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Frank Inami

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Interviews conducted by
David Dunham and Candice Fukumoto
in 2013-2014

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Interview 1: November 9, 2013

Audio file 1

Dunham: Today is November 9, 2013. This is David Dunham and Candice Fukumoto-Dunham, from the Regional Oral History Office of UC Berkeley. We're here to interview Frank Inami, regarding his life experiences. But particularly as a UC Berkeley student and having his studies rudely interrupted. But we'll start at the beginning, and I'll turn things over to Candice.

Fukumoto: We'll begin with just your full name, date of birth, location, and family background.

01-00:00:34

Inami: Okay. My name is Frank Kaoru, K-A-O-R-U, Kaoru Inami. Kaoru, I use that as a middle name. In fact, I think, as I recall, until the war started, legally, Kaoru was the name given to me in school, for example. But Kaoru, even in Japanese, is a difficult name to pronounce. Not only that, it's a sissy name, because it's usually used for girls. The only reason Dad named me Kaoru is because Dad only had a fourth grade education. But in that little community of Madera, there was a college graduate. So he went to this college graduate, Mr. Mochizuki, and said, "I want to name the first name for my son," in the Kanji, that is, the basic Chinese characters. So Mr. Mochizuki wrote out three Kanji, and they can all be read Kaoru, K-A-O-R-U, which as I mentioned, is rather difficult. But when you write the characters, the name Kaoru, usually used for women, is symmetrical. So Dad thought, gee, that's a good name. So that's how I got my name Kaoru.

Then when I started school, first grade in Madera, Lincoln Grammar School, they gave me a name, Frank, because—two reasons. One is Kaoru is difficult to say. Plus our neighbor was from Italy, De Cesari, and they named me Frank because of Frank Sinatra and so forth. It's an Italian name. So my next sister, Lillian, and then Joe and Thomas. Dad would go to the neighbor and say, "Hey, what shall I name my daughter or son?" That's how I got my name Kaoru. Now, the characters when you write it, means good smell. Fragrance. Which is appropriate for a woman, but for a man, as I say, it's kind of sissified. The other character that he should've picked has something to do with a bear or animal that has four strong legs, see? So too bad he didn't pick that one, but I got stuck with that Kaoru name.

Dunham: It's turned out okay.

01-00:03:55

Inami: Yeah. So I was born April 25, 1921, in Madera, which is just north of Fresno. Madera is about twenty miles north of Fresno. Madera was, as I recall, about 2,000 population at that time. Of course, like most cities, they're up to about 30,000 today; but that's, remember, 1921. So we had a truck garden, Now, people say, what's a garden? You grow vegetables for making a living. At that

time, as you may know, Japanese, Chinese and Koreans could not become US citizens. You could never become naturalized. Then to make matters worse, they wanted to kick us out, essentially. They had an anti-alien land law, which means if you were an alien, you could not own land, see? So my parents were restricted in what they could do. So they bought this ten acres in Madera to raise vegetables. But they couldn't own it, so they put it in my name. See, here I am ten years old, running a ten-acre vegetable farm, see? Well, to even make things worse, there's a part of the law that's called escheat, E-S-C-H-E-A-T. Escheat law. Now, these days, they use that for drug dealers. That part of the law says you can confiscate anything that that person has done which is against the law. So the drug dealers, they take away their home, they take away their money. Of course, they have a lot of money, cash, stashed away. So they did the same thing to us. Because, they said, we were doing something illegal, they would take away our land, see? After we have cultivated the land and it was highly productive, they would take it away from us. But fortunately, the lawyer, Mr. Barcroft, in town, is a very nice guy. He had made a guardian, who looked after me. Now, this guardian was Mr. Nishimoto, and he was born and raised in Hawaii. Then he married, and just happened to move to Madera. So he was my guardian, so they couldn't touch us, see? So we were exempt. But for example, there's a couple other families in Madera, through the escheat process, they lost all their property.

Dunham: So this is in the thirties that that would happen, the escheat law?

01-00:07:21

Inami: Right. Well, not only 1930s, but it went all the way up to just before the war. With the anti-Japanese feeling during the war, even though we were incarcerated elsewhere, the land was still, for example, in my name. So our neighbor, Mr. Naito, was a prime example. He had put his daughter, who was a few years younger than I am, see? So they were able to successfully—by they, I mean the government of the State of California—successfully able to take away his land. So when they came back from the evacuation, somebody else had bought the land. I think they tried to get it back, but that part of the law apparently has pretty definite—apparently, it's only used when illegal things are done.

So that's why I was running ten acres of vegetables. Dad and Mother, as soon as we were able, we would go out and pick the tomatoes and the cucumbers and whatever, and Dad would either—well, my mother would stay home and there was kind of fruit stand there. People in Madera would come and buy the vegetables from us. I'm the oldest, and there's seven of us. The youngest is Lucille. She's seventeen years younger than I am. So I started out at the beginning, and she's seventeen years younger than I am. So that's Lucille, and there's seven of us altogether. So we all went to Lincoln Grammar School, which was walking distance. Then a little farther, to Madera High, for high school.

Dunham: What do you remember about Lincoln Elementary?

01-00:09:55

Inami:

Lincoln Grammar School, the first four years, fourth grade, everything went along fine. I didn't know the difference. For example, I was the shortest kid in the class. So for example, when we played baseball, instead of pitching to me, they would roll it to me and I'd whack it, see? At that time, I didn't realize it was a kind of reverse—well, maybe not reverse, but—discrimination, because I was so short. At that time, fourth grade, Dad took us to Japan—of course, not all seven of us, but only four of us, I think—because he wanted to see his mother. His mother was not too well, so he took us all to Japan. We stayed about six months, and then came back to the farm. So I went back to school at Lincoln Grammar School.

Now, seventh and eighth grades I remember distinctly, because in the seventh and eighth grades, we were able to pick the class president for the class. For some reason, because of my size and because I was getting good grades, I was picked as the president. So first two semesters in seventh grade, I was able to be president of the class. Then the first part of the eighth grade, I was president of the eighth grade, first half. Now, second half, there was a campaign. One of the teachers said we should have a political campaign. So I got defeated by a good friend of mine, Bob Stevenson. Remember, I'm the only Japanese American in the class. I'm the only minority, except for a Mexican, Robert Flores. He was Mexican descent. So he'd say, "I'll call you Pancho, which means Frank," he says. He says, "You call me Roberto." I didn't realize till years later that Pancho is a kind of a diminutive name given to little kids. You call them Pancho. But he wanted to be called Roberto, which is a formal name for Robert, Robert Flores. But then I realized that for me, he should've been Francisco, okay? Francisco instead of Pancho. But I'm sure he meant well.

01-00:13:07

Anyway, eighth grade came. The American Legion in town had a chapter, and they gave a award to the most outstanding student in the class. Now, some people thought I would get it. But I knew by then there was a certain amount of discrimination. Even though we were equal, or even better, scholastically, that wasn't all of it. So the night of the graduation—June 6, I think it was, 1935—we were all in the same class. Everybody was dressed up and making a lot of noise, because we were graduating. My homeroom teacher, Miss Ebling, called me out of the room. I heard in the background, "Oh, he's going to get the award, that's why. He's being primed for the award." Well, I sort of knew there's something different here. So she took me to the other room and gave me a fountain pen. She said, "The faculty got together, and we're giving you this award as the most outstanding student." I knew right away I'm not getting the award, see? So I was braced for it. There's nothing I can do. I wasn't angry, because the next in line was my buddy, Bob Stevenson, and he certainly deserved it anyway. By the way, Miss Ebling told me, "Please don't

say anything to anybody about this award.” Because see, it’s a small community, and the teachers are afraid of losing their jobs, so they didn’t want the word out that they gave me an award to circumvent the American Legion. For example, the American Legion had an interest in our swimming pool. Apparently, they had helped build the swimming pool. We Japanese, Mexicans were not allowed to go swimming, see? So these things, we knew.

For example, this other family in Madera, there was a Keith, and Keith joined the Boy Scouts. This is when we were, what, ten, twelve years old? He kept saying, “Hey, Frank, join the Scouts. We have a lot of fun.” But he tried to get the merit badge for swimming. Remember, Madera gets hot. So one of the requirements for the Boy Scouts is to learn how to swim. But they wouldn’t let him in the swimming pool, see?

Dunham: He was of Japanese descent?

01-00:16:19

Inami: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Dunham: But the Boy Scouts let him, but he couldn’t do—

01-00:16:24

Inami: Yeah, Boy Scouts let him in, but—the scoutmaster tried everything to try to get the American Legion to make a—. So I told Dad, “Hey, I want to join the Boy Scouts.” Dad says, “If they’re so biased that they won’t let you in the swimming pool, you can stay home.” So I stayed home. Well, I think quietly he figured I could work at home. Because on the farm, little kids can start working. So I think he—and I tried to join the Lone Scout. There’s a thing called the Lone [Scout]. If you’re away from the center of population, you could become a Lone Scout. So I applied for that. I read up on it. I was what, twelve years old? I applied for that and they wrote back and said, “You have a Scout [troop?] with a scoutmaster in Madera, so you can’t be a Lone Scout.” So I never did join the Scouts.

01-00:17:35

Now, getting back to graduation night, I congratulated Bob Stevenson for getting the award, and he tried to shove it to me. He says, “Hey, Frank, you deserve this. Here, take it.” Of course, I refused it to take it. So those are the type of quiet discrimination that—not only from my parents, but when we got down to the citizens like me, born and raised here. I found out that this isn’t endemic to just Madera.

Well, let me go to high school now. I graduated in 1935, and then high school, four years. Now there I tried to concentrate more on my studies, because I wanted to go to University of California. There was another Japanese American, Kaz Goto, G-O-T-O, who had gone to Cal. He was about four years ahead of me. He was at UC Berkeley. So I wanted to get my grades up so I could go. So I spent the four years mostly concentrating on my studies.

Again, in that class, there were maybe three other Japanese Americans, so the rest of my friends were all non-Japanese. So they included me because my grades were way up there. I went on oratorical contests; I went on debating teams. From Madera, the teacher would drive us to San Francisco. If you know San Francisco, Lowell High is one of the top high schools, and we have to debate against them, oratorical contests against them. We never got anywhere, but it was very good experience.

Dunham: Do you remember some of the topics, any of the topics you debated?

01-00:20:05

Inami: Oh, the topics were like, we should prepare for war. At that time—remember, it was 1939. In fact, getting back to 1931, 1931, when Dad took us to Japan, they were already talking about war with the US. In fact, I remember—see, I'm ten years old, but very impressive. I picked up the language with no problem. So one of the things they were talking about was war with the US. So one day, there was a group of older people talking, so I asked my uncle. Yeah, they were talking about possible war with the US. My uncle was sitting next to me, kind of behind the group. I said, "Uncle, if Japan and US fights a war, who's going to win?" He quietly looked around the room, and he says, "Of course, Japan's going to win." But see, that's even 1931. Now, that's when Japan started to invade China and Manchuria and so forth. So a lot of the topics had to do with mobilization, the draft, should we draft or not, this kind of topics.

Dunham: Did you choose which side to debate on, or were you randomly assigned and had to debate both sides?

01-00:21:51

Inami: Well, we just took it by—yeah, either way. Because the idea of debating is to see both sides of the picture.

Dunham: Right. So you could debate both.

01-00:22:00

Inami: Right. But there was a topic that I really liked. Should students be given homework? Okay.

Dunham: Still being debated.

01-00:22:12

Inami: Right. We were debating that. They gave me the positive side; in other words, students should not be given homework. I'd get up in front of 400 people. Of course, my poor opponent; everybody was against his topic, because he was all for. By the time they reversed this thing, I think we changed topics.

Let's see now. High school. As I mentioned, I concentrated on my studies. See, I found out that I could get straight A's, except for PE, physical

education, because I'm kind of clumsy and not well-coordinated. I'd go out to track and not get anyplace. So my grades were straight A's, except for phys ed, I'd have a B or C. Now, my sister, as I mentioned, seventeen years later, she comes along. By the time she got to high school, she got straight A's plus phys ed. Of course, women, I don't think they're—see, to get an A, you had to get on the football team, you had to get on the track team. But for the women, I don't think they're that strict.

Dunham: Well, speaking of your siblings, did Madera change over the years? Their school experience, did it become any more diverse and any more tolerant? Or was it getting worse?

01-00:24:04

Inami: Yeah, it was gradually getting a little more tolerant. Because as I recall, we were able to go—swimming was one of the classes, high school classes. So we could go swimming at the American Legion. They call it the American Legion swimming pool. So things got quite more tolerant.

Dunham: Do you know what maybe led to that change of being allowed? Was there any legal fight?

01-00:24:37

Inami: No, I don't think there was any legal fight. Well, they think part of it was because my predecessors, like this Kaz Goto, was able to go to Cal. He was four years ahead of me. Now, the rumors are, and I never—well, it's true to a certain extent. They had this valedictorian, salutatorian. All the Japanese Americans, every year, would be the valedictorian or the salutatorian. So by the time I got there, they cut that out, so there was no salutatorian or valedictorian. Now, the rumors are they didn't want all the Japanese garnering the top spots. But the thing I got was the California Scholarship Federation, which was separate. It was administered through the high schools, but they took your high school grades. So I was able to get the—it was only \$50, but that's a lot of money, those days, okay? To go to Cal, it cost \$27.50 a semester. Twenty-seven dollars and fifty cents. So fifty dollars is a lot of money. So I got that award. Years later, I found out that my high school principal was against my getting that award. I'll elaborate on that a little later. But things kind of come out, so there's documentary proof.

Dunham: Well, we'll definitely be interested in that. Could you back up and tell us a little bit about your family background, your parents, grandparents, if you knew them?

01-00:26:46

Inami: Oh, the grandparents were all in Japan. Uncles, aunts. Dad was the oldest of eight kids, I think, something like that, but they were all in Japan. So we used to envy the other kids. Well, most of the Japanese Americans or the Japanese, they were in the same situation I was; the grandparents were in Japan. Now, occasionally you'd find a family with grandparents. Among the non-Japanese,

they were always talking about their grandpa, grandma coming for Christmas and all kinds of things, but we missed that part. The only really good part, I remember quite distinctly, was when Dad took us to Japan. My grandma was the only one left. Oh, my grandfather on my mother's side was still living, but he was very quiet, didn't say much.

Dunham: He was in the US?

01-00:27:57

Inami: No, no, he wasn't. No, in Japan. They were all in Japan. My grandma in Japan used to tell me they used to have a game you'd play, like cops and robbers. She said, "When you play, you play the Chinese, because they were our enemy. And the Japanese, and you're Japanese army." She says, "Don't be just a private. Be the general and run the show." That's what she tried to drum into me. Be a leader; don't try to be just a follower.

Dunham: How did your mother and father meet?

01-00:28:42

Inami: Oh, they're cousins. First cousins. See, in Japan at that time—and it still is—see, marriages are arranged. It's deteriorating quite a bit. By deteriorating, I mean there's a thing called love marriage, and there's—what's a good term—marriages made by others.

Dunham: Arranged?

01-00:29:17

Inami: Arranged marriages, right. The arranged marriages. So apparently, they're eleven years apart, but two cousins, they had made an arrangement. Some of them even before they're born but usually when they're five, six years old. Like my mother says, she was told, "Your husband's going to be him. He's going to be your husband." So there's no love connection, is what she used to tell me. It's either first cousins or else they're arranged. In other words, you go to a marriage broker and you say, "I have a son here that needs a wife." He makes all the arrangements. They meet. They meet once for lunch, maybe, or dinner, and then you've got to make up your mind. Do you want to marry her or not?

