



## ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

An interview with  
**Katherine (Tasaki) Segawa, 1932-1993**

**September 20, 1990**

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### PREFACE

Katherine Segawa was born in San Diego in 1932. Both of her parents were Japanese, and both were born in Hawaii, making them American citizens. Katherine grew up in downtown San Diego, in what is now the Gaslamp (Quarter) district, where her mother operated a fish restaurant which catered mainly to the African-American community. After the interview, Mrs. Segawa informed me that she remembered several black musicians and entertainers coming into the restaurant when they were in town performing at the Creole Palace, an African-American nightclub nearby. Mrs. Segawa spent most of World War II in a relocation camp in Poston, Arizona, although she was in a different campsite from the rest of the Japanese internees from San Diego. After returning to San Diego, Mrs. Segawa attended San Diego High School and worked for the San Diego Public Library and later the county of San Diego. This interview was taken a few days after Mrs. Segawa's husband, Ben Segawa, was interviewed, and she makes several references to that interview.

Vincent Ancona, Interviewer  
May 18, 1993

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## INTERVIEWER'S NOTE

This is an interview with Katherine Segawa. We are in Mrs. Segawa's home in Bonita. The date is September 20, 1990. My name is Vincent Ancona.

**VINCENT ANCONA:** Why don't you start by telling me where you were born and about your early childhood?

**KATHERINE SEGAWA:** I was a "Mercy" baby. I was born in Mercy Hospital in 1932. My parents lived in Golden Hill, on Island Avenue, 2670 Island Avenue. In those days, of course, it was a very nice area. We rented the home and there were two or three other Japanese neighbors on the same street, going up towards the top of the hill. It is just above where, I think it is called Physicians' Hospital, is now. That's where there were three or four of our families there.

About that time my father had a produce market. He had come from Hawaii; I found his diary, he had come from Hawaii in 1918, first to farming country up in Selma and Kingsburg. Then, eventually, he worked his way down to San Diego and he worked for other produce people. Then he finally opened his own produce house at, I think it was Sixth and Island, where the produce area still exists.

In 1937, I think it was, my parents separated, and for awhile he lived with an uncle in Kingsburg, and he sort of wandered around. He gave up the produce house. Then my mother eventually moved to Third and Market, and she bought a fish stand. She bought it from another Japanese family. That area, which is now the Gaslamp, in the twenties and thirties was not only the Chinese community, but also there were a lot of Japanese businesses there. There was a barber shop; there was a grocery store; there was a little shop that made tofu; there was a bake store; there were all kinds of little businesses, little restaurants. There was quite a community there. So she bought into this business on the corner of Third and Market. When she bought it, it was called the "Baby Grant." She kept the name, and I'm sure that in this era of litigation, if the U. S. Grant (hotel) had known about it, they probably would have sued her. In those days, there was no problem. Everybody in the area knew her; she was called "Mama" and I was called "Baby."

So I grew up in that area and went to Lincoln Elementary School. After a year or two after that, the war (World War II) broke out and we went to Poston. We went to Camp one, instead of Camp Three with the other San Diego area people. When we went first to Santa Anita, my mother had experience as a practicing nurse; in fact, that is how she met my father. He was in the hospital and that is how they met each other. So she had heard that there was going to be a hospital in Poston, and she thought that if she volunteered to go work in the hospital that we might get better quarters. So she volunteered and we went there early and she did not realize that we were going to end up in a different camp than the rest of the San Diego people. So we spent the war years with the so-called Arizona contingent. We lived on a block that was people from Phoenix, Glendale, Mesa, Arizona, that area. So, during the war, when we were in camp, she worked for a while in the hospital; she worked in the canteen, and she had unusual, little jobs in the camp. In those days, I can't remember exactly how much they were paid, like \$27 a month or something. It was nice to have that little extra income.

My age group enjoyed camp; it was fun. It was impractical, it was hot, and there were times when it was real miserable. But it didn't affect us; it didn't hurt our schooling that much; it didn't affect our careers. We were at an age where the damage was at a minimum. It was just an interesting part of our lives.

So then when we came back from camp, we luckily still had our business; we had turned it over to a friend to run while we were gone, and it was still there when we came back. Then after a while she sold that and she bought a hotel. It was on Market Street between Fourth and Fifth. It was one of those upstairs hotels. And that really was more work than she could handle; it was a lot of work. And so she sold that, and she bought another little cafe on Fifth Avenue, and she finally realized that it was easier to go to work for someone else, so she started doing housework. She worked in Coronado and she had, oh, I forget how many families she worked for, but she was very happy doing that. I guess she continued doing that. Then, I think, she went to Japan for a while and when she came back, she continued doing that until, if I remember correctly, until she became ill. She died about 25 years ago. She had a heart attack. After she passed away, I finally found my father, so some good came out of that. That was a rather traumatic story for the children to have him just appear like that. I don't know if there is anything else that is interesting or different about my background.

**VA:** Well, why don't we start with when you were living on Island Street, Sixth and Island, when you had the fish market?

