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Interview with Susumu Ikeda

Susumu Ikeda

California State University, Monterey Bay

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Interviewee: Susumu Ikeda
Interviewer: Kristofer Owens and Sean Poudrier
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Kristofer Owens 00:00

Hello, my name is Kristofer Owens, and I'm with Sean Poudrier. We're students at CSUMB. And today we will be interviewing Mr. Susumu Ikeda from Santa Clara. Right. Today's date is November 14, 2010. And—

Sean Poudrier 00:22

The interview is taking place in Ikeda household.

Kristofer Owens 00:26

Yeah. And this won't be your traditional interview, this will be more of us asking you questions, base questions and you try and—we just—we would like you to tell us more. You know, the more you talk, the better for us. The better for the listeners. So, this won't be your traditional interview.

Sean Poudrier 00:47

Not a questionnaire if you will, yeah.

Susumu Ikeda 00:49

Okay.

Sean Poudrier 00:55

We thought it would be nice to try and begin this process by learning a little bit about your family history.

Susumu Ikeda 01:01

Okay.

Sean Poudrier 01:03

I know that you did say you're Japanese ancestry. So, we can maybe kind of just leave it open, you can just sort of tell us about your family and then possibly how they kind of came to this area.

Susumu Ikeda 01:16

Okay. Well, first of all my grandparents were here. They came around, about the early 19—around 1912 or so. And so, they were here. And then my father came, came here around about 1917 or thereabouts. And my dad was born in Japan, in southern Japan, called Kagoshima, Japan, that was in the year of 1902, that he was born. Anyway, so he came here. And he went to school here a couple of years to learn English. So, to the day that he died, he was able to read the paper and be able to speak English fairly well. But then in 1924, he went back to Japan, to—to get married, and bring my mother here. And so, then the following year, 1925, I was born, okay. And I have two brothers and three

sisters. We're all living and we all live in the same area, except I got one sister that lives in Monterey. Okay. So, so I'm very familiar with the Monterey Bay Area. Being that I was born and raised in, in Salinas. And my grandparents, they farmed, and so did my parents, my father farmed in Salinas and farmed there till the outbreak of the war in 1941. At that time, we had—we were evacuated to a place called Poston, Arizona, in the middle of the desert. Very hot, very hot. As you know, the—the climate in Salinas is very mild. And this was in July of 1942, that we were sent to Poston. And it was hot. I think we arrived in this place called Poston, Arizona. I think it was around about four—four o'clock in the afternoon, which is the hottest day of the year. So that experience I shall never forget. Yeah, yeah, that heat was, was really something. But as for myself, I'm married. I have my wife, Sadie. I just had the one son. And he was born in 1959. And I also have three grandsons. They're —they're young, the oldest is 11 and the—and the twins are six. Okay, so like I was telling him before, those three, they keep me very busy. Keep both of us. Very busy. Yeah.

Sean Poudrier 04:17

Do they live here in the area?

Susumu Ikeda 04:18

Yeah, they live here in San Jose. Yes. So, we—but I enjoy looking after the kids. Yeah, it's very enjoyable. And the other thing that's very informative for me is, is how—what they learn in school today. I think they learn subjects I was learning in third and fourth grade, and here they're only first graders—the twins—first grade, they bring home these—these homework, and I gotta think to help. [laughter] So—

Sean Poudrier 04:55

It's been a while.

Susumu Ikeda 04:56

Yeah, like my older grandson. He's, he's in the sixth grade. I don't think I'll be able to help many more because they're just too far advanced. Like, myself—as for my education, I went to Salinas High School. And I was a junior when I was—when were evacuated to Poston. And so, I finished my senior year in camp. Then after, after leaving camp, I didn't go to college, I took some correspondence course. And my, my occupation was a, I was a estimator for a steel fabricating company. So, I did that most of my life, and I retired as a—as an estimator, though I started out as a draftsman. And then I just worked myself up to being an estimator for this steel fabricating company.

Sean Poudrier 05:51

How long did you work at that?

Susumu Ikeda 05:52

Oh, I worked in that business for—gee, that was 19—that must be fifty—yeah, must be fifty years. Yeah, a good fifty years.

Sean Poudrier 06:06

Wow.

Susumu Ikeda 06:06

Yeah. In that business. So that kind of gives you my background.

Kristofer Owens 06:19

How did your family come to get into the area of Chinatown in Salinas?

Susumu Ikeda 06:24

Yes. So, we—I remember, going shopping in—in the Salinas Chinatown area. It was—at that time when I was growing up, I thought that place was huge. [laughter] Today I go by there, and—I drive by there, you blink your eye, you're—you're right through that area. But they had, they were all small stores there. And they, they're all lined up there. And I don't know whether Kaye Masatani showed you but in that book that I was referring to, it shows all the businesses, and it's amazing how they all survived. With that many business. Though, we did have a large Japanese community. So, but as far as remembering the area, there, they had some, they had some dry goods store, they had some pool hall, they had the—they had the grocery stores, they had the radio shops, they had the tofu shop, barbers and garages. So, and they had a druggist there—a drug store there. So, they had quite a few stores and restaurants, eating places.

Sean Poudrier 07:52

That kind of brings us to something we've talked extensively about in class. And there's all kinds of stories about this place called the Republic Cafe.

Susumu Ikeda 07:59

Yeah. I heard the name but I'm not too familiar with the story, the background of the Republic, no.

Sean Poudrier 08:10

Do you have any memories of it at all?

Susumu Ikeda 08:12

No, not the Republic. No.

Sean Poudrier 08:15

Okay.

Susumu Ikeda 08:15

Yeah.

Sean Poudrier 08:20

What were some of your earliest memories of Chinatown?

Susumu Ikeda 08:25

Well—

Sean Poudrier 08:27

Any good stories or anything that stood out for you?

