EI – 991
SUMI SHIMATSU
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INTERNED AT ELLIS ISLAND, SEPTEMBER, 1943

LEVINE: Today is April 5, 1998, and I'm very happy to be here with Sumi Shimatsu who came from Los Angeles to the opening of the Ellis Island exhibit on, Japanese American concentration camps. And so we are in New York City and, this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Sumi Shimatsu was interned at Ellis Island in September of 1943, and we'll talk about what led up to that and then what happened after that, during this interview. Okay if you would simply say your date of birth and where you were born.

SHIMATSU: All right, I was born August 14,1928, in Los Angeles, California.

LEVINE: Okay, and did you live in Los Angeles up until the time the Second World War started?

SHIMATSU: Yes, I was. I was born right in the middle of little Tokyo. A small, uh, Japanese community in Los Angeles, heart of Los Angeles.

LEVINE: Oh, wow. Now little Tokyo, uh, what, what, how would you describe that?

SHIMATSU: Well, it was, uh, concentrated with many Japanese business, stores. My father was a very first Japanese photographer in Los Angeles. He was original forty, uh, one of the forty-nine Japanese men that were in Los Angeles, uh, at the turn of the century, and he became a public, uh, relation, uh, public, um, what do you call it? P.R. uh, photographer for, uh, David Belasco of Belasco Theatres, the vaudeville theatres, and uh, he had his uh, City Hall, I mean his photography studio where City Hall is standing right now on Main Street.

LEVINE: Wow.

SHIMATSU: He is part of history.

LEVINE: Yes. Uh-huh. So he came, did he come through Angel Island or was that even earlier?

SHIMATSU: No, he was born and raised in a *Nichiren* Buddhist temple because he at three years old his father put him in a Buddhist temple to be raised by the Buddhist monks. Not to be a monk or priest but uh, he was sort of rebelling because his mother left him and he wanted to go with his mother, and therefore the father couldn't handle him so he just took a three year old son and put him into a Buddhist temple to be raised over there. In that age, sixteenth, he, uh, never went to school but he was given a trade of carpentry and at sixteen he somehow managed to have enough money to come to United States because he had no family in Japan. Well, he went to Vancouver, Canada and became a citizen there. And he heard about warmer area and so he worked himself down, straight down the coast from Vancouver to Washington, and helped lay in the railroad ties at that

time, and somehow, I don't know how many years it took, but he came down to California doing labor work, picking fruits, working on the farm, laying railroad ties and in Los Angeles he became a janitor for David Belasco and, um, in so doing David Belasco loved, uh, my father so much that he called him Tom, and gave him a Kodak box camera. And my father loved it so much he went two months to learn photography, and thereby became the first photographer for Mr. Belasco and he put in publicity shots of the theatre and performance of the vaudeville actors from Broadway, New York, and he took pictures for the L.A. Times, and L.A. Examiner and I have scraps paper with his credit from 1908 in a whole big scrapbook of all the stars he was able to take pictures of.

LEVINE: Wow and what was your father's name?

SHIMATSU: His name was Tokiji Utsushigawa, but he went by Tom at that time. They couldn't say Tokiji.

LEVINE: Then spell it, the whole thing.

SHIMATSU: T-O-K-I-J-I, Utsushigawa.

LEVINE: Wow. Now Utsushigawa, oh, that is your maiden name.

SHIMATSU: Yes

LEVINE: Okay maybe just to spell that on the tape.

SHIMATSU: Okay. U-T-S-U-S-H-I-G-A-W-A. It means "reflecting river."

LEVINE: Wow. Well, that's incredible (laughs), the story.

SHIMATSU: (Laughs) I know. I love it.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah, right. Uh-huh. So, now he met your mother in Los Angeles?

SHIMATSU: No. He had a girlfriend, Japanese girlfriend, but his uncle, he found, uh, the uncle kept track of my father and told him he had a wife for him in Japan. Although he loved this Japanese woman in Los Angeles, he was very dutiful, you know in those days you never argued. He went back to Japan and met my mother and married her there, but she came back in a later boat. My father came back first. So when she was supposed to return, I mean come over to America, she came alone. She did not know how to sit on a toilet because in Japan you squatted. So she always squatted up on the toilet seat until she all of a sudden noticed legs, you know the feet under the toilet; and so she realized you sit on the seat. Then she saw all the American women sun, you know sunning themself on the deck chair so she sunned herself. So, when she landed in San Piedro, my father went after her with a bouquet of flower and box of chocolate to greet his wife, and when she came, instead of the white, beautiful, young girl that he married in Japan, was suntanned and was dark and short and he was so disgusted that he threw the flower and box of chocolate in a trash can and walked way ahead of her, very angry that she dared to look like a terrible woman that he did not marry in Japan. (Laughs heartily)

LEVINE: Oh, no.

SHIMATSU: She always laughed and said that I was his disgrace. (Laughs)

LEVINE: I take it he got over that.

SHIMATSU: Oh, definitely, definitely.

LEVINE: Well, now what was your mother's name and maiden name?

SHIMATSU: Her name was Nobu, N-O-B-U, Usuba, U-S-U-B-A. They were from Sendai which is up north Japan.

LEVINE: Well, just while we're still on this are there attitudes that you feel were passed along to you from your father, and, or your mother?

SHIMATSU: Yes, very definitely. Um, of course the parents are examples and father not having a family and also not having brought up a family did not know how to raise children. Of course, in Japan, just like Europeans too, they want sons. I was not expected. My sisters are eight and ten years older than me, and when I came he thought I was going to be the son and the name bearer. I was another daughter, and I was supposed to be Kiyoshi Utsushigawa. Since I was a girl the same name was, uh, you could read it Sumi. So he called me Sumiko which means "pure." So I was "pure reflecting river," Sumiko Utsushigawa. He was very disappointed, but that's life. (Laughs HEARTILY)

LEVINE: What's the Japanese word, wasn't that a Japanese word?

SHIMATSU: *Shikataganai:* Can't help it. (Laughs) That word comes in handy all the time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SHIMATSU: Yes.

LEVINE: Yeah. So, um, so as far as attitudes that they passed along to you, what would you say are the ones that have stuck with you?

SHIMATSU: My mother always told me that I must always be stoic. Never show my emotions. No matter if I'm sad, or glad, well, glad, it's okay to be happy, you know smile or laugh, but angry or hurt or disappointed you don't show it. You put on the stoic act, and it showed when my father was arrested. She never, ever, cried or showed her emotion to me. She always had the stiff upper lip with a stiff smile. That was very strong blessing, and I think I kind of passed that along to my children to a certain extent. Although we do, I mean, I make it a point to hug all my kids. You know love my kids, I show my love. I do wear my emotion right in front of me, but I couldn't even hug my mother. There was no hugging of my father. We always knew through our eyes just looking at each other how much love I had for her, but she would hug my friends, my American friends but she couldn't hug me. It was just that thing that she taught us.

LEVINE: Was that it, would you say that's typical or not? Or was it typical at the age and day?

SHIMATSU: At that time it might be, it had been more typical because the *nissei*s, the second generation, we're brought up this way and as much as we loved our parents we didn't show it. We showed it through our demonstration of giving things or watching over them, caring for them, but hugging, no. Kissing, absolutely not!

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

SHIMATSU: You know?

LEVINE: Well, okay getting back to the Los Angeles, little Tokyo. Now were the Japanese restaurants, (laughs), it's like there were a number of Japanese restaurants.

SHIMATSU: Oh, lots of Japanese restaurants. The reason, when you were asking I about the Chinese restaurant, you see Japanese food was always available. Our mothers always cooked it. It was nothing spectacular to go to a Japanese restaurant to eat, except noodle shops, or little place where we could have just a bowl of, uh, um, certain kind of thing with fish, but most of the food, Japanese food was cooked for us at home. So to us it was a treat to go to Chinese restaurant with all that sweet and sour and roast duck or chicken. Uh, that's why all banquets and parties and weddings were, and even after funerals, were at Chinese restaurants.

LEVINE: What were the relations between the Chinese and Japanese?

SHIMATSU: They never mixed because there was a Chinese-Japanese war, uh, that started in late '30's. It was very, very, um, we just never crossed that line.

LEVINE: Before that war do you remember, you were too young maybe, but…

SHIMATSU: No, I have an impeccable memory. I don't know why, but I have that memory and, uh, we were careful never to cross that line. Although I had friends of all nationality in junior high school, I'm one of those that just blended well with all these friends. So I did have Chinese friends but we would never go to each other's home.

LEVINE: Oh. Mm-hmm.

SHIMATSU: Yes.

LEVINE: Okay, uh, well, leading up to the internment of your family, what were the first events that you recall related to that?

SHIMATSU: You mean the Pearl Harbor?

LEVINE: Yeah or, yeah.

SHIMATSU: Well, that was a shock because it came on December of 1941, it was a Sunday, and I believe it was about eleven o' clock that I heard that Pearl Harbor was bombed. Uh, being thirteen, I did not know where Pearl Harbor was or what it meant until they told me that Pearl Harbor was in Honolulu, and that Japan declared war on America. Even then it doesn't really give you the knowledge of what war is. War was very far away. When they had war and we saw newsreel of Japan invading China, Shanghai and all this, it was far away, and we didn't have television so we didn't see immediate result of what war produced. We just heard this was a war across the sea. So as much as we heard about it, we were not involved. Uh, our parents talked about it. They said that Japan invaded here, invaded there. It meant nothing to me. I was really, totally American and they may have, uh, feelings but they didn't talk to a thirteen year old daughter as to how they felt, but I think, in their way of thinking Japan was great for taking on a huge country to fight with. But whether they really were proud or not I cannot say. I do know that they were always talking about a Japanese town because that was the talk. So when the Pearl Harbor began, I recall, because I was right in the middle of Japanese town, people running in and out of our second story home. We lived, uh, upstairs right, uh, in Japanese town on East 1st Street in San Piedro, and there were FBI, uh, agents who were trying to get people on the list they had to arrest them. All we knew were there were men running

through our building and out the back, and we would see some of the agents. We didn't know who they were, they were in suit, big Caucasian men, uh, saying he went this way, he went that way, and they're running through our building. And we didn't know what was going on, but we found out that, uh, they were arresting many of the Japanese people who were on a special list. And they were people who were prominent in Japanese Chamber of Commerce or had anything to do with Japanese companies, uh, Embassy. And I do know down the street there was a, uh, a doctor and his wife who were always welcoming the naval, um, sailors, the officers, when they came, the Japanese, uh, navy ship came, they welcomed them to their home, and um, uh, took them on sightseeing tours of Los Angeles. So they were well known and I understand that there was always a popcorn, peanut, uh, vendor right there that took name of people going in and out of this place because they thought they were spies. I have no idea of anything, except that I did see a popcorn peanut vendor there at all time. Uh, at the time, nighttime, we still heard people running in and out of our building. Later on the rumors starts going so and so was arrested, so and so was arrested, so and so's gone. They didn't know where they took them and people had fear. So my mother said, "Well, papa you better pack up and be ready," 'cause not a lot of people were arrested without being able to take clothes. And so my father said, "I never did anything wrong. I have no, uh, reason to believe that I will be arrested. He is so black and white you have never seen anyone who believed in justice and truth as my father. (Laughs a little) So he felt that he never would be arrested.

