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## **Interview with Kaye Masatani**

Kaye Masatani

California State University, Monterey Bay

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Interviewee: Kaye Masatani  
Interviewer: Ryan Eller  
Date of Interview: November 13, 2010  
Duration of Interview: 51:55

**Ryan Eller 00:00**

Okay, so do we have your permission to record the interview?

**Kaye Masatani 00:03**

Yes.

**Ryan Eller 00:04**

Okay, so today is November 13, 2010. I'm Ryan Eller and I'm interviewing—

**Kaye Masatani 00:12**

Kaye Masatani and Ben Masatani.

**Ryan Eller 00:16**

So, this interview is not really going to be the standard, like, I'm going to ask you a question and then, like, you're going to answer, then I'm going to keep firing questions. I prefer if you just kind of, like, tell your stories, and when I ask the question, just, you know, go on as long as you'd like about it. And then if we ever feel like we're getting off track, I'll ask a question to get us back—

**Kaye Masatani 00:33**

Okay.

**Ryan Eller 00:33**

—on track. Okay, so could you start me off by telling me about your family?

**Kaye Masatani 00:37**

Yeah, my mom and dad came to America—what year was it? I forgot now, but I should've looked it up [Ryan laughs]. Let's see, well, they're the first generation that came to America, and—it might be in here—story. In 1906, my father and his two brothers came to America to farm. And they were farmers in Japan and they came to America to shop, farm, and they went to Castroville, and later moved to Lompoc, California. And the three brothers went back to Japan to get married, and the wives joined them in 1970. After a few years in Lompoc, the three brothers went back to Castroville to continue farming. And we all lived together. I wasn't born yet. But the three brothers and their families lived together in probably one house. And my father is from Kanegawa Prefecture in Japan. And my mother was from Odawara Kanagawa Prefecture. And we first rented a home on Pajaro Street in Salinas. And my mother used to rent rooms to lettuce workers or people who worked in the sheds. My father ran a pool hall on Market Street on the first floor of the Plaza Hotel. I don't know if the Plaza Hotel is still there or not. But it's on Market Street, next to that Chinese grocery store.

**Ben Masatani** 02:37

I think it's gone.

**Kaye Masatani** 02:38

You think it's gone? And then in 1932, my father moved to Soledad Street, 6 Soledad Street in Chinatown, and he expanded his business with a pool hall, cigarette stand, ice cream candy stand, a liquor store, bar, Chinese restaurant in a rooming house. And I'm the seventh child from a family of eight. What else do you want to know?

**Ryan Eller** 03:14

[laughs] Okay, so your parents were the first generation to come over. So where did your parents stay in—they stayed in Lompoc?

**Kaye Masatani** 03:28

No, from Lompoc they moved to Castroville, and then to Salinas.

**Ryan Eller** 03:32

So then how did your experience growing up differ in Salinas maybe than to your parents?

**Kaye Masatani** 03:38

Well, I was—I lived in the restaurant, you know, and I used to order my breakfast, dinner, and lunch and dinner from the cook. And that's how we used to eat. So we never ate as a family, except on New Year's Day. And that was the only time when the whole family sat together and ate together. And the only other time we ate together was when we went into these concentration camps, and we were assigned certain tables so the family would sit together and eat together. I guess we were considered not wealthy, but better off than most people because my father had the business, and he sent three of his children to Japan before the war. My older brother, oldest brother, and the second brother and the oldest sister went back to Japan. We always played in the backyard because we weren't allowed to go into the restaurant or the liquor store or the bar and all that, pool hall. And we attended Sunday school every Sunday at the Buddhist church on—I guess that's on California Street. And I attended Lincoln Grammar School and then attended Japanese school on Monday, Wednesdays, and Fridays. I took piano lessons and tap dance lessons when I was a youngster. And we played with other Japanese children in Chinatown, which was on Soledad Street. Japantown was on Lake Street. We used to play house or imaginary circus or carnival in the backyard. We used to go to the movies. My mother would give us 15 cents—10 cents for the movie, and five cents for candy or ice cream or whatever we wanted. My family had ice cream in the cigar stand area. But my father only carried vanilla and strawberry, and I like chocolate [all laugh]. And so I used to go buy my chocolate ice cream. We had a cousin that came from Castroville to live with us because her family was quite poor. And she came to live with us and she became our nanny. And she was the one that I used to order my breakfast, lunch, and dinner from. So I have a lot of likes and dislikes, because I ordered just what I liked to eat, not what the family had to dish out. Okay. That's about what it was in Salinas.

