

YUICHI NAKAMURA

October 15, 1982

- T: Mr. Nakamura, what is your present age?
N: Now? In Nov., I'll be 85 years old. Yes, on Nov. 1
T: And are you an issei? Were you born in Japan?
N: I was born in Japan and was later called to Hawaii. I was called to Hawaii in Taisho 15
T: Where in Japan are you from?
N: Hiroshima
T: How many were in your family?
N: I was the eldest and the only one born in Japan. The rest of my brothers and sisters were born in Hawaii.
T: All in all, how many brothers and sisters do you have in the family?
N: (Recounts his brothers and sisters).....
(Son Harry Nakamura interjects): There were 10. 5 males and 5 females
T: Your son Harry said that there were ten of you. Five men and 5 females. Is that right?
N: Yes
T: And you had brothers and sisters that passed away?
N: They all died from injuries. One was involved in a traffic accident on the mainland. He was hit from behind.
T: Was this before or after the war?
N: Before the war.
T: Mr. Nakamura, how old were you when you came to Hawaii? Your said that you came to Hawaii in Taisho 15
N: I was 15. I just finished Koto-Shogaku. Then we went to Kealani, Kauai to live. I later went to intermediate school for 2 1/2 years.
T: What kind of work were you doing before the war?
N: Before the war we had the Nakamura Shoten and I stayed there for a while. Then I went over to the Kobayashi Hotel. Kobayashi called me over for a talk. He said he needed help so I joined him. I was there for 4 years and after that I began the Nakamura Hotel.
T: What year was that? Do you remember?
N: I don't remember.... it was quite so many years ago Eh.... Eh.... (still trying to remember)
T: That's alright.... what were you doing when the war broke out? Dec. 7, 1941.
N: Dec. 7 when the war began.... they had a lecture on how to handle the injured and displaced during a wartime situation. I was over there to learn what to do. I was at a Shugai at the Nippon Theater when the war broke out
N: And a lot of people were being arrested. I wasn't picked up that easily. The FBI investigated everyone who was later interned. Yamamoto Ikoshi was among them.
T: Who was that?
N: Yamamoto Iskoshi. Then the FBI was searching for him they found him at my hotel. That's how they apprehended Yamamoto-sensei. A lot of the hotel guests were arrested.
T: Where were you taken?
N: You know-- where they got the island.
T: Sand Island?
N: The island. The immigration station. There were a lot of

- T: them (japanese). Then they sent us to the mainland.
- T: Did they, the FBI, give you any reason for arresting you?
- N: We, the ones who were to be internees, were investigated. They said that I took tour groups to Japan. Why didn't I take groups to the mainland, they asked. "Isn't that because you were receiving money from the Japanese government?" they claimed. That's the kind of things that the FBI would say. The Japanese government would give money to private businesses! But that's the kind of things the FBI would say. And I was put into Sand Island with 4 or 5 others. Then, they said, as we were going to the mainland, that they (Americans) had just bombed Tokyo that day. That's that day I was shipped to San Francisco.
- T: There were quite a few of us on the ship. maybe about 300 people on the ship.
- T: Were you married when you were arrested by the FBI?
- N: I had a wife and children then. (Points to Harry) He was there. The hotel was on Beretania then. They left the Nakamura Hotel operational and just sent me to the mainland.
- T: What was your family's reaction?
- N: Well, it was war so shikata-ga-nai. They, the government, left our business in tact. It was like they were almost protecting the business. During that time, we had all kinds of people staying at the hotel-- soldiers and all kinds. It didn't matter if I served drinks. During the war and after the war-- the Nakamura Hotel was still there.
- T: What were you able to bring when you were picked up?
- N: The military provided everything that we needed. Military clothing. Khaki pants and stuff like that. Food and clothing were provided -- we had no problems. We were provided with the same food that the Americans feed to their troops. And we had cooks among us that prepared the food. So, the internees were divided into different areas of work--kitchen help, dish-washers and so on. And we had different kinds of work in the camps. Since I ran a tour agency in Hawaii, I helped with immigration-connected work and the government paid me \$1.00 per month.
- T: Was that with the Japanese consulate?
- N: No, the U.S. government. It had nothing to do with the Japanese consulate. In the beginning, the internee affairs fell as part of the military's responsibilities. After it was turned over to the civilians, things were relaxed somewhat.
- T: Just a minute ago, you mentioned that you handled immigration procedures. Was that for the Japanese consulate?
- N: I handled some matters as a consular agent and things for internees as a camp immigration official.
- T: Which mainland camp were you at?
- N: At first, I was at Angel Island off San Francisco. It was a cold place. As Hawaii's internees reached San Francisco, we all stayed at Angel Island. After that, we were transferred to different locations in various states. The early people were sent to St. Louis and other miserable places like Santa Fe. (He places emphasis here as an indication of this is where he stayed.) In going, they would take us from here to there on the train.
- T: Who did you go with? You said that there were about 300 on the ship.

