

**California Council for the Humanities  
California Stories Initiative  
Years of Valor, Years of Hope  
Tulare County and the Years 1941-1946**

**Tulare County Library  
The Friends of the Tulare County Library  
And the Tulare County Historical Society  
Interviews in 2003-2004**

**Interviewee:** Roy Sumida

**Date:** 2/29/04

**Tape #** 82

**Interviewer:** Catherine Doe

**Place:** Tulare County, CA

**Place of Interview:**

Mr. Sumida's home in  
Visalia, California

**PLACES WHERE INTERVIEWEE LIVED DURING 1941-1946**

Visalia, California  
Poston, Arizona Internment Camp  
School in Pocatello, Idaho  
Los Angeles, California

**OUTSTANDING POINTS IN THE INTERVIEW:**

Internment Camps  
College opportunities for Japanese Americans  
China Town in Visalia

- CD: My name is Catherine Doe and today's date is February 29, 2004 and I am interviewing Mr. Roy Sumida and this is the Years of Valor, Years of Hope. Could you state your name and spell it for me please?
- RS: My name is Roy Sumida. S-U-M-I-D-A.
- CD: Ok, let's get started then. Could you give me a little bit of your background? Where you were born?
- RS: I was born here in Visalia, July 11, 1923. A long, long time ago. The war came in 1941; in 1942 we were moved out of Visalia to Poston, Arizona. It was mandatory that we move. My parents (*Kaichi Sumida and Yoshiko Miyamoto*) took a beating because they had to sell their business, property, not property, but they had to find somebody to manage the property. We were moved to Poston, Arizona in 1942.
- CD: How old were you then?
- RS: I was 18 going on 19 and I spent 8 months in Poston, Arizona which is a euphemism for Relocation Center, but it was a Concentration Camp because they had machine gun nests pointing not outside, but inside. In Poston, we had three camps. Number one was the biggest, number two and we were in number three. I was there for eight months. My parents were there for over four years.
- CD: Now why were you there for just eight months, but your parents were there for four years?
- RS: Because I left for college. To show you how good the United States government is, if you wanted a higher education, they set up a clearinghouse in Philadelphia and I wrote to the clearinghouse for the relocation students, and said I'd like to go to pharmacy school. They said fine, we'll find a school for you. A lot of schools will not take Nisei, which we were. They said, "There is a school in Pocatello, Idaho. A top notch pharmacy school and they want you to come." So that's where I went. By the way, I said "Where's Pocatello?" I had never heard of Pocatello, Idaho. They said, "In the southern part of Idaho." I made the necessary application and then I went.

*Ed. There was a relocation camp in Minidoka, Idaho, 17 miles Northeast of Twin Falls, Idaho. This camp is now a U.S. National Monument. "Restored" barracks can be found at the Idaho Farm and Ranch Museum southeast of Jerome. Idaho State University is in Pocatello, also in the Southeastern part of Idaho.*

*Poston Relocation Center was in Yuma (now La Paz) County, Arizona in the desert three miles from the Colorado River and on the Colorado River Indian Reservation. It was the largest of the camps with a peak population of 17,000.*

CD: That's amazing. While you're in a camp and the machine guns are pointing in at you guys, at the same time they're willing to send the youth to college.

RS: As long as you aren't going to the west coast.

CD: Poston, Arizona was on the west coast.

RS: Well, we were in Arizona, not California. They didn't want you to be in California. I left for the school in Pocatello, Idaho. They were very nice. They received us . . .

CD: How many? Was it just you?

RS: Myself and another student, but he was an engineering student, and he went there with me. He went there ahead of me and I couldn't get the clearance until later and then I went there. From 1943, 44, I graduated in 1945.

CD: And then what happened?

RS: They had what they called an accelerated program because they had a naval student there. V12. I don't know if you've heard of V12 or not.

*Ed: V-12: The Navy College Training Program by Carolyn Alison. WWII Committee (Copied from the Internet at <http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/wwii/facts/v12prgm.txt>*

*The V-12 Navy College Training Program was initiated in 1943 to meet both the immediate and long-range needs for commissioned officers to man ships, fly planes and command troops called to duty in World War II.*

*When the draft age was lowered to 18 in November 1942, the Navy quickly foresaw a shortage of college-educated officers for its operations. Likewise, hundreds of the nation's colleges and universities feared economic collapse without students to fill suddenly empty classrooms.*

*Help came from the federal government with the creation of the V-12 Navy College Training Program. V-12 accepted students already enrolled in the Navy and Marine Corps college reserve programs, enlisted men who were recommended by their commanding officers and high school seniors who passed a nationwide qualifying examination.*

CD: The plane? The B12 airplane?

