

Howard Ono: My name is Howard Ono and I'm a volunteer at the Henry Madden Library at California State University, Fresno. And today we are going to interview Betty Yamagiwa because her recollections of her life in the internment camps during World War II is going to be saved and put into the oral history program at the Special Collections Research Center at the library. So, we are now, it is now September 13th and we are at the Central California Nikkei Foundation in Fresno, California. Are we ready to go, Betty?

Betty Yamagiwa: Yes.

Howard Ono: Okay. This is going to be part of kind of an electronic online collection of people's recollections of internment camp life and things like that, and it'll be over at the library. I'm going to ask you questions about your family history, ask questions about your early life in California, what the internment was like to you, and what you did after you returned from the- you left the internment camp. Okay, first of all, I'd like to have you tell us your full name, date of birth, and your place of birth, and where you lived the major part of your life.

Betty Yamagiwa: Betty Yoshiko Yamagiwa. I was born on May the 9th, 1924, in Fresno, California. And that's where I grew up, I was always in Fresno, never moved from that area until we had to move. And my folks were farmers, they had grapes.

Howard Ono: Okay, how did your- your family, way back when, get here from- from Japan?

Betty Yamagiwa: From, my- my father came from Japan when he was in- teenager to make a better life for himself and the family. And my mother came years, a couple of years later, and they were married, and they farmed in Kerman, California. And then when the- my oldest brother was born, they moved to Fresno to have a better life, and they planted grapes, and there was some trees, and that's what they did, was raise grapes and dry them for raisins.

Howard Ono: Okay, and where did, from which part of Japan did your family come from?

Betty Yamagiwa: My dad and mother came from Komomoto, Komotogon, and they knew each other in Japan.

Howard Ono: Oh, they knew each other?

Betty Yamagiwa: They knew each other, yes, the families anyway.

Howard Ono: Okay, so what- about what year did they come from- from Japan, do you have any idea?

Betty Yamagiwa: I have no idea. It was in the early, early, very early stages, because he was only 16 or 17. So, when he passed away, he was 94, so he must- it must have been when he was really young, way back. Di

Howard Ono: Yeah okay, so what was, where did you grow up, or you told me where you grew up, but what was your life like before World War II?

Betty Yamagiwa: I was just a regular farm girl, lived out on the ranch, and didn't know any, really was an innocent farm girl, and just grew up with the- the- my sisters and my brothers, and we worked out on the ranch. Did whatever we had to do to help the farm.

Howard Ono: What was your school like, your schooling?

Betty Yamagiwa: Oh, there was no other Nihonjin girl, anybody in my class at grammar school, so I had this Hakujuin girl that was a real close friend of mine, and our families got real close, and they helped us a lot.

Howard Ono: Ah, okay. And how far out from the main part of the city were you when you were growing up?

Betty Yamagiwa: We were about 13 miles from Fresno-

Howard Ono: Okay-

Betty Yamagiwa: -out toward Caruthers.

Howard Ono: Okay, okay. So, life as a child was pretty good? all-

Betty Yamagiwa: It was very good, because I had a lot of sisters that all-, we always played together and had a lot of fun, and in those days, the families did a lot of back and forth visiting, and all the kids from each family would always come, and so we were friends with a lot of the kids in that area.

Howard Ono: Were you close to the Japanese community at all?
[Microphone Adjustment]

Betty Yamagiwa: Yes. My dad was quite a leader, and he- he organized a lot of different organizations, and he got young people together to organize some clubs so that they would be able to converse with each other and have fun. And he always felt that the young people had to know the whereabouts of the world, of the country, and he formed what you call a kengakudam, a group of young people that would go on trips. And he organized a group to take to Los Angeles because they were all farm boys. They knew nothing of the big city, so he wanted to expose them to the big city, so he took them down to Los Angeles.

Howard Ono: Wow, that's pretty impressive. [Microphone Adjustment]
Okay, well that means you know, things were very- sounds like life was pretty good before the war.

Betty Yamagiwa: It was, yes. And we all- and the community was close, very close, because there was a lot of Japanese families there, and we all- we congregated together and had community picnics and different celebrations, and he always organized those things. And so, we were always in the midst of everything [laugh].

Howard Ono: You had a busy life even then, huh?

Betty Yamagiwa: Yes. [Both laugh]

Howard Ono: So- so where did you go to elementary school, junior high school, high school?

