

Museum of History and Industry
Historical Society of Seattle and King County

Transcript

Tomo Shoji - taped interview, April 10, 1985
corrected and edited transcript, approved

Side A

This is an interview with Tomo Shoji on April 10, 1985. The interviewer is Lorraine McConaghy for the Museum of History and Industry.

Q. You yourself are a Nisei, but one of the older Nisei?

Mrs. Shoji Yes.

Q. When did your parents come to America?

Mrs. Shoji My father came in 1903.

Q. Why did he come?

Mrs. Shoji Well, he had just graduated high school, and he wanted to study in America, but after coming here, he had to make a living, and he couldn't make enough to go to school. And so he never did...

Q. Was he interested in engineering or ...?

Mrs. Shoji He was interested in politics. I don't know why he came here to study that, but I remember as a child that he was very interested in that. He was a Republican.

Q. And your mother, how did she come?

Mrs. Shoji She came as a picture bride.

Q. What does that mean?

Mrs. Shoji That means that, in her case, the family of my father felt that he was old enough, and that he should get married.

Q. Even though they were in Japan, and he was here, they were still able to control his choices?

Mrs. Shoji Oh, yes! Because there were no Japanese women here. So he wrote to them, and said it was okay. They had him send his picture home, and then they got her picture and sent it to him. So evidently they okayed it, because that trade as made.

My mother was a Red Cross nurse during the Japanese-Russian war, and when the war was over, she went into midwife training. She said that to be a nurse was to be under a doctor, and she wanted to be independent. She had just passed her exam, and she was looking forward to being a

midwife, and her brother and sister, who had raised her, insisted that she get married.

They had been telling her to come home so that they could arrange a marriage, but she didn't. Finally, they said they had somebody for her, and they wrote to her but she didn't answer. Many letters went to the city where she was, and finally her brother came into town to tell her that her name had been registered in her future husband's family. So she had no choice but to go home, make arrangements, and come to America.

First, she was upset, but then she decided that with so many women going, there would be many children born. And she reconciled to the fact, and she came.

Q. And they were married here in Seattle?

Mrs. Shoji Yes. My father was a foreman in a Japanese lumber company - I mean that he was under a Caucasian owner. So then my mother, not having any experience in cooking or anything domestic - at fifteen she had left home to go into nursing training - she had to cook for over sixty men.

We used to ask her, "How were you able to cook for them?"

Well, people taught her how to cook the rice - so much water, and so on. It was in the mess hall. The men would get the food, sit down, and eat; when they got through, they would throw the garbage away and put the dishes in the sink. She just watched, and when she noticed that the garbage can was filling up, she knew there was something wrong with her cooking.

Q. It sounds like a logging camp...

Mrs. Shoji Well, no, it was a sawmill camp, where the lumber was made.

Q. Where was it?

Mrs. Shoji In Ohop, Washington.

Q. Gosh, it must have been the middle of nowhere.

Mrs. Shoji I know.

She had two miscarriages, and then she came into Seattle, and I was born here in Seattle. Across the street from here, in the Ohio Hotel, at the corner of Maynard and Weller.

Then after I was born and my younger sister was born, my mother didn't go back (to the sawmill camp with my father) but stayed in town. She had somebody take care of us while she practicing midwifery.

She would go down to Renton, and you know how bad the transportation was in those days, and she had no car. In those days, a midwife would bring the baby into the world, and then for a week or so, she would go and bathe the baby.

Q. When she went down to Renton, was she working in the Japanese-American community there?

Mrs. Shoji Well, yes, out in the scattered farming community.

Q. Down the Kent valley?

Mrs. Shoji Yes, on the outskirts.

Q. When did you graduate from high school?

Mrs. Shoji In 1932.

Q. Where did you graduate from?

Mrs. Shoji Well, I'm from the country, and I graduated from Auburn. But for three years I went to Longview High School, in the lumber mill town, and then mother and the children came to Auburn, and I finished school there.

Q. When did you come up to Seattle?

Mrs. Shoji After I graduated high school. I came in as a domestic, and I got married in 1935.

Q. What was the prewar Japanese-American community like here in Seattle? Where did people live and what did they do for a living?

