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University of California  
Berkeley, California

Sam Mihara

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Interviews conducted by  
Sam Redman in 2012

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Interview 1: November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012  
Audio file 1

Redman: Today is November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012, and I'm sitting down with Sam Mihara. This is in Berkeley, California for the Japanese American Confinement Site Series of Oral Histories. To begin, Sam, I'd like you simply state your name. And, for the benefit of the transcribers, if you'd spell it out for me as well, that would be beneficial.

1-00:00:32  
Mihara: My full name is Samuel, middle name, Kiyoshi, and last name, Mihara. First name is Samuel. Middle name K-I-Y-O-S-H-I. And my last name is spelled M-I-H-A-R-A. Most people call me Sam.

Redman: Great. And your date of birth, Sam?

1-00:00:53  
Mihara: I was born in February 1st, 1933.

Redman: Great. And you don't have to worry about the camera. You can look at me. That'll be fine.

1-00:00:59  
Mihara: Okay.

Redman: And now to begin, I'd like to ask a little bit about your family. In particular, questions of your family's immigration story and how that relates in particular to something we were talking a little bit about yesterday, which is the Asian Exclusion Acts of the 1920s. So can you talk a little bit about how your family arrived in the United States?

1-00:01:23  
Mihara: Sure. Really, there's two parts to the family. There's the father's side and the mother's side. On the father's side, we're seventh generations, at least, that's the record, goes that far back, in a large island across from Hiroshima, Japan. Grandpa, Grandfather Mihara, was the first to come over around 1900. He came ahead of the rest of the family. The reason he came was similar to other reasons, other peoples' reasons, which is the economic hardship in Japan at that time, and they wanted a better life, so they joined the many immigrants at that time. So grandfather came over around 1900 first. And then, later on, about 1920-ish, his wife, my grandmother, and my father and siblings came during that time.

My father had just finished university in Japan, so he was ready to get on with his career, which is in the writing business. He wanted to write for a newspaper, so he came over with his mother. So my grandmother, my father,

and the siblings came over around 1920. Then, after that, dad found a job with a newspaper in San Francisco.

And after that, in 1924, there was the Alien Exclusion Act which prohibited further immigrants from Asia to come across into the US. The one exception being—the people who were here who wanted wives to get married and raise a family, the women were allowed to come across and also become part of the family. They were called “Picture Brides” and they corresponded by sending pictures of themselves. I know several families who have mothers who were picture brides during this time, after 1924.

My dad came over here, found a job, and then he met his future bride, my mother, in San Francisco, just about one block away. They got married. Then my brother was born in 1931, and I was born in San Francisco in 1933.

Redman: I wonder if you could talk a little bit about— one aspect of this that I’d like you to touch on is a little bit about the newspaper your grandfather worked at. But I’d like you to tell me a little bit about what Japantown in San Francisco would have been like in that era. In particular, what your parents’ community might have been like when you first came into the world and when your brother came into the world? What was their life like in that day?

1-00:04:50

Mihara: Well, Japantown, like many ethnic communities, was a core portion of San Francisco where many of the immigrants from Japan came. They felt very comfortable being amongst people that they know and they can speak the language. There were small stores, mom and pop stores, even special educational locations where they were taught the Japanese language. So typically, the youngsters would go to the American schools during the day, and after the regular school, they would go to Japanese school to learn the Japanese language. Or possibly during the weekend, when there was more time. So that continued for quite a bit. Those of who were born here in the US almost had two cultures going on at the same time, in parallel. We were learning the American system and the values of America, and then, at the same time, learning about Japan, and the language. So it was a challenging time.

Redman: One of the things that you’d mention in sort of that dual existence was Boys’ Day and Girls’ Day. I wonder if you could explain what those events were and what your recollections of those events might be.

1-00:06:13

Mihara: The Boys’ Day, Girls’ Day event is very historic in Japan. Almost like in the US, we honor the Birth of Christ on Easter and we celebrate Christmas. To that extent, in Japan, they have a celebration for all boys, all families with boys, and girls a separate date. Many of you may recall seeing these paper

kites flying in front of homes sometimes during this day, and that symbolizes that family has a boy inside and they're celebrating a Boys' Day. That's where that symbol came from, these papers kites flying in front of the houses. And we celebrated that like most people. They would gather a collection of dolls and things that are masculine, like samurai figurines and swords and things of that nature, and display them. Then there'd be a special celebration, a meal, and invite our friends who were all boys. That event would take place once a year.

Redman: Tell me a little bit about what you remember about your grandfather's personality and then a little bit about your father's personality.

1-00:07:41

Mihara: Well, that's an interesting question. They really did not talk too much about their feelings and what they felt about the environment, the situation being Japanese in America. Both my father and my grandfather were very outgoing type people relative to other Japanese. They communicated quite well with others. Dad being in the newspaper business, almost, it was essential that he be able to communicate. He enjoyed meeting people and interviewing them and try to learn about them. And grandfather, he did not have the training. He was not university trained, so his skills were more of a manual skills, and he worked as a laborer in different kinds of industries. But he was still an outgoing type of a person. He liked to meet people and help people a lot. That's typical of the Mihara side of the family.

Redman: I'd like to hear also about the women in the family and then, maybe when you were a kid, a little bit about what was expected of the women say, around the house, or what sort of their roles were in the family, if you would.

1-00:09:12

Mihara: During that time, most women, maybe not even unique to Japanese families, they were pretty much relegated to providing a lot of domestic labor work in the house. They had to take care of the house, they had to provide for meals. They had to literally raise the kids because usually the father in the home was off to work. That was no different than our family. Dad went off to work and mom had to take care of the family and the kids. I can remember being disciplined more by my mother because she was around all the time watching me. When I misbehaved, she had the duty to make sure I knew it was wrong. I would say, perhaps, it's typical of women all over the world they had that responsibility during those days, when women had to be responsible for domestic affairs.

Redman: Now you would have been born into, in many respects, the depths of the Depression. I wonder if your parents talked at all when you were young, or if you sort of gathered later on anything about the impact of the Depression, if that was felt at all, or if that was a major component of life growing up.

1-00:10:48

Mihara:

Well, I knew that the Depression was a severe thing. In a way, it was fortunate in my dad's business, being in the newspaper. The newspaper did not close because of the Depression. So he had a job during the time all the way up to the war.

Redman:

And which newspaper was he working for?

1-00:11:08

Mihara:

It was called *New World Sun*. It was a bilingual newspaper. They had a Japanese section and an English section. My dad eventually became the editor of the newspaper, so he was pretty responsible for everything that went into the paper. Partly because of his background, he was trained as a Journalist and as an English major in college in Japan. So he was trained for that job, basically.

Redman:

I wonder if you could talk a little bit about school, early school. I understand that you went to the Raphael Weill School in Japantown. But I wonder if maybe you could tell me, for someone who wasn't able to go to that school in the 1930s, if you could set the stage a little bit, of what that was like.

1-00:12:02

Mihara:

Raphael Weill is kind of an interesting school in the respect that, by geography, a lot of schools in San Francisco were pretty much segregated. We had almost all white schools in the west side called the Sunset or Richmond District. That's where the Caucasians usually lived. Then we had a Chinatown and there was a school for Chinese kids. American school for Chinese kids. In particular, Japantown, we were a very diverse neighborhood from the start. We didn't have to wait until events happen to take place, after Martin Luther King, that integration took place, but we were already well diversified. And one reason for that is, during the War, when we left San Francisco, a lot of laborers came into San Francisco to work on the Shipyards and the defense plants. They were multicultural. There were blacks who came from the South, there were other ethnic groups who came in and occupied our neighborhood. So when we came after the War, returned back to San Francisco, the schools were already quite integrated. So it wasn't surprising that even during the late 30s, when I went at grammar school, we had a nice mixture of various people. And that's what happened.

Redman:

There's some really, now iconic, photographs that have been taken, especially by Dorothea Lange, of the school and the environment and the faces of the children especially. I wondered now when you look at those images, you used those images to talk about the incarceration experience and the story of your family. But I wonder now, when you look back at the elementary school days, and the pictures of the faces, what sort of feelings and reactions or memories that that solicits.



1-00:14:22

Mihara:

That's an interesting question. I never really thought about the fact that we were diverse and we had this mixture of cultures. Since I was growing up in that neighborhood, it just felt very comfortable and normal to see various people of various backgrounds. It wasn't a case of asking, "Where are you from?" and "What's your background?" inquiring about peoples' different cultures. It's just normal situation. These are friends. We work together, we study together, and live in the same neighborhood, and we really did not discuss too much about our cultural differences.

