

DON NAKAHATA AND ALICE

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DON NAKAHATA AND ALICE

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An Interview By

Sandra Taylor

May 12, 1988

American West Center

University of Utah

Utah Minorities Series: Asian

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Donald T. Hebl

Interviewee

Donald T. Hebl, 1915-1988, Salt Lake City, Utah

Robert L. Goff

Interviewer

ST: Now, Dr. Nakagawa Table of Contents

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ST: Oh, yes.

ST: And doing that and he was working for the Japanese

THIS IS SANDRA TAYLOR. THE DATE IS MAY 12, 1988. I'M IN MILL VALLEY [CALIFORNIA] INTERVIEWING DR. DON NAKAHATA.

ST: Now, Dr. Nakahata would you tell me a little bit about what your family was like and your life and your parents life before the relocation.

DN: Well, let's see. Our family consisted of starting with the oldest person my grandfather, who was an Episcopal priest. His niece came to live with us after the war started because of the rumors of things were that going to happen. She'd been living in San Diego. My father was picked up by the FBI as a dangerous alien on December the 8th. My mother, my aunt, and my sister and me, so at the time of the evacuation it was my grandfather who was born in 1864, who was nominally the head of the household. He was alive during the American Civil War, so he was in his late seventies or eighties and my mother was probably about fifty and I was twelve years old. Let's see, my dad had been in the produce business in Southern California in the early thirties, he quit and came to San Francisco. At that time then he suffered a stroke and so he was partially disabled and he was working for the Skin Sekai it was probably the predecessor of the Hokubei Mainichi.

ST: Oh, yeah.

DN: And doing that and he was working for the Japanese

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Association, and you know about the Japanese Association.

ST: Yes.

DN: So essentially he was I guess sort of a social worker because of what the Association did.

ST: Oh, yes.

DN: And I guess that's partly what got him or made him a suspicious and dangerous alien in the eyes of the American government.

ST: Right, yes.

DN: Because I've learned since then that they, the Japanese Association, did things like take a census of Issei since they were not American citizens but were Japanese nationals so somebody had some kind of responsibility for them if nothing else. My grandfather, who was close to eighty, was a retired Episcopal priest. My mother at the time worked as a domestic and at this time it's hard to remember if that was after my father got picked up by the FBI or before. It's probably before. This was the tail end of the Depression.

ST: Oh, yes.

DN: And we lived in a two story flat. I know we had a piano because my mother was trying to teach me how to play it but I never learned. I guess most of the

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furniture we left with the landlady who was going to sell it. She did come to Tanforan to give us the proceeds. And I think what she brought us was one cake because that was all she said she got.

ST: One cake! [laughter] My!

DN: I remember our family tried to sell some things because I remember the dining room table being set up with dishes and things, and people wandering around looking at the things that were on it. That's about what I remember before the evacuation. I remember the day of the evacuation. I can picture it. There were four floors in the building including ground level in that building, 2092 Dupont Street. There was a first floor flat and then we had the second flat which had the third story and then an attic, and so there was a long flight of stairs running down. I remember looking down the stairs and seeing the light outside. I can still picture this and sense (and it's really kind of crazy) the fear of our family being left behind.

ST: Oh, yes.

DN: I didn't know that, looking back now at twelve, I can say it was a child's sense of insecurity, but that's what I remember.

ST: Must have been frightening for you?

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DN: But that's, you know I guess, what John Tateiski caught when he wrote the other book. [And Justice For All.] He says a lot of us have blocked a lot of memories and I have a lot of memories I don't remember. And that still may be true.

ST: I think its quite common to block something like that.

DN: Anyway, that's the way it is. Because of my grandfather's advanced age and because of the fact that he was a Christian minister, we didn't get a stable but a barracks room at Tanforan Assembly Center.

ST: Yes, not a horse stall.

DN: Yeah, that's right. And then, you know, sometime I would be interested to see how many accommodations, how many people--the percentage breakdown of how many people they were able to put in the barracks and how many that were put in the horse stables.

ST: Yes. Yes.

DN: To know how fortunate we were.

ST: Yes. I'll see if I can find the figure.