Susumu Ikeda 08:32

Stories I can remember? Well, I remember going—being that we were farmers, so we lived out in the country and going to town for shopping. I remember playing with the kids, you know, the city folks, the city kids, but I don't really have a recollection of any real stories to tell. No, I don't. Other than I used to go to the stores and visit with the owners. And so, a lot of the—being that I used to go with my folks to the stores, a lot of the merchants—being that I was the first born in the family—well, they would call me by my first name, you know, so we got very close in that way, but other than that, I don't have any other memories that I can tell you at this moment.

Sean Poudrier 09:40

So, for you it was more of kind of going to town shopping experiences more than sort of loitering and hanging around? Is that—

Susumu Ikeda 09:48

Yes, it was mainly going in for shopping. Yeah, I would say, yeah. Most of the time, we were out in the country. Yeah, we—I remember living out in the country. We were—our neighbors weren't very close, so playing with my brothers and sisters, you know, out in the country. Yeah, that's, that's—those are the things I recollect more than doing anything in the cities.

Kristofer Owens 10:21

Was there any, like, certain business that—or a certain building or shop that you really, really loved in Chinatown?

Susumu Ikeda 10:29

Yeah, I think maybe one of the places is going to the—what we call the chop suey house—the Chinese restaurant.

Kristofer Owens 10:35

Okay.

Susumu Ikeda 10:36

That was a real treat, to be able to go into town and to eat out. That was a real, real treat. Yeah, it's—so that's one of my fond memories of going to Chinatown.

Sean Poudrier 10:52

Do you have any sort of—anything come up, sort of descriptive things, that would come up for you with that particular chop suey restaurant. We did a tour of it recently, and we saw—

Kristofer Owens 11:03

They rebuilt the sign.

Sean Poudrier 11:04

Yeah, they redid the sign, and I've seen pictures and such of the inside of what it used to be like, but do you have any sort of descriptive memories of the food or maybe the smells or—

Susumu Ikeda 11:15

Yeah, as I recall, the one particular restaurant where we used to go, you had individual rooms. It was—it's not like the restaurant today where you're out in the open, you have all the tables and chairs. The Chinese restaurants in those days had individual rooms, and you sat in privacy. You didn't have to look at other people, or the other people didn't look at what you were eating.

Sean Poudrier 11:42

Okay. [laughs]

Susumu Ikeda 11:44

Yeah, so it was, in that way, it was very comfortable. Yeah.

Sean Poudrier 11:49

All right.

Susumu Ikeda 11:50

You didn't have to watch your manners. [laughs] But yeah, that's—I think that's one thing I really remember.

Sean Poudrier 12:01

Okay.

Susumu Ikeda 12:01

As far as the food—they all tasted good to me, so I can't pinpoint any one dish that I liked, but there was really, really good—

Sean Poudrier 12:18

You touched upon—sort of my segue here to—you brought up you didn't really have to watch your manners, and in some of our research, we've heard that there was a lot of stuff going on in Chinatown where people didn't really quote, unquote "watch their manners." There was—we've read about different, sort of, almost illegal activities that were taking place in gambling halls and—do you have any memories of any of that kind of—

Susumu Ikeda 12:47

Yes, I do remember. Right in the area there was a red-light district. [all laugh] Yeah, I, as a—I know it was there, they—I heard—I don't know who was talking about it. I heard them talking, but little did I know what was going on, because I was too young to know what was—but, yeah—

Kristofer Owens 12:47

You would have been a teen—

Sean Poudrier 13:15

It—was there—how were the interactions between—we refer to it as Chinatown, but we've learned since then a lot of people also call it Japantown.

Susumu Ikeda 13:15

But—Oh yes. I—there's one little street there, and there's a street right by the—where the Buddhist church is located now. There was a house of prostitution there. But other than that, I know my dad used to like to play pool. So, they had pool houses, poolhalls, there. In fact, I think that they had several there in that Lake Street area, so but—

Susumu Ikeda 14:07

Yeah.

Sean Poudrier 14:08

What was the—what were the interactions like between the Chinese and the Japanese?

Susumu Ikeda 14:20

Well, as far as I can remember, we got along fine. Now, I don't know exactly what would happen after maybe—things might have changed when Japan and China went to war. That was in the late '30s. So, things might have gotten different, but as far as I can recall, or I remember, I don't see anything, any flare-ups of any kind or vandalism or anything like that. But, you know, they call it Chinatown, but the Japantown was on Lake Street. That was all Japanese business. And then the other street, Soledad, came into Lake Street. Now, on that street, there was, I would say, maybe half the business, or maybe more than half the business, were Japanese, and then the other were Chinese. But mainly the Chinese business, as I recall, were restaurants, Chinese restaurants there. Yeah.

Sean Poudrier 15:28

You brought up dates, and that was a good—I'm glad you did. That was a good thing I didn't ask you. Roughly, what were the—what was the time period that you have these recollections of Chinatown?

Susumu Ikeda 15:38

That would be—I would say, that would be about, oh, between 1935 and '41.

Sean Poudrier 15:49

Okay.

Susumu Ikeda 15:50

Up until the war.

Kristofer Owens 15:54

Can you tell us anything about the military influence? Did you see, like, a lot of soldiers from Fort Ord in Chinatown?

Susumu Ikeda 16:00

No, you know, I don't ever recall seeing any servicemen there. Yeah. You know, because we used to go there shopping, so we didn't spend too much time there. So, there may been some servicemen, but I don't ever recall seeing there in that Chinatown area.

Kristofer Owens 16:28

So, Mr. Ikeda, can you tell us about the Japanese community, how together you guys were before the war?