Redman:

Do you think that those early experiences, being in an integrated school, gave you maybe a different perspective on race in any way, than other people of your generation?

1-00:15:24

Mihara:

That's a good question. Probably, compared to many other people, we were perhaps more sensitive and more tolerant to having a diverse community and people living and working together. So we really felt uncomfortable with the situation, for example in the South, where there was such a strong racial prejudice against the blacks, or in certain parts of California even, where there was a strong prejudice against people of Latino background. We almost didn't understand how people could take such an attitude because of the way we were raised in such a close-knit community. It was quite foreign to us to see people having such a strong racial prejudice in America. We're not used to that.

Redman:

So, in many ways it allows you to take certain aspects of a diverse America for granted in a way that other individuals who may have gone to those very segregated schools may not have had that same type of experience, it sounds like.

1-00:16:42

Mihara:

Right. I think throughout all of my education, high school, even here at Berkeley, we just did not experience the kind of racial problems that existed in many other parts of the country. So it was very comfortable for us to just continue life as it should be. Very comfortable talking, communicating with people of various backgrounds.

Redman:

I'll ask two more questions about early school. One more about photographs and then one about school in general. Your wife of many years is featured in a very iconic Dorothea Lange image. I wonder if you might comment. Now many years later, when you see that image, when your wife sees that image, what sorts of feelings or emotions that now solicits given the fact that it's been a heavily reproduced image. It's used in textbooks and museum exhibits and documentaries. Do you have a special relationship at all to that particular

image or do you see that as a collection of your school day images that bring you back to that time?

1-00:17:53

Mihara:

Well, whenever I see the photograph, it reminds me of exactly that period in our life when we were very, very loyal. We were taught to be loyal to the United States. There wasn't a question of being disloyal at all. Even though it was routine, every morning we would pledge allegiance. The real meaning of that comes through as we became adults and then see in the photograph, the degree of loyalty we have towards this country. As a result, we just did not understand why the government would have such hatred against us, especially accusing us of being disloyal. It didn't make sense to us at all. But that photograph reminds me as well as many other people of the fact that we were taught to be loyal to the US. So that was very, very important.

Redman:

I wonder if you have anything else to add. We could go on and on about elementary school. But do you have anything else to add about your elementary school day experiences?

1-00:19:18

Mihara:

Well, there was nothing special that I recall about the school itself. We were all taught to keep trying hard and try to get the best possible education. I guess exactly what was taught is kind of foggy in my mind, but I do remember that the parents especially kept instilling in us the values of getting a very good education. It was very important to the future of our careers to do that.

Redman:

My next major question is generally about Pearl Harbor. But before I ask about December 7, 1941, I wonder if you could set the stage a little for what Japanese American life was like immediately before Pearl Harbor, especially with potential growing tensions between the governments of Japan and the United States.

1-00:20:20

Mihara:

That's an interesting question. Being at that time I was nine years old, on December 7, 1941, and I was doing my best to try to learn in school and that being a Sunday, I remember going to a theater, a movie, about two blocks away from Japantown. When the movie was over, we came out in the streets and I can clearly remember the newspaper headlines. You know, "the Japs Attack Pearl Harbor", and thinking to myself, "What on earth is going on? Why would they do that?" As soon as I got home, I enquired of my parents, "What happened?" and "Why?" And I can remember they could not answer. They couldn't figure out why they could not do such a thing. We were pretty much caught off-guard with this particular event. And dad's immediate reaction, by the way, was "My god, we're going to be accused of being sympathizers with the Japanese government. We must be very, very careful about this." I remember, as one example, of almost paranoia about concern for

the US Government finding evidence that maybe he was closely allied to the government of Japan. He got all his records— since he was in the newspaper business, he had many articles. He had a large library in the house. He had photographs. He had a movie camera. He took films of lots of things in San Francisco area. And I can remember, he lit up the fireplace and he burned everything. It was running twenty four hours a day. He was burning books, photographs. As a result, a lot of the photographic records that we had of those days prior to the Pearl Harbor event, they're gone. He destroyed them for fear that the government would catch him and accuse him of being a collaborator with Japan. Those are the events that I remember in our family, that we were very, very concerned the government would come after us as being sympathizers with the government of Japan.

Redman: Now, it sounds, from learning a little bit about your family and your family friends, that those fears of government observation, government direct intervention into your life were not unfounded. In that the example of Reverend Fukuda and his family, for instance. I wonder if maybe you can talk a little bit about your family's knowledge of that situation and maybe how that fear of the government actually taking an interest in those types of materials, say a movie camera or things in Japanese, is a very real fear, it seems.

1-00:23:44

Mihara: It certainly existed at the time. And I can remember, for example, the agents from the FBI came into our neighborhood and came into our homes without a warrant and entered in, did a search, and confiscated anything that might be suspicious. That included any photographic equipment, any records of photography being taken that might be critical to the defense effort. All cameras, All weapons. All knives. They just came out and removed all these items.

Redman: So you remember that event.

1-00:24:30

Mihara: I remember that very clearly. Yes, yes.

Redman: What reaction does a young boy have to that? How does that feel?

1-00:24:36

Mihara: Well, it was just shocking. "Why would they do that?" I wasn't old enough to understand my rights and question whether they should even come in the house. But they did. My recollection was, they were very forceful about it and it was a very disturbing event that took place.

Redman: I wonder then, can you describe a little bit more about the experience of some of the other families in your neighborhood in those immediate weeks after Pearl Harbor. It seems like the community itself was going through these types of intense experiences and having to try to project what their life was

going to be like as the conflict grew. What were people's responses? How did families react to this?

1-00:25:40

Mihara:

The community knew instantly, instantly, within hours, that the government agents were rounding up these so-called "high risk, suspicious people." They were either community leaders, like Reverend Fukuda or they were people who were somehow tied-in financially to organizations that supposedly provided financial aid to the Japanese government. Although that was not the case in our family, we knew several others, like the Nakamoto family that I talk about whose father owned the grocery. The FBI had confiscated some records of a social organization, a club where they took up membership dues and they found out that some of the money were being shipped off to Japan, and that was enough reason to round-up all the people who made contributions towards this organization. And so we had community leaders, we had local business people, anyone who possibly could be related to Japan, were quickly rounded-up. And we all knew that, so we knew that this activity, if it continued, someday, we may be all subject to being imprisoned, which happened. It took awhile. We didn't know it at the time, but there was an issue within the government as to whether or not this mass removal of the Japanese people in Japantown, or along the West Coast, would take place. It was really a surprise to us.

Redman:

I wonder if we could talk about the role of the local media in shaping the perceptions of the Japanese and maybe compare and contrast a little bit the English newspapers to the Japanese and Japanese American newspapers.

1-00:27:51

Mihara:

I don't recall the Japanese papers. I don't read a lot of Japanese. But I remember the English papers were very, very bad. They created these headlines that were obviously racial in nature. They labeled us as either Japs or equivalent to the word Japs, a very, very derogatory name to most of us who feel that—

Redman:

I wonder if this isn't—

1-00:28:28

Mihara:

—it's not appropriate.

Redman:

—a terribly pleasant topic, but I wonder if for the benefit for the record, we could get out there just some of the terms that were—

1-00:28:37

Mihara:

I don't remember seeing all the other terms, but I've read about the terminology used. And the word nips, N-I-P-S. It was used frequently. Phrases like "The Yellow Devils". We were called yellow, by the way, we're not yellow, but that was an interesting name they gave us. So those terms were

used and the intention was obvious. The media having such headlines would be able to gain by adding more subscribers and more people listening and watching the newspapers. So the media were very strong in creating more of this hysteria around the area and that caused a lot of problems for us.

Redman: So it seems like there was a widespread fear, and now I'm talking about predominantly Anglo Americans at this point, about— and this sort of hysteria that you'd mentioned, and then specifically fears of espionage. The presumption that everybody is a spy or people of a certain age, or people that have certain kinds of camera equipment must be a spy or an espionage of some sort. Can you talk a little bit about that perception of being labeled a potential spy and how maybe some of the ridiculousness of that assumption on a young boy or the elderly?