Dunham: Did they develop a love connection over time, would you say? They started as from an arranged marriage, but as—?

01-00:30:34

Inami: Oh, yeah. Yeah, well, that's the theory. That's the theory behind there, that love will come later, see? Divorce is unthinkable, see? So among my siblings, a couple of them were sort of arranged, and some of them were love marriages, you might say.

Fukumoto: Did your parents move to California together, then?

01-00:31:09

Inami:

Yeah. In fact, see, Dad was here first, and he made enough money. He's quite frugal. So he went to Japan, I think, in 1920, right after World War I. He had saved enough money. Then he went to Japan, back to Japan. Had made enough money, built a house for his mother and married my mother, who was about twenty-three at the time, I think, and Dad was eleven years older. Then they came back. Well, he came back first, so he could settle down here, and then he had her come right away.

Fukumoto:

How did he get to Madera? How did they choose Madera?

01-00:32:08

Inami:

Oh, Dad was farming all over the place. He started out in Imperial Valley, went in Bakersfield, all the way up and down the—. And Fresno, Kingsburg, Hanford, all these little places. He would say that all he'd do is just get his blanket and go from farm to farm, working, with just a bicycle and a blanket over his shoulder. It was a little more than that, but that's what he would tell us. So as I mentioned, seventeen years later—or much later; yeah, seventeen years later—my youngest sister graduated high school, and she graduates at the top of the class.

Dunham:

Did you and all of your siblings work on the farm?

01-00:33:12

Inami:

Oh, yeah, everybody. Everybody worked.

Dunham:

You worked before or after school, or both?

01-00:33:17

Inami:

Oh, yeah, after school. After school we would come home, change our clothes, and go out and pick strawberries or tomatoes. It's child labor. Today, they would be known as child labor; but that's the only way you could make a living.

Dunham:

Did you work all day in those hot summers?

01-00:33:45

Inami:

Oh, yeah. Summers, we only got one or two days for vacation. Dad would take us up to Bass Lake or up at the hills. But that's about all that we got. But see, that's why I wanted to join the Boy Scouts, because at least I wouldn't have to work on the farm, see? But it never worked out quite that way. See, they drummed into us the Japanese system of succession. The oldest son has to look after his parents, look after the siblings. That's his job, his destiny in life. So they drummed that into me, that even if you graduate college and have a job, your job is to come back to the family and run whatever the—. In this case, by the time I started college in 1939, he [Dad] said, "Farming is too hard, too hard work." So he started a little grocery store in Madera, just across the freeway. It's not a freeway; it was 99, just a two-lane road. But he started that because, he says, "Number one, you can eat on wholesale." See, with

seven—well, nine altogether—to feed, you can eat wholesale. You can save some money that way. And the kids can work in the store. Even my little sister, six years old, she would play in the store. Play with herself and act as a kind of a—because even those days, just pickpockets, there're people that'll—but just the fact that she's roaming around the store would discourage any pickpockets or—

Dunham: She was security.

01-00:36:17

Inami: Security, right. Everybody again. Plus the fact, he says, “You're prevented from the rain and bad weather.” Even in bad weather, you've got to work on the farm. You work in the shed. But in the grocery store, you've got a nice warm place to work.

Fukumoto: Were you ever resentful, having all that pressure? Or did you just accept it?

01-00:36:47

Inami: Oh, yeah. I wasn't that resentful, because I knew, or I had determined, that I wasn't going to go by the rules. A couple of events happened. Number one was the evacuation. When they moved us out, that kind of broke up the family. Although everybody stayed together, except me. I went to Chicago, to finish my education. See, I started in Berkeley in 1939. Two and a half years later, I have to leave, go back to Madera; and within a month Madera gets evacuated. So we went to the Fresno Assembly Center and eventually to Arkansas. There're two camps in Arkansas, Rohwer and Jerome. That's where we ended up. So this was a chance for me to get away from the family rule that I'm supposed to take care of the—and I had all this stuff in mind already, see?

Dunham: You hadn't voiced your plans before?

01-00:38:18

Inami: No, I didn't, because for example, I went to Illinois—well, let me backtrack. It's easier to backtrack here. Because when I started at UC Berkeley in 1939, I stayed at the Japanese Students Club, because the fraternities and the sororities would not allow us in. So we couldn't stay [in the] fraternities. Now, there was a student co-op, but it was difficult to get in at that time, because it was very popular. But there was a Japanese Students Club, a special dormitory just for us. In fact, by the way, we used to call ourselves Jappa Sappa Chi. Remember? JSC. Japanese Students Club. We wanted to make it sound like one of the fraternities. However, half the guys objected to that Jappa Sappa Chi, so it never—see, the City of Berkeley wanted to document that and put up a plaque. The student club is still there; it's Euclid Hall. So they wanted to put up a plaque, but there was no documentation, so I think they dropped it. Anyway. So the Japanese Students Club, 1777 Euclid, just two blocks from the campus. The ideal place. There were about twenty-five of us, I guess, Japanese Americans. Like the fraternities, it was by invitation only.

Fortunately, as I mentioned, this fellow from Madera had stayed there, so he vouched for me and I was able to get in. See, you have to have somebody vouch for you, unless there's an opening. See, if there isn't anybody, they'll let somebody in to keep it.

Dunham: Was there any type of initiation process or ritual?

01-00:40:37

Inami: Oh, yeah, there was all kinds of initiation.

Dunham: Are you allowed to speak of that?

01-00:40:43

Inami: Well, the initiation was just—like for example, I started to mention, there's a women's club, for social purposes. Obviously, we can't date white women; we can't date others, other than Japanese. Well, the Chinese weren't that friendly to us, the Japanese. So down the street, block and a half away, was the Japanese Women's Student Club, see? So you wanted a date or something, they had the same situation. I think there were only about ten or twelve girls there. They tried to pick the better-looking girls there; at least we thought they did.

Dunham: Well, what was the dating scene like?

01-00:41:42

Inami: Well, we had dances together and all kinds of [things]. Not only that, we included the rest of—see, there were about 500 Japanese Americans on campus, at that time. That's including all four grades, plus graduate students. So maybe every month, there was something going on. In fact, I just—what'd I do with that? For example, just the class alone. See, class of '43 election dinner. We'd meet once every semester and we would meet for dinner just before finals. Then on the back—oh, you've got it.

Dunham: I just wanted to hold it for a second.

01-00:42:44

Inami: Oh, and then flip. Then people would sign the—

Dunham: So if there were as many as 500 Japanese Americans at the University, and a very small percentage of you were in the club, in this dormitory, where else did the Japanese live, since there were—?

01-00:43:05

Inami: Oh, there were all kinds of boarding houses. A lot of the students—I'd say maybe a hundred, at least—commuted from San Francisco, commuted from Berkeley, from Oakland, see? They contributed to this group. You had a very, you might say, diverse, within the—in other words, anywhere from freshmen up to seniors, grad students. So you had the whole gamut. For example, there's a typical example of Terry Takahashi. He was from San Francisco.

Now, he had a girlfriend. Well, he picked the prettiest girl at the women's club, Taka Chono, from Corcoran. Corcoran is a little town south of Hanford. North of Hanford is Fresno. She's very attractive, and they were running around together. We men in the student club were told, "She's off limits for you guys," okay? It's a typical example. I think she was a sophomore and he was a senior. So there were quite a few. In fact, I've often wanted to make a book or a study of the campus romances. See, there were quite a few. Now, that couple never made it through. There were all kinds of differences, I guess. But there were other couples who married each other, in the group, and successfully.

Dunham: Now, going back, had you dated in high school?

01-00:45:08

Inami: No, because dating whites are out of the picture. Plus the other Japanese never lived in town, close by. See, they lived out in the country, about ten miles away.

Fukumoto: What would happen to you if you tried to date someone out of your—?

01-00:45:36

Inami: See, for example, there's a gal named—well, anyway, I noticed quite a difference. See, I was quite popular, as I mentioned. I was quite popular in seventh and eighth grades. All of a sudden when I went to high school, some of them wouldn't even say hello to me, see? I kept thinking, now, what did I do to make them antagonistic toward me? I think that part of the reason is they didn't want me trying to date them. See, by the time you get to high school—even grammar school, there's a little bit—there was dating going on. Especially good-looking freshmen, the seniors are already looking the crop over. Now, that's just a personal feeling I got. Because years later, I looked up some of these gals. After. Like Catherine Curtis, for example. She used to sit behind me, and we used to chat and so forth. When I got to high school, she was quite cold. So years later she married a guy named George Tolladay. He was lost over in Burma, and then she married another guy, D'Amicis, I guess. They were Catholic, so they were living apart. But anyway, he died. So I started to look her up. She was in Aptos. She was living by herself. We'd go out to lunch and so forth. In fact, we used to have a lot of talks about the good old days.

Dunham: Did you ask her about her coldness in high school?

01-00:47:53

Inami: No, I never have. I didn't want to embarrass her. That's kind of off limits. But see, in the meantime, I had—well, let me bring that up just a little later, because I'm getting to the college level.

Dunham: Let me just ask again about the high school and back in Madera. Was it something you ever discussed with your parents or your siblings, the question of sort of dating and lack of opportunity then?

01-00:48:30

Inami: No. There were two things. My mother always told me that interracial marriages will not work; it'll cause a lot of problems. Racial differences. Now, Dad was a little more specific. He would say, "You marry a white girl and everything will be fine, until you lose your money. Soon as you lose money, off she goes. Or if you get sick, she'll never take care of you," see? He drummed that into us. Well, into all three of us boys. He would pick an opportunity and say that over and over again, see? I think part of the reason was, after the war things changed quite a bit. So he was afraid that one of us could marry outside the race. Chinese, Japanese, okay. But outside the race, my parents kind of, when I was even in high school—yeah, yeah. So getting back to college, fortunately, there was a fellow I met in college, at UC Berkeley, Ben {Nagata?}. He was Japanese American, from LA. Soon as the rumors of evacuation showed up, his whole family went back to Chicago. It turns out that they had lived in Chicago before, and they had moved to LA within the last ten years, maybe. So as soon as the rumor of evacuation began, they moved. He was a mechanical engineering major, I was an electrical engineering major, so we had a lot of courses together. So as soon as he moved to Chicago, he went to Illinois Tech, and he was already on his way.

Whereas here I lost almost a year, because here we are in Arkansas. I'm trying to get out, educational leave, so I can get to Chicago. Well, they had two things we had to do. One was there was a student relocation committee. It still exists today. Student relocation committee, by Robert Gordon Sproul, who was head of UC at that time. So he realized what our plight was, so he arranged so that we could continue in some other school, away from California, and Oregon and Washington state. So we had to get a clearance from the student relocation committee. Number two, we had to get a clearance from the high school principal. Okay?

Now, that's where my high school principal comes in. This group, the student relocation committee, had written to my high school principal for a reference, to see if I'm not only a good student, but a good risk to go out from Cal. Okay? He wrote a very unflattering letter, saying, "I don't know about those guys. I don't know what you guys are trying to do." He's talking about the relocation committee. "But you're going to regret it one of these days." How did I find out? There was a gal named Ann Hayashi. Ann Hayashi, she's half and half. Her mother is German, her father is Japanese. Her father was at UC Berkeley with us, and he evacuated, and he went to med school at Temple University, in Philadelphia. So he had married this German woman, and they had five children, I think. One of them is Ann Hayashi. She wrote a dissertation for her PhD, talking about two subjects. One is the history of the Hayashi family, and the other is this student relocation, how we had to—. She

went through all the files, and used the letter that I'm a subject of, to the principal of Madera High, and she put that in her dissertation. I was able to get a copy of that dissertation and I read the letter. Except it said, "Mr. Williams, principal, Madera High." I thought, "Gee, we never had a Williams there. Something's strange here." So I wrote to Ann Hayashi. She was in Maui. I think she teaches school. She's teaching school there in Maui. She's half and half, so I think she married another white person. So I wrote to her and I said, "Our principal was L.C. Thompson. I remember him distinctly. But your letter says Madera High, but Mr. Williams." "Oh," she says, "on advice of attorney, we changed the names." See, their attorney, because these dissertations get broadcast quite widely.

Dunham: Do you know how she got a copy of the letter?

01-00:55:35

Inami: Oh, yeah, the student relocation had copies. I'm trying to get the original record. Ann says, go see so-and-so in Oakland, but I could never find that. I told Ann, "Next time you come to the States, I'd like to meet you." But she never did. She never did follow through.

Dunham: Had you had idea in high school of L.C. Thompson's, the principal's, hostility?

01-00:56:04

Inami: I should've. Yeah, I think I should've, because I notice that he was never supportive of me, like my homeroom teachers. See, my homeroom teachers were always, like Miss—I've forgotten her name. Anyway, she says, "Frank, you've got to go to college." And she'd do everything she can. She says, "The ideal place for you to go is Caltech, California Institution of Technology. That's the top engineering school." Better than Cal, see? But she says, "Unfortunately, it's a private school, so you're going to need more money. But if you decide to go to Cal, be sure to let me know. I'll write all the necessary—." Because going to Cal, those days, all you had to do was pass an exam. They'd tell you how to write the essay. The whole thing centered on how well you wrote that. The thing was, write short, concise sentences. Don't ramble. So I did just like they said and I had no trouble getting in.

Dunham: Do you remember the topic of your essay?

01-00:57:34

Inami: I don't even remember what the topic was.

Fukumoto: Did you have other teachers who supported you?

01-00:57:39

Inami: Right. For example—I don't remember her name anyway. We were in class and that teacher, for some reason, had gone to Southern California—a weekend trip or something—and got delayed. So there was Elsie—I've

forgotten. Anyway, there was a gal in our high school class, and no teacher. So she came up to me, Elsie Watt came up to me and said, “Frank, why don’t you take over the class?” Because she was with me in grammar school; she knew I could handle the class, see? So I said, “How do you know our teacher isn’t coming?” She said, “Well, just in case. As soon as she comes, she can take over.” So there was a guy named Paul Wilson. He was always against me. For example, even in the fourth grade, he said something like—what’d he do; oh—we were playing king and queen or something like that, and I was the king. Of course, it has to be a white girl that was queen. This Paul Wilson objected. Remember, this is fifth grade. He says, “Frank can’t marry a white; whites can’t marry Japanese.” See? Things like that. In this high school class, he said the same thing. “Oh,” he says, “I don’t want Frank.” He almost said, “I don’t want a minority,” or something like that, some crack. You should see. The whole class, especially the girls in the class, really jumped on him. I thought, “Gee, I guess I’m still popular, only thanks to the women.”

So I ran the class. The teacher, next week or the next session, came and she thanked me for running the class. And there were others. There’s a Patsy Barnes. Her father was a Cal graduate. So on a cold day, he drove to our farm, which is right on the edge of town, and wanted to make sure I had applied. He said, “If you need to apply or if you need references I’m a Cal grad,” he says. So there were people that were supportive of me.

Getting back to Chicago—

Dunham: Hang on. I need to change the tape.

01-01:00:41

Inami: Change the tape, sure.

