and then there's a lot of—five is the main backbone of the corporation, of this yard. Maybe they have other yards or parks.

1-00:12:02

Graves:

And what were they dredging for?

1-00:12:06

Oishi:

They would dredge the bay. You know Foster City? Foster City is all dredged land. They dredged the bay around there, pumped all that water into Foster City. And when the ships come in, you know, the ships come into Oakland. If they didn't dredge maybe the depth of the water would only be twenty feet. They need maybe eighty feet, maybe a hundred feet, so they would have to dredge. Every once in a while they would have to dredge. But now, the environmental people, it's a big headache, dredging. They won't let them dredge.

1-00:12:49

Graves:

So they were dredging all around the bay when you were working there?

1-00:12:52

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

1-00:12:56

Graves:

So you said you worked there about six months, then what happened?

1-00:12:57

Oishi:

Then I figured, “Geez, I’m not doing nothing here.” You know, welding pipes day after day, mending pipes, that’s no fun. [Laughs] You’re working all by yourself, see. So I figured, I went to the Richmond shipyards {inaudible}.

1-00:13:18

Graves:

Was the shipyards becoming a big thing?

1-00:13:23

Oishi:

No, I think they were just making the first ship, the first ship that was there. That was the first ship—never been launched, never been a ship launched in this Richmond shipyard and this was 1940 year, I don’t know might have been ’40—yeah, might have been ’41, I ‘m not sure. And at first, they have to weld the shell of the ship, half-inch thick or something, maybe three-quarters of an inch thick. You need a lot of heat to penetrate through that. Amperage-wise, I don’t know, four or five hundred amps you have to use. And here a {inaudible} weld it was all done by hand. Come home, boy my eyes are burning me out. They didn’t know it well. A lot of things in those days, they were harmful to the body and they didn’t know how harmful it was.

1-00:14:20

Graves:

Did you ever have that flash people have talked about?

1-00:14:24

Oishi:

Oh, we had masks on. And we had to use the—we have a helmet, covers over your head and you have glasses, and there’s a different thickness, different—how dark, how much light that’s coming through. If you’re burning heavy plates, you have to use a very powerful glass that won’t burn your eyes out.

1-00:14:55

Graves:

So how did you get the job in the shipyard? Do you remember what that process was like?

1-00:14:59

Oishi:

Maybe the school got it—told me to go there. Yes, the school told me to go there.

1-00:15:06

Graves:

And when you went, did they assign you to a particular kind—?

1-00:15:10

Oishi:

Yes, yes. We were doing plate welding on the ground and we’d have to kneel down, which is hard, and we were out all day long, same old place, and we were team welders.

1-00:15:25

Graves:

That was Yard One?

1-00:15:27

Oishi:

The first shipyard there, I don't know what it was.

1-00:15:29

Graves:

So down Canal Boulevard?

1-00:15:32

Oishi:

Yes.

1-00:15:34

Graves:

Yeah. How would you get to work?

1-00:15:34

Oishi:

Oh, I had a car, I had a car and I used to pick up fellows around here.

1-00:15:40

Graves:

So you had neighbors who were working in the shipyards too?

1-00:15:45

Oishi:

No, no.

1-00:15:46

Graves:

Who were you picking up?

1-00:15:46

Oishi:

I don't know, the fellows I used to work with, in our same department.

1-00:15:50

Graves:

You got to know them at the shipyard?

1-00:15:52

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

1-00:15:52

Graves:

So did you have a crew you worked with most of the time?

1-00:15:55

Oishi:

Yes, yes. What happened, like anything else, there's a foreman, there's a leaderman. This leaderman might have fifteen people, see, and then out of fifteen he has at least five of them are top man, these next five are middle, the next five they're alright. But you know, he classified them. I was in the five, top five, see. So, when the ship was launched the shell of the ship was made. And the ship would launch, this leaderman, his assignment: go that ship that was launched, so I went on there. I just stood by the same leaderman. And we started from the bottom, bottom, rock bottom, way down in the bottom—the refrigeration and everything. And then as the ship is being made, we come up higher and higher and higher. Finally we were around—the ship was almost ready to go out in the ocean, see. I was doing the railing of the ship and electrical for the electrician. But down, first I had to do work in the galley, galley is the kitchen. Towards the bottom of the ship. And a lot of stuff is galvanized and your way down in the bottom of that hole and air circulation is very bad, you have to go down with the blower. The galvanized would get you sick.

1-00:17:36

Graves:

Who were the other people on your crew?

1-00:17:37

Oishi:

I don't know.

1-00:17:38

Graves:

Were there other Japanese Americans?

1-00:17:40

Oishi:

No, no, no. Most of the people were older than me, older—maybe they were thirty, forty years old. I was young kid then.

1-00:17:51

Graves:

Do you remember if they were locals or people who came—?

1-00:17:55

Oishi:

No, they came from Bay Area. I think eventually they got them from all over the United States to come here because there was such a shortage. When I was working there, you know, to launch a ship might take one month or something, this is first ship. They might have been putting out a ship per day towards the end. Our days, one ship per month we putting out. That's all we were putting out.

1-00:18:21

Graves:

And it sounds like you got to work on all aspects of the ship.

1-00:18:26

Oishi:

Yes, all aspects of the ship. So it was much more interesting than doing plate welding.

1-00:18:32

Graves:

So you did plate welding for a while and then switched.

1-00:18:35

Oishi:

Yes, after ship after the shell was made, I started from the bottom and work in the galley and all the way up.

1-00:18:44

Washburn:

Well, Tom, explain too that first you worked on the ship where it was docked and then once it was completed to a certain extent, what would happen? You'd float it and work at it—.

1-00:18:56

Oishi:

Yes, it's floating on the water, and that's where we worked.

1-00:18:59

Graves:

Right, it would go to the outfitting dock, right? Isn't that what it was called?

1-00:19:03

Oishi:

First, I wasn't working on the ship itself, I was working on a flat something, it had nothing to do with the ship. Someone else was welding onto the ship, putting the shell on but I was doing flat welding or something, which was hard on your eyes. Even when I was welding after ship was docked, you know the noise, riveters, the noise is terrible. I had to wear earplugs, you know. You come home with a headache and everything else.

1-00:19:47

Graves:

I heard it was cold too.

1-00:19:50

Oishi:

Yeah.

1-00:19:51

Graves:

You were there in the early part of the shipyards. Were there many women working alongside you?

1-00:19:58

Oishi:

Not in my department. I don't think they were using women at that time. This is the first ship that was built in Richmond. O'Brien or something or—I'm not sure. Maybe you have the name?

1-00:20:14

Graves:

I have it somewhere but it wasn't the O'Brien, it was something else.

1-00:20:18

Oishi:

O'Brien might be the one that's in San Francisco.

1-00:20:20

Graves:

Did you think about going to college?

1-00:20:23

Oishi:

I didn't because what happened was my older cousins and friends, they go to UC Berkeley and get a degree. They come out, if they were doctors, they were alright they can open up practice. If they were accountants, maybe they can open accounting office. If they were dentist, they could open up their own practice. If they were engineers, there's no future for them. If it was schoolteachers, they would not accept Asians. You could not get a county job, you couldn't get into the fire department, you couldn't get in a city, state, nothing.

1-00:21:07

Graves:

So it didn't seem like college was going to benefit you?

1-00:21:11

Oishi:

Yes, these people getting out of college, they would have to work in the fruit stand or laundry or go gardening.

1-00:21:24

Graves:

What about your siblings, what did they do?

1-00:21:26

Oishi:

We had a business so my brothers went into, you know, help the business.

1-00:21:34

Graves:

And your sisters?

1-00:21:37

Oishi:

They helped too. No, my sisters, one was a beautician. She went to beauty college and I think and that shortened her life. You know, you go to beauty college and those days, you use all kinds of chemicals and they didn't know how harmful it was. And maybe that's where she had got her cancer. She had passed on before she was little over sixty, see. Could have been true the chemicals that they were using, dying hair.

1-00:22:13

Graves:

So, back to working at the shipyards. What was it like—what were your social relations like with the other people you worked with?

1-00:22:23

Oishi:

Good. Good. I asked the foreman, foreman—maybe didn't want to ruin me—"Listen, maybe I shouldn't be working." "Oh no, were you born here?" "Yeah I was born here." "You got citizenship?" "Yes." "Well, you can work here." I worked there until the last week, until I evacuated. But there was all kinds of restrictions. Anybody was Japanese—any portion of Japanese blood in them cannot go over to the railroad tracks.

1-00:23:01

Graves:

Cannot go?

1-00:23:02

Oishi:

Over the Santa Fe Railroad or SP Railroad Track or something, there's all kinds of ruling, it comes out in the papers, they come pertinent to me, you know. You can't go over so many miles. Go over the bridge you have to get a permit. Everything, all these restrictions was coming.

1-00:23:20

Graves:

So those followed Pearl Harbor. Can you talk a little bit about—do you remember when Pearl Harbor happened and how you heard about it and what you thought at the time?

1-00:23:30

Oishi:

Pearl Harbor, December 7th, we came out of Japanese School, you know that Japanese School there? No, no, I don't think I was in Japanese School. I couldn't have been going to Japanese School at the age of eighteen or something. I think I quit when I was fifteen or fourteen or something. Anyway, I still remember when Pearl Harbor happened.

1-00:23:56

Graves:

What did you think?

1-00:23:58

Oishi:

Well, I just thought nothing of it. I thought nothing of it. Yeah, I'm a son of a Japanese citizen. And my folks, financially they didn't—you know, we had a big family. They weren't able to go to Japan. They came here and that was it. Going to Japan was like going to the moon. You go on a boat—especially if you had money, it's not so bad, you go on first or second class. But they're in steerage. They're at the bottom of the ship where they put the cargo. They put the boxes up there, maybe ten high. You don't know what they eat or something, they're down there and maybe they don't see sunlight, I'm not sure what condition they're coming back and forth.

1-00:24:48

Graves:

So, you didn't feel a connection to Japan?

1-00:24:52

Oishi:

No, no. I had no interest in Japan, I had no interest. My mother and father and stuff are—you know, my mother used to write a lot to Japan. My father felt this was his country. A lot of Japanese—well, one reason for it is—well, he had little high school education or something in Japan. They weren't farmers. A lot of people had very little education, all they knew—how to work. And he didn't know how to work. [Laughs]

1-00:25:27

Graves:

Yeah, we've talked about that.

1-00:25:31

Oishi:

He didn't know how to work. So he thought this was a great country. He felt this was the best part of the United States, which is true. The climate is good. You're next to a port. Used to tell me, "Tom," he says, "This place is one of the best places in the United States," he says. "Other parts of the country are too hot, too cold, snow, freezing." I didn't know I was a kid.

1-00:26:00

Graves:

So, you were working at the shipyards when Pearl Harbor happened.

1-00:26:02

Oishi:

No, I don't think I was working at the shipyards, I must have been working at the other company. I'm not sure, it was pretty close.

1-00:26:14

Graves:

Yes. Do you remember anyone ever saying anything to you?

1-00:26:19

Oishi:

No.

1-00:26:21

Graves:

About your being Japanese American?

1-00:26:23

Oishi:

No. It was like going to high school, you know. You have your German friends, maybe my leaderman was Italian, I'm not sure, he might have been an Italian American, nice fellow. I would like to have meet him, I never saw him after that.

1-00:26:44

Graves:

There were a lot of Italian Americans here.

1-00:26:46

Oishi:

Yeah, but these Italian Americans was mistreated too. If their father was an immigrant and didn't have citizenship, you know, they were treated just like Japanese Americans.

1-00:26:59

Graves:

Yeah, so the other big employers in the city were Chevron and Pullman and Ford, right?

1-00:27:10

Oishi:

Yes.

1-00:27:13

Graves:

And you were able to get hired at the shipyards, did you know other people who—other Japanese Americans who worked at the shipyards or worked at these other companies?

1-00:27:19

Oishi:

No, they would not hire. They would not hire. You couldn't get a job at Chevron. You couldn't get a job at Ford. You couldn't get a job at Pullman, Certainteed. You know, none of those people would hire you, it was known.

1-00:27:40

Graves:

So the options were pretty limited?

1-00:27:43

Oishi:

I think the only reason I got on was through the school. See, you give this man, he had to guarantee you a job. You give this \$150 or something and he guaranteed you a job.

1-00:27:56

Graves:

So he had an in for placing his students?

1-00:28:00

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

1-00:28:01

Graves:

Okay.

1-00:28:02

Oishi:

So he's making money all the way around.

1-00:28:10

Graves:

When you started working there, since we know that—well, actually, we don't know. You think you started working there before Pearl Harbor or after? I think from your guys' earlier talk, it was before Pearl Harbor.

1-00:28:28

Washburn:

When we talked earlier, you said some time around November you started working there.