RS: V-12. A Naval Student. And they were going to be an officer when they graduated from the V-12 program. So I studied next to the V-12 Naval student and we got along very well and in 1945 I graduated because it was a three year program. A three semester per year program.

CD: In 1945, did you have to go back to the camp or could you go to work or set up your business? Were the camps closed?

RS: No, the camps were still open. So I graduated in June, 1945 and I bought a ticket to Los Angeles because that is where the state board for California was to be given. By then the war had cooled down quite a bit and we were allowed back in California. Then I went to California, Los Angeles and I took my state board and I passed it. My parents didn't come back right away because it was still hot in California so they went to Chicago.

CD: What do you mean hot? The weather or the atmosphere?

RS: No, no, the sentiment toward Japanese. They were first generation; I was second generation. So they thought it would be good to go to Chicago, away from California and they were in Chicago for at least over a year and then they went back to California.

CD: Interesting.

RS: Anyway, June of 1945, I went to Los Angeles, took my state board and because of the help with the good school, I had no trouble passing my pharmacy board and I got my license and now I had to look for a job.

CD: How did that go?

RS: I had a little trepidation, that I was going to have a problem, but I didn't. I was walking down Spring Street, I don't know if you are aware of Los Angeles, and I saw the sign that said, "Help Wanted at Thrifty Drug Store." So I walked in there and said I was looking for a job. They said, "Fine, we have a job for you, but this is not the place. You have to go to 5<sup>th</sup> and Hill. There's a big Thrifty Drug Store and there's a little employment office in the back." So I walked down there and walked in there and I said I was looking for a job and they sent me here. They said, "What kind of job do you want? Do you want to be a dishwasher, sweep the floor, or whatever?" "No," I said, "I am a pharmacist." "You're a pharmacist? You have a license?" "Yes, a newly minted one." "Well, you have to go back where you came from." I said, "OK, I've got a lot of time." And I walked back there and Miss Robb, I'll never forget that name, she was very nice, and she said, "Oh, I didn't know you were a pharmacist." I said, "Yes, I am a pharmacist." And she said, "OK, we have a job for you too." Back then they didn't have an intercom to the back office so she hollered down, "Mr. Oleno, please come forward." So Mr. Oleno came. A real nice man, they're all gentlemen you know, and said, "You are a pharmacist? I said, "Yes, I have a pharmacy license." and he said, "Yes, we can use you." I said, "When can I start?" And he said, "Tomorrow."

CD: Oh good. Wow. What did you mean by the clearinghouse in Philadelphia? What was that?

RS: People that wanted to go to college wrote to them and they would relocate you. The government set that up. They had a professor that took a temporary leave from the University of Michigan and he was running it. He was a very efficient, nice man. I never met him, but through letters. That was the Student Relocation Center. And all the Nisei students that wanted to go to college called them up or wrote a letter and they placed you at different colleges that opened to the Nisei. The University of Utah was very cooperative and that's because of the Mormons. They went through hard times too and they knew what it was. This professor that was at the Relocation Center was a Quaker, so he went through hard times. So these were the people that helped us out.

CD: Great. And was it well publicized, did everybody know that you could write to the Student Relocation Center?

RS: Not everybody, but those like us, we were looking for a school to go so we were aware of it. They were very efficient. They placed me right away.

CD: That's great.

RS: Yeah, it was great.

CD: Let's get back to your parents. Your parents were born in Japan?

RS: They were born in Japan. They were born in Hiroshima of all places.

CD: Oh my gosh.

RS: My mother was born in Miyajima, which is in Hiroshima.

CD: And when did they move over here?

RS: My parents – I think they came here back in the early part of the 1900's.

CD: And where in Visalia did they live? Did they live in Visalia? Where did they set up?

RS: My father came over with his father and he was only 13 years old, and the father made sure he had a job and this and that and then he went back to Japan, but my father stayed.

CD: But did he settle in Visalia?

RS: I think in Spokane, Washington.

CD: In 1941, where were you? Weren't you in California?

RS: Yes, we were in Visalia. I was born in 1923 in Visalia.

CD: So what was the business they set up?

RS: My father? H. Sumida Company.

CD: And what was that?

RS: That was in Visalia and China Town.

CD: Oh really.

RS: On the corner. There's a picture of it. They came and took a picture of a truck that can haul two trailers and of all places, the best place was right on Center and Bridge. And my father's business was there and they accidentally got him into the picture.

CD: And you have that?

RS: Yes, I have that.

CD: Neat, neat. And what kind of business was it?

