

Regional Oral History Office  
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Eiko Yasutake

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Interviews conducted by  
David Dunham and Candice Fukumoto  
in 2013

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Eiko Yasutake

## Table of Contents

Interview 1: July 24, 2013

Audio file 1

1

Family background and growing up helping parents in LA with their produce business —  
 Hearing of the bombing of Pearl Harbor — Parents' fears of the relocation camps — Having to  
 sell their furniture and saving the Girls Day dolls — “Voluntarily” moving to Oklahoma instead  
 of going to incarceration camps — Fair treatment until V-J Day — Dislike of movie newsreels  
 — Living freely as Japanese Americans in Utah while visiting incarcerated Japanese Americans  
 at Heart Mountain Camp — School in Utah — Victory garden and rationing — Junior high and  
 high school in LA — Church experiences — Racially-based bullying episode — Working as a  
 dental assistant — [Final section looking at photos]

Interview 1: July 24, 2013  
Audio file 1

Fukumoto: If you could state your name.

01-00:00:03

Yasutake: My name is Eiko Yasutake. My maiden name was Kato.

Fukumoto: Date of birth?

01-00:00:09

Yasutake: September 15, 1934.

Fukumoto: And where was your birthplace?

01-00:00:14

Yasutake: Los Angeles, at the Los Angeles Japanese Hospital, which is no longer there.

Fukumoto: If you could give us some information on your family background.  
Immigration story—

Dunham: Parents, grandparents.

01-00:00:32

Yasutake: Okay. When I went to the Japanese National Museum, I picked up this paper that shows when my father came here. He was sixteen when he came to the United States; he came with his mom. But my mother was born here. She was born up north, in Alviso. Her parents were the ones who came from Japan, and I do not know when they came.

Fukumoto: Do you know what part of Japan your father came from?

01-00:01:03

Yasutake: From Fukushima.

Fukumoto: And line of work. Do you know if your family, his parents, what kind of work they did in Japan?

01-00:01:12

Yasutake: No, I don't. No.

Fukumoto: Have any of your parents or grandparents returned to Japan? Visited?

01-00:01:24

Yasutake: No. My grandparents, not that I know of. My mother was born here and never saw Japan. Sometimes I think that was kind of sad. But my dad did go back when he was in his sixties, I believe. He had a good time, he said, but he was so used to over here that he kind of liked it here better.

Fukumoto: So while they were in California, what kind of work did they do here in California?

01-00:01:57

Yasutake: I understand when my mom and dad first got married my dad and his brothers had a noodle factory. Then—I don't know what happened to that—they relocated. This was up in Sacramento; they were living up in Sacramento. Then they relocated down to Southern California, and my dad and his brothers all went into the produce business. In those days, there were not the supermarkets like now, but somebody ran the grocery section, somebody ran the meat section, and somebody ran the produce. Each of them had their own markets, where they did the produce.

Fukumoto: And that was in Los Angeles?

01-00:02:40

Yasutake: Yes.

Dunham: Do you know where exactly it was?

01-00:02:44

Yasutake: I know my dad was someplace in Hollywood, that I remember when I was young. Then from there, they moved to—I don't know the street; maybe Vine or something. And then from there, he moved to Sunset. I think that was the last place that I remember.

Fukumoto: Did you spend some time in the produce section, too, and working?

01-00:03:12

Yasutake: Oh, yeah. I had to hang out because my parents were both there.

Fukumoto: So both your parents worked in—

01-00:03:18

Yasutake: Yes.

Fukumoto: And they did that work all the way up to—

01-00:03:23

Yasutake: Until we went to Oklahoma.

Fukumoto: Do you remember where you lived in LA? Your home and just childhood experience. Do you remember any stories?

01-00:03:34

Yasutake: We lived on Virgil Avenue, in a duplex that my parents rented. They rented from this black family, who were very nice to us. I remember the lady would invite me over when she made waffles, because I liked waffles, I guess, I don't know. Yeah. And I went to—gosh, I don't remember the name of it now. I can't remember the name of that school I went to.

Dunham: Can you remember what it was like at the school, what a typical day at school was?

01-00:04:16

Yasutake: Not really, no.

Fukumoto: Did you have friends of all different ethnic backgrounds, or were most of your friends Japanese?

01-00:04:27

Yasutake: The friends from school were not Japanese, as I remember. But I had cousins who lived close to me, and so we went to the same school, also. Yeah.

Fukumoto: Do you have brothers and sisters? You have how many total siblings?

01-00:04:47

Yasutake: Two brothers, two younger brothers.

Fukumoto: Two brothers, right. Now, I know you were very young, but do you remember just even leading up to when Pearl Harbor happened? Do you have any memory of that time period, bombing of Pearl Harbor?

01-00:05:13

Yasutake: Well, I remember the day. Wasn't the day a Sunday? I think it was a Sunday. My parents and I were down in Little Tokyo here, and it was very quiet down there. I guess I sensed that something happened, something was wrong, but I didn't really know what that was. Then after that, I guess, is when FBI agents started coming to the homes of the Japanese people. So they came to our home. Yeah, a lot of strange things were going on then, after that. Yeah.

Fukumoto: Was your family part of any church or community centers or anything at that time?

01-00:06:04

Yasutake: No, I don't think they were. They just worked six days a week, as I remember.

