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YAYE AIHARA
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LEVINE: So today is April 5th, 1998. And I'm here at the Mayflower Hotel in New York City. And I'm with Yaye Aihara, who-- spent four days at Ellis Island interned there in September of 1943. Today Mrs.-- Aihara is 72 years of age, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Okay, if we, if you would say again, please, for the tape your birthrate, and where you were born?

AIHARA: I was born in Pride (ph), Washington, this is right next door to Tacoma, Washington, on August 18, 1925.

LEVINE: And did you-- did you grow up in Pride?

AIHARA: No, my earliest recollections were of Seattle, Washington where I grew up.

LEVINE: And when, when did you move there, when, ?

AIHARA: When my younger brother was born, in 1929. So I-- I remember when he was born.

LEVINE: And what was your mother's name?

AIHARA: My mother was Shizu . Her maiden name was Otsuka—

LEVINE: Could you spell those, please?

AIHARA: Oh, Shizu, S..H..I..Z..U.., maiden name, O..T..S..U..K..A..

LEVINE: Okay and your father's name?

AIHARA: My father was Sho, S..H..O.. Kanogawa K..A..N..O..G..A..W..A..

LEVINE: And Kanogawa was your maiden-- ?

AIHARA: Maiden name, yes.

LEVINE: And did-- what other brothers and sisters?

AIHARA: I have one older sister, Sei, S..E..I.., she's two years older. I have one younger brother, Shogi (ph), but everybody calls him Stogi. He's two years younger than me. And I have my-- my youngest brother, Reo, R..E..O.., he was also two years younger than Stogi, but he passed away in 1990.

LEVINE: Okay, and that was the brother who was-- when he was born that--

AIHARA: Yes—

LEVINE: Was when you moved?

AIHARA: Moved, Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Okay, now do you recall-- your days of growing up. Uh, when you think about it, were you in a Japanese community, or-- ?

AIHARA: We were in a mixed community. I think you would -- refer to it as a ghetto right now, where only Japanese, Italians, and Jewish people lived. My earliest school recollection was when I started kindergarten and I went to a primarily mixed school. My sister was already going there. And I remember one house there had a dog that just barked ferociously. But I only spent my kindergarten years there. And then we moved and I went to Washington Grammar School in Seattle. Yeah, Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Were the-- were the other people, the Italian and Jewish people, were they immigrant people, do you know?

AIHARA: I think so, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So there were different languages being spoken by the children.

AIHARA: In that neighborhood, yes.

LEVINE: And, uh, when you moved to, um Seattle, what kind of community-- ?

AIHARA: It was also-- the first house was-- not too far from the house I grew up in-- in Seattle, Uh-huh. Yeah.

LEVINE: And-- what was your father doing?

AIHARA: Oh, we had a grocery store.

LEVINE: In Seattle?

AIHARA: In Seattle, yes.

LEVINE: And your mother, did she-- ?

AIHARA: She helped in the grocery store, she didn't work outside of it. And then the grocery store-- in those days the store front and then the living quarters upstairs, that's how it was with us. Yeah. And it-- the house in the back had three stories and we slept on the third floor. And we'd just rattle up those stairs, and rattle on down (she laughs).

LEVINE: And do you remember any social life with other members of the Japanese-- Japanese-American community?

AIHARA: New Years Celebration. New Years was a big thing with the Japanese community. And they'd have something called *shinenkai* a big New Years Party. And we'd-- definitely always go to our prefecture, my father's prefecture group at a-- usually at a Chinese food restaurant-- Chinese Restaurant. Uh Huh.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

AIHARA: And then we would have the biggest event of the year would be the Japanese School Picnic. They would call it *undokai* which translated into English would be athletic get together. It means to exercise. And this would be held in a public park and we'd have races. Each class would have races. It was a big thing. We always got a new dress for that occasion.

LEVINE: What was-- was it a particular date every year?

AIHARA: Every summer in July, I think. And, you know in Seattle it rains a lot. And every year that morning we would get up and wonder if it's gonna rain or not. And it did on several occasions, yeah Uh-huh. But on those picnic days my mother would get up early and make a bento, our lunch. And it was a big deal. And the bento would always include fried chicken, which we would never have at the ordinary meal. It was only on special occasions, yeah, Uh-huh.

LEVINE: How about the diet in general?

AIHARA: The diet we had fish, mostly fish. Strictly Japanese food because my mother didn't know how to cook American food. the only time I lear-- we did was after my sister and I started high school and we-- we took "Foods" and we learned how to make American style foods. Up until then it was strictly Japanese food. Fish, dried fish, cooked fish with radish-- always radish, yeah.

