EI-667
NAOYE SUZUKI
BIRTH DATE: SEPTEMBER 25, 1918
INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 17, 1995
RUNNING TIME: 1:30:00
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE
RECORDING ENGINEER: PETER HOM
INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 7/1998
TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

BORN IN THE U.S. OF JAPANESE PARENTS
INTERNED AT ELLIS ISLAND AS AN ENEMY ALIEN: 1942-1943

LEVINE: Today is September 17, 1995, and I'm here in the Ellis Island Oral History Studio with Mr. Naoye Suzuki, who was interned here at Ellis Island as a Japanese American during the Second . . .

SUZUKI: Well, a Japanese subject, yes.

LEVINE: A Japanese subject. And, uh, this is Janet Levine, and I just want to say that I'm absolutely delighted that you visited here today and we have a chance to talk with you and have your interview be part of our collection, uh, that will give the story of Ellis Island and the history and what actually happened here.

SUZUKI: Well, thank you very much. I, it happened over fifty years ago, so my memory isn't very clear. I didn't keep any documents, so, but I will try to answer any of the questions that you have for me.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, um, whatever you remember will be just that much more that we can have for posterity, so whatever you remember.

SUZUKI: Thank you.

LEVINE: Um, how about, Mr. Suzuki, saying, first, what were the years that you were actually here?

SUZUKI: I think I was here in January 1942, I think. I'm not sure. Maybe it was December in 1941 or so on, and I think I was interned here for about a year-and-a-half or more.

LEVINE: Okay. Uh, well, let's first start in your younger life, and then we'll come up to this part. Would you say your birth date, again, for the tape?

SUZUKI: Oh, I was born in San Francisco in 19, well, September 25, 1918.

LEVINE: And how long did you stay in San Francisco?

SUZUKI: I think I was there, I, um, because I had most of my education in Tokyo, Japan. ( he coughs ) Excuse me. Uh, my, uh, father died, and then I was raised by my aunt and uncle in Tokyo, Japan. Then I returned to United States, I think it was in 1938, '38 or . . . I think it's somewhere around '38 and so on. And then I came to New York, I think it was in 1939.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SUZUKI: I can't remember.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, um, let's see, first let's have your father's name.

SUZUKI: Oh, my father's name is Juhei, J-U-H-E-I, Suzuki.

LEVINE: And your mother?

SUZUKI: Kayo, K-A-Y-O.

LEVINE: And do you remember your mother's maiden name?

SUZUKI: It's Mizuhara, M-I-Z-U-H-A-R-A.

LEVINE: And so you and your mother and father were living in San Francisco, and then your father died.

SUZUKI: Yes, ma'am.

LEVINE: And your mother, did she go . . .

SUZUKI: No, she stayed in the United States and, uh, my, uh, uncle, or actually my aunt, is my father's older sister, and the, uh, she did not come, but the uncle came because of, my father was very ill, so, but, uh, he didn't arrive two days after my father died. And then they, since I was young, so they decided to take me back with them, with him, to Japan, and raise me. So that's why I was educated in Tokyo, Japan.

LEVINE: How old were you, Mr. Suzuki, when your father died?

SUZUKI: I think, uh, what was it? Four or five?

LEVINE: Oh, four or five. Do you have any memories at all about life in San Francisco before you left for Tokyo?

SUZUKI: No.

LEVINE: When you think about that time?

SUZUKI: No.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything? You were very young.

SUZUKI: Not much.

LEVINE: Yeah. So, um, so you, do you remember your father at all?

SUZUKI: Oh, yes. I remember him quite well, I think.

LEVINE: What . . .

SUZUKI: Not, not too well, but . . .

LEVINE: What can you remember? Can you remember any experiences with him, or what he was like, or . . .

SUZUKI: I think he was, well, like my aunt, uh, said that, uh, who he was quite a scholar, and, uh, I remember him reading a great deal. And, uh, I think he was, I remember him as a very gentle person.

LEVINE: Now, had your mother and/or your father come to this country from Japan?

SUZUKI: Yes, ma'am. They, I'm not sure what, I guess in the early 1900's they came to the United States, uh, and I guess they settled in San Francisco. I'm not sure. I think he worked for the Japanese steamship company. I think it might, San Francisco office there, I'm not sure.

LEVINE: Okay. So is there, are there any other people that

you can remember from your early days in San Francisco?

SUZUKI: Not much. ( he laughs ) I, since I was brought up, uh, in, uh, with my, uh, aunt's children, so I was, I didn't realize I was not part of the family.

LEVINE: Oh, you thought you were part of . . .

SUZUKI: I thought I was, because we grew up, even to this day I, uh, tell, my cousins acted more like a brother or sisters, and, so, uh . . .

LEVINE: So you felt wanted and loved as a child of your aunt and uncle?

SUZUKI: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes. Uh-huh, yes.

LEVINE: What was your aunt and uncle's names?