LEVINE: What were your mother and father's attitude toward this country at that time?

SHIMATSU: My father wanted to buy a home, my mother wanted to go back home because she was one of nine children. She really loved her, uh, family. So she didn't feel that she was going to stay here. My father, since he had no family in Japan, this was his, his home. Actually he was a better American than many, uh, other Japanese because to him this was type of home. Uh, he was able to enjoy the kind of life he really wanted. As a photographer he was a character. He wore white, silk blouse, black smock, silk smock, black bow, silk bow tie with black beret and he looked like a French artist and he called himself, uh, photography, he was artiste. He was just a character and I know that we were very fortunate because he loved American food. So he would cook the American food and my mother would cook the Japanese food. He always had huge pot of stew or, or chowder, and corned beef cabbage and if it's raining, hot soup. I mean we'd come home you'd smell soup, and the thanksgiving, uh, turkey he would make with meticulous care. He just went out and bought all the nuts and, uh, raisins and all the spices and he just took delight in making the perfect turkey and invited everybody that lived in this, this, uh, apartment that we had. So I was privileged in having a father who really loved American, cuisine, and my mother who was real great in Japanese cuisine and so I had both. The better of the two and every Sunday morning we gathered to have breakfast with the people who stayed in this, this, uh, business apartment. We had a Japanese dancing teacher that I grew up with and I learned Japanese dancing with her and I always heard the *shamisen*, the Japanese instrument, and I grew up with this background. There was a, uh, legal, I wouldn't say he was a lawyer but he was like a lawyer. I would say paralegal like, who spoke both, he helped the Japanese community in any legal matters, and with his wife and they had no children so we were always his, their, children too. So we had this extended family that met every Sunday morning and we had breakfast together. It was really wonderful.

LEVINE: So when your mother said to your father, “Pack your things, ‘cause you may be taken and you want to have them,” your father didn’t want to do that?

SHIMATSU: No. He refused to because he, he said, he, he, he didn’t do anything wrong so he will not be arrested. Well, this person who was a paralegal was the first person that was arrested. It offended his wife to hear that his, her husband did something wrong therefore he was arrested. It wasn’t because they did anything wrong. They were just leaders of community.

LEVINE: So was your father then…

SHIMATSU: He was arrested but in 1942, March 13th and it was Friday the 13th. And he woke up feeling really depressed and he told his, told my mother, “This is Friday the 13th.” And she says, “Well, your not superstitious. Why are you carrying out American superstitions?” But he just laid down on the floor on his back at the studio and he just came looking at the ceiling. So she told him, “Go outside and go do some shopping,” because you know she just wanted him to get out and, and, knock this depression away. And while he was gone at ten-o-clock, she said five of the biggest FBI men came in and asked for Tokiji Utsushigawa and she said he wasn’t there. And they start searching, and they pull down all the drapes and curtains. They opened the safe. Took everything out of the drawers. Took my bureau and took everything out of it and I had souvenirs of Japanese flag from some navy men, or some postcards of the navy ship that came to Los Angeles. They took all that.

LEVINE: They actually took it away?

SHIMATSU: They took it, yes. They took anything that looked like, uh, Japanese things. And as soon as my father walked in, uh, they asked him his name and he said he was Tokiji Utsushigawa. He says, “You are arrested,” and they put a tag on him with his name on it and his number. I don’t know what it was because I was at junior high school at that time. And my mother, secretly, had packed away one suitcase with his, uh, underwear and clothes for change, with a coat and hat. And my father was so furious that my mother had packed a suitcase for him because she, he felt that she was disloyal to him and, and, and would pack, instead of being grateful, he held that against her. He wouldn’t talk to her after that. So when I came home from junior high school I saw my mother sitting perched Japanese style with a stiff upper lip smile and I said, I looked at the house and it was in such shambles. It’s like tornado hit the house. Everything was just out. Papers on the floor, drapes, everything on the floor. And so you just knew something was wrong and my mother sitting there with this smile (laughs slightly) and yet her eyes was just angry. So I said, “Oh, they took papa away?” And she said, I remember her words, “Yes, five FBI men come. Take papa away. Ten o’clock.” I thought Wow, you know. And so she just sat there and I just looked around. I went to every room, and, so we just sat and looked at each other and this was about four thirty in the afternoon. So she says we better eat dinner, in Japanese, so she says, (clears her throat) “Go out and buy some sardine and spinach. We’ll have it for dinner.” So I remember going down the street this, we bought our fish fresh every night. I bought five sardine and a bunch of spinach and she made rice. And we sat there taking our chopstick and I took every flesh of fish off of the sardine but couldn’t eat it and she was doing the same thing. We were just playing with our food. Couldn’t eat. Did not know where our father, you know father was and what had happened to him and I recall how we both just kept looking at each other and didn’t know what to do, except to just clean off the dishes, wash it. And I doubt if she slept that night ‘cause I know I didn’t. I went

next morning to the junior high school and said, “I quit. I’m not gonna stay here,” and they said, “Oh, where are you going?” Because they knew all the people were going to different camp. “Are you going to Manzanar “ I guess. Whatever camp they’re going to put me. I don’t know. They took my father away and I refuse to go to school.” (Laughs a little) And so I just dropped out and I stayed with mom and we were trying to sell our furniture, or whatever, because they said, “Get whatever you can because we didn’t know what to do with our furniture just like said, we did not that people, uh, uh, stored furniture . . . Above that we didn’t have any money ‘cause they froze my father’s money at the Japanese bank. So we had no money except the money that my mother had, uh, hidden away, uh, few cash and I had, I was so proud, seventy-one dollars that I was putting in savings, and I went out and, uh, took that money out and that helped with some of the, uh, living expense until, uh, May 9th, when we were supposed to go to Pomona.

LEVINE: Now when, how long, when was your father taken? March 13th?

SHIMATSU: My father was taken March 13th, 1942.

LEVINE: And then you were supposed to go May 9th.

SHIMATSU: And we, so between March, uh, 13th to May 9th, we were busy trying to sell furniture, uh, putting things away and then finally there was a family friend that came and told, uh, he sold our safe for twenty five dollars, sold our piano for twenty five dollars, our refrigerator for fifteen dollars, it was a pretty new one, and our, uh, Huckmobile, 1928 Huckmobile, that I didn’t like at that time, wish I had it now, (Dr. Levine laughs) for twenty five dollars. And, um, the rest of the things didn’t sell except for one of my father’s enlarging machine that he had bought for $150, he sold, she sold for fifteen dollars. And rest of the things didn’t sell so what she did was,

there was a trunk full of china and few things that she wanted, my Japanese kimono, uh, she had at a friend's basement. That survived, but the rest of the things we put into one room and hammered it shut. Needless to say they were all stolen.

LEVINE: Who was buying, who was buying these things at that time?

SHIMATSU: People who heard, you know, and, and, there were just people, uh, that just came and offered whatever and it was like giving it away. Somehow they heard. Let me tell you, going back to December, uh, 7th in 1941. That night, uh, evening of December 7th, East First Street in San Piedro was the center of Japanese town. Therefore people from all over Los Angeles. There was a traffic jam. The people of Los Angeles of all nationality, mostly white, were so angry and they thought we in Japanese town would be celebrating. So they came to look at Japanese town and they were throwing things on the sidewalk. We were upstairs watching them. It was bumper to bumper. I mean you were talking about New York traffic just sitting still. You have never heard the horns, and, and, and, and all the horns that were blowing and calling out names, Japs, and cussing at us and, "Where the Hell are you? Are you celebrating with sake and whiskey because you invaded and bombed us?" It was very scary. And behind East First Street where we were living is a diagonal street called Weller, and the Filipino people were living there. So when Manila was bombed we were scared that they were going to come after us because they were full of high emotion of anger and resentment. (laughs a little) So between all this we didn't know day to day what was going to happen.

SHIMATSU: While many of the men were being arrested, there were thirty women that were arrested and taken into Terminal Island in Los Angeles.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE 1

BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 1

LEVINE: Now why were they arrested?

SHIMATSU: They were head, uh, president of women's club. They were in charge of some Chamber of Commerce, like secretary, but most of them were teacher's too. They really were mostly mothers and one of our friend, she was with the rice cracker factory, *Umeya*, they're still in business, uh, she was arrested in January. And we heard that, I don't know what happened in Terminal Island, but she hung herself with her silk stocking and they had the first casualty of this war. And I knew her because I always went to her factory and played with their sons. Her, their sons and my sisters grew up together. They were older than I was. But to have her kill herself, we didn't know what led to it 'cause nobody had known what occurred in Terminal Island. Later on, you saw, Aihara, you know, Kanagawa, and there was another Yae in Ellis Island. She's a very dear friend of mine and tomorrow, April 6th, is her birthday. She was like a older sister to me and her father was arrested December 7th because he was a *kendo* teacher. *Kendo* is a art, martial art of fencing, and they considered all fencing teachers or fencing person, uh, Black Dragon society. I don't know what a Black Dragon society is but they were supposed to be something to be feared of for some reason. The FBI had them on the first row of people to arrest and they arrested 's, uh, father and then in January they arrested her mother. She was eighteen and she had another brother in this farm in Hunnington beach and she says there wasn't a day she didn't cry because she was alone in the farm with her brother and they

didn't know what was going to happen to them. They went to visit their mother in Terminal Island and, she and her brother went, and then they couldn't get out. For eight hours they were in there, incarcerated for eight hours because they were told nobody is to leave Terminal Island. And so the soldiers held them and didn't know what to do with them until later the words came that they can be released. She says that was the scariest time in her life. To this day she has such bitterness. She cannot talk about camp or her mother and father. To extract this story from her, it took me seven weeks. Everyday one sentence at a time. I asked her to take oral history, and she said she couldn't sleep. And she finally decided at three o'clock in the morning, "I can't do it Sumi." Even with her being my best friend she could not talk about it without crying. So what piecemeal I got was a little here, a little there and I was able to put it together. And she really had to have you know, um, went through so much because she did not see her father and mother for two years. She was one of the first to go into Crystal City, Texas, this internment camp and for the first time was able to join her father and her mother. The brother refused to go into a camp.

LEVINE: What happened if you refused to go in?

SHIMATSU: They, if they were not on West Coast and if they had a job, that was fine. They could, as long as they were, uh, able to, to provide for themselves.

LEVINE: So they could move from the West Coast?

SHIMATSU: As long as there was a guarantee that there was a job or if they were accepted by a University and it was not West Coast. So Shiro was, and Shiro volunteered for the army so, or was drafted, so he went into the army right after that. And from Crystal City, Texas, she came to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Oh, she went to Crystal City first?