1-00:30:06

Mihara: I was too young to fully understand such accusations. After I grew up, I learned more about the history of what happened. It started really with not only the media, but others in businesses that had a possibility of a financial gain by our removal, had promoted this forced-removal from our neighborhoods. It just created a really difficult problem for us in the area.

Redman: So early in 1942, notices are posted around Japantown and elsewhere, and certain kinds of new laws and rules are placed on the Japanese, including curfews, exclusion zones, registration, and removal. I wonder if maybe you could talk a little bit about your recollection of any those things, personally or how those things may have affected your family and any other thoughts on how those sorts of new restrictions were affecting others in your community. First, I'd like to hear about you though, then build out from there, if that's all right.

1-00:31:30

Mihara: Well, I can recall the curfew because our parents told us as soon as the signs went up, that we have this curfew condition in San Francisco between eight o'clock at night and six o'clock in the morning and we were instructed not to go outside our homes, be sure to be in our homes. And it was in law that if we were caught violating these rules that were punishable as a federal crime. So I can remember that we were not allowed to do that, go outside. All of these rules. the exclusion zone is— within the city, around the Japanese neighborhood, there were certain streets that were identified as "invisible fence" and the police were patrolling to make sure we were not going outside. It was an obvious reason that, in San Francisco, if you climbed on top of a hill outside our neighborhood, since we were kind of in a valley, a little hollow there in San Francisco, you climbed on top of a hill, almost any hill, you can see the ships going in and out of the harbor. And so they had us constrained within our neighborhood as far as that goes.

And the third point is that the registration— there were several purposes on the registration. One, they wanted to know who's who. Who lives in the neighborhood, what's their address, and get that on record. How many members in the family, and so forth. And the other thing they tried to do was they tried to keep our families together. That is, they knew that we were going to camp and being removed, so they tried to find entire families who are related to each other to stay together as we were shipped off to camp. In our case, it did not happen that way. Our family was literally split in two. So we each went our different ways during the removal process.

Redman: Can you just briefly outline for me the details of that split? Which part of the family goes to Heart Mountain? And then another part of the family goes to Topaz?

1-00:34:01

Mihara: Sure. There's no reason for this, but my father, my mother, our family, my grandparent's on the father's side, and one uncle and aunt, went to Heart Mountain. The rest of the family on the mother's side, grandma, grandpa, and two of her sisters, went to Utah, a different camp. And we had no understanding as to why they would do that because theoretically we were still supposed to be together.

So anyway, it happened. In fact, San Francisco was broken-up into many pieces. Even by different block, they were assigned to different camps and so that's why the San Franciscans who went to camp were located in different camps throughout the US.

Redman: Was that an aspect of the experience that was particularly hard on any family members, to be split from other family? Or was that something that, given the whole range of the challenges that this experience presented, saying goodbye to your family for this set amount of time was less noticed, or was that a very painful part of the experience?

1-00:35:16

Mihara: Well, it was painful. The extent to which the pain existed, I don't remember because I wasn't old enough. But I'm quite certain my parents were very distressed about seeing the fact that part of the family's going somewhere else. And none of us were told where we were going. We had no idea. They simply said, "Show up. You will be under guard at the buses and trains and board at the specific time and place." They would not tell us where we were going. They kept it a big secret, so we had no idea what clothing we should take with us. We don't know what the environment would be like, or how far away we would be. Very difficult.

Redman: I want to ask about when your family went to the assembly center. But before that, I'd like to hear what preparations were necessary for the family before

reporting to— the process that you just described, being under-guard and being put on buses and trains. But what preparations were necessary before that time to get, say, the house ready and the furnishings?

1-00:36:27

Mihara:

The government gave instructions on what to do with our property, our household furnishings, and taking care of any other affairs needed before the move. So they started out by saying, “You will be limited to one carryon, period, When you board these buses or trains.” So typically one suitcase or one possession. That was a dilemma as to what to pack because we didn’t know what type of clothing would be needed wherever we were going. And as far as furnishing goes, the government promised that they would store the household goods, the furnishings, and take care of it while we were gone. And when we returned someday, it would all be returned back to us, which turned out to be completely false because they were not well taken care of. We put all our furniture outside by the street and a moving company came by, picked everything up one day, and the residences were left empty. Some families were able to find a caretaker for their apartments or houses. In our case, fortunately, dad was able to find some families to literally move-in and take care of our property. So he did not lose our property, which is not the case for many, many families. Financially, it was a very difficult time because he wasn’t able to get the income that he wanted to pay-off the mortgage. But He was able to survive, and therefore, fortunately, in our case, we were able to move back in to the same house we lived in, which is not the case for many, many families, who had to have a sale of their property at depressed prices. So it was difficult for a lot of people.

Redman:

So tell me, then, a little about— we saw some pictures during your presentation of going to the buses and leaving in waves, a section, a group of people would leave at any one time and waving each other off to the assembly center from San Francisco. What are your memories as a young boy of that day, if you have any at all?

1-00:39:13

Mihara:

I can remember the armed military. That you don’t forget. And they were escorting us from our homes, getting on the buses. And once we were on the bus, they were with us. Whenever we stopped, they would step outside the bus and watch us. The armed forced-removal constantly stayed with us until we got into the camp and, of course, at the camps, they were very heavily fortified and defended and lots of military police, military armed guards there. So we were not allowed to leave on our own at all.

Redman:

This is a question where I’ll ask you to jump ahead a little in your thinking, if that’s all right. Can you talk about the relationship or the nonexistent relationship and just feelings you might have had towards the armed guards throughout your time? Both between the initial movement to the assembly

center being under armed guard, and then later, seeing the towers. Was there any interaction between say, the kids and these guards or was that so off-limits and there was a sort of this blank perspective on who this individual might be? Or how did that came about?

1-00:40:48

Mihara:

We really did not communicate with them very much. I remember, once we got on the train, which is between the assembly center and Heart Mountain, Wyoming, which was about a three day trip, the guards came through immediately when we were boarded and they said "Pull the shades down, You're not allowed to look outside. And therefore, we don't want people outside looking in, into the train." And I can remember all the shades coming down. Some of my buddies kind of peeked out the shade to see where we were at. That's about the only interaction we had with the guards. As long as the train was moving, of course, they kind of stayed away and we didn't see them at all. But whenever we stopped, the guards were the first to get out of the train. Once in a while, we stopped and stretched our legs or something. But we were allowed to leave the train at some [stations]. And the guards would then surround the entire area while we were stopped to make sure we don't go beyond their posted positions. But other than that, there was very little communications with these guards.

Redman:

Let's talk about the assembly center. To clarify, which assembly center was your family taken to?

1-00:42:13

Mihara:

Our family went to Pomona, California, which is a state fairground, which included a racetrack. So we went from San Francisco to Pomona as our first camp.

Redman:

Can you tell me about the living conditions at that camp?

1-00:42:30

Mihara:

Pomona is typical of many of these assembly centers. The conditions were absolutely horrible. The first group who went in were forced to live in horse stalls because that's the only facility because that's the only facility that was available at the time. And the conditions were absolutely terrible. They attempted to try to clean up the horse stalls. Gave it fresh paint and they covered the floors with some sort of a covering, I don't remember the details. But I've talked to several people who were forced to live under that condition. The government provided large sacks for a mattress and we were instructed to stuff it with hay. So they had hay feed for the horses in piles and they made mattresses out of hay in these bags. That was their furnishings for living inside these stalls. Fortunately, in our case, we were one of the group who arrived after all of the stalls were filled. So by the time we got to Pomona, they quickly built these barracks. Some people called it shacks, a temporary



structure to house us. It was very, very rudimentary. Paper-thin walls, uninsulated, and you can hear all your neighbors and all the problems that they have. The conditions were terrible. Wall-to-wall cots for sleeping. Very little room for moving around. We lived there for about four months before we went to Heart Mountain.

Redman: My next question was going to be about the mood of the family at this time. You got at that a little bit, but I wonder if you could elaborate on the mood of the family.

1-00:44:50

Mihara: We really did not talk too much about the situation. Certainly, we did not talk about why the government is doing this, but we were all concerned. “What’s going to happen to us? What will they do to us?” There were even some rumors that “They’re going to ship us off to some place and create such a difficult condition, we may not be able to survive at all.” We were just very worried about what was going to happen to us.