Betty Yamagiwa: We went to, the whole family went to Alvina Grammar School, which was about two miles from the- our home.

Howard Ono: Okay.

Betty Yamagiwa: And we walked. There was no bus service or anything, so we walked, and we all had the same teacher. My oldest brother and all of us had the same teacher, and she knew all of us and how much we- we were able to do. And so, she emphasized that, well, your sister or your brother was able to do this, so you should be able to do it too.

Howard Ono: [Laughter]

Betty Yamagiwa: And we had to follow in their footsteps.

Howard Ono: So how about junior high school, high school?

Betty Yamagiwa: Well, there was no junior high, so we went from first grade to eighth grade, and then directly into high school. And we went to Carruthers High School for four years, and by the time we went to high school there was bus service. So, we were so excited we could ride the bus to school, and we didn't have to walk anymore.

Howard Ono: [Laughter] Well, Carruthers is still kind of country, you know, considered country.

Betty Yamagiwa: It's still country, yes.

Howard Ono: Okay, so- so where you were living was not in the big cities, not in downtown Fresno.

Betty Yamagiwa: No, it was way out, there were houses were scattered. There was always farmland all around, and a house here and a house there just scattered.

Howard Ono: Ah okay.

Betty Yamagiwa: So, our neighbors were about at least a mile away-

Howard Ono: Okay.

Betty Yamagiwa: -and the road was an old country road, so no traffic. We were able to run around on the road and play and learn to skate on the road.

Howard Ono: Okay.

Betty Yamagiwa: And we swam in the ditch-

Howard Ono: [Laughter]

Betty Yamagiwa: -when we were kids in the summertime, and that was fun.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm. So, what do you remember about Pearl Harbor and the times of-

Betty Yamagiwa: What I-

Howard Ono: -when World War II started?

Betty Yamagiwa: What I remember the most is it was on a Sunday morning, and we were still in bed, and I don't know who heard it on the radio, but they announced that we're at war. And it just scared me because I- you know, being Japanese and- and I knew all- all my friends were Hakujiins.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: So, I just, first thing that came to mind was how are they going to react to me.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: But this one- one family, this daughter and I were real close friends, and she was always good to me, she was really, she helped me a lot during that- during that time. She stayed with me and she said everything will be fine, and they had me go to their house because we couldn't travel. So, she would come and get me and I go to her house, and at least they knew that we were close.

Howard Ono: During the time after Pearl Harbor, were there problems that your family had to face before the internment camp started?

Betty Yamagiwa: No, we- we- I- what I recall is that we were all just- they- they wanted to- our- our- they wanted all our radios and knives and our guns and anything we had, they wanted it turned in. And I remember our cameras and our radio and our guns had to be turned in. And when we came back, we never got them back and I don't know what happened to them.

Howard Ono: [Laughter] So, so tell me about the assembly center time-

Betty Yamagiwa: Oh, the assembly center was real hectic.

Howard Ono: -but did you- did you know, how far ahead of time did you know that you were going to have to go-

Betty Yamagiwa: Two weeks before they let us know that we were going to be going to Fresno Assembly Center at the Fairgrounds. And they said everyone can have one suitcase. So, we all had just one suitcase to pack. And I-I really don't recall my folks taking all the sheets and blankets and everything, but they had this great big duffel bag. And they packed everything in that. And of course, I was too young to even appreciate what they were doing. It was just more fun. You know, as kids you always think everything is fun. And so, it was a lot of fun. But once we, they told us we were to catch, we were to go to Selma to catch the bus. The bus was going to take us to the assembly center. So, our Hakujin friends took us to Selma. I remember that the PG&E station was where we caught the bus and we were transported to the assembly center. And, and I remember getting off and there were all people that were there already. Here we are just a bunch of country hicks walking in and everybody staring at us when we were carrying one little suitcase.

Howard Ono: Did you have to leave some valued stuff behind because you were only allowed to carry-

Betty Yamagiwa: No-

Howard Ono: -or were you able to store some-

Betty Yamagiwa: I didn't have-I didn't have anything, but my folks had the furniture that we stored at the- the Hakujin family home, and they kept our car. And I think that was about it. And then the ranch was run by a family friend. And so, he had all the equip- use of all the equipment. And that's all that I remember. I don't remember too much of those days because I was too young and [Both laugh] and all I thought about was just to have fun and what an exciting experience this was going to be.