**Ryan Eller 06:59**

So, your dad had a business in Chinatown—it's building 46 on the map. So, you were saying you had, like, a bar, and then—?

**Kaye Masatani 07:10**

Yeah. See, this was the front of the store. And my father had a liquor store there, and the pool hall was right behind that. And then he had a bar where they served beer, and the eatery was in the back where my mother served dinner and lunches to the shed workers. And behind that there was a Chinese restaurant. There was a big hall in the back, and that's where we used to have parties. So, this was my family. And my brothers took Kendo—do you know what Kendo is? Fencing. And so, the three brothers took fencing. And my older sister took Japanese classical dance, dancing, and my oldest sister took piano and maybe sewing lessons. So, it's not a typical growing up in Chinatown family. Because we had other—and I used to go to a dressmaker to have my clothes made [chuckles], you know, dresses made because my mother didn't have time to take us to the store to buy it, so she would just buy the yardage and then she would have dresses made for us. That's it for that.

**Ryan Eller 08:51**

So, your family had like a bar restaurant, but did you have any other favorite restaurants in Chinatown that you liked to go to?

**Kaye Masatani 08:58**

We never ate other places because my folks had the restaurant.

**Ryan Eller 09:07**

Do you have any, like, memories that really stand out or any real familiar family stories about Chinatown?

**Kaye Masatani 09:16**

We used to play on the sidewalk—jacks. You know, you love the game jacks [Ryan laughs]. Yeah, we used to play jacks and we used to play—we used to go to the Japanese school and play, I don't know what they call that game now where you run across and tag the other guy and run back. We used to play that in between—

**Unknown 09:42**

Red Rover, right?

**Ryan Eller 09:44**

[laughs]

**Kaye Masatani 09:44**

I don't know, but we used to play games like that, or something about putting a prisoner in a section and you have to take them out. I don't know what you call that game.

**Ryan Eller 10:01**

It was jail. That's how we played it [all laugh].

**Kaye Masatani 10:04**

Okay, jail. Yeah. Okay, so that's that.

**Ryan Eller 10:12**

What other things can you tell me about the Japanese in Salinas?

**Kaye Masatani 10:17**

Well, I can't say too much because as a youngster, all we did was just play. You know, we didn't get involved in the politics or whatever was going on, because I was too young.

**Ryan Eller 10:33**

What time did you leave Salinas?

**Kaye Masatani 10:36**

I left Salinas when I was 12 years old. I had a birthday on the sixth of December, and war started on the seventh. And then in April—was it April?—we had to go to the assembly center and the rodeo grounds. Yeah. And then from there, we went to Poston, Arizona, on July 4.

**Ryan Eller 11:01**

So then, what was your experience with the internment camps?

**Kaye Masatani 11:05**

Well, the first thing was when President Roosevelt issued the proclamation of Executive Order 9066. And then all the Japanese people had to move out of Salinas. I remember we only carried our personal things that we could carry. And we were going to Arizona, so they said, there will be rattlesnakes and scorpions. And so, then we were—we had to buy cowboy boots to protect our legs. I think maybe I saw a scorpion once or twice only, but no rattlesnakes. But before, when the war started, the FBI came to the house and ransacked the whole house looking for things that might have helped Japan, you know, so. Let's see, what else can I say? Yeah, and during that war time in April, whenever the siren would ring, we had to pull down all the shades in the store, because of the enemy might be able to see where there were locations, where towns and cities were. Ben and I have been friends since we were little kids from about five years old. And so, we've known each other most of our lives. He—his family moved to Salinas. And I first met him in Sunday school, and I was only about five, and he was six. And so, I've known him most of my life. And then we went into these camps. And we were—we ended up in the same block. There were 14 barracks, and his family lived in one and we lived in the other. And we had a lot of social activities going on as youngsters, and we built our own school. And we used to give the teachers a bad time, because can you imagine a whole classroom full of Japanese children? And these teachers were not the best, and we used to give them a bad time.

**Ryan Eller 13:40**

So, your teachers weren't Japanese?

**Kaye Masatani** 13:42

No, they were Caucasian. And they came from all over the United States. And we felt that they were probably rejects from other [laughs] areas, and they couldn't find a job. So, they took the jobs at the relocation center.

**Unknown** 13:59

What would you do to give them a bad time?

**Ryan Eller** 14:01

[laughs]

**Kaye Masatani** 14:01

Well, I used to knit under the desk because lessons were very boring, you know. And as you know, Japanese kids are pretty bright. And so, if you have a whole classroom of Japanese children, the boys used to tease the girls and we used to give the teacher a bad time. And, but we managed, we—I guess we were there three years.