And yet, very few people complained. They almost accepted the government’s decision to do this. Part of the reason being the culture of the first-generation people who were taught in Japan that “The government is always right. Obey what the government decides and don’t challenge, don’t question it.” With that culture, it was difficult for the first-generation people to express themselves and voice a complaint that this is incorrect. Really, they did not know much about the constitutional rights that people in the US have. And they certainly did not know that being American-born, as a second-generation, we had these rights that were deprived during this time. They really didn’t express their mood in way of complaints about the situation and taking a position against this move, forced-move, at all.

Redman: Was there any attempt by parents to shelter children from certain aspects of this experience or was it sort of impossible to keep children from— despite the confusion of comprehension maybe, to be witness to this entire experience? Or was there any way that parents could shield kids from some of this?

1-00:46:59

Mihara: I don’t remember there being any attempts to shield us from the environment or the circumstances. Not even discussing why. I don’t remember that they even talked about why they were doing this. Maybe it’s because being a Japanese extraction, and with Japan causing the start of the war in Pearl Harbor, maybe they felt some degree of, perhaps, responsibility for the situation. But the bottom-line is, they just didn’t complain. They just felt, “We have to do what the government tells us to do” and that was it.

Redman: My last question on this tape is, we talked about the train ride between the assembly center and Heart Mountain. I wonder if you could elaborate on that process and that experience for you of moving from the assembly centers to Heart Mountain.

1-00:48:01

Mihara: Well, that's a really interesting question. I did not talk about that too much in the speech. The government just arranged for the train companies to provide a train, a conventional train that goes from point to point. And it included lots of coach class cars. Hard benches literally, with no beds. Sitting in a sitting position for the entire three days was very difficult. To feed us, they had the regular dining car. And in those days, the dining cars were kind of a special treat for people, especially after the camp food that we had at Pomona. We were given a menu and there were all kinds of nice dishes on this menu. I can remember that. But at the same time, my parents said, "Don't just order anything you see on there because we don't have that much money" because they were charging us like ordinary passengers on a train. I remember we were constrained as far as what we could order based upon the price that was listed on the menu. But the interesting thing is, the porters, the helping hands on the trains, especially in the dining car, had expected tips from the passengers. And we didn't have much money, so we became famous as the train passengers who don't tip on this prison trip ride to the camps. I remember the train people had passed the word on, "Beware of these people who are going on these camps. They don't tip very much." But other than that, very boring, very tedious, very difficult ride until we finally got to Heart Mountain.

Redman: Maybe I will ask one additional question on this tape which is if you could describe for me the layout of Heart Mountain when you arrived, and then just a little bit about how it was growing at that time in terms of the camp facilities.

1-00:50:34

Mihara: Sure, I might step back for a moment and simply point out, many people ask the question, "Why did they pick these locations? What's so unique about Heart Mountain and other locations like Utah, Colorado, Arizona?" The government wanted to have locations that were number one, government-owned. So it had to be not a question of having to transfer ownership from private property to government. There was no right of Eminent Domain by taking over a property. The second thing is, it had to be near water source because they knew water was essential. You have to drink. You have to take care of bathing. And the third thing is, it had to be near a railroad siding because the railroads were the only way to move this massive number of people, some ten thousand people over the matter of a few weeks, to relocate. So they went through and then selected the locations of the camps. And of course, it had to be away from the West Coast. And so all these properties that

are in these middle, the western states, but east of the western states were selected.

I'm sorry, the question?

Redman: About the nature of the camp when you arrived and how it was growing a little bit. Sort of the physical space.

1-00:52:05

Mihara: The space, yeah. When we arrived at Heart Mountain, we arrived on that train and a siding. The layout was a fairly large compound, large area, surrounded by barbed wire fences. And there were guard towers, nine guard towers, and was manned with military guards with weapons. And we got on a truck. I remember the back of this Army— Army trucks. They packed us in the back and I remember carrying our single suitcase, loading up the backs of the trucks, and going through the main gate. And there was an intermediate stop for a quick physical exam to make sure that we're healthy enough, otherwise we would have been diverted to the hospital that was in the camp. But beyond that, we went straight into each of the assigned blocks and within each block. There were barracks, twenty four barracks per block. And thirty blocks, all told.

Based on the size of our family, we were assigned each room— one room per family. Our family of four was in what we called a “middle sized room”, which was twenty by twenty. Some rooms were a little bit larger. The twenty six by twenty rooms were for larger families, up to seven people. And if you had more than seven, they would then allow two rooms, so that was the magic point.

When we got there, we walked in the rooms and it was almost empty. It was just a bare room. There were— there was like a typical Army cot, not very comfortable, but one cot per person. So in our room, there were four cots. In the corner, there was a stove, a coal-fired stove, a pot belly stove, and in the middle of the room, on the ceiling, there was one light bulb, and that's it. Nothing else. No other facilities, no running water, there's no toilets. And then we learned that there's a community toilet. In our case, it was about a half a block away, and there was a community mess hall, a feeding location with a kitchen. And that was it. That was our home. Quickly, we tried to learn to become accustomed to what this new environment is going to be like. But that—

Redman: Pretty Spartan

1-00:55:03

Mihara: — was our—

Redman: Pretty Spartan conditions, it sounds like.

1-00:55:05

Mihara: Very, very Spartan. And the density of the number of people being housed in one room for those many years combined with the barbed wire fences and the military guards and the weapons pointed toward us, and the degree of concentration of the living conditions, and the bad weather, in Wyoming especially— that winter being minus twenty eight degrees was just terrible— clearly, those conditions would bring it under the definition of the phrase, “A concentration camp” and that’s what it was called by most people who went there.

## Audiofile 2

Redman: This is Sam Redman back for my second tape with Sam Mihara for the Japanese American Confinement Site Series, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012. When we left off, we were talking about what life was like at Heart Mountain. And I wonder if one of things that you in your study of life in confinement camps during the war, if maybe you could elaborate a little for me about Heart Mountain and how it may have been different than the other camps and the degree to which there was any communication or sense of differences between each camp and the different experiences that people were going through, maybe, either via letter writing or communication. Maybe you could use this as an opportunity to tell me a little bit about how the family in different camps may have been in touch. Or not, if that was the case.

2-00:01:02

Mihara: Well, there was a clear difference between the two types of camps as soon as we arrived. The facilities at Heart Mountain were more of a community type of an environment. For example, there were no horse stalls in Heart Mountain. There were all identical barracks. Each barrack room was a little bit larger than the confined room that we had at Pomona. They were better organized because, for example, in the food service area, the food preparation and the mess halls— it was more organized with one feeding facility per block, or technically it’s half a block every twelve barracks. And so we had our dedicated mess halls and a separate set of cooks and helpers preparing the food for that half a block.

Redman: One of things that you pointed out in your presentation that was very interesting is the necessity for a police force on the camp. And one of the reasons for the necessities of the police force was (you may have been a little tongue-in-cheek about this but it may have been a very real, lived experience) is that some of the cooks were better than the other cooks. And especially given the limited food considerations, where I believe you started off on a diet

of simply bread and potatoes before, ultimately, maybe a little bit more of a diverse diet comes in. But maybe you could tell a little bit more about food and eating and how that would play out on a day-to-day basis.

2-00:03:05

Mihara:

The food, like you mentioned, I can recall at the start was just terrible. The camp administrators had absolutely no idea as to what we were accustomed to eating. They ordered things that we just did not eat. Typical bread and potatoes, like you mentioned. We're not used to bread and potatoes in those days. We liked our rice, we liked fresh vegetables, and an occasional— a meat of some type, some protein, like perhaps a small piece of chicken, or maybe a little bit of meat to go along with the rest of the meal. But with this terrible menu of bread and potatoes, we just simply complained that "We're not used to that."

And we gave the administrators the request that we raise our own veggies. We arranged to have irrigation canals finished and created farms. There were some local experts in farming in Wyoming because very few people in the camp knew how to raise vegetables in that terrible environment. They have a growing season of three months. In California, we have it almost year-round. So with these limitations, we still had to learn how to raise these crops during the critical time of the year. We succeeded. These farms grew up and we had much better food as a result. Still not as desirable as we were used to, but still it was better than what it used to be. So that's an example of the kind of work that was accomplished to make life more livable in the camp.

Redman:

I wonder if you could talk a little bit about— as life becomes as regular or as normal as it could possibly be in these situations, that some aspects of— familiar aspects of American life start to reappear and maybe reinvented, you might say, within the confines of the camp. And you'd mentioned Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, sporting events, and ice skating as some of them. I wonder if first we could talk about those before I ask about other types of things that were going on the camp. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and Sports— why were those things important in the camp?