LEVINE: Red radish?

AIHARA: White radish, Uh-huh. Are you familiar with the long, white-- ?

LEVINE: Oh, yeah.

AIHARA: Yeah, Uh-huh. That's a-- and in retrospect-- that was the best diet, fish and-- and radish.

LEVINE: Daikon radish?

AIHARA: Oh, yes! Daikon. It's daikon ,Uh-huh.

LEVINE: And-- how come you went to a Chinese restaurant?

AIHARA: Well, mainly because it was cheap, and we could eat family style. See, they would bring all the plates out, maybe five,six depending on how many people. And we'd just take our serving out and pass it around, Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Was there a Japanese restaurant is Seattle?

AIHARA: In Seattle I think there was-- only a few, very few, Uh-huh.

LEVINE: And how about religion? Was your family religious?

AIHARA: My father was-- both families, we were Buddhists. And there was one Buddhist church within-- next-- couple blocks away, yeah.

LEVINE: And were there any-- either ceremonial or religious events that you recall from your childhood?

AIHARA: Uh, just, uh, the bir—the Buddhist birthday. But just-- it was within the Buddhist church community, the-- members. So it wasn't a big thing like the Japanese School Picnic, or the changing-- the prefecture body-- New Year Party. But uh, the church was-- we had a choir, I remember. And of course the Sunday School Services. But there was never any-- big social events. Only at graduation time when the graduating seniors would be invited to a party, yeah.

LEVINE: And were-- were most of the Japanese people Buddhist, or were they—

AIHARA: There were Christians too, I would say half and half, yeah, Uh-huh.

LEVINE: And have you maintained that affiliation?

AIHARA: Just-- yeah, Uh-huh. I've been a life-long Buddhist, yeah.

LEVINE: So, let's see, do-- what-- what are your first memories about the Second World War?

AIHARA: Well, I-- I was-- 16. So, I was very much aware of Pearl Harbor being bombed. And the events leading to Pearl Harbor of course, it-- we were very apprehensive because we're American citizens, my parents are enemy aliens. And it was very much on our minds. And--

LEVINE: Had you-- had both your mother and father come from Japan?

AIHARA: Yes, my mother was from Fukuoka, F..U..K..U..O..K..A.., prefecture, which is on Kyushu the Southern-most island of Japan. My father was from Wakayama, W..A..K..A..Y..A.. M..A.., prefecture, which is on the main, Honshu, the main island. And my father was here first. My mother came after she finished junior high school in Japan. And theirs was a-- an arranged marriage in Tacoma. They got married in Tacoma.

LEVINE: Did they know each other from-- ?

AIHARA: No, but I think the families knew each other, Uh-huh.

LEVINE: And-- so-- so you-- all of the children were born then in-- in this country?

AIHARA: Country-- yeah.

LEVINE: So, as the war was approa-- the war was-- we were-- we were drawn into the war what-- what specific events do you recall about-- well, when Pearl Harbor was bombed, or maybe actions, or responses?

AIHARA: Well-- well I remember the-- the Ambassador was Kurusu. And he was in

Washington, D.C. desperately trying to negotiate, uh, peace, not peace, but a non-war. But the declaration just-- reached the U.S. Government too late, I guess.

Anyway, I was in-- Sunday School when the bombing news came. And we just were stunned. And I remember walking home with my sister and brother from Sunday School not saying a word. And we stayed in the house all day and that night the FBI came and picked up my father. And they searched our house from top to bottom. And they told my father, "Pack up your-- some clothes." And they took him away. And I didn't see him until we got to Ellis Island, yeah, Uh-huh. And my mother was only 36 at that time. And we had to-- she had to get rid of all our grocery-- the business.

LEVINE: Inventory?

AIHARA: Yeah, inventory. I remember-- you know the-- you know what did we call them? Scavengers-- they were mostly Jewish people, but they took advantage of our situation because we had to get rid of everything in less than a month.

And my mother had to sell our store fixtures, the-- the scale, the showcase-- the meat showcase, the meat slicer, cash register, $25. And she's only 36. The grocery-- the shelves-- I think she sold for less than a penny on the dollar. And, you know, we didn't get much money for it. And we could only carry what-- take what we could carry.

And I remember our bedding we had to take. So those big sea-- sailor sea-bags they called 'em sea-bags that the sailors used. And we rolled our blankets into them. And what little suitcases you know we could carry we stuffed our clothes in there.