DN: I remember at one point they did organize a school at Tanforan. I guess that's always a thing parents worry about--education. And jailers are interested in keeping the prisoners occupied--

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ST: Surely, yeah.

DN: --one way or the other, and keeping kids occupied, you're keeping (probably more important) the educated young prisoners occupied.

ST: Yes.

DN: Give them a new direction. I can look back at this and say that was really a fantastic fascist enterprise that our government undertook.

ST: Oh, yes.

DN: Because they came through--they cut the head off the community by taking all the established leaders.

ST: Yes.

DN: Then they had a whole bunch of stories going around so people didn't know what was going on. There was a lot of uncertainty as to what the timing was going to be, whether or not anything was going to break.

ST: Yeah.

DN: Then they put us in camps and if you think about it how Topaz was laid out, when you think about Stalag Seventeen that we all watched on television--

ST: Sure.

DN: --the guard towers, the fence, the free fire zone within the fence. All the buildings were together in the middle. This was a typical prison camp.

ST: Yes.

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DN: And this is the great citadel of democracy! But anyway, what else do I remember about Tanforan? Not a heck of a lot. Just about forty years [ago].

ST: Forty-five [years ago].

DN: Forty-five years [ago].

ST: Well, I guess probably the food wouldn't have made that much of an impression on a young boy, not as much as on his parents certainly. And probably the lack of privacy and bathing and so forth might have not made as much impression on you.

DN: Yeah. I do remember that the women had more of a problem with that.

ST: Yeah.

DN: And they set up a dining room underneath the grandstand in Tanforan.

ST: Yes.

DN: It was a big thing in my family that we ate together both at Tanforan and Topaz. That made it tough sometimes on an adolescent boy because all the other kids ate together.

ST: Oh, yes. Well, how did you arrange that particularly in Topaz--well in Tanforan as well? Did you cook in your room?

DN: No. I think we went as a family to the dining room.

ST: Oh, yes.

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DN: Or in Tanforan, I mean Topaz, I think some of the time, and I think a lot of families did it, a representative of the family went into the mess hall and got the food and brought it back to the room.

ST: Yeah.

DN: Or I think sometimes we just simply ate together in the mess hall.

ST: Sounds like--when did your father join you?

DN: No. my father--

ST: He never did.?

DN: Yeah. I walked my father to--I guess it was on December the 7th. It must have been the seventh because he was working part-time for the Japanese Association in San Jose, and he said something like, "Well, there would be lots of leaders in San Francisco but in San Jose somebody had to be in the community."

ST: Yeah.

DN: So he was going to go to work in San Jose and I guess the FBI picked him up there.

ST: Oh.

DN: And so I walked him to--in those days the 22 streetcar ran down Fillmore Street to the Southern Pacific Depot, and so I walked him to the streetcar and that's the last I saw of him.

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ST: Oh my.

DN: You know, you think about--sometimes I think about that and the fact that my father was picked up by the "security police," essentially.

ST: Yes.

DN: And I never saw him again. Ultimately in the report of the hearing [the INS held "hearings" to determine if the "detainees" should be "released" to the WRA concentration camp. Under the Freedom of Information act only the final report of my dad's hearing was made available.] that he had said he was dangerous because his brother who had died in 1932 had been in the Japanese foreign service.

ST: Oh, good grief.

DN: The report went on to say that he was educated and a community leader, and that's why he was dangerous.

ST: Oh, yeah.

DN: But if you compare that to what happens in the Banana Republics today--that would be fun!

ST: They've always liked that sort of thing.

DN: You know, it's--we were doing it then and we're still doing it. But anyway, I don't know. Where I was now?

ST: I'd say we were still in Tanforan. Who took the leadership then? Your grandfather?

DN: Possibly my grandfather. Probably, I think, my aunt.

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ST: Oh, really.

DN: Because she was, probably, Aunt Faith was unmarried, and she was born in 1899 so she was only forty-three years old. She was educated because she went to Cal, and my mother was, my mother's nickname was, "The Lady."

ST: Oh.

DN: She probably wouldn't have exerted that kind of leadership.