Mrs. Shoji Just like the Vietnamese and the Cambodians do now. They have a little store in front of the building, you know? It's like that.

Those of us who remember say "Isn't it just like the Japanese town of years back?" You know that grocery store on the corner of Jackson Street, that has the boxes in front?

Q. And does the family live right behind it or right over it?

Mrs. Shoji Some did, but now all can't. The housing rules are strict now, not like way back seventy years ago.

Many lived behind. Behind dry-cleaning and groceries and such. But not now, because the Housing [Authority] will no longer allow that.

Q. Was the Japanese-American community here in Seattle about the same size it was now?

Mrs. Shoji Oh, it's bigger now, and it's way out into the Eastside. It's bigger in the South End, also.

Q. Where did kids from this district go to high school?

Mrs. Shoji At Broadway [High School].

My husband was an alien - he came to America when he was eighteen years old. He didn't understand English and so he was sent to the school where foreign students went. It turned into a vocational school later. Was it Minor? He

went to school there, and many young people who came early, or some who were born here and their parents sent them back to Japan thinking they'll eventually go back there. Then they got settled, and those children came back [to America] and they were called Kibeis - born here, raised in Japan - Those people, and people like my husband - people from Japan - went to school there.

Foreign classes, that's what they were called. ESL - (English as a Second Language).

Q. The Kibei - were their parents particularly wealthy that they could afford to send them back? Why did they do that?

Mrs. Shoji [No, the parents weren't particularly wealthy.] Eventually, they thought that they would go back home.

Q. And they expected their children to stay [in Japan]?

Mrs. Shoji They were staying with grandparents or an auntie [in Japan]. They weren't wealthy when they sent them back. Sometimes it was so the mother couldn't work. They sent them back and let their family take care of the children, and they would send them money for taking care of the children.

But eventually, many parents didn't go back, and they called their children back and settled here.

Some just wanted a Japanese education for their children.

Q. Why did your husband decide to come to America?

Mrs. Shoji His father died in the Japanese-Russian War, and his mother came to America to take care of her husband's younger brother who had become ill and was an Episcopal priest here in Seattle. Then, he got well, and eventually they got married.

My husband was very unhappy about it. He thought he could stay in Japan, and live with his mother, but she told him to come.

Q. It was his duty?

Mrs. Shoji Maybe. He was her only son, and she wanted him to come. He was eighteen and he was very rebellious after he came.

Q. The strength of the Japanese family is mentioned in nearly every book I've looked at concerning the Japanese here in America. It sounds like the ties are much stronger than in most European societies...

Mrs. Shoji Well, European societies used to have strong families back in the old country. Isn't it after they've come here that things have changed?

When I hear about the Irish and the Germans - the first generation - I can't see much difference from the Japanese.

Like for the funeral, they have a wake service, and then they have the funeral - just like Japanese!

But I guess after they come to America, things change. America is made by people who are not conservative. They're rebellious people. They came here because they want a new life. Do you know what I mean?

So the people who came from Japan came here looking for riches and adventures - they're the people that came. During wartime, many G.I. wives were Japanese - many of these wives were not the quiet and conservative girls, but they were the risk-takers and adventurers.

So I think that America is made up of these kind of people, and that's why they get away from their home-country culture. At least, that's what I think.

Q. That makes me wonder what the intellectual climate was like here in the International District, within the community. Were there a lot of Japanese-language newspapers and periodicals?

Mrs. Shoji There was a newspaper, and the community had a culture of its own. Have you heard of Nippon Kan Hall? Okay, that used to be the cultural center. It used to be if they had a big program, it would be there. If somebody great came from Japan, he was a speaker there. And they had a kendo - martial arts with bamboo - tournament there, too. Judo tournament was there. A dance program was there. Everything was there.

In fact, if you'd come to see the pictures that they had at Nippon Kan Hall - all the pictures of the early days - you would have seen how this was a community in itself. And Nippon Kan Hall played a very important part. In fact, the famous Madame Butterfly came there. Remember her? Mura Tamaki. And another singer - I forgot his name. My husband was very musical, and there's a picture of this singer and the Japanese musical community taken there and my husband's picture was in there.