SHIMATSU: First. So she was one, the only one, from Crystal City, ‘cause there were others from Crystal City who were on the repatriation boat. That was the second one. The first one left earlier, a year earlier with all the consulate and consul generals and embassy workers and all this. But the second one was the one that we were supposed to catch in September of 1943 and this is the one that and her mother and father were supposed to, supposed to. But we met also on Ellis Island in September of 1943 and she was the only that returned back to Crystal City and all her friends in Crystal City, Texas, were so happy to have her back again.

LEVINE: Wow.

SHIMATSU: And she never went to Japan.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What, uh, so her family, were they, no, they met at Ellis Island?

SHIMATSU: No. They met in Crystal City, Texas.

LEVINE: And then they were transported to Ellis Island…

SHIMATSU: To Ellis Island.

LEVINE: …to take the boat back to Japan.

SHIMATSU: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And why didn’t they, why didn’t she go?

SHIMATSU: They didn't have room for her. There were ninety-seven who were denied, uh, boarding the ship because they, they were not able, you know they didn't have room for us, which is nice. But all her luggage went and it was terrible because even her personal belongings went.

LEVINE: Mm. Hmmm. Um, let me pause here.

SHIMATSU: Okay.

LEVINE: Okay. We're resuming here. Um, you were talking about that the boat, uh, the ship, The Grish, Grip…

SHIMATSU: Gripsholm.

LEVINE: Gripsholm was too full and so ninety-seven people…

SHIMATSU: Were denied passage, but our, our, baggage's got the passage. We never caught up with it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. So is that where you first encountered, um, uh…

SHIMATSU: Yae. Yae.

LEVINE: (Laughs a little) I can't . . .

SHIMATSU: Yes, both Yae's

LEVINE: Yes, at Ellis Island.

SHIMATSU: Yes.

LEVINE: Okay, well, um, let's talk, uh, let's just backtrack a minute. When your father was taken your mother was told that on May 9th the rest of the family would go or how did that work?

SHIMATSU: No. Uh, we didn't know what was going to happen to us. Uh, see they posted that 9066 executive order and we had to be ready to leave any time with, uh, baggages that you can carry only. So day to day we didn't know what was going to happen. As I said before, we hammered our furniture shut into a room, uh, just a day before we left Los Angeles but on the day before we were to leave, uh, we were told that, uh, my mother signed up with a Christian church in Los Angeles because that's where some of our friends were going to take off from. There were going to be buses to take us and at first they said we were going to go to Santa Anita race track, where they had over 10,000 people and some people staying in stables. And, uh, we thought we were going to go there first and then to Manzenar in California. However, the last minute, the morning we were leaving they changed it to Pomona assembly center, which is in, uh, where they hold a Los Angeles county fair. They built a camp for 5,000 people right on the parking lot of, uh, the racetrack. Right there in, in Pomona. So there were thirteen Santa Fe Trailway buses that left this church ground and we were in the seventh one and I couldn't figure out why everybody was crying because I guess for a thirteen year old, and when, when you have a mother who's taught you to be stoic, you look at it as another adventure. And I guess because my father was arrested and taken away and just being with my mother, as long as I had my mother it didn't bother me. We were together. So I considered going on this excursion as a, uh, adventure but I could see all the women folk crying and wiping their eyes with handkerchief because they were leaving their home.

LEVINE: Now were you a Buddhist and then you joined…? What was your

religious…?

SHIMATSU: Okay. This interesting. My father, like I said, was brought up in a *Nichinen* temple.

LEVINE: Right.

SHIMATSU: Okay. My mother is a *Zen* Buddhist. They're both Buddhist. I wanted to go to a Buddhist church, uh, Sunday school and my mother said, "This is a new country. I don't know what Christianity is. I don't know what the religion is, but this is your country. When you are of age and you want to seek a religion that you feel comfortable in and there may be Christianity, and there may be Buddhism. I want you to make your own choice, therefore I don't want you to go to any, uh, Sunday school, whether it's Buddhist church or whether it's Christian church. I want you to be free of any kind of doctrine until you are, are of age to study and learn which path you want to take." Therefore I never got a chance to go to a Sunday school and participate in lot of the programs because the Buddhist church temple had very charming, uh, uh, celebrations. Not just, uh, *Bori* day but they had *Obon*, which is a festival of the dead where they feast, uh, the spirit of the departed in festive way during a summer days. They have also, see I know more about it 'cause I grew up in Japanese town, they got *Shichigosan*. If you're seven, five, or three they dress you up like princess or you know like a prince or princess in Japan with all kinds of ornate costume and you walk down Japanese, uh, street with little, with all the makeup and this ornate costume and, and, and they put little dots on your forehead like they do in Hindu. And so there's part of Hinduism and Buddhism in this *Shichigosan* festival.

LEVINE: How do you spell the name?

SHIMATSU: *Shichigosan* is, *shichi* is seven, s-h-i-c-h-i, *go* is g-o, which is five, *san* is s-a-n and it means three so it's *Shichigosan* festival. They had other festivals that was really nice. The girls' festival is very nice. We had a big one in Japanese town. Girls' day comes on March 3rd, the three-three of any year and we get all dressed up and we have dolls in five, five stairways with red, uh, cloth and then they have the Emperor and Empress and they have all those servants. People carrying different things and they have all these different, uh, uh, people on this, this, this street and you have the red, green, and white, uh, sweet cake and they the sweet sake, you know, sweet, uh, rice wine and different types of ornaments. And this was on March 3rd. On May 5th, five-five of any year, uh, it's boys' day. *Tangonosekku*. And they have these boys sing and they have the carp, uh, on a flagstaff and they have these boy's dolls and they have all these… It was just really nice to grow up in a Japanese community because we had the Japanese tradition that Yae never knew because she was living in a separate area up in Seattle. Um. The Ja… after, uh, American school everyday we went to Japanese Language school from 3 to 4. So we have extra, uh, curricular education. So we were adept in Japanese and English.

LEVINE: Now did your mother and father speak Japanese at home?

SHIMATSU: In, in Japanese town the language was all Japanese.

LEVINE: So people were buying things in the stores?

SHIMATSU: So people, yes, spoke nothing but Japanese. So I did not know that I spoke with a English, a Japanese accent. They all thought I came from Japan because I was in Japanese town and I spoke, I thought, perfect English, but they told me I had a Japanese accent.

LEVINE: When you started school did you know English?

SHIMATSU: Yes, I spoke English, but it was real funny because when I went to my third-grade and, uh, we had to go to the blackboard to do our arithmetic a Mrs. Petersen told me she had three times three and, then she had a line and, she says, "Sumiko come over here and work out this problem." So I go up there and I saw three times three so I put *sazan wa ku* and she says, "Excuse me?" I said, "*sazan wa ku*." And so she says, "You got the answer right, it's nine but, what are you saying?" and I said, "I'm saying, *sazan wa ku*. Uh, you told me to work this problem." She says, "Are you speaking Japanese?" and I said, "I don't know." So I have to go home and ask my mother, "Was I speaking Japanese when I said, '*sazan wa ku*'?" 'cause *san* and *san* is three and three, three times three is nine and *ku* is nine. And so for a long time, you take it for granted, I'm one of the most naïve persons in the world. You just take it for granted. I mean you don't know that it's different.

LEVINE: Interesting, interesting. Okay, so you, um, when you left you boarded up the room and you had…

SHIMATSU: Just what we could carry.

LEVINE: …what you could carry and then you went on the bus…

SHIMATSU: Yes.

LEVINE: …and where did the bus take you then?

SHIMATSU: To Pomona, which is about and hour's drive from Los Angeles.

LEVINE: And that was an assembly center?

SHIMATSU: Yes.

LEVINE: And how long were you there?

SHIMATSU: Until, uh, August of 1942, so that means three months: May, June, July, August.

LEVINE: And what was life like in the assembly center?

SHIMATSU: For me it was fun, okay. (Laughs) Although communal living was, uh, one of the worst adjustment for myself. We were brought up very strict, to be very modest and hide yourself, you know, mean you clothe yourself. You never show your body to anybody. You know, it was, so when you go to Pomona assembly center everybody's lined up and you have this communal toilet and communal showers. It's in the same building. There's no doors. You could see each other sitting there and the shower stall, there's eight shower stalls in a room that's about eight by eight. And so my cousin and I, my cousin was seventeen, and I wore our bathing suit, locked the door and went in to shower, and we faced the wall so we don't see each other, even with the bathing suit. We're hearing pounding on the door for people to come in 'cause they want to use the toilet and we were really scolded for, uh, locking the door and they took all the locks off after that. And I can remember the first lunch, I mean, uh, lunch we had was, was, uh, something that we never ate because we're not use to cold cuts and cheese, and pickled beets with onion. You see, I mean, I have, I remember the first lunch and my mother and I looked at each other and she and I looked at the food and this was something we never would eat. My mother would never let me eat mincemeat or salami 'cause she thought they were made out junk, you know, the bad parts of all the animals.

LEVINE: (Laughs) I think she was right.

SHIMATSU: I think she was right too. (They both laugh)

LEVINE: So, so, once you left there, where did you go then?

SHIMATSU: Well, from there they sent people to different camps. Some people went to Manzanar, in California. My mother and I went to Heart Mountain, Wyoming. It took us five days and four nights on a train to go to Wyoming.

LEVINE: Which was cold right?

SHIMATSU: Very cold. It's the first time I saw snow, yes, and it was very interesting to go through Colorado. It was beautiful and Wyoming where you see all the bubbling, um, mud, mud, uh, I don't know.

LEVINE: Springs?

SHIMATSU: You know. It bubbles up. It's like these, uh, what, you have Old Faithful is what, the thermal…

LEVINE: The geyser?

SHIMATSU: …thermal, thermal, uh, muds that bubbles up. The train goes right over these places and they were fascinating to me.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

SHIMATSU: Yes. So like I say for a thirteen year old, well, I turned fourteen in, uh,

Pomona, but it was nice. I got to, uh, do craftwork, art and craft in Pomona and I met friends and, uh, lining up for mess hall was the thing or communal life. And, uh, it was a different kind of life. We went to, uh, Wyoming, uh, my mother and I got a corner barrack with, there's no housing on either side and it was like way out in the wilderness you know. And we went into this huge camp that held about 10,000 people. Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you have correspondence with your father at this point?