ST: Uh huh. Yes.

DN: So, probably Aunt Faith.

ST: Uh huh. That's interesting. So then you moved from Tanforan to Topaz.

DN: Right.

ST: Do you remember anything about that train ride?

DN: Yeah. I know it was hot. I know they let us out someplace to exercise.

ST: Oh, yes.

DN: And there were armed sentries. There was dust and that's about it.

ST: Mmh, yes.

DN: They were old cars. They were older than the trains we rode in to visit my uncle and cousins in Stockton. Sometimes we'd go to Stockton on the train.

ST: Yeah.

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DN: Trains that took us to Utah were a heck of a lot older.

ST: Ah, yes.

DN: And that's about what I remember about the train ride. I know that you know, we all talked about the dust and the heat and the scorpions and cold in the winter and I remember looking at the mockup up of the barracks room in the Smithsonian exhibit and my sense was that the floor in the Smithsonian was too [good].

ST: Yes. Yes. Many people have said that.

DN: Didn't have all the cracks in place.

AN: You know, Don, I was thinking about the furniture and it was usually the family who built it because there wasn't any.

ST: Uh huh. Also families because your grandfather was a priest, friends who intercepted and in a sense took care of your family?

DN: Yes, that's true. There were a lot of people that--

ST: --who felt some responsibility for him.

DN: Yeah.

ST: Hmm, that figures.

DN: I think so because my grandfather did a lot of the weddings for picture brides.

ST: Oh, yes.

DN: And he taught English, and my grandmother taught

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English, and my grandmother had been a translator at Angel Island.

ST: Oh, yes.

DN: And I guess my grandfather was kind of a militant, and got into trouble in the Japanese Episcopal church and that's how he immigrated to this country. And so for a while he was an itinerant priest, and worked in the labor camps and I guess constantly preached against womanizing and gambling and drinking.

ST: Ah, yes.

DN: "Really save your money so that you can go back to Japan or make something of yourself." So I guess there are a lot of people that felt indebted to him.

ST: Oh, sure.

DN: And so that's true, Sandra, we did get a lot of help from a lot of people.

ST: Had he been converted to Christianity in Japan?

DN: Oh, yeah. Because he was ordained an Episcopal priest and an Anglican priest I guess in 1887.

ST: Oh, my, early, yeah. I did some work studying Congregational missionaries and converts in Japan in that period of time.

DN: That's totally aside from what you're talking about.

ST: Yes, it is.

DN: But my grandfather was a positively fascinating man

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and I wished I had known him better because he was trained as a Samurai.

ST: Oh, my.

DN: He actually had his hair pulled back and shaped and everything. His ancestors probably took part in Christian persecutions. One of the history books mentions that one of the lords in southern Japan known for his cruelty, a Terasawa, may have helped Christians escape from Japan during those times.

ST: Ah.

DN: And I've always wondered if they weren't "hidden Christians."

ST: Yes.

DN: Although the Terasawa's, were on the other side in the watershed battle of Sekigahara, my grandmother's side was on the side of the Christians.

ST: Yes. That's interesting, yes.

DN: So when you ask about my grandfather I don't read Japanese so I'll probably never be able to research that.

ST: Oh, yes.

DN: But anyway, I got lost.

ST: Yeah. Well, we had just arrived at Topaz. Where did they put you in the barracks there?

DN: We were in Block 26 which is the northeast corner of

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the square right in the middle of the camp.

ST: Ah, yes. Were you all in one room?

DN: We started out in one room. Eventually we did end up in two rooms, my aunt, my grandfather and his niece, "Obasan" were in one room, and my mother, my sister and I were in a small room. And various people did build shelves and room dividers.

ST: Yes.

DN: And Aunt Faith still has a chest of drawers from Topaz.

ST: Oh, my.

DN: I remember that one of the things that I remember was that we all had those potbellied stoves, you know.

ST: Oh, yes.

DN: I remember the potbelly stove. It burned coal.

ST: Oh, yes.