2-00:06:02

Mihara:

Interesting question.

First, we had a lot of time on our hands [laughter] outside of school. We really wanted to have some degree of entertainment that we could occupy our time with. The Boy Scout/Girl Scout Movement was very strong in the camp because here's something that you can join, you can learn about new skills, learn about relating to other people, and that became extremely important in the camp.

Then, the sports was almost a byproduct of the school systems because we had a high school that the residents themselves built after we got there. And the high school sports programs were very popular. In fact, some of the sports teams from outside the camp came into the camp. So we played football and basketball and baseball inside the camp where the opposing teams came from the surrounding neighborhoods. It was very popular. It was something to do, something to look out for, and everyone seemed to have enjoyed.

Redman: Many historians have commented that the appearance of baseball and the proliferation of baseball leagues especially point to an aspect of heavily Americanized culture. The symbolism of baseball as, of course, being an American game, but it's very popular amongst Japanese. And now, today, it's very popular in Japan. I wonder if those things were taken for granted and not thought of as being this very sophisticated symbol, but if instead it was just something that boys do, or girls do to pass the time. To what extent do you feel like this was intended to be a symbolic construction of American life in the camp? And to what extent is it just a taken for granted activity as, like you said, "We need to kill time"?

2-00:08:23

Mihara: You know, I think it was more of the latter. There wasn't any particular social aspect that we were pursuing. It was just primarily entertainment. We wanted to kill the time with something that was interesting and useful and developing skills and watching the young people develop their sports skills was something that we all enjoyed. It was nothing more than that— simply a form of entertainment and skill-development during that time.

Redman: I wonder— I missed a question a moment ago about eating. One of things that you mentioned was that the setting of the mess hall, the community space for eating, in many respects, disrupts a major aspect of Japanese culture. It's a major disruption of the Japanese American social experience. Tell me about why that's the case, why eating is so important in Japanese American culture, and why that mess hall environment disrupted many of the traditional cultural norms.

2-00:09:30

Mihara: Right. When you have a gathering of people in a mess hall, you can imagine we weren't forced to sit at tables together as a family. The youngsters kind of congregated amongst their friends, the parents got together with their friends. The family environment became really disrupted by going into these camps, and to some extent, a lot of parents felt they lost control of the family culture. The communication started to break down. The parents lost control of the youngsters. And there was a lot of concern about that. So much so that some families elected not to eat in the mess halls, but to— like take-out food, they would collect the food from the mess hall, take it back to their rooms, and eat in the privacy of their own room as a family unit to try to keep together the

family during camp. I remember, in our case, maybe my dad and mother wasn't so concerned about it, so we always ate in the mess hall. We didn't have to go taking our food back to the rooms. I know in many cases, there were some families who were concerned about that environment.

Redman: Could we talk about bathing and personal hygiene and why that was so important, and the distinct form that that takes, then, in the concentration camps?

2-00:11:12

Mihara: In the Japanese culture, this may seem strange for people who're not familiar with it, but bathing is almost a religion. And frequent bathing is almost a religion. Having a private facility for maintaining your cleanliness and keeping your body clean is very important. And all of a sudden, we're thrust into this environment where there's a communal bathroom, communal showers with no tubs that we're used to, and latrines that were about ten in a row, if you can imagine ten toilet seats without any walls and everybody just sitting down and doing their business. It was uncomfortable and very embarrassing, especially for women. They weren't used to that at all. In some cases, there were some women who insisted going to the toilet in the dead of night to avoid being seen by someone else [laughter]. It just was a disruption of the style of maintaining cleanliness that we weren't used to at all.

Redman: Could you talk about the innovation of bedpans and why that was necessary in Heart Mountain?

2-00:12:36

Mihara: When we got there— That winter, we got there late in year, and that winter set a new record at Heart Mountain, a temperature record. Minus twenty eight degrees Fahrenheit. Minus twenty eight degrees Fahrenheit for two days in a row, two nights in a row and a wind speed of fifty miles an hour. And no one, no one wanted to go outdoors and walk a half a block, and especially at night, under those conditions. So we had to create bedpans. And the innovative way to create a bedpan is to have used containers, these tin cans from the mess halls, and create little bedpans for our night activities, for restroom. I can remember because I had the duty of cleaning the bedpans in the morning. [Laughter] That's just an example of the conditions that we were facing at that time.

Redman: I wonder if you could talk a little bit about— one of the things that you had mentioned was the idea of not knowing what the conditions would be like, especially weather-wise, and then also, too, having a bunch of San Franciscans being shipped off to the middle of Wyoming. Very different weather conditions. One of the responses to this is buying new clothing. In order to do this, you needed to shop through catalogs. I wonder, could you tell— students of this generation who are hearing this are unfamiliar with how

catalogs, a Sears Catalog would work. Tell me how in the camp setting that that process would go about.

2-00:14:30  
Mihara:

Well, we had no alternative. There was no department stores. There were no shopping centers. We weren't even— at the first, we were not allowed to go into town for shopping.

We needed clothing, winter clothing especially, very quickly. And the only resource we had was to go through these catalogs and I can remember the Sears and the Montgomery Ward's catalogs were everywhere in camp. As a result, you find people wearing the same model, the same style of clothing. You knew either you bought yours from Sears or you bought yours from Montgomery Ward's. Unfortunate for some people who did not have any money. They couldn't afford to buy and that became a real hardship.

We were able to get along. I remember my mother insisted that I have some Montana or Wyoming style boots for winter. I was growing at the time, going in at nine years old, and she insisted that I get two sizes of shoes bigger than my normal size because I'd be growing into those larger shoes quickly. It was embarrassing walking around looking like a circus clown, these large shoes obtained from Sears. I'll never forget that.

Redman: I wonder, if we could talk a little bit about the Japanese Theater Company and what having theater companies did for the local culture in the camp site.

2-00:16:21  
Mihara:

Again, in a form of entertainment, we had a number of people talented in different Arts and one was Theater Arts. They had the skills, and some of them brought their costumes. Within each mess hall— we did not have a theater, as such, a nice large theater for housing a lot of people. So they made like a temporary theater in the mess halls themselves. They would partition off the kitchen portion and create a stage and a curtain and the musicians. They would actually have a Kabuki play in these mess halls and they would rotate around different blocks so that you get a little variety of different people seeing different theaters. So that was a popular form of entertainment.

Redman: You've mentioned that people came in with particular talents and skills. One of the things I've done some reading on is, folks who were particularly talented, artists who became Art teachers or people who were teachers, committed teachers just in general, setting up a school and the challenges that were inherent to that, especially with a lack of the proper equipment or things like chalk and chalkboards, pencils and papers, art supplies. I wonder if you could tell me from your perspective what school was like in a barracks setting and talk about how these were furnished. But in particular, I'd be curious to hear about Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic, but then also Civics, what you



were taught about American Government and Politics, and then Art, if there was any Art component or Music component of school in those days.

2-00:18:21  
Mihara:

Our schools— in fact, at all the camps, the guiding principle of the quality of education was to meet the local state standards for education. And this was very important to the residents of the camps, mainly because they wanted the youngsters to be prepared to enter into the US college system, wherever that college may be. The residents insisted on the degree of quality of the education meeting the local state standards for education. We worked with a state educational organizations to create the proper curriculum and, in fact the states in many cases provided assistance in the way of books, even though there weren't too many at first. They provided used books so we could be better trained.

Another component that helped a lot are the Quakers. The Quakers were unique at that time in being very humanitarian about our situation. They came to our camps. And they took up collections of teaching materials from their memberships. They provided access to local colleges in their home states and try to get youngsters from the camps to enter into these colleges. But in order to do that, we had to meet the standards of education for colleges from our camps. So that's what pretty much set the standards for all of the requirements for education. The teachers— we insisted they be qualified under the state rules for qualified teaching and therefore we had to hire— the government had to hire several teachers from outside because there were not enough qualified teachers from within the camps. Like you asked, yes, we had a full spectrum of typical curriculum inside the schools, whether it's basic material or even things like Home Economics, and Sports, and Culture, History and so forth.

Redman: Do you recall the breakdown of your own teachers? Were most of them Japanese American or did you have a few of those Caucasian teachers that came in as hired teachers?