SHIMATSU: Yes. We, we wrote in English because, uh, letters were confiscated but also… (Coughs) …excuse me. My father never wrote Japanese because he felt, because he didn't get education in this temple. Although he could read it he would never write. My mother would write, but because of this we had someone else that wrote English for my father and sent it to me so that I could interpret it to my mother. Also I have to tell you that my father was very angry that my mother had the suitcase ready and also selling the enlarging machine for $15 when it was $150. So he felt, um, that she betrayed him. Therefore he was not on speaking term with her. It was difficult to be the communicator of a family and I had to live this part between my mother and father, but it was wartime. It's crazy and in Wyoming, I was antisocial. I was so angry at the government. I was angry they arrested my father. I was angry that we were sent into camp and I remember my constitutional right as an American citizen. I had rights but there were no, no rights when you were put into camp. So when you have a person who's a daughter of a hard headed father, who thought everything in black and white, you had a hard headed daughter who believed in justice and felt that we were handed out a terrible thing from the government that you couldn't believe, you were taught you were American citizen with all your rights and until you were found guilty that you were innocent. And we were not guilty of anything except that we looked Japanese like the enemies who started Pearl Harbor. So I was a

very angry person and when they gave us, uh, uh, IQ test for high school I, see I quit school when I just turned into eighth grade. So when I got into, uh, uh, Wyoming they put, they wanted to put me in ninth grade but I said, “I never went through eighth grade.” But they gave us an IQ test and I answered everything wrong, either opposite or wrong. I don’t believe they checked the answer because I, I didn’t care. But they pushed me into ninth grade.

LEVINE: In the camp?

SHIMATSU: In Wyoming.

LEVINE: Wyoming.

SHIMATSU: Yes.

LEVINE: Hm.

SHIMATSU: And we lived a, I feel a very interesting life there. The thing that is very impressive with me in all the camp lives that I had is the spirit of the Japanese people. In spite of the, the dismal place out in nowhere, where there’s desert and, and, and sagebrush and really nothing to speak of, they created gardens. I myself had a vegetable garden ‘cause being in the city it was miraculous to see things grow. In many people’s home they had rock gardens, gravel gardens. They created small lawns. Um, I found some people were artistic, they made wooden plaques. They created homes out of a little, little room that was… My mother and I were given twelve by twenty room with an iron potbelly stove and, uh, couple of cots and mattress. And we were always lucky, always, I must say God blessed us because we found always someone to help us carry the mattress and cot. No way could my mother have carried them. And they

set up these heavy things that they carried into our room and most people put up drapes or curtains. Um, my mother, uh, fixed it up the best she can and we put our cots together because it was cold. And we had the iron pot, pot, uh, stove but I built a thirty by thirty by three, uh, thirty bin for my coal. I never, ever allowed the coal to go down because that's one thing. Often time when they didn't deliver the coal, uh, many people were scrounging around to find something to burn. I didn't want mom to ever get to the point where it was cold. So I scrounge around. I go to the mess hall or some time laundry room where they heat up the, the stove and sneak out coal and I was always proud. My coal bin was always full. And I made shelves. I made chairs. I became a pretty good carpenter.

LEVINE: Had you ever done that kind of thing before?

SHIMATSU: No, but I think I took after my father's carpentry. (Laughs)

LEVINE: Yeah. Great. Uh-huh.

SHIMATSU: It was, it was interesting in the sense that I think I was born with observing eyes that I saw so many creativeness. I saw people go out and find quartz, crystals, arrowheads that the Indians and cowboys had, had, uh, uh, battles on the field. And they would show me these arrowheads and I thought I could never find one. I don't know how they could find it. They found stones that were these beautiful amethyst. They break these huge boulders and there's amethyst! I don't know where these people found things but it was fascinating to see how they were so, uh, out in nowhere. And they carved, they painted, they made, uh, birds out of, little birds, pins, out of ends of crates. They carved and they painted it. I still have one that my mother made. And twigs and they put it on, and they put safety pin in the back and glue it on and you make lapel pins. The creativeness, the arts and craft, the people, the farmers never wanted to

work on the field so they just really got, were happy that they were fed three times a day in mess hall. I saw a man that enjoyed toast every morning. He buttered it and then he'd put soy sauce and he said that was the best toast he ever had. And we saw like some other people said the mutton stew was the worst. Rutabagas and parsnips, I'd never had those food. And my father made beef stew, not mutton and they're very, very, very oily and, and they smell a lot, all right. In some of the mess halls were real good because they were, they had, there were people who had restaurants or were cooks. Our mess hall, everything was goulash. We called it *gottani*, G-O-T-T-A-N-I, which means goulash. They just put meat and whatever vegetable and that was it. If it was mutton, it was mutton. If it was beef, it was beef. But everything they chopped up and threw it into a pot and that's what we had most of the time.

LEVINE: Who was doing the cooking?

SHIMATSU: People who volunteered to work; and they got twelve dollars a month to work. The professional people were given 19 dollars, like doctors, dentists. They were given nineteen dollars a month, and people who were waitresses and you know . . (laughs). They got, they got the twelve dollars. The in-between were fourteen dollars, they were semi-skilled people.

LEVINE: Were there other so-called enemy aliens in the camp?

SHIMATSU: Not in the ten camp which was run by the WRA; which was War Relocation Authorities.

LEVINE: So then where did you go?

SHIMATSU: From there, my Father, not being able to be released from the Santa Fe, New Mexico and then later to Lordsberg, New Mexico detention camp, said he was signing up to go to Japan, so sign up to go to Japan so that we may meet on the ship, if not we will meet in Japan. And because I had two older sister who were visiting Japan before the war to meet their grandfather, they were stuck there during the war, so my father wanted to see if they were still alive during the war, and also because he couldn't be released into our Wyoming camp, he thought it was better if we reunited together in Japan. Therefore he said he was going to go to Japan and sign the Gripsholm to be sailing to Japan…. There, and this, we didn't know that so when they said that my mother requested that she be, she and I would be, uh, joining my father on the ship. The other people that were going to Japan already left camp and went to Missoula, Montana, which was another all men's detention camp. And so, I was out in the field picking beans and they called for me on the pickup and they told me I was to leave right away to, uh, meet the group that was already in Montana and join them to go to New York and catch the S. S. Gripsholm and go to Japan. So I didn't have time to pack but everybody in the neighborhood packed everything into boxes and cartons and suitcases and, uh, we were on our way to Missoula, Montana, and we were there where all the men were, who were first arrested when the war broke out.

LEVINE: Okay, we're going to pause here because it's the end of the tape.

SHIMATSU: All right.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

LEVINE: This is tape two and I'm talking with Sumi Shimatsu and we're going to continue now. We were talking about, uh, leaving Wyoming and you went to the man's detention camp in Montona.

SHIMATSU: Yes, Missoula, Montana. Yes.

LEVINE: Okay. So when you arrived thee what was your impression of that?

SHIMATSU: Well, I feel privileged in having been able to see this place because the men were, did not see any Japanese family, women or children, or their families since they were arrested December 7th. These were the first men that were, first group of men that were arrested when the war began. So here was September, uh, uh, '43, it was August, end of August when we went to Missoula, Montana, and they were just clinging on to the fence staring at us and just having tears coming down their cheek and, and, just so happy to see women and children, asking me how old I was. Then figuring their children was about the same age, about the same height, they brought out their most cherished Japanese food, pickles and preserves, to put in our, you know, eat with our food that was given to us by the mess hall that, and telling us, "This is not much, but will you, I'd like to share this with you." And to, to, to have that kind of, uh, love and having that much thoughts for us, uh, my mother and I were in tears knowing that they were starved to see and were so happy to see, uh, women and children and trying to imagine their own family about the same, you know, size or what they would look like because they haven't seen women since their arrest.

LEVINE: What happened to your anger? Were you, were you, did you keep your anger and also have these warm feelings for the Japanese people or how did that…?

SHIMATSU: Well, when I was in Wyoming I, like I said, I was antisocial and I only went around with one person. And I wouldn't talk much and I did not join any social clubs with the young girls and boys then. Um, what movie I went to see, I went to see with my friend or just walked out of the camp. Uh, there was fence and guard towers but I used to just, where can you go out there you know. So during the daytime I would walk out of the camp, crawl out between the barbwire and go to Shishoney River. Summertime with bucket, empty bucket or jars and I would get into the river and get these minnows, little, little, uh, fish. And I would come back to camp and empty them into the laundry, uh, tub and have them swimming. And lot of the women would come and they would want pets for their apartment, for their little barrack room. So they would ask me, "Could I take some?" And I said, "Help yourself." So it was so much fun to just go out there and bring something back that people were so happy to put in there, there, there, uh, um, little barrack rooms. They had swimming minnows or I would pick up some lizards, uh, horny toads. I love living things and they, we would have a box and they would put it in the sand and I would carry it on my lapel. And this was the things that I enjoyed was sharing whatever I could with a lot of these women who enjoy just seeing, seeing a little living thing in their house.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SHIMATSU: So, that, and my mother saw me always alone and angry. She, she read my mind. I, (laughs) she's very smart. And she told me war is crazy. Nobody wins. There is no victory in any war and the only person you're

hurting is yourself and that, and yet she never preached to me. That's all she said and I thought about that. But because I was always alone, uh, and walking around in my jeans, I would never wear anything but jeans and pea coat. They furnished pea coat, uh, navy coats and jeans and they always thought at the high school that I was a very tough girl. Not only tomboy but she's just, uh, really tough. She's looking for fight. And they misunderstood my bitterness and anger towards the government and the FBI for my father being in a separate imprisonment. That, uh, they just thought I was, I was just up look for fight or just being a tough girl. Not knowing that I was hurt and, and, and just angry. And so I was in most of the time by myself and they, they, they just never, meanwhile they say you want to join us but most of the time I wouldn't join any of the group. That, that, was my life in Wyoming. But it was good because often times I was able to think things out and what mother said was right and I didn't like being alone. It's not fun and therefore I always, it's funny, I always have believed in god regardless of not having religion or church that I would belonged to, that I told god, "I can't experience being a teenager. I can't start wearing skirts or being social. They know me as antisocial and a tough girl. So if you give me an opportunity to find a place where I know nobody, I will change over." So when I went to Texas I did a 180-degree turn. It was scary to become friendly. It was very scary to say hello because up until now I was always holding onto myself and not answering people and always looking down, never looking up to people. And here I was in Texas and I'm saying, "Oh. Hello o*basan*." That means hello lady, you know. We always talked to everybody, regardless of whether you knew them. And I'm dying, 'Is she going to answer? Am I making a fool out of myself.' Pretty soon they just say, "Oh, hello. Oh, hello." So I thought, 'This is great. Gee, this is nice.' And then, next thing you knew, I, we were always just friendly toward one another and I came out of my shell. It was neat. It was really neat, you know.

LEVINE: Very, but you didn't go to Texas until after you went through Ellis Island. Is that right?

SHIMATSU: That's right.

LEVINE: So tell about after you arrived in Missoula. You stayed there a period of time?

SHIMATSU: Yes. We stayed there until all our baggage was searched, all our boxes, suitcases. We could not take a piece of paper because they thought there might be messages. We could not take magazines, books, any pictures, all paper things were confiscated, and because many people were trying to take things to Japan, after our boxes or suitcases were searched people threw in photographs and things into our box. We never knew who they were cause we didn't go to Japan. I had some of them remaining, see all of mine didn't go, all Yae's went, and the other Yae's went, but some my families were not, so when we opened our box in Texas and we didn't eve know some of the pictures, who were they, they thought we were going to Japan so they were going to pick them up you see. Well when we went to, uh, Missoula Montana, and they closed up our baggages, we got on the train , and it took us four days to get to New York. In between we get our shots, you know, all the typhoid shots, and uh, tetanus shots, and uh, we got to New York, and they told us that we were going to be in New Jersey Harbor, and when we got there, we could see the boat, it was only about a hundred feet from where we were standing, so we didn't know when we were going to get on, but we got off and we were there about ten o-clock in the morning, and we waited, and we waited, and we waited, and they said that, uh, "I don't believe we're going to be able to get you on." We didn't eat lunch. We waited all afternoon. Then somebody came and said, "Well, we'll find accommodation. We're going to put you up on Waldorf Astoria", and that Waldorf Astoria became Ellis Island.