1-00:28:35

Oishi:

Yeah, maybe, I'm not sure.

1-00:28:37

Graves:

Well, at that point, what the shipyards were doing was supplying ships to Great Britain, to help with the war in Europe.

1-00:28:44

Oishi:

Yes.

1-00:28:43

Graves:

Did you have any feelings about the war? I mean, you were pretty young, but did you support it?

1-00:28:51

Oishi:

No, I think the reason why I went to the shipyards was because I wanted to do something for the war effort. That was the main reason. I was naïve. Just like Mariucci, they claim he's naïve. He had a broker in between there, he had an agent in between there and he was doing everything and Mariucci was naïve.

1-00:29:17

Graves:

This is a sports thing?

1-00:29:19

Oishi:

Yeah, I don't know if you follow sports or not. Anyway, this is what {inaudible} said last night. He was very serious, he thought he had something to do. The agent wanted \$6 million or something, you know, in Miami or somewhere, right? Mariucci was naïve and the agent was there, that's why the guy got ratted out. "The guy tried blackmail me." So they booted him out. That's what he did.

1-00:29:54

Washburn:

Tom, before you—

1-00:29:56

Oishi:

Oh, okay. [laughs]

1-00:29:58

Washburn:

Back to this. When you started working at the shipyards in the first place, the war effort in the Pacific was not quite that strong. I think Donna's asking, when you were working there, the ships were mostly being produced for the war effort in Europe and did you any opinions about what was going on there—against Germany and against Italy there?

1-00:30:22

Oishi:

The war was not started. Japan's ships used to come into Richmond refinery to get oil.

1-00:30:31

Graves:

Right, right. The United States hadn't entered the war, but the Kaiser shipyards were supplying ships to Great Britain to fight Germany and Italy.

1-00:30:41

Oishi:

I don't know, oh were they? I didn't know that.

1-00:30:52

Graves:

But then, after Pearl Harbor, you knew while you were working at the shipyard that what you were contributing to was the American effort?

1-00:30:59

Oishi:

Yes, yes. And it was very interesting in the shipyard. The plate welding was bad. You know, I thought, "Geez man, I have to quit here." You know, this is no good for my health. You're on your hands and knees and welding all that time. And then as I got in there, you go through different steps of the ship. Every week or every month is a different challenge, doing something different.

1-00:31:32

Graves:

How was the pay?

1-00:31:32

Oishi:

Pay was good. Pay was very good. Pay was \$1.10 an hour. And people working in the nursery, maybe fifty cents, twenty-five cents an hour. We work Saturdays, we got time and a half. We work Sunday and we got double time. So maybe for two, three months, I worked every day of the week.

1-00:32:02

Graves:

So you were making more than your family members?

1-00:32:07

Oishi:

Oh, yes, yes. That's how I make big money. But that wasn't big money. You add up just a dollar an hour, that's only \$40 a week, so you get time and a half and, you know, and double time, you might get \$80, you might get \$70 a week, that's not big money.

1-00:32:28

Graves:

What did your brothers think about you working at the shipyard?

1-00:32:31

Oishi:

One of them was in the army and one was trying to keep the nursery running. And then I used to help with the nursery after working anyway.

1-00:32:47

Graves:

So after Pearl Harbor, a lot of leaders in the Japanese American communities were picked up. Did that happen here and can you talk about it?

1-00:33:03

Oishi:

Yes. Well, what happened was—from Japan, there's all different class, all different state that came to this country. They all had different education, different thinking. But my father, and his brother and few Oshima and stuff, they had a little education or something. And they felt, in the market they were collecting money with a {*Hemushakai*}, what they call a {*Hemushakai*}, I don't know what that means. They collect the money, help Japan or help Japan out. It was legal to do that, there's no war, see. And maybe a lot of them didn't have property. We had property. So my folks felt, "Geez, this is a great country." Maybe they were making their money and they were sending it to Japan.

1-00:34:14

Graves:

Before the war started?

1-00:34:14

Oishi:

Yes. So when the war broke out, there was names. Treasury, the State Treasury's {inaudible} all these things and more members. My folks felt, "Wow, I don't think this is right." You're in America, maybe we shouldn't do this. So they were not picked up, even though they were kind of leaders in the flower industry. But the other people, they're all different thinking, see. There were a lot of them picked up in Richmond. They came to the house. They blasted over the *West Contra Costa Times*. Adachi, big flower shop, one of the better-known retail flower shops. "Oh, Adachi big spy. We found cameras in his house. We found a Japanese flag in their album. They're spies!" They took him away like a dog. Chained him up, took him away. All of those people. But they were not found guilty, they were not guilty. They had a trial after a couple years or something, they were not found guilty, they were not found guilty. But it shortened their lives.

1-00:35:47

Graves:

And they were picked up because they had contributed before the war to this support for?

1-00:35:50

Oishi:

No, they were on this board or something and maybe this—we don't even know, maybe this guy would give them money, maybe he was sticking half in his pocket. You know, maybe {inaudible}. We don't know. But friends of my father, they didn't have faith in the man so they didn't go along with him.

1-00:36:13

Graves:

And what was the name of the organization?

1-00:36:16

Oishi:

Henmushakai.

1-00:36:17

Graves:

Henmushakai?

1-00:36:18

Oishi:

Yeah, I think that was it.

1-00:36:20

Graves:

We can look it up. Did your family have any possessions confiscated? Cameras, binoculars?

1-00:36:29

Oishi:

No, they didn't come.

1-00:36:29

Graves:

So it was only those other families that had people picked up and things taken away?

1-00:36:37

Oishi:

But you could have cameras, there's no harm in having cameras. Anybody could have a camera. Just like this trial in Modesto. You know that poor guy, I don't know if he's guilty or not. This guy who killed his wife, they claimed he killed his wife or somebody. You know, there's all kinds of stories coming up around it. They're just presuming, they don't know what's going on anyway. Today, they had a different story. They says, "He took out a big insurance." \$200,000 insurance. [Laughs] And he had a girlfriend! He didn't go fishing, he went to girlfriend's place. [Laughs] Everyday, it's a different story.

1-00:37:18

Graves:

Sorry, my mind's blanking, I knew where I wanted—.

1-00:37:24

Washburn:

Tom, why do you think nobody came to talk to your family at this time? Why do you think your family was left alone and others weren't?

1-00:37:36

Oishi:

His name was not on the board. My dad's name was not on the board. They had a—well, they don't know, these {inaudible} guys are probably thinks the guys are crazy. This guy's a board member so many years or something.

1-00:37:53

Graves:

What were some of the other restrictions that were put on people? You mentioned some earlier, but can you talk about them?

1-00:38:02

Oishi:

Here in Richmond, we were in a vital war zone or something. You know, City of Richmond or something because we had Standard, we had the shipyards. But in Berkeley, there was no industry for war effort or something. Maybe in San Francisco, there was none. Different areas—maybe Alameda was a naval base or something. So different areas was restricted to Japanese Americans. Any alien, German aliens, Italian aliens, restrictions that came up. It's all in the paper, I guess if you read, you go and look it up.

1-00:38:45

Graves:

Do you remember being aware of places you couldn't go?

1-00:38:49

Oishi:

The only thing I couldn't go is, maybe reading the fine print, maybe I wasn't supposed to go over certain tracks. You know, the SP track or something. And maybe I had to be in by a certain time, eight o'clock in the evening or something, by sunset I had to be in.

1-00:39:14

Graves:

Did you follow this curfew?

1-00:39:18

Oishi:

I was working daytime so it didn't affect me that much, but I used to go over the tracks. But it came out in the paper, not a personal letter to me. I didn't read the paper. [Laughs]

1-00:39:32

Graves:

So you were innocent.

1-00:39:33

Oishi:

And my mother, she was an alien. Asian aliens were not able to apply for citizenship. Or a European alien—German alien or Italian alien—they come to this country, for a couple of years they have a clean record, they can apply for citizenship. Those are two difference.

1-00:40:06

Graves:

So, you mentioned something about your parents moving to Berkeley during—?

1-00:40:10

Oishi:

Yes, yes. When more restrictions came out, if you go buy the newspaper or we get a newspaper, “We’ve got to do this.” It says, “If you’re Asian {or America},” was out in the paper, “Richmond zone is vital, you would have to go someplace else.” So my sister was in Berkeley, so my mother and father moved to Berkeley. But we stayed in Richmond, my brothers and I.

1-00:40:38

Graves:

Because the children were citizens?

1-00:40:41

Oishi:

Yes.

1-00:40:41

Graves:

But your parents had to leave.

1-00:40:42

Oishi:

Yes. The restriction was not on citizens. The restriction was on Japanese American citizens cannot go over a certain tracks, you have to be in by a certain time. There were all kinds of restrictions.

1-00:40:59

Graves:

Was that hard on your parents?

1-00:41:05

Oishi:

No. They just went to Berkeley.

1-00:41:06

Graves:

They went to work in Berkeley?

1-00:41:09

Oishi:

No, they didn’t work.

1-00:41:09

Graves:

Oh, okay. They just lived with your sister.

1-00:41:12

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

1-00:41:15

Graves:

That might have been hard for her.

1-00:41:15

Oishi:

I don't think if you're a citizen, if you don't have papers you can't get welfare or something. So all these Asian aliens, since they can't get welfare, they have to go on and do housework and make a {inaudible}. Domestic work.

1-00:41:49

Washburn:

Tom, who was enforcing the restrictions?

1-00:41:51

Oishi:

No one. It came out in the paper. The paper says, "David, you can't do this." Paper comes out, maybe the paper's wrong, maybe it's right.

1-00:42:04

Washburn:

Right, did anybody say, "Well, no one's enforcing this, why do we have to do it?"

1-00:42:12

Oishi:

Just like the highway says forty-five miles, school zone is thirty miles an hour. You might go forty miles an hour, but a police won't see you going forty miles an hour, he can give you a ticket, throw you in jail. Same thing.

1-00:42:32

Washburn:

Do you remember anybody that you knew in Richmond who challenged the restrictions?

1-00:42:37

Oishi:

No. We're like a sheep. {Inaudible} newspaper, "All Japanese Americans in Richmond, go to this church—Methodist church in Berkeley. Have all your baggage packed, you can only have so much. One suitcase, go over there." Paper comes out and says. We're like a sheep, we do that. Nobody to enforce it.

1-00:43:09

Graves:

So as the restrictions increased—.

1-00:43:13

Oishi:

It was getting tighter and tighter, but it wasn't too long. You figure in December 7th, we were out of here in, maybe end of March. December, January, February—we didn't have a hundred days. New restriction coming everyday. Maybe towards the end, these restrictions came back. "You can't go over the railroad, you've got get permit to go over the bridge." It was getting to the point where we wouldn't be able to function.

1-00:43:48

Graves:

Do you remember when the evacuation notice was posted? Was it put in public places in Richmond or did you see it in the paper?

1-00:43:58

Oishi:

Paper I seen. It was mostly the paper.

1-00:44:03

Graves:

And it said you had to report to this church in Berkeley.

1-00:44:05

Oishi:

Yeah. So we're like a sheep. We packed all our stuff and went over there.

1-00:44:09

Graves:

Your whole family went together?

1-00:44:10

Oishi:

My mother and father was in Berkeley, so they packed their stuff from there.

1-00:44:16

Graves:

Can you describe that day?

1-00:44:22

Oishi:

I was not too involved because I was welding. My job was very interesting. I was doing something for this country, building a ship for us to win the war, see. You picture Pearl Harbor come in December, January maybe not much doing, then February things getting a little tighter. In February, maybe in the month of February, every week, new orders are coming out. So I wasn't too concerned. I think my job was very interesting.

1-00:45:08

Graves:

But you had to go to the church that day in Berkeley, the same as your family. Do you remember that day, do you remember what it was like?

1-00:45:18

Oishi:

The church was very nice. A lot of people in this country—there's all different class of people. The educated people thought this was wrong. "This is unconstitutional, their American country, they have no right to do this. They have no right to take the property away." Other people says, "Geez, these Japs are dangerous. They might bomb us. They're a bunch of spies, you don't know what they're going to do, they're dangerous people." That's how the propaganda from Sacramento came out. All the General DeWitt and all these guys says, "Oh, you can't trust these people." So a person reads it, he believes it in the newspaper. Half the people believes it, but the educated people figure they don't, "This is wrong."

1-00:46:13

Graves:

I read that the people in that church took it on themselves to—.

1-00:46:19

Oishi:

Did they? I don't know.

1-00:46:19

Graves:

Yeah, I actually have some newspaper articles I can show you. That the people in the Congregational Church in Berkeley wanted to offer a large space where the Japanese Americans could come register.

1-00:46:39

Oishi:

Yeah, they treated us good. They gave us coffee and tea and donuts and everything.

1-00:46:47

Graves:

Well, what this one articles specifically says is that they were worried that if it was in another place, Japanese Americans would be lined up outside and that people might be unkind to them and that they would provide this.