I remember we left a lot of clothes in the closet. And my mother was quite naive. We didn't know there was such a thing as [ ] storage. Our-- furniture, it wasn't much, we just left it in the house. We left all our kitchen utensils. But some of the dishes-- good dishes that were in our grocery store we stored at the Buddhist Church. And that, of course, was all stolen during the war. Yeah, all our-- anything of value that we stored at-- it was looted during the war so there was nothing-- nothing, yeah.

LEVINE: So what-- do you remember what you were told when-- when your father was taken away?

AIHARA: Oh, we didn't know where-- where are you going? They wouldn't tell us, the FBI.

LEVINE: And what-- what did they tell you about getting rid of everything?

AIHARA: They just issued that executive order, 9066. And we had to be at a certain place at a certain time. And you had to take only what you could carry, and the rest was-- yeah, Uh-huh.

LEVINE: So do you remember actually leaving?

AIHARA: We had to meet at-- I think we met at the-- a church, or near the church. It was near a playground. I think that's where we got on the bus. I was 16, but everything-- about that time I blocked it out of my mind.

The only thing I remember, going to the Assembly Center, passing the farmers still working in the field, and they were Japanese, they would wave to us. They knew that they would be next. And here they're working in the fields. But they never harvested-- were able to harvest the crops. Their neighbors did, and just-

- they took the profit, yeah, Uh-huh.

LEVINE: So, in other words, they were-- there were waves of people being taken away?

AIHARA: Yeah, Uh-huh. Certain people in this area, on this day, next block would be this day, this day. And in-- the Seattle area where I lived, most of us went to as Assembly Center called Puiallup, P..U..I..A..L..L..U..P.. And that was a race track. And some people stayed in the horse stalls.

Ours was-- we were lucky, we had barracks. But the barracks were very, very flimsy, hastily put up. And-- and it was for three months. And the walls were maybe-- less than six feet high of real thin wood. And you could hear everything. And heaven forbid you slept in the same barrack as a snorer you could hear them-- through the whole barrack.

We had one, little stove in the middle of the room, uh, to, uh keep the room warm. But that wasn't that necessary because it was Spring, May. And May it's not that cold. We were there May, June, July. The bathrooms were-- hastily put up things where-- the-- no privacy. There was four-- toilets-- you know cut out seats, actually out-houses-- four seats on this side and this side. And every so often a big hopper full of water-- when it was full it would just wash everything down, yeah. It was that sort of-- facility.

You know the women-- we couldn't even change our napkin in-- in privacy. And then I remember finally they put up [walk-throughs?] with a curtain the very corner so we would have some-- some privacy.

LEVINE: This was at the Assembly Center?

AIHARA: Assembly Center, yeah Uh-huh. And from there were went to Minnetonka, Idaho. And Idaho was no better. There were outhouses with no lights, and no

privacy. And I was there one year. And the running toilet-- water toilets were available just before I left there. And it was cold at winter, you know, freezing. Idaho is really cold.

And I hated to go to the bathroom. In fact, I couldn't go to the bathroom. And-- it was awful, being constipated. You know, you cannot go sit like that in the-- when it's-- below zero.

LEVINE: And-- was there any communication with your father during the period before Ellis Island?

AIHARA: We would get censored letters, yeah, you know the [ ] things a lot of times. And my father would have to write in English, no Japanese. Yeah, he always-- because there were no censors in Japanese. So every letter had to be written in English.

LEVINE: Now where was your father—

AIHARA: After the Seattle City Jail he was transferred to Missoula, Montana. And this camp was done by the INS, Immigration Natural-- and only men were detained there.

And then after that they moved him to Lordsburg, New Mexico, another INS camp, and from there to Santa Fe, New Mexico, which was still another INS camp. And-- while we were-- I think the-- where he was one of the very first internees to request-- repatriation to Japan because this was no way for a family to be living, separated.

But the first coupl-- it was actually a false start of a call for repatriation in-- September of 1942-- . We were already in Assembly Center, so we were told

that we were going to Japan so you can't leave yet. But all the others had already gone on to Minnetonka, so we were the very last families-- there was two of-- two families, to leave Puiallup.

So we got to Minnetonka, we were put into block 42, which is at the end of the camp, where as the people that we were with in Puiallup were in block 19, 20, you know in the middle of the camp. And we spent one year there, Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Um. And what-- what happened as a result of your father-- as a result of your father requesting repatriation?

AIHARA: Well, we were still on the repatriation list. So, the actual repatriation order came in September of '43 after we were in Idaho for one year. So we were, uh, shipped from Idaho to New York. My father from New Mexico to New York. And that's where we met in Ellis Island.

And we got there at night. So Ellis Island, the facilities were separated men and women. So my brothers saw my father before we did-- my mother and I did.