The community didn't used to be all spread out like it is now.

Q. And the newspaper - was it a weekly or a daily?

Mrs. Shoji Oh, it was more than a weekly. I think it was a daily, but maybe it didn't appear on the weekends.

And that paper went out to the country, too, to sawmill towns, railroad sections workers - that was a lifeline.

Q. I had wondered whether there was any breach between the urban Japanese-Americans and the ones who were farming down in the valley or out on Bainbridge, or whether it really was a cohesive whole.

Mrs. Shoji Well, what do you mean by a breach?

Q. Well, you were certainly separated by distance. Did those folks tend to come in here to the Nippon Kan, or to shop?

Mrs. Shoji Oh, yes. Though like anyplace, people in town

think they're better than country people. Now that's not only Japanese! But there was that.

Even now they say, "People from Kent and Auburn - my goodness! they're just like town people!" That's what you hear.

If there was a big doing, they would all come in.

I remember we were living in Longview, and we used to come pick berries in Kent, and when Fourth of July came - nobody worked on Fourth of July. We all came into town, to see the parade and to go to Chinatown or to Japanese town and eat Japanese food in a restaurant. And if the boys had a baseball team, there would be baseball games among the Japanese, and they came to that.

So we were close, because Washington State-Oregon-California people would come together in the United States. If I am from Washington and you are from Washington, we would be close. It was organized that if somebody in Washington came, and I had a death in the family, all these people would come and support me.

One of the very interesting things about the Japanese were their funerals. Do you know about Japanese funerals?

Q. No, please tell me.

Mrs. Shoji When there's a funeral, you take money to the family of the deceased. If you know them well, you give a lot; but if you don't - well, it's according to how much you want to give. That was very, very important because there was no welfare. A funeral was very expensive, so this friends' support helped a lot.

Now it still goes on, but they don't need it now because the families now are more affluent. Funerals are expensive - I've taken out a memorial, and that's what I'll have if I die or if my husband dies. So we can take care of it, and don't need this thing of people bringing money. But the tradition is still holding.

Q. You mentioned an Episcopal minister. What percentage of the Seattle Japanese-American community were part of the Christian tradition, and what were Shinto, or Buddhist? Were these very active?

Mrs. Shoji It was a way of getting together. There was Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist; and then later on, came the fundamentalists. It was, I think, the Holiness Church, and it isn't there anymore.

Of course, there's the Buddhists. There's two kinds - the Nichiren and the Honganji - in town, and there's more now. There's quite a few.

If they get together, and that's the big thing.

But the Christians altogether are big, too, though divided up, they're not so big. Among Japanese, the Methodists are the biggest, and the Presbys, and our church is farther down the line.

Q. Was this true before the war? Was Christianity as big a

deal before the war as it is now?

Mrs. Shoji Oh, I think it was bigger. Nowadays, the youth do not go to church like they used to. When we were growing up, we all went, whether the parents were Buddhist or not. We went to church. If you didn't go to Christian church, you went to Buddhist church.

Church played a more important part in our lives. I think that's so not only for Japanese, but all over. Is it not?

Q. Possibly. It isn't always easy to tell...

Mrs. Shoji Now, you can be a Christian and not go to church - that's what they're saying. It didn't used to be that way. If you were a Christian, you went to church. Now, they say, you don't have to go to church.

If I believe in God, I can get together in a small unorganized group.

I don't know how many [Japanese Christians] there are, but the Buddhist church on Main has a very big attendance.

Q. The Japanese traditions of other sorts - were they taught in the Japanese language schools?

Mrs. Shoji Yes. I didn't go because I was out in the country. They had classes after public school. Now, they just have it on Saturday.

Q. As we've moved up closer to Pearl Harbor, I wonder if the community sensed that something was coming. There had been Japanese adventurism in the Pacific for some years before Pearl Harbor was attacked...

Were you surprised by the attack on Pearl Harbor? Had you seen a collision course for the two nations?

Mrs. Shoji Well, in 1932, I was a senior in high school, and at that time I felt that the United States was squeezing Japan too much in that small island. Eventually, something had to pop. That was way back.

You heard lots of things at the time from Washington, DC, but I think we were surprised at Pearl Harbor.

