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Interview with Henry Hibino

Henry Hibino

California State University, Monterey Bay

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Interviewee: Henry Hibino
Interviewers: Grant Leonard & Carlos Canedo
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Grant Leonard 00:00

Hi, I'm Grant Leonard, and this is—

Carlos Canedo 00:05

This is Carlos Canedo.

Grant Leonard 00:06

And we're here with Henry Hibino, and we're going to be discussing his life in Salinas and his family history with Chinatown and whatever else Mr. Hibino feels like sharing with us. Very quickly, is it alright if we conduct this interview with audio recording and video recording?

Henry Hibino 00:25

I have no problem with it.

Grant Leonard 00:28

Well, Mr. Hibino, we'd like to start, maybe, chronologically. Do you want to tell us how your family came be in the area and maybe what growing up around here was like?

Henry Hibino 00:39

Yeah, believe it or not, I am a native of Salinas. I was born here. My parents—my father was basically a farm laborer way back when he first came to the valley, and along the way he learned the shoe repair trade, and he had a shoe repair shop and sold shoes in downtown Salinas in the 30s. And from there, he started farming prior to World War II. And then just as we—he started farming. He must have started farming—I think it was—I was just a little kid then, so I think it was 1938 and 1941. We were evacuated to the internment camps, and so we ended up in a place called Poston, Arizona. And after spending roughly three years in Poston, Arizona, we lived in the Hayward area. My parents worked for a nursery there for a year, and we came back to Salinas, and we've been here ever since. We came back to Salinas in about—I guess it was 1946—and actually lived in Chinatown, because prior to World War II, [unclear] couldn't own property. And so, my cousin, who was of age, owned this piece of property on Lake Street. If my memory serves me right, it was 134 Lake Street. 134 Lakes street was right across the street from Ted Ponton's Glass Shop. It's still there today. Right across the street was a two-story rooming house that my dad ended up with, because my cousin legally owned it, but some other family really owned it, and they chose to return to Japan. And so, my dad took that over. So, he owned it, so we came back to Salinas post World War II. We lived in that rooming house [unclear]. Oh, must have lived there since 1946, '47, to roughly 1950. About three years. Then he bought a little ranch in that Carr Lake area, and we moved there. So, I lived on the ranch for [unclear] number of years. I guess we moved there in 1950, and I—they ended up building a house, building a new house on the ranch, and so I got married in 1962. So, I lived there from 1950 to 1962, and then lived in different houses and

towns since I've been married. But that's kind of the chronological—over the years of my life, I attended Santa Rita Grammar School, was my first school. I attended Spreckels Grammar School, and we were gone [unclear], came back I was at Washington Junior High School, Salinas High School, and I went to Hartnell College, and I ended up at San Jose State. So, since getting out of San Jose State, I served a short stint in the Army, and I've been farming with my father ever since, but he's since deceased, and so now my son is farming with us. So, we're third generation. That's kind of a quick summary of what my life's been.

Grant Leonard 05:13

Alright, well, would you mind going into a little more detail about Chinatown—what it was like at the time, and living in [unclear].

Henry Hibino 05:22

Yeah, we'll see when I lived there—so, I was born in 1934—so, 1946 and '47 when I was thirteen years old, twelve, thirteen. I was a junior in high school. So, I still remember a little bit, but I don't remember a lot, you know, things have changed. A lot of the buildings are gone that were there in the old days. But that's where our—that's where that two-story rooming house was that my parents owned. It was just right directly across the street from Ted Ponton's Glass Shop. And Ted Ponton's Glass Shop used to be Harry's Garage, and Harry's Garage moved to another location, where the underpass is there now. They had to demolish that and put the underpass in, and that garage building on the corner of Front and Alisal Street became Harry's Garage. That originally was Harry's Garage, and I think the family still owns that, but they rent it to different people.

Carlos Canedo 06:31

Do you remember if it was a noisy area or was it really quiet, Chinatown?

Henry Hibino 06:39

There was no crime to speak of that I can recall. You know, not like it is today. I mean, I used to—the only way I got to school was we used to have to walk or ride a bike. So, I went from there to Washington Junior High School. We usually walked. [unclear] but we used to walk. I don't know how far that is, but it's a pretty good walk. But yeah, Salinas High School was the same way. There was no bus service or anything.

Carlos Canedo 07:14

And do you remember what was the game that you played, for example, in Chinatown, with your friends? What kind of things did you do with your friends in Chinatown?

Henry Hibino 07:25

Well, there was a park called Snyder Park. It was—it's right there by the Mexican Catholic churches, right from the backside of that parking lot. I guess it was probably in the parking lot. It was a city owned park that we used to play baseball there all the time. And that's where we hung out, so to speak. And all the different areas had parks on the corner of Front and Alisal Street where that big housing project is now. That used to be Front Street Park. And there was a lot of those parks all over town. Some of them were on school grounds. Lincoln School was another park—city run park on Lincoln School, and I

believe Roosevelt School. But so, depending on which part of town you were from, we used to compete against each other.