1-00:46:59

Oishi:

Yeah, if you read everything in the paper, come from the government office, General DeWitt. We were a bunch of spies, "You can't trust a Jap." Anybody that was a Jap, "You can't trust them. They're loyal to their country."

1-00:47:15

Graves:

Do you remember anyone specifically being unkind or hostile to you or your family at that time, because you were Japanese American?

1-00:47:28

Oishi:

Well, a German friend—our neighbor was a German. We had a quite a few German friends. But they were Germans—second generation German or they're German that was married to an American citizen. A German immigrant that came here and they're citizens, but still they were

Germans. They were awfully kind to us, they knew the situation that we were in. So, a lot of our personal stuff, icebox and stoves and anything. In those days, icebox is something new, gas range was something new, radio was something new. It maybe came out five years before that. Refrigeration maybe came out in '35 or something—first one. Radio maybe '38 or something. You know, these are something new.

1-00:48:32

Graves:

And you had all those and you had to figure out what—.

1-00:48:34

Oishi:

Yes, yes. So our German neighbor looked after most of it for us, and they used to come to— when we were in Tanforan, they would write to us and we would write to them, and they would bring us cookies and stuff, you know.

1-00:48:51

Graves:

Do you remember their names?

1-00:48:58

Oishi:

Barch. I don't know. Barch, I don't know. I think they were both second generation Germans.

1-00:49:06

Graves:

Yes, where did they live?

1-00:49:07

Oishi:

Next to us. Right next to our property.

1-00:49:10

Graves:

On—?

1-00:49:10

Oishi:

Right next to George. You know where George lives?

1-00:49:12

Graves:

Yes.

1-00:49:15

Oishi:

That building there.

1-00:49:16

Washburn:

Tom, you were still working at the shipyards right before you were evacuated.

1-00:49:22

Oishi:

Yes. Maybe I didn't even get my last paycheck. I didn't get it.

1-00:49:28

Graves:

Because you were evacuated.

1-00:49:34

Oishi:

Yes. No one's there to send it to me.

1-00:49:38

Washburn:

Can you describe two things? You had told me once before that there were restrictions from working at that time.

1-00:49:47

Oishi:

No, there were no restrictions. At that time, the government didn't get that far, they figured the Japanese wouldn't be working at shipyards. But later on, when I went to Chicago and stuff, or when I was in camp, I'm welder. Maybe I could do something for the war effort. I applied for a job in Salt Lake City. Ruling came out from Washington D.C. anybody of Japanese ancestry or Japanese blood cannot work in defense work. I think that came out later. But when I was here, there was nothing like that.

1-00:50:26

Graves:

I see.

1-00:50:26

Oishi:

They didn't get around to it yet.

1-00:50:31

Washburn:

And can you describe your last day at the shipyards and what you said to your leaderman about why you were not going to be returning?

1-00:50:42

Oishi:

I don't think he believed me. It wasn't a sad something. You know, there were so many things going on and it wasn't that—I was very interested in my job. I wanted to get out of my shop. My goal was get on this ship. The ship is in water—it doesn't run yet. My something was, I wanted to get on the ship, when the ship hits the water—takes a trial run, maybe a couple hundred miles—I wanted to be on board that. And I didn't get—the ship did not leave. It was almost complete. Everything was complete, maybe another week, couple weeks or something, maybe they wouldn't need no welders on there, I'm not sure. But that was my goal.

1-00:51:33

Graves:

But you were evacuated before?

1-00:51:32

Oishi:

Yes.

1-00:51:36

Graves:

So what David was asking, you had to go to work and say why you were leaving.

1-00:51:41

Oishi:

I didn't tell them—I didn't tell the fellow workers I'm a Japanese American, I'm not supposed to be working here. I told this leaderman one time. I told him. "No, Tom, go to school here? High school? Born here?" [Laughs] "Yeah!" "They can't do this to you," he says. Okay, we go over there {inaudible}. If I was afraid someone was going to drop a wedge on my head, someone was going to drop a plate on my head or something. You know, it wasn't that way. I was well accepted on the ship.

1-00:52:23

Washburn:

You said it was out in the papers, all of this stuff.

1-00:52:26

Oishi:

Yeah, but—.

1-00:52:28

Washburn:

So your leader man knew what was going on?

1-00:52:30

Oishi:

No, you don't read every article in the paper. Maybe a kidnapping or rape or something, you read every line of it, see. What's this here? What's going on? They don't even know what's going on, so complicated. The average citizen does not.

1-00:52:52

Graves:

So you just left. You had your last day.

1-00:52:53

Oishi:

Yeah, I left. I left and then what happened was—. Here in Richmond, you know, it was few Japanese. Sports, I was interested in sports and San Francisco got a big—lot of people there. They had basketball teams and baseball teams and stuff, and the Japanese more or less stuck to themselves. They couldn't integrate with the Caucasian people. They were smaller and everything else. So we had our own team. The different churches liked the Buddhist Hall, they had their own Buddhist gymnasium, see. You know, the YMCA in the City, that was built by the

Japanese or something. So they had their own courts and we had Richmond High court. Ooh, that beautiful court. They all want to play there. Even though we were bad, they want to play us. [Laughs] You get to play on that beautiful court. They drummed the heck out of us, because we didn't have much of a choice of players. When we went into camp, I think pay money to go see these people play Japanese, you know. I used to pay money to go see them. Here I go to camp, they sat there in my camp, in my mess hall, and they took me in. Here a young kid, these guys are thirty, twenty-five. They were their high school stars, maybe Cal graduate catchers. They even let me play. Ooh, that was a big honor for me, see. They let me play every inning. I was one of them.

1-00:54:40

Graves:

This was at Tanforan?

1-00:54:41

Oishi:

Yes. So I enjoyed Tanforan. And then as kid, "Geez man, I'm going to be a cook after this." I started off as a coal boy.

1-00:54:52

Graves:

Coal boy?

1-00:54:54

Oishi:

Coal—we had coal stoves. And you had to go in there and light the stove before the cooks start. I started off in there. {Inaudible} They gave me a stove. There's four stoves. Four stoves, I got one of the stoves, last couple months or something, maybe six months at a stove. I'm a cook.

1-00:55:23

Washburn:

This is about to end, this would probably be a good time take a break. We have to change the tape here, Tom.

[End Audio File Oishi.T06]

[Begin Audio File Oishi.T07]

2-00:00:00

Graves:

Before we talk more about the assembly center, I just want to ask more about how your family arranged to have the house, your car, all of that, either taken care of or placed somewhere.

2-00:00:26

Oishi:

Actually, we couldn't think it over too much because we didn't have time. After the war broke out, we didn't know these notices were going to come, we didn't know what was going to come. We felt we wouldn't have to move. So it came so fast, we had to act fast, not much they could—.

2-00:00:47

Washburn:

Hold on one second you guys. We missed that. In between that the mic got pulled out just a little bit there. We're going to do that again, so Tape 2!

2-00:00:59

Graves:

Okay, so back up and talk about how you guys tried to take care of things before you left.

2-00:01:05

Oishi:

Actually, we didn't have time. We only had a hundred days after war broke out 'til the time we were in camp. All the notices did not come at one time, gradually came. We thought that we wouldn't have to go to camp. So as it came, we accepted what the situation was. First, we had to lease or rent, let someone take over our nursery. Piazza Flower Shop, a wholesale flower shop in Downtown Oakland. I don't know if you would know about it or not. Market Street and maybe around Seventh Street, Market Street, the building is still there, Piazza. We used to sell flowers to them—Italian family, young, very aggressive Italian American. And we asked him, "Okay, we'll look after the place for you guys." But he has his own problems so he, "Okay, we'll lease it to you, you look after our place." Maybe there was nothing in writing or anything, just word of mouth. Leo, I believe his name was. Then Leo had, you know, other interests. So he got this guy {Thornstead}. Maybe in Oakland, the Thornstead Flower Shop is still there, I'm not sure.

2-00:02:45

Graves:

Thornstead?

2-00:02:46

Oishi:

Yeah. Anyway, he was, in those days, he was kind of aggressive. He had maybe two, three flower shops. You know, he was businessman. So Leo told Thornstead, "You operate this {inaudible}." So he was running it, see. But he was no grower, he was a flower shop man. He figured he was going to get somebody to water plants, and you're going to get this carnation cheap. But they were not that way. So he had to struggle. At least he kept the house in fairly good condition, living quarters, and he didn't break the glasshouse or he didn't do no damage. They didn't steal nothing out of the house even though they had their lot of African American people in there. I think he got reliable men, reliable people in there.

2-00:03:44

Graves:

Who rented the house?

2-00:03:46

Oishi:

Yes, and then he rented the house and stuff to the shipyard workers, but he wasn't making much money on carnations. At least he didn't break the glasshouse and he didn't do no damage or he made sure that no damage was done to the nursery or the house.

2-00:04:09

Graves:

And what about your car, your family car?

2-00:04:14

Oishi:

Things was coming so fast, we had a Chevrolet 1940, I believe. Good car, four door car. Oh, we were proud of it. I don't know, I was twenty, {inaudible} thirty years old. He had a '36 Chevrolet before that. You know, as first car he was a pretty young guy. And then he bought this 1940, oh, he was proud of it. And then war broke out, and you know, there's all kind of people, classmates and stuff. Some friends of mine, I went to school with, he says, "Oh, these people have to move. I could buy this cheaper." So he come over here, he wants to buy my car for maybe half the price. I threw him out of the house. "Get the hell out of here!" And the stove and ice box and stuff too. You know, these guys, they're young, they don't have the money. Maybe their family don't have no good car, no icebox, they want to buy the stuff cheap. I threw them out, "Get the hell out of here."

2-00:05:29

Graves:

So what'd you guys do with the car?

2-00:05:31

Oishi:

So we had to come to a conclusion: we have to get rid of the car. Maybe week's time so I told Joe, "We'll jack the darn thing up, take the tires off, put it inside the car." {Inaudible} we put inside the car, jack it up, put the blocks underneath there. "And we'll plant trees around this garage." We had a single garage, garage maybe, I don't know, fifteen by twenty or something. It was a new garage {inaudible}. Well kept garage, fairly new garage. You had a {inaudible} before. And then we nailed the door up and everything and locked up the windows and planted trees all around the garage. And when we came back, one, no two—four years? Two, three, four—well, over three years. When we came back. The thing was just the way we left it. And all these albums and stuff, pictures, were in grandma's basement. No one touched it. All of our personal stuff was back there. Lot of people lost all their—everything they had, they lost. Pictures are very dear to a family, to even the niece and nephews and sons. Pictures is very dear, more than money.

2-00:07:10

Graves:

But all your stuff was still there. That's great.

2-00:07:12

Oishi:

Oh yeah.

2-00:07:14

Graves:

So you went to Tanforan and you worked as a cook, what was that like?

2-00:07:22

Oishi:

Good. Well, maybe, the pay was maybe eight dollars a month. Eight dollars a month! That's all we got. They didn't give us enough clothes or nothing. The government gave me eight dollars a month. Sweat, my ego was to put out good rice. I don't know. Nine hundred people we had to feed—four stoves.

2-00:07:53

Graves:

Wow. Did people eat in shifts?

2-00:07:59

Oishi:

I think there were two different shifts. We had, well, the kitchen was here and the dining room here, then we were on this side, see. So from the kitchen, both sides you could go to the dining room.

2-00:08:15

Graves:

What kind of food were you cooking?

2-00:08:18

Oishi:

Rice and whatever the government gave us. We had a lot of meat and stuff. At first, it was very bad because, you know, any—the government—how it works at first was very complicated. You don't know how to do the right amounts of things. As the months go by, weeks go by, you get better food and everything gets to be better. By the time we were going to leave Tanforan, everybody was pretty good food and everything there—good supply of everything, whatever we needed. But early part, it was pretty hard.

2-00:08:54

Graves:

Well, I have some pictures in here of Tanforan.

2-00:08:59

Oishi:

Oh, you do.

2-00:09:00

Graves:

Yeah. The horse stalls.

2-00:09:07

Oishi:

Yes. Oh, is this whole thing of Tanforan?

2-00:09:12

Graves:

It's mostly about San Francisco's Japanese American community, but when I saw that, I thought, "Well, that must be what it looked like when Tom first got there."

2-00:09:20

Oishi:

Yes.

2-00:09:21

Graves:

So can you talk a little bit about arriving? You want to look at that.

2-00:09:25

Oishi:

April or March, I don't know what month it was. It was a rainy day. We went over there and we were assigned to one of these horse stalls. Rainy, they didn't clean up good. They cleaned up the best they could. Maybe the government says, "Well, we'll give you a couple of \$100,000 or something—\$100,000, \$50,000, you clean up this thing." You know, "Okay." They guy grabbed our \$50,000 or whatever they gave him. He did the best he could do.

