

MICHI KOBI

MICHI KOBI

New York City, New York

Tape No. 6

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An Interview By

Sandra Taylor

October 6, 1987



American West Center  
University of Utah  
Utah Minorities Series

EVERETT L. COOLEY ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Date Nov 15 1988

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*Michi Kobi*  
Interviewee  
*Michi Kobi*

*Paul L. Jay*  
Interviewer



INTERVIEW WITH NICHIE NISHI IN NEW YORK CITY ON OCTOBER 4, 1987. (THE INTERVIEWER IS SARAH TAYLOR)

ST: NICHIE, WOULD YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU WERE THINKING ABOUT IN TERMS OF THE EFFECTS OF TOPAZ IN

Table of Contents

First Restrictions . . . . . 1  
Solace of Drum Mountains at Topaz . . . . . 2  
Feelings About Topaz . . . . . 3  
Painful Experiences After Camp . . . . . 5  
Survival at Topaz . . . . . 6  
Psychiatry After Camp . . . . . 7  
Scholarship . . . . . 8  
Mother's Business . . . . . 9  
Early Rumors of Camp . . . . . 10  
Father's Life . . . . . 11  
Mother's Life . . . . . 14  
Camp School . . . . . 15

we learned another proclamation had been issued  
father and I missed our chance to fly to  
the USA (Warime Civilian Control) and  
could refuse to accept the government's  
departure and departure schedule. At  
qualifications. I think I missed it. I was  
restriction/proclamation which I was  
just could not accept. My wife and I were  
paralyzed. I think that was the worst part. I was  
experiencing open hostility at school and by the



INTERVIEW WITH MICHIO KOBAYASHI IN NEW YORK CITY ON OCTOBER 6,  
1987. [THE INTERVIEWER IS SANDRA TAYLOR]

ST: Michio, would you tell me again what you were talking about in terms of the long-term effects of Topaz on your life.

MK: The long-term effect--I like to start out by saying that I think that most of us Nisei have had a very hard time articulating our thoughts partly because we haven't had the vocabulary; partly because our culture restrains us from speaking clearly and frankly about our real deeper emotions. We were taught to be ashamed of expressing ourselves, and the feeling of shame is extremely intense as far as the Japanese people are concerned. We're a very proud people. As I might have indicated before, when I tried to leave California voluntarily in March, 1942 we learned another proclamation had been imposed. Mother and I missed our chance to flee by 24 hours. The WCAA (Wartime Civilian Control Administration) flatly refused to accept our application for departure and supportive evidence of our qualifications. Denied a waiver of this newest restriction/proclamation which meant imprisonment, I just could not express my anger or fear. I was paralyzed. I think that was the greatest shock after experiencing open hostility at school and in the

MICHI KOBI

larger San Francisco community following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. I couldn't express my rage verbally. In Topaz, the Drum mountains became my friends. The fault deep underneath the Drums, which Mr. Beckwith, Jane Beckwith's Grandfather had written about in Trek roared with the sound of colliding boulders and thundered mightily. They expressed an emotion of fury I could not say aloud. . . I could never understand why we Nisei didn't scream and yell out loud in frustration. When I took these long walks from the hospital where I worked, diagonally across to my block, block thirty-six, I walked along the outer rim of the camp because I didn't want to look at the hundreds of black barracks and see the misery of the people walking around. I wanted to be as far away as possible, get closer to the open desert always aiming toward the Drums, and they were my soul mates, my alter ego. When I heard them crashing, I wanted to really scream and release the pent-up rage of me. Nobody did. No one dared.

ST: Yes.

MK: No one ever dared. No one ever dared to express themselves openly, honestly. The over-control of feelings had, I believe, a deep, painful, scarring effect on me. In degrees, I'm sure it happened to



MICHI KOBI

many, many others. Hysteria was internalized. After the outbreak of war, I discovered that I wasn't American anymore, that I was cut out of society, that people shunned me, that I was snubbed, that people wouldn't talk to me, people wouldn't serve me, and common courtesy was forgotten. All of the racial prejudices became naked. Any pretence of politeness in San Francisco, particularly, was cast off, and that anger--that ugly, beastly anger, hostility just came right out, except for isolated incidents when people showed tremendous compassion. If you didn't happen to be lucky enough to be in that kind of situation, whether it is in church or in school or at work place or wherever, you were just out of luck.