And I remember meeting him as he and my brothers came down a stairway. That's why I wanted to see where they were -- had-- been sleeping and came down. And-- and then of course my mother and I, we just hugged-- it was really tearful-- we were happy, but after two and a half-- two years, yeah.

And um, we slept in cots, I remember. There weren't too many other inmates. I don't think there was any-- immigration taking place during the war. But I remember seeing some Japanese men there being held. And they were in a-- another area. And the food was awful.

The only good thing I remember eating was a scoop of the orange (laughs).

But the worst part was our baggage it went on the ship. So we had only the clothes that we were wearing.

LEVINE: What ship?

AIHARA: On the [ ]See, when we got to New York we found out we were standbys or alternates in case the original, so many who were intended to were-- you know taken ill, or we would be taking their place. And there was 97 of us standbys. And 21 of us-- the fathers of family-- the family head was internee of war, like my father.

Now, he, because of his status couldn't go back to Idaho with us. See, Idaho everybody was taken from their homes. They weren't internees of war, they were just ordinary citizens or Japanese nationals that weren't picked up by the FBI. So my father could not go back to Idaho unless the FBI released him. But they wouldn't.

But, if you want to stay together there's a family camp in Crystal City which had opened early part of '43 just for-- families like us. And if you want to stay together you have to go to Crystal City. So, we decided to go to Crystal City.

And at that time my sister was already engaged and she refused to go-- to Japan. Yeah, but my-- my brothers and I we dut-- dutifully went with my mother and met my father here in New York.

LEVINE: Now, why was your father picked up and-- and why was the FBI particularly interested in him?

AIHARA: I think ‘cause, well, he was very active in the Japanese community. And he was President-- he had been President of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce

in Seattle. And he was also the President of his *Kenkinkai*, the prefecture group. And I-- that's the only reason I could think of.

Yeah, Uh-huh. Plus he was quite an accomplished *kendo*, you know a martial arts, *kendo.* But he never practiced it because he was so busy trying to run a business. But he was quite good in his college years.

So, see the people who were picked up were Buddhist ministers, Japanese school teachers, educators, martial art teachers, and business leaders they were all rounded up.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And he was educated-- he was college educated in Japan?

AIHARA: Well, he had a-- I think he was a college drop-out. I think he went to Waseda for two years. And he was on their *kendo* team. He was very good, yeah.

LEVINE: So when the family reconvened in Crystal City you expected that you would be going back to Japan?

AIHARA: Yeah, we--

LEVINE: Is that what you had in mind then?

AIHARA: Yeah, my father was definitely planning to return to Japan. And it's funny-- ultimately we never did. And when the war was over in 1945, and that was August, in December another repatriation boat left for Japan. Most of the men and people went on that ship.

But my brothers and I, we were two and a half years older and we didn't wanna go. So we told-- and we were fully expecting a confrontation with my father.

But to our surprise he—he, um, just nodded his head, that okay, we're not going. But we were really surprised. But you know we don't question your parents' authority in those days. We do as we're told.

And only until 1988 and 40 something odd years later did I learn why. And this was in Los Angeles we had a Crystal City reunion. And our family friend from Seattle came to participate. Now her-- she and her family were interned in Crystal City also.

And during the war her brother, who was in the U.S.-- Intelligence Core, he was one of the top interpreters called Merrill's Marauders, I don't know if you've heard of-- that was a group that was hiding in the-- the intellectual war in the China, Burma, India theater they called it, in the Pacific side.

He came to Crystal City to visit his family. And at that time he told my father in utmost secrecy, "Don't go to Japan because we're losing the war." See-- see they already knew they were losing.

And my father took that secret to his grave. He never told us, and we never questioned him. And then his sister told us, I guess she figured her brother had passed away, her parents are gone, my parents are-- my mother was still living, I think. Was she? Yeah, she was still living. Was she-- during '89-- '90-- . . . she didn't tell us until-- when was-- Suni (ph), when was Monteray reception-- reunion?

SUNI: 1993.

AIHARA: Oh, '93 she told us, I found out.

LEVINE: So your mother knew. He had-- he had told your mother?

AIHARA: I don't think so, no-- no.

LEVINE: No?

AIHARA: No, so both of them never knew. That Hank had told our brother-- Marion's brother had told my father, "Don't go to Japan." And it's a good thing we didn't go.

LEVINE: Well, now were-- were ships leaving in that interim, those two years—

AIHARA: No, I don't think so.

LEVINE: From the time you were on standby till you actually could have gone?