Susumu Ikeda 16:36

The Japanese community was pretty well close-knit because of the fact—you know, today, the immigrants that come here, they have all kinds of government help to get their life started. But when my parents and my grandparents came, there was no help. They were on their own. So, what the community did, they got together, and they helped each other to get their start in life here, you know, whatever business or whatever they did, and so there was a lot of—there was a closeness in that way. But one thing I have to tell you is—there were—Japanese people were very clannish at the time, because people came from Hiroshima. There's some people came from Kagoshima. There's some people came from Wakayama, various parts of Japan. And so, they—those groups had their own Japanese association. So, they pretty much stuck together with their group. In fact, during my—well in fact, during my day and my age group, they said that you can't marry—it's like saying you can't marry anybody from Texas. You got to marry a Californian, in that vein. It's—they were very strict. Then later they said, "Oh, you could marry Japanese." Then later, intermarriage came along, so you can marry anyone. [laughs] But yeah, so as you can see, from generation to generation, that has changed in that way. But at first, it was very, very tight-knit because of the fact that they couldn't get outside help, that they had to be together to help each other.

Kristofer Owens 18:28

Did you guys bond closer when the internment camp—when that came along?

Susumu Ikeda 18:37

No, I think—it's already—that was already there, so I didn't see any closer bond. No, no, I didn't. I didn't feel that to be so. Yeah.

Kristofer Owens 18:54

Can you tell us a little bit about the internment camp?

Susumu Ikeda 18:58

Well, yeah, it's—you know, in hindsight, you can say, "Why? Why didn't we object to this?" and all that. But our way of Japanese culture is that you respect authority and what they say. You do as they say, and don't make waves. And so, that's what we did. We took it, and we grin and bear and did the best that we could out of that situation. So, in that way, you know, people were kind of the same. We're at peace with yourself, because you didn't want to make trouble. So, there were a few instances where there were people that were really, really offended by what was done, but on the whole, people just kept their cool, you know, and we tried to make the best of our situation. Yeah. But yeah—when we first

got to those internment camps, it was very primitive. We could only take what we can carry. A suitcase, and our clothing, and our personal belongings was all we could take. And when we got there to the barracks, and each family was given a barrack, or one room in that barrack, and there was just cot beds, bare. And there was a oil stove there and then one—a light hanging from the ceiling for that room. So, it was bare. It was—there was nothing there. So, after a few months, people start with scrap lumber, start making little furniture and making chairs and table. And then to make it—get a little privacy, the people hung sheets from the ceiling down to the floor to give them—to divide the rooms to give privacy. But yeah, so and the walls were very thin, so you could hear everything that was going on in the next room. So, it was not a very pleasant situation. But that's what we had to live with, so we did what we could, and we didn't complain. I don't ever recall anybody that says, "To heck with this! I'm not gonna stand for this," and just flat out refuse to go along with it, you know. People didn't do that. They figured they're there and we got to live, so we got to do the best we can. And that's what we did.

Sean Poudrier 22:13

How long did you live in the camps?

Susumu Ikeda 22:15

I lived there—I was there—my family was there for three years. Now, while we were there, we were allowed to go out of camp to—we could relocate to the Midwest. A lot of people went to places like Chicago and to Philadelphia, New York, but a lot of them went to Chicago. I guess there they could find the—there was housing available, and there was work available in the war industry. So, that's [unclear]. And then some left camp to go to college. So, they went back to the Midwest for schooling. And then also we were allowed to leave camp to—there was a shortage of help on the farms, so they'd give us maybe a month leave to go out of camp to help, and I went to Utah one year to help in the sugar beet harvest. That was in—around about November. In Utah, it gets very cold there too. And then the—I think it was next spring, I went to Idaho to thin sugar beets on the farm to help the farmers. And when we went to these places, they had a labor camp there, so we all went there, and it was just like camp again. You lived in one big dormitory, had a bunch of cot beds, and then we had the central dining room, or mess hall, to eat there. But it was not easy. It was tough. It was very tough. I think at that time I was only seventeen when I went out to camp, and then I went with my uncles, and they were older. So, they're—but I had to keep up working with them. That was hard. [laughs] That was hard. But then the other thing I did was, after that, I did—[unclear]—the camp was on an Indian Reservation. They had an Indian Agency in [unclear], just north of the camp. And so, I went and that's where I first got my start in this—in my mind profession, as I became a draftsman there. Yeah. And I had a—I was employed by the Indian, United States Indian Agency. I was there for maybe—I can't remember. I was there maybe six months at the most, I guess, working there.

Sean Poudrier 25:19

So, you lived in the camp, but you—

Susumu Ikeda 25:21

No, I lived at the agency.

Sean Poudrier 25:24

Oh, okay.

Susumu Ikeda 25:24

They had their own—they had their own housing there, individual, kind of like, motel-like, around this agency, and I worked there.

Sean Poudrier 25:40

Did your family remain in the camp?

Susumu Ikeda 25:42

Yeah, the family remained in camp. So, to get back and forth from camp to that agency, there used to be a mail truck running between the camp and [unclear]. I used to hop a ride with them, and on weekends, I'd go back to the camp. And before that—the reason why I got this job is because I got my experience in camp. After I graduated high school, I worked for the engineering department in camp, and that's where I got my training, being a draftsman there. And then when they had the opening up at the Indian Agency, I applied for the job there, and I worked there. And yeah, you know about the camps? The camps, they were run like a city. We all had our hospital. We had our own agencies, all the various departments, the agriculture department, the engine department, the—and we had the fire department, the police department. It was kind of run like a city. So, each group had their responsibility to run the camps.

Kristofer Owens 25:42

How big would you say the camps were?

Susumu Ikeda 27:06

Pardon?

Kristofer Owens 27:07

How big? Football stadium—

Susumu Ikeda 27:10

When you say big—by population wise?

Kristofer Owens 27:14

Yeah, maybe, like, size.

Susumu Ikeda 27:15

Yeah, well, let's see the camp that I went to was in Poston, Arizona. We had three camps there: Poston one, Poston two, Poston three. And Poston one was supposed to have about 10,000 people. And then the other two camps had 5,000 apiece. And we were separated by roughly about two miles, two to three miles between camps. And they had a shuttle system between the three camps, because the hospital was only in the camp one, the largest camp. So, but then we could visit people in the other camp by hopping on these trucks, or trucks to go between blocks, or between camps. So, yeah, and

then we have in the camps, we had our outdoor movies. Yeah. I guess—I forget, maybe we used to get movies about maybe twice a month.