2-00:10:04

Graves:

But it must have smelled.

2-00:10:06

Oishi:

Yeah, if it wouldn't rain, it wouldn't have been so bad. But it was raining and all this manure and stuff was all on the ground. There was no blacktop. You could picture going to Golden Gate Fields, when it's raining. When it's sunny, it's not so bad. So we were there and it was so bad, we complained. And there's a new barracks—new barracks, not horse stalls—they put up barracks. Maybe half of the Tanforan was barracks, but they didn't have time to build the barracks.

2-00:10:46

Graves:

So when you moved in, did you share a room with—?

2-00:10:52

Oishi:

We had one room. We had one room. Our family, in the new barracks, we a room—twenty by twenty, maybe. That's all we had.

2-00:11:03

Graves:

And who was in the room?

2-00:11:06

Oishi:

The whole family.

2-00:11:10

Graves:

Your parents and—?

2-00:11:10

Oishi:

Joe, Hannah, Lucy and me, and my father. Five. And then the building is pitched, but they have sheet rock so high and in that pitched place, no sheet rock, see. So you could hear the neighbor on this side, you could hear neighbor on this side. [Laughs] When they turn the radio on too loud. So you have to be awfully careful what you say. [Laughs]

2-00:11:48

Graves:

So, if you worked in the kitchen, did other members of your family have jobs?

2-00:11:56

Oishi:

Yes. Joe worked in the commissary. I don't Hannah and Lucy, they must have been doing some secretary work or something.

2-00:12:04

Graves:

Yes. There's a nice picture of the library at Tanforan in there too. Do you want to see it?

2-00:12:09

Oishi:

Yes.

2-00:12:11

Graves:

I think I can find it. I think it's right near here. Yeah, here.

2-00:12:52

Oishi:

I enjoyed Tanforan, you know. Because I didn't see no guards. I didn't see no guards with live ammunition. And the challenge becoming a cook, being on a baseball team, trying to put out a good rice. Our rice for a meal is one of the most important things for a Japanese dinner. You could cook all kinds of rice, you can get it wet and something {inaudible} be not well done, see. To put out good rice, it takes a lot of patience.

2-00:13:37

Graves:

That's true. So you had some things you loved doing at Tanforan.

2-00:13:46

Oishi:

Something new, I think. It was a challenge.

2-00:13:48

Graves:

Were there young women you were interested in?

2-00:13:51

Oishi:

Oh, my wife. My wife. [Laughs]

2-00:13:53

Graves:

You met her at Tanforan?

2-00:13:57

Oishi:

Yes, she was, I believe, on this side. The thing was open there. [Laughs]

2-00:14:06

Graves:

So where did her family come from?

2-00:14:08

Oishi:

Berkeley.

2-00:14:09

Graves:

And you got to know her at Tanforan?

2-00:14:10

Oishi:

Yes. We were both in the horse stables together. And her father was little older than Joe, see. And my father was pretty old at that time. I was twenty he was seventy, or maybe seventy-five. Oh, he was in his prime, maybe he was in his fifties—my wife's family. So he had a pretty strong mind.

2-00:14:31

Graves:

So did you start courting her there?

2-00:14:33

Oishi:

Not courting her. We were friends, like. I wasn't serious. You know, at age twenty marriage was not on my mind. Anyway, I had a lot of things on my mind.

2-00:14:49

Graves:

And what was her name?

2-00:14:51

Oishi:

Shizu.

2-00:14:52

Graves:

Shizu?

2-00:14:53

Oishi:

Yeah, Shizue, yeah.

2-00:14:55

Graves:

And her last name?

2-00:14:55

Oishi:

Akiyoshi.

2-00:14:59

Graves:

Akiyoshi.

2-00:14:59

Oishi:

Her something's in that Obata book.

2-00:15:02

Graves:

She's in the Obata book?

2-00:15:05

Oishi:

Yes, her name's on the Obata book. Did you read the Obata book? I showed it to you, I think.

2-00:15:10

Graves:

Yeah, but I'm trying to remember why was her name in there?

2-00:15:15

Oishi:

Oh, she's thought she was it. She's a secretary for Chiura Obata.

2-00:15:22

Graves:

Oh, right.

2-00:15:23

Oishi:

Chiura Obata started this art school, see. He's a University of California professor. But we didn't know who Chiura Obata was. Maybe her family knew Chiura Obata, see.

2-00:15:33

Graves:

And this was at Tanforan?

2-00:15:37

Oishi:

At Tanforan. And I was working the kitchen and she was secretary to Obata. Obata had a new school or something, I think. He wasn't well-known in camp yet, but when he went into Topaz and stuff, he started drawing and he drew a lot of pictures for the camp something. He was well-known.

2-00:16:00

Graves:

Did you take any classes from him?

2-00:16:03

Oishi:

No, I'm no artist. Her name was on the Obata book.

2-00:16:10

Graves:

I'll need to look for it. Shizu Akiyoshi.

2-00:16:14

Oishi:

Yeah, she was on the staff of Tanforan Obata School. It's hard to find there. I had the book and it must have taken me, I don't know, couple hours maybe couple days to find her name on there.

2-00:16:29

Graves:

So she was interested in art?

2-00:16:32

Oishi:

No, she wasn't interested in art, I don't think. Maybe her father got her the job. I don't know.

2-00:16:39

Graves:

There's another picture in here—there was a sign on the gate. It says, "Tanforan Assembly Center Notice," with Visiting Hours and it has all this information about what visitors can and cannot do.

2-00:16:57

Oishi:

Oh, I didn't read that.

2-00:16:59

Graves:

Did you—why don't you look at it and we can take a picture? It's here.

2-00:17:05

Oishi:

Yes.

2-00:17:27

Graves:

Do you remember getting any visitors?

2-00:17:27

Oishi:

Yes.

2-00:17:29

Graves:

Who visited?

2-00:17:31

Oishi:

Our neighbor used to come and visit us. {Inaudible} was his name. I don't know what his person was. Nice fellow.

2-00:17:40

Graves:

Do you want to see this? [directed at Washburn] Or not really? Okay.

2-00:17:41

Oishi:

He was a mechanic and he was a welder too, see. There weren't too many welders in those days.

2-00:17:48

Graves:

He welded at the shipyards?

2-00:17:50

Oishi:

No, no, he was working for a {trucking} company and he was pretty good welder too.

2-00:18:06

Graves:

So, he came alone? Did he bring his family? Do you remember the visits?

2-00:18:12

Oishi:

But, you can't go inside the camp. You have a visiting place, like a prison. They can't come inside—where we live. There's a visitor's center or something and you have to meet there. We're like prisoners, we're prisoners. And you just meet there. They don't come inside your barrack and your mess hall and have lunch with you.

2-00:18:40

Graves:

How long were you at Tanforan?

2-00:18:45

Oishi:

From maybe April to October, maybe.

2-00:18:51

Graves:

And can you describe people leaving Tanforan and where people left? Where people went and what the travel was like?

2-00:19:01

Oishi:

Well, when we left, it wasn't so bad. I didn't see guards. I didn't see many guards. And we went by bus to a train station, and then at the train station we were told to keep the shades down.

2-00:19:19

Graves:

Why?

2-00:19:20

Oishi:

I don't know. Maybe in the city limits or something. No, maybe as far as Sacramento or something. And then when we got into the High Sierras, we were able to put the shades up.

2-00:19:34

Graves:

Do you think that's because the government didn't want Japanese Americans—?

2-00:19:40

Oishi:

[Laughs] I don't know! It's just like what's going on in the airport today, you know.

2-00:19:45

Graves:

Security.

2-00:19:46

Oishi:

{Inaudible} Then we had our shades up and all the way through Utah we had our shades up or something. And then when we went into Delta, Utah is the town, which is roughly, probably seventy-five miles south of Salt Lake City. Maybe fifty miles south of Ogden, Utah. Delta is a small town, maybe 10,000 people. Alfalfa was the main industry. {Inaudible} alfalfa for hay. I guess we were able to have our window up. The train stopped. I see a company of guards lined up, "Come down!". Their guns are drawn, MPs.

2-00:20:39

Graves:

This is for your arrival?

2-00:20:42

Oishi:

Yes, yes, they greeted us. Ooh, these people, the government really—this is when I first found out these people mean business. When in Tanforan, I never saw anything like this. Only thing was, when the visitors come, you know, we have a visitor's center; that was a little bit odd for me.

2-00:21:07

Graves:

So when you looked out of the train window and you saw all those men with guns—.

2-00:21:11

Oishi:

They were ordered by the government. They didn't do it on their own. That was their orders from the government.

2-00:21:19

Graves:

What did you feel?

2-00:21:23

Oishi:

[Laughs] I was stunned. I was stunned. That's how the government felt. In Washington, they thought that we were mean, dangerous people. That's the impression California gave them.

2-00:21:37

Graves:

So, the train stopped in Delta?

2-00:21:40

Oishi:

Yes.

2-00:21:43

Graves:

And did you get off the train and, what happened?

2-00:21:45

Oishi:

We got off the train and I don't think we walked too far. But we take a few steps, the bus was already waiting for us. We got on the bus and it took us off to Delta, maybe ten miles out in desert some place. It wasn't desert. It was pretty high elevation. We had snow. In the winter months it freezes. So maybe the elevation was pretty high, 5,000 feet or something.

2-00:22:16

Graves:

And your whole family was there, together?

2-00:22:18

Oishi:

Yes.

2-00:22:21

Graves:

What do you remember when you arrived at Topaz? What was it like?

2-00:22:25

Oishi:

What the government does is, anything new—. When we went in to Tanforan, first it was bad. You know, your food is bad. Living quarters is bad. First when we went in to Tanforan, same thing over again. The government gives someone a contract to build a barrack for 10,000 people. "Here's a million dollars. I give you so many months to finish it, so many days. This is where I want—." The government says, "I want it done in one month's time." "Okay, Okay." You show

them another couple \$100,000 I'll get it done in one month's time." {Inaudible} And he'll get it done, not three months, or sixty days, it takes him maybe one year, two years to get it completed.

2-00:23:21

Graves:

So it was pretty crude when you got there?

2-00:23:23

Oishi:

It was crude. When we got there, I think we had to put up our own sheet rock. The grain was there maybe. They screwed sheet rock. They had nails there, {inaudible} or something. That's how it is.

2-00:23:40

Graves:

Was your family sharing a room again?

2-00:23:42

Oishi:

Same thing. Same, maybe twenty-by-twenty room.

2-00:23:45

Graves:

With open partitions?

2-00:23:49

Oishi:

No, this time I think it was closed. Maybe we—they gave us the sheet rock so we closed it. But we had no sheet rock to close it at the other place.

2-00:24:01

Graves:

You talked about working outside of camp?

2-00:24:05

Oishi:

And then another thing about camp was, it's a camp. You know how the government works. All dusty, no something. And here comes a wind storm, it's a dust storm. We have dust there. There's no trees or nothing. They got tractors and everything. They took away all the vegetation, see. So we had dust storms. In the fall, we went in for two months or something, dust storms came. And then when the winter came, it wasn't so bad. And the only way you could get away from this dust storm is—we have a lavatory. Lavatory, you know, all the beds, and then there's 200 people in one block. And there's one mess hall and there's a lavatory and laundry room.

2-00:25:08

Graves:

For each block?

2-00:25:12

Oishi:

Yes. Each unit did not have, and there's a public lavatory you go to. There might be ten stalls, ten bowls or something. And you put water inside there, let the water run, the moisture. Moisture in the restroom would ease the dust storm. That's the only way we were able to get relief. And even before I left camp that was it.

2-00:25:48

Graves:

You talked about one of your sisters being pregnant when—.

2-00:25:53

Oishi:

Oh, my sister Amy, in Berkeley, she was married before the war. She had one child, maybe born in 1939 or '40 or something. And then her second child was due in '42, latter part of '42, November or something in there. So, the government says, "Well, Japanese you can't bring her to a local hospital. You can't because of danger. You don't know what she going doing to do." [Laughs] This is a ruling—government ruling. Well, you can't put a guard behind her. We can't afford to have a guard, make sure they don't sabotage. So maybe in Topaz, Utah, she left maybe before camp opened, maybe one month before camp opened, in Utah—left Tanforan. She was in Tanforan, maybe she was eight months pregnant, going to have a baby a month from now. So they—special trip or something, I don't how she went. Her and her husband went to Utah, early ones, one of the early ones. And her child was born in the laundry room.

2-00:27:22

Graves:

At Tanforan? I mean, at Topaz?

2-00:27:24

Oishi:

No, at Topaz. She was first child born in Topaz, Utah.

2-00:27:34

Graves:

Were there any doctors?