Howard Ono: For your parents it probably was not all that exciting right?

Betty Yamagiwa: Oh no, they, they were really concerned and, and my dad always said, well, shikata ga nai. We have to do what we're told to do so we'll all do it. And so, we did, nobody rebelled. And the community was all together. And he had said- told the community too that shikata ga nai. We have to do what we are told. And so, everyone just continued to do what they were told. And, and we all had to have our shots.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: And that was more painful than anything else [Howard Ono laughs]. Those typhoid shots. Oh, that was murder.

Howard Ono: So, what's your first image of the assembly center?

Betty Yamagiwa: It's just that all these people are there and they're staring at us and here we are walking in and then we go to the barracks. And it's just an empty old, just an empty box it was like. And we had to make our own beds. It was just cots. And the, um, we had to stuff our own mattress, straw, stuff it with straw and put it on the bed and then make our beds. That was the main thing that I remember.

Howard Ono: The building itself was not a great place to-

Betty Yamagiwa: No

Howard Ono: -to have to spend the summer.

Betty Yamagiwa: No, it was hot and we had asphalt floor.

Howard Ono: Oh, asphalt floor?

Betty Yamagiwa: Yeah, so, you know, like on the road. And so when it got hot, our posts and the beds just sank [Both laugh].

Howard Ono: So, so it was like they put these, uh, these- these barracks on, on a parking lot essentially?

Betty Yamagiwa: Yeah, that's what it was like really.

Howard Ono: And, uh, it must have been warm and-

Betty Yamagiwa: And- and then-

Howard Ono: -uncomfortable?

Betty Yamagiwa: And then it was all- there was no, you know, it was all open all the way across. There was no ceiling. It was all, what do you call those, just, you know.

Howard Ono: Yeah, yeah, I can picture it.

Betty Yamagiwa: It's just all open.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: So, you could hear what's going on next door.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm. And was your family in just one section of a barrack or did you share it with lots of other people?

Betty Yamagiwa: We had two, two rooms. There was five of us in one and four in the other. The four oldest ones were in the room next door, the two boys and the two girls.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: Oldest ones were in the one room and then we were with my folks.

Howard Ono: Okay.

Betty Yamagiwa: When I think back now, it must have been miserable for them. But for us, it was all an adventure. It's like camping or, or something new to us. And when you're kids, you don't realize a lot of the things that the older people go through or the hardships that they're going through and it just, it really was.

Howard Ono: Yeah.

Betty Yamagiwa: And so, during, and then my dad was always a leader, so he was always block manager. He always took care of the whole block. And anything that came up, he always announced and let everybody know what was going on.

Howard Ono: What happened with school once you went into the camp?

Betty Yamagiwa: When we were in camp?

Howard Ono: Yeah.

Betty Yamagiwa: Well, see, I, I was a senior, so I graduated, so I didn't have to go to school anymore. But they did have schools, not at Fresno Assembly Center, there was no school. But as soon as we moved to Jerome, then they started having schools for everybody. And my sister, my younger sister has a diploma from Denson, Arkansas [Both laugh].

Howard Ono: Okay.

Betty Yamagiwa: Her senior year.

Howard Ono: Okay.

Betty Yamagiwa: And then my younger sister graduated from the grammar school. She was an eighth grader and my mom didn't want to leave until she graduated eighth grade and then we came back.

Howard Ono: Oh, okay. Okay. So, so are your memories of the Assembly Center kind of relatively positive in terms of how you felt when you were there?

Betty Yamagiwa: Well, all I remember is the bathrooms were horrible. [Both laugh] It was just- it was just a trough you sat on-

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: -and those great big buckets of water would all night just dump every once in a while, and you could hear the water gushing down and that was flushing it. It just, so you didn't want to sit at the end. You wanted to sit up here at the very beginning.

Howard Ono: Were there, were there any problems that people had at the Assembly Center in terms of being able to adjust and, you know, being able to kind of hold their life together while they were there?

Betty Yamagiwa: No, I, most of them were, you know, able to adjust. Some of them had mental problems because of, I'm sure, because of all this. And, and then those with small children I felt sorry for, they were really the ones that had to have the milk delivered and this one family from locally from our area that their baby had milk that was spoiled.

Howard Ono: Oh.