Kristofer Owens 28:14

Were there any other activities that you did to make time go by?

Susumu Ikeda 28:17

We had basketball, played basketball. We played baseball, and played—a lot of people played cards. Yeah. Let's see, what other—mainly I remember baseball and basketball. And there was some football played. Yeah. And about—the only thing I could tell you about my education there—the first year I went there, our camp—each city had sixty blocks. No, there was not—I think not that many. Maybe there was about forty blocks, so called blocks, just like this city block, but each block had fourteen barracks. Let's see, so roughly there was about 200 people living in each block. So, we had forty of these blocks, and each block had a central mess hall, and then they had in the center, they had the training for the men, the women. And then they had the laundry room. And then one of the barracks was used as a recreation hall. And so, most blocks, the recreation hall was empty. So, that was our classroom, those recreation halls in each block. So, our classes, we'd finish one class, then we had to go to the next block, or it could be across camp, to go to our next class. So, that's how our classroom was the first year, but then in the meantime, they were building a new school there. And so, then the following year, they went to a central area, so that was nice for them, because they got to meet all the other students. Like, for me, I just got to meet the students. That was in that class. I'd go to the next block, to the next classroom. I just get to know those people.

Sean Poudrier 29:48

So, you would travel with the same people?

Susumu Ikeda 30:30

Yeah—no, not with the same people, because you're taking different classes.

Sean Poudrier 30:33

Oh, I see. Okay.

Susumu Ikeda 30:33

So, some people would take math, or typing, or History, or English. It's—but—

Kristofer Owens 30:44

And you were able to finish high school in the camp?

Susumu Ikeda 30:46

Yeah, I finished high school. It's—again, the education was very, very primitive. Very few textbooks. We sat on benches and tables. That was our desk. But one thing I do marvel about the education is the teachers that came from the outside. I think the—our government must have really sold these young college graduates to come to Poston, because—they must have told them, "Oh, you have wonderful opportunity to go out and educate these people in camps." [laughs] If they had realized that they were

going out in the middle of the desert, hot, desolate area, to teach us—and I really marvel at those teachers, that they did come out to spend their life and to teach us.

Kristofer Owens 31:53

Were they Japanese?

Susumu Ikeda 31:53

No, they were Caucasians, Caucasian teachers. So, that's why I really hand it to them. And they were all good teachers. You know, I think one of the things too, our culture—we don't cause too much trouble. So, the students were pretty well-behaved. Because if you weren't behaving, then if you go home—you catch it at home. So, we behaved. [laughs]

Sean Poudrier 32:28

I had a couple of questions. As camp kind of came to be, what were the preparations like before you were actually taken off to Arizona? I know you said you could take a suitcase, but what did you do with everything else? What happened? What happened with your home and—

Susumu Ikeda 32:45

Yeah, you know, well, my dad was—we were renting a farm. On the farm was the house that we lived there. But you know, to this day, I should have asked my parents what they did with all the equipment, because we had the tractors and trucks and all the farm equipment. But after the war broke out in 1941, I know he got rid of all that, you know, and I don't know to who he sold it to. But if he did, he didn't get too much money for it. It was—but then, so anyway, we got rid of the equipment, but we still—the owners were nice enough to let us live there. And then the FBI, they took in all the leaders. My dad was a leader in the Japanese community. So, they were all—all the leaders were all picked up by the FBI, and they were sent away to a different camp.

Sean Poudrier 33:54

Your dad was sent separate than the rest of you?

Susumu Ikeda 33:56

Yeah, yeah.

Sean Poudrier 33:56

Oh, wow.

Susumu Ikeda 33:57

So, then that left my mom, my mother, by herself to watch us, watch all of us kids. I was sixteen years old at that time, so I had to help my mother with taking care of the family, but we got all of our equipment—let's see, then my dad was taken away, so—and I think it was about three months there—February, March, April—about three months there. My dad was away, taken away. And then we were sent to Salinas assembly center. Before we were sent to Poston, they sent us to assembly center, right there at Salinas Rodeo grounds. They built a whole bunch of barracks there, and that was converted to an assembly center. And that's where we first met. And then from there, they shipped us off to Poston.

Sean Poudrier 34:59

How many siblings?

Susumu Ikeda 35:00

I have two brothers and three sisters.

Sean Poudrier 35:02

Oh, wow. So, there were six of you?

Susumu Ikeda 35:05

Yes. Six of us. Yeah. So, just getting back a little bit to, you know—like, my dad went back and got my mother. My mother, she got married when she was sixteen. And the reason why she got married so young was in 1924, at the end of 1924, you couldn't come—the people of Japan couldn't come into the United States. Yeah, they stopped the immigration. So, in order to beat that, my dad went back and married my mother and brought her back in 1924. And so, she was only sixteen when she got married. And when she was seventeen, I was born.

Sean Poudrier 35:50

Did he know her? Did he go back specifically for her?

Susumu Ikeda 35:56

That I don't know. He must've known. They must have known. Yeah, because it was all arranged.

Sean Poudrier 36:03

It was—okay.

Susumu Ikeda 36:03

In those days, everything was arranged. But at least my dad and mother got to see one another when they got married, but there were other marriages where the men folks all came here first as labor. They worked here, and then they sent their pictures back to Japan. And then the brides back there, they look at the pictures. "Oh, I like this man." So, they come over to the United States to get married, but I understand some of them were very disappointed, because what they did, they got pictures of some handsome guy. [laughs] They come over here and they look—they're not the same man. [laughs] Yeah, but—

Sean Poudrier 36:45

We read a little bit about that.

Susumu Ikeda 36:47

Yeah, it actually happened. Yeah, [unclear] my relatives have I think—one of my relatives, I think she's a very attractive woman, because when she came here, I think he was good twenty years older. [laughs] Tiny little man, and she was rather tall. But—

Kristofer Owens 36:47

How did the—

Susumu Ikeda 37:02

—things like that happened that—

Kristofer Owens 37:18

How did the internment camp affect your parents?