SUZUKI: Uh, I can't remember his ( he laughs ) first name, but the last name is Fujita, F-U-J-I-T-A, and my aunt's name was Sadako, S-A-D-A-K-O.

LEVINE: Now, um, so you started school then, in Tokyo.

SUZUKI: Yes.

LEVINE: You hadn't been in school before that.

SUZUKI: No.

LEVINE: And, could you say a little bit about, about your life there, or your childhood?

SUZUKI: You mean, Ellis Island?

LEVINE: No, your childhood in Tokyo, just briefly.

SUZUKI: Well, I think I had a normal childhood. I enjoyed, I guess a normal childhood.

LEVINE: Did you have any favorite things that you liked doing as a child? Can you . . .

SUZUKI: Well, I guess baseball. I liked to play baseball, and, uh, and, uh, nothing special.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you ever go places with your aunt and uncle?

SUZUKI: Oh, yes, yes, yes. Uh, during the summer we spent, we had a summer home in, uh, near the Pacific Ocean, so we spent part of the summer vacation in a summer home with them. And, uh, but a normal life, I guess.

LEVINE: And how about your cousins? What were their names? How many were there of them?

SUZUKI: There was three boys and three girls and, uh, the youngest was, uh, a year older than I was, so I was actually the baby of that family.

LEVINE: I see. Were you closest to any particular family member?

SUZUKI: Oh, the second, the first son and the second son, because the, uh, their oldest daughter and, uh, the second daughter, uh, they were born in, I guess, San Francisco. I'm not sure. But in America, when my uncle and aunt were in San Francisco. So when my, uh, father was near his death, they, three of them came, and then they stayed in United States, the two, you know, their two daughters, and then, uh, my uncle and aunt and I went back on a boat to, uh, Tokyo.

LEVINE: And how long did you stay in Tokyo, then?

SUZUKI: Till 1930, about '38 or so on.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, uh . . .

SUZUKI: So, like . . .

LEVINE: You grew up there, essentially.

SUZUKI: Yes, ma'am.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember, then, coming back to the United States in 1938?

SUZUKI: I don't know. ( he laughs ) No.

LEVINE: Uh, so when you came back, did you come back to San Francisco then?

SUZUKI: Yes. I was in San Francisco a little while, and then, uh, I, uh, was working for a Japanese company, uh, well, actually, it's the Japanese government, part of the Japanese government, for San Francisco World's Fair. And then, uh, later, uh, I was at the, uh, New York World's Fair, uh, they had a Japanese pavilion there, so they were constructing a Japanese pavilion, so I was here in 193 . . .

LEVINE: Nine.

SUZUKI: Nine. And then, uh, they, uh, I worked for the Mitsubishi, M-I-T-S-U-B-I-S-H-I, one of the biggest corporations in, uh, the three biggest corporations in Japan. They had a New York office here, so I worked here and, uh, I think it was 2 Park Avenue.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SUZUKI: The office was there, and I, I was there until the war broke out, I mean, working for Mitsubishi.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, you had gone through college in, in Japan.

SUZUKI: Yes.

LEVINE: What was your profession? What were you . . .

SUZUKI: Well, I studied electrical engineering, and then I, uh, also took some courses at, uh, NYU, New York University, downtown, and improved my, uh, especially my English.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, uh, did you know English when you came back here from, after you, after you studied and were in Japan, did you learn any English, or did you learn English after you came back to the United States.

SUZUKI: Over here, mostly. Well, in Japan, English is compulsory, from, uh, junior high on, or high school on. And it's one subject that, well, in Japanese education system, you do not have a selective. It's all compulsory. And so, uh, you'd have to take

English. But my English wasn't that good, you know? I think, uh, well, even the present day, the Japanese government and then, as well as Japanese firms, are asking Americans to come and teach, especially conversational English, because, as you know, the textbook English is different from the conversational. So, uh, they, even present day, they ask Americans, so any Americans who wish to find a job teaching English, you could do that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Tell me how you felt about, uh, about your life here. I mean, once you came back and you were working for the World's Fairs, and then Mitsubishi, how did, how did you like being in the United States?

SUZUKI: I, uh, liked it. Although I was, grew up when the militaries who are in power, so, uh, of course, with propaganda. But, uh, I found out the Americans were very friendly and I realized that it was entirely different from the propaganda, the Americans are very, uh, openhearted, and so I, uh, I learned a great deal about United States when I was here, especially when I was in Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, we're coming to that part. Um, so you

say, in your personal experience, you were well-received. Did you, did you also encounter any prejudice against you when you had come here to the United States?

SUZUKI: I myself have not. Uh, maybe I'm not sensitive enough or, uh . . .

LEVINE: I was just going to say, you're so nice, maybe nobody felt that way about you, that you were just warmly received.

SUZUKI: Well, I, uh, I don't know. I don't think I have ever been discriminated, oh, except during the war time, but, uh, otherwise I think, I think, you know, when I talk to some of the, uh, people, they talk about being discriminated and so on, but sometimes I think they're, uh, too sensitive or overreacting to some, because, uh, often those who experience some prejudice or so, or discrimination, they, uh, take it too seriously, I think. Whereas I, uh, don't think that even a joke is going to, it doesn't bother me. I don't know.