AIHARA: I don't think there was any other ships. Otherwise the people in Crystal City would have gone, or we'd have gone earlier. I think that first post-war ship was the first-- you know after that (INAUDIBLE) that we-- that we missed.

LEVINE: That you missed?

AIHARA: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Well-- is there anything else about-- the internment at Ellis Island that you can recall? Either things that happened or-- ?

AIHARA: Well, I remember when we were on the dock, we could see the boat right there, white-- painted white with a big red cross on it. And all of us that-- would not be on the boat, they herded us into a huge freight elevator-- it was big, at bayonet point. Yeah, I-- that scared me. You know they-- they-- go, like this, and they pointed that thing right at-- right at us.

LEVINE: Do you know who-- who-- who it was?

AIHARA: The U.S. Soldiers.

LEVINE: Soldiers-- they were in uniform?

AIHARA: Yeah, they're-- oh, yeah, military clothes I think, Uh-huh. And, you know when you have a bayonet pointed at you, you do as you're told, yeah. And I vaguely recall climbing some steps to get to-- to Ellis Island. I don't-- but see Suni remembers more.

But I just remembered that the food was terrible. I remember getting on the elevator. Oh, and I remember seeing these beautifully dressed women with these-- naval officers scattered around the dock. And I don't know what the women were doing, but they were beautifully dressed women. And I guess they were-- seeing their husbands off, or whatever. American Navy-- Naval Officers.

Yeah, and I think going from Pennsylv-- going to Pennsylvania Station, going down those steps I remember the soldiers clearing away for us going down the steps. And because we were going down with sol-- soldiers accompanying us, everybody was staring at us, I remember that.

But I don't remember how we got to Pennsylvania Station. We must have gotten on a boat and gone there.

LEVINE: And then how did you get-- you went by train from Pennsylvania Station?

AIHARA: To Crystal City, yeah, and it took four days and—

SUNI: Uh-uh. Five days.

AIHARA: Five days? In the same clothes. But in retrospect, you know it during war time you do make do with a lot less. And it was a "can't be helped" situation. So-- I mean we were complaining. But as soon as we got to Crystal City they gave us new clothes to wear.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you have--

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Do you have any other memories of that train trip between New York and Crystal City?

AIHARA: I think-- shades were drawn. The meals weren't bad-- compared to-- to Ellis Island. I remember, "Ooh, this was good," (she laughs) that's all I remember of the train ride. I remember stopping and-- we were able to buy ice cream, I think once, yeah.

(OFF-MIKE CONVERSATION)

AIHARA: Yeah, and I remember spending a lot of time on the-- outside the-- what do they call that area in back of a-- ?

LEVINE: Like a-- a caboose, a platform?

AIHARA: Not caboose-- platform at the end of each car, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, Uh-huh.

AIHARA: So—

LEVINE: Because it was-- was it summer when you were going?

AIHARA: Yeah, September, so it was hot. And coming through-- Texas it took how many days just Texas because it was so huge. And Crystal City is 150 miles southwest of-- we had to change tracks, or change-- we had to-- ch-- change tracks I guess. And during the night all that-- clatter, clatter, clatter, changing of track.

LEVINE: And then how-- how was Crystal City compared with the other places you'd been?

AIHARA: Well, for one thing we were able to eat together as a faimly unit. And we had no-- there were no barracks. There were houses. It used to be a-- a migrant farm worker's camp. And depending on the size of the family, it was either three families in one house, or two, or even one family in a house, depending on how many children.

And for us-- at first we shared three families in one house. But-- after a couple months we were able to move to another house where I had my own little room. Just one bed in there, but it was my own room.

And we did our own cooking. We did our own marketing. They gave us coins-- special coins, plastic coins to use at the food market and clothing. And depending on the ages and size of your family you got an allowance in these tok-- in these tokens. And so depending on the mother's ability to cook food you had-- we were able to eat quite well.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so did you-- you were, by then, what-- age? Was it-- ?

AIHARA: I had just finished high school. I finished early. I wasn't quite 17 when I finished high school. And since we had to leave in May we were excused from our final exams in high school, that was pretty good too.

But-- so because I was finished with high school I went to Japanese school every day, nine to three every day. So, I learned quite a bit in Japanese. It was subject was in Japanese, everything was in Japanese.

LEVINE: This was at Crystal City?

AIHARA: Uh-huh. And we-- of course we had the best teachers because they were all educated ministers and teachers. We had the best professors. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Yeah. So, it sounds like Crystal City was a lot better as far as--

AIHARA: It was, yeah--

LEVINE: --your living conditions then-- than other places.