RS: General merchandise. But my father knew he couldn't be a laborer all his life. He studied English in his spare time and was able to speak it and write it, not too well, but enough to get by.

CD: So when did your parents settle in Visalia? About what year was that?

RS: 1907.

CD: Wow, then they're really early. Almost pioneers then. So it was 1941 and you were moved to the camps in 1942. What happened to the business?

RS: We had to get rid of it.

CD: How much time did you have between . . . ?

RS: We didn't have very much time.

CD: Like what's that?

RS: I think they had two or three months. They had a man from Los Angeles; he was a liquidator and they had to sell it to them at the liquidation price. Ten cents on a dollar or something like

that, but they were very nice. They sold the business for us. So if there's profit to be made, there's somebody there, always.

CD: With a few dollars to buy it.

RS: Back in 1942 they sold the business and I think it was the farmers who were the ones that had a hard time.

CD: What did they do?

RS: They had to get someone to look over their property for them and some of them got with people that were very fair and they did very well, but some didn't.

CD: That must have been hard.

RS: Yes, just to show you a story that a lawyer named Firebaugh told me. This really happened. This farmer said to his neighbor, "Will you watch the property? I will pay for all the expense and then whatever you sell the fruit, they had an orange grove, we will split the profit 50-50." Fine. So after 1946 when they came back, there was nothing in his bank account, so he said, "What happened to the profit?" And the man said this and that. So they had a trial and went to the court and the judge asked, "What happened to the profit? You didn't put a penny into his account. Everything went into your account." And he looked the judge straight in the eye and said. "I was being patriotic." And this really happened. The Firebaugh lawyer was telling me all this. Some of them had men that were very fair and profit was put into their account.

CD: My mother mentioned something about the Cross family.

RS: Cross. R.F. Cross. Yeah.

CD: They took care of somebody's property.

RS: Yes. But my father, I guess, didn't trust any individual and he put his property under the care of Bank of America.

CD: How did that work?

RS: It worked out beautifully. They took care of his property and not one penny was stolen.



CD: And what was this property? Was it a house or was it an orchard?

RS: We had the business and rental property. The Ford Garage, it's still the Ford Garage, was taken care of by Bank of America and they had another property on Main Street. Have you heard of Bertram? (ed.: *Bertram Motor Sales, 324 E. Main Street, Visalia*) He had that. Ford Garage was taken care of by Bank of America and the Bank of America took care of everything. Bank of America Fiduciary Account. *This was commercial rental property.*

CD: So why didn't he do the same thing with his general merchandise store?

RS: We had to liquidate.

CD: You had to. They absolutely had to?

RS: Yeah, we had to liquidate, but the other property was left to the Bank of America and they took care of it.

CD: So, some Japanese people came back and they didn't have their property anymore, so I heard. How did they lose their property?

RS: They didn't pay their property tax, all kinds of reasoning. The property was taken away from them.

CD: So they came home to nothing.

RS: Yes, they came home to nothing.

CD: So where were you? Were you still in school? Had you graduated from school by then?

RS: 1945.

CD: No, I mean high school. Where did you go to high school?

RS: Here in Visalia. In 1941. And then one year of junior college. We used to call it Visalia Junior College. I went there for one year. So I had one year in college already, three years I did in two years in Idaho and got my degree and passed the Idaho Pharmacy Board and then went to California to take the

California Board. Pocatello had a good school. I had no problem passing the boards.

CD: When did you land back to Visalia? What year?

RS: I worked for Thrifty Drug Store. They were very cordial and good to me. I worked for them for 10 years and then I said, "I'm 31 years old, and I have to leave now. I have to start my own business. If I wait any longer I'm going to have my eye on the pension and probably be working for you all my life." I didn't want to do that. It was a good company, but I wanted to start my own business and came back in 1955 and started my business and I had my business for 40 years. I did fairly well. I can't complain. We had . . .

CD: Oh, everybody remembers. Yeah, you had your own drug store.

RS: Roy's Drug Store. (*ed. At 310 E. Center, Visalia, Roy Y Sumida and Jack K Sumida listed as owners in the 1956 City Directory.*)

CD: Roy's Drugs, right, that's what my mom remembers.

RS: It was a good business. It would be tough to start now with all the competition, big competition like Wal-Mart and all that, but it was a golden moment for us. A golden moment because we were in the business for forty years and we did fairly well.

CD: Well, I'm glad you were successful. Let me get back to the war. So where were you when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

RS: Here in Visalia.

CD: I mean, were you in school? Where were you when you heard about it? Were you with family?

RS: At junior college.

CD: And what was the reaction? Was it tense?