- N: There were the military escort and a cook accompanying us on the train. The food was pretty good. They would stop the trains in places where they didn't expect too many people. We went to Texas; they had a base there and they held us there. They had built barracks for groups of twenty. Texas really had bad thunder and lightening storms.
- T: Where in Texas was that?
- N: Where they had the biggest base. What did they call that place? It's been such a long time...
- T: When they refer to Texas, it's usually Crystal City. If they had a tent camp, then that would be San Antonio.
- N: They had Hawaii people assembled there. Then there were people from Mexico.
- T: Did they have people from Peru there?
- N: Yeah!
- T: Then that must have been Crystal City.
- N: Canada...What's further than Canada? It used to belong to Russia/
- T: Alaska.
- N: Alaska--they put us together with the guys from Alaska at Santa Fe. The military built a camp there and put us together with the guys from Alaska. The guys from Alaska, some of them didn't speak any Japanese. Some of them had Eskimo wives. There was this old-timer. He was in Alaska for a long time. In the beginning, he didn't know any Japanese, but as he stayed with us, he started remembering his old language of Japanese. He talked to the others for us and told us tales of Alaska.
- T: What kind of stories did he tell?
- N: About life in Alaska. Alaska is cold. They would kill game for food. They would put that meat in the freezer because it was warmer in the freezer than outside. That way, it was more ready to eat. That's the kind of things he would say.
In camp, the internees would make the food. They had some good cooks there.
- T: Mr. Nakamura, did you call for your wife and children after you got settled in?
- N: No. They stayed in Hawaii during the whole war.
- T: Life in camp must have been pretty hard...
- N: Internees had government issued food and supplies and clothes. We would wear some of our clothes, but the military clothes were the most common. They even paid us three dollars a month. From that, we would pay for our cigarettes. We all received the same pay--even the poor from the mainland. Whenever I needed money, my family would send it to me.
I started to learn how to play golf at that time. In order for me to purchase the necessary equipment, the family sent me money. And there was this guy from Hawaii named Mikami. He was really good on the shakuhachi. He had a lot of students learning from him. Always on New Year's, he would play the "Kimi na yo" on the shakuhachi. He had between 100 and 200 students. I had a shakuhachi sent from Hawaii. Others would make shakuhachi out of a pipe.
- T: Dan Nishikawa, formerly with the Hawaii Times, had a shakuhachi made out of a pipe.
- N: With the drilled holes...Then there was a former Hochi man, who is now with the Times. He quit the Hochi and joined the Times. He was good in plays. He was good and was teaching some at the camp. He made all the costumes. What was his name? Shimazu. no. Tsushima! He was good in shibai.