AIHARA: Yeah, we had to answer to roll call every day. You had to show your face. Whether you were in the toilet, or you had to come running out of the shower you had to-- show your face. And our mail was censored. Everything was censored.

But other than that-- the life itself was I guess-- more family-like than in the-- relocation camps, concentration camps.

LEVINE: Were-- and just describe what it was-- what a roll call was like?

AIHARA: Oh, the-- camp official would come in a car. And they'd go very slowly and mark off-- there should be five people here, there should be six people here. And if we show our face they just move on.

LEVINE: So was it at a certain time every day? So you knew- ?

AIHARA: Yeah, usually it was evening, yeah, after the-- everybody came home and it was dinner time, or after dinner time.

LEVINE: Now, were you aware of-- other so-called enemy aliens at Ellis Island when you were there?

AIHARA: Only the prisoners that were held there.

LEVINE: German?

AIHARA: No, they were Japanese prisoner.

LEVINE: Only Japanese?

AIHARA: Yeah, that's all-- all I remember, yeah. I think they were Japanese prisoner of war. They wouldn't tell us their name or where they were from. But I remember conversing with one of them.

LEVINE: Oh?

AIHARA: Yeah, we were kind of separated. I don't remember if it was a gate or-- but we couldn't mix with them. Yeah, I-- you know that Ellis Island is completely unrecognizable now. Of course I didn't go into the dormitory, but I-- I don't know where the mess hall was. Was it that main room where the program was the other night?

(OFF-MIKE CONVERSATION)

AIHARA: Oh, see so I don't—

LEVINE: It didn't-- it didn't ring true to what you remembered, right now?

AIHARA: No, Uh-uh. (NEGAT.)

LEVINE: Yeah?

AIHARA: I just remember a very dingy, dingy dormitory where we slept. Yeah, and-- the tables where we ate was one-- you know long tables. It wasn't a table with four chairs around it. It was a mess hall type of table, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. (AFFIRM.) How about relationships with-- with the other groups that were at Crystal City, other than the Japanese?

AIHARA: There were a few German families. At the most I think they-- there was about 600 to 800. But in 1944, I think, most of them left the camp, and most of them died in the bombings of Germans-- that's what we heard, yeah.

And the-- the German Bund (ph), I don't know if you ever heard of that, that was a whole German group. And the leader of that Bund was in Crystal City with his family. And they were all killed during the-- in '44, or maybe early part of '45. The reports came that they all perished. But they were very cold Nazis. Their children were trained in the [not understood] it-- was scary to watch them, yeah.

LEVINE: Now were you aware of reports about the war and what was happening the

whole time?

AIHARA: Oh, yeah, we got newspapers from San Antonio. Although some of the Japanese didn't believe any of it. They were-- they said that was propaganda. It was pathetic. And a lot of them, when the war was over, they still thought Japan had won. And that's stupid. They were so sure that their country would win the war, a little island country could -- you know-- it was really pathetic.

And-- but when the surrender came, in Crystal City you could hear the men sobbing that their nation was defeated. So there were that-- one extreme to the other. One-- some felt that it was all propaganda, the others believed the paper, the radio. No, we didn't have radios,-- yeah, the newspaper that-- that Japan had lost.

LEVINE: You weren't allowed radios?

AIHARA: I don't recall having radios. We didn't have radios, Uh-uh. Because we had to give it up when we went to camp. We could take records, record players were allowed, yeah. But no radios.

LEVINE: Well, when you look back on it now, how do you feel about it?

AIHARA: Oh, it was a pathetic that Japan, those militaries that were involved could even think of-- . But, there were some educated-- you know people even in the Japanese military that were against war with the U.S., but they were outnumbered by the militants, yeah.

So, I think Japan learned a lot too. So they were very eager to become a democracy afterward. You know, but you know you cannot allow these single-minded mili-- especially militarists to get into power.

LEVINE: And how about the way your family and others were treated by this country?

AIHARA: Well, I think my father and mother post-war were-- we-- were able to rebuild our lives. But I think-- because they were the enemy at that time we-- we-- the Japanese have a saying, *shikataganai*, it cannot be helped. And I think they just pushed that all aside and rebuilt our lives. I know my father did. He had no-- hard feelings about the way he was treated. You know, or how we lost everything.

LEVINE: What did actually happen? When you-- did you go back to-- where was it, Seattle?

AIHARA: No, we-- we came to Los Angeles.

AIHARA: Because of-- because of my mother's health. And we had to leave camp after the war was over. And—

LEVINE: Well, why don't you tell about when-- when you heard the war was over, and what-- and what you did?