2-00:21:17  
Mihara:

I went in at the third grade and I was there through, I believe it was either the tail-end of the fifth grade or the start of the sixth. It was all grammar school. And all of my teachers were Japanese Americans who were qualified teachers.

Redman: Were they young women?

2-00:21:43  
Mihara:

They're pretty much young women. I don't remember any men teachers that I had and I can't recall whether they were outstanding or superlative or the quality of the education, but I do remember the conditions in the classroom were pretty bad at the start. We had benches, no tables, very few books, and it was a very difficult environment until the carpenters in the camp created a lot of the furnishings and the extra material, like books, were brought in later on.

Redman: But it took time for these things to build up, it sounds like. That at first, it was pretty—

2-00:22:29

Mihara: Right. I don't recall how much time it took but I do remember at very, very first, it was not very good conditions conducive to learning at all. Eventually, we got there.

Redman: I wonder if we could talk about the camp hospital and if that could lead into a little bit of a description of some of your family's medical issues that took place during the war?

2-00:22:58

Mihara: Maybe the best thing I could talk about the hospital system is that they did attempt to create a hospital. And they tried to staff it with professionals who were in the camps. There weren't enough medical— medically skilled people in the camps, especially nursing skills. So, they had to hire a number of Caucasian nurses from the outside. We had several barracks that were connected together with hallways, so the entire cluster would make up the hospital. One of the barracks was an emergency room and operating room. We had some basic equipment. We had an X-Ray machine and we had some basic facilities. But beyond that, it was very limited.

Our family had some serious, serious health problems. I personally had problems. As I growing up, my joints were extremely painful. I can remember the hospital people couldn't figure out what was my problem, as if they had never heard of young kids with joint problems.

My father was a difficult, very difficult case. He had glaucoma before he came to camp. He was being treated at University of California Medical Center in San Francisco, which is only about a block from our home. I'm sorry, about a mile from our home. The pressure kept building inside his eye, unless it's treated by relieving the pressure. Because in those days, they did not have medication to do this, they had to mechanically relieve the pressure every once in a while. It takes a special skill to do that. Once he went into camp, he was about half-blind. One eye was totally blind. The other eye was starting to go. He asked for permission to leave the camp to go and see the specialists who were used to his case. They wouldn't let him go. They wouldn't allow him to leave camp in order to get this help. As a result, he very, very quickly became totally blind. I can remember that. I was his guide dog for the rest of his life. It was very difficult on him. He never saw what San Francisco looked like after camp. It was a very difficult time for us.

My grandfather is probably the most painful process of all. He had colon cancer and I checked the medical records by looking at the National Archives Records in Washington. Everyone who went to camp, by the way, has

personal records of what happened in the camp. They have access to those records in the archives. I looked at my grandfather's medical record. It showed that he was treated for colon cancer with milk of magnesia (laxative). And he suffered. Hard. Bad. In four months, he was down to skin and bones. He just wasn't eating. He looked terrible and painful. He finally passed away in camp. It was difficult time.

We had no choice, but all the remains of people who died in camp— well, most of them I should say, not all of them. The family wanted the remains to be returned back to home. California. Family plots in cemeteries. The only choice was, therefore, to cremate. Interesting dilemma. There are no crematories in Wyoming at the time. Not one. It was a new invention, created of all places in Germany, in fact. The closest one was either in Denver or far away in Montana. After my grandfather passed away, they had to ship his body to Montana for the cremation, bring the ashes back, and store it in grandma's cell until the end of the war. She took it back and had it buried in the family plot.

For all those reasons, it was a very painful process. Obviously, the skill level and the restrictions of not being able to leave camp for getting medical help was a major concern. Every time I give a speech, I point out to the fact, with those conditions, our standards were worse than federal prisons today where it is a law that federal prisoners, under conditions where they need specialty help, are allowed to leave prisons and get this help. That did not exist during the camp days.

Redman: You'd mentioned that funerals at camps were, if not a common occurrence, they were a regular occurrence. Part of life. Can you talk about both funerals and the grieving process just a little bit in Japanese culture in that era in the camp setting? How that for most families would go about?

2-00:28:50  
Mihara:

We have a tradition. Japanese people like funerals, especially the first generation. So whenever a person passed on, and by the way, the rate of death is about five per month, so it was fairly frequent. When you have a city of 10,000 people, you can expect a pretty high rate of mortality. The local morticians would come in and take care of processing the remains. But we would always have a funeral service.

I can remember we were Protestants. We were Presbyterian. In fact, there were ten different religions in the camps. Various Buddhist sects, as well as— there was a Catholic, and there was a Protestant— Presbyterian type church. We had our services in, of course, the barracks. There was no church. If you can imagine the scene of a funeral service inside a barrack and a photographer taking pictures outside the barrack with the casket and the family surrounding it. That was very memorable. There are a lot of scenes of funeral with that.

We had no fresh flowers. A lot of flowers made of paper. There were stories about people making up garlands of flowers made out of Kleenex tissues. So we did everything we could to try to maintain that culture of the entire life process inside the camp.

Redman: I wonder if you could tell me about your father after his blindness sets in. He is quite an innovator and innovates, I understand, or adopts a Braille system for Japanese readers. Can you tell me both about that story and then the legacy of that as you've seen it as his son.

2-00:31:05

Mihara: Sure. Dad was always trying to innovate. One thing he tried to do was to be of use to society throughout his entire life. He felt that working in the Media, getting the word out was something that's helpful. And even after he became blind, he kept thinking about what can he do to help, help society. Since he was skilled at writing, and skilled at innovate forms of writing, he wrote a couple of books in camp. He had some helpers come in and he dictated. He wrote a textbook for learning English for Japanese people who don't speak English. He wrote a textbook on— a dictionary to convert Japanese words into English words. And he created this Braille system. These raised dots so people, blind people could feel across. At the time, there was no Braille system in Japan, so he felt that it would be very useful to create an alphabet in Japanese with these raised letters for each letter of the alphabet. So he had that done and that was shipped off to Japan. It was pretty widely adopted, so he felt he made a contribution of a need for these kinds of things.

Redman: Did he know that in his lifetime? That this had started to be an adopted system? Was that something that he—

2-00:32:40

Mihara: Oh, yeah. He felt that this was very, very important. I have a photograph where, as the inventor, he wrote out his name in Braille at the bottom as the creator of this. He was very happy with the fact that this was being used in Japan.

Redman: That's very interesting.

Let's talk about life at the end of the war. I wonder if you could talk about either Hiroshima or Nagasaki and hearing about, or collectively, the dropping of the atomic bombs, hearing that news and what sorts of thoughts, emotions, confusions there might have been for someone who I believe was now eleven years old at the end of the war. Can you talk about that?

2-00:33:28

Mihara: Yeah. I was twelve at the time. We were in camp. We were in camp and I can remember the announcement was made of the first bombing of Hiroshima.

Even before that, we heard about the test bomb that was done in New Mexico, and then subsequently, the bombing in Hiroshima.

Redman: Take me back to that. Tell me just a little bit about what you had heard about the test bombing in New Mexico. That there was a major explosion?

2-00:34:03

Mihara: Nothing more than there was a major explosion and possibly tied to a new weapon system. At the time, I don't recall that it was intended to use it directly on Japan, much less Hiroshima. But when we did find out and heard about the bombing of Hiroshima, it was a real shock to most of us.

Even when I lecture, once in a while, I get a question. When I'm talking about camp, all of a sudden some student would ask, "What did you think about the bombing of Hiroshima?" It made me pause to think the first time I heard that question because I'm not talking about atomic bombs. I'm talking about imprisonment in the US camps. But I thought about it and I answered this fellow's question. I said, "Well, I wish it did not have to happen, obviously. Terrible weapon— But if it did have to happen, if it did have to happen, I felt that was the wrong target."

For humanitarian reasons, to bomb— all that was left in these large cities were women and children and elderly. All the men went to war. Why would they want to take out humanity? Could they have picked a better target? For example, a military target where you wouldn't have so many civilian casualties. I wasn't there at the time making decisions. But I answered the fellow's question that way. I said, "I wish it didn't happen. And I wish if it had to, it would have been a better target."

Redman: How about the actual end of the war, hearing of VJ Day and what your response and feeling of the actual announcement of the end of the war?