Grant Leonard 08:32

We've heard a lot about the Republic Cafe in Chinatown, on Soledad Street. Did you go there often or—

Henry Hibino 08:41

We used to go there from time to time. It was considered authentic Chinese food. It was the real thing. One of the dishes that the Republic Cafe was famous for was they had Peking duck, and I know a lot of people will tell you to this day that there is nobody in the whole country that made Peking duck like the Republic Cafe did. It was good. It was good. And I don't know what they did or how they did it, but anyway, that's what they were famous for. Republic Cafe was always owned by the Ahtye Family, because I remember they had a gas station across the street, and then the restaurant. So, if you were going into the restaurant, all you had to do was leave your car with the gas station, tell them to park. They'd take care of it. And then you went to dinner at the Republic Cafe. They didn't have any problem like they talk of today. There wasn't any vandalism or anything really to speak of, even in that part of town.

Grant Leonard 10:00

Were there any authentic Japanese restaurants in the area for the community?

Henry Hibino 10:05

Postwar, no. Prior to World War II, there was a number of them. In fact, I have—I had an aunt that had a restaurant right down the street from the Republic Cafe. I can't remember exactly where it was, but then my aunt had a restaurant and my cousin had a candy shop. And we had a lot of his equipment not that many years ago that he had from the candy shop, that we stored out at the ranch. But I think since we've thrown it away or whatever. I don't think any of it is around anymore. But that was just right down—it was right on Soledad Street.

Carlos Canedo 10:56

And how did you get along with the other Asian communities [unclear]?

Henry Hibino 11:01

How did I get along with whom?

Carlos Canedo 11:02

With the other Asian communities in Chinatown?

Henry Hibino 11:05

It was never a problem. The Chinese school was always there. The Buddhist church was—they rebuilt that completely, but the old Buddhist church was always there. There were not that many black families in town. There never was. When I went to high school, I think there was less than six kids, black kids, going to school in the whole high—Salinas High School.

Carlos Canedo 11:39

But did you have, like, Chinese friends and Filipino friends?

Henry Hibino 11:43

Well, we had, as I recall, the guys that I hung out with and we stuck together even to this day. One kid was—kid, he's not a kid anymore. He's Mexican. We had a Filipino and myself, and I guess there wasn't any Chinese guys that hung around with us, but then we had a number of Caucasian kids. But race never was an issue. Never was.

Carlos Canedo 12:23

And in Chinatown, do you remember, like, I don't know, some festivals that they did in that time?

Henry Hibino 12:30

The what now?

Carlos Canedo 12:31

Some festivals, like, festivities.

Henry Hibino 12:33

The festivities—the Buddhist church always had—has that Obon they call it in July. They've had that for, I don't, forever. And they still have it to this day. And that's—I'm not Buddhist, so I'm not familiar with all that. I'm kind of an outsider, but that's a big activity for their church. I think it happens in July every year.

Grant Leonard 13:08

And were there other celebrations, the Chinese New Year, that affect the community—in San Francisco?

Henry Hibino 13:16

There was not that much festivity in Salinas as far as Chinese New Year's go. The Chinese people that were here, they went to San Francisco for the big festivities. I don't know how much of a celebration they had in Salinas. If they did, I'm not really that familiar with it. Our neighbor is a Chinese dentist, and he's active with the Chinese people today, but they—I think they probably have a party or anything, but there's no big, big festivity here.

Carlos Canedo 13:58

Do you remember, like, if there was a market or where they sell fresh fruits or—

Henry Hibino 14:05

Oh yeah, there was a lot of Japanese grocery stores, a lot of Chinese grocery stores, a lot of Filipino markets, and the same way with the restaurants. There's a book that a lady just put together, came out, on the history of the Japanese people in Salinas. And, you know, it tells you what stores were in town and this and that and—I don't know where my wife put it. But anyway, yeah, it's the history of the

Japanese people. And somebody's doing the history of the Chinese people, and I'm not sure if somebody's doing the Filipino People, but the Japanese one is done, and they've been selling it. It's kind of interesting. We have one here around the house.

Grant Leonard 15:02

You mentioned about the difference between prewar and postwar for the community.

Henry Hibino 15:07

Well, Salinas had a very large Japanese community in Salinas. Most Japanese people were involved in agriculture, and so they were either farm laborers who later became farmers or sharecroppers, or some of them became big shippers, lettuce shippers, and some of them became big farmers. They were big farmers. And so, when the war took them all away, a lot of—other than the people that owned property—didn't come back. So, post-World War II, the Japanese community was very small. And then after World War II, a lot of those flower growers came to the valley. There's a lot of nurseries in town now. And most of them came from Japan under some refugee act, that they were able to come to this country. And so, they—there is a large community of them. But they've been on hard times too. The flower business is tough business with the imports. Can't compete with the imports. But the ones that are surviving I think have done well.

Grant Leonard 16:34

Do you have any memories of the internment period?

Henry Hibino 16:38

Yes and no. You know, I was—we left in 1941. I was seven years old, so I didn't know why, or I didn't really understand the whole procedure or process, and we went to school in the internment camp. And when I came back out, I was in the sixth grade, and I didn't have any problems, you know. Just walked right in. So, we must've gotten educated on schedule. In fact, it was tough. I don't know what it was, probably thirty Japanese kids. [unclear] relatively good students. Percentage wise, they're good students. So, you get thirty of them and you grade them on a curve, and it's pretty tough. I mean, they're all—I can recall that, but other than that, we were little kids. We'd go swimming every day and it was so hot, but we were in—Poston, Arizona is—the best way to explain it is across the river from Blythe, California. And that's all you did. You went to school, and you stayed in the water. They had a great big swimming hole that they built, and you just stayed there.