(Laughs a little) And so, this was, well, this was normal, I mean, you don't expect anything else, except this kind of thing to happen to us, and so, uh, in the evening, uh, we, uh, all boarded the bus and, uh went to Penn Station, no, this was, no we boarded a bus and we went to, Coast Guard cutter, there was a Coast Guard with soldiers, and uh MPs and Coast Guards, and they put us into this, uh, boat, and ninety-seven of us crossed the bay to Ellis Island, and it was dark when we got there, and we didn't have lunch, and we didn't have dinner. And it was cold in the evening but…

LEVINE: It was September, '43.

SHIMATSU: …it was September, but it was still kind of, well you know the bay, the air is chilly. I think what it was, was I wasn't as cold as I was scared because when we, uh, got to Ellis Island and until I met Mr. Suzuki I didn't recall the entrance of Ellis Island because when we got there from the ferry boat we saw this nice, uh, um, building. But I never could remember that was the place. Then when I met Mr. Suzuki who was there for almost two years and he showed me where we landed was in the back, there's a Coast Guard place and that, and then it dawned on me. And when I saw where he was, uh, his dormitory and the broken glasses, then I recall I was in that building, upstairs, probably above the men's dormitory. And I remember the metal mesh that we could not, you know it was like, it wasn't a barb with the metal mesh that was covering the, the windows, and I recognized the area that we landed only because of direction and it wasn't the edifice that we came in from ferry boat.

LEVINE: Okay, yeah.

SHIMATSU: And it was nighttime.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SHIMATSU: And they, they put searchlight out. Each of, yeah, my mother and myself, as we went up to the, the entrance of the building and they had the machine gun trained on our back and that's what I believe I was shaking. I was scared. It's the first time where you have a searchlight as you go up the wall. Each time they came, they, they, they, uh, led each group of people that, that went up that, uh, steps and all. All the way up to the entrance the searchlight just stayed with us and you know there was a gun, machine gun, on our backs. It's a very scary feeling to know that they're right there back of you and until we entered the building and we went upstairs and we saw the women's dorm and it was, um, like, uh, the, the, the cots with, uh, it wasn't cotton but it had the spring with dilapidated, uh, stained, uh, cotton mattress. And no sheets, no pillow, uh, army blankets, and we stayed there for, uh, four nights. And we did not know that our father's were there. We did not know whether they were going to Japan and so for, for a night, I'm sure we were restless but somehow we probably also slept. Next morning at breakfast time we went down and we saw the men and we searched for our, you know, our father and I looked around, looked around because I heard he never shaved after he was arrested so I was looking for a man with a beard. But because he wanted to, to, to have us recognize him he shaved. (They laugh) But we met for the first time since March 13th, 1942. It was September 1943.

LEVINE: And how was that? Were you all three together at the same time?

SHIMATSU: Yes, but you know, you don't hug. You don't, all you do is see, mom, pop, say, "Hello, mama.", "Hello papa." Oh, you know, and as far as he was concerned he saw me taller and bigger but he didn't say anything. That's the stoicism. And you know when my father was first arrested, uh,

they took him to a jail. He told us he was in jail with eight men in this small cell. And next day they took him to Tahunga, C.C.C. camp. It was California Conservation Corp. camp up in Tahunga. And (clears her throat) there was a place there, uh, we could take some clothes. Well since he had packed but he wanted some more warmer clothes 'cause he heard they were going to take him to maybe a cold place. So I had to shop around all over to find the corduroy pants he wanted. He was fancy dad. He wanted certain color, certain type, and I went all over looking for this pants and sweater he wanted. So when we went to visit him we had somebody else drive us 'cause I was thirteen, I couldn't drive, my mother could not drive, and when we got there we could only have five minutes visitation outside. A chainlinked fence. My mother and I are to stay five feet behind the chainlinked fence. My father was five feet behind his side of the chainlinked fence. There was a soldier with rifle and bayonet standing right there and saying, "Speak English only." So the only English my father and mother knew was, "Hello, papa. How are you?" "How are you," uh, and he would say, "Fine." And my father would say, "Hello, mama. How are you?" And he would, and I would, and mama would say, "Fine." "And Sumiko, how are you?" And I said, "Fine." And it was dead silence for another four and a half minutes, (laughs), and then we say goodbye. And we could not say anything else. Then my mother was trying to say, "Take care" in Japanese,

kyotsukenasai, and when she said that, that soldier jumped up with the bayonet and stuck right by her throat and said, "Don't you speak Japanese. I said English." And I got so angry, I just went jumping in front of him and said, "Don't you point that rifle at my mother." And he said, "I told them English." I said, "She just said, 'Be careful,' and she didn't remember." And, uh, (laughs a little), and so, you know, it was not easy (laughs) for them to communicate. So when we met in Ellis Island it was very formal. Uh, I think we spoke from our heart not saying a word than speaking with words.

LEVINE: But you could speak Japanese then?

SHIMATSU: Yes, I can. Yeah. And he was very, very, very silk, uh, sick in New Mexico. We heard he had kidney disease. So he was very pale and green and, and we were concerned about that. But the food, uh, in Ellis Island, corn flakes in the morning with powdered milk, no sugar, was not something we could eat. So we just ate the fruit they gave us, which was, um, orange that was pretty old and lunch, I can't even recall. Uh, dinner was, you know, you just don't even think of what it was 'cause it wasn't really that great. I wasn't like Suzuki*san* where he ate every week and he could remember every day. You know and Friday was fish day. However he said something very interesting to me. He said, "Did you get scrambled egg?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "What day was it? Was it the first day?" I said, "No. First day was corn flakes, second day was corn flakes." He said, "Was it your last day?" I said, "Yes." He said, "They always have scrambled eggs on the day they discharge people."

LEVINE: Interesting.

SHIMATSU: It was amazing 'cause I would, since he lived there he knew that was the signal almost. That scrambled eggs…

LEVINE: You were leaving.

SHIMATSU: …somebody was going to leave. And I didn't know that. I knew there was scrambled egg and there was powdered egg, it's like, you know, remember those, well I don't think you remember those, those, uh, powdered, milk and powdered egg but it was not the way, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SHIMATSU: It was very interesting. I didn't know there was this signal, silent signal. But there was Japanese, um, pilots, uh, who were POW's, seventeen years old, two of them that had tears in their eye looking at us because he could hear us talking in Japanese but they were behind a wire mesh too. You know, this, this, this, it wasn't a barbed but it was a meshed up fence and they were behind. And I went to talk to them and I said, "Where are you from?" And he says, "Japan." He won't say from where and said, "What is your name?" 'Cause I, I, you know, wanted to know and says, "No, we cannot tell you because in Japan they consider us dead. We are not supposed to be taken prisoner of war. Therefore I cannot, uh, uh, humiliate them. So we are now dead heroes. We will not give you our name."

LEVINE: Wow.

SHIMATSU: "We cannot ever return to Japan 'cause we lost our face."

LEVINE: Now, what became of them? What would become of them?

SHIMATSU: We don't know. That's the only time I saw them. That's the only time I saw them.

LEVINE: So, you would think they maybe would stay?

SHIMATSU: Unless by force they had to go to Japan, you know. But the only, uh, the, the last ship that went to Japan was the one we missed, Gripsholm II, because, uh, the first one got to Japan. The second one got to Japan too because I met people who went there and they said that, "Sumi, it's a good thing you didn't go back because they were asking some of the young men to get off Singapore and fight for Japan and they never had

any military training." And many of them, uh, were, uh, uh, told to, uh, see if they can't, uh, do some sort of work for Japan's military, you know, before they even reached Japan. You know, a lot of them were people I met coming back here or were here and they said, "It was terrible and you were lucky you didn't, didn't go to Japan at that time."

LEVINE: Hmm. Now once you had the reunion with your father at Ellis Island, you were there for three more days.

SHIMATSU: Yes.

LEVINE: Were you together then? Could you be together?

SHIMATSU: No, no. The men were still in the men's dormitory, womens in the women. And until we got on the, uh, they made up, you know, they had to decide what to do with us. So then they decided, they asked us, "Do you want to go back to your original camp and, and, or do you want to be with your father 'cause they do have a family internment camp?" And mom wanted to be with, uh, dad. So they asked (clears her throat) five families, who were allowed to go to Crystal City, Texas because the fathers were not going to be released to any place except another detention camp. So twenty-one of us went to Crystal City, Texas, and seventy-six were returned to, uh, not returned, but they were sent to Tule Lake, California, which was considered, uh, out of all the ten W A, (clears throat), R A camp, uh, sort of a hard cases or because they had no, no, they considered them more difficult Japanese or Japanese-American or pro Japanese type of people in that. They didn't realize that the American citizen were fighting for their right. That they didn't want to join the US army because how could they join an army that were imprisoning, (clears throat) their family with the soldiers guarding us, you know, in watch towers.

LEVINE: So was your father disappointed at missing the, uh, Gripsholm II?

SHIMATSU: Do you, uh, he may have but my father never, ever…

LEVINE: Ever didn't show it.

SHIMATSU: …uh, tells us what he felt. Yes, and when we got to Crystal City, Texas, I have to say, it was the best experience in my life. Well, one of the best, because there were off and on up to six to eight hundred Germans there. They had three repatriation boats to Germany. They were very, very, very, uh, hard headed and very strong Germans.

LEVINE: Pro Nazi?