ST: Oh yes.

MK: See, that's the natural thing with the Japanese already because they're surrounded by so much water, and the Pacific ocean is so much greater than the Atlantic, so you know great distances, you know, so they have that effect. And then when you're in a ghetto situation where San Francisco was a very large community at one time, but because of the racial prejudice, it just squeezed down into a very small little service community for outlying people who lived on--you know grew--made a living in farming,



MICHI KOBI

produce and nurseries and so on. All the professional people were in New York--the newspapers and so on and the church leadership which I didn't know. The Buddhist Church, you know, the central office is in San Francisco. But for me it was the onslaught--the psychological onslaught against my integrity as a person that was the most excruciating experience. I felt that might--you know, I thought here I went to church, I was active in the YWCA. I did the proper thing. I got proper grades at school. You know I was never a truant. Never anyone in our community ever asked for welfare or any of the public services, partly out of shame and partly because of discrimination. Mainly it was shame. They just did not want to ask, and so for many of us, to have our basic honesty attacked and denied and being accused of being devious and sinister and cunning and double-faced. Yes, we were two-faced. We didn't want to hang out our dirty laundry, and we didn't exhibit any pain, whether we were hungry, out of a job or someone was sick at home. We avoided parading suffering even among ourselves. It was simply a matter of pride that we did not do that. We never asked the church for help. We never asked anybody of the social agencies for help. It just wasn't done; therefore, we had this

MICHI KOBI

veneer, you know, "Thanks to the God." Thanks to God, you know, that everything is all right. That is the expression of very refined point which the other Americans could not, you know understand, particularly those West Coasters who were less refined from those who came from more sophisticated European cultures or older societies or what you do out here in the East. That's about what I would say is the extent of it, and there are some of us who belatedly admitted we needed psychiatric care or needed to go to a psychologist to help us through this trauma. When I came out of camp, I thought I was free, but I didn't know what my direction and goals were when I came to New York City. I ran into cultural groups that were just so totally alien from anything. There was no community. The church was--well I wasn't sure about the church anymore. When I went to the Christian church it was strange. No one was friendly or welcoming. They didn't have the little coffee or tea klatches, which other churches might have. They were not hospitable, there was no sense of family or community, so I floundered around from one ethnic group to another trying to find myself. We were told to assimilate as much as possible. I didn't want to know other Japanese. My



MICHI KOBI

self-hatred, a result in internment, was complete. I no longer knew what was right and wrong. One person gave one opinion and another person said another. I could not make my own decision. I got excruciating migraine headaches from inner conflicts. I became very depressed. I found myself being afraid of standing on a subway ledge. I didn't know whether I would jump off. But I think were fantasies more than anything else. There were no emotional outlets except those who were wise enough to tame them, such as through painting, drawing, and art craft. I had played the piano, and I missed my piano very much. That was my companion, my confidential friend. They did set up a library in camp. The Japanese library in Topaz I understand was the best among the ten camps. Unfortunately, I didn't read Japanese. Japanese language was not taught in Topaz because that was regarded suspect and subversive. The Issei found other ways to survive, letting out their anguish. But those of us who were Japanese-American thought we were Americans and really floundered when our freedom was denied us.

ST: When did you begin the psychiatry?

MK: I would say about a year after I came out to New York. I was here in New York just before the war



MICHI KOBI

ended. I became involved with a very left political group. I left them feeling quite uncomfortable. They were too friendly, I became suspicious. [laughter] "Why are they taking on my cause so much?" I was a victim of racial prejudice and should be embittered. I wanted to go to college. I wasn't interested in fighting for racial equality at that point. I wanted an education, and as I said in an earlier conversation, I felt that the education in the high school in Topaz was so inadequate, so inferior, I just felt that, well, that disqualified me from ever being able to get into other schools. Well, that's not true because so many other Nisei succeeded, but I just felt really so inferior at this time. I had no self-esteem, and was only through the psychiatrist who herself was a refugee from racial prejudice. She was a refugee from Berlin, and she came from very fine family and very cultured family---very compassionate woman, a deep, gentle person-- everything I wished my mother was.