LEVINE: Well, could you talk about, uh, when the Second World War was on, and how, what led up to your being

interned here? What was your experience?

SUZUKI: Well, as you know, on December 7th when the war broke out, uh, I think it was around two o'clock New York time here, in the Pacific it was, what, eight o'clock or so when the bombing started, and, uh, I was, uh, asked, well, in the meantime, uh, prior to December 7th, uh, most of our staff were sent back to either Tokyo, Japan, or some other branch office throughout the world. And, uh, the branch manager called about maybe a week or ten days before the war broke out, uh, he said that, uh, you and another person will be, uh, manning the branch office. And, since I was, at that time I was still in early twenties, and I didn't, I told them that's a big responsibility. So he said, "Well, there's nothing to worry about, because, uh, the, uh, in August the United States ceased the trade." So there was no trade going on. And he said that the only reason that we'd like to keep the branch office open is that if we give up the lease on the building or so on, it will be hard to find, to reopen. So all you have to do is just, uh, you know, come to the office, and then, uh, and whatever instructions we give you, you just send it, instruct the answer back

to the home office, or so, in Tokyo. So, uh, and I ask him if that is very, a war situation, is it, not a war, but is negotiations getting bad or not. And I had a friend who worked for the, worked at the, uh, Japanese consulate general's office, and he said that it's getting pretty bad, and he wanted to know what is your office, or what are they going to do with you, and I said I was told that I will be staying. So he said, "Well, it's pretty bad." ( he laughs ) So, uh, so when, uh, the news of the war, uh, I was getting my last instruction from the branch manager, what to do and so on. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: And you and one other person were here?

SUZUKI: Well, I was supposed to be here, and at that, I think it was, I think there was a hotel called St. Moritz near Central Park?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SUZUKI: And that Sunday morning I went real early to his hotel to get the last instructions on how to keep the branch office open, and around two o'clock, uh, someone called him and said, "Have you heard the news that Pearl Harbor was, you know, Japan has declared war and

Pearl Harbor was bombed?" And, uh, he, he told me to turn the radio on. So, and then we, uh, discovered the war, the Japanese has bombed Pearl Harbor. And so he told me to go down to the office and get some of the documents, but the FBI and the local authority has already seized the branch office, so I couldn't get in.

LEVINE: Wow. Could you describe anything of how you were feeling when you discovered that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor, and you were here?

SUZUKI: Well, all along we did mention that the, uh, you know, the militarists in Japan does not understand the United States, or the United States production capacity. But I guess they never did, uh, took our advice, and so on.

LEVINE: Hmm. What was happening around Central Park and here in New York, when that news came out? Do you remember like sort of the public response?

SUZUKI: No, I cannot. The only thing I know about, I think it was about four o'clock or something, they, uh, the FBI came and asked the branch manager, and they, uh, took him in, and, uh, and, uh, the FBI told me that they

asked my name and address, and then they told me to go back where you live. So then later on, uh, I was thinking that, I'm not sure some time in late December or early January, I was brought to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: What was happening between the time that you were brought here and you had that meeting with the branch manager, and then you found out the FBI had been to the office. What was it like in that time in between?

SUZUKI: Well, I had all my money in the company safe, so I didn't have, I was more or less stranded because at that time I didn't have any bank account with American banks or so on. So, like my salary was always, I left it in the company bank, so when the confiscated, I lost everything. And so whatever I had, uh, was, uh, the cash I had when the war broke out. So I had a hard time making a living, I mean, uh, you know, I was very careful to spend my money, because the cash I had was low. I think in those days I think maybe I had about two, three hundred dollars into my pocket, but the rest of the money was in the company safe.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Were you able to manage?

SUZUKI: Pardon me?

LEVINE: Were you able to manage on the two or three hundred dollars?

SUZUKI: Until, uh, I was incarcerated. ( they laugh )

LEVINE: Okay. We're going to pause here and turn the tape over, and then we'll continue with the Ellis Island part.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

LEVINE: Okay. We're resuming now. And you were saying that you managed on your two or three hundred until you were incarcerated. Could you talk about how that incarceration happened, what was your experience being brought here?

SUZUKI: You mean the life in Ellis Island?

LEVINE: No, how were you brought, what, did someone come and get you, or . . .

SUZUKI: Well, um, the branch manager asked, since he was interned, and he asked, he sent me a postcard saying, that, can, uh, I go to the hotel and get some trousers and so on. Uh, so I, uh, got them, and I didn't know

how to send it, so I went down to the FBI office in downtown Denver, I mean, excuse me, New York. And then they questioned me. Then the, they asked, uh, where I lived and so on. And then the next thing I was down near the, the pier over here, uh, on Manhattan, the . . .

LEVINE: Battery Park?

SUZUKI: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SUZUKI: And I, while they were driving down, they, I told them, well, I think we're going the wrong way. And they said, "No, no, no. We know New York." And then when, uh . . .