Q. How did you hear about it? Do you remember what you were doing?

Mrs. Shoji I was living in Los Angeles. My husband's asthma was so bad that friends said we should come down to California, so we went there.

I was so upset. I said I wasn't going into camp. There was a curfew - we had to pull down black blinds - and they said we would have to eventually go. I said, "Oh, I'm not going. I'm an American citizen. They can't send me."

My husband, being an alien, had talked with his friends, and they said that it was safer to go (to Japan),

because they didn't know what they outside Caucasians would do. But I said, "The outside Caucasians can't do anything to me because I'm an American citizen." I didn't realize that, although I am an American citizen, my color would not prove to people I was American-born. If I had been white, it would have been different.

I said that I wasn't going (to Japan), and he said that he would take the children. I said that he couldn't take the children, they were my children, and he said that they were his, and we just - !

But as it turned out, everybody was going to camp. They said, "You have to go." The order was if you were 1/32 Japanese - even if you had that much Japanese blood, you had to go. So, all right, I was going to camp.

I wrote to my relatives up north (in Seattle) and said that I would have to go. I couldn't understand why we were quietly going when we were American citizens because [of something] my dad had said to me in my younger days.

When we would go to the store, or go to the PTA, I could see how the Caucasians weren't nice to my Dad because he was Japanese. He would go to the PTA as father of a pupil, and the teachers ignored him. We would get in line to talk to the teacher, and white people would get in front of us, and I would push myself forward, and my Dad would pull me back. And I thought it was his fault - if my Dad was there, he should have stood his ground, but he didn't. He'd pull back and somebody would go in, and then somebody else would go in, so we didn't get to the teacher. He said, "We're going home."

I said, "No, I want you to meet my teacher." The teacher had never said a nice thing about my father. She would tell other students, "Oh, your mother is pretty; your father is nice," but she had never said anything about my dad, except "Tomo, your father writes very well." He was a good writer. He could write and read English, but he couldn't speak well.

That's just how some of these people from Southeast Asia are, and that's why I'm really interested in teaching English. I said, "You've got to learn. Don't go only for reading and writing - you've got to talk! You've got to talk!" And I just really emphasize conversation.

So, I wanted him to see the teacher, and he said, "No," and started dragging me, and I remember that. I said loudly, "Teacher, this is my father!" And everything was quiet. And teacher looked up, and my Dad said, "Thank you for teaching my daughter. I am Tomo's father." And then we walked out.

For all the other kids, it was "Your mother is pretty," or "Your dad is nice," and the only thing teacher had said to me was, "Your father writes very well." I wanted her to meet my dad. Going home, I was crying, and I said, "How come they did that?"

And he said, "Because I don't have American citizenship," and I didn't know what he was talking about.

He said, "You won't be treated that way because you are an American citizen and you are equal."

That stuck to me. "You are a citizen." And ever since then, I've been a civil rights person.

If I was playing with some kids, the kids were always nice, but it was the parents [who weren't]. They wouldn't treat me the same, if there were four or five kids playing, the Caucasian kids would all get the same candy, and when she came to me, it would be another candy or a smaller candy. A smaller candy I didn't mind. I would say, "Thank you," and the other kids would say, "But your's is smaller, Tomo!" and they would give me a piece of their's.

But one day, this mother came out with a different candy. I looked at it, and I was the last that she gave to. I went there to play with those Caucasian kids because our parents weren't making a good living, and we didn't have the elaborate furniture and toys like these kids had.

This one family had a piano! A player piano! If you did this (Mrs. Shoji pumps with her feet), you got music out of it! And we could play with it.

And they had toys like a doll with a cradle. We had dolls, but we just put them in a box. Oh, they had so many nice toys.

At first when I would go, my mother would ask "What happened?" and I would answer, "This girl did this or that mother did that," and she would say "Don't go anymore."

I wanted to go, so after that, I didn't say anything. When my mother asked, "How was everything?", I would say, "Okay." If I told her what happened, she would have just said, "Don't go."

I didn't have any friends to play with because I was oldest among the Japanese. With them, I'd be playing with kids; over there, I'd be playing with peers. And they would be nice with me but the mothers!!