AIHARA: Oh, it was-- oh, December-- I mean August 14th the war was over. Of course it was in the paper. And I'm sure every Japanese male there was devastated that their country lost; but some felt that it was propaganda.

But I think my father accepted it, yeah. And-- but some men-- men were sobbing. Our-- my neighbor across the street, I could hear him crying. It was pathetic, yeah. But--

LEVINE: And then-- talk about your leaving, you getting reading and leaving-- ?

AIHARA: Oh, yeah and then in December, of course, was the first repatriation, and my brothers and I refused to go. So we-- we had to decide where we're going to go, but my mother got sick. And she had to have major surgery. And a doctor told her-- told us that she should go to a warmer climate. And if we went to Seattle it's mid winter and it's cold there.

So while my father was interned in New Mexico he had met-- a friend from his prefecture in Japan. And this man lived in Los Angeles and had a big house. And he told us-- my father got in touch with him. And he welcomed us to come to Los Angeles and stay with him, so that's what we did.

My mother and father stayed with them for a couple of months, until my mother got back on her feet. And then my mother and father went to do domestic work which, you know, it was hard on my mother. And I went to do domestic work which I did for three months too in order to have a place to stay. And then in the meantime my mother and father found a rental unit so I could-- we went to live together again as a family.

LEVINE: And then did your father start a business again?

AIHARA: He started a gardening route after working here, here, here. And after he got enough money together he started gardening, which he did until he died.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

AIHARA: But I think my father mellowed a lot, after he was such an authoritarian person. But he was able to joke with the-- the other Crystal City people, our friends. And-- it was pretty nice afterwards Uh-huh.

And of course we still couldn't buy into the White neighborhoods until their restrictive covenant was declared unconstitutional. Yeah, there was-- do you know about the restrictive, yeah?

LEVINE: Well, actually why don't you say everything—

AIHARA: Oh, in Los Angeles because of the restrictive covenant only White people could buy into certain areas. And that was abolished in 19-- 50 in the mid '50s, I think. Then we were able to-- by then I was married. We were able to buy into-- previously all White area.

It wasn't much of an area. But-- and then when the Japanese started moving into all the White [ ] it started taking places. And wealthier Japanese in the '60s still had to use a-- caucasian friend's name to have-- buy a house first in his name, and then they would sell it to the Japanese friend, American friend, yeah.

But now the Japanese nationals can come and buy anywhere. Yeah, but see they don't know what discrimination we faced.

LEVINE: Uh huh. Do you-- can you say anything about your sense of identity, being a Japanese-American, how-- how it was affected, or how it was changed in the course of all those events?

AIHARA: Well, in high-- grammar school it was-- we were integrated school. There was Blacks, Chinese, Jewish-- in my class most of us were Japanese. And the whole school is integrated. And we had a-- a Caucasian principal. And the majority of Japanese students did real well.

I never felt any discrimination when I was going to grammar school. I felt it definitely in high school because only the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants could

go to the Senior Prom. If you were Jewish or of color you couldn't go.

We weren't as bad as California. My husband says the Japanese and the Mexicans had to sit up in a balcony when they went to a movie. In Seattle that wasn't the case. But of course Seattle-- in Seattle we only could buy houses in the ghetto, couldn't even buy it-- my-- because we were underage yet. But any Japanese who were over 21, they had to buy in the ghetto, a house. They couldn't buy in the-- this is before the war.

And then after the war, when we came out by-- by February, I think many Japanese had started to resettle on the West Coast. So most of the animosity was gone. I didn't feel much of it, you know "Japs leave, go home where you came from." I didn't get any of that.

But the people who left camp and returned before the war was over, they were shot at-- it was scary for them. In fact, I think one of my friends-- their-- one of their siblings was shot, killed.

LEVINE: These are people who left the camps, you said?

AIHARA: Uh-huh. And they were able to come back to California shortly before the war was over, I think, after the FBI decided that they were no saboteurs among-- and they came back to their farming communities, they were shot at, yeah.

And a lot of the big cities wouldn't-- wouldn't serve Japanese, they wouldn't allow them in their-- hair cutting-- their barber shops, "we don't cut Jap hair, we don't serve Japs," that type of thing. But I never had that after the war because I think the-- Los Angeles being more diverse-- I never faced that, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else you can think of regarding the effects on you-- or on

your family?

AIHARA: No, it's pretty much it, I think, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, how about your brothers and sisters? Did-- did-- were they affected in any way in particular?

AIHARA: My sister-- no, but my sister's first husband was killed in Europe. He was with the 442nd. And she was-- in Salt Lake City during the war. So she-- because she got married and-- left us, didn't go back to-- didn't come to New York with us. She stayed in Idaho.