**Ryan Eller** 14:28

So, what were some of the things you would do to have fun maybe, while you were in the internment camp? Like, what would you guys—

**Kaye Masatani** 14:36

Oh, each block had a club, and our club was called The Penguins. And we would have social—we learned how to dance. And we would have socials or ping pong, basketball clubs, and then we would play against other blocks of children. Each block had their own club. And so, we would have tournaments against each other. And then we would have—we would go to a movie. We built a amphitheater called the Cottonwood Bowl. And we would have to take our own chairs to go to see the movies. And then in the winter, it would be cold, so we would take blankets and charcoal inside the one-gallon cans with a—you make a handle and then you put charcoal in there, and then you put it under your seat and keep warm that way while you're watching these movies. Yeah, I guess that's what we did, huh?

**Ryan Eller** 15:52

So, was the internment like—would you consider the internment something really negative in your life? Or was it something that you guys dealt with?

**Kaye Masatani** 16:06

Well, we had a lot of fun, because we were kids, but our parents lost out on the business, and my mother had—my father was taken in to, by the FBI. So, we didn't know where he was going. And so, we went to the immigration office in San Francisco to say goodbye, not knowing where he was going to go. And then he ended up in Bismarck, North Dakota. And then my mother had to take care of all of the business, clearing it up and selling whatever you can. And I remember one thing, we had a piano that was practically new, and I remember selling—my mother sold it for fifty dollars. And at that time, pianos

were, you know, pretty expensive. But we had to get rid of it. So, even fifty dollars was money in our pocket.

**Unknown** 17:06

Were you home when the FBI came and went through your home?

**Kaye Masatani** 17:12

Ransacked the home, yeah. Yeah, they were just terrible. But they were looking for contraband, and different things that would help. My father was kind of active in the Japanese Chinatown. And so, he and a lot of the reverends at the Buddhist church—because Buddhism is more Japanese than America—they were all taken in at the same time. And they were taken to the jail in Salinas.

**Unknown** 17:46

The reverends from the Buddhist temple?

**Kaye Masatani** 17:50

Yeah.

**Ryan Eller** 17:58

So then, after the internment, what was it like returning back to Salinas?

**Kaye Masatani** 18:02

Well, kind of terrible, because in Salinas, there was a principal by the name of Mr. [unclear]. And he took all of us in one by one, and we used to use our Japanese name. And he says, "In order to have peace around the school, please start using your English name." So most of us all picked up an English name and started to use that. High school was, well, not very much fun because I went into a home. And they used to call that school girl. And I would take care of the children and help the mother, and I lived with the family. And I did that for two years. I lived on—one was near the Washington Junior High School. I lived with the Sconbergs. And then the next year, I went down and lived with the Lamar—I guess, Salinas had the Lamar Brothers tire company. And I lived with that family for a year before I graduated high school. And we as Japanese kids decided we're going to show the American kids that we could get good grades. And so, we all got on the scholarship. And there were seven of us, and maybe six of us ended up being—getting, I don't know what you call that scholarship now. But we got good grades, and then we dispersed from there and went on our own way.

**Ryan Eller** 19:43

So, touching on education then, like, what was your family's values regarding education?

**Kaye Masatani** 19:48

Of course, try to go to college if you can, but because of the war, everything got disrupted. My one brother went to—after relocating from camp, he went to Nebraska with his older brother and sister, and he finished the University of Nebraska. And my older sister, after she came back to California, went on to interior decorating school. And then I went to Berkeley to go to a business college called Armstrong Business College. And I went there. And then I came back to San Jose to work.

**Ryan Eller** 20:33

So, you mentioned—sorry to [unclear] on a completely different topic—but you said your dad was taken to North Dakota? Do you guys know why they decided—

**Kaye Masatani** 20:44

Because the—

**Ryan Eller** 20:45

To do that, besides—?

**Kaye Masatani** 20:46

He was an enemy alien, and North Dakota was so far removed that they couldn't do anything. And it was just freezing over there for them, you know. And I remember I learned how to knit, so I used to make them stockings, because it was so cold in North Dakota.

**Unknown** 21:06

Did you know right away where they were taking him?

**Kaye Masatani** 21:08

No, we didn't find out for a while, you know. And then finally, somehow or another—and I don't recall—but somehow or another we got a notification that he was in North Dakota. And from North Dakota, then he got transferred to Santa Fe, New Mexico. And then he came home to us. So, it was about a good two years before he joined us.

**Unknown** 21:36

When did you find out that he was termed an enemy alien?