Audio file 2

Dunham: This is tape two, on November 9, 2013, with Frank Inami. This is David Dunham and Candice Fukumoto-Dunham for the Regional Oral History Office, and we’ll just resume. I wanted to ask, backing up, another question about Madera growing up, that I’d read in another interview, where you talked about religion and some religious conflict. I was curious if you could talk about your religious background, and maybe speak to what that conflict may have been.

02-00:00:33

Inami: Okay. Let’s see. They say only 2 percent of the Japanese in Japan are Christians, and the rest are basically Buddhist. So both my parents are Buddhist, so I was raised as a Buddhist. Let’s see, there was a small community building in Madera, out in the country, where most of the Japanese, maybe ten, fifteen families, they used to have a Buddhist service there, maybe once every few months, something like that. But the funerals, weddings were in Fresno, twenty miles away. So I remember—I was only

four years old, I think—but I still remember. I'm the oldest; next is my sister. And there was another sister who was born when I was either four or five, and she died all of a sudden when she was a few months old of suffocation. She suffocated because in those days the parents all went out and worked in the fields. So I still remember the doctor coming and looking at [the baby] and shaking his head, saying, "She's gone." I still remember the funeral, the funeral being held in Fresno. A Buddhist funeral, with all the trimmings, you might say, of the funeral, and Dad trying to explain to me what the various things are for.

So I was raised as a Buddhist. Whenever they'd have these periodic Buddhist sessions in Madera, I would drive out there and take some of my siblings along. So basically, I was raised as a Buddhist. When I went to UC Berkeley, I became—. Well, number one, if you live in California, if you live in the state, it's basically a Christian state. If you're a Buddhist, especially at UC Berkeley—there was a Buddhist church in Berkeley, but the Christian churches seemed to dominate. At least the Japanese Americans from the Christian group would come and take us to the Christian services, for example. For Easter, especially. My two roommates I had were from LA area. One was Soichi Fukui, of the Fukui Mortuary in L.A. So they were strong Christians, and my friend Carl Oike, from Boyle Heights, which is basically close to downtown LA. So I would tag along with them, because it was off a little ways, and the Berkeley people would come with their cars—their dad's car or mother's car—and take us to [church]. Especially on Easter. They'd give us an Easter bunny, chocolate Easter bunny. We'd refuse it, but they'd force us to take it. That's the extent of our Christian influence.

Dunham:

So there wasn't a conflict back in Madera.

02-00:05:03

Inami:

No, not as far as—but this Paul Watanabe you mentioned, from U of Mass. See, I just got through mentioning the student relocation council, how that letter had counted against me. Okay. While we were in camp, in Jerome Relocation Center, there was another guy named Ben Jinkawa. He's from Fresno. He came to me one day and he said, "Frank, what'd you put down for your religion?" I said, "I put down Buddhist." I said, "What'd you put down?" "I put down Buddhist. Did you notice all the Christians are getting clearances to go out, and you and I, we put down Buddhist, and we still haven't got our clearance?" I thought, "Oh, okay." I mentioned this to Paul Watanabe, and he referred me to a book. A book that mentions the biases. In it, if you put down Buddhist, it counted against you. If you got a negative report from the high school, it counted against you. See, that's why my friend in Chicago said I could've gotten out in October, November. I didn't get out till March. Ben kept telling me, "Hey, the semester starts in January. Hurry up and get out. Sneak out some way, if you can." [laughs]

Dunham: Well, you mentioned President Sproul and folks at UC Berkeley. Were there any students who were able to transfer before relocation, before having to go to camp, that you know of?

02-00:07:06

Inami: Talk to Ted Ono. I think he was somehow able to transfer. Yeah, because he went before his parents were evacuated from Fresno. He ended up at Wash U, Washington University. That's where George Matsumoto ended up. They must've had some prior—let's see, they're both—well, I'm not sure about George, but Ted definitely is Christian.

Dunham: And then also, speaking of religion, were the Quakers, the American Friends Service Committee, were they involved at all?

02-00:07:51

Inami: Oh, definitely, very strongly. Yeah, very strongly. They had canvased all the schools, will they take you or not. For example, University of Chicago has a good engineering program, is widely accepted as some of the better schools. They wouldn't take us because [Enrico] Fermi was working on the [Chicago] Pile. See, Fermi was one of the nuclear scientists. He proved that the nuclear bomb would work, see? They were working right underneath the athletic stands. That's why they wouldn't take us. There were other places.

Dunham: So how were you getting that information? Were you meeting with anyone from that group, or how did you get the information about which universities to apply to?

02-00:08:51

Inami: Oh, yeah, that was by phone sometimes, but mostly by letter. There was Trudy King, who was in charge of this, and she would always send us letters. But the interesting thing is, I got accepted to Swarthmore, Swarthmore College in Philadelphia, I think. I got accepted to that college, but their engineering program, they just have general engineering, they didn't have electrical engineering; whereas Illinois Tech had a definite electrical engineering program, see? So I kept turning them down. I got a strong letter from the President of that Swarthmore. It's a Quaker-run school. So I found out later, somebody told me, not Paul Watanabe but some of his friends told me, "Did you know that the President of Swarthmore, at that time, was on that committee that determined who went to which schools? They wanted you to go to Swarthmore because of the war, because it depleted a lot of the men from the schools. We had money. At Cal, it's, what, \$27.50; at Illinois Tech, it was \$300 a semester, see?"

Dunham: So your family had to come up with that money.

02-00:10:47

Inami: Oh, yeah. Fortunately, Dad was quite frugal. He said, "Don't worry. We can come up with the money."

Dunham: Was Swarthmore comparable, about \$300 a semester? Or do you know?

02-00:11:02

Inami: Well, I think the school said, “We’re willing to give you a scholarship to pay for at least the first year,” or something like that. But I kept turning Swarthmore down. The schools, as I mentioned, needed the students. Especially male students, because not all the males, but a lot of the males were off in the war. Somehow, when I went to Illinois Tech—see, I was finally able to get there in March. Let’s see, I’m trying to figure out—.

Dunham: I wanted to back up a little bit, if you don’t mind. Just chronologically, I wanted to go back. Talk about Berkeley a little more. When you first came to Berkeley from Madera, what was that like? I know you talked a little about the church, but what else about the campus and/or the city, coming from small-town Madera?

02-00:11:59

Inami: Oh, yes, it was a small-town high school. The competition was rough. We really had to catch up. For example, Lowell, Lowell High. I was taking calculus, differential calculus. Anyway, these guys from Lowell, they’re getting good grades, and they were not even studying. And their homework; they get their homework done in no time. I said, “Hey, you guys, how come you guys don’t do any studying?” “Oh, we had the same book, the same thing at Lowell.” At Madera High, heck, they never heard of calculus. That’s the difference. Now, when we got into sophomore and junior classes, the field was more level.

Dunham: You’d caught up?

02-00:13:01

Inami: But still, those guys are pretty sharp, see? So that’s the difference we noticed. The other difference was, of course, the sheer numbers. How much? Eight thousand people, 8,000 students at that time, I think, something like that; Madera High, with about four or five hundred. It was quite a difference. And the fact that you’re not working at home. Although a lot of the Japanese American students, at least—and I’m sure the other students, too—they had to rush home after class to help their parents. Chiz. I guess you’ve talked to Chizu Iiyama?

Dunham: Yes.

02-00:13:55

Inami: They had Chiz Kitano’s store there. And there was a hotel, Kitano Hotel.

Dunham: Did you have to work while you were at Berkeley?

02-00:14:09

Inami:

We had to set the tables, we had to help with the cooking. We had one cook there. So we took turns. Then we had to do the yard work. That's part of our—. So as I recall, it was like a dollar day we got, \$30 a month.

Dunham:

So where did that funding come from?

02-00:14:42

Inami:

Oh, the funding came from our \$30 a day that we paid. And all of a sudden they said, "Gee, there's no endowment. There's no money to pay for the future." So all of a sudden there was a group to save some money. Of course, evacuation came along and took care of that.

Dunham:

What was the Japanese Student Club like inside? What was your—?

02-00:15:22

Inami:

Well, it was the first time I roomed with so many Japanese Americans. Especially in the frosh—we had what they call a frosh porch. There were five of us, six of us. We're all in one big room, so we got to know each other quite well, during the freshman year. After the freshman year, we graduated to two-man rooms. Let's see. Willie Nakatani was from a farm, so we compared notes. Now, Soichi Fukui, of Fukui Mortuary, Carl Oike, Willie Fujioka, all from the city folks, you might say.

Fukumoto:

So were you excited to have friends who were of a similar background?

02-00:16:24

Inami:

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Some became life-long friends, especially Soichi Fukui, Fukui Mortuary. He taught me all about the mortuary business, for two and a half years. So when my wife died ten years ago, all of a sudden, twenty minutes, she's brain dead. So I knew exactly what to do. I went to the mortuary, I said, "Look, I want to put her in a cardboard box and cremate her. And we're going to have the service in Fresno." I let them make an estimate. They said, "Well, we'll fix her up nicely, we'll do this and that. You can have the service here, and cremation, \$6,000." So I said, "No. All I want is put her in a cardboard box, \$45. Cremate her, \$300." I don't know, it came to \$1600, I think. But thanks to my roommate, who I roomed [with] for three and a half years—. In fact, he promised to take care of me if I died first. Unfortunately, I'm still living, and he died thirty years ago.

Dunham:

Now, when you came to Cal, you also joined ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps], right?

02-00:18:04

Inami:

Oh, ROTC, yeah.

Dunham:

Yeah. Can you tell us about it? Was that a voluntary thing?

02-00:18:08

Inami:

Right. Yeah, it was compulsory. All men had to join it; women were exempt. In fact, I don't think they even had women's groups. But if you were physically able, you had to join. I noticed one guy, I was in the clinic, and he says, "I'm going to tell them I've got a bum knee." He says he wants to get out of ROTC. But see, in grammar school, there was a guy named William Baker. He says, "Hey, Frank, let's go to West Point." So I said, "Sure, I'll go to West Point with you." This is sixth grade, seventh grade; we didn't know. I didn't know at the time. But the requirements were five-five, five foot, five inches, and I was only five-four, five-three. Bill says, "Hey, we've got to stretch you a little bit, so you can come with us." Well, I knew there were a certain amount of biases at that time, because ROTC, you take two years of ROTC, compulsory; two years are voluntary. You sign up for two years, and when you graduate, you can get a commission, second lieutenant. So I was gung-ho at the time. Out of the hundreds of Japanese Americans, there was only about three or four of us who volunteered for the two years. Now, I was in Signal Corps. The others were in other groups, so I don't know what other groups did. But Signal Corps, I was interviewed by Major Larabee. He asked me one question. "Where was your mother born?" I said, "Japan." He shook his head, said, "We can't take you." See, this is 1941. So that ended my military career.

Dunham:

Your first effort.

02-00:20:38

Inami:

Yeah, first step in military career.

Dunham:

Well, what was the ROTC program like then?

02-00:20:45

Inami:

Oh, we wore a suit, a uniform. We used to call it the monkey suit. Twice a week, we'd have formation. Well, the Army types had a lot of marching to do and so forth; but fortunately, in Signal Corps, there we'd go out in the field with radio equipment, and we learned how to use the equipment and things like that. Theory-wise, it paralleled a lot of our coursework at the school, so I was all for it. But unfortunately, it cut it short. Now, I'm a B student; my grades are around B. See, I'm [an] A student at Madera High; but when I went to Cal, competition's too rough, so I'm a B student. Well, there was a guy named Sammy Yanagisawa, another Japanese American. Straight-A student, and he got along well with everybody—with me, with the white students—because he's from Berkeley, Berkeley High. He applied; he was turned down, too. In fact, he was kind of my role model, because he was quite well liked by the faculty. I said, "Sammy, are you going to apply for upper division?" "Sure," he said, "I'm going to apply." "You think you'll get accepted?" "Sure, I'll get accepted." Very confident. But then I asked him later, when I got rejected. He was a year ahead of me. I sort of knew that he was rejected, too. I said, "Sammy, did you get accepted?" He says, "No." See?

So it wasn't based on grades; it was strictly ancestry. So that ended my career, until—well, not only that, we had to sign up for the draft. One-A means you're ready for the draft to be inducted immediately. There's a classification called 4-C. See, 4-F means you're physically unqualified; but 4-C means you're an enemy alien. So we're classed as 4-C, enemy alien, unfit for military service. That's what they classified us. That put another roadblock in my career for the military.

Dunham: So how did you feel about that and about the rejection of going for the two-year—?

02-00:24:00

Inami: Well, when I got to Arkansas, in Rohwer, they were recruiting people for the MIS, Military Intelligence Service, Japanese language. Also for the 442, the infantry unit. I applied for both of them. I applied first for the 442. They said, "How bad are your eyes?" I said, "20/200." They says, "You're going to flunk the physical." He says, "You have an alternative, something else to do?" I said, "Yeah, I'm planning to get out and finish my education." He says, "I strongly encourage you to do that, because in the infantry, you're going to do a lot of marching, and it's going to be physically impossible for you." See, I've got flat feet. For flat feet, you could get rejected, those days. Not anymore.

So I applied for military intelligence. Same thing. Because they were sending us out to the Pacific, in the jungles and so forth. So that kind of put another damper on my military career. I figured I'm going to give it up and put my effort into getting to Illinois Tech. Because Ben kept writing to me and says, "Hey, you've got some money." He says, "I'll lend you the money. I'll get you a place to stay. I'll get you accepted." He already had me accepted in the—. He's quite a politician; he knows what the right—. So when I finally got accepted to Illinois Tech, I was finally able to get out in March; but unfortunately, the semester had already started. And by the time I got there, it was too late [in] the semester. They said, you better wait till June. So I found a job, menial job, doing the same thing over and over again, fifty cents an hour. Because they were finding jobs for people coming out from camp. So I was finally able to finish up. Again, quite a difference. Here I was living right in the middle of Chicago. The school is an hour by streetcar away, right in the middle of housing. Not like UC Berkeley, with trees and campuses. Plus there's a stockyard right next to the school. During the summertime, you smell the stockyard. We'd go to class right through school. So it was quite an experience going to Illinois Tech, but [I] finally made it.

02-00:27:48

Oh, I wanted to include—during the freshman year, or at the beginning of the freshman year, at UC Berkeley, you go through orientation. So I went through this orientation. You get a chance to meet with the—let's see. Well, she's the one that finds jobs for you. Placement officer. Miss Christie. Miss Christie

finds jobs for you when you graduate. But this is when I'm a freshman, see? She's looking on my list and she says, "I see you want to become an engineer? Why do you want to become an engineer?" I said, "I want to become an engineer." I didn't know what to answer. I said, "Why do you ask?" She says, "Because there're only two companies that hire engineers, GE and Westinghouse. And they bluntly tell us, we don't even want to interview Japanese or Chinese. So when you get out, there's going to be no jobs for you." Says, "I see your dad runs a mom-and-pop grocery store. Why don't you change your major to business, and go home and run your dad's mom-and-pop small grocery store?"

Now, I want to jump thirteen years ahead now, because I want to give the prelude to this story. So thirteen years later, I get out of the Korean War. I'm back on reserve, and I'm courting my wife, who, after three tries, finally says she'll marry me. She's living in San Francisco. I met her at that camp in Jerome. I had to ask her three times. She finally said she'll marry me. I said, "Where do you want to live?" "Well, Bay Area's okay." So I went back to Miss Christie. She's still there at UC Berkeley. I said, "Miss Christie, I'm not trying to vindictive or make you feel bad, but thirteen years ago, you told me not to go into engineering. I did not take your advice. I got a degree in double E [electrical engineering] from Illinois Tech, and I need a job." She says, "Oh, they're hiring up on the hill." The hill is Lawrence Berkeley Lab. Says, "They're hiring up on the hill. I'll call up and you go ahead and interview."