Betty Yamagiwa: And the baby passed away.

Howard Ono: Oh.

Betty Yamagiwa: Yeah, so, you know, there was accidents and then there was one little kid that was chasing the water truck, you know, the water truck and he got hit and he passed so, there was accidents that did happen.

Howard Ono: Do you remember anything about the food?

Betty Yamagiwa: Oh, the food, yes. You could just smell cheese and, and, and mutton stew.

Howard Ono: Okay.

Betty Yamagiwa: Everyone just remembers the mutton stew that smelled, but I loved it.

Howard Ono: Oh [Laughs].

Betty Yamagiwa: I loved the mutton stew and so, it didn't affect me at all. A lot of the food I- I liked. But my sister used to say, oh, I can't eat this and she turned around and go back and make herself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Howard Ono: Did you- were you able to maintain connections with anybody in the, in the outside community while you were in the assembly center?

Betty Yamagiwa: Um yes, there was one, one Hakujin fellow that I was real good friends with and I sent him a pass and he came to see me once. That was- he was- and then the- the Hakujin family that took care of our place came to see us too. But those are the only two that ever came to visit us.

Howard Ono: Did you ever feel any, anybody in the community had negative feelings toward the, your family and the Japanese in general because of the war?

Betty Yamagiwa: No, not- not because we were so far away from neighbors and, and then school, we didn't go to school anymore.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: So, at first, the first couple of days, it was kind of iffy and I- I kind of felt like the city people, you know, the ones that lived in Caruthers town were a little bit uppity. But then I had my girlfriend, so she was always good to me, so then I didn't feel quite so bad. And then there was a few other Nihonjins that was in my class, there was three of us in my class, so it wasn't too bad.

Howard Ono: Okay.

Betty Yamagiwa: I, I didn't feel that, not what you call discrimination.

Howard Ono: Well, that was good.

Betty Yamagiwa: Yeah.

Howard Ono: How about your, your transfer eventually to Jerome, do you have any memories of, of that?

Betty Yamagiwa: Oh yes, that, the train ride definitely.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: It was an old, old train and it was full of soot and, and, and then they just blew in there too. And when we got to Jerome, they, they said, "We looked like Crombos" [Both laugh] and we were all

black. And, um, we had to have our shades pulled all the time. They said, don't pull, open your shades.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: And, um, but we used to peek. [Both laugh] And we always wanted to see where we were and what was going on. But, uh, they didn't want us to know where we were going or anything. I don't know why. It wouldn't have made any difference to know where we were going. What could we do?

Howard Ono: Yeah. Do you remember, do you remember the trip itself in terms of, were you able to get out of the train at all?

Betty Yamagiwa: No, we didn't get off the train at all. They wouldn't let us off. The only ones that could get off were a few of them that wanted to smoke.

Howard Ono: Oh. [Laughs]

Betty Yamagiwa: They let them out.

Howard Ono: Okay.

Betty Yamagiwa: And the guys could do, and then we had, uh, like train managers. My, uh, oldest brother was a train manager. So, he could go from one car to the next and get off and things of that sort. But the rest of us had to stay in our seats. We were assigned a chair and you stayed there. And of course, in those days when you were told to do something, you did it. You didn't move. And that's what we did. It was-, it was an- altogether different era.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: The way the kids are today and the way we were is just so different. I can't imag- even picture it now.

Howard Ono: Well, let's hope that it's not going to happen again.

Betty Yamagiwa: Yeah.

Howard Ono: So, so what is your first image of Jerome? Because that's, I mean, because that's where you had to spend part of your time.

Betty Yamagiwa: Yeah, it was, um, I thought after we got there, I thought, "Gee, there's nothing but trees all around." And, and then, um.

Howard Ono: Well, what, what time of year was that when you got there?

Betty Yamagiwa: It was in October.

Howard Ono: October.

Betty Yamagiwa: So, it was, it was getting a little chilly.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: And so, uh, we, um, we had- we got assigned to our room and it was kind of, it was, um, built up. The walkways were built up on dirt, but it was kind of clay-like. And then the barracks were over here. And I remember walking all along there and on this kind of rocky dirt. And, um, and then we just had the potbelly stove in the middle. And that's all the heat we had. And, uh, I don't remember too much else about that. I guess all I was thinking of was having fun and meeting all the guys. You know, uh, I was a teenager, just eighteen, and, and at that time your hormones have just been, and all you're thinking about is fun, fun, fun.