**KS:** That was Third and Market, and it was a fish restaurant. She sold fried fish and chili and pig's feet. It was mostly a black clientele. It was a block over from Creole Palace. The Japanese community was in the middle, and west of it was the black community, and south of it was the Chinese community. Then eastward was the Bank of America and businesses. Ferris & Ferris, at that time, was a very prominent drugstore in San Diego. That was a lot of fun. It was a fun time to grow up. One of the differences between Ben and myself is that I never learned to ride a bike because it wasn't safe to ride a bike downtown. I roller skated. I would roller skate all around the block on the sidewalk. I was a very typical city kid. We really had completely opposite backgrounds.

**VA:** What was the area of the Japanese community, what streets bounded it?

**KS:** We were on Third and Market, and then going southward, a block down to Island, there were businesses there, merging with the Chinese community. There were quite a few businesses right on Island between Fourth and Fifth, and there were businesses right along Fifth Avenue, and then going over to Sixth. So between Third and Sixth and from Market and Island is where I remember most of the businesses being.

**VA:** And did a lot of Japanese people live down there as well?

**KS:** Not a lot, no. A lot of these people lived in back of where their businesses were. They lived in back of their grocery store or they lived in back of their restaurant. Most of the others had homes elsewhere. People from the homes in San Diego and the bars in San Diego would come into that area to go shopping. There really has never been a Japanese town like there is a Chinatown. We have never had a very strong or very large Japanese area.

**VA:** Was there much friction between the Chinese and Japanese?

**KS:** Not that I can ever remember. It was sort of like a mutual aid society.

**VA:** How about between whites and the other groups there?

**KS:** If there was, I was too young to remember it. The minorities that shared that area, the blacks were also there, seemed to get along very well. In that era, it wasn't the skid row that it became afterwards. It was mostly businesses. A big factor down there was the produce area. It was far bigger than it is today. It was a very vibrant part of that part of downtown. That produce area supported a lot of cafes that were run by minorities. These cafes had to be opened during weird hours because produce people start at three o'clock in the morning. They would be open at very peculiar times.

**VA:** Was the produce industry controlled by Japanese and Chinese farmers mostly?

**KS:** No. I am trying to remember who were the prominent people. Back in those days, Japanese could not own property. So it was either leased ground, or if property was purchased, it would be in the name of one of the children who had been born in the United States. If I remember, there were a lot of Italian farmers. The one who would remember what it was really like in those days would be Tom Hom because he is old enough to remember what it was like to run a produce house at that time. This business about not being able to own property, did Ben tell you about the Buddhist Temple?

**VA:** No, he didn't.

**KS:** It was on 29th and Market Street. Are you familiar with that area?

**VA:** I've been there, just driving through.

**KS:** It's a beautiful temple inside; it's well maintained. I don't know if it's called an altar or not, but where the services are held, it's a beautiful example of Asian art. When they wanted to buy that property and build their temple there, of course, they weren't allowed to. So they got some of the Nisei, who were businessmen, to buy the property in their name, and my father was one of them and George Iguchi was another one. I can't remember who all the others were, but they are the ones whose names were put on the deed. I found out that no one ever got around to removing those names for years and years. It was only recently that they took off those names and straightened out the ownership again.

**VA:** So that temple is still there today?

**KS:** It's a very active temple. During the war it became sort of like a USO (United Services Organization). A lot of people who had stored their belongings in the basement of the temple, I heard, lost some of their belongings. It was just one of those things. A lot of people lost a lot of things.

**VA:** So you were not able to own your fish restaurant?

**KS:** My mother did. She was born in Hawaii so she was an American citizen. Both my parents were born in Hawaii, so that was no problem.

**VA:** As long as you were a citizen you could own property?

**KS:** That's right. Ben's parents were not able to own property for a long time. I'm not sure when the law was changed, but back in the 1920s you couldn't own property. It affected a lot of people.

**VA:** Was there a big marketplace for Japanese and Chinese goods? Was there a lot of trade between the community and Japan and China? Could you get a lot of Japanese products and things?

**KS:** Some of it was trucked down from Los Angeles, in fact, it still is. There were several markets in that Gaslamp area that would bring in things that had been shipped to Los Angeles and they would be trucked up. But if you wanted a selection and a choice, then you would have to go up to Los Angeles and do your purchasing. And it's still true today.

**VA:** Just being a bigger city, it has more of everything.

**KS:** That's right. Some things don't change.

**VA:** You said that your restaurant was taken care of while you were in the internment camp. Did you have a Caucasian friend that did that?

**KS:** Yes.

**VA:** And he just volunteered to do that for you?

**KS:** Yes.

**VA:** What was the arrangement that he had?

**KS:** I'm sure that he ran it and kept whatever profits; I don't know what he sent to my mother. I have no idea what the financial arrangements were. When we came back from camp it was there and we were able to just take over again. We were very fortunate.

**VA:** Did you know a lot of people that lost their property?

**KS:** I was too young to know. It didn't register. I'm sure there were, but I couldn't give you names. Some of the older ones that you could talk to would be able to give you specifics about who lost what and what kind of hardships there were.