DN: They'd bring a dump truck and dump the coal. They didn't bring it very often. We had a coal scuttle and everybody would run out there to get coal, and I guess I was kind of a shy kid at thirteen--twelve, thirteen, fourteen whatever, and I wouldn't get in there and elbow people out of the way which is really what you had to do.

ST: Certainly.

DN: And, you know, I guess there again that's an

ST: interesting observation of what you do to people.
DN: They dumped this pile of coal and we'd have to fight it out.

ST: Yeah.

DN: You know, and somebody was always nice enough to make sure that I got coal one way or another.

ST: Yeah, and that was the administration, that was the way they delivered coal.

DN: They did it, we divided it I guess. But you talk about dehumanizing experiences.

ST: Yeah. In a small way that is one.

DN: I guess I was fortunate that I was only a kid.

ST: Yeah. So someone took care of you.

DN: Yeah. If I'd been older then you'd have to make those ethical decisions to go along with that.

ST: Uh huh. Yeah. Either you're left to fend for yourself and if you don't get any that's too bad, yeah.

DN: Well, how do we take care of those other, you know, you were once a family, but you're a family no more.

ST: Yeah, very much, yeah. So you got the coal and I suppose you went to school then?

DN: Yeah. There was a school and I guess if I remember some of the teachers were camp inmates and some of them were from the "surrounding communities," some were from the rest of the country.

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ST: Yeah.

DN: Our English teacher was somebody from the surrounding community and all I remember learning is the story about how he killed a bear.

ST: Oh, no.

DN: And he said that he ran out of ammunition and he was standing there with tears running down his nose into the barrel of his gun and so cold the tears froze and so he shot the bear with the icicle.

ST: Oh. [laughter]

DN: And that's all I remember from--

ST: Yeah. Oh my.

DN: And I guess I was behind scholastically when I went to Rochester when we left camp. We left camp in August of '45.

ST: Well, that's just about the end.

DN: Yeah, and although, you know, I really don't know how much longer Topaz was open.

ST: I think it was closed by the end of December, '45.

DN: Because I know I have a vague recollection of people leaving but I don't know where in that migration that we left.

ST: Yeah. That's fairly late.

DN: I don't remember. An interesting thing is I guess with all that was going on with our family, I don't

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ST: really, to this day I really don't know when VJ day was. Do you? VE day was in June I guess.

ST: It was in--yeah, yeah. Normandy was June 6th, in '44.

DN: Yeah.

ST: Yeah. D-Day was I think May 8th. Yeah, and VJ Day was--

DN: Sometime in August I think, and we left sometime in August.

ST: Yes. Was that coincidence do you know?

DN: I don't know.

ST: So you went to school and do you remember--well, of course you wouldn't know about I guess the quality of the education much at that age.

DN: Well, they didn't have enough spaces and I guess didn't basically have enough teachers.

ST: Yeah.

DN: --so that they had a placement test for a science class and so I got to take cooking.

ST: Oh.

DN: Because I didn't make the cut in science class.

ST: Oh, no. Of course did they teach you western cooking or Japanese cooking?

DN: We made a lemon meringue pie.

ST: Oh, wonderful.

DN: But it didn't gel.

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ST: Yes. [laughter]

DN: And that's about all I remember, and I thought I remembered more.

AN: Ask him about the kids.

ST: Yeah. Did the kids get along or was there fighting or was there terrorizing?

DN: Yeah, I remember being harassed a lot. In looking back, my mother came from--I guess my mother had been in various schools in Japan. My grandfather's family was actually from Fukui which is the China seaside of the main island.

ST: Oh, yes.

DN: He'd been a priest in Osaka so that my mother told me she'd been to various girls schools, and I didn't know until she died that she'd been a missionary.

ST: Oh, my.

DN: In northern Honshu. I think so. My dad was from Aomori, way up in the northern tip Japan so I think there were maybe two or three other men in San Francisco who were from Aomori.

ST: Yes. That's unusual.

DN: Yeah. Most of the people are from Wakayama, Hiroshima and other places so, you know, we were a minority. We were Christians. We were Episcopalians, you know, we were a very small minority.

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ST: Yes.