I remember this mother gave me a stick of candy (that was different), and I didn't want it, but I had to be nice. So I said, "No, thank you." And from then on, it was "No, thank you," because she always gave me a different candy. Now here is the equality - if it had been the same candy, even smaller, I would have taken it, but she brought a different candy... That candy may have been better, I don't know - I never did try it. But because of the fact that it was different from the other kids, I said, "No, thank you."

Do you know that 60 years after that, when I was working in the office at Diocesan House, I had been working there only three or four days, and was feeling very insecure. This one lady brought cookies, and passed them around, and I said, "No, thank you," without even looking at it. I just passed it along.

I happened to look at it, and it was something I like. What made me pass it up? For two or three weeks, I couldn't sleep, and I kept thinking about it. Finally, in the third week, it came to me - that lady at work looked a little like that lady that treated me so bad. I was just in the habit of saying, "No, thank you," and I just said it automatically.

So I went to work, and so excited to find this revelation! I said "Last night, I figured out why I really turned the cookie down, and listen to this!"

Side B

Mrs. Shoji ...and they really didn't get it. I was kind of disappointed and I said, "Oh, you people, you wouldn't understand it. You've never been discriminated against." And I just walked away.

Sixty years afterward! I realized that it's so important that we treat everybody the same, even the little kids.

Q. In that sense, when you were interned - well, where were you interned?

Mrs. Shoji Manzanar.

Q. So you did not come back up here and join your parents?

Mrs. Shoji No.

Q. Did you consider doing that?

Mrs. Shoji I suppose I could have, but look how much work it would have been to pack all that and come up here.

My sister was down there working for a doctor, and he was part of the first volunteer group that had to go to look after the internees. So I went as part of my sister's family, to Manzanar. That was the first camp that was opened.

Q. Did you feel that you were being interned for your own safety, or did you feel like a prisoner from the start?

Mrs. Shoji I felt I was a prisoner. When people said it was for our safety, I didn't believe that. For one thing, the sentries weren't looking out that way, they were looking at us. The gun was aimed at us. Those young soldiers - they were scared of us. You can't blame them. I think they were really scared of us. All these Japanese - if they were to have a riot... These young soldiers - I can just imagine how scared they must have been.

My older daughter, Nancy, said three or four years ago that once they went out to where they had a garden there with vegetables, and their teacher took them out there. They got to talk to the soldiers - "Mom, they were nice." We didn't know that because we didn't go close up. I guess they were nice - they didn't know what they were there for. They were there to see we didn't get out of line, I guess.

But they can't say they did it for our safety, because if that was the case, when we got put into those camps, why did they have soldiers at four corners aiming at us instead of out? There was nothing they could shoot at outside - we were put way out in the sticks. Nobody would come that way.

Q. You had been in L.A.? What was the atmosphere like among the white people? Was it hysterical? Were they angry? Were they abusive? Did you ever experience any abusive treatment?

Mrs. Shoji No, we lived in a market area and it was all

Japanese.

But, like Bainbridge here, when they were leaving, the Caucasians came and wanted to buy things cheap. We have this story in the play I'm in that I was telling you about. The mother says she wants some money [for her dishes], and she asked \$200.00, and the white man offered only \$17.00, so she took each dish of her good Japanese set, and just broke them one by one, so this Caucasian man says, "Don't do that! That's too precious!" But she just broke them and broke them to the last cup and saucer. That shows how angry she was and how the Caucasians tried to take advantage and to buy things cheap, and I think my brother had bought a new car, and he had to sell so cheap.

Q. Were you able to care for your own property?

Mrs. Shoji I was taking care of a hotel, so we didn't have too much furniture, but what we had, the government sent boxes that we could pack it in and store it in a government warehouse. I didn't hear of that up here, so maybe they didn't have storage.

I remember I had some dishes, and a paddle that you dish out rice with - a shamoji - with some Palmolive soap. I guess at the last minute I had thrown in some Palmolive soap. Well, we couldn't use any of those things - there was Palmolive smell all over in those wooden spoons.

It was stored in a government place.

Q. And it was returned to you?

Mrs. Shoji Yes. But if people trusted their friends, it wasn't there when they got back.