LEVINE: Where did you think you were going?

SUZUKI: I didn't know.

LEVINE: Where was . . .

SUZUKI: They said that they were going to, you know, uh, take me home, you know, but . . .

LEVINE: You knew you weren't going in that direction.

SUZUKI: No.

LEVINE: But where was the branch manager?

SUZUKI: He was in a, in Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SUZUKI: And then, uh, so next thing, uh, it was in, towards the evening, and, uh, it was very cold, I remember. And, uh, I asked him, "Where are we going?" They said, "Well, you don't have to worry." So next thing, we did get on a ferry, and then, uh, we arrived at Ellis Island, and I, I know it wasn't the main building, like where the ferry right now, I told my wife I don't think I landed here. I think it was maybe the one across, on the other side, but I remember it wasn't the main entrance. So, uh, and then I talked to one of the rangers outside, and then he said, "Oh, you must have landed in the back." And, uh, he said, "That's where the, uh, ferry used to, uh, land us, or especially the Germans, Italians and Japanese who were being interned were brought up there." And I think I remember the Coast Guard was stationed here, too. And, uh, I remember going into the building and the FBI, um, handed me to the guards.

And I thought it was sort of a cold place because of the tile floor and the tile wall. And then, uh, they, uh, took me into one of the small rooms. I remember that they locked the door, and then I think there were about four double bunk beds, or, uh, five. I think it placed eight or ten people in. And they were all, uh, I guess they were shipwrecked sailors or something, and, uh, the next thing the steel door closed and then, uh, they locked up, and I was terrified because there was, I guess it was only one, one, uh, window, with bars, and then the door had a little, uh, window, but that, too, was kind of barred. And I knew if I asked for help or so on, the guards won't hear me, because I know by walking down the hallway the, your footprints echoed in. Then one of the, uh, fellows that was in the room asked whether I was a Chinese or Japanese, and I, I was so scared that I didn't answer, nor did I sleep at all that night. And, uh, that was my first experience at Ellis Island the first night. It wasn't a pleasant one. I don't blame the people in that room, nor the authority or anything. That's one of the things that, unfortunate thing happened. And I think I was in that cubicle for about, I'm not sure whether it was three or four days or a week. And all

that time I was really scared.

LEVINE: Did you talk with anybody for those four or five days?

SUZUKI: No, because I was afraid to talk to them, and, uh, and I think a couple of the people were, uh, shipwrecked sailors, you know, foreign sailors from a transporter ship in Atlantic.

LEVINE: They weren't, they were not what was called enemy aliens, the other people in the room with you?

SUZUKI: No, they were not. No. They were not. They were, I guess, uh, because of, they were immigrants, or not immigrants, or foreigners, but, uh, I'm not sure whether they were, uh, British or, uh, some other, uh, nationals, and sailors, you know, shipwrecked. And I guess they were brought in until they were cleared or something. I'm not sure.

LEVINE: Well, then, what happened after the four or five days?

SUZUKI: Well, then finally they, uh, took me up to, I remember this big, huge room. There were two huge, about gymnasium size rooms. And, uh, there were all the Japanese, my branch managers, and then all my friends were there. And, uh, I think altogether there were

about three hundred Japanese subject for intern there up in second floor. And, uh, I think one room held about a hundred fifty beds or something. I'm not sure. I know, uh, we, uh, walked between the beds. You know, the beds were all lined up, the metal beds. And, uh, double bunk beds, and, uh, or early stage they did not, the U.S. government did not allowed us outside. We marched to the dining hall, and then, then, uh, marched back to the room, and then there were, uh, if I recall, there was only one door going into the room, in or out. And, uh, I think there were about three or four shower stalls, and then the, one thing I didn't have to worry is how I'm going to eat, so, because they provided the food. And, uh, the food wasn't too good. ( he laughs )

LEVINE: No. Do you want to talk about that? What was it like?

SUZUKI: Well, uh, the menu never changed. It was, for the, you know, the week, it's repeated, and then, uh . . .

LEVINE: You mean Monday was always the same thing, and Tuesday was . . .

SUZUKI: Monday, Tuesday was always, and then I think there

were more Germans internees, or incarcerated, so they, uh, I think catered more to the Germans. Many of the Japanese would have been happy if we even got a bowl of rice. But we never did, uh, they, I remember some of the menus that, uh, like one meal was a pig knuckles and sauerkraut, and, uh, a mutton, and I guess you'd call it the German potato salad, the sour potato salad, and the Swiss cheese. And, uh, I think it was a big cod or something. You could, Friday we could always smell the fish, and it was really, it didn't taste too good. But, uh, and, uh, the Germans used to see us not touch the sauerkraut and pigs knuckles, so they used to whisper to us how about passing the plate. So whenever the guards were not looking, we'd pass it to them, and then they gave us their empty plate, and then we put it in front of us. Breakfast was, most of the time it was, was it mush? Mush and, well, I guess oatmeal, and toast. Well, I'm not sure whether it was toast or bread, but we learned how to dry it whenever, they would not allow us to take any food to the rooms, but somehow we put it under our shirt, and then took it up to the room, and then put it on the radiator, and then, uh, about eight, nine o'clock that evening, it made it nice and

crispy. ( they laugh )

LEVINE: Was this the mush, or mush?