RS: We had this superintendent - Williams and he made an announcement over the junior college public address system and said the students that were born in Visalia are loyal students and for people to treat us as American citizens. And that's the way it went. This William was R.L. Williams. He was superintendent

and he made that announcement and everybody treated us fine. Oh, there's 1%, the redneck, you know. Always that 1%. But when I went to Idaho, I was so amazed that the people there were so friendly and they were mostly Mormon and they had been shabbily treated in the past and they remembered that.

CD: Gosh, I never thought of that. Well, you came home that night. You were at school; you hear the announcement; what was the conversation like around the dinner table?

RS: I'll tell you a funny story. When Pearl Harbor happened, we had this general merchandise store. We sold guns and bullets. Citizens of Visalia came to us to buy the bullets. That's just the way it went.

CD: What was the atmosphere at home with your parents? Were they feeling that . . .?

RS: Well, we had several crank calls. But there is always that 1% that will cause problems.

CD: Right. But did they know, did they think there was going to be some kind of retaliation? They're going to send us to the east? Did they think anything?

RS: Well, and then Roosevelt said we were going to move all the Japanese Americans to a camp and they had set up tent camps all over, away from California, some in Idaho, some in Arkansas, and all over. About ten camps. 128,000 people were moved to these camps.

CD: Within a couple of months after Pearl Harbor.

RS: We got on a train and we had to have so many suitcases. Just two to a person or something like that. So we got on the train and went to Poston, Arizona and on that train when we came to a city or town, they pulled the shade down on the train.

CD: And that was because?

RS: They didn't want people to know they were alien. My father was alien. He couldn't become a citizen until 1955 and became a citizen then. But at that time, they were not citizens. We were citizens.

CD: Right, because you were born here.

RS: Yes, we were born here, so we automatically became citizens. And we went to Arizona. It took about a day because they had to go through a circuitous route to get there. They didn't want to make a straight pass, I don't think. But anyway we got there finally. The camp was set up by them and they had these Army barracks and we were placed in the barracks.

CD: How many? Was it a house? A tent?

RS: It was a barrack.

CD: And your family was all in one room?

RS: They allowed so many. We were a family of four – my father, my mother, myself and my brother (*Jack Sumida*). So we were given a certain allotment and we were there. My brother was there two weeks and he went to University of Denver and from the University of Denver to the University of Wisconsin to get his final degree *in electrical engineering*.

CD: So you guys left your parents there?

RS: They were in good care. The government, you know, three meals a day and room and board and everything.

CD: What was the atmosphere like at the train station? Was there a lot of crying; people were just in shock?

RS: We boarded a train in Visalia and we didn't have any incidents.

CD: But wasn't there people to see you off?

RS: Oh, yes, a lot of people to see us off. A lot of people at the station.

CD: A lot of people at the train station that I heard.

RS: They were very friendly. No hysteria or anything like that. Then when my parents came home in 1946, they didn't want to come home right away because the hostility was still there, so they went to Chicago. And most of them went back east to Chicago.

I'll tell you a little story. From Washington, there was some architect that couldn't get a job in California. So he was working in a grocery store and lining up the fruit and all that, but when he went to New York the world opened up for him. They had a job for him as an architect and he, Yamasaki, the architect, is the one that designed the two twin buildings that were destroyed. He designed it.

CD: So he couldn't get a job in California, but he went to New York.

RS: And in New York they were waiting for him. They were looking for men like him. Accomplished. A good architect and he was the one that designed that twin building for the Port Authority that was bombed. He was the one who designed it. Good architect.

There's another story about a guy named Hosokawa. He was a writer – journalist and he couldn't get a job, so he had to go to Singapore, someplace like that, before the war started. He came back. He graduated from the University of Washington as a journalist and then after the camp, he stayed in camp and then he went to Denver, Colorado. Ultimately he became . . . working for the Denver Post and became an editor.

CD: Really.

RS: The Sunday edition, he became editor. He was a very talented person. That was good for him. Anyway, the war broke up the ghetto and they went to Chicago and Denver and New York and got the job that they were trained for. Then I came back to California, back to Los Angeles and I didn't have any trouble getting a job. They were waiting for me because they needed a pharmacist.

CD: I think the big cities and the lack of men, too. All the men were gone at war.

RS: Like when they hired me, one question they didn't ask me, what rank I had when I graduated. Nothing. All they wanted was, "Do you have a pharmacy license?" I said, "Yes." "You're hired." Just like that.

CD: Oh gosh.