Fukumoto: Did your parents speak Japanese in the home, or mostly English?

01-00:06:18

Yasutake: A combination of both, since my mother was a Nisei. So my dad would speak broken English. But she was bilingual; she could understand him if he spoke Japanese.

Fukumoto: Yeah. It's just interesting, just trying to figure out what is going on; whether or not even in homes, they would speak Japanese, so maybe kids wouldn't understand what's happening. If you have any memory of that. So the bombing of Pearl Harbor happens and we hear all these things. You said FBI agents coming, checking in Japanese homes. I'm curious, how did your family

decide to, what, you just were going to pack up and move to Oklahoma? Do you have any memory of why make that move to Oklahoma?

01-00:07:20

Yasutake: I know why. It's not a memory, but it's what my father and mother have said afterwards, that my mother was pregnant with Thomas at that time, and they had lost a child between me and him. So my father wanted this child very badly, and he was afraid that going to camp, that there wouldn't be the proper facilities to take care of her. He wasn't sure. He didn't know what it was going to be like. I don't know anybody knew. So they knew families in Oklahoma. It was kind of like distant relatives of his, I guess. So he knew if he went to a city, there would be a doctor and a hospital and all of that. So that was the motivation, is what I've been told.

Fukumoto: Do you remember, were you guys in a car, train?

01-00:08:17

Yasutake: To go there?

Fukumoto: Yeah.

01-00:08:19

Yasutake: In, yes, our family car, that was loaded up. The three of us sat in the front, because the back was all loaded with stuff. Yeah, whatever they could take with them.

Fukumoto: And you remember that journey pretty well?

01-00:08:36

Yasutake: No, I don't really remember that, just that we were in this car, where the three of us sat up front and the back was all full of stuff.

Fukumoto: So what was Oklahoma like?

01-00:08:50

Yasutake: As a kid, I kind of thought it was fun. But I don't think my parents liked it. But when we got there, one of the families that they knew had two kids a little bit younger than me. Pretty close to my age, though. So they were trying to show me all the things that they do over there, and I thought that was fun. We lived in the country. It was in the country, because that other family had a farming business, they did the farming, they took the veggies into town to sell at—I don't know what they call that. Truck farming or something like that. So when they had the thunderstorms, then the road would get flooded, would become like a lake, and we could run out there and play in that. I thought that was great fun. I don't know.

Dunham: Do you know about when you left for Oklahoma, about what month? Was it early '42?



01-00:09:55

Yasutake: Well, it was just before Thomas was born. He was born April 9. So I think somebody told me it was the ending part of March. Because evidently, they were only given—someone told me afterwards—two weeks to leave California. I do remember that my mom had to sell all the furniture in the house in a hurry, because I remember her being really sad because included in the furniture was a baby grand piano, which she just felt really bad about having to give all that up. But I remember her talking to people and saying that. Everybody knew we had to leave, so it was kind of like take it or leave it.

Dunham: And the business with the brothers, was it just left?

01-00:10:46

Yasutake: Yeah, I really don't know how they left all that.

Dunham: And back to the FBI raids, had you heard if any items were taken? Or had your family had gotten rid of or hidden any Japanese items?

01-00:11:04

Yasutake: I don't remember their taking anything. I don't remember if it's my parents, but the neighbors—in those days, they had incinerators—being out at the incinerators and crying and putting stuff in there. I still have these Japanese hina-san dolls, the Girls Day dolls, because my mother would not give that up. Those were part of what was in that family car. Then by tradition you pass it on to your daughter. But my daughter, she claims she doesn't have room in her house, so it's still here in my closet. But anyway. So every so often I put them out, because I feel like they need to get out. [laughs]

Fukumoto: How long were you in Oklahoma?

01-00:12:00

Yasutake: Not very long, evidently. I think it was less than a year, because my parents didn't like it there. When I think back about it now, I do recall we went to see after a tornado had hit nearby. I don't know if that scared them. I'm not sure, but thinking back, I just think maybe that had something to do. I don't know. But we moved to Ogden, Utah.

Dunham: Can I ask you, how did the pregnancy go? Obviously, your brother was born successfully, so do you know much about how the healthcare went then?

01-00:12:37

Yasutake: No. No, I just know that he was born and they were happy.

Fukumoto: Did your parents talk about how they were treated in Oklahoma? Because I know your memory is hey, you just had a good time, you were playing. But as far as your parents—

01-00:13:02

Yasutake: I think they were treated okay there. I could tell you, also about our trip there, that before we went, my dad, one of his good friends I remember sitting in the house yelling at my father, getting after him for taking us. I guess he thought it was a stupid thing to do, because everybody seemed to think that we were going to be mistreated. But my parents always told people afterwards that they were treated well. I guess when you leave California or whatever, they check your fruits and things, and the guy let them keep it. Told them, "Oh, well, you have a little girl in the car, so you can have it." So I just remember them saying everything was nice. I think it was only in California, where there was so much hatred and not good things happening, I guess. Probably because it's the West Coast, and maybe that's the way the news played it up. I'm not sure.

Dunham: Yeah, and maybe in Oregon and Washington, too. But maybe because there was a larger number of Japanese, also.

01-00:14:19

Yasutake: Oh, could be.