**VA:** How about your schooling? You attended school at the camp?

**KS:** When I was living in Golden Hill, I went to Sherman Elementary. And then I went to Lincoln Elementary. When we went to Santa Anita, they started a school, but this was in April, and my mother felt that it just wouldn't be worth my going to for a few months. But they did set up a school in the grandstand. So they had teachers there and they had classes. The ones who really (were) affected were the ones who were seniors that year. They didn't have any commencement; it was very sad.

There have been some interesting books written about that age group and how it affected them. There are some fiction stories that really dramatize that part of history. It is really very moving. Then when we went to Poston, I went to Poston Elementary and Poston Junior High. Then when we came back, I went to Roosevelt Junior High and San Diego High. And then I went to San Diego State (College) for two years.

**VA:** Did you lose any time in school?

**KS:** No, no problem there. That downtown area, there were so few children living there that it was an optional area. You could either go to Roosevelt or to Memorial. My mother decided to send me to Roosevelt. If I had gone to Memorial I would have had more contact with Japanese children and ethnic minorities because that is where they all went, even in those days. So by going to Roosevelt, there were only a couple of other Asians there. I think there were only two others, and they were Chinese and they lived in the Hillcrest area. So I really lost contact with the San Diego Japanese for a long time because I had gone to Camp One instead of Camp Three, and then I went to a different junior high school. So, when I got to high school, then I started meeting more of the Japanese community. But we were really isolated during that period of time.

**VA:** That must have made it even harder.

**KS:** Well, I didn't know what I was missing. It did hurt; it's just that I lost contact with my peers because I was so separate from them.

**VA:** Did you have a lot of friends that you would have been in the same camp with if you had gone to Poston Three?

**KS:** Yes. You see my mother, of course, knew everybody. Basically in those days it was a very small town and everybody knew everybody else. So my mother knew all the families in town. This goes back to the time when my parents were living together and my father was quite a prominent businessman. So these children whom I would have normally met in the course of events if I followed the regular pattern, my mother knew their families all along. So when I got to high school, I became acquainted with quite a few people who actually lived right around that area. I never knew them very well but my mother knew them. One of them, her folks had a grocery store on lower Fifth Avenue, and when we got married she was my maid of honor. So I developed a lot of close friendships after I started meeting more people.

**VA:** When you were growing up during the Depression, did you sense anything that made you realize the country was in a depression?

**KS:** No. I was very fortunate because my father was doing well during the Depression and it didn't touch me. We lived in a nice home. We always had more than enough of whatever we wanted, and I had no idea that there was a Depression.

**VA:** That's funny because that seems to be the case with most of the people we've talked to that lived in San Diego. For some reason it doesn't seem like it affected this area as much.

**KS:** Well, the merchants that were active were in the kind of businesses that were essential. You had to have your groceries; you had to have your food. It's not like being in an industry that was subject to layoffs. I think generally, on the whole, we survived the Depression pretty well.

**VA:** When you came back from the internment camp, you said you went back to the fish restaurant for a while, and then what was next?

**KS:** My mother tried a hotel.

**VA:** How long did that last? **KS:** I don't think it was even a year. I think they were tearing down this fish restaurant. I can't remember who bought it or what triggered this move, but I don't think it was her choice; I think she had to move. I know that after we moved, that thing was leveled; it became a parking lot. I think it was out of her hands. So she tried this hotel and it really did not work out. So we got out of that business, and she rented a space at 449 Fifth Avenue that was near the corner of Fifth and Island, and it's still there. We take the kids there once in a while to show them where Mommy used to live. This was a long, narrow store space that she rented. It could be that, I haven't thought this through for a long time, it could be that when we initially moved there she did have to move and then she tried the restaurant business again.

She tried another fish restaurant just off Fifth and Market. She was happiest doing the housekeeping, because she worked for people that she really liked and they were fond of her and took good care of her. But when she tried the fish restaurant, there was something about her that she always felt she was better off being her own boss, and finally her health gave out. She just had worked too hard. So the second fish restaurant didn't last too long. I can't remember how long she did housekeeping after that; it was quite a few years. But she developed heart problems and went on disability.

**VA:** Did you help out in the restaurant when you were a kid?

**KS:** Yes. I used to be real good at holding a record number of soda bottles between my fingers. I used to help a little bit, but not an awful lot. I was not one of those who was always around the family business. I used to stay in the house a lot, or I would wander around downtown San Diego. I

would go to the movies by myself, walk to the Orpheum or the Spreckels or the Fox (theaters). If there was a movie I enjoyed seeing, I would walk over there by myself and go see it. That was the period of my life when I really started reading. I would walk to the library on the corner of Eighth and E. The central library right now is on E Street between Seventh and Eighth. The children's room was in an annex across the street, up on the second floor. There were a lot of us who found a second home there, who would go there on our way home from school. Lincoln Elementary was on Twelfth and E, Twelfth and F, somewhere around there. And so it was just a four-block walk to go to the library. We would all spend hours there with Miss Breed. She really took good care of us. When I was going to high school, in my senior year, I got a part-time job at the library in the children's room as a shelver. I kept that job for three years while I was still going to college. Then, finally, my mother's health got so bad that I had to get a full-time job; but I thoroughly enjoyed working there. I got a good education.