DN: And I guess there was some tension between Christians
others. Anyway, I remember being picked on (I was
small) because my birthday is in October.

ST: Oh, yes.

DN: So I'd be among the smaller kids in class. I guess I
was pretty smart and for kids that never helps
either.

ST: No, it doesn't.

DN: Because I remember being picked on and harassed. Then
there weren't a lot of kids in my block for some
reason. There was, I think there was three of us,
three boys, and there were a number of high school
kids, but in the junior high there were just three of
us from my block.

ST: Yes.

DN: I know this one kid--I don't know how we did it, but
we used to have little football games. And he made
himself a set of shoulder pads using corrugated
cardboard from cardboard boxes.

ST: Yes.

DN: Let's see, what else do I remember? I worked at the
poultry ranch one summer.

ST: Oh. Was that at Topaz.

DN: At Topaz. I learned to drive a tractor. Almost tipped

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ST: it over on him, but I guess that's not an uncommon farm accident.

ST: Yeah, it isn't.

DN: What else did I do? I worked one summer in the dental clinic.

ST: Oh. Were you interested in dentistry?

DN: No. It was my aunt's "pull" if you want to call it that.

ST: Oh, I see.

DN: One of the dentists was an old family friend. What else?

AN: You said you also remember that's your formal exposure to more fundamentalist type hymns.

DN: Oh, yeah.

AN: You would never get that kind of thing in the Episcopal church.

ST: No, certainly not.

DN: Yeah, that's right. Yeah.

AN: But a lot of those, you know, those old hymns like, "What a Friend We Have . . .," you know, those quotes.

DN: Yeah. Because the church was a union church essentially.

ST: Yeah.

DN: And so the Sunday services, except when the bishop

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ST: came, I guess would be ecumenical services.

ST: Oh, yeah.

DN: And you know it's an interesting thing that for me there's a very strong emotional something to those old fundamentalist hymns that I had never encountered before going to camp. I guess things like--

AN: Oh, well, you didn't see things like that in the Episcopal church.

DN: There was an old hymn--"Abide with me" because I remember we sang it when my grandmother died at home, and I remember singing that as a kid and "Onward Christian Soldiers," which we've now taken out of the Episcopal prayer book or hymnal.

ST: Oh.

DN: So that, some of them are common even to the Episcopal church, but "The Old Rugged Cross."

AN: "I came to the garden alone."

DN: Yeah. "When the dew is still on the roses." Yeah, some of those, you know, and I--

AN: You heard in camp.

DN: Yeah, and I wonder what kind of ties am I making that it has that emotional appeal or maybe Jerry Falwell and the other Fundamentalists are right. That's the true path and that's what-- [laughter] that's why he has such great appeal.

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ST: Well, that's hokum. [laughter] Oh, my. So you went to church and you probably--did they have organized sports when you were participating?

DN: No, I don't think so. Not for kids my age. I know there was a--they organized a Boy Scout troop, but they did it in the summer and they started out by doing close order drill. So my friend and I marched away because it was too hot.

ST: Oh yeah.

DN: And let's see.

ST: Did you have community movies?

DN: Yeah, they had movies. I remember that. You'd go sit on the floor of the recreation hall. What else? They had--that wasn't for us to take part in. They had sumo that was going on. I think they had--I don't know if they had a block baseball team. A lot of these things were for young men, you know, the high school kids and the young men beyond high school age.

ST: Yeah.

DN: And I guess maybe there wasn't a lot for boys my age. I know my mother actually had a job as a recreation something or other and she had a Brownie troop.

ST: Oh.

DN: So I remember she had to learn the Brownie song about the Brownie smile and so I remember that but I won't

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DN: sing it. [laughter]

ST: Oh, boy. Aggie's hole.

AN: [Inaudible, memory prompt about the store.]

DN: Yeah, we went out to the store but I don't remember
ST: having any money to go shop there.

ST: Yeah. You weren't working, you probably didn't have
any money to be there. So you never got into Delta
ST: then at all?

DN: I don't know if I ever got to Delta. We went--I know
the poultry ranch had a picnic for the workers, and
ST: we went to some field down there, and collected
DN: arrowheads and Trilobites. Still have those. Getting
old. I don't remember that much.