RS: And I got a job at 5<sup>th</sup> and Hill and the war was still going on, but the employees there, we had a big store, there were at least 100 people working there I guess. They were all very cordial. The customers were very cordial. I had no incidences. Maybe one or two, but you expected that. One day the General Manager walked into the 5<sup>th</sup> and Hill store and he said, "How are you doing?" I said I was doing very well. He said, "Any incidents?" And I said "No." That's one thing, there was one customer out of the ten years that I worked that said, "I don't want you to wait on me." I thought, "Fine." There was another Jewish pharmacist there and he said, "When things like that happen, the Jewish people, they went through that, you just walk away," which I did. That was a good experience for me. And at Thrifty Drug Store, working for them for 10 years was like getting a PhD in the retailing business.

CD: You knew every angle about the business?

RS: Yes, I learned the business very well. When I started my business I did very well because of the training I had at Thrifty Drug Store. We had real good people working there.

CD: So what you called a euphemism, what we call a relocation camp, you call a concentration camp. Do all the Japanese Americans call it a concentration camp?

RS: Well, at that time we called it a relocation camp, a euphemism, you know. But now when you look back, it was a concentration camp, what with the machine gun tower and the soldiers there and the machine guns not pointing outside but inside. They never had occasion to use it.

CD: But they would try to use it if people tried to escape?

RS: Trying to escape, they were going to try to shoot them down I guess. On the train on the way to Poston, they had United States Army personnel and they walked up and down the aisle and they had something wrapped up in a blanket which was a machine gun.

CD: Really. They had it wrapped up in a blanket?

RS: They didn't want to expose it. So it was a machine gun under the blanket.

- CD: Did they take everybody – all the Japanese Americans from Visalia and Tulare to the same camp? Or did they split you up?
- RS: No, from the Visalia we went to Poston. They had three camps there and we were all put into the same camps, yes.
- CD: That's interesting. My program director had said something about everybody from East 99 went somewhere and everyone west of 99 went somewhere. Do you know anything about that? Do you know of anybody who went to the Tulare Fair Grounds?
- RS: We were with our friends so it was very nice. People we knew. They had to divide it in such a way that we can all go to . . . well, they had three camps in Arizona. In fact when they opened up Poston, it immediately became the second largest city in Arizona, next to Phoenix.
- CD: Wow.
- RS: So when I went to school in Pocatello, we had a student from Arkansas that was thrown into camp in Arkansas and others from different parts of the United States, so I got to know them. We got along famously.
- CD: So while you're at college, did you write back to your parents much?
- RS: Yes.
- CD: And what did they say? What kind of feedback about the camp?
- RS: I had kindergarten training in Japanese, so I wrote a letter in Hiragana, which is kindergarten Japanese, because they couldn't read English.
- CD: But your dad knew enough English to run his business?
- RS: Yes.
- CD: But when you wrote to him, you wrote in Japanese. Huh. And the government didn't – I heard there was censorship at that time. They didn't open up letters?

- RS: Simple kindergarten Japanese: they didn't bother us.
- CD: Interesting. What did your parents have to say about the camps? Did they write back?
- RS: My father was working in the camp.
- CD: What did he do?
- RS: Plumber.
- CD: Really.
- RS: He wanted to become a plumber - \$16 a month and the professional, a doctor, got, I think, \$18 a month.
- CD: Oh my gosh.
- RS: But that was just spending money. The food, the room and board was taken care of.
- CD: But still, four years is a lot of lost income for a doctor. Man alive! Also, how many of your friends moved back to Visalia? I heard one lady say she didn't remember any of her Japanese friends moving back. Until her fifty year reunion she didn't see any of them.
- RS: They moved back to Visalia because they had property and they had orange groves and things like that, that they had to come back.
- CD: Do you remember many not coming back, just saying forget it?
- RS: Yes, a lot of the students that graduated, they stayed back east, instead of coming back to Visalia.
- CD: Oh, what about their parents?
- RS: I think the parents came back, but the students that graduated stayed back east because they could get a job. Whatever training they took, pharmacist, engineer, doctor, they stayed back east.