Q. Before going to the relocation center, did the community have to hand in cameras and radios?

Mrs. Shoji Yes. I didn't give it to the government, but to a friend of my sister's, and we didn't get any of it back. They just weren't around.

Q. And you could take with you just what you could carry?

Mrs. Shoji Yes. Very little. Later on, some people who had money had their friends send them some things.

But we had a crate box for a chair, and the bed was stuffed straw in a canvas bag. As soon as we went there, they gave us a canvas bag and we had to stuff it. That was our bed, and soon the mattress was this high - you know how straw is. (Mrs. Shoji shows a thin, pressed-down mattress)

And we had a cot.

Q. How was it for privacy?

Mrs. Shoji There was none. It was a long barrack divided in half with wood. We were staying with a middle aged couple, and we had an Army blanket...

Q. As a wall?

Mrs. Shoji Yes. There was no privacy.

Q. Where is Manzanar?

Mrs. Shoji In the Imperial Valley. It was lovely - the mountain range with snow on top. The only thing is there were dust storms. In the morning, when you'd get up, where your head had been was white, and the rest was all dusty.

Q. Compared with Minnidoka, wasn't there an increasing Japanization at Manzanar? Weren't there segregated prisoners there?

Mrs. Shoji That's Tule Lake, where many of those who wanted to go to Japan went. Manzanar was mostly California people, and the Bainbridge [Island] people went there. They were the first ones to go, and Minnidoka and Puyallup weren't ready to be inhabited.

Manzanar was an assembly center, turned into a relocation center. Others went to an assembly center, and then to a relocation center.

Q. Were your children in school in Manzanar?

Mrs. Shoji They were preschool age and in first grade. They had schools there, though.

Q. You had mentioned your daughter going out with her teacher...

Mrs. Shoji Yes, she must have been in first grade. My boy wasn't born - he was born in Manzanar in 1943. When he was going to school, he wouldn't admit that he was born there - he would write down, "Los Angeles."

One teacher called my attention to it, and asked me why. I asked him, and he was young then - I think he was in junior high school - and he said, "They had no business putting us in there."

I didn't think he knew that much - he was only two years old when we came out of camp.

Q. Did your husband consider repatriation - going back to Japan?

Mrs. Shoji Yes, we had a big fight. To me, I was so divided. I didn't want to go in to camp, I was quarreling with my husband, and he said he would take the children. It was quite a trauma for me. Then after we got in there, he wanted to go to Japan, and this was really something.

He said that he had the right to take his children, and I said that they were my children.

Somehow, though - I never did ask him why - when it came time to go, he didn't go.

Going to Manzanar, he won out because I had to go to Manzanar. I didn't want to go, but I had to go.

But going to Japan, I said "No," and that's how it stood. And he didn't go. But we never talked about it.

He's never talked about why - because it was really terrible.

Q. Both of your loyalties must have been so divided and confused.

Mrs. Shoji Why would I go to Japan? I had never been there. My parents were from there and I had relatives there, but why would I go? I was an American citizen.

He said, "They did this to you now. What do you think they'll do to you later?"

I said, "I don't care. I'm an American citizen. They can't do too much against me."

I didn't expect them to do anything bad, but he thought I would be in bad trouble, so he wanted me to go. And then it was the children - he wanted to take "his" children, and I said they were my children.

One thing that I said that I really shouldn't have said was the straw that broke the camel's back - I said, "What makes you think they're your children?"

I still remember his face. He was so upset that I would even say such a thing even though he knew they were his children.

He felt that I would be better off if I went to Japan.

Q. His friends, who did go, what were their motives?

Mrs. Shoji Well, one woman had been raised in Japan. She was one of the kibeis that was born here, and she would feel at home there, her childhood home.

But later, I heard that when these people went to Japan, that Japan had been at war in Manchuria and many resources had been used up. It was really a hard time.

Q. I'm not sure that the native Japanese would have trusted the Kibeis.

Mrs. Shoji They didn't want them. They didn't want anything to do with them. They were having a time getting enough food for their own families so they couldn't take care of these people from America.

I heard that these people who went to Japan really had a hard time, really had a hard time.

And some did come back, you know. Quite a few came back.