ST: You remember pretty well.

DN: Thank you.

AN: What was it, when we went back there you found some
place, somebody had dug--

DN: No, you mean the guy that lived in the barrack across
ST: the way? Because it was hot he dug, I guess,
DN: essentially it would be a root cellar.

ST: Oh, yeah.

DN: And with a trap door so you could get down and it'd
be just like Stalag Seventeen. The escape tunnel but
where could you escape to?

ST: Yes.

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DN: But it had this hole and so when we went back there I
ST: found Siggie's hole.

ST: Oh, for heaven's sake.

DN: Yeah. Still is a depression in the ground.

ST: Yeah.

DN: And we even brought back the tied end of the barbed
wire fence that was hanging down.

ST: Oh, really.

DN: And a few pieces of wood from the area where my
barrack was and--

ST: Oh, yes. Your collection.

DN: On the same trip we went to Taos, and we learned that
those are called by archaeologists, potsherds.

ST: Potsherds, yes indeed. Oh my yes, and artifacts. Oh,
yeah. Gosh.

DN: And I remember the year we went back, that year they
had the great summer rain storm and they had a great
flood in Estes Park and a bunch of people died.

ST: Oh, yes.

DN: We followed that rain storm east on Highway 50, and
so the desert was wet and it was blooming.

ST: Oh, yeah.

DN: It was amazing how quickly it bloomed, and I
remembered Topaz as being this vast place.

ST: Yes.

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DN: And when we got there originally in '42--and dusty.

ST: Yes, of course.

DN: But following the rain the--and without, say, ten thousand people walking around, that soil wasn't all pulverized.

ST: Uh, yes.

DN: And so it was it was like any other dry mountain desert. It's gorgeous, it's really gorgeous.

ST: Yes, must be. Yes, it would be.

DN: Yeah, and it's small. It's only a mile on each side.

ST: Yeah, it is.

DN: And it's--I don't know how many--there's the free fire zone perimeter within the fence.

ST: Yes.

DN: You know, having been in the service I know what that represents.

ST: Yeah.

DN: But I didn't then.

ST: No.

DN: There that was. So the area the barracks covered was actually quite small.

ST: Yeah.

DN: It was a strange feeling.

AN: I bet.

DN: To take your kid when he was probably fourteen.

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AN: Probably. Something like that.

DN: Probably fifteen. He (John) was just short of being a legal driver.

ST: Yeah. Wow.

DN: You know, so you take your kids and say, "This is where I was in jail."

ST: Yes. Oh, yes. Well, so you finally got out in August. Was there any discussion do you recall about whether you should go somewhere else other than back to San Francisco?

DN: Yeah. Actually because my family was in a church family, and being a hierarchial church--I don't know if Bishop Reifsnider--Bishop Reifsnider had been the missionary bishop, and he was a long time friend of the family as a missionary bishop in Japan and he had been nominally placed in charge of all the Japanese American Anglicans. He had talked to people and said since my father was now dead and my grandfather was now dead the family consisted of my mother, my aunt, Mrs. Nakamura who is probably in her late sixties and my sister had already relocated to Rochester New York.

DN: They said it's probably not a good idea to come back to the West Coast at that point.

ST: Oh, yeah.

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DN: So they said, "We found someplace for you to go-- Rochester, New York. I guess partly because my sister was there, but there was a small group of Japanese Americans in Rochester, mostly people going to the university. They did ship our belongings to the Baptist church, and I'm not sure if they had a hostel or something there or not. We stayed for a brief period of time with a Baptist minister's family, and then my mother got a job as a domestic for a physician. His wife was essentially a paraplegic and so my mother did the cooking, housekeeping and they had a nurse for her. So I lived with her. We had two rooms essentially in the attic. I went to high school. I started high school when we were living with the Baptist minister. So I continued in that school even though I had to ride all the way across town at that point. Aunt Faith and Mrs. Nakamura worked for a family by the name of Angle. He was the chairman of the board of Stromberg Carlson at the time.

ST: Oh, my.