So I drive up to the hill, only a few minutes, and I'm waiting. A guy comes walking in—fortunately, not recognizing him right away—Dick Mack. He says, "Hey, Frank, what the heck you doing here?" So I explained, "I'm looking for a job." He says, "We're hiring for Livermore." "Where's Livermore?" "It's right out there off of Highway 50." So he says, "We're starting a new lab there." See, they started the lab in July of '52, and here it was October of '52, so they're just starting. We chitchatted, and he didn't ask me for my transcript or anything. I thought, that's strange; maybe he's going to reject me. So he says, "Come on along." So he took me into the placement office, he says, "Hire this guy." Just like that, see? So I got hired for Livermore. That was in '52. I got married in '53. The marriage lasted fifty years, until she died all of a sudden. I worked at the lab for thirty-some years. Thirty-five years, I guess.

Dunham: Well, back when you had that initial counselling session with Miss Christie, how did you have the confidence to continue in engineering?

02-00:32:39

Inami: Somebody else asked me that question, and I don't know why. See, there were other examples of other Japanese Americans who had majored in engineering and were working in a fruit stand or something like that, see? So there were other examples. Except there was one example just before the war started. This guy named Higuchi, he thought he had a job with the government, the

National Space Administration; it wasn't called space at that time, but—. But this is before the war started, see? I never could figure out what he finally ended up, but there's a glimmer of hope there. But see, somehow—I'm an optimist, in a certain degree. I'm always looking at the brighter side of things—even though the guys at the students club says, they're going to line us up with machine guns and shoot us all down. There were all kinds of rumors floating away. We're going to be second class citizens; we're never going to get full citizenship.

Dunham: This is before or after Pearl Harbor?

02-00:34:17

Inami: After Pearl Harbor

Dunham: Before Pearl Harbor—you mentioned the one student who was above you, who thought he was definitely going to get the two-year appointment, how he had a real good rapport with white students and professors. How about for the rest of you? How as getting along? And were there instances of other direct or indirect racism that you felt at Cal?

02-00:34:42

Inami: I'm not sure what the—there was a guy named Roy Mita. He kept insisting on applying for upper division ROTC. So they finally let him apply, but they wouldn't give him a commission, see? So he ended up on 442. He was wounded, and I think he gave up. Yeah, he became a lawyer. He got a law degree. He's buried over there in Minneapolis.

Dunham: But not just on campus, with the white students and professors. And the ROTC group was mixed, I assume.

02-00:35:33

Inami: Right.

Dunham: What was the day-to-day like with that? Were there any challenges there?

02-00:35:38

Inami: No, we were accepted as double E students. I remember quite a few, including Dick Mack, that was my benefactor. Just by pure coincidence. I remember he was in ROTC with me. And there were a few other guys that I got treated—in fact, there was a guy who was in upper division ROTC. He was shorter than I am, and he was able to get—. So I figured they can't reject me on account of—he was a white guy. I was pretty sure they won't reject me on [my height]. He was one of the trainees. When he came by, he was shorter than I am, so I figured they can't reject me on account of [my height]. But race, there's nothing I could do, see?

Dunham: You said double E student?

02-00:36:49

Inami: Yeah, electrical engineering.

Dunham: Oh, right.

Fukumoto: So when Pearl Harbor happened, what's your memory of that? Where were you? What were you doing? How'd you hear of it? What was your reaction, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor? What's your memory?

02-00:37:15

Inami: What was the original?

Fukumoto: Just where were you, what were you doing? How did you get that information about Japan bombing Pearl Harbor?

02-00:37:23

Inami: Oh, I was at the students club. By that time, I had gone up to assistant house manager. See, there was a house manager, who managed the group, and I was the assistant house manager. The job of the assistant house manager was if the light blew you, you'd change the lights, this kind of thing. Once a week from the laundry I would get the sheets and I would pass out the sheets. That Sunday—it was Sunday morning—I was passing out sheets to the various rooms. Somebody said, "Hey, they bombed Pearl Harbor. The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor." Somebody said, "No, that's not Pearl Harbor, that's Dutch Harbor." Dutch Harbor's up in the Aleutians. There was some argument, and I kind of brushed it off. That morning, there was a mother of one of the students coming up from Madera to see her son, who was—see, this Louie Kobayashi, who was a year behind me, they'd diagnosed him as cancer of the rectum or something like that, and she was coming up with a friend. They drove up. This friend drove the mother up to visit Louie. They came up the walkway and they had no radio in the car, so they didn't know that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. So I was so busy that day, taking them to the clinic and seeing Louie at the hospital and things like that. You're talking about the exact day of that date, right?

Fukumoto: Yeah.

Dunham: So when did it begin to sink in, what had happened? You talked about the reaction of your roommates in the Japanese club. The next few days and weeks, what transpired? And for your family back in Madera, what was happening with them?

02-00:40:23

Inami: Yeah. Let's see. Number one, by that night—this is December 7—by that night, the FBI had fanned out and picked up anybody of the Issei, the first generation, who were obviously not citizens. They were head of various churches, head of Japanese schools—there were Japanese schools—or trading

companies. Obviously, the consulate and so forth. The FBI had picked them all up. Then days later, another group came by and picked up some more.

So see, right after Pearl Harbor, there was finals. You took the finals and went home, and you didn't come back until first of the year. So we didn't get a chance to see each other until first of the year. So there was kind of a status symbol. Guys would say, "Hey, your dad get picked up?" Says, "No." "Oh, I guess he's not a big shot, like my dad. He got picked up right away." See, there was a status symbol that ended up. Then there was a curfew. We couldn't go past eight o'clock. After eight o'clock, you had to be inside. This put a cramp on the people from San Francisco, because they had to be home by eight o'clock.

Now, one guy named George, he insisted—it was almost eight o'clock. I said, "Hey, George, where you going?" He said, "I'm going back to San Francisco." "Oh, no, no. Eight o'clock. There's a curfew on." "Oh," he says, "I'll just pass as Chinese or something." Said, "No, George." I told him, "You sleep on the couch. I'll get a blanket for you." So my roommate, the mortician's son, Soichi [and I], we were sound asleep. Knock on the door. This soldier comes in with a rifle, bayonet fixed. He had George with him. He says, "Do you know this guy?" We told him, "Sure, we know him. That's George Kobayashi." See, he got picked up. Apparently, he got a talking to because this soldier says, "Now, George, you remember what I told you." He really read him the riot act, I guess.

Dunham: Well, at a certain point, students from San Francisco weren't allowed to cross at all, I had thought. Or was it just by curfew?

02-00:43:45

Inami: No, I think it was just the curfew. Number one, because their family—see, they gave us two to three weeks to evacuate. So a lot of them had to stay home and take care of their family, so they purposely didn't come. Then there's others who were staying over here. As far as I know, there was no blanket.

Dunham: When you went back home over the holidays, what was the scene with your family and the broader community in Madera?

02-00:44:28

Inami: Oh, we were busy trying to take care of the store. There was a Chinese family who agreed to take over the store. So we had to go through the lawyer, with all the law, and inventory to take, and showing them what the—. So as I recall, the days just slipped right back. I remember on my birthday, April 25, the day before, we had to evacuate Berkeley. So I went back to Madera on April 24.

Dunham: So the semester wasn't quite over. You weren't able to finish the semester.

02-00:45:16

Inami:

No, no yet. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, the semester was over in May, end of May. So that's why some of the professors would give credit for the whole semester; but engineering is pretty tough, so they wouldn't give us credit. But when we had to evacuate was May 17. May 17, we had to evacuate. Dad said, "Remember this date." We'd tell him, "Why?" Said, "I just said remember this date, May 17." They took us to Fresno Assembly Center. There's a race track there, and they quartered us there till October, when they moved us to—.

Dunham:

So what was that like, both the transport, even getting there? How did you get to—?

02-00:46:15

Inami:

Oh, the troop train. They put us on a troop train. Everything was under the government. Food, clothing. They took care of everything. They gave us when to move, and under guard, see? So they had to keep us under guard because of the ruling, because there would be no point in putting us in camp, if we weren't guarded, see?

Fukumoto:

Can you describe the assembly center in Fresno? What was it like, what'd it look like, where did you sleep?

02-00:46:52

Inami:

Well, fortunately, we went in May and moved out in October or November. Fresno, it doesn't rain during the summertime, see, so there was no rain. So the weather was hot. But these barracks were tar-paper barracks. It wasn't bad. We had things to do. There was a electrician crew. We went around changing light bulbs and things like that. Everybody that wanted a job was given some sort of make-work type thing. And there was dances and so forth.

Dunham:

How were your parents and siblings doing?

02-00:47:44

Inami:

Well, it's interesting to note—and this is true of both the camps and Fresno Assembly Center—the old folks, the parents said, "Oh boy, we get a chance to discipline our kids," because you were in the same building. Except that it didn't work that way, because we would eat at the same place—they had a mess hall—and us kids would go to eat in the mess hall together. Parents would go together. They'd have their own groups. Because see, because most of the parents worked day and night, it was a good chance; they could get together and talk about the good old days. Especially if they're from the same area in Japan. They'd be talking all day long about that. So there were two groups. So us youngsters, we had our own group; the old folks had their own groups. And they didn't do too much trying to discipline us, because they knew we couldn't get very far. Right? They said, oh, no problem. There's the guards. The interesting thing is—same as Fresno, but in Arkansas—they had machine guns. See, one of the reasons they tried to give us is, "We're going to put you in camp because if we don't, the others, the non-Japanese will come

and kill you. So we're going to put you in camp and guard you." Well, we go to camp and those towers are all facing inward; machine guns are all facing inward. See? So that rationale didn't work. So anyway.

Dunham: Were there any conflicts that you observed in Fresno or at Jerome with the guards?

02-00:50:11

Inami: No, the guards were well behaved, you might say. They were friendly. Not too friendly, of course. But we had our own police force, see?

Dunham: Oh, a Japanese police force?

02-00:50:26

Inami: Yeah, the Japanese police force. They ran the curfew, for instance. There was an eleven o'clock curfew, and they would knock on each barrack. Of course, they didn't count everybody, but whoever was in that barrack would say, "Present." Just like in the military. Yeah.

Dunham: As the oldest sibling, did you have to look after your younger siblings?

02-00:51:03

Inami: No. Fortunately, we didn't have to look after our siblings because they couldn't get very far. We knew they couldn't because there were guards always there.

Dunham: So you mentioned it was busy, there were dances. What were other activities and things that were going on?

02-00:51:30

Inami: Oh, they had school and classes. Even though I didn't have a degree I was able to teach advanced algebra. So I was teaching advanced algebra. We had to meet in the laundry room. But I kind of enjoyed having something to do. I kept a record of the students and how they did and things like this. Then when we moved to Arkansas, I thought, "Oh, great; I'll be able to teach for a while." But no. They said, "Since you didn't have a degree, you can't teach. You have to have a degree." Well, there was both the teaching and medical. See, the medical association in Arkansas—Arkansas is a rather poor state, so right away, as soon as they said they were going to put up two camps, the medical association said, we'll furnish all the medical people. Because a lot of them are underused. But then the government came in and said, "Hey, this is a government facility. They have their own doctors and dentists and medical people." They had to, because a Japanese American, a Nisei, would graduate from med school, and the only place he could work was among us. See? Now, some of the ones that were better suited did have white clientele. But as a result, there were enough doctors. So the government told the medical association, "They're furnishing their own doctors and medical people. In

fact, some of them have better qualifications, like Harvard and so forth, than you do.”

They did the same thing with teachers, see? So I wasn't able to get a teaching position. However, while I was an electrician, there was a guy named Ogawa. Kik Ogawa. He had a degree. Here we were doing electrician work, doing menial work. He said, “Hey, Frank, I'm going to go ahead and see if I can get a job as the chief electrical engineer.” I said, “How are you going to do that?” Said, “Well, there's going to be 8,000 people, and they've got to have some sort of engineering.” He says, “Since you don't have a degree, you can be my assistant. Assistant electrical engineer.” He says, “I'm going to go ahead. You stay behind, and I'll see what I can do.” So true to form, he was able to get the job as chief electrical engineer. There was a white guy, Mr. Matthews, who was head of the engineering department. But Kik was the chief engineer; I was the assistant. Instead of just menial work we got to design some of the future engineering requirements of the camp.

Dunham: How was the camp being designed? Was there input from the Japanese community?

02-00:55:40

Inami: No, no. These camps were, you might say—I should've brought that book to show you—just stamped. See, the war was going on, and these people were used to building military camps, so it was just a—. Then they were also putting up prisoners-of-war camps. So it was just stereotyped everything.

Fukumoto: Did you know you were going into Arkansas from Fresno? Or did you—?

02-00:56:23

Inami: Let's see. Rumors kept flying. See, the first rumor was that there're camps being built. Ten camps. See, there were two camps in Arkansas, one in Colorado, one in Utah, three in Arizona, one in—I've forgotten the couple of others. Now, someone was able to get that information. The question is, which one will we go [to]? I don't know why they picked Arkansas for us. But just the Fresno area. There were even people from Hawaii. See, they evacuated some people from Hawaii and some people from—I've forgotten where. There's a mixture.

Dunham: We interviewed one deaf woman who was there with her entire deaf family. Were you aware of any deaf or disabled members of the camp?

02-00:57:36

Inami: I didn't notice any. But there was one family in Hanford, I think, that had a mentally retarded son. He would roam around the camp. They let him roam around because they knew that he was harmless. He'd run around and just say hi and then run off. You'd try to [have a] conversation with him. So that's the only one I remember.

Dunham: Well, you mentioned the camps were just sort of set up, the prisoner-of-war and these camps, all at once; but they did have to adjust some, or the community did help create *some* change over time. Like food originally started out, I've heard, bread-based, right? But ultimately did change? Do you remember that? Or was it already—?

02-00:58:40

Inami: Oh, yeah, well, that's military-based, so bread and meat and potatoes type of thing. Rumors that we were eating horse meat, but— [laughs]

Dunham: But did the food change or improve over time?

02-00:58:53

Inami: Yeah. What they did was, they were able to get rice because Arkansas is rice country. So they were able to get rice and soy sauce. In fact—this was in the military I met this guy. He was a chemistry major; he had a degree in chemistry. So they wanted him to learn how to make soy sauce. He wanted me to help him translate some of the chemicals. But I don't think they were very successful because I guess you know soy sauce is made out of soy beans; and there's plenty of soy beans in the Midwest.

Dunham: What was the winter like? How did you deal with the weather? Did you have clothing for the cold?

02-00:59:57

Inami: Yeah. Well, it's not so much the cold; you can get used to cold weather. But Arkansas is kind of the dividing line. So one day it'd be hot; and then the next day, you get the cold wind coming down, and possibly snow. This is what [was] really hard to get used to. But it was good for me, because when we got to Chicago, you get the snow. Then worse yet, when I got to Fort Snelling in Minnesota for the MISLS, Military Intelligence Service Language School, it really snowed. When it snows, it— [laughs]

Dunham: What were the bathing situations like at the camps?