Grant Leonard 18:18

It's quite a difference between Arizona and here in Salinas.

Henry Hibino 18:21

That's right. That's right.

Carlos Canedo 18:24

And do you remember, like, having any kind of difficulties with the space or with the housing in the internment camp?

Henry Hibino 18:30

Well, you know, we lived—I've got a book here someplace. We lived in these—I don't know how to explain it, but they were just a tar paper building that you just had a cube—every family had a cubicle, and the bathrooms and the laundry room and everything was a central building out in the middle of the block. And that's how it was. That's how they all were, and I still kind of recall that.

Grant Leonard 19:10

Did your family ever speak of how it was for them? You said they were landowners before they went. How did it affect them?

Henry Hibino 19:17

My father was not a landowner previous to the war.

Grant Leonard 19:22

Farmer, correct?

Henry Hibino 19:23

What's that?

Grant Leonard 19:23

He was a farmer though, correct?

Henry Hibino 19:26

I'm sorry?

Grant Leonard 19:26

He was in farming?

Henry Hibino 19:27

He—as I said, originally he was a cobbler. He had a shoe repair business. Then he went into farming, and that's where he got his start, and then the war broke out, and we left.

Grant Leonard 19:46

How was that for him and your mother?

Henry Hibino 19:49

Well, I'm sure it was a tough time, you know. I was young. I didn't understand the whole process, but it had to be a tough time. I mean, they just pick you up and move you, and you don't have anything but the shirt on your back, so to speak. You know, it's pretty tough.

Carlos Canedo 20:07

Do you remember, like, a journey from here to there? Like, you were in a bus or by car?

Henry Hibino 20:15

To—?

Carlos Canedo 20:16

To the internment camp?

Henry Hibino 20:17

When we went to the internment camp? I can remember we got in the train. They sent us by train. Still remember that. I can still remember when we got off. They ended up bussing us to the final destination, and I can remember getting off, and it was just desert. I mean, just loose [unclear] dirt [unclear] to your ankles and that stuff. I still remember that. But again, you know, I was seven years, eight years old by then.

Carlos Canedo 20:17

Did you have, like, an idea of the war in that time?

Henry Hibino 20:52

I didn't have a what?

Carlos Canedo 20:58

The idea of the war that was happening.

Henry Hibino 21:03

I'm sorry, I didn't really understand what you were saying.

Carlos Canedo 21:05

I mean, you said that you were seven years old, so you pretty much didn't have the idea that [unclear] having a war—

Henry Hibino 21:12

No, you know, you don't understand they're at war or why they're at war or—and you just don't worry about those things when you're just a little kid. And no, I didn't actually know what was happening. I didn't know why we were there, or what we were and—

Carlos Canedo 21:36

Okay, so when you returned to Salinas, it was difficult for you to—

Henry Hibino 21:42

Well, when we returned I went to Washington Junior High School. I was in the seventh grade. So, I didn't have any problems in school or anything. It was—I don't know how well you know the history of Salinas, but the—I guess the word is climate for Japanese people in Salinas was bad. The National Guard unit that's in town, they were involved in the Bataan March. And so, there was, well, basically there was a lot of hatred just because of pigmentation in your skin. Well, it's just like what's going on now, you know, Iraq and Afghanistan and all those. So, you get anybody that's olive skinned on a plane

or anything, they want to ask you a bunch of questions. You know, I can understand that. There's not that many bad apples, but then still they treat you like one. And so, just like all that controversy over the Qur'an or whatever that's called in New York City that they're making an issue about. I don't know what solution to that is. There's people that have strong feelings against it, and some people that don't see any problem with it. That's basically what we went through too.

Grant Leonard 23:19

And your father went on to become a landowner, correct? Farming?

Henry Hibino 23:29

Yes, my dad bought a small ranch and he went into farming. So, when I got out of college, I came back. I've been farming with him—was farming with him ever since, and he passed away in 1989, I think. So, well, by 1989, previous to he passed away, he basically retired when he was in his sixties. I think it was later sixties—sixty-seven or eight—and he retired. So, I was running it anyway. After my son got out of college, he came back. He wanted to come back, so he pretty much runs it now, runs the farm now.

Grant Leonard 24:24

And you've been quite successful, correct?

Henry Hibino 24:27

Oh, I don't know if we've been successful, but we're still here. I guess that's being successful if you're still here, because we've had some tough years.

Carlos Canedo 24:40

And how did you get involved with politics?

Henry Hibino 24:43

What's that?

Carlos Canedo 24:43

How did you get involved with politics?