DN: So Mrs. Nakamura helped the maid essentially and I guess, you know, looking at it now the Angles were probably just being really nice people who could afford it who were giving us shelter in exchange for

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the little work that Mrs. Nakamura did and Aunt Faith did. The maid Isabel served dinner and I think went home, and then Aunt Faith and Obasan cleaned up afterwards.

ST: Oh.

DN: And you know, I never thought of talking to them, you know, the Angles were probably just a real good family

ST: Yeah.

DN: And Aunt Faith worked. She worked in a commercial photography laboratory for awhile retouching pictures because she had learned that skill twenty or thirty years before.

ST: Oh.

DN: And then she went to work for the "Y" just doing clerical work, and she did that until '47. I graduated high school in '47 and I remember my mother; my mother told me that we had this conversation. I'm not sure that I remember, but she told me, you know, that she and I talked as my graduation approached. And I said that in June a lot of my friends were going to get jobs. They had careers working for Eastman Kodak. I said, "I'd like to do that," and she said, "No you are going to go back to California and get an education first,"

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DN: because California at the time was the only state that had created a free university system.

ST: That's right, yeah.

DN: So we came back to California, and I guess Aunt Faith came back first and she promised to find a place to stay. It was essentially one big room in a Hotel at Turk and Fillmore run by some friends from pre-war days that had a hotel and we stayed there for quite a while, maybe a year or so.

AN: And that was how many of you?

DN: Aunt Faith, Mother, Obasan, me, Nelson too, my cousin for a short time when he got out of the Navy, my sister--all of us essentially in one room--actually it was two rooms. They were sort of like this arrangement (indicating layout of room). One room and then an alcove kitchen/dining room.

ST: Oh, yeah.

DN: And there was a community bathroom down the hall. I've said to somebody else that in a sense we were our nation's first boat people except we didn't have to come by boat.

ST: Yeah.

DN: And when you think about problems really started by-

[END OF SIDE ONE]

AN: [Inaudible]

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DN: Okay. I'll tell you something about what happened to my father. My father as I said before was picked up by the FBI I guess, and I really should look this up sometime on the 8th of December. And the grapevine told us that he'd been picked up. I don't think we were ever officially notified that he was in custody. But at some point somebody called and said, "Mr. Nakahata and a bunch of people are now at the immigration station." That's on Silver Avenue which I think now is used for an old peoples home. "And they're going to be moved, and you should get out there right away." So despite the fact that money was really tight and because the time was so short, Aunt Faith and my mother gathered up a bunch of clothes for my dad because as far as I remember they hadn't-- didn't know where he was, so they hadn't been able to send him anything. So they gathered up a bunch of clothes and took a cab and went out there, and they said, "Well, it's too late. Everybody is in buses. You can't see him but we'll give him the bundle," and I guess he got the bundle. But that was as close as anybody got to see him. I know he was in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He was in Camp Polk, Louisiana, and I guess he died in Missoula, Montana, and so he was moved something like three times within the space of

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ST: eighteen months because he lived about eighteen months after he was picked up.

ST: How did he die?

DN: He had a stroke in 1937, and apparently he had, I guess, a couple of more strokes while in custody.

ST: Oh.

DN: And looking back on it now, you know, if you're in an unsettled condition and a man is hypertensive already, already suffered one stroke and that kind of situation, being moved every few months, each time being interrogated by the new camp administration--

ST: Oh, yes.

DN: --wouldn't be the best result.

ST: No.

DN: And every once in a while other people would be released and come back to our camps and say, "We saw Mr. Nakahata. He was in the hospital or he was out of the hospital."

ST: Oh.

DN: We did get a few letters. And then--

AN: They were censored.

DN: Yes, they were censored. He always referred to the FIB--

ST: Oh, yes.

DN: --rather than the FBI.

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ST: So you never saw him again?

DN: No. Never saw him again.

AN: [Inaudible/memory prompt]

DN: Oh yeah. They notified us one evening that we had this telegram inside, and said that we could claim his body by, and if we didn't claim his body, he'd be buried the next morning.

ST: Oh, good grief!