Q. They did come back?

Mrs. Shoji Yes.

Q. Did you ever consider moving out of the coastal strip?

Mrs. Shoji That cost money. To move the whole family out?

After I got in camp, I wanted to go east, but my husband wouldn't. So we stayed in camp, and went to Spokane, where he felt more familiar. I wanted to go away. I thought this was a chance to go away East. But we didn't go. I wish I had.

Q. Do you mean to Minnesota?

Mrs. Shoji No, further east. Minnesota's so cold - I don't think I'd want to go there.

Q. How did you spend your time at Manzanar? You had this little tiny baby, and before that you were pregnant, so maybe you had your hands full - but what was there to do?

Mrs. Shoji Well, some worked in the mess hall as a waitress, and some cooked. My husband was a cook for a while and he was block leader at one time. He worked in the hospital. But I had kids, and I just did that. I didn't go to classes, either.

I think I was angry!

Q. It sound like you could express your anger...

Mrs. Shoji At my husband!

Q. You must have been angry at the nation, too.

Mrs. Shoji But nobody would join me in saying that.

Q. They seem like a very placid people, very accepting of all this.

Mrs. Shoji Yes, and what really got me was the conscientious objectors. The Japanese community felt they were - Yucch! And to me, I said, "Good for them!" They didn't say they wouldn't go - they just said they wouldn't take arms - and what's wrong with that.

If I was a man, I wouldn't have wanted to take up arms, and I would have been a conscientious objector.

I can't see anything wrong with it, but in those days it was wrong to think that. If the government tells you to take arms, you're supposed to take arms.

Even after we came back, the Japanese community ostracised the conscientious objectors. It was terrible.

Q. The conscientious objectors you're talking about were Japanese-American boys?

Mrs. Shoji Yes, yes.

Q. I'm surprised that the response was that strong, and that negative.

Mrs. Shoji In spite of what the government did, I guess they were really loyal to the government.

I know that the 442nd boys volunteered because they wanted to get out of camp and they wanted adventure. But many said, "Our parents wanted us to go." I can't imagine parents saying, "Go and join the Army." I just can't imagine it - you'd send your son out and you may never see him again, and you'd be sent into a camp?! I couldn't. I wouldn't.

So then these 442nd boys came back and said,

"Uh-huh. The situation is better now because we volunteered."

I'd like to say, "Baloney!" although this is very unpopular to talk about. They think they volunteered so that the government's attitude, the white man's attitude toward us is better. I don't think so. I think the time had come now that they can't treat us as they did before the war. But many think that the 442nd boys did it.

But then what happened to the 800 fellows that had to die to save 200? That makes me angry. Don't tell me that the Army or Navy men didn't know that it would take 800 to save the 200, and that they were willing to send the Japanese 800 for the 200 lives. Whether it was Japanese, or the other way around, I don't think I would have done it.

So these boys come back. But is there any salvation for the boys who died? 800 of them died to save 200. That was awful.

Q. It was an awful war.

Mrs. Shoji Yes, I know.

And, then, the Japanese are so placid about anti-nuclear things. Today they will not join these groups. They will not lift a finger. They will not join these people who are saying, "We don't want nuclear war."

You'd think because most Japanese had relatives or friends who had gone with the Hiroshima bomb or Nagasaki bomb...

I thought that we would be the first ones to say, "Okay, we don't want bombs."

Q. There's just not an activist tradition in the Japanese way of being. Or there hasn't been. As you say, the people who came to America are movers and shakers. Maybe it will change.

Mrs. Shoji Well, the movers and shakers are gone now. They were movers and shakers when they came, but the tradition among Japanese is still to obey authority, to not rock the boat. That's a tradition - that's the thing they'd been taught in Japan. When the parents came here, that's what they taught us. My mother used to say, "Don't go out of your way to say what you want - don't rock the boat."

I said, "Why?"

She said, "Because you're a woman." And that used to get me - just because I was a girl. She'd say, "You're a girl - so you don't say anything like that."

Now I say to my friends that we've just got to change something. I don't care much for this \$20,000 that redress is asking for, but I want the history books to change. I don't want this to happen to any other ethnic group. And I want some money to go someplace because money is the thing that talks in this day and age - if you get some money from them, they will see that they don't have to put out that much money next time.