Howard Ono: [Laughs] Okay, well, that's, uh, I, I can imagine, I can imagine, uh, that time of life would be, that would be important.

Betty Yamagiwa: Yeah, and, uh, um, you want to be sure you got to go to all the dances.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: And my folks were kind, uh, they were real open about it and then they let us go. Some of them were very strict and wouldn't let their kids go out. But then my folks were a little more lenient and they let me go to the dances and parties. But they wanted to make sure that there was plenty of light.

Howard Ono: [Laughs]

Betty Yamagiwa: They didn't want it dark.

Howard Ono: So, what do you remember kind of about the, the physical plant? What, what, what was Jerome like as a place to live, I guess?

Betty Yamagiwa: Um, it was, um, kind of, uh, rainy, kind of, um, wet, uh, and then we had snow. And the first snow we had, we were all excited. It was all snow. You know, we've never been to the snow before. And here it's snowing and, and we didn't realize how slippery and wet you could get. But that was the most, uh, impressive thing that I remember. And then, uh, the, we used to walk into the forest out there where there was, um, the- there was a water running there and we'd walk out there. And they always said the chiggers were out there. But I never had a, they said the chiggers would stick to you and, and it would be real, you know, itchy and, and poisonous. But luckily, we never run into that.

Howard Ono: Well, that area is, has lots of mosquitoes, lots of insects-

Betty Yamagiwa: Insects, yeah.

Howard Ono: And that made, I would guess, uh-

Betty Yamagiwa: And snakes were in the water.

Howard Ono: -It would make, make it challenging living during the summertime-

Betty Yamagiwa: Right

Howard Ono: -particularly in, in, uh, in that part of the country.

Betty Yamagiwa: Uh, I can't remember how the summers were. I, I, all I remember is the wintertime. It was cold and, and wet. The summers must have been sultry. Yeah, that's, I, I, and then, uh, and I remember, um, we, they used to, uh, they had a goat or a sheep or something that they, they, they had for, for some kind of celebration they had. And they, and they, and they killed it so that we could have a big feast.

Howard Ono: Right.

Betty Yamagiwa: And I remember that. Not, uh, not really too much of it, but just, just barely. It, just kind of hazy, I remember. We had this big feast.

Howard Ono: So, so what was, what was lifelike in the camp itself? How did you, what did you do? How did you keep yourself occupied? How did your family keep occupied?

Betty Yamagiwa: Well, um, my dad was always busy with his, he was block manager so he had lots of meetings and different things he always went to. My mother stayed and she knit and crocheted, did a lot of handiwork. And, uh, I learned to embroider and crochet and do those- those things. And then I got tired of that so then I went to work at the canteen, the store. So, I did work there for, um, eight dollars a month. But at least it got me out and I liked it. I had fun. I enjoyed that part.

Howard Ono: How about your other brothers and sisters?

Betty Yamagiwa: And then my, uh, brother, my brother, uh, my younger brother, the younger one, worked at the hospital. And I don't know what he actually did but he used to work at the hospital. The older one was, um, uh, he had something to do with delivery and, uh, the mattresses. He worked there and then they, they left and went to, uh, the, my oldest son went, uh, brother went to, uh, Cleveland, Ohio and

he worked there. And, uh, my sister went to Columbus, Ohio. You know, they, the only kind of work they could get was working as, uh, housemaids. And so that's what she did in Ohio. She worked for, I think it was a doctor's family. She really liked it. And then, uh, the second sister of mine went to, uh, she was, uh, more of a office worker, bookkeeper. And she worked in an office. And she stayed at, um, a Jewish family in Columbus, Ohio. And then she went to work. And my young, the younger boy went to work in, in a candy factory in Chicago. And I wanted to go out but they said, no, I have to stay with the family and help him interpret. My, my dad was quite fluent in English, but there was a lot of small details that he couldn't quite figure it out. So, then they made me stay. I was so mad and I couldn't, uh, I couldn't go to school. There was no, no chance for me to go on to school or do anything. And so, I just stayed, stayed in camp and then just worked what I could, the little that I could.

Howard Ono: So how, how long were, were you in the camp itself in Jerome?