ST: Oh. the estrangement from your mother begins in camp

MK: And [laughter] she became my surrogate mother so to say. She'd see my going chaotically into crazy places, and she tried to restrain me from it, but she never strictly figured my people, although she tried

MICHI KOBI

to discouraged me from it, and she was worried and she was worried. She was very unhappy when she found that I was going around with a left group, and when I expressed my confusion, she didn't approve of that at all, of course, but she tried to restrain herself. She wanted me to grow to make my own decisions. But through her, I found myself applying for a scholarship. There was a remnant of the Nisei Student Counsel that the Quakers had set up, and they were practically out of funds, but I did get one year at NYU.

ST: Oh.

MK: And after that I was able to apply for a scholarship at the New School for Social Research. So I was able to get their two year scholarship there, and that was very expensive, and so I was very lucky to get it.

ST: Oh yes.

MK: And then I had to work, and so on, and that's about the extent of my early--you know--coming right out of camp.

ST: Did the estrangement from your mother begin in camp or did that predate camp?

MK: Uh, the fact that we could not get out of California started it really. I was angry at Mother.

ST: Now why?



MICHI KOBI

MK: Because she dillydallied I felt. When we had a chance to get out of California, she didn't want to, she was afraid. She didn't know the people who offered us a hostel place in Denver, Colorado. My friend and her family immediately zipped out there and got themselves a home, and she was saying, "Come on out. Stay with us. See if things are going to get any better." And we knew it. Every day there was a new law saying this approach, bla, bla, bla. It's fighting against time, and so I kept nudging her, and mother didn't know. In the mean time of course which I didn't realize, and I'm her teen-age daughter--her only child, and she doesn't know what to do with her business or her creditors who want everything immediate payment on everything--they want payments way in advance, and she didn't have the money to do this, and so she was terrified, and of course her business had dropped off precipitously because everybody was saving their money. They only came in for permanents, you know, to carry them through, you see. The most people now felt that they could not afford the luxury of having their hair done, you know, and the women, of course, who did have their hair done, their husbands had either lost their jobs. They might have lost their jobs, and so on. Now, we



MICHI KOBI

had the wives of a lot of merchants--merchants along in Chinatown or around in town, and so those went anywhere around tended to be more modernizing, and those mothers who were just mothers and just family raisers--they kept their hair long and in a bun. So the mother was kind of like the modern woman, you know. ---?--- tried to make the rest of the Japanese-American community and it was mostly Issei, not the second generation that came to raise customers. So that had dropped off, but since she was scared to make that move, and I couldn't see why, why we shouldn't because we had a place to go to, and I said to come to a new school. I want an education. I don't want to go into a concentration camp. These rumors, of course, were going and the same time it frightened because the first rumors were only that the first generation would be taken away, and I became frightened whether I didn't know whether Mother would be taken away in jail and her store would be abandoned. You know I had no idea. See, that was the first terror, and then the next one was, you know, pretty much and all of these rumors--most of it, and of course the newspapers are going viciously; the same thing with the radio. We didn't have television, and it was just more and more, you know, frightening.

MICHI KOBI

And we found out that we are Japanese. We're Japanese. We're not Americans. We're not people. We're not people with lives or people who should be, you know, encouraged to be part of the society. It was this constant move to reject us all the time, so I said, "Let's get out of here. You know, why stay around?" And then when she finally came around to saying, "Okay," it was too late.

ST: What happened to your father?

MK: My father died before I was three years old.

ST: Oh. Just the two of you then?

MK: Just the two of us.

ST: Was your mother from Japan?