Dunham: So outside of your cousins—they were Japanese, right?

01-00:14:26

Yasutake: Yeah.

Dunham: So outside of them, did you know of any other Japanese in Oklahoma ?

01-00:14:30

Yasutake: While we were there, I think they met either one or two other families.

Dunham: Who had similarly come from California or who were already there?

01-00:14:41

Yasutake: No, they just lived there, yeah.

Dunham: Also doing produce, farming?

01-00:14:46

Yasutake: I don't know what they did.

Dunham: Do you know if your parents were able to stay in touch—did their siblings go to a camp?

01-00:14:54

Yasutake: Mm-hm.

Dunham: And did they have a way of communicating with them during those years?

01-00:15:00

Yasutake: Oh, yeah. By mail. Everything was only mail then.

Fukumoto: So you're only in Oklahoma for about a year and your family decides to move to Utah?

01-00:15:13

Yasutake: Mm-hm. They knew somebody in Utah. That family was also farming, but of course, they didn't want to do farming, I guess. So I remember we just stayed with them for. I don't know, a week or whatever, a week or two or something, until they found a home in the town of Ogden. Evidently, they had to buy it. So I think about it sometimes, I think, "Wow, how'd they have the money to buy that house?" But anyway, that's what happened.

Dunham: *Your* parents bought the house?

01-00:15:49

Yasutake: Mm-hm.

Dunham: Which is interesting, because there also were restrictions against even leasing beyond a year, I've read, in some cases in Utah. So it's interesting they were able to buy.

01-00:15:58

Yasutake: Oh, I don't know, yeah.

Dunham: Maybe because your mom was Nisei, it may have—

01-00:16:05

Yasutake: Right. I believe that it was probably in her name, probably, yeah.

Fukumoto: Was the town big?

01-00:16:13

Yasutake: No, it's a small town. I was the only Japanese in the school there, I remember that.

Fukumoto: How was that?

01-00:16:20

Yasutake: That was fine. Everybody was nice to me.

Fukumoto: So for the most part just accepted you?

01-00:16:31

Yasutake: Right. Yeah, I never felt anybody being prejudiced against us or anything, until the day of V-J Day. Then cars went around honking, and some car threw tomatoes at our house. I was really kind of shocked then. I thought, why? How come they're doing that? Because I had never felt anything before that.

Fukumoto: And for you, obviously, you're aware, "I am Japanese. My parents, culturally, this is who we are." As far as assimilating to the American culture, was that

just no problem for you? It was like, at home, this is what we do; at school, this is what I do.

01-00:17:23

Yasutake: Well, actually, I don't think I felt Japanese, because I was born here and grew up here. I just thought I was American. That's why I think I couldn't quite understand why all of a sudden, I was different, because I don't think I felt that way, really.

Fukumoto: That's interesting. That's really powerful. That "I'm born here, this is my country—"

01-00:17:50

Yasutake: Yeah. This is all I know.

Fukumoto: "—I listen to this kind of music." So being in that transition, or "we are moving because of this." I don't know, I just feel like that would be a really powerful experience. But you're in it, so you're kind of, what's going on?

01-00:18:11

Yasutake: Mm-hm.

Dunham: Did your parents ever talk about sort of their experiences or feelings, or during the war, representation of Japanese? Did you know how they got news of the war? Through radio or newspaper or newsreels at the theaters?

01-00:18:32

Yasutake: Right. I do remember that when we went to the movies, I didn't like the newsreels—they used to show the newsreels, always, in those days—because every time they showed the war ones, then people would start booing and everything. That made me a little bit frightened, I guess.

Dunham: How did your dad come to work in the defense industry? What was his job, and do you know how he got it?

01-00:18:56

Yasutake: I don't know how he got it; I guess he just went and applied at a help wanted thing or something. But, yeah, he was making the crates for the ammunition.

Dunham: Do you know how long he did that for?

01-00:19:09

Yasutake: All the time that we were there in Ogden, I believe. Yeah.

Fukumoto: How many years were you guys in Ogden?

01-00:19:16

Yasutake: Well, we returned here in the spring of 1946, I think it was.

Dunham: Did he ever talk about his experiences doing that work?

01-00:19:32

Yasutake: It seemed like it must've been pleasant, yeah.

Fukumoto: What did your mom do?

01-00:19:38

Yasutake: She was a homemaker, except I think she worked on Saturdays, being a cleaning woman at a bank building because I just remember on Saturdays she wasn't home. The people in camp were able to come out for a few months. So when my grandma was with us for a few months, we used to go to the movies on Saturday, and then pick up my mother afterwards.

Dunham: So tell us more about that, how your grandma was able to come.

01-00:20:11

Yasutake: And visit, and stay.

Dunham: For months at a time?

01-00:20:14

Yasutake: Yeah, I think so.

Dunham: What camp was she at?

01-00:20:17

Yasutake: Heart Mountain. Then I had an uncle; he was also in Heart Mountain. They get work permits or something, and he came out and worked for a while someplace and stayed with us. But I don't really know what work he did.

Dunham: And you were about 180 miles away from Topaz, right? In Utah, camp? Were you aware that it was there, at that time?

01-00:20:46

Yasutake: No, I really wasn't aware of it at the time. I've only heard of it afterwards.

Fukumoto: That's very interesting, though, about the visiting from camp and having some days to step out of camp.

