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Topaz Oral Histories

Fumi Hayashi

FUMI HAYASHI

Berkeley, California

Tape No. 19

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An Interview By

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THIS IS SANDRA TAYLOR INTERVIEWING FUMI HAYASHI ON OCTOBER 28, 1987 FOR A SPECIAL PROJECT.

ST: Fumi, would you like to tell me a little bit about yourself, your parents, and life before camp?

FH: Let's see. I guess the strongest influence in my family's life is the Christian religion because my dad was a very strong Christian and my mother was a fairly strong Christian also. My father was originally a Salvation Army officer. He became a Christian during early 1900s, and he educated himself so that he could pass the tests to become a Salvation Army officer. He was sent to Japan as a leader of a team of Salvation Army workers to help in Tokyo after the big Kanto earthquake there. He met my mother there. She was living in a Salvation Army dormitory. She was raised in Sendai, northern Japan and she came from a family that was fairly well-to-do. Her father died when she was young. She was the youngest of a large family. The brothers in the family mismanaged the family money and at one point they were going to either sell my mother or give my mother away. Her older sister put her in a mission home because that would protect my mother from her brother or brothers. She attended a mission school and only came home on holidays and only if a relative was willing to take her in. So, she had a rather unpleasant life in that

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she was at the beck and call of relatives. She remembers incidents like the time her older sister got married, and later this sister tore her kimono down and remade it into clothes for my mother. I guess they were so poor that when at one point in her life my mother wanted an egg, the same older sister took flour and water and made her an egg. So she remembers some very, very poor times. She had finished her schooling and was a certificated teacher. She went to Tokyo to work as a school teacher and that was the time of the big earthquake in Kanto. In Tokyo she met and married my dad and she came to the United States. Later they left the Salvation Army and they joined the Christian Layman Church in Berkeley and were there for about forty years. He was very, very active, and he used to do some circuit preaching around Danville and Concord and it was a major part of our lives in that on Sunday I, even when I was very little, cooked the meals because my mother and father were in church all the time. My dad studied every night and he wrote out his sermons. When I was in the first grade we had an assignment to go home and count how many books and magazines we had at home. I know I got up to a thousand and my mother says, "We're not going to

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count anymore. Tell the teacher we don't want to do anymore counting."

ST: Oh my.

FH: But my dad had a garage full of books. We were very poor and I know we didn't have a lot of clothes and I know we didn't have really good food, but we had a lot of books and all the books came from Japan. We were a family with five children. My older sister died of blood poisoning when she was in the third grade. Even though we were poor we all took private music lessons and that again was due to the Salvation Army influence.

ST: Yes.

FH: So when the war broke out, I had just started Berkeley High. Berkeley is a very interesting city in that the people who live in the hills have a great deal of money. There are some very high incomes in Berkeley. There are still some very, very successful writers in Berkeley. At the same time the part of the city that was very poor and was very, very poor. There were very poor Japanese families, Chinese families and people like Billy Martin. They all lived on the wrong side of the track, and I think the city was very stratified. So when I went to camp, high school was a lot of fun. Even the Girl Scouts in Berkeley would do

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things like oh, horseback riding, and a lot of those girls took lessons every single day. They took music lessons. They took dancing lessons. They took horseback riding lessons. They took swimming lessons and on and on and on and on and so a lot of the--a lot of us didn't have a chance to participate as fully in school life as everyone else. But we could direct ourselves in [Topaz] the way we wanted to. That is to say we ran our own school paper. So we could be in all the plays or do whatever we wanted to do. There were no restrictions, certainly neither money or color or status. I thought that school was a lot of fun. Sororities and fraternities "ran" Berkeley High.

ST: What did you think of the teachers?

FH: I think you can probably look this up. In Utah at that time, it was possible to get teaching credentials with two years of college, and so the school board for that state set the same standards for Topaz schools. So some of the local teachers were certified to teach with two years of schooling. Some of our own resident teachers were highly educated, but were not trained to teach high school. When I took geometry my teacher would forget he was teaching plain geometry and start teaching euclidian geometry. We had no textbooks, or course of studies. We had a

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teacher in camp--Mr. Walter Goutzel, and the next time I heard anything about him, he was featured in the Time magazine for having written a book on child development, on The Childhood of Excellence. He must be a professor emeritus on the East coast. One day he was no longer there in Topaz.

I think we all had an attitude problem. Some of us would study but most of us wouldn't. But as I said, I think we had one book in English and one history book all through high school, the same one all through high school. But the other thing that is interesting is, and I don't know what the percent is, but a great number of our students went on to Eastern and Mid-western colleges and universities.