Henry Hibino 24:45

How did I get involved in politics? Well, probably the best way to put it, somebody asked me to join the Rotary Club, and Rotary Club is a pretty powerful group. Of all the service clubs, they're very powerful. So, I joined the Rotary Club. And so, when they look for any people in any political position, they really look at the rotary clubs. I have to admit that. And so, the mayor at the time said, "I want you to be on the Rec Park Commission." So, you just—it's an advisory board. They have Rec Park, they have Traffic, they have all these different planning commissions. So, Rec Park Commission. Doesn't sound like it's too bad, I'll do that. And actually, when you stop and realize it, it's kind of a stepping stone, because when they look for people to run for the City Council, they look at the people who are serving on the commissions. And so, I served on the commission for one term, which is four years. And then they said, "We want you to run for City Council." And there's a lot of committees around town, and they said, "You don't have to do anything. Just say you'll do it and be wherever you gotta be at. Everything

else will be taken care of." So, that's how that happened. And so, then I was on the Rec Park Commission, and I ran for the City Council, was successful. So, when you run for the City Council, you just run for a seat on the City Council, and at that time, there was only five. And out of the five people, they basically select their chairman every two years. So, the first four year [unclear]—when you run for the City Council, and I think it's still pretty much the same today. You serve a four-year term. But back in the old days, every two years, you selected a chairman among the five people that were on the council. So, the first year, one of the older guys, one of the holdovers, became the mayor, and then after his two years were up, his term expired, and so then they selected me as a mayor for the second two years of my first four-year term. And then I ran for reelection for another four-year term, and so then they selected me for mayor for the next two years, and then the following two years. So, I served three two-year terms as mayor, which is six years. Since then, they've changed the format, and now instead of running for the City Council seat, you run for mayor. And so, the mayor is directly, like—they said, you know, they're more powerful that way, this and that. And there's a lot of arguments for and against it. Like the Board of Supervisors, I think there's—is there five or seven on the Board of Supervisors? They still do it the old way. They select their chairman, and they usually rotate it. But they don't have anybody that runs for the specific office of being president of the Board of Supervisors or anything. But the City of Salinas now, I think they have seven members. And the mayor's seat—somebody runs specifically for the mayor's seat.

Grant Leonard 24:45

What do you remember about how politics affected Chinatown post World War II? You've mentioned how it's changed quite a bit.

Henry Hibino 28:45

The political part of it? Well, you know, I'm not that familiar with it, but it's an area—I don't know how you would word it—but it isn't the most desirable area of town. And so, you have Dorothy's Kitchen there, and I assume it's still there. And so, they draw a lot of people, and I really—I'm watching this—really watching the whole Chinatown project, because I don't know if you can successfully change a whole area. It's going to be difficult, but then they may be able to do it. I don't know. So, but politically, you know, they were always trying to, like, downtown revitalization, when the lower Main Street became revitalized. They—I guess it was the police department. I don't know, police and planning. Anyway, they were trying to figure out a way how they can keep those so-called undesirables out of the area. So, if you keep them out of there, they're going to congregate someplace else. They got to congregate somewhere. So, I think they still pretty much hang out on Soledad Street, and they don't want them coming on lower Main Street or anything. I mean, if the truth were known, they don't want them there.

Carlos Canedo 30:43

Do you think that there's a solution for this issue in Chinatown?

Henry Hibino 30:49

Is there a solution? I'm not smart enough. I don't know what it is. It's probably about, like, the gang problems they're having in town. They haven't found a solution yet. It's a tough one. It's tough.

Grant Leonard 31:06

What do you know about the change—the shift in Chinatown from being a Japanese, Chinese community to what it is today?

Henry Hibino 31:16

Well, you know, I think from an economical standpoint, the Chinese and Japanese people in general did much better, and they upgraded themselves to a higher social level, and the others just—old age and died, or whatever. And so, there aren't the Chinese people or the Japanese people other than the people at the Chinese church or the Japanese church that get involved, and they—I don't know how they can revitalize that. I mean, is there going to be a bunch of Chinese and Japanese restaurants go in down there and, you know, businesses go in down there? You ask me, I would say no, I don't think they would, you know. So, but I might be wrong. Maybe they're—you ask yourself, if they had a store down there, would you go down there and shop at that store? You'd ask yourself, "No, I'm not going down there." I tell my wife that, she'd probably say, "I'm not going down there." And I think that will be the general consensus of the people. Now, for a long time there was that one Mexican restaurant that was popular in Chinatown called La Revancha cafe. And I think it still might be there. It was a popular place, but it's kind of an outlying area on Lake Street, close to Main Street. And they didn't have as many problems there and, I mean, I used to go to lunch there now and then and, you know, you'd see everybody under the sun there. I mean, Caucasian people, you know, a little bit of everybody. So, you know, I think probably it could be done. But I don't know. I'm not—I don't know what the solution is to that in terms of revitalizing it. It'd be a tough—it's a tough project.

Carlos Canedo 33:36

There was a project, right? The Salinas Chinatown Renewal Project?

Henry Hibino 33:41

Yes, yes, I'm kind of half familiar with it, the renewal project. I mean, they're gonna try to renew it is what they're going to try to do. But you asked me, will it be successful? I don't know. I mean, if you put a bunch of new buildings and all those open lofts and new businesses and all that, it may work. I don't know.

Grant Leonard 34:11

Well, shifting gears a little bit. You talked about education in the Japanese community, from the internment camps to your own college career. Do you want to elaborate a little more about the role education played in the Japanese community?