MK: Mother was from Tokyo. My father had come from Hiroshima. He was--his family owned a farm, and he was the eldest son, but he worked very anxious to become a doctor in the western world, and so when he was a young man, in the early nineteen hundreds, he came over here by himself, and I don't know exactly how he went to college apparently in Oregon and also in Washington, but he eventually really finished his medical education in--at Northwestern in Illinois.

ST: Oh.

MK: And then returned to California around the San Jose area and practiced medicine for awhile, and I guess



MICHI KOBI

he wanted to raise a family so he went to Japan, and landed in Tokyo. He did not go back to Hiroshima, and he met my mother there. He was introduced to my mother and this is right after the 1923 earthquake when they met, and so I guess he figured, you know, [chuckle] it would be better to come back to the United States to practice medicine, so he came back to California--sailed to Seattle, brought her down to Sacramento. There was a large Japanese community there, and there my brother and I were raised--were born, not raised, and shortly after that he died of tuberculosis. So mother wrapped us up, and she sold the house, and she had a great big funeral. There was a funeral picture that my brother in Japan has, and went to Japan--went down to his village and put up a big stone and buried my father's ashes there. Then left my brother. He was only about a year and a half or two years old, which must have been pretty hard for her with--her brother-in-law. And at that time--talk about women's--women's lib conditions are not great even today although it was getting better I understand, from our friends last night. They said, "You know we're not getting into professions," and his daughter is going into accounting, and you know--not just being a key service in some office, but at



MICHI KOBI

that time, women could not legally get a divorce. As a matter of fact, women could not get a divorce--they could be divorced by their husbands--not that--Mother was widowed. But a woman who was a widow is already a second-class citizen. So she left my brother there, went back to Tokyo. My cousin feels that my grandmother was such a strong-willed woman that she urged Mother to come back to the United States--thought that her chances would be better there.

ST: Okay. No, no. We don't need to stop. I'm saying the time is okay. We don't have any more time than I thought. So your brother grew up--

MK: So my brother was raised in--on a farm by my uncle--by our uncle, and I was supported by my father--what little estate my father had left, and he was too young to get into World War II, but he was about to get into training when he was fifteen when he was sixteen yet--going into the Kamikaze.

ST: Oh.

MK: Training the Kamikaze. And there is another whole different story there too. If you ever can get into it, it's so far reaching. There are so many Japanese-American who were taken over there at very young ages, and they found themselves caught in this militaristic government and many of them did not

MICHI KOBI

really want to be into the war--get into the war but they found they had to, because they were looked on suspiciously because they were American born. They were not accepted as Japanese so they did extreme measures to prove that they were ---?--- they didn't belong in the United States. They didn't belong in the ---?---. They didn't belong in--you know. They had to belong somewhere. They had to belong in Japan.

ST: So then the alienation from your mother just grew throughout the camp here.

MK: Yeah.

ST: She wanted to, I understand make you stay in camp.

MK: She wouldn't let me out. She wouldn't let me leave California when we could have. Then when we got into camp, she would not let me go out again. You know, at the time if you had sponsorship or a job or something, she would not let me go out of camp, and that just doesn't point that I felt the communication really severed into this tiny little room. I just stopped talking to her because I thought there no communication here at all. It was bad.

ST: Oh dear.

MK: A lot of guilt feelings because Mother became severely sick, very, very sick. The dust really got to her, she had a history of bad allergies including



MICHI KOBI

hay fever, and so that dust just exacerbated it and made her, you know, get severe asthma attacks and eventually emphysema too. She was crippled the rest of her life. So she can never work full-force.

ST: So did you leave when you were eighteen then or were you able to get out earlier?

MK: Well, then I stayed on, and I stayed in camp, and I finished high school. I returned to my work as a nurses aide until the accredited school started, and then I finished high school. And by that time my morale was so shot. I felt all my friends had disappeared, and I felt, "Well, I am worthless and stuck in this camp. Maybe this is where I should stay." I had lost all fight, and I was kind of like always the rebel. It is funny, the women last night remember me as being a vivacious actress or something, and I don't even remember. I think I took that up because I couldn't get the courses I needed. I couldn't get the physics.