2-00:27:36

Oishi:

Yes. One thing about camp is maybe in Bay Area, there's quite a few doctors. Other areas there's no doctors. So to each camp, they figure, well, we have to have so many doctors, so many dentists. So they might have had more doctors than we should have, so doctors from the Bay Area would have to go to another camp. So there were sufficient doctors, and teachers too. You know, I was worried about teachers in school, but there was a lot registered teachers and college grads that they would teach.

2-00:28:19

Graves:

But they didn't have a hospital, so she had the baby in the laundry room?

2-00:28:22

Oishi:

Yes, yes, because the hospital was not complete.

2-00:28:25

Graves:

And was the baby okay?

2-00:28:28

Oishi:

Yes, baby's good. And she is sixty years old today. That baby that was born, her name is Jeanie. And her doctor was a woman doctor. A woman, Japanese American, second-generation. She might have been thirty years old. Maybe she just got a doctor's diploma. Her name was Jeanie—Eugenia.

2-00:28:53

Graves:

What's her last name?

2-00:28:57

Oishi:

Fujita. Her father was a dentist in Berkeley. My father used to go to him. And this Fujita, Eugenia Fujita delivered Jeanie. That's why they put Jeanie on her name.

2-00:29:14

Graves:

And what was your sister's married name?

2-00:29:18

Oishi:

Takagi.

2-00:29:20

Graves:

Amy Takagi, okay.

2-00:29:21

Oishi:

And this daughter, Amy's daughter Jeanie, her son just got married. Her son just got married, thirty-one, thirty-two years old. And Jeanie got married in Los Angeles and we all gave him presents. And Jeanie got a lot of gifts from Bay Area relatives. So she threw another party here for the newlyweds, roughly a month after they got married. We just had it last Saturday night.

2-00:30:00

Graves:

That's nice. So, how was it for your parents, in camp? I've heard that it was especially hard for older people.

2-00:30:10

Oishi:

No. Different persons—I'm going to tell you—different persons, they took it different. Maybe my parents enjoyed it. My parents enjoyed it. They were in Richmond, they had to work hard.

They had to pay the bills. They had {inaudible} debt and stuff, you know. Dentist problems and everything else. {Inaudible} And illness in the family. They were in camp, they were very relaxed. They had friends, neighbors, all kinds of friends. They meet friends in the kitchen. They go to classes, art school if they have interest in art. They have flower arrangement, if they have interest in flower arrangement. There are teachers there. So they enjoyed it. I have a nephew. I have a sister in Sacramento who has four boys or three boys. Gary was oldest. He's ten years younger than I. If I talk bad about camp, he'll start coming to this and this here. Gary says it was like camp to him, going to summer camp. Everyday go to summer camp. All kinds of girls, he says. [laughs] He enjoyed camp! He loved camp. I said, "Gary, don't ever tell other people that you enjoyed camp! Tell them how rough it is. How they mistreated us." But that's his version.

2-00:31:43

Graves:

I've heard a lot of teenagers—it gave them a lot of freedom.

2-00:31:46

Oishi:

Yes. They enjoyed camp.

2-00:31:53

Graves:

Now, you worked outside the camp when you were at Topaz, how did that happen? Can you talk about that job?

2-00:32:00

Oishi:

The group, they were kind of leaders in the Bay Area—San Francisco and Oakland people you know. They had football players in UC, you know. And I used to go see them play basketball and stuff. And I was in this group. So, since I was in the group in the kitchen, somehow they got connections in Delta, Utah, which is, I don't know, twenty miles or ten miles, out of our camp area. There's a mill there. They grind alfalfa. Alfalfa is the main crop in the town, around the town. They grow alfalfa and it's supposed to be high in protein, and there's a big demand for that. And this mill grind up all the alfalfa. Buy the alfalfa from the farmers and grind it and put it in the boxcars, ship it wherever they wished. And we were employed there.

2-00:33:08

Graves:

Were you paid the same as other employees?

2-00:33:08

Oishi:

We were paid fifty cents an hour. An hour, that's quite a bit—four dollars a day. Compared to in Topaz, Utah, they were giving them sixteen dollars an hour. In Tanforan, they gave us eight dollars an hour—no, eight dollars a month. In Topaz, I'm sure, they gave us sixteen dollars a month. They doubled the pay or something. But in this milling company, we were paid fifty cents an hour. That's four dollars a day.

2-00:33:48

Graves:

So you were making more in a week than your family was getting in a month?

2-00:33:52

Oishi:

Yes. And then we would—we had no sleeping quarters over there, so they would loan us a truck. And we would drive the truck into camp and then the next shift would come and drive it back, and back, see.

2-00:34:10

Graves:

So they employed a lot of people from the camp?

2-00:34:14

Oishi:

Well, I think we ran three different shifts. Regular day shift, swing shift and graveyard shift. Maybe to every shift there was ten people. And then, that's alright, but they treated us like, you know the Mexican immigrants that comes here, illegal people. Lot of people take advantage of them. We don't though, no. We were treated like that. We would go to work. Cold, it could be freezing weather. We go over there. Working conditions are bad. We go over there and we see {Ridgetown?}, two hours. We don't get paid for that two hours {over there}. We waited over there one day, the first hour, after one hour, we see a {Ridgetown?}. Seven hours we don't work, we just came for one hour. We have to stay there.

2-00:35:28

Graves:

Were they treating other employees differently?

2-00:35:30

Oishi:

Most of them was Japanese. Oh, we had a foreman and he was the one in charge of them there. And no doubt they were making real big money off of us. We were putting out a carload of alfalfa, ground up, hundred pound sack. That's roughly 500 sacks a day.

2-00:35:54

Graves:

Do you want some water?

2-00:35:55

Oishi:

No, that's alright.

2-00:36:00

Graves:

So, when you were in Topaz and working at the alfalfa mill, did the whole issue of the Loyalty Questionnaire come up then?

2-00:36:11

Oishi:

I don't think we were—we had to because we were living in camp. I know another thing is, every time we come in, even though they know us, we make—everyday, we're there, they search us, harassment. They search us like we were a bunch of criminals. So we couldn't bring in whatever we wanted. Well, we figured, this time {inaudible} we could bring in some beer or something. You know! [Laughs] You'll bring something in. You know, you couldn't bring in

beer or something, see. I think he {inaudible}, you couldn't bring it in! They usually, they search us like a bunch of criminals. They were ordered, the company of guards—MPs.

2-00:37:05

Graves:

They were there at the mill?

2-00:37:07

Oishi:

No, no, at our camp. At our camp. Maybe two hundred MPs or something. That's their duty, they got orders from Washington. {Inaudible} They have to go by that.

2-00:37:19

Graves:

How long did you work at the mill?

2-00:37:25

Oishi:

I might have given David—I want your answer David. {Inaudible}.

2-00:37:32

Graves:

What did he say before? He's wondering.

2-00:37:34

Washburn:

I don't know.

2-00:37:36

Oishi:

Maybe from fall—October, November, December, January, February, March—six months or something. We made a lot of money for those people. They got rich out of us. They were shipping that stuff to Los Angeles. High protein, they would mix it in with feed, you know, for chickens and something.

2-00:37:59

Graves:

So then you got to work at a nursery in the Midwest. Can you talk about how you got that job?

2-00:38:06

Oishi:

Oh, that. I had to get clearance from the government that I was a loyal American citizen. They had to go through my records, give me a clearance.

2-00:38:15

Graves:

How did you hear about it?

2-00:38:17

Oishi:

Oh, one of my relatives, my cousin. Maybe I told you about him.

2-00:38:24

Graves:

Yeah, but we need—we want to be able to have this whole story.

2-00:38:28

Oishi:

Okay. Well, Jun Agari—my cousin, see. He went to Cal. He went to Richmond High. Richmond High, you know, he—a pretty brainy guy, see, gutsy, brainy. And he was in Richmond High, and the teacher felt, “Geez, this guy Jun—good speaker, he’s got a good line. Maybe he would be a good commencement speaker.” So they recommended Jun, “He’ll be commencement speaker.” Maybe she helped him out to make his speech out. And when he graduated, he was commencement speaker. We were very proud of him. Then he went to Cal and got {inaudible}. He got a diploma. He come out. That was nothing for him, you know. But he was kind of early one being drafted from Richmond. One of the early ones being drafted. We were in the army, and he was Fort Ord. He had a good job at Ford Ord or something. Maybe it was because of his education, but he wasn’t no commissioned officer or anything. He didn’t even have a rating, maybe a PFC or something. “Alright, you’re Cal graduate, you should go to OCS.” With your IQ, they classified you. But being a Japanese American, no. So when the war broke out, “What are we going to do with Jun,” they figure. “We have no place to put Jun. He’s a Japanese American, we can’t trust the guy.” So they released him from the army. He was on reserves or they put him on the Army Reserves or something. Well, my brother was in Fort Custer, Michigan when the war broke out. But since he was away from the West Coast, he stood there. They didn’t release him. Since Jun was in the West Coast, they released Jun. So Jun had to go into camp. And Jun might of made flower magazine—. We have a magazine—flower growers have a magazine—help wanted. So he answered that. He put it down in writing or something, I don’t know. Maybe he had a typewriter or something, maybe he just wrote it down. And the guy answered it. “Jun, come on over,” he says. “We got a place here. Fifteen guys we need. Come on over, I want you to operate it.”

2-00:41:09

Graves:

And where was this?

2-00:41:11

Oishi:

It was Melrose Park, Illinois, outside of Chicago. Maybe roughly ten, fifteen miles west of Chicago.

2-00:41:23

Graves:

So your cousin got his subscription to this flower grower magazine at camp?

2-00:41:28

Oishi:

Yeah.

2-00:41:30

Graves:

And answered this ad?

2-00:41:30

Oishi:

Yeah. And he's good at writing, you know, he could put words in piece of paper when the guy—the guy was a young gentleman {inaudible}. This Premier Rose Garden was one of the biggest rose-growing corporations in the United States.

2-00:41:54

Graves:

And so Jun helped you get a job?

2-00:41:57

Oishi:

Yes. He asked me if I wanted to come.

2-00:42:01

Graves:

Did you go out with him or did you follow?

2-00:42:02

Oishi:

No, he was in a different camp. He was in a different camp than I was.

2-00:42:09

Graves:

What camp was he at?

2-00:42:09

Oishi:

I think he was in Arkansas.

2-00:42:11

Graves:

Rohwer?

2-00:42:13

Oishi:

Yeah. He moved to Stockton because they had a sister or something in Stockton so they moved over there. They wanted to be all together. So they moved to Stockton, I think, instead of going to Berkeley, they went to Stockton or something. Maybe they were able to do it.

2-00:42:36

Graves:

So he contacted you and said, "Do you want to go work?"

2-00:42:40

Oishi:

Yes.

2-00:42:44

Graves:

And then you had to apply for clearance?

2-00:42:45

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

2-00:42:49

Graves:

Did any of your brothers or friends go with you?

2-00:42:52

Oishi:

No, I think I went myself. He went first and he had half the crew there by the time I got there.

2-00:43:04

Graves:

How did you get there?

2-00:43:07

Oishi:

Oh, train. It was a good ride, you know. Get on the train. In those days, the train would burn coal, not oil. From Delta we went to Salt Lake City. From Salt Lake City into Chicago. And if the wind is blowing a certain way, all that coal dust come inside your car. No matter how tight it is. If the wind is blowing the opposite the {inaudible} is not so bad. And by the time we get to Chicago, we're all black. [Laughs]

2-00:43:38

Graves:

So you must have been kind of odd, this one Japanese American on a civilian train, in wartime. Do you remember, was that—?

2-00:43:49

Oishi:

I didn't feel nothing. Maybe I was too excited. [Laughs] But I know when I got off the train, and I was walking in Chicago, ooh, I felt every Tom, Dick, and Harry looking—staring at me. I was paranoid. Being out of camp and being in a public street, I thought everybody was looking at me. {Inaudible} Didn't' take long to get over it though.

2-00:44:20

Graves:

Do you think they were?

2-00:44:22

Oishi:

No, no, no. I just felt that way, you know.

2-00:44:27

Graves:

So, did you live with your cousin?

2-00:44:31

Oishi:

No, I lived out in the—the corporation had a big house and they put addition on. They had a bunkhouse for us too. The corporation had big money, they were making big money. And they

spent money and they put additions, and they have a big bunkhouse and everything for us. And there was about fourteen or fifteen of us guys were living in that. We had good living quarters.

2-00:44:58

Graves:

Was the whole crew Japanese American?

2-00:45:01

Oishi:

Yes. No, well, there was one man, German man. He was elderly. He was more or less supervisor. He used to come and look after us. And then everyday there was a superintendent or general manager would come and consult with the German—what to do and what not to do.

2-00:45:27

Graves:

Were you treated the same way you had been at the mill, or was it different?

2-00:45:31

Oishi:

No, it was much better, much better. But still, you know, maybe instead of getting fifty cents an hour we got sixty cents an hour.