I had hoped at one time to be a librarian; I was planning to go to library school. So they gave me a lot more responsibility and varied jobs that most shelvers never could do. I would work with children; I would review books. I did a lot of things that they felt they were doing to help train me. It was always exciting; it was a real positive experience.

**VA:** You were an only child?

**KS:** Yes.

**VA:** Did you have a lot of playmates in the city?

**KS:** No, very few. I got to know all the adults in the area real well. When I would walk around town, doing whatever I wanted to do, as I was walking home, people would know who I was and I never had any fears. I could come home even at night, and I was never worried about making it home safely. When I was going to high school, I would go to the football games and catch the streetcar to Third and Broadway and I would walk home; everybody knew who I was. It was something that never entered my mind, being afraid.

**VA:** When did you move out of downtown?

**KS:** When I got married. I lived there until the day I got married.

**VA:** And your mother continued to live there?

**KS:** Yes, until she died.

**VA:** What happened after college?

**KS:** Well, I went to work for the county of San Diego, and I worked there four years before we got married, and then I worked there for one year after that. So I worked for the county of San Diego for five full years. And then when my first baby was born I quit, and I raised the four children until about four years ago, when I went back to work at the library. So I came full circle.

**VA:** What did you do for the county?

**KS:** I started out next to the bottom level, as a clerk, and I had worked up three steps by the time I had quit. And then when I went back to work, I started out part-time at the library. That's when Ben quit the agricultural supply business, and we needed health insurance because I had had surgery

five years ago. This would have been a year after my surgery. We didn't qualify for all the group plans that we belonged to, so the solution was to go to work full-time so that I could get health insurance. So I went to work for a short period of time with the county of San Diego as a clerk. And after eight months, the library had an opening that they wanted me to try out for, so I went back to the library on a full-time basis. I've been there now for two full years.

**VA:** And you've lived in Chula Vista ever since you've been married?

**KS:** We moved here in 1959; I'm pretty sure it was 1959. We got married in 1956; we lived at one place until 1957. We bought a house in, I guess it's called Logan Heights, southeast San Diego. We lived there for two years, and then he left the farm and he got this job here in Chula Vista. And so we moved down here in 1959. We lived there for 30 years before we moved here.

**VA:** You lived in Logan Heights for two years?

**KS:** Yes.

**VA:** Was that a bad neighborhood then, too?

**KS:** Not then. It has changed in 30 years.

**VA:** Was it a Japanese neighborhood?

**KS:** No, it was black. We lived on Keeler Street, just off of 43rd and Logan, in that area. It was predominantly black, but not 100%, and we all got along; it was a fairly nice neighborhood. At that time the thing that triggered the move was his change in employment. It just got to be a long drive back and forth, and he wanted to be closer. The kind of job it was at the time, he was on call on weekends and holidays and it was just more convenient to be close to where he was working. So that was really the main reason we moved.

**VA:** How did you and your husband meet?

**KS:** He didn't tell you that story?

**VA:** No.

**KS:** As I said, we are both native San Diegans, and his family has known my family for umpteen years; I mean going way, way back. They've always known each other. When I was going to high school, one of my classmates had gone into the service during the Korean War, and I used to write to him. And when he came back on leave, he brought this friend over, and it was Ben. And this friend had told Ben that he was going to come over to see me and Ben said, "Who's that?" The friend said, "You don't know who she is?" "No." So he brought Ben over and it was the first time we had met, but his friends and my friends are all the same friends; our two families knew each other, but we had never met. We had never heard of each other and we had no idea each other existed. It was really very surprising. But that's how we met.

**VA:** So the Japanese community must have been pretty small.

**KS:** Yes. It was small in the sense that there were basically only three churches and those were the social outlets. So you would know everybody through your churches, particularly the Oceanview United Church of Christ, and the Buddhist Temple are more socially outgoing, and so those people all knew each other. I think I am the only one in San Diego who has belonged officially to all three churches.

When I was growing up, I belonged to the Buddhist Church. I went to the Sunday school and the Japanese classes there, and I attended services there. Then in high school I was exposed to a marvelous history teacher. She taught us ancient history and world history and I just wanted to know more about Christianity. So I started going to the Oceanview Church because that minister's children were classmates of mine. I started going there and I became baptized and became a Christian. Then when we got married, Ben's family belonged to the other Christian church in town, so I transferred my membership. So, I have belonged to all three churches. That is the center of social activity, or has been in the past for the Japanese community. You used to belong to one church or the other; that was your identification.

**VA:** And the congregation is primarily Japanese?

**KS:** Yes.

**VA:** Where are these other two churches?

**KS:** Our church is on 19th and E, just outside the center city area, just east of the new police station. The Oceanview Church is on 35th and Oceanview Boulevard. It used to be a Congregational Church, and it is now merged with the United Church of Christ. It's a more liberal church; ours is a more fundamental church.