ST: Oh.

MK: No, they didn't have advanced French. They didn't have some of these advanced courses, and they didn't have the books or anything like that, so what was there to do. You just get English or the history or the--they had a drama school so I made it a lark, and

MICHI KOBI

luckily that teacher was a lovely teacher that red-headed man, Eugene Lewis, and we all remember him so warmly because he was such a dear, kind man. And in the morning he encouraged us and gave us much encouragement. Jean is dead. She took the course because she wanted to learn how to speak. She was so shy. You know, being able to act and to pretend that you are not there, and we did Wilder's "Our Town" because it didn't require any sets. I played the part of Emily.

ST: Oh, yes.

MK: It is funny, I will have to read the play again because it will have a different perspective. I don't remember the people that played for it, but it was fun. You know, it was make-believe, and it was fun. But then I worked in an office of an anthropologist, and his name was Otto Hoffman, and he was from the Midwest, and he was a very quiet, gentle, and caring person. And I understand that a lot of these community analysts and anthropologists are looked on with great hostility and great suspicion by even people in the community. But I worked in his office, and I was supposed to help to conduct human interviews, and at that time I was trying to, you know, try to understand our dilemma. But I don't know



MICHI KOBI

how many months I worked for him, and he was the one that said, "Michi, don't stay here. Get out. Get out and go to college." I said, "I don't know whether I have any--I don't know what I want to do with my life. I don't know where to go." I thought I wanted to go to college and study, but I don't think I have the head for it any more. You know, I just didn't think I could do it.

ST: One thing while I think of it is tell me your real name.

MK: Michi Ko Okamoto.

ST: Uh huh, and your father's name is?

MK: Okamoto. Riki Kasu Okamoto.

ST: And your mother's name was?

MK: Ob Ito Kobinata. Which means red, but also can mean beloved in one old dictionary. She was a loved child. My mother was--I try not to be critical of her because she grew up in a very protected environment. She wanted me here to be so American and gave me much freedom, and that was her biggest mistake because I thought I was American. That would be a story--

ST: Now, that's all past, no question. Oh my.

MK: What time is the plane?

ST: In about twenty minutes, so probably I ought to go.

[END OF INTERVIEW]



Michiko Okamoto (Kobi)

January 25, 1988

Background and Revision of Interview

Father: Rikikazu Okamoto, M.D. First son of landowner father, Hiroshima, Japan

Mother: Ito Kobinata, youngest child of merchant and samurai class mother, Tokyo, Japan

My father came to the United States when he was 17 in 1902. He studied in colleges in Washington and Oregon then moved to Illinois where he became a radiologist at Northwestern University about 1920. He practiced medicine in Stockton, returned to Japan and worked in Tokyo. He met mother and was married after the Great Earthquake of 1923. In 1924, they sailed to the U.S. and settled in Sacramento.

I was their first child. My brother, Masayuki, was born a year and half later. In 1927, our father died of tuberculosis. Mother buried his ashes in Hiroshima and entrusted Masayuki to her brother-in-law who was given the family farm by our father. In 1928, she sailed back to the U.S. with me and settled in San Francisco.

I was placed in a Methodist orphanage for Japanese, Korean and Eurasian children and was supervised by devout Christian Americans. Mother enrolled in an English language school and became a beautician at a trade school. She remarried through Japanese arrangement a chef for the rich. With his financial assistance, she opened a beauty shop in Japantown then removed me from the orphanage at the age of nine. The psychological adjustment to a closed Japanese community was difficult for I was grounded in the Western puritanical ethic. The binding filial piety ethic with mother was also to create problems.