DN: And I guess Aunt Faith because she had been working in the camp welfare section managed to find somebody to intervene and said to send the body.

ST: Yeah.

DN: And I'm not sure how we came up with the money for the train to ship the body back.

ST: Yeah.

DN: Whether they took up a collection in Missoula because I'm sure my family didn't at sixteen dollars a month have money to do that. I'll have to think about that. They sent the body and I know my mother and my aunt went to see my father's body. If you're in that situation and you don't think of this as plain ordinary citizens, but I guess if you're in that situation you have to go and verify for yourself--

ST: Oh yes.

DN: --that he did die, and I remember Aunt Faith asking

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and trying to get the mortician to tell about the condition of the body for I guess evidence of injury or violence.

ST: Yeah.

DN: And I--you know, we never did get a medical record, in the records that I got from the Freedom of Information Office. There had been medical records. There obviously was a doctor.

ST: Yeah.

DN: But the government didn't release those. And then finally--how many years later was it? My mother put up a stone.

AN: They must have had him cremated someplace.

DN: Yeah. Yeah. My mother put up a stone and had my dad cremated I guess in Delta and a--

AN: And your uncle?

DN: Yeah. My uncle who--and that's an interesting story too. My uncle who was living in Brighton, Colorado paid for an urn. So we had this paper wrapped package of dad's ashes that my mother carried from Topaz to Rochester, New York and back. And so finally after the war she got enough money together and so she paid for a headstone at the cemetery, and we were going to inter the ashes. And so I said, "Okay." Well, we got this paper box, you know, I'll open it up. The

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ST: mortician's instructions to my mother, "Don't open this. It is against the law for you to open this package!" So my mother being a good law-abiding citizen never opened the paper wrapper. But me, I'm just another American so I'm going to open the package. And I unwrapped this wooden box. My uncle paid for an urn so it must be inside this box. So I opened it up and no urn. Just ashes.

ST: Oh, my. Terrible.

DN: That's an interesting aside.

ST: Yes.

DN: I was going to tell you about my uncle. My uncle worked for, and eventually with George Shima, the potato king of the delta islands. When war started, of course, they all got picked up, right? In fact they sent him to a camp in Arkansas. Yeah, and from there they recruited him to go out to all the camps and to recruit people to go back to the Intermountain states to be farm workers because we didn't have any farm workers.

ST: That's right, yes.

DN: So the government paid for him to go back to tour these areas and then go back to camps and recruit these people, and that's how he ended up in Brighton, Colorado.

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ST: Well, so much of it made so little sense.

DN: Yes. What else should I tell you?

ST: Then after you had returned to San Francisco what did you and your mother do?

DN: Oh, let's see. My mother worked I guess briefly as a domestic again. And then I guess that's the common immigrant entry to this country, and then she worked as a seamstress for I Magnon for years. My sister graduated from the University of Rochester with a degree in philosophy of history or the history of philosophy. I'm not sure which.

ST: Oh, yes.

DN: And came back and couldn't get a job so somebody got her a job in the military traffic management system shipping munitions overseas. And she was let go the Friday before the Korean war started. They called her back on Sunday. Working on sending munitions overseas. She's been doing that ever since. I went to City College in San Francisco and from there to University of California, Berkeley. And like a lot of kids I put in a fifth year. I wanted to be a cellular physiologist. Today I'd be a genetic engineer or something, but, in those days my training was as a conventional biologist, and my interest was in an area that required physical biochemistry. So I had to

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go back and be reeducated. My major professor had done that, but he could do it because he was being paid as a full professor too, you know, so he could reeducate himself.

ST: Yeah.

DN: So he did and then the Korean War started and I got tired of school and we were running out of money and I needed to do something so I went to work for the University in Davis as a research assistant.

ST: Mmh.

DN: And got drafted from there and put in my two years for Uncle Sam who then paid for my professional education.

ST: Oh, yes.

DN: Except the last year when my wife worked. [laughter]

AN: I was making plans.

ST: Oh, my.

DN: But she got a degree called "putting hubbie through."

ST: Oh yes, Ph.T. one of those. That is a very, very interesting story. Thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]