ST: Yes.

FH: So they went to--a lot of them went to Big Ten schools (^{West}~~East~~ coast was off limits). A lot of them went to the Methodists schools--went to the Wesleyan schools, and I think most did very well. So one wonders, you know, if you teach somebody how to read, then maybe the rest of it is up to the person. You know he can make it on his own.

ST: Well, that's what I've heard.

FH: Well if he wants to, he can make it on his own.

ST: Yes, yes. So much depends on wanting to.

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FH: I guess so. It was always a surprise to me that some of these fellows who were really terrible kids in school, went on to college and did so well. They went to places like Wisconsin, and did very well.

ST: Did they just tease the teachers at Topaz that weren't so good?

FH: Well, the attitude was "waste time" you know.

ST: Oh.

FH: Homework was "waste time." They wouldn't turn in papers. They wouldn't study. Then you see the same people go on and do well in schools outside university. It was funny, one time we were talking to one of Harry Kitano's sisters. She said Harry used to go around with all these horrible kids and we said we used to go around with Harry. [laughter]

ST: Well, Harry, today admits that he ran around with horrible kids and next he got into a lot of trouble.

FH: Well, he was probably a horrible kid, you know.

ST: Yes, he was.

FH: Tad's brother was one of the "horrible kids." He went to the University of Montana and did very well so it is hard to say who is horrible.

ST: How did you, as a young girl get used to the lack of privacy in camp?

FH: Well, one of the very first things that happened to

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me that was really awful. I remember my dad had to take me behind the barracks in the bushes to go to the bathroom because when we first went to Tanforan, there were so many of us that the bathrooms got stuck and overflowed. The facilities were inadequate for the number of people housed there. So my father had to take us behind the barracks to go and I was horrified. I thought that was terrible. The other thing is the sanitation wasn't always very good, and so it was easy to get diarrhea, and I never had diarrhea in my life, and I didn't know how to control it. We had to run to the latrine several hundred feet away, and then there were only maybe six stalls for ladies and six stalls for gentlemen or something like that for everybody in the whole block--not just the building. So if you didn't make it, you didn't make it. Well, sometimes I didn't make it, and we had these two by fours, you know, with no insides things. I remember hiding some of my uh--underclothes in there and my mother finding them. [laughter]

ST: Of course not.

FH: That was really--that was really a bad one.

ST: You did your clothes in a common laundry, then?

FH: Actually there were no laundries. Yes, there were. I mean there were maybe six sets of four cement tubs

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for laundry, shaving, bathing a baby, washing dishes.

ST: Yes.

FH: You had to be really careful to get your turn.

ST: Yes, Miné Okubo talks about doing laundry in the middle of the night so you could get hot water.

FH: Oh yeah. The same facilities were used to bath the babies, do diapers, dishes, everything.

ST: No.

FH: They were in the laundry tub.

ST: Do you think it made a lot more work for your mother being there?

FH: I think it made for a different kind of work because now there is only one room to clean--at the same time that room probably got much dirtier because you know that everyone was crowded into the one room, plus the dust. She didn't have to go out and shop, and she couldn't cook. We got to a point finally in Topaz that every time I went to a party or anything I got a new dress, or a new something. She'd always take time to make me something. That's when she was in a sewing class.

ST: Oh, yes.

FH: And Mrs. Suzuki in Oakland used to teach drafting, and Mom made me a coat and a suit, and I think I wore that suit for fifteen, twenty years. I mean it was

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beautifully made, but she never made another one after that. She tailormade it--drafted the pattern, lined the inside. So I took that out to St. Louis with me and brought it back to Berkeley with me.

ST: What sort of things did you do for pleasure when you were outside of school?

FH: Actually, I probably studied as much as anybody.

ST: Oh.

FH: And I have a feeling that the boys took pride in not studying and maybe the girls studied harder.

ST: Yes. Well, they ordinarily do, I think.

FH: And there was a dance or party or something every week, and I went to a music school. I didn't do really well in the music school, but when we first got to Topaz, I was asked to go with a group of people to Delta to entertain and we sang songs and played the piano. I played for Rev. Nugent's church in Delta. And I went with him to Provo to help pick out a piano, but I think that Rev. Nugent had it all picked out, but I think he wanted them to see that we were not so terribly different from them. Now, there was a Christian school in Salt Lake City, and I stayed there overnight. It was a small school. I think it was a woman's college. Is there a college in Salt Lake City? I think the University of Salt Lake--

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University of Utah must have had about three thousand. We visited there also.

ST: Yes, I think so.

FH: Berkeley High had 3,200, you know, so it's kind of interesting for us to visit the university there.