Henry Hibino 34:27

Well, I think, you know, you look at graduation time in the paper and see—they usually have pictures of all the—San Jose paper even, or even the Salinas Paper, Monterey paper—of all the outstanding students at all the different schools, and percentage wise, Asian is pretty high. They are very high, in fact. And it probably starts at home. You know, they expect—the parents expect the child to do good. I mean, it's driven into them hard. And there must be some reason, because, I mean, you look at—I'm sure you've seen it. I mean, percentage wise they are—there's a lot of Asians, not just Japanese, Chinese, but, you know, you got the Koreans, the Vietnamese, and you name it. But that's driven into

them, to excel. Some of those kids, they've only been in this country for a few years, and they're one of the most outstanding students in school. You know, they had to learn English before anything, and then they're still—they're one of the most outstanding students in their class.

Carlos Canedo 35:58

Do you know some Japanese?

Henry Hibino 36:01

What's that?

Carlos Canedo 36:02

Do you know Japanese, to talk Japanese?

Henry Hibino 36:05

Do I know what?

Carlos Canedo 36:07

To talk Japanese?

Henry Hibino 36:08

Can I speak Japanese? Is that what you asked me?

Henry Hibino 36:10

Well, I am what they call Nisei. That means second generation, so that means that my parents, both my mother dad, came from Japan. They immigrated from Japan to this country. So, English was a second language in my house when I was growing up, and so everyday language, you know, "How do you do?" I've been to Japan a couple of times. Between my Japanese and usually the Japanese people's English, we get along fine. I don't have any problems. But if they start talking that—start using those big words [Carlos and Grant laugh], I have a tough time. But just every day "How you do," "How's this," "How's that." I can carry that conversation on, more or less. I wouldn't say that I'm a linguist. Just like Spanish—I mean, I took three years of Spanish in high school, and then we've been farmers, so, you know, my Spanish isn't eloquent, but I can carry on a conversation.

Carlos Canedo 36:10

Yeah.

Grant Leonard 37:31

How was the difference between generations here in America, for your parents and for yourself and for your children, for how you experienced—

Henry Hibino 37:43

How are you asking me, or what are you asking me there?

Grant Leonard 37:46

How was your experience in America changed for each generation, your parents, yourself, your children?

Henry Hibino 37:54

Well, as you see, there's pictures of my three children. And each of them is married to a Caucasian. So, their kids are what they call Hāfu. They're half Japanese and half Caucasian. Well, you know, back in the old days that never happened. You were either full blood Japanese or you weren't, you know. And back in the old days, that was very rare for somebody to intermarry. Today it's very rare to find a Japanese wedding where the bride and groom are Japanese. You know, that kind of explains it. And so, their kids, we refer to them as Hāfu. They're half Japanese or half Asian, whatever, and half something else. And so, I don't know what's gonna happen from here, whether those kids are going to have that driven into them like we did, about excelling in school or whatever, or not. I mean, that's gonna—that's yet to be seen. I have some grandsons going to Salinas High School, and I think they're doing okay. They're not at the top of the class, but my one daughter there, she was valedictorian of her high school class. You know, she's not gonna take the back seat to anybody for anything. [Grant and Carlos laugh] That's the way she was. I mean, it didn't matter what she did. She has an electrical engineering degree out of Berkeley, and one of my friends asked her one day, said, "Stacie, you're an electrical engineering major. How many girls in your class?" And she said, "Two, sometimes three." [laughs] So, you know, she was in a man's world. I mean, there's not many girls that go into electrical engineering. In fact, going back, I went to their commencement exercise when she graduated from Cal, and I was reading all the names on the list of the graduates. And I think there was sixty-something percent that were Asian. [laughs] It was over half.

Carlos Canedo 40:28

None of your kids wanted to pursue a political career?

Henry Hibino 40:33

No. No, one of my son-in-laws is—he's pretty active. He's active—very active in Rotary. When they give him a job, he goes at it, and he ends up doing a good job, so naturally, they give him another job and another job and another job. Finally, he's learned that one of these times he's got to start saying no. And but—I don't know, my son is forty. I don't know if he, you know—they appoint him to different committees and stuff. Sometimes if you have a name that's tied to politics, they think, well, we might try this guy. And I think he's on a couple of committees, but, you know, he's not going after anything big. But he has three small children. They're just all close together, so—

Grant Leonard 41:49

Well, speaking of your granddaughter, how she's in a mainly male profession now. How has conditions for women and men changed over the generations for the Japanese people?

Henry Hibino 42:03

For the Japanese people? Well, I'm sure it's like everything in general. I mean, women are getting out of—they're on a equal plateau now—closer, anyway, than they were. You know, for a long time, the

man was in power and the lady stayed in the background. And now they're, you know, they're fighting for their equal rights.

Grant Leonard 42:44

Was that the condition for—or the situation for your mother and father?

Henry Hibino 42:50

Well, I think, you know, they came from the old country, and I think it was still, you know, men were above women, I think it's safe to say. I mean, that's the way it was.

Grant Leonard 43:05

Well, speaking of the old country, what was it that brought your mother and father here to America?