SHIMATSU: Pro, I would say so because they had their, we had their, uh, their boyscouts were, uh, dressed and, (clears throat), when they said, "Achtung," 'cause our Japanese girl scout, (clears throat), also was, excuse me, brought up the Japanese militaristic way. Everything was in Japanese military order. When we drilled it was Japanese army style because the drill leader was a Japanese army man. When we joined the, uh, German people for whatever occasion, I don't remember but they had torch parades with cans, empty cans with kerosene and wick. And they put it, they tied it onto a stick and we had night torch parades singing Deutchland, Deutchland. And they were very, very militaristic. They would not, there was only three German girls who attended American school, high school. All the others just stayed with their own group. They stayed on their side of the camp. Originally there were not supposed to be any one except Japanese. The Germans
were brought in to build this camp, but because they liked it so much they refused to leave. They wanted same kind of treatment. So they got the

best part of our camp. I understand they fixed it up real nice and they had beer garden and everything. And they stayed amongst themselves. They were very, uh, I would say, uh, uh, that super race. Four thirty, five o' clock they were marching around. I mean I would say around the fence, um, I don't know how many times. They were going to keep themselves strong for the super race. That's the word they used was super race. The Japanese people really got along more with the, the outside, you know, um, the guards and all because we're not the type that provoke, uh, we didn't have a chip on our shoulder. If there was a crate of lettuce that was bad, uh, uh, that had one bad lettuce the German people would send it back and say, "We will not accept anything that is bad." The Japanese people would take that rotten lettuce and then accept the rest, throw away that one. And so the Japanese people were acceptable, I mean they were liked by the administration as well the, the guards. And unfortunately the German people felt they had to fight for their rights because that camp was run by the Geneva Treaty. According to the Geneva Treaty we were supposed to have certain rights, and we were treated more like POWs. And we had restriction, high restriction. Whereas the camp, nine camps, had barbwire except for Jerome, because they didn't put barbwire because there were poisonous snake all around so they didn't even have fence. Everywhere else had fence, they were foot apart, four strands or five strands. Crystal City, Texas was ten feet tall with barb wire every four inches, and their guard tower was closely, uh, uh, positioned. And they were guarded by the Texas Rangers on horses as well as on the guard tower. Um, we had stores with, it was fiber, it wasn't plastic, at that time they didn't have plastic but they hard fiber, uh, coins. Red one for meat, green one for, um, vegetables, gray one for, uh, uh, clothing. And they had set up a small canteen or PX. And every Tuesday was meat day, Friday was fish day and the women folk, that was a social time. They were able to go and purchase food with these tokens and were able to get food for their family.

LEVINE: Did everyone get tokens?

SHIMATSU: Yes.

LEVINE: Or was it dependent on what work you did?

SHIMATSU: Well, no this one was according to family size because they didn't have mess hall. We had individual kerosene stove to cook from and the people from Peru, uh, were really, they didn't know how to cook and the Japanese people too from Hawaii. They didn't know how to cook with milk or dairy product. So my friend, um, uh, who was a bishop of one church was, uh, made a cookbook: "How to use milk for cooking." They didn't know how to eat cheese or cottage cheese or, you know. It was foreign to them. In Japan they didn't have milk.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

SHIMATSU: So and we had ice delivered every, uh, day and we had milk delivered to our homes. Young, young boys, teenage boys were delivering and all these, uh, Peru people, uh, were in South America and there was about a thousand of them and there were about three hundred from Hawaii and there was about a thousand of, of those that were from this main, main United States. And the ones from Hawaii were mostly Buddhist priests and Japanese schoolteachers and they were very pro Japanese. And you don't dare. (laughs a little) They didn't want us to have social, uh, prom. They didn't want us to have dance because that was, that was, oh no, I mean, you know, especially Buddhism. Girl-boy relationship, uh-uh. To even touch would be, uh, forbidden. So they didn't like the mainland, uh, Japanese people because we were considered, our folks were considered more delinquent because we allowed our, the, the girls and boys to have

proms or dancing or have jitter bugs, get together and sing songs. We, we had, there was nothing wrong with it. The Peru people were again another culture. It was totally different and over there when it gets hot they never wear bras or slips. I mean they just wore half-slips. So these ice boys and milk boys were excited. “Oh, did you see that gal with that big boobs!” You know, and then we had to, the people, uh, the elders had to go and tell them, “Please. Put slip on or blouse on because in United States we don’t go undressed.” And they said, “But it’s hot. Texas is hot.” “Well we don’t do that.” “Well in Peru we do this.” “Well, I’m sorry this is not Peru. You must learn to dress yourself because the boys are getting too much excitement out of your girls.” And so, little by little the cultures was very interesting that in your actions between us, you know. So at noontime you’d die because I lived right across from the people from Peru and they all fried or cooked their garlic. And it’s like, “Aw. This garlic fumes.” Pretty soon you get used to it but that was something that was totally different for us.

END OF SIDE A , TAPE 2

BEGIN SIDE B. TAPE 2

LEVINE: if you would say for the tape, the situation of the Peruvian, um, uh, Japanese. How, how was it that there were so many and what was their particular situation?

SHIMATSU: Well, you know, there were eleven South American country where they rounded up Japanese people but most of them came from Peru. The United States government and the government of Peru made an agreement that they would like to have some of the Japanese-Peruvians come over as hostages because they needed people to exchange with the POWs that were over in, uh, Manila or in, uh, China that were caught there before or after the war started. And a lot of the, uh, fighters, uh, soldiers who were POWs but because the Japanese people would not be taken in as prisoner of war, uh, and many of them did *kamikaze* or suicidal attack, they didn't have enough people to exchange with the American POWs. Therefore they needed, uh, exchanges. So they had, they got Japanese-Peruvians to come over here to exchange and so they kidnapped them or they just brought them over. Some were able to pay off and not be arrested but most of them. And it didn't matter what they were doing. They were merchants, they were farmers, they were businessmen. It just, they were just, some of them hid in the jungles who eventually came out and they were taken as hostages and brought over here and later family joined them in Crystal City, Texas.

LEVINE: And did, could you, was there some kind of attitude that they had apart from the other Japanese-Americans, uh, who were in the camp? I mean were they particularly angry or how did they…?

SHIMATSU: No. They were, they were more, they were not as, as, as, uh, angry. I would say they felt like, uh, there were injustice done but they were also glad that they were reunited with their parents that were arrested too because they didn't know. I think some actually went to Japan without ever meeting their family. They didn't know what was going to happen to them any more than we did, you see. And therefore, uh, I, I hadn't really asked how they felt. They just knew that it was good to be together just like we did.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm. And how about it was in Crystal City when you became more, uh, outgoing and friendly and was there a click that happened in your head that changed and you said I'm going to try this? I mean was it something…?

SHIMATSU: Well, it was, uh, it was being alone and realizing what my mother said in Wyoming that, uh, I'm the one that's going to hurt more than any one else. And it was because being alone, uh, you isolate yourself from all the social function and your not joining in any of the fun and what are you doing except just rebelling for who. You know, it didn't make sense after one year but it took one year for me to cool down. And so when I got to Texas it was wonderful because I turned myself around and it was scary for the first two, three months. But found out that, 'Oh my goodness. This is wonderful.' When you extend yourself and become friendly and warm, people, the world is warm and it's wonderful and everybody answers and greets you and it became totally a new world, a new, new, new adventure for myself. And there was a part of me that grew into another person. Instead of going into solitary isolation, I came out in the open and, Voila! There's a world around me, you know.

LEVINE: And how about your mother? Was it, she must have noticed.

SHIMATSU: Oh, she's, she's very, oh she was, she's always been one that was positive person. Every camp she went she was the joyful woman who always went with little children. Sang and danced for them and with them and she was the delight of everybody. She was the sunshine and see one thing good when we went into Pomona, my mother and my, her sister who's ten years younger with her family, and her husband wasn't arrested, we were in the same camp, in the same room in fact when we were arrested. But then in Pomona my mother was a sunshine and my aunt

was gloomy gust, the, the cloud. And so I got a chance to see the difference between sunshine and the cloudy person. And it was the best example again to know that my mother was just a beautiful soul that gave, and my aunt was someone to be pitied because all she did was gripe, cry, moan, groan, and nobody wanted to be around her. And they went to Manzanar, and we went to Wyoming.

LEVINE: Well Texas was warmer all the way around.

SHIMATSU: All the way around.

LEVINE: Weather wise, social wise (laughs).

SHIMATSU: Weather wise, and going to Japanese school it was very interesting ‘cause I had the best teacher, Japanese schoolteacher. He was the bishop of the Zen Buddhist temple.

LEVINE: Did he give you an attitude about the whole situation that you were able to incorporate?

SHIMATSU: You know he never preached, and we just lost him two months ago, at, at, a just before he turned eighty-eight. But he was mentor. He adopted me as his daughter the last few years. He has been an example to my life, my teacher and friend. And he showed me how, just by his way of life. He was so down to earth. He was only thirty-two in camp, and he had three small children, and, and a beautiful wife. And when we went to Japan, his wife and the three children were in the same stateroom as we were, my mother and I. But the mother was seasick all the way across the ocean, but the bishop uh, I didn’t realize he was the eighth abbot of all Zen religion of Japan. He’s the only pre-Zen priest, or a priest, Buddhist priest, that spoke at United Nations several years ago.

LEVINE: Wow, What if you could just put it in a capsule, what do you think you learned from him?

SHIMATSU: I believe kindness, to be very gentle and kind. And he was that. See there's a word in Japanese, in Budhism; it's called mu. In Z.T. Suzuki's book, when I read it it said nothingness, you have to get to that point where there's nothing. I tried for so many years to get to the meditation of sitting there and getting to that point of mu. And every time I'm thinking of nothingness, I'm thinking I got to do this today. I got to shop for this. Oh, this is coming up. Oh, tomorrow I got . . . and I can't empty my mind and we're supposed to be in this empty place. But the word "nothingness" is not the word he should used. I believe the word is "void." And you don't get that by thinking or just telling them to sit and meditate. You get that really through years of learning and you get to the quiet, silent point. And I do that every day. It's so nice. It's so nice to be in that quiet place. When you find it, you want to stay there (laughs heartily).

LEVINE: Is it M-O-O?

SHIMATSU: M-U. And see the thing is you asked me my religion. I was very fortunate. I, I really lean to Christianity. In Sendai, in Japan, I wanted to really go to church. My sisters were both alive when we went back there. And she has one of the most beautiful operatic voice. I don't know how come she was endowed with it but, on Sundays, we went to three church meetings so she that could sing for each of the service. So I used to sing all the… listen to her and we used to sing the hymns, and I loved it very much. And I believe I, I really wanted to become a Christian, yet to the chaplain every time he's talking to me and showing me the Bible, I, I act like oh no I don't need preaching, I don't need to be saved. Because the word you hear

from Christianity is being saved. Saved from what? O.K. (laughs) And so I feel I don't want to be saved because I'm happy, and I don't feel like there's anything that bad in me. But then when I came over here, and I went uh uh, I came back here, I was the first Crystal City person to come back here in 1947 of uh, uh June. And I didn't have anyone to go to anywhere. I had no relatives, and I had thirty dollars in my pocket (laughs). And um I worked for military government in Japan, but uh, uh, I had to get away from there because I was stoned everyday going to and from uh work for two….

LEVINE: Really?