2-00:45:42

Graves:

Wait, I didn't understand.

2-00:45:44

Oishi:

Sixty cents an hour instead of fifty cents. But they started a union since it's a big city. Union started sixty. As the first year, we got a little bit more and more and more, see.

2-00:46:02

Graves:

So you all were able to join the union?

2-00:46:05

Oishi:

Yes, we were in the union.

2-00:46:08

Graves:

Do you remember the name of the union?

2-00:46:09

Oishi:

No. Melrose Park—the gangsters in Chicago used to live there. Is that the name, Al Capone or somebody? In Melrose Park is real close to where our nursery was. Italian something, big gangsters, Al Capone—.

2-00:46:40

Graves:

So you lived in company housing, and when you weren't working—?

2-00:46:43

Oishi:

Oh, we had a good time. We had a good time. We had a car. We had a couple cars, you know. Couple of the boys had cars. We would go to Chicago, see Chicago. Went to football games. Went to a baseball game. Went to see a college play. We enjoyed ourselves. We had a good time in Chicago. Theatre, stage plays and everything, theatres. Melrose Park and—do you know Oak Park?

2-00:47:14

Graves:

I've heard of it.

2-00:47:15

Oishi:

Oak Park is like Evanston. It's a classic place in Chicago. And Oak Park was very close to us.

2-00:47:22

Graves:

Was it strange for you to have all this freedom, knowing your family was back in camp?

2-00:47:26

Oishi:

No, we enjoyed it! [Laughs] We enjoyed it! And then we were doing something. More than that, we were putting out flowers. We were making big money for those people. We were growing flowers the way we grow on the West Coast. They were growing the way they grow in the Midwest. See, in the West Coast we cut flowers all year round. But in the East Coast, it gets too hot. So maybe there's no demand for the roses in the summer months. So they would have no rose in the summer months and late spring. But we grew it our way, and the war is on, there's a big demand of roses. So we grew flowers twelve months out of the year.

2-00:48:20

Graves:

Did you Premier how to do that? Your crew?

2-00:48:23

Oishi:

Yes, yes, our management. Jun and {inaudible}, they felt that way.

2-00:48:33

Graves:

Really.

2-00:48:32

Oishi:

They had an oldtimer. They had a set way of roses over there. You know, the foreman and everything, and they just went by that way. They didn't realize that the was a war going on and they're injuring themselves.

2-00:48:47

Graves:

And so Jun and the other people introduced this new way of doing it?

2-00:48:49

Oishi:

Yeah, but I think they went over that way.

2-00:48:51

Graves:

Oh, they didn't keep it.

2-00:48:53

Oishi:

We just did it at our place. There were three different nurseries. Our nursery roughly had 100,000—150,000. That's roughly three acres. The other nurseries maybe had twelve acres, and the other nursery maybe had twenty-four acres. That's how big the corporation was. We were the other smallest nursery.

2-00:49:18

Graves:

How did that compare to your nursery at home?

2-00:49:22

Oishi:

Well, we had about three acres here. But the corporation biggest nursery had twenty-four acres.

2-00:49:33

Graves:

Were you able to go back and visit your family?

2-00:49:39

Oishi:

Yeah. Once a year I used to make it.

2-00:49:41

Graves:

What?

2-00:49:43

Oishi:

I think I went two, two or three times to come back. But what happened was every time I come back, the camp's getting better. They have a contract like I told you. Maybe they didn't even have no water tower up there. Maybe the hospital was not complete. Maybe the library was not complete, they didn't even start. They didn't even have no gymnasium. One year I come back, the camp, they're growing trees around there. The Japanese people, you know, they get one of the desert something, get trees to plant. They fix their garden. They fix their block. They make it much nicer. Baseball field getting better. By the time, the last time I went the camp was beautiful. The contract is there, the government intention is right. One of them got to teach these guy's right. You have a hospital, everything else, is not complete. After three years, two and a half years, finally it's complete.

00:50:49

Graves:

Now, so there were opportunities for you and other men to work outside the camp. Did your sisters or do you know of other women—?

2-00:50:58

Oishi:

Yes, my sisters came out. They came out to Chicago too. Well, about a year later or something.

2-00:51:05

Graves:

And worked at the nursery?

2-00:51:05

Oishi:

No, they had—they worked in downtown Chicago, at the Loop. They used to get on the L-train and find whatever secretary work, or whatever they were doing. They lived downtown.

2-00:51:20

Graves:

Oh. So that would be—which sisters?

2-00:51:26

Oishi:

Hannah and Lucy.

2-00:51:30

Graves:

Did they enjoy it?

2-00:51:29

Oishi:

Yes, I think they did.

2-00:51:30

Graves:

And you saw them?

2-00:51:35

Oishi:

Well, yes, I saw them.

2-00:51:36

Graves:

And what about your wife? Were you still in touch with her?

2-00:51:41

Oishi:

Not much but we used to write back and forth.

2-00:51:46

Graves:

As friends?

2-00:51:47

Oishi:

Yeah, as friends. Maybe she didn't see it that way but I {inaudible}.

2-00:51:55

Graves:

It's Joe who was in the army right?

2-00:51:59

Oishi:

No, George.

2-00:51:58

Graves:

George.

2-00:51:59

Oishi:

And then George, George I know, when I was in Chicago, maybe 1944 or something—now, he used to come to see me. He was in Michigan—Fort Custer, Michigan. Fort Custer, Michigan to Chicago, maybe couple hours drive or something. So he figured, “Well, the little brother.” He's eight years older than I am, see. He figured, “I have to look after him. Maybe that guy's going wild.” He used to come every few months, see how I'm doing. I didn't mooch no money off of him, I just had to give him the money, see. He was stationed in the hospital. He had a good easy job. He had a corporal rating, you know.

2-00:52:44

Graves:

What was he doing in the hospital?

2-00:52:46

Oishi:

I think he was supplies in the hospital. But he was in med corps or something. Maybe he's something else. And then later on, they says, “Geez, these guys are laying around here. How can the other Caucasian people and other African American and Mexican and stuff are going overseas and getting their legs shot off, getting killed? All the Japanese are in the States and they got a good easy job in the hospital, mess hall. It's not right.” George was there a long time, two years or something. Maybe he's thirty-three or something. They says, “Well, we're going to form a combat team.” They formed this 442 combat team. So they grabbed them all. All those guys like George, they grabbed them, send them down to Mississippi, give them a rifle.

2-00:53:42

Graves:

And then he went to Europe?

2-00:53:43

Oishi:

He went to southern Italy, came all the way into France. I followed him in his letters.

2-00:53:54

Graves:

Before the 442nd, what did your family think about most of you being in camp and one of the sons being in the army?

2-00:54:03

Oishi:

That's why I give my father a lot of credit, see. My father's still stuck by. He stuck by. "This is our country. Now, son, this is a good country, the war's on." The other people in camp, they pushed around, maybe their family lost all their money, their sending it to Japan. Maybe they were in Japanese banks. They were there buying property in Japan. It's all—every situation is different. But my father figure, "Oh, my son in the army. Tom has to go. For the good of the country, he's going to go." I thought, "No, no, don't send your son, don't send your son." Some example—send your son. {Inaudible} There's all kinds of thinking.

2-00:54:52

Graves:

So there was this debate in the camps among people about loyalty and there was this Loyalty Questionnaire that people had to sign, did you have to fill that out?

2-00:55:04

Oishi:

Maybe I was out of camp by then.

2-00:55:06

Graves:

And there were also people who formed the Fair Play Committee. Do you remember hearing—. Saying that there shouldn't be a draft unless there were citizenship rights. Your family, it sounds like—.

2-00:55:22

Oishi:

We were all citizens.

2-00:55:25

Graves:

Not your parents.

2-00:55:27

Oishi:

Drafted. Did you say drafted?

2-00:55:27

Graves:

Well, there were people who thought that people should have citizenship rights, meaning they shouldn't be in a camp.

2-00:55:35

Oishi:

Yes, yes.

2-00:55:38

Graves:

If there was going to be a draft of Japanese Americans. So there were people having this debate in the camps.

2-00:55:43

Oishi:

There was all different thinking. Just because you're Japanese, they all don't think alike. They all have different financial status, different education, different parts of Japan they come from.

2-00:55:57

Graves:

But in that debate, where would you say your family—?

2-00:56:02

Oishi:

I gave my father a lot of credit. I was afraid he was going to get beat up. I was afraid that he was going to get beat up by some of the friends.

2-00:56:15

Graves:

Why?

2-00:56:14

Oishi:

You know, because he felt his boys are American citizens and {there was no} right to fight for the country. And other people felt—they were bitter. They were thrown into camp. They lost all their personal belongings. Their house, maybe they lost the house, everything they lost. Just like the Hoshi family and the other family, Fukushima, right. They lost it. They have debt. The bank says, "We feel sorry for them." {Inaudible}. They're in the banking business. They're out to make money. You don't pay, they take it away.

2-00:56:55

Graves:

But you've described feeling bitterness.

2-00:56:57

Oishi:

Pardon me?

2-00:56:58

Graves:

You've described feeling bitter.

2-00:56:59

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes.

2-00:57:00

Graves:

Did you feel better then or was—?

2-00:57:02

Oishi:

Yes, I did. No, I didn't feel bitter but my bitterness was against throwing me into camp. I thought that was wrong.

2-00:57:12

Graves:

What did your parents think?

2-00:57:13

Oishi:

I don't know how they felt. Maybe by rights, they were aliens. They could do it to aliens. I had Italian friends and German friends here. They were living in Richmond. They had a good job here. They had a home here. I think German and Italian immigrants, they didn't have to be citizens to buy a house. While Japanese, Japanese could not buy house, even though they were aliens. But Italian aliens, I believe, could buy a house without being a citizen. We would have a house here, two boys are in the army, father and mother are aliens. They have to move out of the house. Go someplace else. They were restricted. You can't go no more than five miles. You have to be in by eight o'clock. When the sun sets, you have to be in. So we were restricted, try to go more than two miles, you got to get a permit.

2-00:58:27

Graves:

Yeah. So, is there anything else about living in Chicago that you remember?

2-00:58:36

Oishi:

What was hard was we had money, we're go to the store, want to buy meat, you can't buy meat. We have stamps. [Laughs] We got a lot of stamps. We can't buy meat. We don't know nobody, see. But I did work with all Germans, mostly Germans. But there's a shortage of meat. No matter how many stamps you got, you can't get it. A lot of things, sugar, restrictions—everything you buy. {Inaudible}, shoes—.

2-00:59:13

Graves:

Gasoline.

2-00:59:13

Oishi:

Tire, gasoline, everything you need stamps to buy.

2-00:59:19

Graves:

And would you get the same amount of stamps as other people?

2-00:59:22

Oishi:

Yes, we get the same amount of stamps, stamps don't mean nothing. You don't have friend, you don't know nobody. And that's how it was. Maybe in the early part of war, when we first went out, it was tough. But as it got on, whoa, we could buy up all the ham and everything—little

black market. You know the right people, all the tires and the sugar, whatever you want you were able to buy more than we could use.

2-00:59:51

Graves:

So you found that in Chicago you were able to buy things?

2-00:59:54

Oishi:

Yes, but maybe in the early part, maybe I'm not sure, if we knew the right people, we were able to do that from the beginning. It was tough. In camp we didn't have that stuff. Oh, we had all kinds of restrictions in the war years. You could picture here in Richmond, you know. Richmond must have been awfully tough.

2-01:00:17

Graves:

Oh, I remember you talking about some of the chemicals you'd use at the nursery being from Richmond.

2-01:00:25

Oishi:

Yes, yes. Richmond, being a refinery town, we had Niagara Chemical here. We had Stauffer Chemical here. We had Ortho here. Those were the three major chemical plants in the United States, all over the world. We might supply the whole world of these things. And we go to this place in Melrose Park, Illinois, and we {inaudible} all these chemicals that we buy—manufactured in Richmond, California. That's a brand name. We {inaudible}. We grow flowers here, beautiful flowers here. We shipped them to Canada, New York, Chicago, Nashville, Tennessee, Texas. We sold it as Oishi Carnations, grown and raised in Richmond, California. And throughout the whole year, average throughout the whole year, we thought our carnations was better than any carnations in the United States. Better than Redwood City or Mountain View or East Oakland because we had the ideal growing conditions. That wasn't because we were great growers, or we were great agriculture management in carnations. We had the ideal conditions to grow.

2-01:01:54

Graves:

As you were in Chicago—.

2-01:01:56

Oishi:

The City of Richmond don't know. We buy greenhouses. We buy all the supplies for nursery. Sales tax, everything you buy there's sales tax on it. We buy greenhouse—one the eastern greenhouse. "Where are you going to put it?" "Richmond, California." They have to look up what the sales tax rating is in Richmond, and give Richmond the money. All we did was give to the city of Richmond. We took nothing out.