**VA:** And are they still primarily Japanese?

**KS:** Yes, although both churches now have a lot of Caucasians and other minorities. We have quite a few Chinese, through intermarriage or whatever. The interesting thing about our church is that we have two services. The one at 9:30 in the morning is Japanese language, and then ours at 10:30 is the English-speaking division. The Japanese division is bigger and more active. They draw people like college students, exchange students from Japan, wives of Japanese servicemen, and people brought here by businesses. So it is a far more active part of congregation than the English division.

**VA:** I suppose the people that speak English could choose other churches if they wanted to.

**KS:** Yes. That has happened a lot. We probably would not have been so strong in our church attendance if it hadn't been for my husband's mother. She was one of the pioneers of that church, and we felt that we needed to support her. But when the children were little, it was just more convenient to send them to the Baptist church down the street. I know that we have lost a lot of members that now choose to go to neighborhood churches or a church that might be more evangelical, or where the philosophy is more important to them. So, if you don't need the Japanese connection and the religion is an important thing, then you lose them. Our major focus is the ethnicity; that is what draws most people.

**VA:** I've heard that the Chinese community had some sort of a benevolent society; did the Japanese community have a similar thing?

**KS:** We have some loose organizations. We have the Japanese-American Citizens League (JACL), which is a national group that was the spearheading organization for the drive to get the reparations. It is a very old organization and locally they oversee various programs. There is a scholarship group; I am the secretary of that committee. Annually we award scholarships to high school seniors. They do other things to further Japanese participation in the community and to try to make the general public aware of what our goals are, what we are like.

Then there is UPAC, which is Union of Pan-Asian Communities, and that is a loose group of all Pacific rim countries, natives from those countries. They are more the social agency. Then there is the Japanese Coordinating Council which tries to coordinate all the Japanese organizations. There are two or three different gardeners' groups; there are some Japanese groups that are primarily flower-arranging groups; there are the churches. It is surprising how many Japanese organizations there are in San Diego. Ben has a long list of contact people in all these different organizations.

**VA:** Were many of these groups around in the 1930s and 1940s?

**KS:** No. I think the only ones besides the churches would have been the JAACL. And then if you were from Hiroshima or Mamoto, or wherever, they formed little social clubs and they would hold annual picnics, that kind of thing. They were just loose social organizations. But those are about the only other kinds of groups there were around here then in the 1930s. These other groups have sprung up since then, I would think, in the last 20 years more as a response to social needs. They have mutual interests, but they don't have a real heavy agenda.

**VA:** You mentioned Japanese gardeners and I have seen a lot of references to Japanese gardeners; was that a pretty popular occupation?

**KS:** Yes, it still is. In fact, a large percentage of the Japanese population were farmers, but as the farmlands have disappeared. some of the farmers have gone into gardening.

**VA:** You were talking about prejudice.

**KS:** Yes, there was a lot of prejudice. I might mention one thing. When I was looking for the full-time job, this would have been in 1952, I sent my application around to quite a few places. Back in those days the department store was Marston's, and that was one place that I went to apply, not realizing that they never would hire me. They had an unwritten code that you had to fit a certain mold to be hired there. And there were other places that I applied and back in those days, and I think even today, civil service is the safest place for a minority to get a job, or at least get started and get some experience.

Farmers went into farming because they could be their own boss. By this time most of them could buy their own land, or if they didn't buy it, they could lease it and make a success of it. Gardeners were the same way. They could be their own boss and they didn't have the fear of any kind of prejudice. You either got hired or not hired by somebody. The other big industry was tuna fishing. There were a lot of fishermen. Let's see, what else did they go into in those days? It was really the kind of work where you would not be exposed to rejection; you would avoid that as much as possible.

**VA:** Do you think the discrimination was more subtle, or did you see it directly?

**KS:** I think it was quite direct. As I said, most of the time during that era I was too young to know it, and then right after the war, for a good many years, there was a lot of prejudice. It wasn't until the civil rights movement that we sort of got swept in with all the activity.

**VA:** You said that when you applied to Marston's that you had a problem. Did they flat out say, "We can't hire you"?

**KS:** No. I knew people who worked there and they clued me in. The other place that I applied to was Walker Scott. They were a big concern in those days. I can't remember where else I applied, but it turned out that civil service was the safest and the best way to go. There was no problem; all you had to do was to take the test and pass it, and then you had to have an interview, and they really had affirmative action. I don't know if they were just open-minded or fair-minded, or what, but you really didn't have to worry about getting hired. I can't say that it would be as easy if you tried to climb

the ladder, I really don't know. Even today there are some accusations about how hard it is to get into mid-management and administration. So maybe times haven't changed that much; I don't know.

Not to make accusations, but when I worked for a while for the county superintendent's office, at that time it was funded by the county of San Diego as well as by state funds, and I got my job through the county civil service. When I got one of my promotions, it was into that office and I would see applications received for teaching positions. And in those days it was very difficult for a minority to get a job in the county schools. This was the mid-fifties, early to mid-fifties. So there were times when it was hard to be a minority, but on the positive side, you can always find something. If you just look hard enough, you will find it. You don't have to sit back and say, "Gee, this isn't working out." Just find some place where there is an opening where they will take you.