- CD: What did your family think about the United States getting involved in the war?
- RS: I'll tell you, my parent, when he was 13 years old, came over with his father and worked as a farm laborer. They could not get over the opportunity that was available in the United States. The opportunity - he said this was the greatest country in the world. He admired people in the United States. The way the government was run. They were very fair. They were thrilled to be in the United States and there was no way he was going to go back to Japan and live over there. Maybe eventually, after making enough money, they'll go there and retire, but that never happened. Maybe 1% made it back to Japan. Maybe 2%, but the United States was such a great country.
- CD: So did they feel that the United States should get into the war? What did they think about the United States getting into the war? Do they think they should have?
- RS: Well, it was going to happen. It just happened. Between you and me, Roosevelt said we were bombed without notice and all this. He concocted the attack. They said to Japan, the government of Japan, "You can't use Panama Canal." And advisors around Roosevelt said, "No, that made war." And they said that's what they wanted to do, bring on the war.
- CD: Right. So they were trying to find a target for Japan to hit, and they said, "Don't use the Panama Canal."
- RS: That would cause Japan to start a war and Roosevelt said that's what we want. This is looking at the backside of the newspaper.
- CD: Yeah.
- RS: They knew about it. Intelligent people knew the United States goaded Japan into attack. That was expected. And the Japanese people, when they started the war, they knew they weren't going win. They did not have the industrial might. They were going to lose. For six months, Admiral Yamamoto said we'll win the war, but after six month, we're goners. And he was right. They didn't have the industrial might.
- CD: They didn't have hardly any industry. So where were you when the United States dropped the A-Bomb?

RS: I was in Los Angeles.

CD: At work? And how did you hear about it?

RS: In the newspaper.

CD: And did you talk to your parents with your mom being from . . . the first one was dropped on Hiroshima.

RS: Yes.

CD: Did you get a chance to talk to your mother?

RS: Yes. Well, they were in Chicago at that time. Not a very pleasant moment.

CD: Must have been sad.

RS: Yeah. But in a way, the United States won the war and to Japanese people here that was a blessing because the United States is a very fair country. Very fair, and in Japan they were not fair. They had to commit, like a kamikaze pilot. If I had been born in Japan, I would have been dead a long time ago.

CD: Yeah, my dad said, "The Japanese, they were going to fight until the last man was dead. It was a sad time."

RS: But the A Bomb stopped it.

CD: Yeah. Well, the second.

RS: I'm telling you a lot of stuff from my heart.

CD: Right.

RS: Roosevelt was not that great of a man.

CD: But everybody loved him.

RS: Yes, but he wanted the war.

CD: Yes, pretty much everyone I have interviewed has said that.

RS: Intelligent people know that, professional people knew about it. But it's just one of those things that happened and we have to live with it.

CD: I missed one thing. Before you left, before all the Japanese were shipped to internment camps, do you remember the curfew? How soon did that happen?

RS: We had to be home by 7 o'clock or something like that and no one to be allowed after that. You had to stay in the house.

CD: Was that a hardship?

RS: Yes, it was a hardship.

CD: It would have been. No night life or business. Do you remember anything about the loyalty questionnaire?

RS: Well, as far as I'm concerned, I'm loyal to the United States. They are a wonderful country.

CD: But I read something that if internees signed it, they could get out of the camp.

RS: But if not they were sent back to Japan.

CD: They were sent back to Japan? I didn't realize that.

*(ed. The people in the "relocation" camps who signed the loyalty oath were not given any special privileges. The young men were asked to enlist. Those who refused to sign the loyalty oath were sent to the Tule Lake Camp in Northern California during the remainder of the war. Then they were returned to Japan. While the "relocation" camps were populated, people who could find jobs or go to school in places other than the west coast could leave the camps. This information was confirmed with R. Sumida.)*

RS: They were sent back to Japan. I remember this one family, the people went back to Japan, but the life there was miserable.

CD: So you knew some, or your parents knew some that didn't sign the questionnaire and went back to Japan?

- RS: Moved back. To show you how great the United States is, they wanted to come back and the United States let them come back.
- CD: Oh they did!
- RS: Yes, they were allowed to come back, but the hard core didn't, but most were swayed by the public opinion, they came back.
- CD: Right, and did you know any of the Japanese that went to go fight? Part of the Loyalty Questionnaire was do you want to fight? And they went to Italy. A whole group of Japanese Americans went to fight in Italy.
- RS: But that was to fight for the United States. In Italy, they were the 442<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. They received more Purple Hearts than anyone. They knew that this is their country and they were going to fight for it. They went to Italy and fought.
- CD: Do you know anybody from Tulare County that went?
- RS: Oh, yes, several that went and got killed too.
- CD: Oh. This doesn't have that much to do with Tulare County, but did your parents, when they became citizens in 1955, what happened with that? There was an act where they couldn't become citizens. Was that repealed?
- RS: They were glad to become . . . they said it was too late, but still they became citizens.
- CD: But wasn't there some exclusion act for so many years. Do you remember when a lot of Asians couldn't become citizens because of the exclusion act? Was that repealed or something.
- RS: That was 1955 and they all became citizens. Up to then they had the exclusion. They couldn't become citizens. They wanted to, but they couldn't.
- CD: So the exclusion act was repealed by Congress?
- RS: It was 1926 when they started it and the Congress struck it down.