SUZUKI: No, no, the bread.

LEVINE: This was the toast.

SUZUKI: Bread. And, uh, we learned a lot of ideas from, for instance, like our, uh, shirt. Somehow we found out that if you, when it's sort of damp, you put it on, you know, the walls are tile, so you put it and spread it on the tile, and it just sticks to the tile, and then when, just before it dries, you, otherwise you, you know, when it dries it will fall on the ground, but then it's just like been ironed. So we found out how to do the, our shirts. And, uh, the, we, I think we used to get up about five thirty or a quarter to six, and the Japanese, I don't know about the Germans, because the guards said that I wish the Germans and Italians will be like the Japanese and clean their quarters, but we, everybody pitched in and we, uh, mopped the floor, and they assigned certain people to clean the latrines and then the bathrooms and all that. And then we did some exercise, and then I think breakfast was about eight, eight in the morning.

LEVINE: Did you do the exercise on your own, or you were . . .

SUZUKI: Well, usually we had some leader doing the calisthenics.

LEVINE: Calisthenics. It would be one of the people who was interned there, as a leader?

SUZUKI: Yes, uh-huh. And we, uh, we weren't allowed to go outside. The only time that we were able to leave the, well, the, what do you call, the living quarters, or whatever you want to call it, when we went down to march down to the dining hall. And then there was a guard. As we left, he counted. And then right there we went downstairs, and at the bottom of the stairs was another guard. Then entering into the dining room was another guard. So that when the last person left the room, the guard will yell to the people down at the bottom of the stairs what the count was, and if it, at that time if the count didn't agree, then they called the whole group, and then they said that they'd recount it again. Because there was no way to escape or so on, because, you know, the windows were all, uh, had the bars, and there's only one room, I mean, a door, but they always checked, and then the same with

when we marched back to the, uh, the living area. Then, uh, the only exercise we did have was walking between the beds, you know. And once a week I think they supplied the sheets and pillow. And then later on they allowed us to go outside for about an hour or so in the morning and an hour in the afternoon. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: How long had you been there by that time when you were allowed . . .

SUZUKI: Oh, I think when the outside, uh, we were able to go out was maybe because of the weather. I'm not sure. But I think it was about three, three or four months, so it's probably around March or April that, the first time we were able to go out for about an hour.

LEVINE: Then did people try to escape? Did you ever know of anyone who tried to?

SUZUKI: No one. As far as I remember, I think we had one person commit suicide, the Japanese. I think he, uh, hung himself in the bathroom, because we were, you know, as I was saying that, uh, the guards were there to, uh, count, and then that day it didn't, uh, jive with the number of internees there, so they, uh,

looked around the living quarters, and then, uh, later they found him in the bathroom. He hung himself. I think, I think that's the only casualty.

LEVINE: Did he leave a note?

SUZUKI: Pardon me?

LEVINE: Was there a note that the man left?

SUZUKI: No, I don't think so.

LEVINE: How were you treated, in general? What kind of treatment did you receive when you were here?

SUZUKI: I think, under the bad conditions, I think, I think we were treated very fairly.

LEVINE: Were the guards pleasant to you, or were they kind of militaristic, or . . .

SUZUKI: In the beginning, I think there were fear. The guards were, you know, they didn't know anything, and, and, uh, I have heard that room where we were interned was not used for a long time, so it had to be cleaned. I'm sure the guards were more, I'm sure that he was scared because of, you know, about a hundred and fifty of them, in one section there was a hundred and fifty

or more, and here is only one guard right near the door there. So I'm sure that he was scared. And, but I don't think we had any problem as far as I know that, I think the Germans and the Italians gave the guards more problem than the Japanese. We, uh, I think, obeyed all the rules. The only regret I have is that, uh, the Red Cross or, I don't know whether it's an immigration department or the Red Cross, but they used to issue us cigarettes, and I think it was two packs, two or three packs a week, and then a little toothpaste. And those who wanted cigarette had to line up, and then they hand it out. And at that time I never smoked, and I used to get in line for some of my friends. They used to ask me to get in the line, and then we'd get it, and then give it to them. I was doing it for, I don't know, maybe a month or more, and I said, "Well, what am I doing?" You know, getting in the line, even we have nothing to do. So I, uh, I got in the line, and I got the cigarettes, and then I gave, I kept one pack to see what it was like. And so I, that's when I was introduced to cigarettes. ( he laughs )

LEVINE: You started . . .

SUZUKI: Yes. And then I still smoke, so that's the bad part of it, actually. But, uh, I, I think I was treated very fairly. When I had a fever and then they took me, they put me in the hospital right away, and when I was talking to the guard he said that building over there used to be the hospital, so I, I think I was treated very fairly, you know? Most of the internees, I think.