Susumu Ikeda 37:21

My parents, you know, they never said. They never were bitter. It just made the—and I think—as I think back now, most of the time we were there, we're here, and we just got to make the best of it. And so, I've never seen my parents being upset or angry. Or even when I got drafted in the Army, you know, we were drafted in the Army from the camp. They threw us in camp. Then they came and says, "Well, we want you to go into the Army."

Sean Poudrier 38:05

To fight against the Japanese?

Susumu Ikeda 38:06

No. Well, yeah, yeah. Fight for the American forces. And so, there's quite a few—in my block, at the time when I was drafted, I think there was six or seven of us. We got drafted at the same time, and—

Sean Poudrier 38:22

What branch of the service?

Susumu Ikeda 38:23

Army.

Sean Poudrier 38:24

Army?

Susumu Ikeda 38:24

Yeah. But for me, I was—well, fortunate or unfortunate—but I wasn't physically qualified, so they gave me honorable discharge at that time, so I didn't have to go. So, in a way, I feel very lucky, because I didn't have to—I could have been killed, you know, whether I went to Europe or went to the Pacific. And so, what happened, I didn't have enough time in the service, so during the Korean War, I got drafted, so I was taken in. That was 1950 to '52. And so, I'm familiar with Fort Ord, because that's where I went when I was inducted. I was at Fort Ord for a couple of weeks before I was transferred to Colorado. But yeah, so I was taken during the Korean War, so then I had to serve two years. And again, I was very fortunate. It was at the height of the Korean War. And somehow, we were sent to Alaska. And so, I spent my time in Alaska. I really, really feel bad and sorry for those soldiers in Korea. There they were fighting that battle in that cold [unclear] GI issues. When we went to Alaska, they provide us with all the Arctic equipment—down jackets, sleeping bag, you name it. Nice caps. We had three different types of

boots for different conditions. Oh, yeah, and then you see pictures of these poor guys fighting the war in Korea. Oh, they must have had a miserable, miserable time. So, I—today, to this day, I feel so thankful that [unclear]—because we were—I was assigned to a regimental combat team, and I thought sure we were gonna go to Korea, because, you know, we were infantry regiment, but somehow we were sent to Alaska. And I'm very thankful for that.

Sean Poudrier 40:53

Something I—going back a little bit, talking about the camps. You said your father was separated. For how long—how long was your father separated from the rest of your family?

Susumu Ikeda 41:04

Oh, yeah. Yeah, my dad was taken [unclear], and he was gone about a year. I think a little over a year. A little over a year I think he was—and then he came back to join us in Poston. They released him.

Sean Poudrier 41:04

Can you—do you recall, like, the—were you there the day he came back?

Susumu Ikeda 41:33

Yes, I was—

Sean Poudrier 41:35

What was that like being reunited with your father?

Susumu Ikeda 41:42

Well, I was glad to see him back. But emotionally, you know, I can't say, yeah. I was glad to see him back, yeah. I was glad that—you know, funny thing about the Japanese culture, you just don't show your emotions. You know, like today, you hug one another, tell them you love them. And nothing like that went on. I was happy to see him back. He came back and joined us. But no, I can't I can't tell you exactly how my feelings or emotion at—other to say I was happy. Oh, yeah. It's nice to see your father come back and join the family. That was—to show our emotion, to dancing with joy, or to go up there and hug them, or—nothing like that, because we just didn't show that type of emotion. Yeah.

Kristofer Owens 43:05

Did you get to keep in contact with him while he was gone?

Susumu Ikeda 43:07

Yes, he sent letters.

Kristofer Owens 43:09

Okay.

Susumu Ikeda 43:09

Yeah. But they were all censored, areas all cut out, you know.

Kristofer Owens 43:13

Wow.

Susumu Ikeda 43:14

Oh, yeah. Yeah, all the mail is all censored, so—

Sean Poudrier 43:18

You knew he was alive. You knew he was—well, hopefully anyway.

Susumu Ikeda 43:21

Pardon?

Sean Poudrier 43:22

By the correspondence, you did know that he was alive?

Susumu Ikeda 43:24

Oh, yeah. Yeah. So, it's—

Kristofer Owens 43:32

Wow. Can you tell us about life after the internment camp?

Susumu Ikeda 43:36

Yeah, after the war was over [unclear]—yeah, I guess when the war—and then the government said that they're gonna close the camps by the end of the year, at the end of 1945. So, we had to go find a place to go to. And I was born and raised in Salinas, so we couldn't go back to Salinas, because my dad didn't own property there, and Salinas had a tank company that was in the Philippines. And they were captured by the Japanese, and they were kind of mistreated, so the feelings were very high against the Japanese, so it just didn't feel comfortable going back to Salinas. So, we came to San Jose.

Kristofer Owens 44:28

Okay.

Susumu Ikeda 44:28

Uh huh. And when we came here, you know, housing was very scarce, so the Buddhist church here opened up their hall, and they had a whole bunch of cot beds there, for the men folks to sleep in the church there. And then there's another building on site. All the women folks slept there, and they had a kitchen there, so we ate there. And I guess we must have stayed there about, oh, two months until we found housing. Then we left that place to our new home. But so, being that jobs, good jobs, were scarce—a lot of jobs were available, you know, picking fruits and things, so that what we did. So, we as a family, as a family during the summer, we used to go pick apricots and pears. And then early in the spring, my dad and I, we'd go pick cherries. And we all worked out on the farm as a family—

Kristofer Owens 45:46

You were the oldest?

Susumu Ikeda 45:47

—and then eventually accumulated enough money, so then we bought a home right in San Jose.

Kristofer Owens 45:55

You were the oldest of five?

Susumu Ikeda 45:56

I was the oldest of six.

Kristofer Owens 45:59

Oh, six. So, all of you guys, mom and dad included, went to work?