**Kaye Masatani** 21:40

Oh, right away because the Salinas console or whatever, they knew who was active in Salinas, and all the—and most of the people who had businesses, they were considered outgoing people. So, they—like his father never got caught, you know, because he lived on Market Street, and they weren't that active in the Japanese community.

**Ben Masatani** 22:09

We were on the right side of the tracks.

**Kaye Masatani** 22:11

[laughs]

**Ben Masatani** 22:12

They were on the other side.

**Kaye Masatani** 22:13

He keeps saying they were on the right side of the tracks, and we were not.



**Ryan Eller** 22:22

So then, did you guys stay? You guys stayed in the same spot then, in Arizona, until he came.

**Kaye Masatani** 22:29

Well, yeah. We stayed in Arizona until—what was it, 1945? Yeah. And you left in July, I think, right?

**Ben Masatani** 22:41

August.

**Kaye Masatani** 22:41

August, and we left in September.

**Ben Masatani** 22:44

At the end of August—

**Kaye Masatani** 22:45

Yeah, his family relocated to New Jersey, where they have the Birds Eye frozen food plant. And his father decided that would be where they would be able to survive. And he had, five younger sisters and brothers?

**Ben Masatani** 23:04

Yeah.

**Kaye Masatani** 23:05

He was the oldest. And so, they went to New Jersey, and my family went back to Salinas.

**Ryan Eller** 23:11

I heard that there was, like, a possibility that—and if I'm totally wrong, just tell me that I am—but I heard that there was the potential that you could move? You were offered to move instead of being sent to an internment camp?

**Kaye Masatani** 23:27

Yeah, we were going to move to central California. And—but my mother couldn't get all the business, financial—selling and taking care of the business in time for the relocation. And so, she—we ended up having to go to the Buddhist church and live until we went to the rodeo grounds. Do you know very much about the relocation or anything?

**Ryan Eller** 24:06

You know, I don't in the sense—like, I didn't know much about it until late in high school. And I guess that I could ask, how do you feel like our school system teaches that, if you know, like—?

**Kaye Masatani** 24:23

I think they're trying to—I think now they have some books in the schools, but I don't, you know, my grandkids are all in college now. So, I don't know what they teach. I know they picked it up at one time. But it's kind of on the light side.

**Ryan Eller** 24:43

Yeah, it's definitely not painted as bad as it was, you know, for people. And it's definitely not touched on very long. So, in the Chinatown community, what were some of the cultural traditions that your family still observed while you lived in America?

**Kaye Masatani** 25:07

New Years, go to the church and participate in all the activities at the church here in San Jose—the Buddhist church. And we're—we might still continue it. But the next generation—my daughter is fourth generation because he's a third, and then my grandsons are the fifth generation. So, they're losing some of the cultural activities, you know, because they go on to college, they meet other people. And then there's a lot of intermarriage between the kids nowadays, too, so.

**Ryan Eller** 25:49

So, when you were a kid then, was it—the traditions more followed, I guess?

**Kaye Masatani** 25:53

Yes. We used to go to the church. I remember the emperor and empress used to be presented, and we used to bow to that [laughs], do all of that kind of stuff not realizing, you know, lots of things. But, yeah.

**Ryan Eller** 26:14

So then were there any, like, festivals that the Japanese people would hold?

**Kaye Masatani** 26:19

Oh, yeah. Obon Festival. Have you heard of Obon, where they dance out in the street? In San Jose, there's a big program and with about over a thousand dancers.

**Ryan Eller** 26:34

Then did you go to a lot of these cultural practices and events in Salinas Chinatown?

**Kaye Masatani** 26:41

Oh, yeah.

**Ryan Eller** 26:42

Like, all the time?

**Kaye Masatani** 26:43

No, in—

**Ryan Eller 26:43**

I mean, whenever they were—

**Kaye Masatani 26:44**

— in Chinatown, we didn't have it. We always—the central place was the Buddhist church. And then, on Lake Street, I think they used to have judo. I don't know what you call those platform. Behind the garage, they used to have tournaments there, and we used to go watch it, but, you know, Judo is—not judo, but sumo—isn't the most fun thing to watch. You know, so—

**Unknown 27:16**

Could you describe the New Year's celebration a little bit more?

**Kaye Masatani 27:19**

New Year's?

**Unknown 27:20**

Yeah.