01-00:21:01

Yasutake: Yeah. Yeah. They were out for months. I visited camp, also, with my mother. I visited Heart Mountain, my brother and my mother and I, because my uncle was in the 442 Army. He was going to be sent overseas. My mother wanted to go see him and say goodbye to him before he left. So he was visiting Heart Mountain, because that's where his mom was, so we went at the same time. So I got to see what camp was like.

Fukumoto: What were your thoughts?

01-00:21:35

Yasutake: Well, I was a kid. I thought it was fun. Because all they did was play, and at home I had to help my mother. I had chores to do. But they didn't have a home. They had to go to the mess hall and eat and all that sort of thing.

Dunham: Were there cousins your age in the camp?

01-00:21:53

Yasutake: Oh, yeah. Yeah, so it was fun.

Fukumoto: I wonder, do you ever talk about this later, about what their—here you guys are in Utah; you're not in camp, and they're in camp. Did you guys ever just talk about that experience of, "Wow, we were here; you were there?"

01-00:22:10

Yasutake: No, actually, I don't think we ever did. But yeah, it might've been interesting to see. No, we didn't.

Fukumoto: Or just the feelings of what was going on. Or maybe it was just acceptance, huh? This is what it is.

01-00:22:25

Yasutake: I think so, probably. I don't know. Because since we were kids. I don't know about the adults. I didn't like the bathrooms in the camp, because it was not private. But that's the only thing.

Dunham: What were they? Can you describe the bathrooms?

01-00:22:54

Yasutake: Just like a bathroom, I guess, at the school or whatever, with the stalls and the shower stalls, that kind of thing.

Fukumoto: They were just kind of open?

01-00:23:05

Yasutake: A big building that had all that in it. So you'd have to walk from whatever they called their living space, out to go to something. Nowadays, I think, wow, I wonder about the old people. Now that I'm old and have to go to the bathroom more often I think, "Oh, my gosh, that must've not been very fun."

Dunham: Do you remember guards, armed guards, anything like that?

01-00:23:36

Yasutake: No, only going in. Yeah. Yeah, that's all.

Dunham: Do you know about how long you visited?

01-00:23:48

Yasutake: I guess it must've only been a few days, I'm not sure.

Dunham: Thinking about your moving from Los Angeles to Oklahoma and then Utah, you mentioned the tornadoes already, and maybe that was a factor for your parents. What about the weather in general, and the winters especially? What was that like? Did you have clothes for that, or get clothes?

01-00:24:11

Yasutake: I don't think we stayed through the winter.

Dunham: Okay. But in Utah, was it cold?

01-00:24:15

Yasutake: Oh, yeah.

Dunham: Terribly cold. So what was that like?

01-00:24:19

Yasutake: Well, again, I thought that was fun.

Dunham: The snow and stuff?

01-00:24:22

Yasutake: Because, yeah, we lived right at the edge of town. So catty-corner from us was already out of the city limits, and there was a big empty area. When it snowed, there was a hill that you could go down. All the neighbors, the kids went over there, sledding on the hill. So to me, that was great fun. [laughs] And then in the summertime, we'd go up in the mountains. Well, we were right near the mountains. We'd go in there, in the canyons, I guess, and there were little streams and things, which was nice.

Dunham: What was a typical day at school like for you in Utah? Do you remember? Do you remember any of your teachers, in particular?

01-00:25:17

Yasutake: In Ogden it was interesting. The classes were almost like high school or something. Well, you had your main room, where you had your reading and writing and arithmetic and all that kind of thing; and then we changed rooms. We went to another room for PE, another room for what they called library, another room for art, another room for music. That was it.

Dunham: Were there grade levels mixed, then? Were you with various ages?

01-00:25:53

Yasutake: No, just with your own level; you just changed around like that.

Dunham: With different teachers?

01-00:25:59

Yasutake: With different teachers in each one of those, yeah.

Dunham: Did you have a favorite subject or teacher?

01-00:26:11

Yasutake: I guess I kind of liked library and I liked art. Yeah.

Dunham: What was library? Was that reading?

01-00:26:21

Yasutake: Yes. I was trying to remember. The teacher, she read some of the classics, I guess, and I think we might've followed along or something like that. Then there'd be free time for us to read. It was a library; it had all kinds of books in there.

Dunham: So you mentioned having to do a lot of chores and things to help the family; but did you also have free time out of school? Were you able to play with friends and those types of things?

01-00:26:50

Yasutake: Oh, yeah. Yeah. But when you live at home, you have to help set the table and help do dishes and do that kind of thing, which the kids at camp didn't do anything.

Dunham: Were you old enough to help with your sibling?

01-00:27:06

Yasutake: Oh, looking after Thomas? Well, I guess I was supposed to, yeah, do that a little bit.

Dunham: When was your youngest brother born?

01-00:27:18

Yasutake: After we came back to California.

Fukumoto: Food. As far as food, did your family mostly eat traditional Japanese food, or a mix of—?

01-00:27:32

Yasutake: Mixed, since my mom was Nisei. And then I think when she was young, they used to have what they called schoolgirl or something, where you'd work in a home, and she learned how to make all different kinds of American things. So yeah.

Dunham: Did you have a preference, what your favorite foods were?