Henry Hibino 43:19

Well, you know, that happens pretty much like everything else. I've talked to different people. One of—I think it was my mother's sister immigrated to the United States, and they went to a place called Vacaville, California. It's right outside of Sacramento. And so then, they call their sister over, and so I was born here. My two sisters were—we were all born here. But so, they went to this—it was a fruit farm. I think pears—I don't know what they have in Vacaville. I think was a pear farm they said. And so, they called the sister over, and then the sister called somebody else over, and pretty soon you got a whole colony of them. And then there was—they'd come from the same part of Japan. And so, there was a group of them that were here in Salinas. And they said, "Come to Salinas. It's better conditions than it is up there." So, they started all coming down here. And usually what happens is, is when they come from the same—I didn't realize this—when they came from the same part of Japan, they stick together, and if one of the guys is a supervisor for, say, a farming company or a lettuce shipping company, the supervisor, they always hire their own people, you know, their own so-called country people that came from the same village or county. And I didn't realize this until I was on a forum one day at—was it Steinbeck? I can't remember. Anyway, the people that immigrated out here from Oklahoma and Texas? They're the same way. Somebody came out here, and they called their family, and they called another relative and another relative. And one of the guys was some kind of a supervisor at one of the lettuce companies. All the people who came from that county in Oklahoma, they worked for that one company, or came from Texas, they worked for this other company. And that's the way it was. I didn't realize that till later.

Grant Leonard 45:42

So, there's a strong sense of community for the Japanese.

Henry Hibino 45:48

What's that?

Grant Leonard 45:49

There was a strong sense of community for the Japanese.

Henry Hibino 45:51

Yeah, those people came from the same country or whatever back in Oklahoma or back in Texas, and they came over during the Dust Bowl. But—and the Japanese people are pretty much the same way. Somebody came over from a certain prefecture, and they stick together.

Carlos Canedo 46:14

And do you have relatives in Japan?

Henry Hibino 46:17

Do I have what?

Carlos Canedo 46:17

Relatives.

Henry Hibino 46:18

Relatives living? Where, here or—

Carlos Canedo 46:21

In Japan.

Henry Hibino 46:22

In Japan? Yes. Yeah, I have some cousins. I don't think I have any uncles and aunts anymore, but I have quite a few cousins.

Grant Leonard 46:34

You mentioned having sisters.

Henry Hibino 46:36

What's that?

Grant Leonard 46:37

You mentioned having two sisters?

Henry Hibino 46:39

Having sisters? Yes, I have two sisters. One lives in town, and another one lives in Watsonville. They're both older. I'm the youngest.

Grant Leonard 46:52

How was—if you remember—how was their experience growing up in Salinas?

Henry Hibino 46:57

Well, theirs probably was a little different, because—I don't know how that happened, but we're all five years apart. My oldest sister is ten years older than I am, and my second sister is five years older than I am. So, when I was seven, she was already seventeen, you know. So, they probably understood more.

They probably did all the things that teenage kids do and all that. But yeah, they're—we're not real close, because we're so far apart in age.

Grant Leonard 47:44

Do you ever discuss the internment with them, or was that something that—

Henry Hibino 47:49

Do I discuss internment with them?

Grant Leonard 47:51

Is that something that's talked about in the Japanese community?

Henry Hibino 47:54

No, we don't talk that much about it. I mean, we talk about days in camp and all that, but we don't talk that much about it. I still remember, you know, little kids, and you'd go see a movie—we used to—they used to show movies outdoors. They'd just have a big movie screen. At Arizona in the wintertime, it gets cold at night. So, if you go see a movie—you used to take a coffee can, or whatever kind of can, tie a little handle with a lot of wire on it, and you'd put a little charcoal in there, and you'd put it by your chair, by your—you'd usually have to take your own seat to go to the movie. Take your own chair and this little can of charcoal to keep you warm, and I used to remember that.

Carlos Canedo 48:42

Do you remember the names of your friends during the internment camp?

Henry Hibino 48:51

Oh yeah, there's still some of them, yes.

Carlos Canedo 48:58

They were pretty much from this area too?

Henry Hibino 49:04

They were—you know, we were put in what they call blocks. There were a whole bunch of buildings—that was considered a block. And usually the people in that block were from the same area, like Salinas, Watsonville, or Salinas, Monterey. You were all in the same area. I'm trying to think. There was a book up there that showed how those buildings look. Let me see if I can find it. [unclear] gave you a pretty good picture of what life was like in camp.

Carlos Canedo 49:35

But for you, you remember it as a good memory?

Henry Hibino 49:46

What's that?

Carlos Canedo 49:47

You remember the internment in a good way, as a good memory?

Henry Hibino 49:51

Well, we were little kids. All we did was go fishing or go swimming. I swam in that Colorado River. I don't know how we didn't drown, but, you know, by then we can swim pretty good. If you just stayed in the water all day long, you can swim pretty good. And they—yeah, we stayed in the water. It's too bad I can't find that book. [recording stops]

Grant Leonard 49:54

[recording resumes] [unclear] internment?

Henry Hibino 50:06

You know, what that Poston, Arizona—the closest town to it is called Parker, Arizona. The people, the Japanese people, saw it as pretty good farm ground. They used to grow gardens and things in it, and they were trying to talk the government into letting them homestead it, but it all belonged to the Indians. And one of the guys, companies that got involved in it was this Bruce Church company out of Salinas, and they developed it into farming. And so, one day we went there to look at the lettuce crop there. They were growing lettuce certain times of the year, and it was right in the area where we lived, or where our barracks were. And it was kind of interesting. I mean, it, you know, everything's gone. It's just lettuce fields and alfalfa fields and things, but some of it kind of brought back memories. I think that main water canal that used to bring the water into the swimming pool—I think that same canal is still there. So, I kind of—it brought back some memories, but, you know, again, I was seven, eight years old, so—

Grant Leonard 51:57

Was there a sense of normalcy in the camps? You had several birthdays there—celebrations and community events?