LEVINE: Did you have any contact with the, uh, Italian or German internees?

SUZUKI: Well, the only time we did was later on the outside exercise were a longer period, so the Germans and Italians and the Japanese were all out at the same time. So we did get in contact, or see them, but, uh, not in the same, uh, room.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SUZUKI: We were in a different, the only other time was in a dining hall, or in the outside.

LEVINE: Is there anything you would say about how, how the three different groups were when they were together?

SUZUKI: Well, they always, the Germans, I think, were more,

uh, vocal than the Japanese. They always said that about the three axis power and so on. But then the other good thing about Ellis Island is I met my wife.

LEVINE: Ah! Well, uh, we're going, I think we're going to go to the next tape in a minute, and I want to get that completed. So maybe you could just say something about, uh, how, um, what did you do, like, on a given day? What would you do all day long?

SUZUKI: Well, and that's the, I think the sad part of it is that there wasn't nothing to do. I mean, later on we were able to get the cards from the, through Red Cross, or the visitors, you know, spouses who was living outside, or friends. At the early part, they didn't allow, you know, no newspaper, no radio, so we were, you know, there was no, we didn't know what was going on, and, uh, but otherwise we just sort of sat there more or less, or, you know, talked. But later on they allowed us the newspaper.

LEVINE: In the beginning no . . .

SUZUKI: One radio. One radio for the whole group. So some people wanted, and they used to argue quite a bit. Some people wanted a certain channel, I mean, station,

and then the other thing was the window.

LEVINE: Up or down.

SUZUKI: Up or down. That's right. Some will say they need fresh air, they open it, and someone will say it's too cold, and then they used to, that window used to go up and down, you know. And it was more, to me it was very comical.

LEVINE: Okay. We're going to pause here now so that Peter can flip this tape.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: Okay. This is Tape Two, and I'm here in the oral history studio with Naoye?

SUZUKI: Yes, ma'am.

LEVINE: Naoye, Naoye Suzuki, and this is just a fascinating interview. And we're talking now about when you were incarcerated here for about one-and-a-half years starting . . .

SUZUKI: Yes. I think that was about, I think one-and-a-half or either two, somewhere.

LEVINE: Wow. One day ran into the other, I suppose.

SUZUKI: Yes.

LEVINE: In that situation. Well, we were talking about what you did for all those days, um . . .

SUZUKI: Well, uh, we, a the beginning, we were not allowed any reading materials, and then, uh, even if, uh, the, uh, if you wrote a letter or so on, it was censored, or if we did receive a letter it was censored, and they will, if the authorities thought it was not good idea to have that message given to us or mailed out. So we used to have some of the letters, words and so on were cut out and, uh, and I think, I know one thing that we didn't have to pay any postage. We, all we had to do was put it in a corner. I'm not sure how we worded it, but whether it was a prisoner at Ellis Island, or what. But we didn't have to put any postage. And then later on we were allowed a visitor once a week. We, we had to request this, and people from outside could not request for a pass. And then, uh, I think it was, one was, one group was able to come, I think, ten o'clock or something, in for an hour's visit, and then the other one was, I think, two o'clock. I

think, I'm not sure. And for an hour visit, and then, uh, then, you know the long table? I think the width is about this much?

LEVINE: About three feet?

SUZUKI: I think so. And they used to have a partition about, oh, a foot high or so, and, uh, visitors sat on the other side, and then all the people who were incarcerated was on this side. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: So you were all along one long table.

SUZUKI: One long table there. And, uh, as you know, this building echoes.

LEVINE: Yes.

SUZUKI: So when . . . ( he laughs ) Say, uh, a hundred or two hundred people talking, you had a hard time hearing, and if you got close to that divider, then the guards will come rushing in and make sure that you didn't lean towards the partition. Then, uh, if they brought any gifts or so, then they had to leave it at the guard's table, then they censored it, then later on they brought it up to the room. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: Were the Italian and German incarcerated people also along the same table.

SUZUKI: Yes. The visiting day, I think it was, I'm not sure. I think it was Wednesday or something, once a week. It's only, I think that's only for the Germans, Italians and Japanese that were, I don't know about the regular immigrants, you know, when they had a special day or what. But we, uh, I remember having the visitors day, although I didn't, you know, at the beginning I didn't have any visitors. But, uh, we, later on when they allowed us to have books or other things, since I had nothing to do, so I thought it was very good because I did lots of reading, because nothing else to do, so, and, uh, of course, the authority censored books that we could have, and also I think the immigration department had a library, and the Red Cross said that they could get certain books from the immigration department library, so we didn't have to buy any books or so. Besides, all our money was, as soon as we came to Ellis Island, they took all the monies and so on. And, uh, kept it. And those who had money, they could request, and sometimes ask their friends to buy things, but we weren't allowed to

have any money, or so on. And then, uh, if the visitors brought food, certain foods were passed. Of course, naturally, liquor was not passed, but I think the comical thing is that not the Japanese or the Germans, I think Germans or Italians, uh, they put it in, I think, either hand lotion or, uh, a shaving lotion bottle, and then they put the whiskey in. And then somehow I guess the visitor, when they were bringing it, was nervous or something, it dropped, and the whole place, uh . . .