01-00:28:00

Yasutake: No, I don't think so. I think my mother was known to be a good cook. She made the roasts and all those American kind of things, and chops and all that kind of stuff. And she did make some Japanese things. She baked. While we were in Utah, she also learned how to can. So my dad had what they used to call in those days a Victory Garden. So she'd can some of the veggies from that, I guess.



Dunham: Do you know what veggies they grew?

01-00:28:37

Yasutake: I remember tomatoes, cucumber, okra, beans, green beans.

Dunham: Do you remember anything about recycling or rationing?

01-00:28:50

Yasutake: Oh, rationing. Just this past week, I was cleaning out a drawer and I found a ration book. I go, "Oh, my gosh." I must've just saved it to show the kids or something, I don't know. I don't know why I had it.

Dunham: Yeah. Do you remember what was it for?

01-00:29:09

Yasutake: I don't know. It had my name on it. So I thought, wow, I guess kids had books, too, I don't know.

Fukumoto: So you rationed food, right? Absolutely.

01-00:29:21

Yasutake: Yeah, I remember if I ran to the grocery store for my mom, then I had to take the ration book for certain things, I think.

Dunham: Meat. But also it could be for—

01-00:29:30

Yasutake: I think sugar.

Dunham: Yeah, sugar. Gas was also rationed.

01-00:29:34

Yasutake: Oh, yeah. The gas, I guess they had to have a book for that.

Dunham: And you had the same car? Is that how you came to Utah, was in that family car?

01-00:29:43

Yasutake: I think it was the same car the whole time. I don't recall their getting another car.

Dunham: Do you know if your father had to commute to work, take the car to work?

01-00:29:53

Yasutake: Oh, yeah, I think so.

Dunham: Did he ever relay any about his experiences working in Ogden? Do you know, did he work day shift?

01-00:30:04

Yasutake: Mm-hm.

Dunham: A lot of places had twenty-four—

01-00:30:06

Yasutake: No, it was during the day.

Dunham: Do you know if they had a twenty-four-hour cycle there?

01-00:30:10

Yasutake: No, I don't.

Dunham: A lot of places in the shipyards and different places, they were going 24/7 making the ships.

01-00:30:20

Yasutake: They could've, but I don't know.

Fukumoto: So then 1946, you guys pack up and go back to Los Angeles. Same original area, or did you guys move to a different place in LA?

01-00:30:42

Yasutake: Oh, we moved to a different place. But when we first came, I think we stayed with relatives, and I don't really remember exactly where they were. Someplace close to town, I guess. Or maybe someplace closer to where we used to be before, I'm not sure. But then my parents bought a home in what's called the Crenshaw area, I guess now, on one of the avenues over there, Fourth Avenue. I remember my mom telling her sisters and relatives that when she was looking at the house the neighbor man said to her, "You know this is a restricted area, don't you?" So she always had really bad feelings towards that man while we were living there.

Dunham: Was the neighborhood predominantly Caucasian then?

01-00:31:40

Yasutake: Right when we first moved in, but it changed pretty fast, because a lot of other people did come in.

Dunham: To what mix of—?

01-00:31:47

Yasutake: Japanese. A lot of Japanese people came in there.

Dunham: Had your family sold the home in Utah then?

01-00:31:54

Yasutake: I guess. Yeah. I don't really know any of those kind of things.

Dunham: Had you heard of the *Utah Nippo* newspaper? Do you recall that?

01-00:32:06

Yasutake: No.

Dunham: Because apparently, there were a fair number—throughout the state, anyway; I don't know where they're congregated—of Japanese in Utah. Then of course, because of the camp, I guess the camp also got the newspaper. But it dated back to 1914.

01-00:32:22

Yasutake: Wow.

Dunham: And then the newspaper went from a circulation of like 600 to some 10,000—

01-00:32:27

Yasutake: Wow.

Dunham: —during the war years, because it was, I guess, going to the—

01-00:32:30

Yasutake: No, I don't think they had any Japanese paper while we were there. But the Japanese in Ogden, there was supposed to be people in the city. In fact, I guess one of the families was my uncle's friend, so when he was staying with us, then I remember we went to visit them, so my parents could meet them. But that's the only other Japanese people that I know, other than the farming people that were there.

Dunham: Was your school in the city?

01-00:33:00

Yasutake: Yes.

Dunham: So how did you get to school?

01-00:33:03

Yasutake: Walking.

Dunham: How far?

01-00:33:05

Yasutake: I don't know how far it was, but I do remember walking.

Dunham: And in the winter, walking in the snow?

01-00:33:09

Yasutake: Oh, yes, I do remember that, walking in the snow. Yes.

Dunham: Were you walking by yourself, or were there other people that lived near you, other kids that you walked with?

01-00:33:20

Yasutake: Yeah, there were other people near me, but I do remember walking by myself also, so I'm not real sure.

Fukumoto: Were you excited to move back to Los Angeles? Do you remember?

01-00:33:38

Yasutake: I don't know if I was excited or not. No, I don't remember that. When we first came back, though, I was together with a lot of cousins again, which was kind of fun, I guess.

Dunham: You're about ten at this point?