Henry Hibino 52:05

You know, I can't remember birthday parties. But again, when you're seven, eight years old, you don't think too much about—you just think about playing. But playing, we went to school—I think our school was like a regular school session. We went nine months, and then we had three months somewhere. I think that's how it was. And we—I think there was some—I don't recall going to them, but there was also—you can go to a special language class to learn Japanese. Well, I remember that growing up here, that we used to have to go to school on Saturdays to learn Japanese. And you had a choice. You either go in on Saturday or after school. And I, for whatever reason, I went on Saturdays. And so, they had that in camp too. I think the Buddhist church—to this day, I think they have Saturday school for language, Japanese language.

Grant Leonard 53:23

Now, what do you recall about the Japanese school here in Salinas?

Henry Hibino 53:36

What do I recall about it? Well, there again, you know, I was seven, six or seven, when I was going to Japanese school. I was just getting started. I was just starting, so I didn't get involved too much into it. I got to about the ABCs, about all I got, far as I went. I can't write my name in Japanese today. But yeah, I wish probably—I wish I would have learned more. But I can just—I can talk the everyday language. That's about it.

Carlos Canedo 54:22

What was your favorite subject?

Henry Hibino 54:26

What's that?

Carlos Canedo 54:27

What was your favorite subject in school?

Henry Hibino 54:29

My favorite subject? Oh, if I had to take a choice, probably math. I did well in math. In fact, when we were in high school—went to Salinas High School—this one row in our class had the highest grades in the class, just the one row. And so, the teacher suspected we were cheating. So, he said, "There's something not right here. I'm gonna stand behind you during the test—next test." So, he stood there looking at us, watching us. And it just happened, I guess, that there were four or five of us that was in the same row, was doing the best on the test. But I—don't get me wrong, I wasn't that much of a scholar. I was okay, but I was not a scholar.

Carlos Canedo 55:34

And did you play any sport?

Henry Hibino 55:37

Yes, but, you know, back in the old days, we played football and basketball, and they had different programs. Instead of varsity, you can play what they call lightweights. So, I played the lightweight program. It's kind of like the junior varsity, I don't know, whatever. But we played lightweight basketball. Salinas, they were good. Every year they were good. Our coach from high school is still living. He comes to the class reunions even. He must be close to ninety now.

Grant Leonard 56:24

Do you remember the name of your father's shop as a cobbler?

Henry Hibino 56:28

Yes, it was Frank's Shoe Repair Shop. I might have a picture of it right here. I think we do. It's here.

Unknown 56:53

And that was on Soledad Street?

Grant Leonard 56:57

Do you remember which street your father's shop was on?

Henry Hibino 57:00

Yes. It's on Alisal Street, between Main Street and Salinas Street.

Grant Leonard 57:08

And was his name Frank, or did he take that name when he came—

Henry Hibino 57:15

He took that name, yeah. [long pause] We went to camp because of this Executive Order 9066.

Grant Leonard 57:52

And this has photos of the Poston camp that you were in?

Henry Hibino 57:56

What's that?

Grant Leonard 57:56

This has photos of the camp that you were in?

Henry Hibino 58:00

I don't know if it was the same one, but this is basically what it looked like. Those barracks was cut into cubicles. There was probably four families to a barrack.

Carlos Canedo 58:17

Four families to a barrack?

Henry Hibino 58:19

There might be a better picture than that. Let me find a better one.

Carlos Canedo 58:37

Do you remember other Japanese stores in Chinatown?

Henry Hibino 58:40

Not really, because by the time we came back to Chinatown—that's what it looked like right there. I didn't live in Chinatown till post World War II. So, pre—well, at the outbreak of World War II, all the stores were gone. So, I'm not familiar. They have maps of what stores were where, and I don't have any recollection of that. I still remember as a little boy, my dad used to take me to get my hair cut at this one Japanese barbershop. I still remember that.

Grant Leonard 59:41

Do you know who it was, and the name of it?

Henry Hibino 59:45

Yeah, it was the Fukuda Barbershop. It was on Lake Street also.

Grant Leonard 59:49

The Fukuda Barbershop?

Henry Hibino 59:50

Yeah. It was on Lake Street also.

Carlos Canedo 59:55

What was the name of the owner?

Henry Hibino 59:59

Yeah, that's Mr. Fukuda. And he later relocated after post World War II in San Jose. They had a barbershop in San Jose. And I'm not so sure if it's still there today. His son became barbers and then, you know, it's—but I think the younger ones didn't become barbers. But there was a barbershop there too, not that long ago.

Grant Leonard 1:00:29

Do you recall why your father took the name Frank?

Henry Hibino 1:00:35

No, I never asked him, and, you know, everybody did. Instead of having a Japanese name, they always [unclear].

Grant Leonard 1:00:51

And the Japanese restaurant that you mentioned, do you remember its name and where it was?

Henry Hibino 1:00:54

What's that?

Grant Leonard 1:00:55

The Japanese restaurants that you mentioned earlier, do you remember their names?