**VA:** The people that started their own businesses, did they do business within the Japanese community, or with whites and other groups?

**KS:** They would have to go out into the larger community. I don't think, except for Japanese grocery stores and people who offered a narrow selection of whatever it was they were handling and it only appealed to the Japanese, other than that you would have to go into a larger community. If you were a farmer, you had to sell the produce to the produce houses. Some of them were run by Japanese people in Los Angeles, but the large majority, you would have to deal with all kinds of people.

**VA:** Was the same true going the other way; was the Japanese community self-sufficient, or did you have to go out for your grocery shopping and services?

**KS:** I don't think the Japanese community was ever totally self-sufficient. In the narrow things that you want, yes, but you couldn't rely 100% on supplying all your needs with different Japanese businesses. So, we got integrated.

**VA:** I wanted to ask you about the fishermen. You said that your mother had a fish restaurant. Did she buy fish directly from the fishermen?

**KS:** No, she used to go down to People's Fish Market. She used to go down to where the Anthony's Fishette is, just the other side of Seaport Village. There used to be a lot of fish markets there and she would call them and find out what was available and at what price, and she would place her order. It was People's (Market). There were three markets down there that she used to deal with, and the fishermen used to sell to those fish markets. It was not a completely Japanese chain of supply and demand. You had to work with the larger community. You just couldn't survive if you depended on selling to Japanese or buying from Japanese. You had to go outside of that.

**VA:** But there was a middleman. The fishermen didn't come in and sell their fish, regardless of what nationality they were. They didn't just sell their own fish on the street?

**KS:** No, I can't remember. They might have done that in the 1920s or early 1930s. It is entirely possible, but I don't think that was a widespread practice. I think it would have been hard to earn a living. With the amount of fish you caught, you couldn't sell enough that way. You would have to go to a fish market to have them handle the catch.

**VA:** Did you know very many families that were fishermen?

**KS:** There were a couple of people I can think of who were fishermen. The other big employer of Japanese were the fish canneries down along, well, basically, it would be underneath where the Coronado bridge is now. And then there were satellite businesses that grew around the fish canneries.

Another friend used to run a cafe that the cannery people went to. The fish canneries employed a lot of Japanese women. That was one of the biggest sources of employment for Japanese women.

**VA:** That's a really interesting phenomenon, the tuna fishing industry. From what I've read, the evacuation pretty much took the Japanese out of the industry and the Portuguese took over from there.

**KS:** Oh, yes, the Portuguese took over. The Portuguese and I think the Italians, too.

**VA:** Well, the Italians, I guess, they weren't allowed to take their boats out because they were considered enemies, too. They couldn't leave. I can't remember how many miles from shore they were allowed to go out. And then the Chinese had been pushed out even before that, so it is very interesting.

**KS:** The matter of working in civil service, I can give you all kinds of examples. Particularly with the women, it really was the only way for all of them to go to work. I just can't say enough of how civil service has provided a livelihood for the ethnic minorities. And I still feel very strongly that anybody who has difficulty getting a job, that is a good way to get started. There are so many levels that you could try out for. I just think it is a marvelous opportunity in this country. It is not only in San Diego, it is anywhere. I don't think there is any excuse for somebody saying, "I can't do anything." There is a way. This country offers a lot of opportunities.

**VA:** Did you find problems going to San Diego State University?

**KS:** No, none at all. That was an era where it was fun to go out to State. Registration wasn't as bad as it has gotten - well, we still had our problems. I remember that we had to sit there and wait to get into classes. We did not have to try to "crash" as many as they have to today. The professors were wonderful.

**VA:** And when was this?

**KS:** This was in 1950 to 1952. You see, we were going into the Korean War, but I don't know if I was just fortunate, or if I had blinders on. I really don't know if I was being naive, but I thoroughly enjoyed my experiences out at State. I did have the most marvelous teachers. It was a learning experience in more ways than one. I really had a lot of fun out there. And I had good teachers at San Diego High School, too. That is really what started me; I had dandy teachers there. They just challenged me and stimulated me. It was a whole new world; it was an awakening period. I really look back on that period as to what education should be. I hate it when I see kids nowadays just aren't getting it. It is a shame because they are never going to be that age again when they have the opportunity to explore mentally. Once you get older, you might learn, but it is not the same as the youthful learning experience. I was really fortunate.

**VA:** Did you have to leave State to get a job?

**KS:** Uhhh, that is when my mother got sick. As I said, miss Breed had taken me under her wing, and she had wanted me to go to Scripps College in Pomona - she is a Scripps alumna. She had arranged for me to go to Scripps for an interview. In those days there were no scholarships in the price range that you get nowadays. Going to Scripps was absolutely out of the question; there was no way that it could be done. So I figured I would go four years to State and then I wanted to go either to library school at UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) or Berkeley. That would have been for another two years. That is what I had geared all my classes toward, but it just didn't work out. I really have no regrets; my life has turned out very, very well, and I don't think (I) would have changed anything.