SHIMATSU: Yeah, five miles uh two and a half miles to military government and back, because I was uh, American. I had nice clothes. It was same (as) American. I had sweater or blouse with drindle or pleated skirt and bobby socks and shoes. Pig tails. I don't have this fancy clothes but I had nice clothes. It was American clothes. And they could see I was different so they, and the working for military government. I believe even jealousy had something to do with it. I believe being in defeated country had a lot to do with it. So these youngsters and older people too would throw rocks as, to work, and rocks when I cam back, so I learned to fend myself, uh throwing rocks back. I became very good, and I think I could be a good pitcher for the Dodgers. But um, the main thing was that uh that I understood them, but I wasn't accepting. When my Uncle asked me to become Jap, you know Japanese citizen, go to Japanese colleges, I said no I am an American. I am not going to be a Japanese. And he says well the Japanese has everything to be proud of, you know, and he was… one thing good thing about him he was very honest and he said, I really think that uh, uh being Japanese is something to be proud of. And we are so strong and we are proud. I says no your not. I said your bunch of bull. The country uh lies. You guys were misled to believe that Japan was always

winning. You go to Japan and you see this huge sign that says “We Will Win.” “We Will Win,” in Japanese character. And I said when I came to Uraga [ph.], I said we had to get down the ship that to a barge, and from barge to the land. And until then some of the, many of the Japanese wouldn’t believe Japan lost. And so all these people who were so, so looking forward to being, giving banquets, and being treated as honored guests in parades, and being given all kinds of uh, uh wonderful reception, found out Japan actually lost. And I said you should have seen the Issei, first generations’, face. They were weep on the land when they realize it was really true that Japan lost. That there was unconditional surrender. That America won. You should have seen how ghastly they were. And my father died there. My father who was so strong and stubborn, and so authoritative became quiet and never spoke a word against my going out with G I s or talking to any men. Until then, if I spoke to a guy, I would have been just verbally abused, or knocked down like my sister was.

LEVINE: So what happened to him do you think in his mind?

SHIMATSU: Uh, there’s this something in him that died. The faith and confidence he felt that Japan, the Japan he knew, and all though he loved America, like when he was interrogated by the, the guards he said I will answer your question if you will answer mine. And it’s an old Buddhist proverb that he said. And the guards would say okay. He said okay. He claps his hand, and he said which hand made the noise? Well you know it took two hands to make that noise, so the guards can’t answer. So he says my left hand is Japan, the country I was born in. The right hand is, is America, that nurtured me, and is my adoptive parent. How could I say which country I want to win, because I love them both. Well that’s why they didn’t release him. He was a smart alleck. Well he was being honest again. They call him uh Geneva gensuit,[ph.] martial Geneva, because he quoted the

Geneva Treaty for everything. So everywhere he was such a hard head they call him Geneva General. General Geneva.

LEVINE: Where were, do you remember the moments when you found out the war was over?

SHIMATSU: Yeh, it was on my birthday. It was on my birthday, August 14, 1945. And I thought my girlfriend is going to come, she is going to bake me a cake, and we're going to celebrate. And so she was coming over, and all of a sudden, all the whistle and bells, and sirens were going off Crystal City. And we're going What's going on in the city? We didn't know what was going on. And it's just blasting off, and all of a sudden somebody said, Japan surrendered. It's an unconditional surrender. I didn't know what unconditional meant. Well surrender was surrender. It meant no more war. Japan was defeated, America won, we, we're now going to get out of camp. Okay. I didn't know when, where how, but I felt like oh, great! But you're hearing men crying! (said incredulously) You're hearing them in anguish say How could Japan surrender? How could Japan which is rock, surrender unconditionally. And so my friend came with marble cake, put it on my table, said here is your birthday cake, and she and I walked all around the camp listening to everybody crying all over. She's looking at me, I'm looking at her. I couldn't feel happy. But I couldn't feel really sad either, because to me war would be over, I felt released. Somewhere in my heart I felt relieved too. But I couldn't even show the emotion of happiness, because I could hear everybody crying. My father did not cry but he was ghastly, you know sort of pale, and my mother was pale but see my father really loved this country. He wanted to sink his roots here. (whispers) At the same time Japan was where he was born. So I could understand it, and that's the feeling that all these parents had.

LEVINE: Did your family try to go back to Los Angeles?

SHIMATSU: No my father wouldn't. You see my father was sixty-five when the war started. He was seventy when the war ended. He couldn't start a business again. Whatever he had was gone. Everything was stolen. And I think he knew there was no way that he could re, you know, recreate our lifestyle again, because we were living quite well off. Living in the city, and being the photographer, we had good life. He provided for us very well. And going back to my childhood, (laughs) I hate to keep doing this, but my father and mother were Buddhist. But he is an American to the point that he gave me and my sister the greatest gift of Christmas. Many Buddhist did not celebrate Christmas because it was a Christian celebration. And doing so uh, we had the biggest Christmas tree. He got the ornaments, the glass ornaments from Europe. He had beautiful, different kinds of ornaments all over the house. He played Santa Claus to us. And until I was ten, I had Santa Claus that came into our house, even if we didn't have a chimney. I'd find mothers longest cotton stocking, and put it by my, my bed, and because my sisters were eight and ten years older, they played Santa Claus later and filled my stockings. So my folks were very unusual that they were true Buddhists, but gave me an American Christian Christmas. And I am so grateful for that, because many of my Buddhist friends never had Christmas tree. Even today Yae will never have Christmas tree. They have been born and raised, and they're folks told them they have to be Buddhists. My mother gave me opportunity to choose. And that is rare. So when I came back I , I, from Japan I worked as schoolgirl, for a Jewish family. And she was a private secretary to Harry M. Warner of Warner Brothers. And as such I went to Fairfax High School, which was ninety seven percent Jewish. So when they have the holy days, there was just very few of us that stayed in the school. But I learned so much, and they gave me so much because, again I'm naive. Now [ ] worked in this Jewish home getting twenty dollars a month, but they provided room and board. And I cleaned their house everyday, and

washed dishes, but at the same time, I had comfortable place to stay. And they had a dog and two cats. And Christmas Eve was their wedding anniversary. But being naive of Christianity, I asked Mrs. Stern, around the first of December when you going to get the Christmas tree? And she goes Christmas tree? I says Yeah, This is my first Christmas in Los Angeles since I came in, I says, I went away in camps, in Japan. This is the first time I'm going to be able to have my Christmas in Los Angeles. You know and I'm so happy, she didn't have the nerve to say they don't practice Christmas, so they got me seven foot tree, Christmas tree. And they had over hundred guests that came for the wedding anniversary. And they walk in this front door, right close to Beverly and Fairfax where they had there home, and they walk in and I was school girl so they said, Sylvia vhat is this? Vhat is tree doing here? So she would say this is Sumi's Christmas tree. And they would say, Oh. And then while I was in the back she would send me to get bring refreshment, she would explain to them that this was my first Christmas since I got back from camp and Japan. And after that they always gave me Christmas tree every Christmas. (Dr. Levine laughs) And Easter I had Easter egg, and dyed it. And until I got engaged to my husband in June of forty- eight, I didn't know Jewish people do not celebrate Christmas and Easter.

LEVINE: That's great.

SHIMATSU: And so he was going to be a minister for Baptist, so my husband, What? They gave you a Christmas tree, and Easter? And then he had to explain to me the difference between Judaism, and Christianity. And I sat there with my mouth open and just could not believe they did this for me.

LEVINE: That's lovely.

SHIMATSU: That's real, I mean such love. And when I got married in August, she loaned me her wedding gown, 'cause I had nothing.

LEVINE: What was, what is your husband's name? Is your husband alive?

SHIMATSU: No, he died twenty-six years ago. We were, fought for the Four Forty-Second regiment combat team.

LEVINE: What was his name?

SHIMATSU: His name was Kiyo Shimatsu. And uh he was a old family friend. And he was the one that boarded all the furniture into the room for us 'cause he was our family friend. And he came, and he was very helpful in making sure that we were taken care of. And my mother told me never marry him, when I was in Japan. She says promise me one thing, don't ever get married to Kiyo. And I said why? He's like Anthony Adverse, because he was always either in big surgery, or big accidents. And when my sister graduated high school, he took her to the high graduation and back. And on the way he was in an automobile accident, and she got a, stitches on her forehead. When we were in Wyoming, he, it was so hot, 'cause we didn't know how to turn the, put the fire out, that he put a bucket of water on hot coal, and he burned his face, and he burned his all his eyelash, and eyebrow, and hair on the front of him. And she felt that he was not real, very (laughs) responsible person. And if anything happens, it will be be. . you know I will be paying for it. And it was true because we went through really difficult time. But I believe there was a purpose. I learned a lot from him. He was my mentor and my friend, and my teacher. And he gave me the push to become a chiropractor, you know. So it was meant to be.

LEVINE: And how did he fare in the Second World War?

SHIMATSU: Well, he was in Pomona, and he was in Wyoming. He was there three months, and then he was told to relieve the camp because he was one of those young nisseis, who was telling all the other nisseis to sign up Yes, yes. Because no matter whether you're living in camp or not, your still and American. And if you're an American citizenship, don't give it up by writing No, no. And because of that a lot of the first generation isseis were trying to (laughs) string him up, you know, really were upset and so they were going to try to get him. So he was, he had to run out of the camp early, so that they would not hurt him. And uh, but he did make sure a lot of people signed up Yes, yes. And he tried to uh, enlist in, he wanted to enlist in Air Force. They wouldn't accept him. In Navy, they wouldn't accept him. In the Marines, they wouldn't accept him. In the parachute, they wouldn't accept him. So finally he enlisted in the Army, and they wouldn't accept him. So he went to Bethel College on scholarship, and he was there for two years, and then they drafted him.

LEVINE: So why wouldn't they accept him?

SHIMATSU: He was an enemy alien. He was still considered an enemy alien. And the nisseis still had to fight the image of being of Japanese ancestry. And yet he was, when he was going through Wisconsin and Minnesota, in Wisconsin he stopped, it was real hot, so he stopped for a beer at a bar and they arrested him and put him in jail.

LEVINE: Because he was an enemy alien?

SHIMATSU: No because they thought he was a Chipawa Indian. The never saw a Japanese before. And they said you know better than to order that beer. And they took him to the jail. And he said Why am I being arrested? He said you know better than to order beer. Well is there a law against drinking beer? And he says, well you're an Indian. You're off the

reservation drinking beer. He says excuse me, I'm a Japanese American. I'm an nissei. They never saw it. They says no, Japanese have yellow face, have glasses on, they're short, and have buck teeth. No. Yeah, see that's the stereotype that they saw in comic book.

LEVINE: But he did fight in the war?

SHIMATSU: Yes, he was in the Four Forty-Second and he was sent to Italy. And he says he was crawling on the ground, and all a sudden he hears the bees so he thought gee this is just like Southern California where all the bees are flying around. And he didn't know that the enemies were shooting around him and the bullets were just coming close to his ears, and it was bullets that was buzzing and not the bees. And they said Shimatsu get your head down. They're shooting at you.

LEVINE: But he came home unharmed?

SHIMATSU: He came home yes, unharmed.

LEVINE: Great. O.K. we have a few minutes left on the tape, but I wanted to say, What were the considerations, and where did your family actually go from Crystal City when you left there?

SHIMATSU: My father signed up to go to Japan, so we left December 2nd 1945, four months after the war ended. And we traveled by train to Seattle. And we got on December 8th on the S.S. Matsonia. And uh, went on very rough voyage to Japan, and got to Yokosuka, but we could not harbor because there were too many sunken ships there. And we were in Uraga, where

we starved for a week, and we found our way back to northern Japan where we found our two sisters safe in Sendai. I found a job as interpreter and typist at Eighth Army, Ninth Corp Military Government and I worked every, year and a half and ate at the mess hall. And it was like of like you know living in sort of America again, eating American food.