**Kaye Masatani 27:21**

Well, when we were growing up, every morning, the first thing in the morning, you say Happy New Year to your folks. And then she would—my mother would serve mochi, which is rice, pounded rice in a soup. And we would eat that and all the goodies that our, that my mother would cook. And that was the New Year celebration. All day, you would go to different places and eat at other homes. And then you'd play a card game called Karuta, which is—it has characters on faces, and then you read the story on it and you have to try to get the cards, and that was a game. And then you also use the calligraphy. And this was the—probably the night before. The calligraphy, you would write your desire or something about the new year. And that was New Year's. You kind of forget what you used to do, you know?

**Unknown 28:40**

How long did it take your mom to cook?

**Kaye Masatani 28:42**

Well, probably—she didn't have too hard of a time because she had cooks in the restaurant. So, we were much more fortunate than others. But other people took two or three days cooking for New Year's. Have you ever been invited any place?

**Unknown 28:59**

Oh, I wish. No. [laughs]

**Kaye Masatani 29:00**

Yeah. If you—try to get friendly with a Japanese family, and then they'll have New Year's.

**Ryan Eller** 29:07

So, is this like a—the celebration for New Year's, is it like a celebration to, like, gods or is it just, like, kind of a celebration of just the new year?

**Kaye Masatani** 29:15

It's just the new year. Yeah, it's just the new year. We don't celebrate it to the gods or anybody.

**Ryan Eller** 29:21

[laughs] Just curious. So, you've kind of been over your daily life in Salinas, but is there anything else you want to throw out there?

**Kaye Masatani** 29:32

In Salinas?

**Ryan Eller** 29:34

Yeah. More Chinatown, or, Chinatown, Japantown as well.

**Kaye Masatani** 29:38

Oh, when I used to go to Japanese school, my mother would give us money, and we would go to a confectioner on the way. So, you'd walk down Soledad Street, and we lived in the second building. So, you go down Lake Street, and as you walk down Lake Street, there's a confectioner where they have rice crackers. And I would buy a bag of that. And we would eat it on the way to Japanese school. And then we would just wait until the bell would ring. And then we would, of course, by then you've consumed all of the crackers, you know. What else was there? Do you know where—you know where the underpasses going to Main Street? We used to skate down that—dangerous, huh? [Ryan and unknown laugh] Yeah, we used to actually skate down that no helmet, you know. We used to—and it's very narrow to the sidewalk there. But we used to skate down there. And then there used to be a carnival at the depot. Do they still have a carnival at the depot?

**Unknown** 30:54

What do you mean by the depot?

**Kaye Masatani** 30:55

Train depot.

**Unknown** 30:58

Like the rodeo carnival?

**Kaye Masatani** 31:00

Mm-hmm.

**Unknown** 31:00

Yeah, they do that.

**Kaye Masatani** 31:01

They still do that? And they still—

**Unknown** 31:03

[unclear] Kapers kind of thing.

**Kaye Masatani** 31:04

We used to go to that, and I think you used to go to that too, right?

**Ben Masatani** 31:07

It's right there, two blocks away.

**Kaye Masatani** 31:10

Yeah.

**Unknown** 31:10

That's all they really do though anymore. Yeah, the horses and stage, like, wagons with—that are decorated.

**Kaye Masatani** 31:19

And we used to also go to, I think it's called the Central Park off of Main Street. And I don't know what street it was, but there's a park down there. We used to go down there and play quite a bit. And we used to play at this other park by California Street too. There's another park down that way.

**Unknown** 31:41

By the church? There was a church, I think, down there.

**Ben Masatani** 31:43

Across the street.

**Unknown** 31:45

Yeah, but Central Park is pretty far from Soledad Street and Lake Street.

**Kaye Masatani** 31:45

Yeah.

**Kaye Masatani** 31:51

Yeah, well, I think—

**Unknown** 31:52

It's across town—

**Kaye Masatani** 31:54

I think my sister or somebody used to drive us there. We used to have a car. So, we were able to go there. We used to go to Carmel to—the Sunday school used to have a annual picnic in Carmel, where you have that white sand and that pretty Carmel beach. We used to go there at least once a year. I don't know what else.

**Ryan Eller** 32:19

[laughs]

**Kaye Masatani** 32:22

All we did was—you know, it was play.

**Ryan Eller** 32:28

So then, you didn't then really go into Chinatown too much, was that because—?

**Kaye Masatani** 32:34

Oh, I had a girlfriend who lived in Chinatown at the other end of my street. And we used to go to American school, and we were the best of friends. But as we came home, we had to split. She would go on to Soledad Street, and I would come down California Street and come all the way around and come home. Because the Chinese and the Japanese, they were at war, I think at that time. And so, we weren't able to play together even if we were the best of friends. So, to this day, I don't know where she is or—her name was Helen Liu, I think.

**Unknown** 33:13

How old were you?