**VA:** When you had to leave did you have some regrets at that time?

**KS:** No, because I thought maybe it was just going to be temporary - get to work, my mother was better, and I'll go back to school again. It just never occurred to me that I was finished. When I got married there were just more pressing and important things that had to be done. Then I got to a point where I just never felt I wanted to go back and get my degree. I wasn't driven to get my BA. I was just perfectly contented and happy with the way things turned out to be.

**VA:** When you and your husband were farming in Mission Valley, you weren't living on the farm?

**KS:** No. First we rented a house, a little tiny cottage, in Normal Heights. Then when the first baby was due we bought this house in Logan Heights, southeast San Diego. We lived there for two years. My husband's oldest brother lived on the farm with his mother and some of his family, two of his sisters, and two of the brothers. They had two separate houses. They were able to buy a house for his mother in Normal Heights and he lived there until he got married. There were two brothers and two sisters still living at home.

**VA:** Did you help out on the farm?

**KS:** No, I have no talent whatsoever. At the time I got married I was still working for the county and I kept that job. I never did get involved in any way with the farm operation. After we got married and my husband had been working for quite a while for the farm supply company - there was an organization called South Bay Farmers for all the growers in this area. They maintained an office for purposes of insurance and to keep informed. It was an organization of mutual interests and they needed a secretary. So I said, "I'll do it for you if I can do it from home. I don't want to have to go outside the home." I could do bookkeeping and secretarial work from out of the house. I did that for about five years and I got my first introduction to bookkeeping. I don't know if Ben told you about that part of our life when we were partners in a farm. Did he tell you about that?

**VA:** I don't think so.

**KS:** One of his customers, when he was with the supply house, worked for another large farming corporation. He wanted to go out on his own, but he didn't have any capital. We decided to back him financially, as limited partners, and he would run the farm. So I became his bookkeeper, too. But I have absolutely no head for figures. When I would take the books in for the annual audit, I'll tell you the accountant always shuddered; he never knew what dumb mistakes I'd have. So that was a true learning experience. I really struggled, but I learned a lot about bookkeeping.

As I said, I worked part-time at the library, and when I got the full-time job at the county again, it was with the county social services, the welfare department. They sent me out to this office down here in Chula Vista. I showed up for work and they said, "You are the payment clerk." I said, "You've got to be kidding." So I was handling thousands of dollars in payments to welfare clients. It was truly a whole new experience. That was for eight months, and then I got this full-time job that I have now at the library. What happened was, the person who used to be my supervisor when I worked part-time had to quit, so they wanted me to come back and take her job. My only concept of her job was as it related to me. I had no idea of all the other things that she did. So when I went for my interview in the spring, this person would be in charge of the data base. Again I said, "I really don't know much about computers." And they said, "You'll learn." So I've been learning for two years. So I have been dragged, kicking and screaming into the computer age.

**VA:** I think a lot of people feel that way.

**KS:** It's been a struggle.

**VA:** One thing I wanted to ask you, you said you left downtown when you got married. I don't know if you were there at the time, but when did you notice people moving out and the community starting to break up?

**KS:** In downtown there never really was much ever a so-called community of families. This woman I mentioned who became my maid of honor, her family had the grocery store just half a block away from where we were living. They moved out - oh, it must have been ... She was still there when we were going to high school. Shortly after that they moved out into a real home in southeast San Diego. Back in those days that is where most of the Japanese moved to, because that is all they could afford.

It is interesting because when I became involved at the other church I would handle lots of mailings. Almost everybody had the same zip code - 92113 - which is that part of town. That is where they were accepted; that is where they could afford it, and they were comfortable. It is only within the last 20 years, just roughly speaking, they have started moving out into the suburbs like everybody else from the inner city or the so-called ghetto or southeast San Diego. The downtown families, a lot of them left. Some of them didn't come back after the war. The ones who did, maintain their businesses there but did not live there anymore. Then slowly the businesses started closing down. I don't think there is anything there now, any Japanese businesses.

**VA:** I wasn't aware that there was a Japanese community down there.

**KS:** There is nothing up there now. The last one was a grocery store on Island Avenue between Fourth and Fifth, where that park is now. That house is ... I've forgotten the name of it. There used to be a Japanese market there. I think that was the last business that lasted in that area.

**VA:** There are still a couple of Chinese buildings there. I think they are trying to save those.

**KS:** They are, and there are more Chinese still living in that area than there ever were.

**VA:** Why do you think that is?

**KS:** I think that Japanese people are more easily assimilated. I don't know if it is in the genes; I don't know if it is hereditary, what the psychological factors are. You look at China and Japan you see how the Japanese are more adaptable; they are quick to assimilate and take in new ideas. The Chinese are not as adaptable. It seems to me that that has turned over. I see that as a personality trait. There are more Chinese churches than there are Japanese churches, for one thing. I think they seem to cling together more.