2-01:02:28

Washburn:

You want to just take a break right now, there's only about three minutes left. Let's take a break.

[End Audio File Oishi.T07]

[Begin Audio File Oishi.T08]

3-00:00:06

Graves:

So, can you talk about the end of the war, and coming back—out of Chicago, and the return home.

3-00:00:16

Oishi:

Well, in 1945 seems like we were able to come back. Kind of surprise, we didn't know how long we would have to be out of California. But it was a big surprise to us, war wasn't even over. We're still fighting in Germany and Japan. And we got notice saying, "If you want to come back, you could come back. Apply for it." Geez, it was a big surprise. Joe was working in defense plant in Chicago, and I was in Melrose Park, Illinois. So, me and Joe, we met a couple times you know. It was quite a distance to go, you have to go by L train, and he was on the south side. So we had a couple meetings and we decided, well, we're {inaudible}. We'll order some plants, carnation plants, good, clean carnation plants, anything clean. And the roots is—even a human being, you know, the roots is the most important thing. Good, clean carnation plant {inaudible}. So we went to one of the better nurseries over there, small family operation-like. We told him to send us plants in maybe April, May, June, and July. Maybe it was 5,000 each month or something. We just took a chance. We ain't had no money, but we gave him the order. And we came back, and we prepared for that. We learned that our nursery was not in good condition, we were told. But our greenhouse and everything was in good condition. So we came back and we started running {rebuilding} it, 5000 plants in April, so we had to prepare our soil. Sterilize our soil. No, we had to change our soil in those days.

3-00:02:25

Graves:

And this is just you and Joe?

3-00:02:27

Oishi:

Me and Joe—we decided just Joe and I. My mother and father was in camp. But Joe and I, we came back in February or something and we got started. And when we came back, the nursery was in good—the glass house and buildings was in good condition, but the plants was not, and you know, was all rundown, old and dead. So we started a little bit at a time and our main goal was in April, we had to get so many square foot of soil ready since the plants were going to come in.

3-00:03:19

Graves:

Were there people living in your house?

3-00:03:21

Oishi:

Yes.

3-00:03:21

Graves:

So where did you live?

3-00:03:25

Oishi:

When we first came back they might have been living there three shifts a day, I'm not sure! There were many people there. It was much bigger. We had more buildings then what it is today. And they're living in any place that has a roof over it. As long as they could put a bed and they had running water or something.

3-00:03:53

Graves:

So where were you and Joe living?

3-00:03:56

Oishi:

I think we lived at our cousins' and then we ate their too.

3-00:04:00

Graves:

A cottage on your property?

3-00:04:03

Oishi:

No. Cousins, cousins.

3-00:04:04

Graves:

Oh, with cousins. Where?

3-00:04:06

Oishi:

Sakai's. And Sakai's was in much better condition. Since roses are good for four, five years. They can go up for eight year period without transplanting one. Carnation, every year you have to transplant. So they were in much better condition than we were. As soon as they came back, you know, they had a good income.

3-00:04:29

Graves:

And there wasn't anyone living in their house?

3-00:04:32

Oishi:

I think they were able to get them out.

3-00:04:36

Graves:

So you and Joe got the greenhouses started again.

3-00:04:40

Oishi:

Yeah. And then we ate for two, three months at Sakai's. Mrs. Sakai and Tetsama, my cousin, says, "Join us." They had workers there. They had maybe ten or twelve people there. To cook for two more people doesn't mean nothing, you know. So we had lunch and dinner over there for two, three months until we were able to get our house back. We can't just boot them out as soon you come back—you can't just get out and boot them out.

3-00:05:21

Graves:

So there were other Japanese Americans who were coming back to Richmond at the same time you did?

3-00:05:26

Oishi:

No, we were kind of early ones.

3-00:05:28

Graves:

And how did you feel people received you, the other people in Richmond?

3-00:05:33

Oishi:

I didn't think nothing of it.

3-00:05:37

Graves:

Were there neighbors who were happy to see you back?

3-00:05:38

Oishi:

Yes, yes, yes, our neighbors were happy to see us back.

3-00:05:45

Graves:

So you got a draft notice?

3-00:05:48

Oishi:

Yes, yes. And then, I don't know, soon as I came back or something, I changed my draft address, changed the address. When I was in the—. [phone rings]

3-00:06:02

Graves:

Wait just one second.

3-00:06:16

Oishi:

When I was in Chicago, they didn't bother me, but as soon as I came back to Richmond, when I notified my change of address, they drafted me. They wanted me to go to physical.

3-00:06:37

Graves:

And you were trying to get the nursery, and here you got this call to join the army, what did you think?

3-00:06:43

Oishi:

No, and then, in between there, when we first came back to Richmond, in February or something, maybe March or something, we got a notice from the War Department.

3-00:06:53

Graves:

From the what?

3-00:06:55

Oishi:

War Department, government, “Your brother George—your son George was shot in {action}.” Whoop, that’s thunder. We didn’t know how bad he was, going to be crippled for life, he’s going to die or just a minor wound. And he got Purple Heart and Silver Star and everything else. But when he went overseas, he was in a medic. He had the Red Cross on something, he had to after the—. The law says he had the Red Cross, you’re not supposed to shoot at him. You know, that’s a point in international law. They don’t go by laws.

3-00:07:40

Graves:

How long before you found out he was okay?

3-00:07:42

Oishi:

I think he wrote to us. Maybe—it takes maybe a month or something—took two or something.

3-00:07:50

Graves:

Boy.

3-00:07:50

Oishi:

That was a big relief. That was just about war, just about over.

3-00:07:56

Washburn:

Let me ask you, Tom, when you came back, who was staying in your home and why were they staying there?

3-00:08:06

Oishi:

Well, Richmond had a shortage of housing. And the shipyard—Richmond was a town of 20,000 before the war, maybe by the time I came back, maybe it had 120,000. So, you picture 100,000 coming into the town of Richmond, they have to stay some place. And they’re working three shifts a day at the shipyard. Maybe they’re putting out a ship per day and they have to have some

place to share. They had that federal housing they built. I mean, vacant land, they put up federal housing projects, but that wasn't enough.

3-00:08:53

Graves:

So, who was in your house?

3-00:08:55

Oishi:

Oh, African Americans. I think they came from the south, in New Orleans, or Mississippi or Oklahoma, I'm not sure. They weren't Caucasian. They were all black.

3-00:09:06

Graves:

Did you get to know them at all?

3-00:09:10

Oishi:

No, no. Some of them even used to work in the city. I think what happened is, one family comes in and they get their friends so it's not so bad, you're not getting all different people. Maybe the guy was smart enough, he got a good family and he got his brothers, he got his auntie, he got his uncle, got his brother in law. And then we're were lucky we got good people in there. I was surprised. Just like we had the nursery there, we get people from this one little village in Mexico. They grow corn. Maybe it's a good town. They're good people, see. We get their friends, their uncle, their friends, that's all we get. We know we get the friends, the family, they're good people. We have no problems.

3-00:10:07

Washburn:

So Tom, who was watching your house and did he make money off of the people staying in your home?

3-00:10:16

Oishi:

Maybe he made money by rent—renting to the individual people rather than growing flowers. I think that was it. So he was getting a pretty good income and he was able to pay the taxes or whatever, because we didn't have to pay back taxes or anything, we didn't have no bill when we came back.

3-00:10:45

Graves:

So what was the process for getting people out of your house, do you remember?

3-00:10:52

Oishi:

I think the guy, Mr. {Sorensted}, maybe had them move or something. Maybe he gave them notice that he would like this thing vacant. Maybe he gave them thirty or sixty days. And we had no problems getting them out. When that time came, the thing was empty.

3-00:11:13

Graves:

So, you said your neighbors were happy to see you. When you went out to the store there was no problem?

3-00:11:19

Oishi:

The only thing in between the time we came back, time I went in the army was we had this good car. You know, they weren't making cars, they were making guns and tanks and ships and stuff. They had no time to make cars. So for a long period of time, they weren't making cars. So we had this good car, just about new, and we wanted to get insurance on it. We couldn't get no insurance on it. We were told these Japanese Americans, you know, the way it was, "A Jap is a Jap, they're bad people." You come back, you go to court. You get arrested, you go to court and you have a trial, you'd lose. So we weren't able to get insurance on it.

3-00:12:12

Graves:

When you returned.

3-00:12:14

Oishi:

Yes. So I think some of the wiser Niseis, older Niseis, they got in with a company, maybe with a higher premium, and we got insurance through them.

3-00:12:34

Graves:

So, let's get back to the draft notice and talk about entering the army and everything that happened.

3-00:12:43

Oishi:

Well, in August I was inducted. What happened was, when we came back—must have been about seven, eight people, you know, Japanese Americans that came back from camp. We all had to go to a physical at the same time, and I was the only one that was accepted. The others were—maybe before the war they went to a physical and maybe they were in {inaudible} service or they maybe had some eye problems or some problems and at that time they weren't too strict. And then, during the war years, they took anybody. Then, when the war was just about over, they got choosy again, so they just picked the good—the guy with no defects at all. And to me, it was quite an honor. You seven guys go to army physical, and just me passed! It was an honor to go, you know, I was kind of proud even though I was bitter about the other thing.

3-00:14:06

Graves:

And so where did you get assigned and what was your job?

3-00:14:13

Oishi:

I was assigned to Marysville.

3-00:14:16

Graves:
Marysville?

3-00:14:16

Oishi:
Marysville, Camp Beale. Camp Beale, Marysville.

3-00:14:19

Washburn:
Which is just north of Sacramento right?

3-00:14:22

Oishi:
Yes. And this happened at that time, the peaches and fruits were coming. That's a great peach orchard area. And they had no one to can them. The cannery was there. So they asked for volunteers. I raised my hand. You know, I raised my hand and I went to work. I ate at the army camp, they made me lunch, everything. They pick us up at the camp, they bring us to different canneries. We went from all around: Lincoln, Oroville, Newcastle, Loomis, Marysville, you know, there's canneries all over. So everyday—we weren't assigned to set cannery so maybe for two months. From camp I went working there. They gave me money. The army fed me. I stuck the money in my pocket. I was a little older than most soldiers, see. I was maybe twenty-two or twenty-three years old. But the other soldiers were only eighteen, nineteen or something, so I was a little wiser to them.

3-00:15:40

Graves:
Were there other Japanese Americans?

3-00:15:40

Oishi:
No, no.

3-00:15:44

Graves:
How did the other soldiers interact with you?

3-00:15:48

Oishi:
Well, maybe some of the soldiers was just like me. We were in the same shoes. We used to go to work at the canneries.

3-00:15:56

Graves:
But you didn't feel any prejudice?

3-00:15:58

Oishi:
No, no.

3-00:16:03

Graves:

So you did that for a few months?

3-00:16:04

Oishi:

Yeah.

3-00:16:04

Graves:

And then what?

3-00:16:05

Oishi:

And then I think they delayed my assignment and then they send it way to Camp Lee, Virginia, across the country, just about fifteen, thirteen of us guys, and one sergeant. Sergeant looked after us. And it must have taken us a week to get to the West Coast. We had all kind of meal tickets—no, we used to eat in the diner, see. We're army. We're government property now, see. We sit in the good chair. We go to the diner and eat—eat whatever you want. [Laughs] Must have taken us a long time, sometimes we were on—maybe we were on a tube train, I'm not sure. They put us on the side in Chicago, we might have stayed a half a day. We go to Cincinnati or some place and stay there, maybe three-quarters of a day. And we had a good time on the meal on. We ate in the dining car. I remember that and we enjoyed that.

3-00:17:10

Graves:

What did you do in Fort Lee?

3-00:17:12

Oishi:

I was assigned to a baking outfit, baking bread. At Fort Lee is a service company, you know, clerks and bakers and cooks. We're not infantrymen. We're not the medics. We're not the field artillery. Service people—easy job. I was lucky I got in there.

3-00:17:41

Graves:

So you learned how to bake bread?

3-00:17:42

Oishi:

Yeah, we had to bake bread in all conditions. Freezing weather, hot weather. We went to work in a camp bakery, station bakery. But most of it was field bakery, we had to learn out in the field.

3-00:18:05

Graves:

How would that differ?

3-00:18:09

Oishi:

Oh, the bakery is—they have a big building and all machinery, done by machinery. But out in the field, you have to get your own flour and make it on the field with a little stove.

3-00:18:25

Graves:

It's funny that at the beginning of the war you were perfecting cooking rice and at the end of the war, you're learning how to be a good bread maker. [Laughs]

3-00:18:31

Oishi:

[Laughs] Yeah, yeah.

3-00:18:34

Graves:

So how were you there learning in the bakery corps?