Henry Hibino 1:01:01

My aunt's restaurant, I can't remember the name of it.

Grant Leonard 1:01:05

Do you recall your aunt's name?

Henry Hibino 1:01:06

What's that?

Grant Leonard 1:01:07

You remember your aunt's name?

Henry Hibino 1:01:08

Yes. Yeah, her name was Harusato. But she's gone too.

Carlos Canedo 1:01:24

No one continued with the restaurant?

Henry Hibino 1:01:26

What's that?

Carlos Canedo 1:01:27

No one continued the restaurant?

Henry Hibino 1:01:29

Well, at the outbreak of World War II, you know, they closed up and that was the end. They didn't come back. That's what happened to most of the businesses.

Carlos Canedo 1:01:47

Do you remember, like, when you were doing internment, like, some people have feelings of anger being there.

Henry Hibino 1:01:54

Well, I think the older people, some of them probably did. And they gave some of the people that just wanted to go back to the old—go back to Japan. There was some program where they let you go back. And there's a number of families that did that. You know, they were so disenchanting with the situation and anything else, that they had a procedure where you can go back to the old country. I'm not familiar with it, but I know families that did.

Grant Leonard 1:02:44

And for today's generation, how's the connection to the Japanese community and culture. Do your children or grandchildren go back to Japan?

Henry Hibino 1:02:53

No, they haven't yet. I'm not saying that they won't. I don't have too many relatives left, but I do have some cousins.

Carlos Canedo 1:03:04

And do your kids know about the internment camp, about the experiences that you had?

Henry Hibino 1:03:10

What's—who's this now?

Carlos Canedo 1:03:14

Your kids.

Henry Hibino 1:03:16

Relatives in Japan?

Carlos Canedo 1:03:17

No, your kids here know—

Henry Hibino 1:03:19

Oh, well, we explain it to them, and, you know, they look through that book and all that, and they—"Did you really go through this?" But no, I don't think they fully understand it. They probably do, but, you know, they didn't experience it. Put it that way.

Carlos Canedo 1:03:47

It's something they don't teach in schools, right?

Henry Hibino 1:03:51

No, they don't. In fact, I've—haven't done it in some time, but there's different classes. Somebody gives them my name or something. I talked about the experience, and the kids in the class, "Oh, that didn't really happen." I usually take that book along. And so, it's part of their classroom, I guess. In fact, I had a guy, a teacher, ask me the other day if I would do it. I told him I would. There used to be a lady in town that was a school teacher. She was good. She was older than I am, and she really could tell the story. But she's still living, but she's elderly and she has a memory problem, so—

Carlos Canedo 1:04:58

Is there another picture that you—seem interesting?

Henry Hibino 1:05:01

What's that?

Carlos Canedo 1:05:02

Is there another picture—

Henry Hibino 1:05:03

Well, you know, the whole book is—some of it is pretty interesting. It pretty much visualizes what took place.

Grant Leonard 1:05:23

Well, Mr. Hibino, that more or less covers what we had outlined.

Henry Hibino 1:05:27

Okay.

Grant Leonard 1:05:28

Is there something else you'd like to add? Another story or memory or comment?

Henry Hibino 1:05:33

That's about all I can tell you. You know, I don't claim to be an authority on anything. I just tell you the experiences that I've had, that I went through. You probably get some of the older people—if you find—I'm sure they'll get some of them that can really tell you a lot. But they're getting pretty thin now too. I mean, you know, they're all got to be eighty, ninety years old now. But if you find one of those people, they can really tell you a lot.

Grant Leonard 1:06:15

Well, we do thank you for your time—

Henry Hibino 1:06:17

Okay.

Grant Leonard 1:06:18

—and for being willing to share with us your memories and your stories. [cuts to footage of Hibino family photographs]

Henry Hibino 1:06:23

Describe what now?

Grant Leonard 1:06:25

What's happening when the photos were taken.

Henry Hibino 1:06:26

Oh, well, this is just a history book, and this is a picture of me when I was a little boy with my mother. And this is a picture of Girls' Day. They put a display of all the dolls and everything on, and my sisters are dressed in Japanese gowns.

Grant Leonard 1:06:49

And Girls' Day? What exactly was Girls' Day?

Henry Hibino 1:06:51

They celebrate Girls' Day. I don't know how to explain it. They had Boys' Day and Girls' Day. Girls' Day they display all these dolls. On Flag Day—on Boys' Day, they got a big carp that you fly on. I still have a stand someplace, I think. We used to put this big carp, and you fly it. Just a custom. These are my sisters.

Grant Leonard 1:07:29

And where was your—where were they living before then? You said you didn't grow up in Chinatown until after the war?

Henry Hibino 1:07:38

I'm guessing they lived in South County here at Soledad.

Grant Leonard 1:07:42

Oh, really?

Henry Hibino 1:07:43

You know, lived on a farm. I'm thinking—I'm saying that because my oldest sister was born in Vaca—I don't know what year that car is. It's gotta be 1930 or something.

Grant Leonard 1:08:01

And was there one more photo on the other page?

Henry Hibino 1:08:04

What's that?

Grant Leonard 1:08:04

Was there another photo on the other page?

Henry Hibino 1:08:07

It just shows him—just shows him as a little—young man. Right here. That was my dad when he was a young man.