LEVINE: Smelled like liquor.

SUZUKI: Smelled like a liquor store. And so we, so later on the guard were opening the after shave lotion, and then maybe smell it. But, uh, the other thing that, they had a church service, later on, on Sunday. They used to call out, the guard used to call out, "Chapel service." And those who wished to go to the service, the guards will let you out. I mean, through the, you know, the, uh, room, and then they will escort you down to, say, if there were five, then they will take the five to the, it's the same room as where they had visitors.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SUZUKI: And, uh, and each Sunday was a different denomination. Some were, oh, maybe one Sunday would be a Catholic, and one Sunday would be a, uh, Methodist, then Christian Science, and so on. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: Were you, were you raised in any particular denomination?

SUZUKI: No. ( he laughs ) I, uh, I didn't, but I have seen people go down for an hour-and-a-half or so, an hour, an hour-and-a-half, and I said, "Gee, maybe I should, when there's a call for a church service, I will raise my hand, too. And then at least for an hour, an hour-and-a-half, I won't have to be in the room." So I asked one of the men that, you know, what do they do? They said, "Oh, you just go down, and at least you get to meet people and sing and so on." So I said, well, that's better than staying in the room, and I, then one Sunday I, when they said church service I raised my hand, and then they came down. Then I think about the second or third Sunday when I went down the Japanese Methodist group in New York, the minister and the choir, came to conduct a service. And after the

service the guards did not bring us back to the room. They let us mingle with the choir and the minister. And there was a young lady came up to me, and said, you know, asked what my name was and so on, and then she said that, "Did you come and, used to come to the Japanese consulate's office to see Mr. So-and-so?" And I said, "Yes." And so she asked whether Mr. So-and-so was there, I can't remember the name, and so I told them that all the diplomats are in Georgia, and they're not here. And then she said, "Would you, do you have visitors?" So I said, "No." And she said that, "I'll be glad to, if you would like to have a visitor." So I said yes. And, uh, I, she used to come every Wednesday or so, the visiting hour. I'd have to send a card to, from here, from Ellis Island, and then the authority either passed, you know, gave the pass or not. And, uh, that time, uh, she bought a couple of U.S. history books, and a couple of poetry books, and, uh . . .

LEVINE: What was her name?

SUZUKI: The name of the . . .

LEVINE: The name of the lady who was bringing you the books.

SUZUKI: Well, her name is Mary, and her last name is Nagatoshi, N-A-G-A-T-O-S-H-I. And, uh, she, I, she asked me what I'm doing every day, and I said, "Practically nothing," because you just sit around, and sometimes I watch people playing cards and so on, but otherwise maybe read a book or so on. So she said, "Well, would you like me to send you some books?" So she, uh, sent me a big volume of poetry book, and she also said that, well, maybe it will be a good thing to read about American history. So I did read the, from cover to cover. And then I have discovered that reading the American constitution, that any person born in the United States or United States territory, I think it's Amendment 14 or something, I'm not sure. But in the constitution it says that, so I said that, well, I was born in San Francisco, so therefore I cannot be interned as a dangerous enemy alien. So I wrote to attorney general and asked, you know, why I am interned or incarcerated in Ellis Island, and classified as a dangerous, uh . . .

LEVINE: Enemy alien.

SUZUKI: Enemy alien. And so the Justice Department threw my

case to the War Department, and they were throwing my case between the War Department, the War Department said no, I was under the Justice Department. And so finally they released me, and I was out for I think, I'm not sure whether it was a couple of weeks or a month or so, I can't recall. Then they had a military hearing, they, one day I did receive a notice, and it said that no civilians are allowed, and at that time my English wasn't too good, and I asked for, can I have an interpreter, because I, since, since the first time I met Mary, the Japanese Methodist group came to Ellis Island a couple of times, so I also became friends with the minister. And, so I asked whether I could have him as an interpreter, and then they said no. And that's the first time I've seen so many bars and oak leafs and so on, you know, the captains and the majors, and the stenographer was, I guess, a WAC or something, you know. They were all military. No civilians were involved. And they asked several questions, and then, uh, then the next thing I was brought back here to Ellis Island again, and by then many of the Japanese, they were either sent to Camp Upton, or I think it was Camp Meade, no, a little while ago Mr. Peter asked me, I couldn't recall. But

I think it was Meade. And then they also had an exchange boat for diplomats and treaty merchants, one for one. So they, I think they were altogether about, throughout the United States, about a thousand, a little over a thousand people who were on the exchange boat, through the, I guess Swedish government, on The Glipsome[ph]. They went, they exchanged it at Madagascar, I think. And the Americans in Japan were brought to Madagascar, and then from, uh, not only from Ellis Island, but throughout. There were several internment camps.