01-00:33:56

Yasutake: Sixth grade, which is what, eleven, maybe? Yeah. But I remember school wasn't exactly that fun. Well, I was sort of, I felt, like a misfit at school because the Japanese kids were all talking about camp. "What camp did you go to?" On and on, all about camp. And I didn't go to camp, so I didn't fit in with the Japanese kids. Then of course, we're new back to California, so the Caucasian kids, they were okay, but I guess they sort of kept their distance or whatever.

Fukumoto: So that was an interesting and awkward transition?

01-00:34:40

Yasutake: Yeah.

Fukumoto: Did you have other different ethnic group friends that you hung out with in Los Angeles?

01-00:34:53

Yasutake: Not that I remember.

Dunham: How did that play out, ultimately, of who did you become sort of closer friends with?

01-00:35:02

Yasutake: Well, when I went to junior high school, I guess, then—because, see, I only had a few months, I think, to finish up at the elementary school. Then when I went off to junior high school, my friends were mostly Asians—Japanese, Chinese, Korean. Yeah. Some blacks.

Fukumoto: What junior high did you go to?

01-00:35:31

Yasutake: Foshay.

Fukumoto: And then high school?

01-00:35:34

Yasutake: Dorsey, which is now all black. And Mexicans, I guess. But back then, it was basically white. It was white, and the Asians and the blacks were real minorities.

Fukumoto: So high school was pretty good for you?

01-00:35:51

Yasutake: Yeah.

Fukumoto: What kind of things did you do in high school? Were you involved in clubs? Band?

01-00:36:01

Yasutake: No, I was not a band person. My grandkids all are, but I was not a band person. I wasn't really a joiner, I guess, of the school clubs. The Japanese girls used to have girls clubs. I was in one of those things.

Fukumoto: And that was part of the high school, that had this?

01-00:36:28

Yasutake: Well, everybody who goes to the same school is usually in the same club or whatever.

Dunham: And had you participated in church or other community organizations in Utah and/or when you came back to LA?

01-00:36:43

Yasutake: In Utah, the neighbor people took me to their church.

Dunham: What kind of church?

01-00:36:49

Yasutake: Episcopal. In Oklahoma, the families took me to their church, which was Baptist, I think. Yeah, I've always gone to church. Then when we came back after the war, then I went to a Presbyterian, Caucasian church. I liked that a lot, but then what happened was they were moving to a nicer area because our area was changing, and after, they sold the church to a black church. So when they were moving, this Japanese lady who had initially invited me to that church told my family, I guess, that when the church was moving, they didn't want any of us going with them. She was with a small group that was meeting in a house, so I remember I went there a few times and I didn't really like meeting in the house. So I dropped out of church for a little while there, until I went to a Japanese church.

Dunham: So in each of these cases, you went; your parents did not go to church?

01-00:38:02

Yasutake: My parents were not going to church at that time. It was interesting. They thought that we kids should go, but they didn't go because their thing was that they were always working six days a week or whatever. Sunday was their only day off. When they retired, then they did go to church.

Dunham: To the Japanese one that you went to?

01-00:38:26

Yasutake: Yes.

Dunham: So what church was that? Where is that?

01-00:38:28

Yasutake: LA Holiness.

Fukumoto: What kind of things did your family do together?

01-00:38:38

Yasutake: Oh, they had lots of get-togethers, because my mom came from a family of nine children, and she and her sisters were pretty close. Well, some of the sisters and brothers were not here, but the ones in Southern Cal—and her two brothers were there—they were always getting together. And we did picnics, going to the beach, all kinds of things. Yeah.

Dunham: When you got back to LA, I know you said you weren't that excited, but was there anything you particularly missed that you found that you appreciated? Or did you miss the winters?

01-00:30:25

Yasutake: I probably did. I think I probably did miss the snow, yeah.

Dunham: Have you gone back to Oklahoma and/or Utah?

01-00:39:32

Yasutake: No, but I've thought, "Golly, it would be kind of fun to—" I haven't thought so much about Oklahoma, but Ogden; go back just to see if the house is there and what it looks like. But no, I never made it back there.

Dunham: And you didn't stay in touch with anybody from—?

01-00:39:50

Yasutake: No. Initially, maybe for a few months or something; and then after that, no.

Dunham: And you wrote?

01-00:39:56

Yasutake: Yeah.

Fukumoto: Reflecting back overall, what is your perspective on your wartime experience?

01-00:40:17

Yasutake: I don't know. I guess because I was so young, it was just an experience in my life. Yeah. I haven't really given it deep thought.

Dunham: If not for your mom's pregnancy, you think you probably would have gone to the camps?

01-00:40:43

Yasutake: I would assume so, I don't know. Because that's what I was told was the reason that they didn't want to go to camp, yeah.

Dunham: So far as you know, your parents, other than you mentioned the V-J Day, either in Oklahoma or in Utah, didn't experience any prejudice?

01-00:41:05

Yasutake: Not really.

Dunham: I'm curious again, your dad at work—but you didn't relate anything about that. Because certainly, in the defense industry, sometimes people working on planes or things, even, or cargo-type stuff, people might write anti-Japanese or anti-German messages on things. So I just wonder if he ever encountered anything like that.

01-00:41:26

Yasutake: Yeah. Well, if he did, I don't recall his ever saying anything about it. Yeah. To me. I don't know, the whole time in Ogden was pretty enjoyable.

Fukumoto: Pretty peaceful?