- T: What about the leaders in the camp?
- N: Among the Japanese, we had a spokesman. Each barrack had a chief and the chiefs had a leader. I was a barrack chief for a while. There were 30 to 40 of us from Hawaii in that barrack.
- T: And everyone was divided up into different work details? We didn't have any work except what needed to be done in the camps. We helped doctors. The doctors were getting paid the same thing that we were.
- T: Wasn't Dr. Kazuo Miyamoto with you folks?
- N: Yea. And we had a lot of priests there. We had all kinds of classes there. English...Brazilian (Portuguese)...all kinds.
- T: What were you doing, Mr. Nakamura?
- N: I was learning a bit of everything.
- T: What about your job at the camp?
- N: Within the camp, they had an immigration station.
- T: What did you do there?
- N: The guy in charge was a Caucasian. Within the immigration station, we used to take orders to have eye glass prescriptions filled for those with poor eyesight.
- T: At the immigration station?
- N: Yes, at the immigration station.
- T: Did you handle cases in which some were feed up with life in the camps and wanted to return to Japan?
- N: When they wanted to make glasses, we would send the orders to the doctor in town. They would fill the prescription and the U.S. government would pay for it. Then they would make lunch for me and I would go the golf course to work. If you worked half day there, they would let you play for a half day. Occasionally, we were allowed to go out to help pick apples. A bus would come to get us and we would pick apples. They would pay us a little for our services. It was a token payment.
- T: You were relatively free to do anything you wanted to do in the camps?
- N: The Hongwanji reverends had their own classes. They had all kinds of religious leaders there. Seicho-no-Ie and so on.
- T: What is your religion?
- N: I'm a Hongwanji Buddhist.
- T: So you were relatively free within the confines of the camp.
- N: Yes. They never told us that we couldn't do this or that. Nothing like that. They even had a newspaper within the camp. And they used to broadcast news within the camp.
- T: Mr. Yamamoto was doing that, wasn't he?
- N: Yes, Mr. Yamamoto was doing that. There was someone from Hilo. He passed away now.
- T: From Hilo?
- N: He would read the papers and talk about what he read. About the war.
- T: How did you communicate with your wife?
- N: Letters. We were free to write letters.
- T: Did they have a determined number of letters tha you could send out in a month?
- N: We were free to write letters. And before the war ended, we were able to buy beer and drink. We were confined, but we never were in need of things. They paid us and we used the money for tobacco. No matter what you did, we were paid the same. Doctors get one dollar. I went to work and got a dollar. Since it was camp life; there were only males. There were

- T: only two or three females in camp. All the rest were men.
- T: If you wanted to, couldn't you have called your wife and family over?
- N: Yes. There was a family camp. There were people who called their wives over.
- T: But you didn't call your wife over.
- N: I didn't call her over. They were running the hotel.
- T: If you reflect on the camp experience, how do you feel about it?
- N: It wasn't family life, but we were well treated. It wasn't a bad living. We had enough food. In the beginning, we didn't have beer, but later on we got that. We had parties then. They even had stores within the camps. Clothing stores, food and just about everything that you needed.
- T: How were you received by your family when you returned?
- N: We were held at an immigration station in San Francisco. We were returned on government ships to Hawaii.
- T: How did you feel when you met your wife and kids?
- N: When we got to Honolulu, we were free. Every one went to their homes. We came back on military ships.
- T: How many years was it since you've seen your wife and children?
- N: My wife and children were living in the hotel. They didn't really suffer.
- T: When you saw them, three or four years must have passed.
- N: All the leaders in Hawaii were arrested.
- T: What we are investigating is how did the internment effect the Japanese community.
- N: (No response)
- T: Did conditions in your family change?
- N: When the ship docked, I went straight home.
- T: When you returned home, were the conditions different?
- N: When I got home, there was a Jodo-shu priest who was about to return to the outer islands.
- T: Were conditions different at home?
- N: Nothing was changed.
- T: Not too many changes?
- N: Nothing was changed.
- T: Even though you were gone for three or four years. Your wife had to make the daily decisions. There were no problems?
- N: Nothing had changed.
- T: When you returned, how were you received?
- N: My wife came to greet me and we went home. There were no longer any constraints holding us back.
- T: How did the Japanese society receive you?
- N: The people who were left in Hawaii felt sorry for those who were interned.
- T: How were you received by the other people of Hawaii?
- N: There weren't any changed attitudes from other people. They received us well. We may have been interned, but we didn't do anything wrong or anything we should be ashamed of.
- T: There wasn't any form of discrimination from the others?
- N: Nothing like that happened. Besides, in this line of business, you're in touch with all kinds of people from different islands. the more you know about them, better the business judgements.
- T: What do you think the folks left behind felt?
- N: In terms of actual impact on living conditions, there were no changes in living standards. Economically, for us anyway, there were no times that we felt that we faced difficulties. Nothing changed at all.