- CD: Oh good, that was one thing I didn't know how that got resolved. So when everybody came back, and some of the Japanese lost their farms or their businesses, all those lost wages, like that one doctor lost four years of lost wages, was there any compensation?
- RS: There was a \$20,000 per person.
- CD: But what about then? In 1946 when you came back, what kind of compensation was there?
- RS: Nothing that I know of.
- CD: And how did everybody seem? Did they pick up the pieces and go ahead or flounder?
- RS: They picked up the pieces. They didn't go crying to their government. The only one you can depend on and you know this yourself, and I know it, there's only one person you can count on, yourself. They knew that and they worked hard and made a little money and started their life again.
- CD: So what do you think about the apology from President Clinton that came 50 years later?
- RS: Reagan. I think it was Reagan that did it. And the monetary \$20,000 per head was a pittance. Fortunately I was doing okay, so I gave my money to charity.
- CD: That was nice. Did it mean anything to you to have the government apologize fifty years after the fact? A little closure?
- RS: A little bit too late. A closure. And the citizenship in 1955 was a little bit too late. What they said was, "We're too old; we can't do anything with it." But all in all, I'm happy to be here in Visalia, the best place in the world. This is the best place in the world, Catherine. Maybe you don't realize that, but I do.
- CD: So basically, about Tulare County, you have good feelings about Tulare County and you were happy to come back.
- RS: Oh yes, we were happy to come back. I keep telling Linda that we should be very grateful that we live in the United States and the best place is Visalia. I lived in Idaho, which is nice, the

people were nice and I lived in Los Angeles, but I think Visalia is the best place to be.

CD: Why do you think so? Why do you think Visalia is the best place to be?

RS: I've been to other places to live. In Los Angeles, the congestion, the 405, I don't know if you know that, the Freeway 405. I wouldn't want to live there. My friend lives in Los Angeles, so I go down and see him. I'm glad to see him, go through the 405 to where they live in Torrance and then I'm so glad to get out of there, back to Visalia.

CD: What were you saying about your one acre lot? I had it on pause for a second? You said you have a one acre lot?

RS: Here.

CD: Oh, here, that's right.

RS: We lived here for 50 years and the across-the-street neighbors are nice. Furness, the family across the street, they were here about a year before we built our house. They were always friendly and I think neighbors are what makes this a great place to live.

CD: I only have two questions left. Is there anything you wanted to add about the internment camps or the war years?

RS: Well, that was a bad thing to happen. That we were uprooted from our family and all that. All in all, when you look back in retrospect, I hate to say it, but it was one of the best things to happen, because it got us out of the ghetto. I was born in China Town.

CD: And that wasn't considered a good area of town? China Town?

RS: No. To me it was the best place in the world, because I had a roof over my head, my parents were there, but when I look back, you know . . .

CD: What was China Town like back then? You lived in an apartment or a house?

RS: We had a business. We had to live in back of the business. So it was OK. We went to Japanese school there.

CD: There was a Japanese school?

RS: Yes, but we didn't study very hard. We played. I became a ping-pong champion.

CD: (Laughter).

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(side B of tape)

CD: We were talking about China Town in Visalia in 1932.

RS: About that time, my grandmother was dying, so my mother took me and my brother to Japan to see the grandmother. She lived for about three or four months and then died, but when we came back from that I was so happy to come back to Visalia and see all my friends. When we were back in Japan and this is true, we were ostracized by fellow students. They looked down on us saying we were the children of immigrants and they looked down on us.

CD: That's weird, because both of your parents were Japanese.

RS: After we came back to Visalia and I told my friend here, "This is the best place in the world and I wouldn't want to live over there."

CD: Tell me a little bit about the school? Was it all Japanese kids?

RS: In Visalia. Yes. We had one out of the whole bunch who was not Japanese and that was, he was a light skin color. He wanted to be with people that accepted him I guess, so he was in Japanese school.

CD: Was it all taught in Japanese?

RS: Yes.

CD: So you learned to speak in Japanese and write a little bit of it.

RS: This Mr. Shirazawa was the professor, but it's kind of rare to have someone graduate from UC or Stanford and he was a very smart man to be teaching Japanese language. He wasn't getting paid very much and the mother was also graduated from UC. So they were very highly educated. And their kid, they had one son, Takeo, who eventually went to the University of Michigan and got a degree in engineering, because he was from two smart parents. He had no problem going to college.

CD: Where was this school? Was it in a school building?