01-00:41:43

Yasutake: They had that one couple, actually, it was—well, they had a daughter, but she was in college, I guess—it seemed like every weekend, they would come to our house and the man and my dad would play that Japanese game Go, I think it is. Is that what is it? The board game.

Fukumoto: Right.

01-00:42:02

Yasutake: And they would have dinner with us. They were happy.

Dunham: And they were a Caucasian family?

01-00:42:08

Yasutake: No, the Japanese family.

Dunham: Oh, I'm sorry, they were the Japanese family.

01-00:42:11

Yasutake: Well, then the neighbor people who took me to church, they were Germans. So they were real nice to my parents. We didn't have a phone, so my mom could borrow their phone if she had to make any kind of phone calls.

Dunham: And who might she call?

01-00:42:29

Yasutake: I don't know. Yeah, I don't know what she had. Maybe some business thing, I don't know.

Dunham: Well, I'm curious. Back at the beginning, we talked a little about your parents' background, family background, but how did your parents meet, do you know?

01-00:42:48

Yasutake: I think they said my dad's older brother—I don't know if he was already married to my aunt or what, but she was my mother's friend, and she introduced them. Something like that.

Dunham: Do you know where they met? Were they in Sacramento?

01-00:43:13

Yasutake: I thought they were in Sacramento, but I'm not really sure.

Dunham: Do you have any family in Sacramento now, or did you after the war?

01-00:43:23

Yasutake: I had an aunt there. But she passed away, so let's see, I think I just have a couple of cousins up there now.

Dunham: When you returned to LA, what did your father and family do for business?

01-00:43:38

Yasutake: He went back into produce initially, because they still had those little neighborhood stores, and he did the produce part of it.

Dunham: Were they starting from scratch then? Was he with his brothers and just—?

01-00:43:53

Yasutake: No, the brothers were not with him. He did a store on Jefferson.

Dunham: How long did he do that for?

01-00:44:07

Yasutake: Until he supposedly retired. Except he didn't really like to be retired, so then he started doing a little bit of gardening. I don't think he did a whole lot of it, but he did do some gardening, because he didn't like being retired, I guess.



Dunham: For a long time, incarceration wasn't really talked about. I know you had the initial with classmates and relatives, when you came back from school; but for a long time, it wasn't talked about so much in the Japanese community. Then in the last many years, it seems like there has been a lot more discussion and the oral histories and what have you, and then ultimately, reparations. As that time passed, did that affect your perspective or kind of learning more about it in that way?

01-00:45:00

Yasutake: Well, yeah, I would suppose that I did get a little more curious. I did want to learn a little bit more about what happened and that sort of thing. Yeah.

Dunham: I think you mentioned your daughter or granddaughter recently was reading *Farewell to Manzanar*.

01-00:45:22

Yasutake: My granddaughters were reading it, yeah. Both, I think, have read it.

Dunham: Okay. Did they ask sort of, well, what about your experience?

01-00:45:34

Yasutake: Well, yeah. But then since I didn't go to camp, then I can't contribute to that part for them.

Dunham: Well, but that's why we're here, because it is another experience.

Fukumoto: Right.

Dunham: I know there were others who did move. Have you met or talked with other people who also did not go to camp, since that time? I know you knew of some in Ogden, but are there others that you're aware of?

01-00:45:59

Yasutake: No, because anybody that I met since then did go to camp or they're from Hawaii. I have a lot of friends from Hawaii.

Dunham: What have your friends from Hawaii said about that time period, if anything?

01-00:46:18

Yasutake: They really don't say. Because they weren't here, they didn't experience it.

Dunham: Well, is there anything else you'd like to share with us? I know you've been thinking about this a little bit. We welcome anything from your experience or family members have told you that we haven't discussed.

01-00:46:46

Yasutake: Well, there was one incident. You were talking about the prejudice, if I felt any when I was living in Oklahoma. I also walked to school over there, too. Like I said, it was the country. So coming home from school one day, some

kid, Caucasian boy, ran out of a house and he blocked my way, like this. But I don't remember what he said to me. But it had something to do with the fact that I was Japanese, okay? Then somebody came to the door of that house and yelled at him to come back, and so he went in. So when I came home from school that day, I remember telling my parents about that, and I was frightened. I was afraid to have to walk past that house again. But that's the only thing that I remember.

Dunham: Do you remember how they responded?

01-00:47:43

Yasutake: No, I don't.

Dunham: Do you remember walking by that house the next time or other times?

01-00:47:51

Yasutake: Eventually, I did again. I can't remember what I did right away, but I don't think I did walk by that house for a while. Yeah.

Fukumoto: Were you pretty close to your parents? Did you have a very close relationship with your mother, as far as did you talk a lot?

01-00:48:17

Yasutake: I don't know. I think nowadays, we have closer relationships with our kids than parents did back then. I don't know.

Dunham: Did you learn Japanese at all?

01-00:48:31

Yasutake: No.

Dunham: So was that a barrier between you and your father? Or was his—

01-00:48:35

Yasutake: No.

Dunham: —English sufficient?

01-00:48:37

Yasutake: Yeah. My dad and I got along real well. I don't think my father was the typical Issei father that people talk about, that was like whatever they said ruled. My father was not that way. But then he came here when he was real young, too.