**Kaye Masatani** 33:15

From kindergarten to about sixth grade. So, I was—well, I knew her from kindergarten. So that would be five, four or five years old.

**Unknown** 33:31

So even as children, you guys knew that you weren't supposed to come home together?

**Kaye Masatani** 33:36

That's right.

**Unknown** 33:38

What were some of the things that—

**Kaye Masatani** 33:39

Well, our parents just say you don't play with that girl or whatever. And she was told the same. And I don't know what kind of business her father was in in Chinatown either. And to this day, I don't know if she's still alive.

**Ryan Eller** 33:58

So, do you know really what the big dividing factor was? I mean, I know when World War II—

**Kaye Masatani** 34:04

Well, it was because Chinese and Japanese were at war too at that time. So that was probably—

**Ryan Eller** 34:11

That was the divider.

**Kaye Masatani** 34:12

Yeah. Kind of silly now when you really think about it. It was important then.

**Ryan Eller** 34:24

So, kind of to go off that then, besides your, or even with the interaction with the Chinese friend you had, did you mingle a lot before that with Chinese and Filipinos, or during or after?

**Kaye Masatani** 34:38

Well, the only Filipino that I had interaction with—people that used to work in my mother and my father's business. And I remember also one black man named Soul, I think. He used to tap dance and show us steps and stuff, but he was about the only black person that I ever had any encounter with.

**Ryan Eller** 35:05

So, it was mainly Japanese and Chinese people in the area, or—?

**Kaye Masatani** 35:08

Yeah, well, Chinatown was mostly Chinese. So, and then maybe, I don't know how many businesses Japanese had on that. But it was mostly restaurants, a pool hall or restaurant. Do you know anybody who lived on Lake Street, or are you interviewing anybody on Lake Street?

**Unknown** 35:35

Lake Street, was—

**Kaye Masatani** 35:38

Molly? No?

**Unknown** 35:41

We didn't get an interview with Molly. On California Street, we knew Dorothy Shirachi.

**Kaye Masatani** 35:50

Oh, yeah, she's quite old. Did you see her already? Her husband recently passed away, I think.

**Unknown** 36:00

We heard he was very famous.

**Kaye Masatani** 36:02

Yeah. He was well known. Oh, yes, I think they had a grocery store or something on Lake Street and Bridge Street. And Bridge Street was the red-light district in Salinas. Did you know that?

**Unknown** 36:20

No, [unclear].

**Kaye Masatani** 36:22

All the fancy Caucasian girls [all laugh], we used to just look at them with their high heels, you know? Yeah, they would tramp around there.

**Ryan Eller** 36:36

So, then I'm assuming you didn't go to Bridge Street too often? [laughs]

**Kaye Masatani** 36:39

No, that was a no-no [Ryan laughs] to go. And it was—further down, they had houses that they lived in. So, we were never, we never associated with them. But the Filipinos and the Chinese men, they used to frequent those houses. We knew that [Ryan laughs], you know, growing up. Yeah.

**Ryan Eller** 37:09

Let's see, so we've kind of touched on this a little bit, but people say that one of the unique aspects of the Salinas Chinatown is its multicultural character. Do you agree with that, or do you not?

**Kaye Masatani** 37:27

You mean to intermingle?

**Ryan Eller** 37:29

A little bit. Like, you know—

**Kaye Masatani** 37:30

I don't think we did. I think the only thing that maybe we would have mingled with was the Chinese owner of my father's store—maybe that was the only time. He would pay his rent or whatever. And we used to buy firecrackers at that place. And the Chinese had the firecrackers. And so, we used to, every Fourth of July, we would go buy that. But we would just go in, buy the firecrackers, and leave. You never got invited in, other than the store that they had.

**Ryan Eller** 38:04

So, everybody was kind of in their own section?

**Kaye Masatani** 38:07

Oh yeah, you knew where you had to be. You know, you know your place.



**Ryan Eller 38:11**

[laughs] So, do you feel that any aspect of Japanese heritage has been lost? I know you've said a lot about the intermarriages and—

**Kaye Masatani 38:24**

Oh, yeah. Yeah, it's getting lost. You try to keep it up. Like I would even tell my grandson, "Now, if you go to college," I said, "try to find a Japanese girl." And then there really—their interest isn't there if their group isn't with that group, you know. And he says, "Yes, we know you want us to marry a Japanese." You know, but it's okay if they marry other as long as they're good people.

**Ryan Eller 38:57**

So, you moved away from Salinas when you were 12. What do you, like—do you remember the day you moved away? Like was it sad? Do you—did you miss Japantown and Chinatown, or—?