RS: Down where the Buddhist temple is now. 514 E. Center, I think.

CD: Is that where you went to temple?

RS: Yes.

CD: And when did you go? On Sunday?

RS: Sunday, yes.

CD: And the one kid that wasn't Japanese. Was he half Japanese?

RS: What is that?

CD: Was the one child that wasn't Japanese, was he half Japanese?

RS: No, no, he was full-bloodied because his parents . . .

CD: No, the one that wasn't Japanese.

RS: He was mulatto I guess you would call him.

CD: Oh, he was half black or something.

RS: Half black, yes. But he was very fair-skinned.

CD: Right, but he didn't feel accepted in the main stream.

RS: Because I think the father was Portuguese and I think the child was abandoned and the mother was bringing the child up and at least the child was accepted by the Japanese. He was not accepted in the American, English school.



- CD: Right, very strange. So after your Japanese school, then where did you go? Did it just go through 6<sup>th</sup> grade?
- RS: Yes, it wasn't very intensive. We just learned the basic, so I could write to Hirogana, Katekana, and I could write to my parents when I went to the university. I wrote in Hiragana so that my mother could read it.
- CD: And then where did you go to school? What grade school did you go to? Before high school. Do you remember?
- RS: Oh, 6<sup>th</sup> grade or something like that.
- CD: Do you remember the name of the school?
- RS: The Japanese School?
- CD: Yeah, did it have a name?
- RS: Japanese Language School.
- CD: So you went straight from the Japanese school to high school, to Visalia High?
- RS: Yeah.
- CD: Oh, sounds good. So, my last question is how do you think the war over all affected Tulare County?
- RS: Well, there's the negative and the positive. And the positive is that it broke us away from the ghetto. When I went to the University of Idaho, I was there only two years, but I did six semesters of work. It was a good experience there. We got to mingle with the students, the V-12 students and other students, and it was a good positive experience for me. They were good people. I found out that they were just as good as Japanese or better. In fact, there was Marcus Jordan who became my best friend, he got a PhD in Anatomy from the University of Arkansas, I think. We used to correspond and he died when he was 70 years old. I'm 80 and he was 70 when he died, but he came down to Los Angeles when he was in the Navy to see me. He was a good friend, a true friend, there's not even a hint of discrimination.

CD: Did you write to any friends in Tulare County when you were at college? Did you know what was going on here, like about the rationing?

RS: There was one called Ira Pratt. I think he became a professor at COS. I wrote to him a couple of times. I remember that.

CD: What did he say about what was going on here? Do you remember his letters back to you?

RS: He was sorry that it happened, but it happened. What could he do?

CD: Is there anything that you would like to add? Something we haven't covered?

RS: I lived all my life in the United States and I'm proud of it and Linda (*Okamoto*) and I, we've had a good life here. My children, Sandy (*Kiyomi Tokogawa*) graduated from the University of the Pacific, and my son (*Wesley*) went five years to college but did not get a degree, but he is very successful, very successful in what he does.

CD: Where did he go?

RS: He went to Fresno State and he lives in Sacramento and he has fifty people working for him. He's doing; in fact, I'll give you the catalog he sends out. He has two businesses there now. One is a regular computer accessory business and the other one that has gone beyond that, called Extreme. People that are "*computer geeks*," *computer expert consultants*, a little bit more than a computer accessory. Let me go get it for you now.

CD: Where did Sandy end up? Did she come back to Visalia?

RS: They were, he was born in this house, and then my daughter was born in Los Angeles, but she was brought up in this house.

CD: Where does she live now?

RS: She became a graphic artist, working for the Investment Business Journal, maybe you've heard of it.

CD: Here?

RS: No, in Los Angeles. She's working there. Her husband got a promotion to go to Sacramento. So she quit her job, went to Sacramento working for my son. Now they're brother and sister working together.

CD: That's great. That's nice. I always like seeing my kids get along.

RS: My son is doing very well, extremely well. In fact, it's pretty hard for me to realize that he's got fifty people and doesn't have a college degree. He can write.

CD: They don't teach that in college. They don't teach any management skills in college. You have to learn it. How to deal with people.

RS: And to be successful in business, you don't need a college education. You need good common sense. Business sense and he had that, apparently. He's doing very well.

CD: Well, thank you very much for the interview.

RS: And let me bring the catalog to you.

CD: Well, you disconnected, so let me just say, this is the end of the interview.

Catherine Doe/ Transcriber: Jan Chubbuck, 3/16/04/ ed. JW 7/1/04

*Editor's note: Words in italics were added during an interview with Roy Sumida on May 10, 2006 and also to clarify geographic locations and other information.*