Betty Yamagiwa: In Jerome we were there for, from the October and, uh, we were there for how many years? We were there for about two years. And then they said they were going to close up. And, uh, you could either move out into the world or you could go to another camp, which was, uh, Rohwer, Arkansas. Or you could, uh, but my dad wanted to be closer to California to come home. So, we came to Gila, Arizona. And we were there for about six months, I guess. And then we came on home.

Howard Ono: Oh, so, so you were actually in Gila itself?

Betty Yamagiwa: Yeah, so we were in three different-

Howard Ono: Areas.

Betty Yamagiwa: -places.

Howard Ono: Okay.

Betty Yamagiwa: Yeah.

Howard Ono: So, so what, what was your family's feeling about this whole process?

Betty Yamagiwa: Well, just like, uh, he always, you know, shikata ga nai. That we just can't help but we have to do what we're told and, and make the best of it. That's, that's the way they always interpreted everything and, in, in, uh, in, you know, made us think that way too. And so that's what we, we just did and, and the older ones got to go out and do what they wanted. And so, then when we came back then to Arizona, well, and then I met more new friends. And so,

then that was a lot of fun making new friends and, and then, um, it was time to come home.

Howard Ono: So, so what happened to your brothers and sisters who moved out to the Midwest it sounds like?

Betty Yamagiwa: Well, um, my oldest brother, then he got married.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: And, uh, my sister met a soldier and she says, "I'm gonna marry him." And she, she said, "I'm not gonna come back to Fresno" and she never did come back to Fresno. She, she married him. He was from Seattle, Washington and she went to Seattle, Washington with him and, and they were married and, and she's never come back to Fresno. She lived there and she says, "I'm gonna live there" and she's dead.

Howard Ono: How about the other ones?

Betty Yamagiwa: And, uh, well, she, she was always a loner and, and she was more of a book, bookworm, um, you know, office work. That's all she did. And so, she came back to Fresno to work and she went to Heald College for a few years and then she got a good job. And she worked in Fresno as a bookkeeper.

Howard Ono: Okay.

Betty Yamagiwa: And I couldn't understand why she liked bookkeeping so much because I couldn't stand it.

Howard Ono: [Laughs]

Betty Yamagiwa: Well, I didn't like bookkeeping.

Howard Ono: Well, how about your parents? What, what, what effect do you think this whole situation had on them?

Betty Yamagiwa: My folks?

Howard Ono: Yeah, your folks.

Betty Yamagiwa: They, they, um, they seem to fare out real well and, and just came back and we, we had another family come back with us, move into a, the other house of ours. And so, the, the kids and us, we all worked together. It was like one big family and we all did the family work. We picked peaches and cut fruit and picked grapes and did all that together.

Howard Ono: Was it easy for, uh, your family to kind of come back and get the life started again?

Betty Yamagiwa: Oh, yeah. And, uh, we just, it just seemed like we just continued on from where we left off. We just started right in working and, and, um, the WRA, they had the War Relo-

Howard Ono: Relocation Authority.

Betty Yamagiwa: They came out and they, uh, interviewed my folks and all of us and, and they, they wanted to know how we were faring. And it, it turned out fairly well, comparative to some of the others that had come. But I thought we did real well.

Howard Ono: How was the, uh, how was your home and, and your property when you got back?

Betty Yamagiwa: Uh, well, when we came back, the field was full of Bermuda grass and we had to work. They made us, we had to get out there with, they made us use, um, we had to use, um, um, almost like a, what was it, um, almost like a fork and dig in.

Howard Ono: Little holes, little holes.

Betty Yamagiwa: Yeah, and dig in there and the roots and pull out all the Bermuda and we spent days out

there and, uh, we got rid of all that.

Howard Ono: So, was, was your father able to reestablish his farm and his business?

Betty Yamagiwa: Oh yeah, yeah, and he made us work.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: And so, we just, we did what we had to do and, and we cut fruit and, um, we, um, worked out on the ranch as much as we could. And, and as we were growing up, we, we just grew up with the idea that we would be a farmer's wife.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: Never thought of being, of working in the city or anything. Cause that's the way we were brainwashed, I guess.

Howard Ono: [Laughs]

Betty Yamagiwa: And, and we all, we all survived.

Howard Ono: Were there, was there any difficulty in your interactions with the other people, you know,

your, your, your, your neighbors-

Betty Yamagiwa: No.

Howard Ono: -and the other people in the community?