02-01:00:55

Inami: Oh, we had common showers; by common: men's showers and women's showers. The other facilities for urination, they had for men and women. Then on the women, the same thing, except that it was open toilets. The women started to complain. At least—I think in Fresno they didn't partition, but camp was more or less permanent, so that's what they—. Like my dad was on the carpenter crew. They would put partitions in between the toilets. But I don't think they were able to put partitions on the women's shower, and a lot of the women complained that they don't want to be naked in front of everybody else.

Dunham: What were other recreation activities there? Music or sports or that sort of thing.

02-01:02:25

Inami:

Oh, there was sports, baseball games. Let's see, baseball is a favorite one. They were playing Go and Mahjong, games like that. Services. Every Sunday they had Buddhist services as well as Christian services. And school, the regular school. I always had a job going to the engineering building, see?

Dunham:

Were you paid for your job?

02-01:03:15

Inami:

Let's see. If you were a professional, you got paid \$19 a month. A sub-professional like me, \$16 a month. If you washed dishes, I think it was \$12 a month as payment. Then you could get clothing after a while. You'd go through the Montgomery Ward or Sears Roebuck catalog and order basic things, especially coats.

Dunham:

Especially for the cold?

02-01:03:56

Inami:

Yeah, it's because of the cold, right.

Dunham:

So did people have pretty similar coats, then, if you were all ordering from the same catalog?

02-01:04:01

Inami:

Right. Oh, yeah, everybody had the same. Peacoats, I guess they were called. Navy coats.

Dunham:

Well, thank you very much for today.

Interview 2: June 24, 2014

Audio file 3

Dunham: Today is June 24, 2014, and this is tape 3, interview 2, with Frank Inami. If you want to start us off.

Fukumoto: Sure. So camp life, your whole family was together in Jerome?

03-00:00:21

Inami: Yes. Well, we started out at the Fresno Assembly Center. See, Madera is just north of Fresno, so from Madera they took us to Fresno because the camps weren't finished yet. They'd just started building them. So they put up some very temporary tar-papered buildings at the Fresno Fairgrounds. So that's where we went, from Madera to Fresno. Let's see. We went in May 17. Dad said, "Remember this particular day," so I still remember it. It wasn't until October that they had finished the ten camps. So what they did was, we had a kind of a temporary setup. Let's see, since it was October—well, even during the summer they had summer school. For example, I got a chance to teach advanced algebra. Mostly girls in the class; there were one or two boys. We had to meet in the washroom, where they did the clothes washing. But I got a chance to teach. Teach the girls, basically. Some of them were pretty sharp. So we had kind of a make-work. If you wanted to work you could in the mess halls. You could work as a janitor, cleaning the latrines, things like that.

Fukumoto: Was it the US military that organized all of that, or was that coming from your community? Having classes and organizing all of that. Do you know if it was the military that organized the classes, or did that come from you guys?

03-00:02:46

Inami: Oh, it was internally. Internally organized. There was a camp newspaper, and there were people who had run the high school newspapers, and they ran the [camp newspaper]. So they kept us informed. There were about 4,000 in that little area there. I should say, it was all—well, I take it back. There was a group from the Sacramento area. There's a place called Florin, south of Sacramento. There was a group that came in from there. See, there was another camp—or we called them assembly centers, to distinguish them from the permanent camps—there was one in Pinedale. Pinedale is a little area just north of Fresno. There was an assembly center [there]. So there were two assembly centers in Fresno itself. So I think that group, they brought them in from the state of Washington.

Dunham: You mentioned the newspapers that were started. What kind of articles would be written in that that kept you informed?

03-00:04:17

Inami: Well, we had baseball, basketball, various leagues. No bowling, because there was no bowling alley. But things like that. Then just little tidbits of information as to, so-and-so is from a certain area. As I recall, there was no

formal high school or grammar school. A lot of it was, like I mentioned, voluntary, organized by people. So since I got to teach, it was better than—see, since I was a double E, electrical engineer, I was in, you might say, the electrical, going around changing light bulbs and things like that, which is boring work. So I was glad to get out and do a little teaching.

So around October, there were a lot of rumors flying around. But they used the camp newspaper to get information out. In fact, gee, I think my brother still has a copy, where it says it's finally decided we're going to Arkansas. That was quite big news at the time, because we didn't know that there were two camps in Arkansas being built, Jerome and Rohwer. Because there were three camps in Arizona; and of course Manzanar, which was in California; Tule Lake, in California; Heart Mountain, in Wyoming; and Minidoka, in Idaho. We knew about those, so we thought the chances were pretty good that we'll end up in one of those. But to find out that we're going all the way to Arkansas, that was quite a—so I thought, "Gee, I'll get to teach there, too."

But because I did not have a degree, they wouldn't let me teach, because they had a formal system, patterned after the Arkansas school system, and they wanted to bring in—I think I mentioned in the last interview—the doctor's association. The medical association wanted to bring their own people in, and the government said, "We're US government"; they have their—in other words, internees—they have their own doctors, medical people. Some of them probably have better education than you do. So we had our own medical people. Also with the teachers—I think the head of the teaching staff was white. Also in engineering. I mentioned in the last interview, there was a guy named Matthew. He was head of the engineering department. But the chief electrical engineer was my classmate. He was a class ahead of me. So he was the chief electrical engineer, and I was his assistant, assistant electrical engineer. So we were able to do our own engineering work, and I got a chance to learn quite a bit from that.

Fukumoto: What did your parents do while in the assembly, in camp?

03-00:08:37

Inami: Oh, in the assembly camp?

Fukumoto: Yeah, or how did they deal with it? Were they just silent? Did they show any emotion while this was happening, or did they just—?

03-00:08:50

Inami: Yes. See, the feeling was that the old folks, our parents, thought that this will be great because you have guards—we're enclosed in, so they'll have a good chance to discipline us. Well, it turned out to be the opposite. We went to chow hall. See, they had centralized eating places. So our own age group, various age groups, would stick together. And the old folks, we found out that—see, my parents worked seven days a week, practically twenty-four

hours a day, trying to raise us. All of a sudden you're stuck in a place where, if you didn't want to do anything, you didn't have to do anything. So they would get together and talk about the old times. Especially if they came from the same area in Japan, like Hiroshima, various other places. They would get together and talk all night long about their—. So it was a good experience for them. Not only that, we estimate it really gave them a vacation, in a sense.

But Dad always liked to carpenter. See, first, I was raised on a farm, vegetable farm. Then a little later, he started a little mom and pop grocery store. However, he said that he liked to carpenter. He was a pretty good carpenter. Kind of sloppy, but he really got things done. He'd build a house and things like that. So he got on the carpenter crew, and he'd go around fixing the barracks, going out to the woods and chopping wood to keep us warm during the wintertime. So he had a good time. What was it now? I think he got paid sixteen dollars a month. So it's a kind of a make-work type thing. My mother didn't do anything, as I recall. But after a while, it got so boring that she, I think, went off and worked in the mess hall, washing dishes or something like that. If you wanted, you could just work a few hours a day. Or if you wanted to work a regular eight hours, you could. So she also felt relieved that she didn't have to—.

So as a result, I think we missed—for example, my sister's seventeen years younger than I am, okay? So I remember when my sister got into high school, they gave her a car; they gave her money to spend time in Europe. So I would complain bitterly, saying, "Hey, how come I never got all that?" My mother would sit me down and quietly tell me, "Look now, she's seventeen years younger than you are. That means that when we die,"—the parents—"when we die, she's going to miss out seventeen years of our love. Or you're getting seventeen years more of our love." So things like that really stuck. But unfortunately, my younger brothers never got that guidance from our parents, because we were in camp and they ran around with their own group. There was really no discipline because there was no need to, because you were enclosed, with guards, and you couldn't go out. Although toward the end, they let them. My brother-in-law—he's retired as a dentist, my wife's youngest brother—they used to crawl underneath the fence and go into town. I'm sure the guards knew that. But this is toward the end of the three-year period. So he thinks he had a good time, because they could—without the parents. His mother was quite strict.

Fukumoto: So in many ways, a little bit more freedom for young kids. There was a little bit more freedom in camp for young kids.

03-00:14:26

Inami: Oh, yeah, yeah, there was a lot of freedom. Because there was a bed check at ten o'clock, eleven o'clock. I think it was ten o'clock. They'd go around to each barrack and check. Of course, they didn't look at each bed. Just somebody there would say, "We're all here." So you knew that your kids were

back there. At ten o'clock, they had to be home. Then in the morning we all got up at the same time, because breakfast [was] at a certain time, and if you didn't go eat you didn't get to eat.

Fukumoto: Right, that was it. How was the food in camp?

03-00:15:13

Inami: Well, food was like army food, which is meat and potatoes. And bread, of course. Toward the end, after a year or so, they were able to get rice. The main thing they missed was shoyu, soy sauce. They were able to grow a lot of the vegetables, like carrots and napa, which is Chinese cabbage, things like that. And they were able to make—but see, I missed out on most of that, because I got there in October, and I left in March, to go to Chicago.

Fukumoto: To go to Illinois Tech.

03-00:16:09

Inami: I had gone to Chicago, stayed there for a year and a half. Meanwhile, Jerome had closed, and they moved everybody to Rohwer. I would come home maybe once a year or something like that. But when I got back, in June of '44—yeah, June of '44—when I got back to camp, they were already in Rohwer, in another camp. They tried to keep people together. Like Madera people would be one area, Fresno people another area. There was a lot of Caruthers, Kerman, all these little places. When they moved us from Jerome to Rohwer, they just put them in wherever there were—. You were allowed to go out, if you could find a place where they would guarantee that you would not become a ward of the government, you wouldn't get on welfare or anything. So if you could find somebody that would vouch for you and guarantee a job, or go to school, you could get out, see? They started that rather early. In fact, let's see. We got there in October, and I think by December, there were people being able to leave. Of course, I wanted to leave right away, to go to Chicago, to go to Illinois Tech. But I think I mentioned that because I had put down that I was a Buddhist, that counted against me. And the fact that I had an unflattering recommendation from my high school principal, that held me back. So I wasn't able to get out until March. But there were quite a few other—. So there were empty spots in Rohwer, so they put the Jerome people where there were empty holes.

Dunham: So they didn't keep them by area, because there were these vacancies of people having left.

03-00:18:43

Inami: Right.

Dunham: I wanted to ask, back at the assembly center, before you went to Jerome, you mentioned before the article came out and you found out you were going there, there were a lot of rumors flying around. I was curious; what kind of rumors or speculation was there?

03-00:18:58

Inami:

Well, the worst rumor was—there were some pretty bad rumors—that they were going to segregate the men from the women, and take all of us men and gun us down with machine guns, see? There were rumors like that. But those rumors started when I was still back at Cal. They were very negative. I never believed any of that. But then we didn't know what was going [on] over in Europe. Hitler was murdering all the Jews. Maybe by bad luck, we could have been one of those. But nothing like that.

Dunham:

With those kind of rumors, were some advocating taking proactive action of some kind?

03-00:19:56

Inami:

Oh, within the camp, you mean?

Dunham:

Yeah.

03-00:19:59

Inami:

Yeah. We used to have meetings, the block. There were forty blocks. Each block had a block leader, and we'd get together. There were some people who were very vocal, and they said, "Heck with this government; let's all get together and go back to Japan." I'm the type that I keep my mouth shut most of the time. But every once in a while something really gets to me. Well, I got up, and I stood up and I said, "Look. Look at the way the Japanese are treating the Koreans. The Koreans are treated like second-class citizens. They make them change their names to Japanese names. They really take it out on the poor Koreans. Well, the US government's doing the same thing to us. So Japan is no better, as far as discrimination is concerned." I really caught heck for that.

Dunham:

Yeah, how was that received?

03-00:21:11

Inami:

Yeah, because they said the people that were from Japan, like my parents—. Dad never told me, really cautioned me; but my mother said, "Why don't you keep your mouth shut?" [laughs] "You get us in—." Because what they do, they use this pressure. They don't come to me and say, "You shouldn't be saying things like that." They'd go to my mother and said, "How could you have raised this son like that, who doesn't know what he's talking about?" Things like that, see? See, that's why when we volunteered to go in the service, there were those that were against volunteering. Maybe I didn't mention to you.

Dunham:

I don't think we've come to that yet—

03-00:22:06

Inami:

Yeah, I think I mentioned to you. As a result, my mother told me—. But it didn't do any good, because I just went again.

Dunham: Yeah. I don't think we did discuss that. I've seen that in a previous interview. Although we're going to talk about more of the MIS later. But go ahead, since you brought it up. What happened? What did your mother say to you when you volunteered for the MIS?

03-00:22:34

Inami: I guess you never heard the term "baka"?

Fukumoto: I have.

03-00:22:39

Inami: Oh, you have? B-A-K-A?

Fukumoto: Yeah. Stupid.

03-00:22:41

Inami: Meaning stupid. My mother called me "baka nokotowo shita," that "You did a stupid thing." Because her argument was, they were just starting the draft at that time. She said, "If you get drafted, you can't shikataganai. You can't do anything about it; you've got to go. But to volunteer when the government has stuck us in concentration camp—" So she chewed the heck out of me. She rarely did that to me so strongly. But I think in looking back—the buildings are all open, the top is open, and you can hear everything—I think she did that because [of] the pressure on her to saying, "Gee, how could you, son, volunteer? What kind of a dumb thing that he did, and it's because of you." They put the pressure on *her*, see? I have a feeling she did that.

Then I went to—I had volunteered through the local draft board. See, the draft board really liked us, because every one of us that got drafted means that one white Arkansas young man doesn't have to be drafted, see? Because we filled the quotas. I went back and looked at the newspapers, back in '44, '45, and there're all kinds of names. The draft board would put down the names of those who were drafted. You'd see mostly Japanese names from camp. I think I mentioned—what did I do with that?—866 of us were drafted or volunteered. Didn't I show you that?

Dunham: I'm not sure if we saw that, yeah. Do you know about what percent volunteered versus were drafted? Was it more that volunteered or more that were drafted?

03-00:25:10

Inami: Oh, I think more were drafted. Yeah. But I thought I showed you the newspaper. See, this is the newspaper, dated March 15, '45.

Fukumoto: March 15, 1945, yes. Oh, yeah.

03-00:25:35

Inami: See? Eight hundred sixty-six.

- Dunham: So this is not the camp newspaper, this is an Arkansas newspaper.
- 03-00:25:41
Inami: This is a local Arkansas, McGehee Arkansas paper. And you can see—
- Fukumoto: Oh, yeah, you're right. All the Japanese.
- 03-00:25:50
Inami: —my name and my brothers' names on there.
- Fukumoto: Oh, that's crazy. And block. So all the blocks, that's where you were living in camps? They called it block? I notice on the top it has, block 14, block 15. That's just where you lived?
- 03-00:26:07
Inami: Right. Yeah. They were all in the—.
- Fukumoto: Do you want to see, or you got it?
- Dunham: Yeah, I'll look again later.
- 03-00:26:14
Inami: You want to copy it?
- Dunham: Yeah. Yeah, we'll do that. That'd be great, yeah. Well, let's talk about, then, when you were able to transfer out to college. So explain again about the clearance issue. So you had other friends who were able to leave before you, for college, then?
- 03-00:26:35
Inami: You mean there were others who—?
- Fukumoto: Who left before you?
- 03-00:26:38
Inami: Oh, yeah, they were all—but I think I mentioned in there that those who put down "Christian" as a religion seemed to go out earlier.
- Dunham: How did you deal with that frustration of being held back because of that, and worried that you might not get to go at all, maybe, right?
- 03-00:27:00
Inami: Right, maybe I couldn't go, that's true. But since I was working as an assistant electrical engineer, there was always plenty of work to be done. That kept me busy. Then I brought my books along, so I did some studying. Plus my future wife, Setsuko Matsubara, from Hanford, she was working in the clerical pool in the engineering department. So I got to know the girls in the pool there.
- Dunham: Were you dating at that time?