However, mother was eager to have me grow as an American and deflected my interests from Japanese culture except for a few unsuccessful years at Japanese language school. As I grew into my teens, racial prejudice limited my full participation in extra curricula activities at school. My social life was circumscribed within Japantown. I was active in the Christian Endeavor, church choir, and the YWCA where I learned the democratic process of voting for our officers and working in committees when the war broke out.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor and President Roosevelt's declaration of war against the "day of infamy," I was stunned by the barefaced hostility from students and teachers at school. I was terrorized by the sweeping arrest of Issei whom we loved and admired. The severest trauma was to be denied exit from California by the Wartime Civilian Control Administration, under Justice Dept., and to be condemned to a concentration camp. I became temporarily blind, deaf and partially paralyzed before entering Tanforan for about 10 days.



Instead of attending classes set up by internees, I volunteered to become a nurses's aide in hopes of studying medicine in the future. In Tanforan my morale was high for I felt useful, but I also learned about the government's cruel indifference toward the sick, handicapped, retarded and mentally ill, all of whom were shipped out arbitrarily to county or state hospitals in California and disallowed from being with their families when we were transferred to Utah.

The journey to Topaz under guard with armed soldiers was intimidating as well as exhausting; the drawn shades were humiliating; the long waits on sidings as we were shunted aside for the rest of America to go by was demeaning. Underlying the hope that living conditions would be better, more comfortable, was a fear that we would be mistreated farther isolated and ignored by the world in a bleak desert. The rebellions, shootings and eventual killing of Hatsuki Wakasa, an Issei, in my Block, confirmed the hatred against all Japanese.

To be greeted by a fresh platoon of heavily armed military police after four days of travel on rickety trains was numbing as we disembarked in the seemingly deserted town of Delta. Crowded into an army trucks ~~and buses~~, none of us spoke as we bounced over new dirt roads to Topaz. The sight of Topaz was demoralizing:

The far horizon was barely discernible through the thick yellow dust. The flat wasteland seemed to go on in every direction forever. The guardtowers and garrison looked formidable. The sturdy white administration offices and quarters were clustered near the only road and ~~xxx~~ widely distanced from the hundreds of flimsy black barracks. I felt the hard impact of apartheid.

Standing in the dust, inching along a line to be checked off, registered again, assigned an "apartment" and becoming dehydrated seemed ridiculous and ironic. The lukewarm tea offered in heavy, institutional mugs was undrinkable for it was clouded with alkaline dust. There was no transportation to our unit in Block 36 at the far end of Topaz. The blocks were not marked nor were the roads marked. Clumsily carrying our belongings, mother and I groped our way <sup>through</sup> the dust asking directions of other newcomers who could not help.

Nearly all our neighbors in Block 36 were strangers from farms or small towns, extremely provincial in their thinking and behavior. Mother and I were now subjected to another despotism. The "shimajuni konjo" mentality, literally, "island minded" or xenophobic Japanese scorned mother as an uppity Tokyo widow, who had no social status among them. I was a fatherless child--an unforgiveable curse--and refused to be obsequious with them. Even though rigid class distinctions broke down in camp, the Japanese tyranny of conformity and obeisance to authority was oppressive. I felt trapped within a trap.



The San Francisco Japanese community I lived in had felt safe and friendly. In Topaz, my long time childhood friends had vanished. The Christian church seemed aloof and lacking in conviction. Courses I needed for college entry were unavailable and the teachers were unqualified at high school; I became an indifferent student. The camp newspaper, glad to avoid censorship, would not address issues of real concern, such as <sup>the</sup> sensitive questionnaire, volunteering into the segregated army, induction.

The once close mother-daughter relationship was damaged almost irreparably by internment. Her fear of being abandoned or left behind in camp made her put a stranglehold on me. She distrusted me out of her sight and could not be reasoned with. I deeply resented her mistrust and came to despise her selfishness. She became severely asthmatic which compounded my feelings of guilt and entrapment. I fell into near total silence with her and other internees.

Through my job at the hospital before returning to school, I met older Nisei who attended or graduated from U.C./Berkeley. There was no political science class in school nor any interest among the students to discuss the constitution. These upper class Nisei were intellectuals, bent toward the left, and tried to be activists in camp without success. Although I did not understand their adoration of the U.S.S.R.--very strange--they fascinated me. And since Russia was our ally during World War Two, it was okay to support them. My friendship with these people was to torment me years later during the Communist purge by <sup>Joseph</sup> McCarthy.