ST: Oh yes. Now, this was on the trip when you were looking for the piano?

FH: It was on another trip. I guess I've never said no if someone asks me to do something, I just did it. I went to Topeka, Kansas to a "Y" Conference. And I went to Salt Lake. I can't remember what we went for to Salt Lake. We went to Provo for the piano. My father was active with a Berkeley Laymen Church, which was not one of the major churches in camp, so they were just part of the protestant church group and he spent most of his time preaching to Kibeis-- Japanese speaking young people. So he had quite a group of Kibeis. He taught Bible study. My father was very strict and on Sundays we could never look at a newspaper until after we had gone to church and come back.

ST: Oh yes.

FH: And we never ate without saying prayers. Said our prayers first. We never went to bed without saying our prayers. We never went to bed without reading the

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Bible.

When I was very little I'd start to cry if my father would look at me in a stern way. That's all it took. [laugh] So he was very strong.

ST: So did he exercise then strong control over you too for staying out and going on dates and things like that?

FH: No, he delegated that to my mom.

ST: Oh. [laughter]

FH: So I tell my children that here I was, back in Berkeley, twenty-one years old, engaged to be married, and my mother still says I have to be in the house by twelve, mid-night. And that includes taking a bus back from San Francisco. We didn't have a car.

ST: Yes.

FH: And still had to be in by twelve, mid-night. My kids think that's hilarious.

ST: Yeah. [laughter] Oh my.

FH: My dad worked on this chicken farm in Topaz.

ST: Oh, yes.

FH: I guess they raised chicken for consumption in camp. I remember one time my dad captured a huge owl in the desert. That owl was catching chickens so he captured it, and he brought it back to camp and we got to look at it for a few days and then I guess he let it go.

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ST: Uh, yes.

FH: So he worked around the clock. He would work maybe two and a half days and then he would be home for three full days and then he'd go off to work for two and a half days or something like that. He liked working that way and having the time off.

ST: That would be hard.

FH: They probably slept out in the open so that if the predators came after the chickens, they would be able to hear the coyote and everything at night. There must have been a lot of predators out there.

ST: Yes, yes. I would think so. I guess the camp produced pretty much all of what it needed to feed people.

FH: Well, I think probably Topaz produced the least. Manzanar and some of those camps really produced a lot of vegetables. It seems that the Mormons could live almost anywhere and raise crops, but they certainly didn't do too well in the area of Topaz. There were a lot of homes down there that were deserted; farms and homes were deserted by Mormons in that area.

ST: Did you have any interaction with the Mormons in Delta?

FH: No, except my dad found himself a Mormon Bible and proceeded to read it. But I was impressed with their

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thriftiness because they would catch--shoot a deer and can it, and there were no butchers or anything like that in Delta--none that I could see. I thought that it was very admirable that they could support themselves that way off the land.

ST: Yeah. Did you have any dealing with the people of Delta or any--I guess anyone other than the camp administrators?

FH: One time somebody who was like a teaching sister, but she wasn't Catholic came with her charges and they stayed with us. They came to visit us. They stayed in different barracks, and when she prayed for us and she prayed that we'd be able to go back to the kinds of places where we came from and were accustomed to. Well, the girls she didn't even have places as nice as our little old barracks. They thought it was nice and I thought gee, that's really something.

ST: Where did they come from?

FH: I don't really know, but they seem to--they must have come from that area somewhere. [Bingham?]

ST: Oh, nearby.

FH: And I know that some of the kids from Topaz High went to Bingham, and they worked with some of the people that worked on the side of the hill. They said some of those people didn't even have cans of soup to eat,

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they were so poor. And of course we always thought we were poor. We'd never seen anybody living in such places before.

ST: Yeah, horrid.

FH: So that was really interesting. I could never forget what she said. You know, so that we could go back to what we were accustomed to. She didn't say to a better place or anything, cause she knew it was better than what her girls had. The boy's teams played against surrounding community teams

ST: Hinkley?

FH: Hinkley, yeah and Abraham down there.

ST: Did the church organize a lot of activities for young people?

FH: Yes, and later on one Chinese fellow, one caucasian, and one Japanese girl came into camp to work with the younger people, and he is a minister in Hawaii now. The churches were fairly active, but the camp organized games--ball games against blocks and things. When I think about it now, I think maybe the younger kids--the real little kids, nine years old and ten years old--maybe there were no activities for them. There certainly weren't any play yards or anything like that, and they couldn't play baseball, and so I don't know what they did. I guess they just

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sort of hung around.

ST: Yeah.