- T: Not too much effect?
N: Not that much effect. Even though we were interned, it was not reflected by the society.
T: So before and after the war, there were no changes?
N: No difference.
T: Even from your own eyes?
N: Not in the least bit.
T: No changes within the household and no differences before and after the war.
N: No changes at all--truthfully. Even after returning, the internees were not treated like they were poison.
T: If the U.S. and Japan had another war, do you think they would have camps again?
N: They probably wouldn't.
T: The AJA community would probably vehemently oppose something like that.
N: Yes.
T: Do you feel that the internees are reluctant to talk?
N: Two-fifths of those who were sent to the mainland because there was some question about them in regards to national security. Japan didn't have the power that it did when the war began. But at that time, there was the danger of an invasion. The U.S. was worried if an invasion took place, it would be hard because of the large population of Japanese. That's the reason why the leaders were interned.
T: So, before the war, you used to take travel groups to Japan.
N: When the (U.S.) government started investigating me, the FBI said that you go to Japan on trips, but why didn't you go to America (mainland).
T: How did you answer their question?
N: They accused me of receiving money from the Japanese government. There was no way that they would give me money.
T: How did you answer when they asked and accused you of these things?
N: There was nothing like that. My business was to take them to Japan.
T: Did you go to specific locales in Japan?
N: Japan trips... the war was getting bad then. There were a lot of stories circulating about foreign soldiers... coming from the government. It was a good thing that the Japanese government lost the war. If they had won, we wouldn't be able to go to Japan.
T: All the Japanese leaders were taken away to mainland camps. Did you ever hear about the difficulties or hardships of those left behind?
N: None.
T: When you returned everything was the same?
N: No changes whatsoever.
T: How about culturally? Japanese language, music, movies... no changes?
N: Yea. No changes.
T: So the Japanese movies continued to come in, Japanese music continued to come in. No changes at all?
N: No changes at all.
T: So the camp experience was a good experience? You learned a lot. Shakuhachi, drama, drawing, golf. Did you benefit from it?
N: Yes.
T: Mr. Nakamura, how did you feel about it? You met a lot of people

- there and had classes. So you improved or learned more at camp.
- N: Thinking about internment today, there were no changes in living or the way that people interacted with each other. It was a good experience.
- T: What about the camps. Where there any instances where people really suffered?
- N: In the camps, there weren't things that made us suffer.
- T: While you were at the camps, the Nakamura Hotel was still here.
- N: Nothing really changed. Everyone did what was needed to be done.
- T: Who solved the minor problems at home while you were away? You were at the mainland camps. Did your wife write to you about any problems?
- N: No problems what so ever.
- T: You exchanged quite a bit of letters. How often were you allowed to write letters. Where the number of letter rationed.
- N: No.
- T: What about the number received?
- N: No.
- T: I've seen a number of letters that were cut up by the censors.
- N: Well, they sent me money when I asked for it. Also, I requested a shakuhachi from my dear friend Watanabe who was a shakuhacchi instructor. They sent me that too.
- T: But were there any instances where they cut up your letters?
- N: Well, there weren't any instances in which I was desperate (because of lack of communication). All in all, it was pretty good.