Betty Yamagiwa: No. We were-

Howard Ono: Were there, were there, was there anti-Japanese sentiment-

Betty Yamagiwa: We were-

Howard Ono: -when you got back?

Betty Yamagiwa: We were, we were lucky. Some of our friends had, uh, they got pot shots.

Howard Ono: Oh.

Betty Yamagiwa: People shot at them.

Howard Ono: Wow.

Betty Yamagiwa: And, but, uh, we were lucky. But, uh, for a long time after we came back, my sister and I, every time we heard a car go by, we'd jump in case somebody was shooting at us. [Both Laugh] But, um, they never did. Nobody ever did anything harmful to us.

Howard Ono: Were either before the war, before the internment camp or after, were you, uh, were people rude to you? Did they, did they call you names, say negative things about, uh-

Betty Yamagiwa: No.

Howard Ono: -you or the Japanese?

Betty Yamagiwa: No. Not to us. My dad was well respected in the community and so they, I guess they respected the rest of us too. And we were, um, well, you know, taken care of. I thought we were lucky.

Howard Ono: Did, have- did your father ever talk to you about kind of his overall feelings about everything or did, did he?

Betty Yamagiwa: No, he never did. He just, he just, uh, encouraged us to follow what we were, you know, follow the good rule and just do as we were told and study hard. That was one of the main things that they kept insisting was to study hard and, uh, do, do the right thing and.

Howard Ono: Did you know other people who had maybe a harder time readjusting to, to coming home?

Betty Yamagiwa: No, there was no one, not, and no one in particular.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: We, we all just kind of melted together and helped each other and it just seemed like everything went well.

Howard Ono: Have you maintained any contact with any of the other people in, in camp that you, uh, that you lived in, Jerome?

Betty Yamagiwa: At first, but as we, as time went on, you just kind of, they, they move out to other places and we moved to different places. But, uh, my sister and I do talk about somebody that we, we knew when and, and then lots of times you will meet somebody and they'll say, hey, we were in camp and then we say, oh, that was so-and-so and it just kind of.

Howard Ono: Do you, do you still, uh, when you meet other Japanese, the, you say, what camp were you in? [Laughs]

Betty Yamagiwa: Yes. That's, that's one of the first things you ask.

Howard Ono: Well, Jerome was a camp that wasn't there for very long. It was the, the last camp built and the first camp closed.

Betty Yamagiwa: Oh, is that-

Howard Ono: Yeah.

Betty Yamagiwa: Oh.

Howard Ono: So, it only lasted, uh, less than a couple of years.

Betty Yamagiwa: Well, my, um, my second son went back east and then when he was coming back, they were driving. Well, he went to Jerome and, um, he, he kept saying, don't you want to go back there, Mom, and see it? I said, no. There's nothing to see. He said, well, the smokestack was still there. And, uh, there's a big thing that says Jerome, you know, and all that.

Howard Ono: Little memorial.

Betty Yamagiwa: Memorial there. But, uh, he said, the rest of it is all, uh, tobacco growing. It's all fields. And so, there's nothing to see, really.

Howard Ono: That's true.

Betty Yamagiwa: So, uh, there's, um, we're going to go to, um, well, I've gone to Manzanar a couple of times to see that, but there isn't that much left of the camp, really. So, uh, anyone that goes there will not know what it was like. No matter how much they say, well, the barrack is, they've built, they've built the barrack there, but it's different.

Howard Ono: So, so what is your, what is your overall feeling about the whole, the whole event, the fact that Japanese were interned and, uh, you know, kind of singled out for, for-

Betty Yamagiwa: Well, you know, I, I often wondered how come the Italians and the Germans weren't, uh, singled out. And why, why was it just the Japanese? Because they were afraid, we were going to do something here in California. What could we do? There was nothing we could really do. They thought we were going to sabotage something. There was no evidence of any of that.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: So, I don't, I couldn't understand why they were so afraid of us.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: And I, um, still to this day blame Earl Warren. He could have said that we have never done anything bad. There's no, no record of any Japanese doing anything that would turn us against America. And he didn't. He didn't side with us at all. So, I just wonder what he was thinking. He took it with him to his grave anyway. So, we never will know.

Howard Ono: Are, do you know other people that have more bitter feelings about their, about their experience than maybe you and your family have?