Susumu Ikeda 46:03

Yeah, we all worked out—all the kids—in those days there was no child labor [unclear]. So, yeah, we all worked. Yeah. So, we—that's how we got our start here in San Jose.

Sean Poudrier 46:25

So, your family returned, and did they—did your dad establish himself as a farmer again?

Susumu Ikeda 46:37

No, no, my dad never went back to farming. He worked in the dry food processing plant.

Sean Poudrier 46:47

Okay.

Susumu Ikeda 46:47

Yeah. And my mother worked there with him. So, they worked there quite a number of years until they retired. So, they made a lot of new friends there.

Sean Poudrier 47:01

How was the Japanese community in San Jose after the war? After the internment camps?

Susumu Ikeda 47:13

When you say that—

Sean Poudrier 47:14

I guess I would mean, like, kind of compared to your—compared to the Japanese community that you spoke of in the camps?

Susumu Ikeda 47:22

Yeah, at first, we felt like we were kind of outsiders. Yeah, we felt like we were kind of outsiders. But over time, that kind of worked itself out, and we kind of intermingle, so now we're pretty close-knit. But then the—first, the Japanese community all kind of lived in the same area and stuck close together. But like my son's generation now, they all have scattered throughout the United States, because the job takes them to [unclear]. So, it's not tight-knit like it used to be. No, it's—

Sean Poudrier 48:23

How about—if you don't mind me asking about your wife. Was she part of the Japanese community then?

Susumu Ikeda 48:29

She was born and raised in Santa Cruz, so she evacuated when the war broke out. They had an area, Highway 99, and east—if you lived east of 99, you were safe. You didn't have to move. So, her family moved to a town called Visalia, in Central Cal. And they moved there, then no sooner they said all of California is restricted area. So, then she ended up going to the same camp I was in, only she was in camp three. I didn't know her, but she was in camp three.

Sean Poudrier 49:12

Wow, so you guys were in the same camp in Arizona?

Susumu Ikeda 49:14

Yeah. I knew of her, because her cousin used to visit his relatives in our block. He was an ambulance driver, so he—I used to see him come there. I didn't know him, but I met him later, and that he was her cousin.

Sean Poudrier 49:34

Did you guys meet here then, in [unclear]?

Susumu Ikeda 49:36

So then, my wife, after camp, they relocated to the Central California, and she was on a farm there. And then she came to San Francisco to go to sewing school, and then that's where I met her, in San Francisco. So, we've been married since 1954, so that's fifty-six years.

Sean Poudrier 50:06

Wow, congratulations.

Susumu Ikeda 50:07

[laughs] Thank you. Yeah, I put up with her for fifty-six years. [all laugh]

Sean Poudrier 50:12

I'm sure she'd say the same—

Kristofer Owens 50:15

Don't say that too loud.

Susumu Ikeda 50:18

No, no, I would say we had a good, very good marriage. We had little squabbles here and there, but no big war. [all laugh]

Kristofer Owens 50:35

So, in actuality you were only in Salinas until you were sixteen, seventeen years old.

Susumu Ikeda 50:40

Yeah.

Kristofer Owens 50:40

From birth to—

Susumu Ikeda 50:41

[unclear] seventeen, sixteen. Yeah, I was just—

Kristofer Owens 50:48

Junior in high school?

Susumu Ikeda 50:49

Sixteen. Yeah, I was sixteen, because I turned seventeen in camp, so yeah. I was there until sixteen. I was in Salinas.

Kristofer Owens 50:58

How was high school for you at Salinas High?

Susumu Ikeda 51:01

High school? Yeah, it was— but, you know, like I say, we—in those days, we kind of—the Japanese kids, we kind of stuck together. Like, you know, it's—in those days Salinas High School had a Japanese student club also. We had quite a few Japanese students going to Salinas High at that time. Yeah, so we had our own student club there. But in the grammar school—I went to Spreckels Grammar School, and to this day, he's my best friend. I've been down to Salinas two or three times to have lunch with him. But when I went to high school, then we kind of went our separate ways. Then after the war, after we came back, until—maybe it was about ten years ago. Ten, fifteen years ago, I give him a call one day. He said, "Oh, come on. Let's have lunch together." So, I joined him for lunch, and then a couple other times.

Unknown 52:18

I have one question if you don't mind.

Sean Poudrier 52:32

No, not at all.

Unknown 52:35

Did they ever tell you why they took your father?

Susumu Ikeda 52:38

What was that?

Unknown 52:39

Did they ever tell you why they took your father?

Susumu Ikeda 52:42

Right. To my father?

Unknown 52:44

No, did the FBI ever tell you the reason why they took your father to a different camp?

Susumu Ikeda 52:50

Oh, no. We knew the reason why. The rumors were going around that all the Japanese leaders were going to be taken in. And the reason why they did this, they didn't want the—they knew that the Japanese community is tight-knit, so if they take the leaders away, then, you know, there's no uprising will occur, because there's no leader to do these things. But that would've never happened, even if the people that were there, because, you know, there was no case of espionage or anything like that, or sabotage.

Sean Poudrier 53:33

You referred to him many times as a leader, community leader. What kind of stuff did he do that distinguished him as a leader?

Susumu Ikeda 53:40

Well, say, for example, leader be—like I was telling you, people from various parts of Japan have their own association. So, they like their president and vice president, secretary and treasurers. And I guess they had [unclear] and they had their meetings, and I remember they all used to have a community picnic once a year. And that's one of the things I really enjoy and remember, because they used to give out—we used to run races, and they'd give us pencils and tablets. That was really something in those days. Today, pencil, tablet—kids couldn't care less, but to us, we didn't have that. So, oh, yeah, we looked forward to those picnics. We'd race as many times as we can, so [laughter] we can get more pencils and more tablets. But, yeah, that's how they—whenever they—and I understand that the FBI knew who the leaders were already. They knew three, four years prior to when this all happened. They knew. They had the names of all the leaders. So, it was just when the time came, they just [unclear] and picked them up. So, it was nothing that they came up all of a sudden, decided to take like that. They knew who the leaders were.