3-00:18:41

Oishi:

I had to take my, I don't know, my regular army training and then they send me two, three months baking outfit. And then I got my assignment to go overseas. Ooh, Japan. I was lucky. I was happy about it. Then I broke out with mumps. And my group went overseas, the group I was supposed to go over with. Maybe a baker, certain amount of bakers, certain amount of cooks, certain amount of medics and certain amount of infantrymen, you know, that's how the army work. They had to get all assigned and when you first enter. So I missed out on that. I missed out on—my outfit went overseas and I had to stay back.

3-00:19:31

Graves:

Because you were sick?

3-00:19:32

Oishi:

Yeah.

3-00:19:33

Graves:

So you would have been a baker in the occupation of Japan?

3-00:19:37

Oishi:

Yes.

3-00:19:38

Graves:

And what did you think about that?

3-00:19:41

Oishi:

Good. Maybe I can make some money on black market, I don't know. [laughs] No, in August or something, when I first entered the army, I think Pearl Harbor, Nagasaki and Hiroshima was bombed. And maybe in March or something, April or something, Germany gave up, see, I'm not sure.

00:20:11

Graves:

What did you think about Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

00:20:15

Oishi:

Nothing of it. I was American, because I had no knowledge of Japan. I had no knowledge of Japan.

3-00:20:28

Graves:

Was it communicated in the press how incredibly devastating those bombs were?

3-00:20:33

Oishi:

Oh, yes. Oh, it was terrible. Truman's the one—maybe if Roosevelt was living, maybe he wouldn't have done it. Truman was—he just, soon as he got in there. I think Roosevelt died, didn't he? Truman was in there, {inaudible} he dropped the bomb. I'm not sure.

3-00:20:56

Graves:

I can't remember. But so you saw it as a necessary evil?

3-00:21:03

Oishi:

We didn't know what atomic bomb was. No one knew what the atomic bomb was. And then another thing, when I missed my assignment to Japan, I was laying around in Camp Lee, Virginia, doing nothing. Doing nothing in the army, especially for me, was very boring, see. And we didn't have to pick up cigarette butts. We had German prisoners—German prisoners from Europe. They brought them over to the States. Italian prisoners, they had a camp for them in Camp Lee, Virginia. They would do all the dirty work for us in Camp Lee. They would pick up all the cigarette butts. I showed you we'd smoke, we'd throw the cigarette butts away. [laughs] Here come Germans and Italians have to, they pick up all of our cigarettes. They would do all our kitchen work. They'd do all the dirty work for us. I was in a white man's camp, see. There's a German prison camp, Italian prison camp, black camp and a white camp. I had been in the white camp.

3-00:22:19

Graves:

And the Germans and the Italians served you guys.

3-00:22:21

Oishi:

Yeah, {inaudible}. Black did not come and do the dirty work for us.

3-00:22:28

Graves:

Wow. Your life has so many ironies, it's amazing.

3-00:22:32

Washburn:

Tom, will you tell us about riding the buses there and where you sat in Virginia?

3-00:22:38

Oishi:

Oh, yeah. Maybe you won't believe it, I didn't believe it. Virginia is where they fought the Civil War. Civil War was what? Eighteen—, Seventeen—. I don't know when it was.

3-00:22:52

Graves:

1860.

3-00:22:52

Oishi:

1860. See, that's not too old, that's not too far from my days. When we went to Fort Lee, Virginia, we had these fellows from New England states. Our company or our platoon or something, would amount to, I don't know thirty people or fifty people or something. And we had people from the South. Half from there and a few from California. They're fighting, they're fighting about the Civil War. The Yankees and the Rebels. First time I heard this. Yankees and the Rebels, we maybe just read a little bit in the history—civics—in history books. And we didn't think it was that bitter, you know. I thought it was ancient times. But their father and their grandfather was in the Civil War. They're fighting. They dislike one another. And our camp was—throughout it was going on maneuvers and stuff. Major so-and-so died here. So many rebels was killed here. Certain artillery lost so many men. All over camp. Camp Lee, Virginia is a beautiful place. It rains in the summer months and spring, and the rolling hills. It's one of the other prettier places in the summer months. I don't know how it is in the winter months. Nice and green. Here in California, everything turns brown after spring during summer. But in Fort Lee, Virginia, it's awfully beautiful.

3-00:24:35

Washburn:

Tom, when you were off the camp, when you rode the buses, can you describe what the buses were like and where you sat?

3-00:24:44

Oishi:

Oh, the buses in Virginia. Were you ever down south? Virginia, in those days, you had a black toilet, a white toilet. You go in the bus, in those days, the bus is all full—standing room—half of the people are standing up. You know, war years. And all the black has to go to the back. So, hey, one black guy is going to get to on. The guys has to get off the bus, let this one black man go to the back, then go back on the bus. You follow me? I was surprised. I didn't see that in California. When I went to Camp Beale here, blacks and whites were in the same camp. They weren't separated.

3-00:25:42

Graves:

So where did you sit in the bus?

3-00:25:45

Oishi:

I sat in the front. I'm a white man, even though I'm an ex-spy. [Laughs] I was labeled a dangerous Japanese American, can't trust him. That's just like these Arabs. Every one of those guys are suspects. What are they doing to them now? A lot of stuff they're doing to them, they don't come out in the paper, it's there.

3-00:26:16

Graves:

Yeah, they're all being registered.

3-00:26:19

Oishi:

Registered, if they {inaudible}, they're going to lock them up or something. When the Japanese Americans, there's only 100,000 here. You could shove 100,000 do anything you want to 100,000. But you have a million people, it's pretty hard to do anything.

3-00:26:35

Graves:

So is there anything else about Camp Lee you want to—?

3-00:26:38

Washburn:

Was it in Camp Lee that you were assigned to—no, that wasn't there.

3-00:26:430

Graves:

That's in Gilroy.

3-00:26:45

Washburn:

Okay, we can cover that then.

3-00:26:46

Graves:

So after Camp Lee, where did you get sent?

3-00:26:51

Oishi:

Camp Lee, I was laying around, that's the hardest thing to do. I have no assignment—couple of months. So, someone told me, why don't you go to certain office and try to get an assignment. So I went over there. They were {inaudible} in California—Camp {McQuaid}. It's in Watsonville—stockade. What the heck, I want to go there anyway, you know. I went over there. First, they're going to put me at a guard. I don't care, I was on guard duty, live ammunition and everything, I'd done that before. I was going to be a guard. "Shoot to kill!" they said. "Shoot to kill those people! That person gets away, you're going to take his rap if he gets away, you shoot to kill." That was my order.

3-00:27:50

Graves:

And who was in the stockade?

3-00:27:52

Oishi:

The stockade was the court martial people, general court martial people. Now, I'm a guard in the stockade, before I was inside the stockade. That's where I got the word stockade, they called it a stockade. I just {saw on them} they call it, Relocation Center. I told Ruby, "We were not in no Relocation Center, we were in a stockade. We were in the brig." Ooh, they get very upset. They didn't do nothing bad, why should they be in a stockade or brig? They didn't like me.

3-00:28:35

Graves:

It made your family mad when you said that?

3-00:28:36

Oishi:

Yeah. But after we got the \$20,000 they realized what the government really did to them. But I was ahead of them because I went through all that.

3-00:28:50

Washburn:

So did you sympathy when you were assigned to guard the people who were court martialed in the stockade? Did you somehow feel sympathy for their situation?

3-00:29:01

Oishi:

Well, I didn't know this guy could be inside there, maybe he's taking the rap for a sergeant, maybe he's taking the rap for a captain. I didn't know. I'm not going to shoot that man. So I told you, I went up there, I told them the situation I was in. I saw people being shot in the camp that I was in. So they assigned me to the hospital.

3-00:29:24

Graves:

At the stockade?

3-00:29:26

Oishi:

Yeah. But I was in the range, shooting the carbine, shooting the pistol, shooting the M-1. We used to go out in the range every week, you know, shoot—shoot to kill.

3-00:29:42

Graves:

But then, once you were actually out there, you realized you couldn't do that?

3-00:29:44

Oishi:

Yes. I was there until they reassigned me.

3-00:29:50

Graves:

To the hospital?

3-00:29:52

Oishi:

No, from the guard duty. I was a guard at—.

3-00:29:56

Graves:

Right.

3-00:29:56

Oishi:

Then, I told the captain or company commander the situation and he says they need someone in the hospital.

3-00:30:06

Graves:

What did you do at the hospital?

3-00:30:09

Oishi:

At first they wanted me to—. I had a California Drivers' License, they wanted me to drive the truck for them, and get supplies in Monterey. And then they were awfully short of medical help because the venereal disease, syphilis and gonorrhea was new—no, it was always there, but they had no cure for it. In maybe in 1946, spring or something, penicillin came out to our camp. Maybe penicillin was in other camps before that but we didn't get penicillin until the spring of 1946. And we had a whole mess of soldiers that was infected with gonorrhea and syphilis.

3-00:31:08

Graves:

And so you were helping treat them?

3-00:31:10

Oishi:

Yeah. Since it's the brig, the nurse is—you being a nurse, you know, you have your own license, state license from army lieutenant. You just have to make sure that the treatment is being done and they used a guy like me, a PFC, and I had to do all the work.

3-00:31:37

Graves:

So how long were you—is that what you did for the rest of your—?

3-00:31:42

Oishi:

Yeah, and then I think I went there in Camp {McQuaid?} in February or something and I was discharged in December.

3-00:31:56

Graves:

And came back here. So maybe that's what we should cover next time, if there's a next time.

3-00:32:03

Oishi:

And then there was malaria. Malaria was in the hospital. Mostly syphilis, gonorrhea and malaria was our patients. And then the patient was real sick, they would bring him to Fort Leavenworth.

3-00:32:20

Graves:

Wait, I have one more question. So all of these soldiers who you were helping treat—.

3-00:32:26

Oishi:

They were inmates.

3-00:32:28

Graves:

Right, but they had been soldiers, American soldiers, and they'd been out fighting—.

3-00:32:35

Oishi:

Yes, no doubt they were. I'm not sure what they were doing. They were in the Pacific.

3-00:32:39

Graves:

How did they feel about being cared for by a Japanese American man?

3-00:32:45

Oishi:

Well, there's a guard with a gun, so a guy don't like it, "Yeah, this guy maybe, something." Here, I'm giving shots. I poke him, he yells. I know I got him over a {inaudible} because I have a guard there with live ammunition. I do in war zone, see. In war zone. Poke him and maybe the first time I poke him I want to harass the guy. I poke him again. I poke him again. He gets upset. He can't do nothing about it. He gets rough, I call the guards. So he gets to the point where he accepts me. Then next time I go one shot, I poke him, give him the dosage, go out.

3-00:33:39

Graves:

This was everybody or just the people who were—?

3-00:33:41

Oishi:

No, but there was patient like that.

3-00:33:44

Graves:

What do you mean "like that"?

3-00:33:44

Oishi:

No, everybody is different. If you were a patient and I'm a medic and I shoot you and you dislike it, you're afraid, you're timid, I would harass you more, see. But if you accept it, good, one shot, you get the dosage.

3-00:34:02

Graves:

So it didn't have to do with who you were as a Japanese American, it was that you were poking them with needles?

3-00:34:08

Oishi:

Yeah, yeah. So it's—you go to a local hospital, say I'm a nurse in local hospital, they're paying money. There's no guard there. Army is different. There's a different a story altogether in the army.

3-00:34:26

Washburn:

Nobody said anything to you about, you know, "Who are you? Are you Japanese? Are you Chinese?" Did anybody say something like that?

3-00:34:36

Oishi:

Actually, the West Coast, just San Francisco, Los Angeles, major cities in the West Coast, the propaganda came out from the governor's office. So the other part of the United States had no knowledge. They were naïve, they didn't know we were Japanese, they didn't know that we were in camp. They didn't know that we were labeled dangerous, bunch of spies. So when we went east, it was nothing to it. When we go in the army, there was nothing to it. They didn't even know I was in camp.

3-00:35:21

Graves:

I see.

3-00:35:20

Washburn:

So you think most people learned about it after the fact?

3-00:35:25

Oishi:

Well, in the West Coast, it was blasted all over the papers.

3-00:35:28

Graves:

But the people who would have been in that stockade were from everywhere, they weren't just—
?

3-00:35:33

Oishi:

Oh yeah, yeah. When we went back east, they didn't even know that we were in the stockade. Well, the other people call it Relocation Center. When you have guards up there, a company of MPs, they have live ammunition, that's no Relocation Center, that's a stockade. If I was a soldier up there and they give orders shoot to kill, I have to shoot to kill. That's their duty, that's the army.

3-00:36:05

Graves:

Yeah. Well, thank you. So do we have the energy to go look at the house for a little bit or what do you think? Do you have the time? Can we get into your house today?

3-00:36:16

Oishi:

I don't know, I don't know. There's not too much to see in the house.

[End of Interview]