Dunham: And he also married a Nisei, which may have been a factor. Anything else? Maybe we could talk a little bit about after high school. What did you do after high school?

01-00:49:18

Yasutake: I just went to Los Angeles City College and took the dental assisting course. I just got an AA there and became a dental assistant.

Dunham: Did you do that for long?

01-00:49:31

Yasutake: I did that until we moved out here. Well, my last years I was always working just part-time. Then we moved down here, and I couldn't find a job like the one I had when I was living in LA. When I was living there, my last job, I was working for a professor at the USC School of Dentistry, because I had worked at the School of Dentistry, and I met him there. So I worked part-time for him, so I had very good pay, I guess. So when I came out here, I asked my dentist friend out here about job. And he asked me what I was making and he goes, "*Oh*. Nobody pays that much out here." So I was like, "Oh, okay." So I didn't work for a while.

Dunham: How did you meet your husband?

01-00:50:24

Yasutake: At church. At LA Holiness.

Fukumoto: What did he do?

01-00:50:33

Yasutake: Oh, he did all kinds of work when we were young; but then he eventually ended up being in insurance. Insurance and financial planning.

Dunham: Any last thoughts? That's wonderful. This has been really great, And of course, not so different from, I think, people who were so young and in the camps. As you said, how you were kind of a little jealous when you went to the camps, because that, for kids, was that side of it, that they were all together and kind of had that play time, if you will.

01-00:51:08

Yasutake: Yeah.

Dunham: And it seem like that's sort of what your experience was in Oklahoma—

01-00:51:13

Yasutake: Right.

Dunham: —and especially in Utah. But, yeah, certainly a significant impact on your life trajectory, right?

Fukumoto: It's just really interesting. I learned a lot.

01-00:51:28

Yasutake: Oh, good.

Fukumoto: Just because, like I was saying, this is a part that I have not really learned about. Or because honestly, when Scotty said, “Oh, yeah, my family wasn’t in camp,” I was like, “Really? Are you sure? Where did they go?” He’s like, “Oh, well, Utah.”

01-00:51:47

Yasutake: Yeah, I think Carol’s family went to Utah then. I don’t know where. I’ll have to ask her. Well, she wasn’t born yet, but “Where’d you go?”

Dunham: But it sort of begs the question of—we’ve talked about the pregnancy being the key factor, but why wouldn’t more families have sort of proactively gone, in order to avoid camps?

01-00:52:07

Yasutake: I think there was a lot of fear. Just like the friend of my dad’s who came over and told him that he was crazy because we were going to be mistreated. I think probably that’s what a lot of people—

Dunham: The feeling that the camps would be safer than being amidst the general public—

01-00:52:24

Yasutake: Well, because that was a presidential order. So I think that was their mindset is, “Okay, we’re told to do this; we need to be obedient.” I think. But my father was just a little—

Fukumoto: Well, it sounds like a little radical.

01-00:52:47

Yasutake: Yeah.

Fukumoto: In my mind, I was like, wow!

01-00:52:47

Yasutake: In those days, I think that’s probably what he was considered, maybe. Yeah.

Dunham: Do you know, did it create any friction within the family?

01-00:52:56

Yasutake: No. No, it didn’t do that.

Dunham: You mention an uncle who joined the 442<sup>nd</sup>. Did you know much about sort of his career and how he joined and how that went for him?

01-00:53:09

Yasutake: No, I don’t really know many details about it. By the time he got sent over, though, I guess the main whatevers were all over, so he wasn’t involved in any of that.

Dunham: Did you know of any family members or others who were able to transfer out of the camps to go to college or universities?

01-00:53:34

Yasutake: Not in our family, that I know; but yeah, I've heard of it. I have heard since then of other people.

Dunham: Do you know where they went or how that was coordinated?

01-00:53:46

Yasutake: No, I don't really know all how that worked out.

Dunham: The Quakers, I know, coordinated some.

01-00:53:51

Yasutake: Oh, that's right. I have heard that the Quakers were very helpful to them, yeah.

Dunham: Well, thank you very much. This has been terrific. I really appreciate you taking the time today.

Fukumoto: It's been delightful. Thank you so much.

01-00:54:02

Yasutake: Well, I'm glad, if it was helpful.

Dunham: So this is a newspaper article from when you were in Oklahoma, right?

01-00:54:16

Yasutake: Yes.

Dunham: Can you tell us a little bit about this article or how it came to pass?

01-00:54:24

Yasutake: I just remember being called out of the room. I had to go to the office, and I didn't quite know what was going on. Then somebody wanted me to pledge allegiance to the flag; they wanted to take my picture. So I was like, okay.

Dunham: On the back is—

01-00:54:41

Yasutake: When Thomas was born.

Dunham: —when your brother was born. So aside from this newspaper article, though, you don't remember, necessarily, celebrity status maybe for your unique identity or that type of thing?

01-00:55:00

Yasutake: No.

Dunham: But interesting that it was newsworthy and featured.

01-00:55:07

Yasutake: Yeah. Yeah, it is interesting. Well, but when I turned seventy, my kids gave me a big family party. Well, family and friends. So they put up a poster, and they had that thing on it. My friends were real surprised to see something like that, too because—

Dunham: Thank you very much again for taking the time to be with us today.

[End of interview]