And then when she married she went to-- to Mississippi to be with her husband while he was in basic training. After he went overseas she moved to Salt Lake City. And in Salt Lake City I know she faced a lot of discrimination.

LEVINE: Were you aware of particular instances of Japanese-American men who went into the service-- into the military?

AIHARA: They were-- you mean in the 442nd? See, in those days the military service was segregated. And the Japanese could not-- be included in the-- so they formed their own. And they, of course, their record is exemplary, they have the most decorations. But they were lost-- had the most casualties.

I think to this day though, because of the 442nd rescued the lost battalion of Texas, if a Japanese goes to Texas they lay the red carpet for them.

And my brother-in-law who-- my sister remarried an-- another 442nd Veteran, he has a license plate, "442," and he has had more free lunches because his car is parked at a-- at a restaurant, people see that-- and these are Caucasians

see his-- restaurant, they come in, and say, "Is that your Honda outside?" They pay for his lunch, or di-- breakfast, or whatever. Yeah, so there were a lot of people who appreciate what they did.

LEVINE: How about the attitudes? I think it was brought up yesterday in the-- in the conference-- the attitude of-- you know either wanting to prove that—

AIHARA: I think that was the main thing-- see during-- did you see about the No no boys?

LEVINE: No, go ahead, sorry.

AIHARA: Oh, during the war there were two very controversial questions of loyalty that you had to answer. And it was very tricky. And there was a very-- well, I would say thoughtful now. They really thought about the Constitution of the U.S. and what it was supposed to provide for them.

It was supposed to provide freedom. And of course they were willing to serve their country, but here we were imprisoned by our own government, and on principle they refused to say "yes" to those questions. So they were arrested, a couple hundred of them.

But because most of the *Nissei* men wanted to prove their loyalty they shunned these people that say "no, no," and we just called them the no nos. In retrospect they were very courageous to-- state their beliefs, yeah, Uh-huh.

And eventually after they were released from-- I think they spent two years in jail, then they were drafted, and they went and they-- yeah. And-- but they were quite courageous-- before their time. You know, they really believed in their Civil Rights. But in those days "civil rights" wasn't even in our vocabulary, yeah-- yeah. But it was unfortunate, really, this whole war was unfortunate. But it

can't be helped. You know it's war. And war is war, it's horrible, yeah.

LEVINE: How do you feel about the events that have taken place-- now--?

AIHARA: Mar-- marvelous, yeah—

LEVINE: About-- yeah-- ?

AIHARA: I-- I was so happy to see so-- so many young people, and they're learning a lot about their parents' history, a lot of them didn't know. And even my friends that came with me, two of them who live on the East Coast, thought they knew everything, but God they're learning a lot more.

And I think this exhibit opening was marvelous. I think it was very well-done, except for the charge. See, I didn't know about that charge either. But because we came from the West Coast all that was part of our package, I guess. But I didn't know there was any admission-- yeah, a charge.

And like that lady said, "We want more Americans to learn about this." These-- so there's still people on the West Coast, even newly arrived immigrants from Japan don't know about this, are being incarcerated. So, the more people who know about it the less it's likely to happen again. And people will be more-- free from racial prejudice I think, yeah, Uh-huh.

LEVINE: How about this period of your life now? Do you still experience-- prejudice in any way?

AIHARA: No, never. No, I would have to say never, Uh-huh. We're like anybody else now (she laughs).

LEVINE: Okay, is there anything else you can think of before we close that-- ?

AIHARA: No, but I'm very happy that Ellis Island is-- having this exhibit. It's a lot-- reduced, condensed than what was in Los Angeles. But if this story could be-- you know just so many visitors. But if it could be exposed to everybody who comes to Ellis Island, yeah, that would be fantastic. And I hope they will be able to see it free of charge, yeah. And everybody who-- that goes can just go through that and have their eyes opened.

LEVINE: Okay, well I wanna think you so much for—

AIHARA: [ ] very little I could do.

LEVINE: It-- it's a-- it's important that we have this documented as part of the history of Ellis Island, the history of this country. And so I thank you.

AIHARA: But it's-- I really think that the reason I went to Ellis Island never materialized. I never went to Japan. I never was repatriated, yeah. So it's up for us-- it was just fate that-- I was in Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Yeah-- yeah.

AIHARA: Never went. Never-- our purpose for being there was never served (she laughs).

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay, I've been speaking with Yiye Aihara, and it-- it is April the 5th, 1998. And I wanna thank you again. And I'm signing off.
END OF TAPE