03-00:27:44

Inami:

Well, there was dating, but I wasn't into that. But the only reason we kept in contact is that my future wife has a very good—well, she's a good conversationalist, but also she writes. She always writes and always sends out Christmas cards. So when I left they gave me kind of a going away party. She said, "Be sure to let us know how life is on the outside." So I did send her one letter. So at Christmas of that year—yeah—she sent me a Christmas card. But it took me a month or so to get it, because I was in the Army, moving around from building to building, and it sort of got lost. Meanwhile, she had moved to Philadelphia. She had moved out, got a job there as a kind of a baby sitter. So I would send her a card, and because she moved around, she wouldn't get it until a couple months later. So it was just that thin, thin thread that we kept in contact. That's about all.

Dunham:

Do you remember that first letter and what you wrote to her about life on the outside, or just what your impressions were then, having been in camp and then getting to go to school? What was that like?

03-00:29:43

Inami:

Oh, yeah. Well, I wrote to the group as a whole. Nobody in the group bothered to reply, except my future wife, because she's very good at answering letters.

Fukumoto:

Do you remember what was in that letter? What was your experience like when you left for Chicago?

03-00:30:11

Inami:

Oh, yeah, Chicago, number one, the weather was—let's see, this was in March, so the weather was pretty good. Then during the summer months, the stockyards were right next to Illinois Tech, next to the college, and it would stink up the whole place. So things like that I would write. And there was no campus. The campus like Cal, you have high spots and low spots, and you have the Berkeley—it's really trees and flowers. But you go to Illinois Tech, it's right in the middle of a residential district. Hardly any trees. Of course, in the wintertime, the leaves have disappeared. It took me almost an hour to commute from my place in northern Chicago to essentially, southern Chicago. Had to change streetcars downtown, which wasn't too bad, but riding that streetcar, especially on a snowy or cold or hot day—.

Dunham:

Why did you live so far from the campus?

03-00:31:47

Inami:

Because the Japanese community was in the northern part of Chicago, around Clark Street. And my benefactor, the friend that looked after me, Ben Nagata, he was in that area. He found a place. People were coming into Chicago because there was all kinds of work, so living places were not so easy to find. So that's why we stayed there, instead of the southern part of Chicago, which is basically a residential area.

Dunham: Were there many other Japanese Americans attending the university?

03-00:32:43

Inami: I would say, we never made a—maybe thirty. There weren't too many. In fact, I don't know if you've heard of Senator [Samuel Ichiye] Hayakawa.

Dunham: Mm-hm.

03-00:33:02

Inami: You've heard of Hayakawa? He was a professor there. He didn't tell me directly, but he told other Japanese Americans, he said, "Don't be too conspicuous. When two of you are together talking and a third Japanese American comes, one of you have got to leave." He said, "Be inconspicuous." Well, his wife was white, you may know, so that he was saying we should assimilate with the group so we don't get discriminated against. Well, in my double E, electrical engineering classes, I don't think there were any Japanese Americans; there were mostly Jewish. They were Jewish. Some of those Jewish guys really kept up the grade point average. And some of them were the opposite. The ones that were opposite were just trying to get a degree so they can get deferred. See, if you got a degree and you got a job—. And most jobs in electrical engineering, or any kind of science at that time, you had to work for a company that was doing classified work, so you automatically got a deferment. But you had to have a degree to be working for that company. So I remember one Jewish guy would come to me and wanted to copy my homework. He said, "I'll pay you." Another Jewish guy heard about it. He said, "If I were you, you wouldn't give him your homework. If you give him your homework it raises the average and doesn't do you any good; it doesn't do him any good. So don't do it." I never did. I didn't need money that badly.

Dunham: Were there any women in the engineering classes?

03-00:35:33

Inami: Well, not that I know of.

Dunham: Were you socializing or dating or going to dances or that kind of thing?

03-00:35:41

Inami: Never did, because, see, we went all through the summer. See, number one, I got behind because of the—I got one semester behind. See, at Cal, all you had to do was what they call bonehead English. All you have to do is pass the English test; you didn't have to take it. Well, at Illinois Tech, you had to take a semester of English, see? You also had to take American—not literature—civics, a civics course. At Cal, all you had to do was cram and take the civics course and you could get by. So I had to make up all those grades, and, well, it got me behind, almost a whole year.

Fukumoto: Did you get along with the Jewish students?

03-00:36:47

Inami:

With the rest of the students? Yeah. I had no problem, basically. The thing that surprised me—see, at Cal, in Berkeley, in Madera, everywhere you went there was a curfew, eight o'clock curfew. You couldn't be out driving around or anything. Well, you go to Chicago, nobody cared. You just kind of melted into the group. So they didn't know whether you were Chinese, Japanese, Korean, or Mexican, even. So it was very easy, in that way. Yeah.

Dunham:

So with that, being outside of the camp and experiencing that kind of level of freedom, just all of it, what was it like returning to camp, when you said you did visit with that newfound—?

03-00:37:53

Inami:

Well, when I got my degree in June of '44, I went back—well, meanwhile, I had volunteered. See, the reason I volunteered for the service is mainly because I couldn't get a job. See, the government had classified us 4-C, "enemy alien, unfit for service." So with that they wouldn't even interview me, because they couldn't hire. You had to be a citizen in order to—see, you're in a kind of a catch-22 problem. With 1-A you're immediately eligible for service. So if you're 1-A, they wouldn't hire you. And of course, if you're a 4-C, they wouldn't hire you. I couldn't even get an interview.

So I had two alternatives. One was join the service in the 442, and get sent to Europe; or I could join MIS, Military Intelligence Service, the Japanese language, and go to Fort Snelling, in Minnesota, for Japanese language training. I had a choice between them. So I volunteered for MIS. I went back to camp, and that's when my mother chewed me out. Then a few days later, I got sent from the McGehee draft board to Camp Robinson, in Little Rock, and a two-day physical. I took the physical, and I thought I did okay. There was a medical officer who makes a final determination, whether you're eligible or whether you pass the physical and mental exam and things like that. So he looked at me, and he says, "Hey, what the hell you volunteer for?" Kind of shook me. I said, "Why not?" Says, "You guys are getting killed over there in Europe. What the heck you volunteering for? You just came out of camp. The government has put you in camp. You have no obligation to serve." It kind of floored me. I said, "Well, I want to do my part." "Well, you don't have to do your part. See this little square here? All I have to do is check this little square, physically unfit for military service. Sit this war out. You have no obligation whatsoever." I said, "Why?" He says, "Look, you're 20/200 in one eye. You're practically blind. And you've got flat feet." See, if you've got flat feet, you have trouble marching, so you can be a 4-F, physically unfit. So he said, "With a clear conscience, I can check this thing for you, and you sit this war out." He just kept chewing me out, right? I couldn't figure it out.

Dunham:

This is a white doctor?

03-00:41:40

Inami: Yeah, a white doctor, an MD. Here my mother chews me out; a few days later, he chews me out. I think he thought he was doing me a favor, because the casualty rates coming in from the 442 were terrific. What is that? To rescue 200 white Texans, the Japanese-American unit suffered 800 casualties. 200 killed in action, 800 total casualties just to save those 200. He was right, see? He said, “You guys are getting—.”

Dunham: So what compelled you to want to not have him check that box? Why did you want to serve?

03-00:42:41

Inami: I wanted to serve because, number one, I had no other choice. Well, I had another choice, that’s let him check this off, and I could find menial jobs, which I was doing. Soon as I got to Chicago in March of ’43, they had everything organized for us. They sent us to get a Social Security number, all these sort of things.

Dunham: Who was “they”? Who was organizing that?

03-00:43:18

Inami: Oh, there was a Japanese-American resettlement group, or the various—the Buddhist church and the Christian churches. And the government also helped staff it.

Dunham: And were the Quakers, the American Friends—?

03-00:43:34

Inami: Right, the American Friends were part of it, also. They were all in there helping us, so they had it well organized. They had jobs. Said, “Hey, there’s a job out here in an engineering company.” I thought, “Oh, boy, this is great. So I went out there.” It was on Clark Street. Took the streetcar out there. She said, “Oh, yeah, we can use you. Fifty cents an hour.” That was the going rate at that time. You made little round brass rings, and you cut a little hole in it. You did that all day long. Oh, I went crazy. But that’s money. She says, “After a couple months, you come to work, you’re diligent, so we’ll raise your salary to seventy-five cents an hour.” See? But then by then, I started school. I told her, “I’m starting school, so I’m going to quit.” She says, “No, no, no. You don’t want to quit. You can go to school later. We’ll give you a dollar an hour.” I said to myself, “I’m not going to—.” They call that a screw machine. You screw a little hole in there all day long. She would call me. I gave her my phone number and address, and she would call me and says, “Hey, a dollar and a half. Dollar and a half.”

Fukumoto: Oh, that’s funny.

03-00:45:20

Inami: I said, “No thanks.” It was a very nice couple there, no sign of discrimination or anything, and they always took good care of me, but—.

Fukumoto: Work was not fun.

03-00:45:43

Inami: But jobs like that were plentiful during the war. There was all kinds of jobs. Now, I had a roommate. I think he came out from another town. We just happened to run across each other, so we roomed together in Chicago. He got a job, same sort of job, making cardboard boxes. You sat there and you stamped these. All day long you're stamping.

Fukumoto: So where did you serve? Where did you end up going after you volunteered?

03-00:46:24

Inami: Oh, we went to Fort Snelling. The Military Intelligence Service, Japanese Language, which was started in the Presidio of San Francisco, back in 1941, a few months before the war started. Then they had to move that school over to a place called Camp Savage, in Minnesota, just south of St. Paul. That's where they moved the school, to Camp Savage. Then they got too small, so they moved it to Fort Snelling. There was, I think, a railroad group there. They kicked them out, moved them out, and it was there until we moved it to Monterey. So I spent two years at that school. So I started, this was in July of '44. Yeah, I graduated in June, from Illinois Tech, and then in July of '44—. The actual schooling didn't start until December, December of '44. In the meantime, see, what they would do is you take a—it's a six-month course, so every six months, they would start a new class. I got there at the wrong—not the wrong time, but just in between. So what they would do is if you came in just about when the school was starting, you would go for six months, and then they send you to basic training, two months of basic training. If you came in before, you went to basic training first. So a group of us went to basic training in Camp McClellan, in Alabama. So we went to Alabama for two months of basic training; then we came back to Snelling.

Dunham: What was the basic training like? How did that go? With your flat feet, was it any problem?

03-00:49:02

Inami: Well, these are all very interesting trainings, because all Japanese-American units, the competition gets fierce. Even in school, guys are studying day and night, just to get ahead of the other guys.

Let me backtrack a little bit. I met a guy named Junji Ozaki. He was a pharmacist. He had a degree in pharmacy, and was working in Detroit, something like that. He was originally from San Francisco. We kind of hit it off because we were kind of opposite. See, I was gung-ho, saying that we should do our part in the service, and he was just the opposite. He got drafted, and he was bitter. He said, "Boy, I'm going to screw this thing all up." He had gone to Japanese school in San Francisco. The so-called Kinmon Gakuen Japanese school in San Francisco rates as number one, number two in California, Japanese school. It was so good that you could go to any college in

Japan and be able to pass there. He was that good. But he says, “I know I’m good. I can pass these things. He’s kind of a very self-confident.

Fukumoto: Cocky?

03-00:50:49

Inami: He says, “I’m going to screw this thing all up.” So they give you an entrance exam. So he purposely missed all the questions. He didn’t want to look too bad, see, because they’d know that he’s doing it. So he would make mistakes and so forth. So they put us in according to how well you did in the entrance exam. So I got up on the top of the list, and this guy Junji he was kind of way down toward the bottom. He says, “I’m going to not study at all. Goof—”

Dunham: What was the purpose of that, though? What was his rationale?

3-00:51:39

Inami: See, he’s a pharmacist. See, he had a pharmacy degree. When he got drafted he said, “I want to go into the medical field.” “Oh, you’ve got to sign up for three years.” See, whereas if you went to a Japanese language school you only had to serve two years. So he said, “I want to get out in two years. I don’t want to get stuck for three years.” At that time, as I recall, when we were at Fort Snelling, some of the guys went into town, into Minneapolis, and got into a big fight and got into a lot of trouble. These guys from Hawaii. You know, they’re pretty independent. So they restricted the whole group. They said nobody can go into town anymore.

Dunham: The fight was with locals, like whites, or amongst the Japanese?

3-00:52:43

Inami: The fights were with the whites. Those Hawaiian guys, they—. [laughs] So we got restricted. We couldn’t go into town for weeks. Now, when we got to Camp McClellan for basic training one day we had a group assembly; they got us together. As I recall there was a colonel—I’ve forgotten his name—but he got up, and we thought, Junji and I, “Boy, we’re going to catch it.” Something happened, and they’re going to ball us out.” So the colonel got up and said, “You know, I just came from 442. I was over in Europe leading the Japanese Americans there. I heard that last night some of you guys went into town and tore the bar apart.” We thought, “Uh-oh. Here we gotcha.” He said, “Look, I fought with you guys. You guys are really good soldiers.” He says, “Next time that happens, we’re going to go in a close that bar down.” Junji comes up to me, and he says, “You know, things are changing. Things are changing; they’re really going to treat us like good people.” [laughs] We were friends for years after that. He changed.

But getting back to school, he was in this dumb class, we used to call it. One day about halfway through—it’s a six-month course—he comes running up to me, and he says, Hey, tutor me.” “What do you mean, tutor you?” [laughs] He knew I was in the top classes. He says, “You know, I look at these dumb guys

in my class. Some of them don't even have a high school education, and they're getting better grades than me." [laughs] He says, "Tutor me, so I can—"

Fukumoto: Oh, so he felt the pressure.

3-00:55:15

Inami: Oh, yeah. He later became an osteopath. An osteopath is almost like an MD, except they can't do surgery. He was in LA, and I kept in contact. We'd see him from time to time. But there was a gradual change in the attitude of the people that were leading us.

Dunham: Of the white commanders.

3-00:55:48

Inami: Yeah, white leaders. In fact they were bringing up—in fact at Fort Snelling the—well out in the Pacific people were getting direct commissions. See, we would train for six months and get one extra stripe. The white guys—they had white guys like you, quite a few of them—they got a whole year to learn the language, and they got a commission, second lieutenant. See, at the beginning they didn't trust us, so they had the white guys who knew just enough Japanese to be able to tell whether we were being truthful or not, see? But then they found out that the Japanese Americans were much better in Japanese than the whites, so they gave them direct commissions, quite a few. I remember at least two or three of them. And they came back to school and became our leaders.

So there was visible evidence that progress was being made. In fact, that's what I—after two years they wanted me to join the reserve. I said, "Give me a commission, and I'll join the reserves." But they said, "No, we can't do that." I said, "Forget it." Two years later—they must have kept a record, and they sent me a letter saying, "We are now ready to offer you a commission. Do you want to take it?" Remember, this is 1948. The world was—everything was calm. I figured nothing was going to happen. So I took the commission, second lieutenant.