**Kaye Masatani 39:11**

No, it was just something we did. I mean, you were told to do this, so we did, and we carried our suitcases, and we took off. And to this day, I don't know how we got from the Buddhist church to the rodeo grounds. But somehow or another we must have been bused there, you know. But those recollection I don't have.

**Ryan Eller 39:38**

So, then you pretty much left pretty soon after internment, and then after you were done with school in Salinas, you left.

**Kaye Masatani 39:45**

Oh, yeah.

**Ryan Eller 39:47**

Yeah.

**Kaye Masatani 39:47**

Yeah, we had to drop out of school, right? To go.

**Ben Masatani 39:47**

It was in April.

**Kaye Masatani 39:53**

It was in April, so.

**Unknown 40:03**

When did your family move to San Jose?

**Kaye Masatani 40:08**

I was in Berkeley going to school and my family moved to San Jose in 1948, I think, from Salinas.

**Unknown 40:15**

So, after the internment camp, your family went back to Salinas?

**Kaye Masatani 40:22**

Mm-hmm. And I graduated high school, living in these homes as a school girl. And then I don't know why I went to Berkeley to go to business college, but my counselor in Salinas at that time said that I was more interested in like typing and shorthand and all that. So, she recommended that I go to Armstrong Business College. So that's what I did.

**Ryan Eller 40:54**

Did Chinatown and Japantown change a lot after you came back from internment? Were there like a lot of people that you knew that left, or—?

**Kaye Masatani 41:03**

Yeah, practically everybody left, and nobody really came back. And so, Chinatown, since I didn't live in that area anymore, I don't know what happened in Chinatown. But like right now, it's kind of a bad street to go to, right?

**Ryan Eller 41:22**

Yeah, it's a little scary.

**Kaye Masatani 41:23**

Yeah, scary [laughs]. And then, like, the building that my father had, it's gone now. A lot of the buildings are gone. I remember when I first came back from business college to find a job, I would go into—what do you call those? Where you sign up to get a job—recruiting office. And they would say, please come in and fill out an application. And so, the minute I walked in, they would let me know that the job was already taken. Or there was not a job for me. And I said, "Well, how do you expect me to find a job? Is it because I'm Japanese American?" And that was the feeling then. So, you couldn't find a job. And then eventually, I got into the school system, which, no discrimination right in school system? And so, I finally ended up in a school system.

**Ryan Eller 42:30**

So then, do you feel racism was pretty prevalent after you came back?

**Kaye Masatani 42:34**

Oh, yes. Yeah, the Caucasian kids didn't want to play with us, in school, or anybody, anyplace. So, our motive was to get good grades to show them [chuckles]. We had a lot of fight in us, too. See my oldest sister went back to Japan in 1947—no, 1941, January. And she was—she went to a finishing school in Japan, to learn the flower arrangement, the koto, which is a instrument, all the nice things about, wife would know how to do in America. And when she left, my mother told my father, please bring her home because war seemed imminent. And she was kind of afraid that my sister would be left in Japan. And so my sister, I think it was in November, she finally got her passport and her ticket and everything. And she was going to come back to America. So, she gave all of her nice coats and sewing machines and whatever she took back there. And as she was coming down to Hawaii, war broke out, so that particular

ship had to go back. And when she went back, the families, the relatives, wouldn't give anything back to her. So, she lived with her grandfather. And finally, she got sick, and then she passed away. And we didn't know that she died for over three years. Because we were in these camps. There was no way of communicating other than through the Red Cross. And so, we never knew until after we came back from camp that my sister passed away.

**Ryan Eller** 44:40

So, the Red Cross communication thing—you could actually talk to people outside of the internment camps, like send them letters?

**Kaye Masatani** 44:47

Oh, yeah. I used to have—yeah, I used to have pen pals in different parts in Hawaii and Tennessee and Los Angeles. I used to, you know, just—yeah, we used to write letters. And we used to look forward to the Sears Roebuck and Monterey—Montgomery Ward—catalogs, because that was the only other communication we had as to what the fashions were at that time outside of camp. And so, we used to look forward to those catalogs coming in. And we used to have, I think in here it says that we had tickets for shoes at that time, because shoes were rationed. You couldn't get shoes, except maybe twice, two times a year. So, you got tickets to buy shoes. And so, we would look through the catalogs, and that was our enjoyment, I guess, as to fashion.

**Kaye Masatani** 45:51

Anything else?

**Ryan Eller** 45:52

Trying to think of something.

**Unknown** 45:57

What was the reason why your father sent some of your brothers and sisters to Japan?