FH: When my sisters got back to Berkeley, both of them were very fortunate to have good teachers. My younger sister would have flunked out of junior high school, but the teacher said, "If you come to see me after school every day, I'll teach you." So she went to see her every day, "so as long as you come, I'll teach you," so, she went every single day, and the teacher got her caught up so that she could take algebra whatever level she was supposed to be in.

When I went to camp too, I'd taken Latin I and II at Berkeley, but I didn't finish Latin II because we left school in 10th of April so we didn't finish it. So I probably would have had trouble with Latin III anyway, but there was no one teaching Latin III in camp, so then I tried Spanish.

ST: Yes. Now, tell me about how you and your sister decided to go out of camp?

FH: We really didn't decide to go out of camp. My mom and dad didn't know how long we were going to be in Topaz. But if we had known that we were going to come back to Berkeley, I don't think I'd left camp. But at that point, we didn't know. So we couldn't just stay in camp and do nothing or just work. We had to get

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some education. I actually looked around to see what I could finish really, really fast and so I got into this course for medical technicians. It was an all-day-long, no-vacations course. So then I decided to go to St. Louis and try. And then my mother decided my sister should go with me, because again we didn't know when we could ever get back together. We couldn't come back for Christmas or anything, and certainly we didn't know if my mother would ever be allowed to come out to St. Louis. So my sister and I went out of camp together.

ST: When did you leave?

FH: We left in December, 1945. My sister was about thirteen years old. So that's the end of '44. I graduated in '44 and I left in '44. So I was in St. Louis all of '45. I said to my mother once, about five years ago, the only time I ever cried at Christmas, was when I was in St. Louis.

ST: Oh yes, cause you were alone there.

FH: That's right. Well, we were with Henry Tani's home [Evangelical Reformed Church--liaison--students from camps, church scholarships, housing, et cetera], but it's not the same as one's own home. My mother said to me that the only time she ever cried at Christmas was when we were in St. Louis, because we could no

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longer be together or anything, so that was really a sad time for us.

ST: Now, who arranged your getting into the school in St. Louis?

FH: It was just a straight application, but as far as the money went, my dad talked to I think Rev. Carl Nugent. Because he was the Evangelical Reformed Churches, and Henry Tani administered that fund. I think Henry Tani was a vice-principal in Topaz and he was from San Francisco. I think he is the stepson of Abiko, who was the man who started the Christian Cooperative in Livingston.

ST: Oh, yes.

FH: We were there in St. Louis. My mother wanted us to be together. So for me, at any rate, being in camp strengthened our family, and except for maybe our little brother--I think maybe he might have had a harder time with it. Before we went to camp, I went to play with my friend and she played with her friends and you know our friends didn't mix, but once we were in camp, then we got very close to each other. And then I think in a way it was harder for my third sister because my mother divided us. That with my third sister, we weren't as close, as she felt left out of things sometimes. Although now I think

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that we are very close--we see each other--go out together. I remember once when my dad bought a piece of pork home from a pig farm or something and he made chops and barbecue for us on the potbelly stove and it tasted so good. My mother would bring home a raw egg from the mess hall. There were always little ways of fixing treats. I think the quality of the food wasn't good, but it wasn't terrible either. When you make scrambled eggs for three hundred people, you put a lot of milk in it and by the time it's served, it's awful. But if you had the same egg and you cooked it yourself and ate it while it was still hot, it's okay. But I guess they didn't always have fresh eggs either.

ST: Oh yeah. [chuckle]

FH: I think we locked out Jiro Wakaso's sister Catherine. And I don't know if a sort of gang mentality came over us or what, or if rebellion, or combination occurred. But I know we did things that we never would have done had we been going to school outside. And the different experiences are very interesting.

My mother will say things, and my father, too, will say they'll never understand why we got placed in a place like that. My father always felt that as long as we were law abiding, and did as we were

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supposed to do, that nothing bad would happen to us. There was a case where a young, Hawaiian-Japanese in the city of Berkeley was caught robbing a gasoline station. He wasn't even successful; he was caught in front.

ST: This was after the war.

FH: Oh, yeah, quite a bit after the war. There was a huge article in the Nichi Bei, how he disgraced Japanese people with the first case of criminal activity in the city of Berkeley involving Japanese people. First, so I think they took great pride in not behaving in ways that would bring shame to the community. People were really surprised that something negative like detention camps could happen to Japanese-Americans. We kept our noses clean and to stay out of trouble. It was like we kept our nose clean but got in trouble anyhow.

ST: Yes, exactly. Well, have we covered everything?

FH: I guess so.

ST: Well, thank you very much.

[END OF TAPE]