Unknown 55:24

Did they also search your home?

Susumu Ikeda 55:27

No, the only thing that happened, I understand—I was away at school at that time when they came to pick my dad up, but the FBI agent came and he put a shell—I think it was a .22 shell—on the table and says, "Where's the gun? You got a shell here." You know, bullet here. But see all that was already turned in already. We got rid of our radios, our guns and knives, or anything that's—any weapons we didn't have. But just to trick us, you know.

Sean Poudrier 56:05

So, it wasn't your shell?

Susumu Ikeda 56:07

No, no, no. He just planted that just to see how we would react to that.

Sean Poudrier 56:16

Wow.

Susumu Ikeda 56:16

Yeah, that's the only incident that happened. Yeah.

Sean Poudrier 56:23

One thing I'd like to ask you: Do you have any, like, photographs or artifacts or anything that may pertain to kind of what we're doing in Chinatown or Japantown at all? Do you have any that you'd mind sharing? I mean, if you have them, I don't know.

Susumu Ikeda 56:40

Yeah, the only thing is in that book there.

Sean Poudrier 56:46

In that book? Okay.

Susumu Ikeda 56:46

Yeah, in that book has information on the stores that were there. Saw a few pictures of the inside of the stores.

Sean Poudrier 57:01

Any pictures of you personally in the—

Susumu Ikeda 57:02

Oh, yeah. Yeah, it's in there. I don't know if you know, in Salinas, they had the Big Week. They call it the Big Week in July. They had the Rodeo.

Sean Poudrier 57:11

Okay, yeah.

Susumu Ikeda 57:12

In my days, that was the event of the year, Big Week. So, everybody gets a cowboy hat and—yeah, and there's a picture in there of me with my big old cowboy hat on. [laughs]

Sean Poudrier 57:25

Can we do that? Can we look? Is that something we can look at in the book? I'll grab it.

Susumu Ikeda 57:31

Yeah, it's that book right there.

Sean Poudrier 57:33

Is that okay?

Susumu Ikeda 57:35

They wanted us to get an education, yeah.

Unknown 57:38

It's by last name.

Sean Poudrier 57:40

It's by what?

Unknown 57:40

Last name.

Sean Poudrier 57:41

Okay.

Unknown 57:53

Did you get all your pictures back or does Mae still have them?

Susumu Ikeda 57:56

Yeah, I think a lot of it we sent—made copies to give to them. But see, this—my grandparents were here.

Sean Poudrier 58:09

Oh, wow.

Susumu Ikeda 58:10

Have you met Mae Sakasegawa?

Unknown 58:12

I have.

Susumu Ikeda 58:12

The gal that—oh, here's—

Sean Poudrier 58:18

The map.

Susumu Ikeda 58:19

Here's the map.

Sean Poudrier 58:20

That one over here?

Susumu Ikeda 58:21

Yeah. Oh, yeah. And this is Lake Street here. And see, but there's a lot of businesses on Soledad Street here too.

Kristofer Owens 58:29

They weren't all Chinese?

Susumu Ikeda 58:30

No.

Kristofer Owens 58:31

You said it was about half?

Susumu Ikeda 58:33

About half was Japanese and half Chinese. That's my guess. And then this is Lake Street here.

Kristofer Owens 58:46

Did you guys ever go to the Buddhist temple?

Susumu Ikeda 58:53

You know, yeah, we were Buddhists, but for some reason my parents didn't send us to Sunday school or to church. Yeah, but we're Buddhists. But now I go to church here every Sunday.

Kristofer Owens 59:08

To the local Buddhist temple?

Susumu Ikeda 59:09

The local Buddhist temple, yeah. But yeah, so you got a map. And there was none of the street—Market Street here had a few Japanese businesses here. Right in here. So, yeah, I always thought that this was a big area, but you walk through there, it's just a little bitty place. [laughs]

Kristofer Owens 59:34

Do you ever recall Market being called [unclear] Street?

Susumu Ikeda 59:39

[unclear]? Yeah, that's—let's see—

Kristofer Owens 59:42

Was that Market or Lake?

Susumu Ikeda 59:43

[unclear]. Yeah, that sounds familiar, but I can't—I don't know where it is now. [unclear] Street.

Sean Poudrier 59:59

Were there any particular—just looking at East—anywhere on that map. Was there any particular stores you remember, like, exact locations of?

Susumu Ikeda 1:00:06

Oh, yeah. Like, I can remember the [unclear] here. Number 12 is [unclear]. Yeah, [unclear] store. And then I think there's a grocery store. Number 15 is Fujino. Yeah, I remember that. And there's some tofu shop here. And there's a garage, number 27. Yeah, a garage there. Yeah.

Sean Poudrier 1:00:41

So, you have memories of those?

Susumu Ikeda 1:00:44

Yeah. Then there's a drugstore there, the barbershop's over here. And then the gal that you went to, Kaye Mastani, her parents were right about here. Number 50, I believe. No, that wasn't it. Oh, here it is. Number 46. So, her parent's store is right there. Yeah, they had a pretty big—they had a pool hall. They had a liquor store.

Sean Poudrier 1:01:16

Is that where you dad would play pool?

Susumu Ikeda 1:01:17

Huh?

Sean Poudrier 1:01:18

Is that where your dad would play pool?

Susumu Ikeda 1:01:19

Oh, he used to play over here, I think.

Sean Poudrier 1:01:20

Okay.

Susumu Ikeda 1:01:21

Yeah.

Kristofer Owens 1:01:22

Did you have a particular favorite pool hall?

Susumu Ikeda 1:01:24

Yeah, this [unclear].

Sean Poudrier 1:01:44

Was it this one? Number 13? John [unclear] pool hall?

Susumu Ikeda 1:01:49

No, it wasn't that. It should be right in here. It's here. I guess—I guess that's—yeah.

Kristofer Owens 1:01:52

Was there anything in particular about that pool hall that stood out?