LEVINE: And how about your Mother? Was she happy to be back in Japan, or how did she feel about it?

SHIMATSU: Well she was glad to see her brothers and uh, and be there but, she wanted to be back in America. They stayed there seven years, and they returned too. My father lived to ninety six and a half, and my mother lived to ninety one.

LEVINE: They returned also?

SHIMATSU: Yes, we called them back. So, but at ninety-three, let me see, my father suffered relapse of memory that he was in camp. And he would take his pillow case off and would start stuffing things from his drawers. And I said what are you doing papa? And he said, I'm packing up because the soldier told me we're moving to another camp. So the memory still came through when he was ninety-three, ninety-four, that he was still in camp when he was senile.

LEVINE: O.K. We're going to stop here. It's the end of the tape.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE A

LEVINE: We're beginning now on tape three with Shimotsi (?) Shimatsu. (They laugh.) We were talking about your father in his old age reliving the camp experience. What other effects or after effects can you think of that effected you personally or other family members, or even close friends?

SHIMATSU: Well. I'm very fortunate that I'm able to sit back and put things together. As rough as things were I believe for the Japanese Americans and for the future generation, the third generation and fourth, that we paid a price, but it gave them opportunities, the door opened for them. It was our camp experience, the injustice, the injustice of our folks having to be arrested, taken away. All that plus the fact that the hundred battalion the Four Forty-Second regiment of combat group, the MIS, all the others were the sacrifices. They paid the price, the highest price possible for opening the door to higher education. Almost all universities and colleges gave us open door. It also gave them opportunities to occupations they could never reach because before the World War II, there were many who graduated Harvard, Cambridge, Berkeley, and when they came back there was no job. They couldn't go into the fields that they had studied, or majored in, or graduated from. And they took a job as nurserymen, gardeners, fishermen, they could not practice what they had graduated, gotten the diploma on. Therefore it was sort of wasted, and yet it wasn't. The sacrifices of this situation, and of them fighting men, has given our, our children opportunities. There's no limit now. When we came there was a little limit, because we're the second generation. We had to look after our folks. We were pinched in between the younger and the elder. We made sure that we did our duty as the children to make sure that we gave them comfort. We always took care of them, and made sure that our folks were taken care of because they gave us everything. So many of them made sure that second generation went to university and they sacrificed everything. Now our situation, and we never spoke against our

folks, we always did everything they said even if we knew it was wrong, we would never dare think of arguing or bringing up our position. Then we had our children. They're very outspoken. And they tell us we're old fashioned, or that doesn't work anymore. It doesn't happen, and they are free spirited. They believed in peace movement, and flower children and they went through all that. And again we, the second generation, absorbed their retaliation, or their independence. So we call ourselves the sandwiched generation. But you know, it's still good 'cause it's a staircase. Our folks were the first stairs that came from Japan and gave us opportunity in this new country. We were the second step that gave them opportunities to higher steps and there's no limit to them now.

LEVINE: Do you ever experience anti-Japanese sentiment now?

SHIMATSU: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: In what kinds of ways or situations?

SHIMATSU: Uh, (laughs) you know it's real difficult because in West Coast right now there's an awful lot of Koreans, and Vietnamese, and there's gangs. And then there were also incidents with the Blacks against the Koreans, or the Koreans with the Blacks. And because we have Asian face, we get sort of pulled in (laughs lightly) with it. And that we look alike, therefore we must either be Vietnamese or Cambodians, or Koreans. And it's the same thing like every emigrants that came over here. Each group faces prejudices until they get into the second and third generation.

LEVINE: So you're getting prejudice against, really that's meant for these other groups?

SHIMATSU: Yes, yes. It can be. But fortunately many of us, I think we just walk away from it. The Japanese people have a real good saying “shikataganai”: You know you’re helpless, but don’t rock the boat either. You know just leave it alone. And I think it comes from the original Taoism, which became Zen in Japan. You know go with the flow. Just leave it alone. And it does take care of itself. You don’t have to fight them all the way.

LEVINE: Are there any other ways you would characterize the Japanese, Japanese- American I should say, temperament?

SHIMATSU: I would say that, you know they used to, there was one book they wanted to name it The Quiet, uh was it, The Quiet Mind? or Quiet…Anyway it had to be that we were quiet. But it was good because there were a core of Japanese-American Nisseis who start fighting, and fighting for the rights. And this is what started the movement and therefore the Japanese – American that national museum is where it’s at today. If they were where our folks were, we would just let it go, and leave it alone. But fortunately there’s, and I think this isn’t just with Japanese there are always few fighters, leaders.

LEVINE: The first wave always has to be the fighting wave.

SHIMATSU: The first wave, yeah, yeah. And so I would say that in many ways, no even with this group there’s a lot of them that just rather leave things the way it is. And there’s some of us, like me, who will fight. And I think that’s my father’s blood again (laughs heartily). But it’s good, because I will stand up for the right. I do believe that it has to be that we fight for the right. That has to come through that, you know, that you have to, this is America. Justice prevails. We can’t allow injustice to continue. We must see that what the Constitution provided for, that the forefathers wrote, is going to continue on, and on and on. And we can’t let it die off, or kill it

with different kind of amendments, that take away what is there. And I truly believe it, and I am very glad I'm an American. And I know my father and mother were very glad they came back here. They know, they know this was the country that they wanted to be in.

LEVINE: That's a wonderful place to end, but (laughs) I still want to ask a few more questions, they laugh) just quickly. How long was it before you came back to this country, you personally?

SHIMATSU: A year and a half. It was the fastest I could get back. But see in Hawaii the INS, weretrying, they took our passports away because three of us who were in Crystal City, they knew was an interment camp run by the Justice Department. Therefore they thought that we had no right to return to America. So they took our passport away. And when they took that away, I could not enjoy myself in Hawaii. And day to day until we got to San Francisco, we didn't know, because they said they were going to put us in Angel Island. Yea it was Ellis Island, right? They were going to put us in Angel Island and return us to Japan because we have no right to set foot in America again. They cleared us through Washington D.C. that I was under age, all three of us that returned. It was two boys and myself, and therefore we did not give up our citizenship. We did not really want to return to Japan, I mean, not return, go to Japan in the first place. Therefore we had the right to return and that we were still American citizens. We had to give up our, what do you call that, bi-citizenship, dual citizenship. Uh, no problem: Didn't want to be a Japanese. Everyone, I go to Japanese school, told my uncle, I'm an American. I will never be a Japanese. And when he kept trying to sell me Japan, I says no I will not. I do not want to kowtow to your method where the men are better than the women, you know, and where you're so dogmatic on many things. I said

America offers us freedom. And I said I can not live in the way that you live. It's too constrictive you know. And it was good. We had good conversation because, discussion. It clarified for him, but he never tried to make me a Japanese again. I wouldn't. I couldn't.

LEVINE: How about your husband being part of the Four Forty-Second? Was that a kind of an identity that he was proud of and that somehow pervaded his sense of himself?

SHIMATSU: At the beginning, he really had ambivalent feeling because as much as he told everybody to write Yes, Yes, he still is another cause fighter, he felt indignant about being put, incarcerated in camps, that our citizenship didn't mean anything. So he didn't know whether he would join or not. But then when he saw his best friend join Four Forty-Second, and K. Tanahashi told him Yakio this is our country right or wrong. We still have to fight for what the Constitution really gave us is suppose to be the freedom. And even if we don't have it now, maybe our lives will make a difference. And K was killed in Italy, and my husband just felt so bad, that as soon as he heard his friend died, he just had to join. Well, he was drafted, but he went in Four Forty-Second. He was very, very, very glad. And then did everything possible to work with, and then he was one of the original group that formed the Four Forty-Second Club, you know the regimental team in Los Angeles.

LEVINE: And then it was after that then you went back and studied chiropracty and

SHIMATSU: Well my husband had heart attack at thirty-five. And I had six children. And he saw that working in bank, you know he couldn't work anymore. And at U.C.L.A. cardiology they told him he wouldn't see thirty-eight. So he told me with the teachings I got in Japan of working with the spiritual healing and with magnetic healing uh, called reiki it's called pirama in India

and by the force hands on healing over here. He felt that the, he studied everything, and he said I think chiropractic license will allow you to use that. When I went to Chiropractic College, he enrolled me. We went to see. I didn't know he already registered me. And so I went but he knows I'm not a quitter. But he says at least try it. But if you get that license you will be able to provide for the children because I have a feeling I'm not going to be around. And so I, at thirty-five, thirty-six you go for schooling --bunch of these young kids who just came out of college and university. It is very, very, very difficult. And I don't like school. I really don't like school. But he was right, and so I graduated, and he told me I don't expect you to have anything less than all a's. He always set the highest goal for me. Well I had pretty close to it, but one doctor tried to flunk me because I was a woman. But in spite of it, he gave me the best grade he could give me which was C. And he, because of it, brought my grade point average down, but still I graduated uh summa cum laude. And it was neat with six kids, you know, to graduate. But main thing, it wasn't just graduate, it gave me the opportunity to practice healing. And that to me was something more than money. I feel like I'm helping, you know, giving people life. I'd love to talk (laughs) to many people to uplift them or kick them out of doldrum. Cheerleaders to the core, you know. And when you could talk to people on basis of showing them the way, you know, telling them, and then being the spokesperson for any religion because today I consider myself a new universal believer. I go by the teachings of Christ. Okay. I don't say I'm a Christian. I don't like that word. I like to say I follow the teachings of Christ. I also believe in Buddhism. I support them, because Buddha had lot to teach too, and so did Mohamed. All the great messengers of life have been there to point a way and they all teach the same thing: The Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. If you did, there would be peace. There would be no conflict. But nobody practices their religion. They wear it on Sundays or on the Sabbath. They do not apply it to their life. And I'm at position today, that I

enjoy living a fruitful life and God has been good to me. And I feel I was allowed to go through all this experience, have a memory that I have knowing what I have gone through so that I can not only tell the stories, but also to have other people bring their awareness up. Life is really a school. You learn from it, and you got to grow from it, and become somebody, and show others how to walk the life.

LEVINE: Okay, we'll close there. That's a beautiful statement. Thank you so much.

SHIMATSU: Thank You, I really appreciate it.

LEVINE: I've really enjoyed this.

SHIMATSU: Well I really appreciate your taking the time out to record all this for us.

LEVINE: Well, it's part of Ellis Island's history,

SHIMATSU: Yes.

LEVINE: …it's part of our country's heritage,

SHIMATSU: Absolutely.

LEVINE: …and you're a wonderful spokesperson for it, so I really appreciate it.

SHIMATSU: Well, I believe in everything I say, you know. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: Okay.

SHIMATSU: Thank you. Very much.

LEVINE: Thank you, okay, bye-bye.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE 3

END OF INTERVIEW