For that reason, I said, if they give us money, we could have a Japanese-American center, where we could have a flower arrangement class, a martial arts class, and we'd

have a speaker from Japan. Now when we want to meet leaders from Washington, we have to go into the outside community. We need a place where we can say, "Okay, we want to hear what you have to say."

Q. I'd like to ask you a couple more questions about Manzanar, to get back into the forties again. After you were released from there, where did you go

Mrs. Shoji To Spokane.

Q. What was your reception like there?

Mrs. Shoji Well, we had to change our train in Portland, and we couldn't get a restaurant to feed us.

Q. Were they very frank about why?

Mrs. Shoji Oh, yes. "No Japs Allowed."
My husband went from restaurant to restaurant, and my daughter wrote a little story on that, about how she saw my father who she thought was a big man undergo this kind of treatment.

And then we went to Spokane. And in Spokane, we were in a Japanese farming community.

Q. Why did you decide to go to Spokane rather than Seattle?

Mrs. Shoji Spokane was where my husband's friend lived, and they had a farm.

Q. Had any workers been released to go out into the Imperial Valley to work?

Mrs. Shoji Not into the Imperial Valley, but my husband went to Idaho for sugar beet season, and then went to Vale, Oregon for sugar beets.

Q. Was he so bored in camp that he wanted to get out and do just about anything? Was the pay any good? He must have been away from you for a week at a time at least...

Mrs. Shoji Oh, yes! But it was income! Although they fed us, you needed a little bit more. The clothing allotment was \$3.75 a month, I think. You needed more money, especially if you had children. So that's why he went, and that's why most of the fellows went. Maybe young people went for adventure, but it was hard work, cutting sugar beets.

Q. What did you do when you went to Spokane?

Mrs. Shoji Worked in a truck farm.

Q. I'm thirty-eight, and I was not alive during this time. I'm going to ask you a question that may sound silly to you - when did it get easier to come back to a city like Seattle? Did the prejudice against Japanese-Americans go away very quickly after the war, or did it linger?

Mrs. Shoji I was in Spokane for five years, and in '49 we came to Seattle. I didn't see much discrimination. I had a little mom-and-pop grocery store, and we served the people in our neighborhood.

Q. What was your parents' experience?

Mrs. Shoji They were in Tule Lake. And one of my sisters went to the university in Chicago, and my other sister and brother went to Chicago. But I didn't. I had a family, so I stayed in Manzanar.

Q. Did your parents come back to Seattle after Tule Lake?

Mrs. Shoji Yes.

Q. Do you know whether their property was taken care of while they were gone, and whether your father was able to get his job back?

Mrs. Shoji Yes, he got his job back. He went into janitorial work, and they rented a house owned by a Japanese. And my mother stayed home.

Q. Did they speak English at all?

Mrs. Shoji As I said, my father wrote and read. He could understand, but his pronunciation was poor. He was a foreman in the sawmill camp and he was able to communicate with the boss, with the owner of the mill.

Q. Did they get over their internment experience or did it embitter them?

Mrs. Shoji My father, maybe - he wouldn't say much. But my mother would say, "You just can't help it. It's past."

Q. It seems to me that Issei who'd been here as long as he had had as much cause to be bitter as you who were born a citizen. He had given decades of his life here in working.

Mrs. Shoji They don't think of themselves as giving decades of life. They think of themselves as immigrants that have been mistreated. Knowing my dad - I think like him - I think he was probably bitter. But we never talked about it. I'm sure he must have been.

But my mother - I can imagine her saying, "It's just one of those things."

Q. So you came back to Seattle in '49. How had the community changed since you left it?

Mrs. Shoji They were closer together.

Q. Do you think they were driven closer together?

Mrs. Shoji Yes. One thing that was good - well, it wasn't

"good", but it wasn't a minus - is that the war spread us out. Otherwise, we would be ghettoed, except for people who had taken the risk and gone east.

But because of the war, some of the universities and colleges opened up to students and there was an opportunity to go East for a job. That's why so many West Coast [Japanese-American] people are in Chicago.