One of the factors in San Diego with the Japanese community is that physically we are dispersed over a much wider area now than we were before the war, or immediately after the war. Now we are getting so many new people coming into the area. Whenever we meet somebody like that, they'll say, "Where are the Japanese coming to; where is the Japanese area; where can we get Japanese food?" So we send them to Woo Chee Chong because it is the only one around here really of any size. There are a few other smaller stores. You may have noticed that in the Clairemont area along Convoy Street it is getting to be an Asian area where there are some Japanese grocery stores, as well as Woo Chee Chong. There are some Korean businesses, a mixture of Asian businesses. There are quite a few Japanese in that area. That is the only part I can think of where you can go and say for the fewest miles traveled you would run into more Japanese goods.

**VA:** Okay, I think we've got quite a bit of information. Is there anything you would like to add?

**KS:** No, not really. The people you need to talk to who can give you more information and different insights if you are really interested in the Gaslamp area, you ought to meet Mich Yamaka who is a reporter for the San Diego Union. He grew up down there. He is my age, but his memory is so much more vivid than mine. He can rattle off names and figures and impressions that I have totally forgotten.

He has retained all of that. It must be his reporter's mind. Then to get the Chinese angle, you should talk to Tom Hom for the Chinese angle, plus the produce business, because he was so active, and his father was active in that area. For the Japanese community you ought to talk to Don Estes; you ought to talk to Moch Yurinaka and Moto Asakawa. These are people who have already been interviewed many times for television, newspapers. Their memories are so vivid and they are just full of information. They are a great resource. I think Don (?) has a lot of their oral history already, so you might contact him.

**VA:** I know people in the Society have worked with him a lot; he has a lot of information.

**KS:** He is full of information and he is willing to share it. He is a good judge of what is of value. Some people rattle on and sometimes it is not meaningful, but he is a good judge of valuable information.

**VA:** Thank you for the information.

**KS:** Did he talk at all about agriculture?

**VA:** He talked a little bit about it, but mostly just about what his family was doing.

**KS:** This is something that I don't think has been really recognized and acknowledged. The farmers in Chula Vista were unusual. Farmers as a breed are very individualistic, isolationists; they are not a sharing type of personality because of the nature of what they do. It is a gamble to farm and it takes a very sturdy character to go into farming. But we were lucky to have a farm advisor here named Bernard Hall. He got their confidence and worked with the farmers here. They trusted him to help them. It was a mutual admiration society. So they were pioneers in drip irrigation. He worked with them on tomatoes, cucumbers, asparagus, celery, so many things. When they worked together it was all experimental. Now they are established practices. But they were the pioneers in so many things.

I mentioned the South Bay Growers Association. They would have regular meetings and would discuss these things that Bernard was teaching them; they would share their information. Their suppliers were different from any other area we know of. They were willing to work together. They would kind of pool their resources. One of their customers would need something, this particular supplier didn't have it. He would call the other supplier, "Can I borrow from you?" It was an open society and this is very rare in agriculture. Most of the farmers down there were Japanese. They knew each other and they worked well together. Of course that was all due to Bernard Hall. These farmers down here were all successful because they were willing to work with the university. Not all farmers are like this. That was a rare characteristic.

**VA:** This was during the 1950s?

**KS:** Uhmmm, it was the 1950s and 1960s. Let's see, when did farming start to go to pot? I would say really up until the 1970s. In the 1980s there got to be less and less farm land. But farming was very strong for that period of time. Bernard Hall passed away about four years ago. He had retired and when he retired the farmers gave him a testimonial dinner. We were able to surprise him. It was just a very moving tribute to somebody whom everybody acknowledged they owed a great debt to. He retired a few years before he passed away, so by that time farming had started to go down. I

would guess for farming the 1950s were a little bit early. I think it was in the 1960s and 1970s farming was very strong in the area. It was very progressive, very innovative. They were willing to give him a portion of their farm land to experiment with. That takes a lot of trust.

The other person they gave a testimonial dinner to just before he passed away was a community doctor, Dr. Roy Tanaka. He was born in Hawaii, came over here and worked for my father for a while in the produce market. He went to medical school. I think it was the University of Minnesota. He got his MD before the war and when the war broke out, the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) gave him a bad time. They were watching him, but during the war he received a certificate for helping. He would examine people for Selective Service. Then when he went to camp, he worked in the camp hospital. Then he came back. His younger brother now has continued his practice in Logan Heights. He is on National Boulevard and 22nd Street. His patients were Japanese, black, Filipino, Mexican. He was a down-to-earth doctor, a very passionate man. They gave a testimonial dinner to him and again it was a surprise; he didn't know anything about it. It was just a very moving experience. I am glad we did it, as he passed away not too long after that. He was a real, real pillar of the community, very much respected. Everybody was very, very fond of him. When he passed away we lost a big part of the Japanese community.

**VA:** When did he pass away?

**KS:** It could have been no more than five years ago. I really can't remember now. I sort of time things by when I had my surgery. That was five years ago and I think by that time he had already passed away, so it is more than five years ago. He was a remarkable man. He took care of the community, a lot of it for free. Now his younger brother, Dr. Francis Tanaka, speaks Japanese fluently, speaks Spanish fluently. He has many black patients. He is just a very community-minded person. He practices at Mercy Hospital and highly regarded there.

***END OF INTERVIEW***

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