Two years later, 1950, Korean War. About a year later I find myself over in Korea telling myself, "Boy, I really got myself into trouble." Not only that, I end up way up in the front lines with the peace talks at Pongmumjom. I was in charge of being electrical engineer, signal corps, communication. So I was in charge of all the communication. Not only that, it's a neutral area. We weren't allowed to carry guns. I always carried a pistol underneath my—they gave me a Jeep. I had about fifteen guys that were draftees, all white, one black guy, as I recall. And I always carried a gun underneath my seat on the Jeep because, see, we were supposedly surrounded by the Marines. US Marines, First Marine Division. But you never know. The opposing communists have a reputation of not honoring a lot of the neutral area. But fortunately it's the

Chinese—you know, 300,000 Chinese came in and almost pushed us off the peninsula. But by the time I got there things had kind of stalemated, so it wasn't too bad.

Dunham: You never had to use your gun.

3-00:59:59

Inami: Never did. [laughs] I learned how to lead my men at least trying to be the best that I could. For example, the chaplain came to me, because he would see me at the Sunday service. Of course there was no Buddhist service, so this was a Christian service there, Christian—well, they call it Protestant and Catholic. So he'd see me at the Protestant service. He said, "You know, I don't see any of your men there, and we'd like to have them come to the service." So I got the men together, and I said—see, instead of saying, "You should go to church," I said, "I understand some of you may want to go to church—." See, we had these radio stations; we had to keep it going twenty-four hours a day. So you work in shifts. "So if any of you are on a shift on Sunday, and you want to go to church, let me know. I'll take that shift myself."

Well, [laughs] see, there's a sergeant that's in charge. In the military system the officers live separately. The enlisted men live by the—whatever machines, the radios that were there. And there's a sergeant there that's in charge. He lives with them, and he does most of the discipline. So I asked one of the men, "Hey, that sergeant, he's a redneck from Alabama, Baptist, and he won't let us Catholics—. He puts us on a shift purposely so we can't go to church." So that's why I got the group together and said, "Anybody that wants to go to church, let me know. I'll take that shift." Well, the— [tape ends]

Audio File 4

Dunham: This is June 24, 2014, tape 4 with Frank Inami, and we just wanted to wrap up, I think, with a few more questions. I was kind of curious, back to when you started with the MIS and this new group of Japanese Americans coming together. You mentioned some of the things, with the Hawaiian Japanese being more independent-spirited. So I was interested in kind of tensions or challenges with that group. Then also the other group you mentioned was sort of the volunteers, versus the draftees. Now, you mentioned becoming great friends with the one who had a very different—but were there other tensions between that group, as well, the volunteers versus the draftees? So if you could speak to either of those two kind of groups coming together, or other things around that.

04-00:00:48

Inami: Yeah, this is the first time I was able to meet the people from Hawaii. As I mentioned before, they're much more freer. In Hawaii, you could intermarry if you wanted; here, you couldn't. There's all kinds of discrimination. Even though there still was quite a discrimination. Well, they discriminated against

their own people. Like the people from Okinawa were considered inferior. In fact, they would tell me that it's better to marry outside your race, rather than marry someone from Okinawa. There's that sort of discrimination. It's interesting you mention the conflict between the Hawaiian Japanese and the American Japanese. I was able to breach the difference between the two. In fact, we got into a sort of a hassle, because the instructors were, let's say, half from the mainland and half from Hawaii. And the director of the school was from the mainland, so there was a little bit of friction within the faculty. Not just the faculty, but between the director and the Hawaiian group. For example, we had just about finished the six months critique, and we were supposed to write up—. What do you call those things at the end of the—?

Dunham: Evaluation?

04-00:03:10

Inami:

Evaluation, right. The teacher that was with us said, "Make sure you don't write anything bad about the teachers because the director reads every word that you put down, and if you put anything negative, he takes it out on the poor teacher. So don't put anything bad in there." Well, there was one guy in the class, he's a lawyer, he had a law degree. He was in my class of about ten people. He put it in the critique, Sergeant So-and-So says, "Don't write anything negative, because the director comes in and takes it out." Well, director read that. So what happened? Well, before the director came in—see, there's a underground going on. So the teacher who was in charge of the homeroom teacher that said that, that told us not to write anything bad, see, well, he came up to me and he says, "Hey, Inami, can you do me a favor?" Then he qualified that, saying, "You don't have to." Says, "The director's going to come in, and he's going to ask, 'did this teacher say such and such?'" [laughs] He says, "Can you stick up for me?" I said, "Sure."

So, sure enough, the director—he's a major, see; he's way up there; here we're almost down at the bottom of the list—so he came in. He's a very brilliant guy. But unfortunately, his people skills are not—he rules by fear, rather than rule by being calm. So he came in, and he was angry. He got up and he said, "I hear that your teacher Sergeant So-and-So said such and such. Is that true?" Nobody said anything. So I stood up and stuck up for him. I said, "No, the way I interpret it, he says, 'don't be vindictive. Just because he did something to you or something, don't try to be unfair.' I took it just to mean just what he said." Boy, he glared at me. He says, "Private Inami, wipe that grin off your face and sit down. He chewed the heck out of me."

Then apparently, there, another guy in the class stood up and said, "Oh, I agree with Inami, yeah. He didn't say anything like that." Now the director, he's directing the whole school there. He realized that he'd been had. [laughs] He didn't realize that we were stooges in the group. By the way, the teacher was from Hawaii, see, and I'm from the mainland. The director's from the mainland, see. Well, I heard that the director, you had to be careful; he'll take

it out on you. He'll get some way to get even with you. And the way he did that was very—see, we finished the course, and by that time—remember, this is 1945; the war was just about to end, and the school was supposed to double its size, for the occupation forces, they wanted us to—. So what happened was they had the double the size, double the faculty; and a lot of the faculty had been there four years, and so they were getting out. So I got stuck as an instructor. The list came out, and there was my name on the list. Well, we knew the war was going to end in a few months. So a group of us—especially from Hawaii, again; those guys, they're not afraid to do anything—they got a petition going. There must have been ten of us that were supposed to stay back as instructors. So they said, "Hey, Inami, you want to sign this petition?" "What for?" I said. "Oh, we don't want to teach. We want to go to Japan. The war's going to be over, and we can have a good time in Japan." So I signed it. He called us in, the director, the same director. He called us in. Oh, he was angry. He said, "Next time you guys do this, I'm going to court martial every one of you." Court martial, that dooms you. You're through. So I knew that he put me on the list, probably.

Dunham: You mean to be spiteful for when you had stood up?

04-00:10:12

Inami:

Yeah. In fact, the word gets around the school: "Boy, this guy is a buck private; he gets up and speaks against a—." Says, "Aren't you crazy? You're crazy, trying to speak against the director. He's a major. Boy, you're just doomed for life. You better get out of the military right away." Well, I found out later—and in fact, I have proof there that when we graduated, I graduated as the outstanding student. I got the faculty award. The faculty award, I found out I had a stooge in the office. He says, "What the heck does this director have against you? Boy, he's really—." I said, "What happened?" Well, the faculty got together, and they said they were going to give me the award, and the director objected. He says, "He doesn't deserve the award." The faculty stood up and said, "We're the faculty. It's our award; we can give it to anyone that we want. You don't have a say." See, you had guys in there, they had already been master sergeants. They'd been there four years. They were ready to get out. They didn't care.

So as a result, I got the award. Then to top it off, see, they were expanding, the groups were getting bigger. I was thinking, "Boy, I'm in really trouble, because the reason my grades were up there is because you cram the night before." You take the exam; you forget it the next day. Now, there were guys who were raised in Japan. They knew their Kanji; they knew all this, see? But me, I just crammed it. So I'm just imagining the worst. I'm going to have to cram like heck the day before and give my class and—. But what they did for me was they put me—see, they have four divisions, and each division had—usually it's a civilian; I think they had one military, but they're mostly civilians who headed up the group. Of course, they report directly to the director. Then they have a guy like me, chosen as an instructor, to be kind of

the division leader's right-hand man. I had to set up the schedules. I had to keep track of the grades and this sort of thing. They put me in that position.

Well, I think I did one group of teaching because the teacher was sick that day or something, but I didn't have to hardly any teaching at all. I learned the politics. The politics, this whole thing. The word got around, Frank Inami is not afraid to stick up for the Hawaiian guy who could've been in trouble. So they looked after me. And all those guys that looked after me, they all disappeared because their four years are up. One of them went to law school, all this sort of thing. So I learned a lesson in politics. If you're going to stick up for somebody, stick up for somebody that might mean something, see?
[laughs]

Dunham: Why would you have preferred to go to Japan, rather than stay back in the teaching?

04-00:14:39

Inami: See, there's a term called Kibei. Kibei means return to US. See, as a young—some of them maybe six, eight years old—they're sent to Japan. They claim that the discipline and the work, schooling is much better there. Not only that, their argument—in fact, I almost got caught in this thing. See, I'm ten years old. Dad took us to Japan, and he was going to leave us there. My mother confessed that we were [tape skip] ten years old, so you can get the better Japanese education. Not only that, there's no discrimination. On top of that, see, there were guys who got even PhDs here and couldn't find jobs. You go to Japan, you could find a job, see?

Dunham: Because of discrimination here?

04-00:15:51

Inami: Yeah. For occupation, you could find something. So I almost got stuck there. But fortunately, I kind of speak my mind at times. But to get back to your question. The Kibeis, those that trained there and came back from Japan, they would say things like, "Japan is a man's country." And you're king, you can—it turns out that they were right. Because the guys that went to Japan, they really had it good. See, because they knew the language, they had the eyes and ears of MacArthur, and they were having a great time. For example, my friend from the Fukui Mortuary. I mentioned this mortuary in LA. Well, he went to Japan. He was in the same class, graduated same time. They went to Japan. Of course, Soichi was married at the time, so he left his wife in Minneapolis, and he told me, look after her, while he went. He was having a good time with all these other classmates and friends and so forth. For example, he bought a Jeep. Because even when I went there in 1952, '51, during the Korean War, see, if you were in uniform, you got a lot of meals for free. But especially, you could ride the trains; you can get on the train any time. Phone calls were free and you have living quarters. You had all kinds of privileges. So I missed out [on] a lot of that.

Dunham: So you were back in Fort Snelling, in Minnesota, when the war ended. Do you remember hearing about V-E and V-J Days and what were the reactions there?

04-00:18:30

Inami: Oh, okay, yeah.

Dunham: Victory over Europe and then Victory over Japan, and especially being in a Japanese-American community—

04-00:18:39

Inami: Right. Well, I'll mention one incident. There was a Sergeant Suzuki. He was on the faculty, like I was. So one day—it was a few days after the atomic bomb was dropped. Since he was educated in Japan, he had—see, we used to—I didn't do it, but we used to monitor the Japanese language radio broadcasts, shortwave broadcasts. What we would do, they would pick up the messages, the news from Japan, and Suzuki would transcribe it into Kanji, into the Japanese, and mimeograph it, and the students would have to translate it back into English. So I went into the office, and there he is, scratching out some words. I said, "Hey Suzuki, what are you scratching this out for?" "Oh, we just got word from Washington that the atomic bomb was dropped by parachute." See, bombs usually—you don't drop by parachute; you just let it drop. Well, I had asked him, "What you scratching out, the word rakkasan, by parachute?" So he said, "We got word from Washington that the bomb was dropped by parachute, and we had to scratch that word, because that's classified information."

Suzuki's still living. He's an artist in Berkeley. I saw him one day, and I mentioned. He doesn't remember that incident at all. However, through ham radio, I met a ham in Chicago, Joe Joji, Japanese American. He had spent the war years in Japan. He was in Hiroshima. He saw that bomb come down. He was maybe five, ten miles away. He saw the bomb come down. He says, "I've seen other bombs come down, and they come straight down. But this thing came down by parachute. It's the first time I've seen a bomb—." I explained to him. See, in some of my military training, you learn how to drop bombs, or you know how to—especially atomic bomb. You want it to drop slowly, and you want to detonate it maybe a couple thousand feet, maybe half a mile above the ground, because if you let it go down and hit the ground, all it does, [it] will make a crater, and it only kills the people maybe several thousand feet. Whereas if you drop it way up, it covers a much bigger area and see, it kills, what, 10,000 people? Something like [that]. It's one of the principles I learned in command and general staff school, how to use the atomic bomb, compared to ordinary bombs.

Dunham: How did you feel when you heard about the atomic bombs being dropped?

04-00:22:48

Inami: Oh, the atomic bomb? I kind of knew what was going on. See, University of Chicago, not too far from Illinois Tech, it has a good engineering school. Yet

they wouldn't take us. I found out—I think I mentioned last time—that Enrico Fermi, a nuclear scientist, was right underneath the football stands. Underneath the football field stands, he had a nuclear pile working, to show that the atomic bomb would work. See, the idea was if he blew himself up, it'd blow up the whole stadium. That's why they didn't want us there. They didn't want us Japanese around there. But see, because we had to take physics, you knew what the nuclear—see, that's another thing that saved me, you might say. I knew how the atomic bomb works. So when they were interviewing me for the award, one of the things I mentioned to them, how radar works. They want to know how radar works. Well, I learned that in school. They want to know how the atom bomb works; I know the basic principles of how you bring two subcritical pieces together and make them critical. Very simple. I got the reputation, “boy, this guy knows all this.”

Dunham: Well, when did you meet the blonde, green-eyed woman? When did that occur?

04-00:25:01

Inami: She was living next door to us in Madera. We had this little grocery store. She's ten years younger than I am, and her mother was a single mother with three kids. We had some interesting discussions, because she didn't know anything about what happened or what was happening to us. So I mentioned that. And of course, she knew my parents because they were working in the store. Said they were born in Japan, they could never become citizens. Then to even buy land—they had an anti-alien land law. If you were an alien, you couldn't own land. So here I am, ten years old, and the land is in my name. Of course, I was older than that at that time. Remember, this is after the war. Must've been, yeah, about four or five years after the war. And I'm explaining these things to her. Then I mentioned, “For example, I could never marry you.” She says, “Why not?” “Oh, there are law[s] against whites and Asians marrying.” “No,” she says, “it can't be.” This is after the war. So I went down to the local county office, said, “I want to marry this green-eyed blonde.” She says, “We can't give you a license.” So I went, the next day, a few days later, I told the blonde. Said, “See? They won't give me a license. We'd have to go to Arizona or some of the other states to get a license.” She says, “I didn't want to marry you anyway.” But she said she didn't realize.

Meanwhile, the gal that I met in camp, Setsuko Matsubara, we kept in contact. She had moved from Philadelphia to San Francisco, and she said in her Christmas card, “I just moved to San Francisco.” So I knew where she lived. Yeah, I just had the letter. So after the blonde turned me down, I wrote to her, and I said, “Are you still single?” essentially. And she says, “Yeah, I'm still single.” So I would drive three and a half hours up to San Francisco. I used to go back and forth. Let's see, in '48, I got my commission. The war started in '50; in '51 I got recalled to the Korean War. So I told Setsuko, I told her, “Hey,” after three dates and so forth, I said, “Let's get married. I'm being sent to Fort Monmouth, in New Jersey for four months' training, as a signal corps

officer. So let's get married. You had lived in Philadelphia for years. Philadelphia's not far from Fort Monmouth." She says, "No, I don't want to marry." I said, "Okay." So I went. When I got to Fort Monmouth, the whole class, this class of training, we're being sent to Korea because that was our purpose.