2-00:36:11

Mihara: Interesting question. One day— we had a fire alarm system in the camp. The purpose being, if there's a fire, the alarm goes off and everybody gets out of the barrack not knowing where the fire was. Well, one day the fire alarms went on and on and continued on for a long time. Somebody started passing the word, "This must be the end of the war! This must mean we get to leave!" And that's how we found out Japan surrendered. It was some time, though, before we were really allowed to leave even though technically, we were allowed to leave legally before the very end of the war because of the result of the Supreme Court decision.

But the point is, we were afraid to go back home not knowing what the conditions were. So a lot of people just stayed in the camp until the

government forced us to leave camp. We had a few people go back home to check out the conditions and see if the environment was okay for us to return.

Eventually, they closed the camp in November, several months after the end of the war. So at that time, everyone was forced to leave. They moved all the barracks out, sold them off. And the camp was literally, completely removed except for a few remaining parts of the hospital and some of the barracks are still in the surrounding area at different farms.

Redman: Talk about your family's process there of winding down and packing things up. I wonder too if you wouldn't mind telling me the story about you and your father travelling into Cody and experiencing what the actual town was like and what the reception was like there, as well as life as it wound down, as your time at the camp wound down?

2-00:38:25

Mihara: It may be useful to point out the culture in Cody before we got there. And this was documented by several experts in the history of Cody, including the Senator from Cody, Wyoming, Alan Simpson, who lived in Cody as a child.

When the people of Wyoming, and especially Cody, heard that there were over 10,000 Japanese coming to be their new neighbors within ten miles, fifteen miles of the town of Cody, the people of Cody became very, very concerned. Cody was a town of maybe 2,000. They were being invaded by Japanese. 10,000 of them, right next door.

I heard this from Senator Simpson when I heard about his views on what happened during the war. He said people got all upset. They got their arms ready. They're going to be invaded. If anybody breaks out of camp— there were going to be no more residents in Cody. There's going to be retribution on part of the Japanese to get even for being placed in these prisons. There's a natural, built-up hatred by the local residents and it showed when the first time we were allowed to leave for like a day break away from camp, we went to Cody. Dad took us and there were these signs, awful signs, one store after another on the main street of Sheridan Avenue that said "No Japs," one after another. I'll never forget it. And that experience told me, "I don't want anything to do with these people! I've got better things to do in life than try to address people's hatreds." So I never went back to Cody for some fifty years, never met these people.

And it turned out, of course, the opposite— These people turned out to be very, very warm and friendly. Of course, most of the people who were the business people are no longer there. This was over fifty years ago. But the people of Cody today are wonderful. They're very, very pleasant people.

Redman: Let's talk as we conclude, what were the major problems for the Japanese American community after the war? In particular, I wonder if you could speak to the concerns in California, maybe in San Francisco, and your own family. So I'm asking you to speak for a wide community but I also recognize that it's from your own particular experiences.

2-00:41:38

Mihara: All of us had problems in returning back to our homes. And it happened in various ways. First, I'll tell about what happened to our family. Dad lost his job. The newspaper went bankrupt. They did not restart after the war. So he had no job. Number one. Number two, he was blind. Who's going to hire a blind writer of a newspaper?

Fortunately, we still had our house. He had the wisdom to not sell the house, and kept it. I don't remember who took care of it during our absence, but we went back to our own house. In contrast to many people who did not have homes because they were forced to sell their homes and at least have a nest egg to live on when they were moved. But a lot of people didn't have jobs.

Dad had real problems in keeping up his financial obligations. He had to send mother off as a domestic worker. For the first time in her life, she became a maid. I can remember the sad scene when dad had to wish my mother goodbye as she went off to work to be a maid. It was just—culturally, it was such a shock to go back into that environment.

I was getting ready for college and I had planned on attending perhaps some of the better schools, one of the better schools for my chosen profession at engineering. I told dad about the fact that I'd been accepted and he gave me the sad news, he can't afford it. And ever since, I dedicated myself to making sure that my first priority is to make sure my offspring and grandkids get the best possible education. Those are the kind of hardships that we suffered, all of us suffered, when we returned back home.

Redman: It seems to make sense, then, in retrospect some of the major demographic shifts that happened to Japanese Americans, especially with the sale of property or not being able to keep the property, it's understandable that many then would move to other locations. I understand the Japanese American community, in particular in Southern California, grows quite a bit in the Post-War era. Did that affect family friends at all? Were any of the family friends that you had known in San Francisco, did any of them leave San Francisco? Or did most of them return to the city?

2-00:44:34

Mihara: I don't remember the exact numbers, but roughly of the order of between eighty and ninety percent returned back to San Francisco. In fact, returned back to California. About ten percent during the war elected to move back

east. Again, with the assistance of people like the Quakers to find new jobs and so forth. That was an option available to us during camp— that we could leave as long as we did not resettle back in the west coast. I would say about roughly between eighty to ninety percent of us did return back to California. Many of them, however— there were literally exclusions laws created in some counties in California. For example, in Imperial County in Southern California where there're a lot of Japanese farmers, they passed a law that says, after the war even, you are not allowed to be a farmer anymore in this county. And so former-farmers of that area had to find completely new careers. I know one family in particular who was very seriously affected by this environment.

Redman: This is a big question, and I apologize for asking such a big question. Can you elaborate and describe to me your views on the Redress Movement as that historically came about and how that impacted your own life and your own views?

2-00:46:11  
Mihara:

Redress was very important to most of us. The definition of redress, by the way, is, “to make— to correct for an error, a mistake, a problem that was created.” And there was no question, in our case, we all felt that there was a major mistake made, believing that we were not loyal to the US, believing that we were spies.

And as a result, about ten years after we returned back home, it started with a movement out of UCLA. One of the instructors there was interested in the topic of redress. He made a speech at a conference of a need for redress simply by pointing out the injustices that were conducted by the government. And that kind of started the seed rolling as to redress. And it took the form of a congressman, whose name is Michael Lowry, Congressman from Washington state in November 1979, he thought it would be appropriate to have Congress take the initiative and create a bill which formally apologized to the Japanese who were interned.

Then, right after that, a Japanese American Congressman, Norman Mineta who became congressman. He was in camp, by the way. He's two years older than me. He was introduced to politics by, of all people, Senator Alan Simpson from Cody. But Congressman Mineta took up the ball and solicited other congressman to sponsor the bill. It was defeated in the first year, in the second year, but the third year was the magic year when they're able to collect enough supporters and they finally passed the bill. The bill called for a formal apology from the government, restitution, or redress payments (and payments were not new, by the way. The Germans provided payments to those who suffered in the Nazi death camps), and also, to create an education system. So the Redress Movement resulted in a bill finally passed in Congress.



And there was one issue remaining. Here's a conservative President, Ronald Reagan, and all indications were that he would not sign it. He would veto it because the votes were not sufficient. It was not a two-thirds majority. So they had to figure out a strategy how to get President Reagan to approve and sign the bill. They finally worked it out. There was a friend of the Japanese Americans. His name is Governor Keane, Thomas Kean from New Jersey. He got together in private meeting with President Reagan and reminded President Reagan that when he was a young captain in the army, he was at a memorial service for a fallen soldier who was a Japanese American who died in action in Italy. At the same time, his family, including eleven kids, were imprisoned in a camp. When President Reagan was reminded of the story, he agreed that he will sign the bill. That was an important milestone for all of us.

Redman: I wonder— you'd mentioned something that something is actually kind of funny to me is that one of the most common questions you receive, especially when giving your talk to high schoolers is what happens to the \$20,000 check. I sort of assume there's on the part of high schoolers, this naive assumption that it's like somehow winning the lottery instead of carrying this really important symbolic meaning. But it seems like for you and your family, it did carry a particular meaning. And then in light of your college experience, it seems like that had a particular meaning in terms of the right way for you to put that money to good use. Would you mind sharing that?

2-00:51:13  
Mihara:

Not at all. And you're right. Instilled in my thought was the fact that I don't want money to stand in the way of our offspring getting the best possible education.

And I have heard stories getting the \$20,000 and buying a new car or going off to some casino and blowing it. But I figured out that it's best to save it, put it away. And so, we did that. We'd already taken care of our immediate offspring, our two daughters, but we knew someday there may be some grandkids. And sure enough, twenty five years after we receive the money, the grandkids are now in college. They can use the money and so we thought we did a good thing. I'm glad it's being used that way.