Betty Yamagiwa: No, no one has ever, that, that I've spoken to have said anything again, you know, about any hard feelings or anything. But just like it's always shikata ga nai, you know. Just, it was just happened. It's, it's just a his- part of history.

Howard Ono: Yeah.

Betty Yamagiwa: Is what everyone always just says. It just, it happened but it should never happen again. But that was a lot of money the government spent. And what happened, what I want to know is what happened to all that equipment and all those dinnerware, the silver and the dinner plates and all that. Cause they, for every camp they had to have those plates and, and silverware and everything. Well, what happened to all that? And what happened to all of our radios and guns and, and everything? Cameras. There was one camera I really would like to have had. It was one of those pull out, you know, old fashioned ones.

Howard Ono: The bellows.

Betty Yamagiwa: Yeah, right. That would, the kids would have really liked that. But what happened to it?

Howard Ono: Now you have talked to other groups about the relocation before?

Betty Yamagiwa: Yes, I've gone to high schools. My son was principal of different schools and when the seniors were, the seniors were discussing history and they came to this, this relocation business and he asked me to go and speak to the class. So, I did go to Lemoore High School and to Firebaugh and speak to the kids. And then I've gone to that [Unintelligible] that Japanese school. Well, they, they had me talk to the kids there too.

Howard Ono: And they know very little about the [Unintelligible].

Betty Yamagiwa: Yes, they don't, they don't know what this is all about. And no matter how much you explain to them, it's, they can't picture it. I don't think they could really picture what it was like, no matter how much you tell them. And we had, you know, if you, you were lucky you had a stand like that with shelves, if you were lucky. Otherwise, it was just an open box.

Howard Ono: To store your, all your belongings.

Betty Yamagiwa: Yeah.

Howard Ono: Well, you didn't need very many shelves-

Betty Yamagiwa: No, didn't have eno-

Howard Ono: -because you had very little with you.

Betty Yamagiwa: Didn't have anything there, really.

Howard Ono: Yeah. Well, I think it, I think it's important for the next generation to, to know what happened. And to know that, you know, it.

Betty Yamagiwa: It did happen.

Howard Ono: It did happen. And it could happen again. You know, you don't know about that. But they should be made aware of.

Betty Yamagiwa: Yeah.

Howard Ono: Of, you know.

Betty Yamagiwa: But it's such a different world now.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: Things are so, so different. And, and the way, the thinking, the, the way that children think now and the way we had thought at the art, our, our times are just so different. They could

never imagine what we went through or what we were taught. And they wonder why we; we didn't rebel. Why didn't you stand up for your rights? Well, you know, when you were such a small group, you didn't want to raise so much, well, it was bad enough that they, they felt the way they did about the Japanese anyway. So why make it worse?

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm.

Betty Yamagiwa: Yeah. So, you just go along with what they said and say, okay, okay. And, and they couldn't, they can't understand that.

Howard Ono: Well, as you said, it's a different, a different world now.

Betty Yamagiwa: Oh, it's altogether different.

Howard Ono: Yeah.

Betty Yamagiwa: And then it'll be even worse. Later on, it'd be more different.

Howard Ono: But maybe that will prevent it from happening again though.

Betty Yamagiwa: Yeah.

Howard Ono: So maybe people are, are more willing to say, let's.

Betty Yamagiwa: We hope so.

Howard Ono: Mm-hmm. Okay. Well, thank you. Thank you very much for talking to me. I, I enjoy talking to you.

Betty Yamagiwa: Well, I hope I made sense and some of the things that I have.

Howard Ono: Well, uh, yes, well, well, again, I was very, I was very young when this occurred. So, I, I don't have memories like you do. And it's really important that, that your memories are, are preserved because people, people don't know-

Betty Yamagiwa: But you never-

Howard Ono: -what life is like.

Betty Yamagiwa: -you never were in this position.

Howard Ono: Well, no, I, I was zero years old when, when all that occurred.

Betty Yamagiwa: Yeah.

Howard Ono: So, uh, again, you have a much clearer idea of what it was really physically like to, uh, to be involved in the, in the relocation. So, again, thank you very much for talking to me.

Betty Yamagiwa: You're quite welcome.

Howard Ono: And we hope, hopefully we'll, we'll have your, uh, your words preserved so other people can find out what your ideas were and what you saw while you were at the camp. Okay. Ready?

Betty Yamagiwa: Okay. Thank you.