The rumors start to spread. Rumors were we were going through—there's an Army base, Fort Lewis, in Washington, near Tacoma, Seattle. So I heard about it, so I went to the Pentagon. There was another gal I met. She was a widow with three kids, a Japanese American. I had met her at Cal. She knew her way around the Pentagon, so she said, "Oh, I'll take you over there." So I drove from Fort Monmouth, picked her up in Baltimore, and then went to the Pentagon. She told me where to go. She sought the place where they gave the orders. So I went, and I had my ID and everything. I said, "Where are we going? Where am I going?" Said, "You're going through Fort Lewis, in Washington." I said, "You know, I've got a girlfriend in San Francisco. Any chance I can go through San Francisco?" Because I knew there was a POE, port of embarkation. They're sending troops out of Pittsburg, this Pittsburg here. He says, "Oh, I think we can arrange it." When the orders came out, I was the only one going through San Francisco. So now I got a chance to see Setsuko again.

After a couple of dates, I said, "Hey, let's get married, because I'm going overseas. I've got two weeks. They gave me two weeks, so we can get married in two weeks." She says, "No, I don't want to get married." I said, "Why?" She says, "You might not come back." Because the casualty rates were high during the—we talk about 4,000 getting killed over in Iraq. There were 30,000 killed in action during the Korean War. I think there were quite a few Niseis in that group. So I said, "Why not?" She says, "You might not come back." I said, "Well, if you don't come back, you get \$10,000." With \$10,000, those days, you could buy a house. Just put half of it down, buy a car. She can buy two cars, three cars, for \$5,000. She said, "I don't want money like that." I said, "Okay, I'll go. I've got to go." That green-eyed blonde, through the grapevine, [I heard] she was living over here in Rio Vista. You've heard of Rio Vista?

Fukumoto: I have. Yeah.

04-00:33:11

Inami: She was living there. So I found the phone number. She was, oh, working at a card shop, greeting cards. So I called her, and I said, "Hey, I've got one evening free before I get shipped out. You want to go out?" She says, "Okay." So we went to Stockton. Went to a Chinese restaurant, and then I took her back to Rio Vista, said goodbye. Next day they sent me by airplane, to Japan. Meanwhile, the blonde sends me—she said she was divorcing her husband. Yeah, she was divorcing her husband. At that time, there was a one-year waiting period. You had to wait a year before you could remarry. Yeah,

they've changed that now. What is it, three days or something like that? So I wrote to her. She wrote back, and she said, "My husband and I, we're back together again, and we're going to have a baby." The baby was born in April. Yeah, that's her son. The baby was born. So she sends me a letter, "I gave birth to a baby boy." What happened? Yeah. I can figure, so I figure back nine months, and when we had gone out, she was already pregnant. She didn't tell me that. She's usually pretty talkative, and we can talk about—. She was very quiet. Maybe she's quiet because I may not come back, all kinds of things going through her mind. But she was already expecting. But apparently, she was—what do they call it—separated at the time. Anyway.

Then over the years, we kept in contact. Fortunately, my wife is very understanding. She'd come over, and we'd take her up to our—we have a cabin up at Tahoe; we'd take her up to the cabin. She tolerated her. She went through that divorce, another. Oh, she married another guy that she met in Madera. He was a union boss, I think. Apparently these union leaders, a pretty rough life. They have to negotiate all night long. He had a secretary. Her husband got the secretary pregnant. So he asked for a divorce, so she gave him a divorce.

Dunham: But anyway, you guys stayed friends all through the years and are still in touch, which is not—

04-00:37:06

Inami: Right.

Dunham: How did you and your wife eventually get married? When did she finally say yes?

04-00:37:18

Inami: Oh, okay. [laughs] That's right. So I wrote to her from Korea, saying, "I've got a chance to get out of the reserve, so I'm coming back, and I hope we can get married." She wrote back and said something to the effect that, "I'm glad you're coming back; I'll be waiting for you." But the way she worded it, it could mean [laughs] "I want to give you the bad news; I don't want to marry you." So I come back, I get off the ship, and I call her, and she says, "I'm busy tonight. I can only see you for half an hour." So I'm wondering, "Now, what the heck's she up to?" So we were parked on Geary Street, near Japantown. She was living near Japantown. We're parked in the car, and I said, "The way you said you were waiting for me, what do you mean?" She says, "Let's get married." But I found out that she likes to see plays. San Francisco has a lot of shows. She found out that if she ushers at any of those places, you get to see the show.

Fukumoto: Right.

Dunham: Yeah, we've done that.

04-00:39:11

Inami: Right. The only thing you have to do, if someone comes in late, you have to go up to the front and show them the—. So that's why she was in such a hurry. She wouldn't tell me that. She'd keep me guessing, just to—.

Fukumoto: Just to torture you.

04-00:39:28

Inami: Just to see. That marriage lasted fifty years. She died—let's see now. Yeah, the 442 had a reunion—well, they included MIS—in April. So I said, "Let's go. Because this will be good, with our fiftieth wedding anniversary, because the wedding anniversary is March 28." So April 1 we went to Hawaii. Came back, and the following September, September 12, she had an aortic dissection. You've probably never heard of it.

Fukumoto: No.

04-00:40:22

Inami: Your aorta comes out of the heart, comes down, and it splits in two. Well, apparently, the thing just tears apart. It's rather rare; only about 5,000 cases a year in the whole United States. You've heard of John—? *Three's Company*.

Fukumoto: John Ritter?

Dunham: Ritter.

04-00:40:50

Inami: Ritter, John Ritter.

Fukumoto: He had it?

04-00:40:52

Inami: Same day, same problem. He wasn't feeling good that day. He was taping a show; he wasn't feeling good that day. I think he started to faint or something like that. Hospital's right across the street, so they rushed him to the hospital. They diagnosed it as aortic dissection. They tried to patch it up, but he died right there. Same day, same problem, aortic dissection. In fact, it was so uncommon that I remember *Time* magazine had an article on it, aortic dissection.

So within half an hour, she was essentially brain dead. She went right here. That morning—she's lazy; she doesn't like to get up early. So she got up early. I said, "What are you getting up so early for?" "I've got to get my hair done, eight o'clock." I said, "Okay." So she went to get her hair done right down the street here. About ten o'clock, hair finished, got in her car, put the key in the ignition, locked the doors. All of a sudden she realized she's supposed to call her girlfriend. See, she doesn't like to cook, so she's always looking for easy ways to get a meal. So she called up her girlfriend in Pleasanton. She doesn't drive, so she says, "Carmen, I'll pick you up and

we'll go to the senior center in Dublin or—yeah, in Dublin—and have a barbeque lunch.” That’s all. Apparently, the aorta really got to her, and she just slumped over and she was brain dead. By the time they got to me, she was in the hospital, and they showed me the—what do they call it—encephalogram, that showed you—you could see the blood just shooting out of the aorta. The doctor says, “You know, if you want, we can operate. But there’s only 10 percent chance.” That’s what they did with John Ritter. Except John Ritter’s wife sued for \$65 million, because her future TV earnings—. The judge threw it out of court. Said, “That’s an aortic dissection. It’s so rare that they—.” See, she claimed that there’s another type of—ABC, or triple A is it? Aortic aneurism? See, there’s an aneurism. Aortic abdominal aneurism. That’s a different; those you can usually save. But this one is so rare that the judge just threw it out of court.

Fukumoto:

Wow, that’s quite a story.

Dunham:

Yeah. I wanted to wrap up before we get kicked out of our conference room.

04-00:44:50

Inami:

What time is it? Oh, I don’t think he’s going to come after us.

Dunham:

Oh, okay. Well, we mentioned being back in Madera. I was curious, after being in the camps, for your parents, what was that transition back for them like?

04-00:45:07

Inami:

Oh, you mean coming from camp back?

Dunham:

Yeah, yeah.

04-00:45:10

Inami:

Okay. There was a Chinese family who offered to take over the grocery store. Now, when they released, I was in the service, but the rest of the family was still in Rohwer. But they let the people come home before the war ended. See, the war ended in August of ’45. Unfortunately, my younger brothers and sisters don’t remember much of the details of coming home. But anyway, they were told they could leave, and they gave them train fare to come home. They were afraid, because the contract said the contract is good for the duration of the war. So since the war had not ended, they were afraid the Chinese would not give it up until [the war ended]. So they were ready to do something else, find something to live, until the war ended, okay? They were all ready to do this. So they came home, they found out the Chinese family—the housing was in the back of the store. So the family had moved out, all ready for us to move in. We wondered why. This blonde who lived next door says, “Oh, didn’t you know? They heard the Japs were coming home; they’re going to bomb the place when the Japs took over.” So the Chinese figured they’d better get out of there, in case they get mistaken. So they hightailed it. They were glad to turn the store over to us, see?

Dunham: They thought that residents were going to attack? Or who did they think would bomb?

04-00:47:27

Inami: Oh, yeah. See, the blonde tells me that there was a movement going around the neighborhood. “The Japs are coming back; don’t trade there.” This kind of thing.

Dunham: So how did it go, trying to run the store? Did your parents have a hard time? Did they get business?

04-00:47:45

Inami: Yeah, for a while, but—see, what happened during the war was, for example, as I recall, on the night of the evacuation, we had to leave the next morning, okay? That night, we took inventory. At that time, the inventory was \$2,000. A little, dinky store. So the Chinese guy, Lee, says, “I’d like to give you \$2,000, but I’ve only got a thousand cash, check. So I’ll send you the other thousand.” Well, we’ve got to leave next morning; what else can you do? So we took the thousand. He never gave us the thousand back. But at the end of the war, or when he came back, prices had gone up. They had a lot of inventory. So the inventory had gone up to \$4,000. So we owe him \$4,000. He owes us a thousand, so we still owe him \$3,000. See, Dad always told [us], the Chinese are very shrewd businesspeople. So he says, “Be careful.” Sure enough—. So we had to come up with the \$3,000. I don’t think we had to pay it all at once, but somehow he was able to, see?

Another thing during the war is that they had rationing. Meat was rationed, see? So the government would go up in the hills, [to] the cattle ranchers, says, “How many head of cattle do you have?” The rancher would have, say, 120 head, but he’d report 100. So he’s got twenty head of cattle he claimed, cattle will die and this sort of thing. So there’s an extra twenty heads. Now, the hundred head is rationed through ration stamps; but the twenty head is for him. So he would slaughter those, bring them downtown to little stores like us, and sell the meat to the grocer, and the grocer would double, triple the price. People [who] don’t have ration stamps, they’re glad to get the meat. Then you’d make all kinds of money.

Dunham: Interesting.

Fukumoto: Yeah, very.

04-00:50:45

Inami: So we could’ve made [that money] during the war. All kinds of money, we could’ve made that.

Dunham: Yeah. Well, I just wanted to wrap up. Reflecting back on the whole wartime experience—being taken away to camp, serving in the MIS—what’s your

perspective, particularly on how Japanese Americans were treated during that time?

04-00:51:10

Inami:

Oh, well, I feel we were mistreated. I definitely feel that especially during the war, I could've gotten my degree, worked in the defense industries, make a contribution. The Japanese language, I was glad to make that contribution. But the experiences kind of—let's see, let me make a comparison. My white classmates from UC Berkeley, or even from Illinois Tech, they all got good jobs, and they were advancing ahead. For example, my classmate Dick Mack—did I mention he's the one that hired me after?—he had moved up to be the assistant head of the engineering department. He was able to hire me, just like that. As I recall, I think my grades were about equal to his. He's quite a religious guy. He wanted me to go to Burundi. You've heard of Burundi? Right in Central Africa. He wanted me to help him set up a radio station to broadcast the Christian message. He kept bugging me. So I helped him piece together some of the—. And locate the equipment. But meanwhile, they had a revolution. It's a little country. Burundi and Rwanda, two little [countries]. And it's unstable. So we never did go. It's a good thing. But that's a comparison we could've—.

Dunham:

Right, the significant setback of your career path.

04-00:53:47

Inami:

Right. Right. In fact, I only made it up to—even in the military—from a buck private, all the way up to lieutenant colonel. The rest of the group who stayed in the Reserve or stayed in the service, they all made it up to full colonel, see. So you can make that comparison.

Dunham:

But you were able to have a pretty long, successful career at Lawrence Livermore.

04-00:54:21

Inami:

Oh, yeah, I was able to—but I would think things changed, especially right after the Korean War. I was surprised that, for example, to work at the lab, you need what they call a Q clearance. It's above top secret clearance, see. I was able to get that clearance. They checked everything, checked all my background. I'm not the only one; the other Japanese Americans who had a good record, as long as you didn't have a felony or anything like that, you were able to get this security clearance.

Dunham:

And you worked much of your career around nuclear weapons and such, is that correct? What were you doing at Lawrence Livermore Lab?

04-00:55:19

Inami:

Oh, at the lab. Yeah, I was an electronic engineer. We would go out to the Pacific to set off the—. They were prototypes of the bomb, hydrogen bomb. Then we had a test site in Nevada. You never heard of the Fukuryu Maru?

Fukuryu? The Lucky Dragon. See, there was a Japanese ship. They were fishing for tuna out in the Pacific, and they got clobbered. They got hit by one of the nuclear devices.

Dunham: The tests.

04-00:56:08

Inami: Yeah, it's known as the Lucky Dragon, Fukuryu. Fuku means lucky or fortunate.

Fukumoto: Right.

04-00:56:14

Inami: I guess you know. Okay. Fukuryu Maru. Yeah, I don't know whether it's on the internet or not. It's Lucky Dragon. I was on that shot that clobbered them. I think they were fishing for tuna. There were about twenty, I think, twenty, twenty-five sailors on that ship. Twenty-five years later, they wrote a book of that incident. Twenty-five. All twenty-five were still living, except for the radio operator. See, the Japanese radio operator licenses are pretty strict. You have to know a little bit of physics, a little bit of chemistry. So when those white ashes came down, the rest of them were superstitious. They said, "We're near the equator. It can't be snowing." But the radio operator says, "I'll prove to you it's not snow." So he took a handful of the ashes, stuck it in his mouth and said, "See? It doesn't taste like snow." He got radiation sickness, and he died a couple months later.

Dunham: But none of the others—?

04-00:57:47

Inami: Well, all the rest are still living. Twenty-five. Twenty-five years later. I have the book. It's all in Japanese. I met another ham, a real Japanese ham. He's emigrated to Canada. A guy named Fukuma. He had met this radio operator, and he said he had taken the ashes, put it into his handkerchief, and stuck it up in the radio rooms. Those radio rooms are really crowded. You could barely get in there. So he got all this radiation.

Dunham: Well, the tape is nearly over, but are there any last thoughts you wanted to share before we close our interview here today?

04-00:58:44

Inami: Well, I want to thank you for making this interview possible, because this means someday, maybe some of my kinfolds will be reading it or looking at it or whatever.

Dunham: Well, it's our pleasure. Yeah, thank you so much for participating—

04-00:59:05

Inami: Well, thank you.

Dunham: —and sharing so much of your diverse experiences. We really appreciate it, so thank you.

Fukumoto: Yeah. We learned a lot. So thank you.

Dunham: Thank you very much.

[End of interview]