**Kaye Masatani** 46:03

Oh, my oldest brother went to go see the grandfather. And my second brother, he was taking kendo—the fencing, art of fencing. And they had a tournament or something in Japan, where they were encouraging the American boys to go over. And so, they went. And then my sister went because she was going to a finishing school, to Japan. And at that time, not too many families went back to Japan, because of the costs. And it took two weeks to get over there by boat.

**Unknown** 46:42

When did your brothers come back?

**Kaye Masatani** 46:46

Oh, they came back before the war started. It was, like, 1936, and—maybe '38, or something like that.

**Ryan Eller** 46:57

So, the Japanese finishing school that she went to, was that more of, like, trying to help her be more, like, you know—

**Kaye Masatani** 47:05

A lady.

**Ryan Eller** 47:06

—desirable to, like, a suitor?

**Kaye Masatani** 47:07

Yes, she sort of had a friend that she was supposed to get together with—a doctor. And my mother wanted her to know more about the nicer things, and to make her a nice wife for this person.

**Ryan Eller** 47:26

So, is that a pretty common thing for families to do, or—?

**Kaye Masatani** 47:31

Well, it was—at that time, because my mother and my father were first generation, that was the thing that they wanted to do. Maybe we would have ended up going too, you know, someday but because of the war we never did. But they always instilled in us to take piano lessons, go to Japanese school. Education was very important.

**Unknown** 47:59

When was the last time you been over to Salinas Chinatown?

**Kaye Masatani** 48:09

When did we go to Salinas? A couple of years ago, we had a reunion. And we went to the Buddhist church hall. Have you been to the hall there?

**Unknown** 48:22

Yes.

**Kaye Masatani** 48:22

Well, it used to be a small hall where we used to play basketball, and it was a two-story building then. I don't think it's a two-story building now. But they renovated, they rebuilt the place in it. And it's not the original Buddhist church either, you know, that I knew.

**Unknown** 48:43

What do you think of the town now?

**Kaye Masatani** 48:49

Well, I'm glad I don't live in Salinas [laughs]. You know, and his uncle and aunt and his brother lives—his brother lives in Salinas. And his uncle and aunt lived in Salinas, and we used to go visit pretty often.

But since they passed away, we don't go down there too much anymore. I haven't been—and I didn't know the distance between the Buddhist church to Lincoln School either, but it was very far. And I think it might be about, maybe a mile and a half, at least. I don't know. I never clocked it. And I wish I did.

**Unknown** 49:31

You used to walk?

**Kaye Masatani** 49:32

We used to walk every morning. The only time we got a ride was when it rained, you know.

**Ryan Eller** 49:41

So, there was no bus to Chinatown?

**Kaye Masatani** 49:43

No, there was no bus. Is there a bus now?

**Ryan Eller** 49:46

I don't think so [laughs].

**Ryan Eller** 49:48

I don't think so.

**Unknown** 49:50

There's probably something out, like, on Main Street or something. Like they probably have a route of some sort, but I'm not too sure.

**Unknown** 50:03

Did we cover your interview [unclear]?

**Ryan Eller** 50:05

Yeah, pretty much. So, do you have anything else that you can remember from Chinatown or your time in Salinas or anything you feel we might have not covered?

**Kaye Masatani** 50:16

Well, I remember going from my street down to his street, and he would be washing the windows of his father's dry goods store. That was his job to do. And then we would go on to the theaters down there on Main Street. That was a pretty far walk from Japan and Chinatown. But we used to do it every Sunday, at least. And the only reason why we went to movies so much was my mother wanted us out of the restaurant—you know, the business. So that was part of our entertainment every weekend. Yeah, with 15 cents [laughs]. Seems ridiculous now, doesn't it?

**Ryan Eller** 51:05

It really does.

**Unknown** 51:08

So, those would be, like, the Fox Theater and the, what's now—

**Kaye Masatani** 51:11

El Rey. There used to be a El Rey theater, and The Vogue.

**Unknown** 51:11

And I think there's three of them.

**Kaye Masatani** 51:16

Is there a Vogue [unclear]?

**Unknown** 51:17

No, all that's there is the Fox Theater, and that's still not really up to date at all. It's pretty run-down.

**Kaye Masatani** 51:24

Yeah, we used to go to the drugstore down there and buy the ice cream, chocolate ice cream and walk home eating it.

**Ryan Eller** 51:32

How far were these theaters from Chinatown?

**Unknown** 51:36

If you cross Market, [unclear]

**Kaye Masatani** 51:41

Maybe six or seven blocks at least. And, you know, we had little legs [all laugh] for walking, right?