LEVINE: In Japan.

SUZUKI: In the United States.

LEVINE: Oh.

SUZUKI: So, like, in Misola[ph], Montana, and so on. So they, many of them left here. So the second time when I was here, they, I'm not sure whether they gave that room to the Germans or not, because there were more Germans than Japanese by then.

LEVINE: Because, because many of the Japanese were being exchanged?

SUZUKI: Yes.

LEVINE: Is that why?

SUZUKI: Yes. So, uh, we were down in the first floor this time, and, you know, with about eight or ten people to a room. And we occupied, I forgot, I think about eight or nine of those cubicles on the first floor. And, uh, and by then I guess since our group dwindled so much that we were often eating with the, I guess the regular immigrants, or those who were held by the immigration. There were some Chinese and, oh, some other shipwrecked people, and so on.

LEVINE: How about the Coast Guards? Did you have any contact with them?

SUZUKI: Uh, no. We, well, at the beginning they were manning the doors, you know, the guards. But later most of them were, I guess, the immigration officers. We did see them through the window, the Coast Guard, you know, cooking and so on, and then we used to envy them because sometimes we could smell the chicken, you know? ( he laughs ) Whereas we were, you know, being fed with, like, mutton, and then . . .

LEVINE: Pigs knuckles. ( she laughs )

SUZUKI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Right.

SUZUKI: So, but all in all it, I have no regrets about being interned here.

LEVINE: What were the attitudes that people had? Like, over the course of time when you were here, how did people feel? I mean . . .

SUZUKI: The Japanese?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SUZUKI: I think most of them, they, there is an old Japanese saying, "It cannot be helped," you know, they call it (Japanese), you know, it can't be helped. So they, uh, said, "Well, it can't be helped, and we'll try to make the best of it." And, so, I think, like, the immigration officers who were guarding our doors, later on they were more relaxed, even the Coast Guard, you know, before the immigration officers took over, even the Coast Guard sailors felt pretty safe guarding us because sometimes when the visitors, you know, get

some cookies and so on from their spouse or so on, because they were about maybe twenty, maybe a little bit, about twenty, some were married to a Caucasian, and they used to bring, you know, cookies and so on, and, uh, and after it cleared and they were able to get the cookies, they even shared it with the guards. So I think all in all the Japanese internees had a better relationship with the guards. Then, at the same time, I think the guards were more relaxed or gave us more, a little more freedom than the Germans. I, I know that, uh, later on when, well, like Mary cooked something and so on, they hardly, I guess they trusted us or so, that if you put down cookies or so on, they knew that we weren't going to put any other things in the box. So they often, they knew who opened it, and they said, "Well, here's a cookie for you." And so I think all in all we had a better relationship with the officers and so on.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Have your, have your thoughts or your feelings changed much over the time, these fifty years since, since this happened? Your thinking about it, or how you feel, or the effect you think it had on you?

SUZUKI: Well, no. I, you know, and later on, well, I forgot if it was '43 or somewhere around there, the Justice Department and the War Department didn't know what to do with me, so they, uh, gave me a paper saying that I am excluded from the East Coast area so many miles, then north, northern border, southern border, and so on. And, uh, if I do not leave the East Coast within twenty-four hours I will be arrested and put into a jail rather than at Ellis Island, because of then I will be violating this law that they just gave me. So I told the authority that all my monies are confiscated, everything else is confiscated and I don't know where to go. And they said, "Well, it's up to you." So I said, well, the first thing that came to my mind was Chicago, so I said, "Well, I'll go to Chicago." So they gave me one-way ticket, I think it was twenty-two dollars. No, I think it was a ticket and the twenty-two dollars or something for a meal. So, uh, I, then the church, the Quakers were helping the Japanese people, so I was able to find a job in, later in Chicago.

LEVINE: We're practically at the end of the tape, so I want to ask you.

SUZUKI: Yes, ma'am.

LEVINE: Did you keep seeing Mary, and what was the outcome?

SUZUKI: Well, when I went to Chicago, then this minister said that, "What are your plans?" And I said, "Well, I guess . . ." He asked me whether, "Are you planning to go back to Japan?" And I said, "Well, most likely not," because I didn't believe in the militarism. So he said, "Well, have you ever thought about marrying Mary?" So I said, "Well, no." And he said that she's a very sweet girl, and, uh, and I think, you know, you should get married. So he said, "Why don't you propose to her, and if you're, you know, too shy to do so," he said, "I will ask." So I did. And then he also mentioned to her, so then we were married in Chicago, and then we celebrated our fiftieth wedding last year.

LEVINE: Oh, that's wonderful. I'm sorry, the tape is at the end. I want to thank you so much. I'm so happy to have had this chance to talk with you, and preserve this for posterity.

SUZUKI: Well, thank you very much, and I, I hope I was able to give some information to you.

LEVINE: Yes.

SUZUKI: But I had a very happy and sad memory at Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Good. Okay.