These "progressives" spurred me to advocate answering the questionnaire affirmatively in my ultra-conservative block! If I had not been a high school girl, I might have been beaten up behind the messhall where heated discussions were held mostly among young men. (I don't remember who were the "no-no's".) My popularity, of course, sank to a new low. About this time, Wakasa, elite Keio graduate and our messhall cook, wandered near the guardtower and was killed.

Shortly thereafter, the fierce loyalty mother professed to have for me as a parent was compromised. She relocated to Chicago while I was still in school. Her decision to leave Topaz with a new Issei friend, a male companion, surprised me; but I was relieved I no longer had to be responsible for her health, safety and happiness.

From an extroverted youth active in sports, a frequenter of the public library, a leader in her club and at church, I became a fat, moody loner in Topaz no longer able to read through any book, disinterested in any group activity or in making new friends. The friends I had made had gone on to colleges or found jobs in Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago or New York; a few young men had volunteered into the 442nd. I could only feel deep loss of anyone I cared for, loss of initiative, loss of self-worth. I came to believe I deserved to be imprisoned on this wretched desert, to be mocked and sneered at for believing I was American by my own people as well as other Americans. I would have continued to vegetate in Topaz were it not for the gentle urging



of Dr. Otto Hoffman, anthropologist, to leave the unhealthy environment.

Nearly three years of internment in two concentration camps made me a frightened refugee in the United States still at war. I did not want to live in the Rocky Mt. states nor the midwest. I wanted to move as far east as possible away from horrible memories; thus I chose New York and wrote to a Nisei woman, asking her to sponsor me although she did not know me well. I was fortunate she was willing to have me live with her. It took months to process the necessary papers; I resented the detailed loyalty checks, the I.D. card I was compelled to carry at all times.

In December 1944, I was released from Topaz. I stayed overnight in Salt Lake City with a friend who welcomed me warmly. She was a concert pianist who worked briefly packing processed meat for Armour. I stopped in Denver to visit a childhood friend whose family fled San Francisco almost immediately after war was declared. A fellow nurse's aide was in Minneapolis studying to become a registered nurse. Mother was happy in Chicago. A "Y" friend was desperately lonely but was managing at the U.of Chicago. Freedom was wonderful; the icy landscape and vast farmlands were thrilling to see even though the skies were grey and it was bitterly cold. I was shy of my appearance and Japanese face on the trains. I was grateful no one glared at me or made snide remarks. It was reassuring to learn from friends and mother that they never confronted prejudice.

Through the help of my Nisei sponsor, I found a clerical job in a labor union office when I worked with lower middle class Jews, Italians and Blacks. The people were kind while they thought I was strange, and I was indeed peculiar. I did not like being asked my nationality. "I'm an American!" I would retort. I did not like being questioned where I was from or about Topaz. My answers were short and un giving.

I met young Nisei men and women at a social club, but gradually drifted away as I wanted to blend into the larger society, and the desire to enter college never left my mind. But episodes of deep depression, suicidal fantasies and agonizing migraines began to increase and undermined my hopes to acquire a higher education. Through a colleague at the office, I was referred to an exceptionally qualified psychiatrist/psychoanalyst. The self destructive drives and severe psychosomatic symptoms gradually eased off. After seven years of therapy, I became reasonably functional. I acquired several scholarships and a diploma in the dramatic arts.

There have been some threatening valleys and also some pleasant peaks in the decades that followed. My trip to Topaz alone in October 1986 surprised me for the inspiration and peace it gave me. I did not expect to fall in love with and become awed by the



~~by-the~~ Sevier Desert. I did not know I would be humbled by nature's majesty and its infinity, its desecration nearly obliterated. The broken marbles and doll's legs reminded me of renewal as well as deaths in Topaz. The Japanese rock gardens still distinctive after 44 years made me appreciate the extraordinary spirit of the Issei. The rediscovery of Topaz has made me unafraid at last.