## Audiofile 3

Redman: All right, I'm back for my third and final tape with Sam Mihara. Today is November 8th, 2012. I want to wrap up our conversation. We were talking about the Redress Movement. I'm particularly interested in museums and museum exhibits. And something that you'd mentioned that was really fascinating to me yesterday was the major Smithsonian Exhibit around 1987, I believe at the National Museum of American History that focuses on the question of Japanese Confinement. You know, you mentioned as an aside that this iconic image of your wife is reproduced at the front and center of this exhibit and I wonder if maybe I'd ask you little bit about that image. But can you talk about the effect of that exhibit at that moment that people are talking about Redress and the impact that that may have, especially in Washington, D.C. in particular.

3-00:01:14

Mihara: It was almost coincidental of the timing of that exhibit. The exhibit took place at the time when the Congress was gathering supporters for the bill. People like Congressman Mineta would be able then to use this exhibit to introduce people who don't know what happened during the war. The exhibit had a couple of points. One is that it was a prison. It truly was a prison condition in these camps.

The second point is that a very, very large majority of the people who went to these camps were loyal American citizens. As evidence of that, the exhibit showed many US soldiers serving in Italy for the US Army. With that message, loyalty, number one, number two is imprisonment, and denial of the due process that was guaranteed by the Constitution. That message was— it was very important for people like Congressman Mineta to help enlighten others who may not have been aware of it. So the exhibit timing was perfect.

My wife's picture, in fact— I remember as soon as you walked in to the museum starting from the bottom floor, since the exhibit was on the third floor, all along the stairway is pictures of my wife with arrow pointing up toward the exhibit starting from the time you entered into the building. And there's no question, therefore, as to where it was located. And they followed the arrows {inaudible}. And the first display, as you enter the exhibit room was a photograph of the famous photo of my wife and one of the other students pledging allegiance to the flag. And then superimposed on that, like a ghost image, was the Bill of Rights, back and forth. That was a very strong, appealing message to all the people. And it's believed that that helped in the passage of the bill.

Redman: And your impression that did indeed have a palpable effect in terms of reminding those who had forgotten or educating those who were unaware of exactly those three major themes.

3-00:04:15

Mihara: Precisely. It was very, very convenient and very helpful in convincing people that this bill is worthy of passage.

Redman:

I wonder if, for the benefit of our being at the University of California, if we could talk just a little bit about your college career here, what years you attended school, and what you majored in, in particular. When did you arrive at UC Berkeley?

3-00:04:37

Mihara: I came in in 1951, in the fall of '51. I might just step back for a moment.

Redman:

Sure, that's fine.

3-00:04:43

Mihara: I was a major in Engineering. And I was in camp at the time I first thought about wanting to work on airplanes and rockets. I remember being on the steps of the barracks waiting and thinking about my future. "Gosh, wouldn't it be nice to be on an airplane, being able to fly anywhere you want, get out of camp," and "I'd like to help design those planes someday." That was my first thoughts of becoming an engineer and helping design things that fly.

And so I graduated from a college prep high school in San Francisco, joined my several friends here at Berkeley, and I majored in Engineering. In those days, they call it a minor degree or minor specialty in Aeronautics. I got my degree right here in Berkeley.

Redman:

And then what year did you graduate?

3-00:05:44

Mihara: I graduated in June of 1956.

Redman:

'56.

3-00:05:48

Mihara: '56.

Redman:

Do you have any major highlights— major recollections of what some of the highlights were for you as being a student at Cal?

3-00:05:55

Mihara: Oh gosh, I remember so many things. Some of the highlights— It was embarrassing. When I first came in, we all had— I don't know if they still have it today— they had this mandatory English. They call it "Bonehead English" and all my friends passed. And I flunked. I failed the exam, the entrance exam for Basic English. And I have to admit, I wasn't really good at it. My dad didn't teach me a lot of English. I majored in things I liked, which is Math and Science. I was one of the few in our buddies who had to take this

“Bonehead English.” I took it at the hall [Wheeler Hall?] right next to the library here.

But I proceeded on. I remember taking basic chemistry from Professor Hildebrand, a famous hall named for one of the few professors who was a Nobel Prize winner.

Redman: He was supposed to be an outstanding teacher.

3-00:07:02

Mihara: He was a very— Oh, I can remember, he was blowing up hydrogen and oxygen tanks inside the classroom. Very, very effective teacher in teaching us the principles of Chemistry. I can remember courses in Engineering and related sciences. I remember going to Hearst Mining Hall for my required Mineralogy class. I remember the structures lab at the building here at Engineering.

Some really difficult major senior projects, we had. It was good training though. It was a famous senior class where you're on your own, you have a project. Maybe it's generating electricity or going and designing something or other. It was like several nights of all night work in order to get experiments and writing up the results. But that was good training. It taught us how to be disciplined and become good engineers. But all of that, I remember about Berkeley. And it was a very good experience.

Redman: And this leads, just in summary of who you are and who you become, this leads to a career in Aeronautics for you. Is that correct?

3-00:08:25

Mihara: Right, right.

Redman: And then do you advance your training subsequently after Berkeley? Is that correct?

3-00:08:29

Mihara: Yes, I went to UCLA for my Master's in Engineering and a Minor in Business. I was hired in at— used to be called Douglas Aircraft Company in Santa Monica. It is now owned by Boeing. And I stayed there for forty-two years and enjoyed every minute of it. It was a great, great career. I travelled a lot in my senior years and met a lot of customers, convinced them that Boeing products are very good. I enjoyed my career very much.

Redman: So, in effect, that scene of sitting outside the barracks and staring up into the sky— that really becomes true for you years later, it sounds like.

3-00:09:11

Mihara:

Well, in retrospect, maybe I wouldn't have thought about airplanes and being an engineer in San Francisco. [laughter] I hate to say that camp was good for me because overall, the camp was bad for everyone. But it was fortuitous that I had happened to think about the career when I did.

Redman:

My final question today is always the hardest. I ask everyone that I do a World War Two interview to place for me the story of the war in the whole arc of their lives and what that story means for you now in retrospect. We talked about a lot today, all the way from what San Francisco was like beforehand to the process of actually moving and then what school was like, and all of this. But in retrospect, what does the war mean to you in your life?

3-00:10:09

Mihara:

Well, that's an interesting and perhaps a difficult question to answer.

First and foremost, I wish it did not happen. In fact, in my research, I've discovered there was clear evidence that there was no need for World War Two. It goes back to the days before Pearl Harbor, that there was intelligence within the government that there was an imminent attack by the Japanese. And the people responsible for the defense of Hawaii did not take the proper actions. And to think about the fact that if we were able to act on that information, it's possible that the war could have been avoided. I just— that comes to mind as incompetency at its worst, by not being able to do things because of poor leadership.

Now, since the war, of course, we all know better. For example, the policy of Strategic Deterrence on the Russians during the Cold War— it worked. We've never been attacked by Russia because we were strong and we maintained vigilance and the Russians knew it. Even in the Cuban War— or the Cuban Threat— missile threat. [Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962].

So there's a time and place for the proper actions. In retrospect, I wish it didn't happen. But since it did, I'm glad that America won and we're able to continue on living the way we do today.

Redman:

Is there anything else that you'd like future generations of historians and future generations of students to know about this?

3-00:12:23

Mihara:

Well, my dedication for the rest of my life is to try to educate people and to get people to understand that under certain circumstances, like that which happened to us during World War Two, that sometimes these very, very terrible decisions are made and the Constitution, as one expert called it, becomes not even worth the paper it's written on. And that shouldn't happen. Never again should there be such an event as a mass removal of an entire

group of people without due process of law. Very, very important. And I try to pass that message on to as many people as I can.

Redman: When did you start giving lectures and what has that experience been like for you— to talk about your story?

3-00:13:31

Mihara: The way it started, it was not too long ago. It was last year. At Heart Mountain, they created a new museum. And they had a very good response to the museum. I was there at the opening. But after the grand opening, the museum started getting calls from colleges and high schools and even attorney groups, Civil Rights attorney groups, asking for speakers. And the people at Heart Mountain Museum knew that I'm fairly comfortable giving speeches. So they asked me, would I go around and give these people some talks about what I experienced? They want to hear first-hand my experience. And so I put together a story. I've been giving presentations and shows to all of these people who ask for it. But I'm happy to do that because I think it serves a purpose in life and the message should be passed on.

Redman: With that, I'd like to say thank you very much for sitting down.

3-00:14:38

Mihara: Your welcome.

Redman: Thank you.

3-00:14:39

Mihara: My pleasure. Thank you.

[End of interview]