Susumu Ikeda 1:02:11

No, no. I think—I don't recall anything that was any different there.

Unknown 1:02:20

Did you go to one specific barber?

Susumu Ikeda 1:02:22

It was all done at home. [laughs] Yeah, I know my dad used to give my haircuts. Yeah. You know, it's—my family, they weren't rich by any means, and so, you know, try to conserve money. Everything was done at home. Today, my grandkids all go to the barber to get their haircut, you know.

Kristofer Owens 1:03:02

Were there any chores in the house? You were the oldest, so you probably had the most work.

Susumu Ikeda 1:03:06

Oh, yeah. You know, we used to farm lettuce. If you know, farming lettuce is—we used to farm the whole acreage. The whole farm was lettuce at one time. And so, to get the land prepared, there's a lot of tractor involved, so I used to drive tractor. I used to drive tractor when I was—maybe starting age—I was maybe ten. Yeah, I think I was pretty young. Because I hear friends of ours—we used to live out by

the highway, and they see this tractor running up and down the farm. And they can't see anybody on the tractor, but here I was on the bottom. [laughter]

Sean Poudrier 1:03:59

What kind of lettuce did you guys do?

Susumu Ikeda 1:04:02

Iceberg.

Sean Poudrier 1:04:02

Iceberg?

Susumu Ikeda 1:04:03

Yeah, we did that. So, that was the biggest work involved, because other than—the thinning and the hoeing, we get to hire that out and get that done by other people. And so, we raised the lettuce, and get it to time for harvesting. And then we sell it. We sell it to a company that buys the lettuce. So, they come in—

Sean Poudrier 1:04:33

Oh, they would do the harvesting? Oh, okay.

Susumu Ikeda 1:04:35

They come and harvest it and take it away.

Sean Poudrier 1:04:37

I wish I would have known you were a farmer. I'm a farmer. We have a forty-acre farm in Corralitos. I would have brought you all kinds of stuff if I had known. [laughs]

Susumu Ikeda 1:04:46

Oh, yeah.

Sean Poudrier 1:04:48

We just did iceberg, so I know what you're talking about.

Susumu Ikeda 1:04:50

Oh, yeah. I have my own garden in back.

Sean Poudrier 1:04:53

Oh, do you?

Susumu Ikeda 1:04:54

Oh, yeah. I raise tomatoes.

Sean Poudrier 1:04:55

Oh, yeah?

Susumu Ikeda 1:04:56

I raise tomatoes, cucumbers, Swiss chard.

Sean Poudrier 1:05:00

Wow.

Susumu Ikeda 1:05:00

Yeah. Beans, string beans. Yeah. It's a hobby.

Sean Poudrier 1:05:06

Okay.

Susumu Ikeda 1:05:07

I still got the green thumb.

Kristofer Owens 1:05:11

Were there any chores inside the home as far as cleaning?

Susumu Ikeda 1:05:14

No, my sisters did that.

Kristofer Owens 1:05:17

Your sisters? So, the men were on the farm?

Susumu Ikeda 1:05:20

Yeah.

Kristofer Owens 1:05:20

Sisters—

Susumu Ikeda 1:05:21

Actually, you know, like my brothers, they were younger, so they didn't have to work at all. Because the only work [unclear] was the tractor work. So, I did all of the tractor work. Yeah, so I worked—

Kristofer Owens 1:05:37

Driving a tractor at ten years old. Wow.

Susumu Ikeda 1:05:39

Yeah, I think I was about ten. I know I was driving when I was younger. I drove when I was younger, but actually out in the farm and doing it all by myself, I think I was about ten. Yeah, and that was about—it

was about, you know, if you're farming, cutting furrows. All the farmers, they take pride in being able to [unclear] straight, and my dad one year, he let me do it. I think I was about fourteen.

Sean Poudrier 1:06:15

How'd they come out?

Susumu Ikeda 1:06:16

They came out good. [all laugh] [unclear] my father. The secret to that is to get your first one to cut straight—

Sean Poudrier 1:06:23

And just line it all from there. How funny.

Susumu Ikeda 1:06:28

But today—I was out there in Salinas about a couple of years ago—a friend of mine is farming down there. It's entirely [unclear], but they were cutting furrows. He says, "Get on the tractor." And it was one of these air-conditioned tractors. And they got the GPS. He has a TV monitor. He gets that tractor lined up [unclear], pushes go.

Sean Poudrier 1:06:52

And it does—

Susumu Ikeda 1:06:53

Just goes out the—then when you come to the end, you have to stop it yourself, and then turn around and get lined up on the [unclear], and you could start from both ends of the field, and when you end up you—right on the money. Amazing. Amazing.

Sean Poudrier 1:07:10

We don't have that.

Susumu Ikeda 1:07:11

[laughs] You don't have that?

Sean Poudrier 1:07:12

No.

Susumu Ikeda 1:07:12

Yeah, I was really amazed how they [unclear] in Salinas—entirely different from what I remember.

Sean Poudrier 1:07:23

How big are the farms that you—

Susumu Ikeda 1:07:25

We had sixty acres.

Sean Poudrier 1:07:26

Okay. That's a lot of work for one family.

Susumu Ikeda 1:07:29

Yeah. But, you know, like I say, it was tractor work, and then the other work was farmed out.

Sean Poudrier 1:07:35

Okay. What kind of stuff would you grow?

Susumu Ikeda 1:07:41

All lettuce.

Sean Poudrier 1:07:42

Sixty acres of iceberg lettuce?

Susumu Ikeda 1:07:43

Yeah, yeah.

Sean Poudrier 1:07:44

Wow.

Susumu Ikeda 1:07:45

Two crops a year.

Sean Poudrier 1:07:46

Okay.

Susumu Ikeda 1:07:46

Yeah. One you harvest it, you go in and work it up [unclear] plant your second crop. Then the winter months was idle, because couldn't grow it.

Sean Poudrier 1:08:00

Well, that's awesome.