

**National Museum of the Pacific War
Fredericksburg, Texas**

Interview with Takeo & Roberta Shiroma

This is Ed Metzler. Today is December 7th, 2003. I am interviewing Takeo and Roberta Shiroma here in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is taking place in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. I would like to start by thanking both of you for being willing to spend the time with us to share your experiences and add it to our archives. We really do appreciate it.

Mr. Metzler: So let me start out by asking each of you to tell us when and where you were born, and a little bit about your early family history, how you met and got married and then we can go into your experiences during World War II. So I'll start off with you, Roberta. Why don't you start?

Mrs. Shiroma: I was born in Los Angeles, California, June 1, 1932. My parents were from...my mother was born in San Francisco, my father was born in Japan. He came over when he was sixteen years old. He was pretty Americanized, as well as my Mom. She was bilingual, but very, very American. My friends teased me about being more American than the Americans. But going back to December 7th, 1941, I do remember that day very vividly, because my parents were listening to the radio, and so alarmed and very scared about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Or what they were going to do. They had a business – they had a vegetable and fruit stand in Gardena, California, which is a suburb of Los Angeles. My father was a Stanford graduate, my mother was just maybe a community college student graduate.

Mr. Metzler: Takeo, why don't you tell us your early background?

Mr. Shiroma: I was born in Fresno County, in central California. We ended up in... my parents had died earlier, so we had to move into L.A. In the Boyle Heights district, and that particular day, 7th, morning, we had to go to school. We had to wear our letterman's jackets as security because we didn't know what was going to happen because of the war.

Mr. Metzler: So what kind of jackets?

Mr. Shiroma: It was a letterman's jacket. To identify a certain group. High school athletic jacket.

Mr. Metzler: Now your parents, were they born overseas, or were they born in America?

Mr. Shiroma: They were both Okinawan.

Mr. Metzler: Natives of Okinawa. And they came to the United States when?

Mr. Shiroma: Came in early 1900's. Right after World War I.

Mr. Metzler: And they lived in Fresno?

Mr. Shiroma: They lived in Fresno County.

Mr. Metzler: Where you were born.

Mr. Shiroma: Then I moved to Los Angeles with my older sister. And then we had tight security, in school.

Mr. Metzler: How were you treated in school? Do you remember after the attack on Pearl Harbor – did it change how people thought about you?

Mr. Shiroma: There was a good mixture of different nationalities, and you never thought about different races. There was a Russian group, the Jewish group, Mexican-Americans, there were a lot of Japanese in that group. There

were no problems about racism, and then you had to do that in order for efficiency.

Mr. Metzler: So how long was it after the Pearl Harbor attack before you were relocated, or they came to relocate you, was it very quickly or ?...

Mrs. Shiroma: We went to Poston, Arizona, which was one of the internment camps on an Indian Reservation, on May 9th, 1942.

Mr. Metzler: So about six months.

Mr. Shiroma: Part of us it was longer for us to stay. Because most of the people were sent away to an assembly center. At the assembly center you lived there to get familiar with the country. But we were the last bunch to leave, so we went directly to Poston, Arizona, which was on an Indian reservation.

Mr. Metzler: So most of the others of the Japanese community had already gone?

Mr. Shiroma: We were the last ones.

Mr. Metzler: And some of them very quickly. Any reason why some went earlier and some went later?

Mrs. Shiroma: We left by area. What happened was my parents had a business – they cleared everything up within a month. They had to get rid of everything in their house, everything in the business, they were given one month. But they did it in less time and they moved to East Los Angeles where my aunt and uncle had a business, because they needed to help them dispose of their things.

Mr. Shiroma: People who lived closer to the ocean, e.g. Terminal Island, they only had twenty-four hours. People were selling cars for fifty dollars or less, and like that.

Mr. Metzler: Well, it's almost like you had to have a fire sale, because you had to sell very quickly.

Mrs. Shiroma: Yes. Well, my mother gave things away.

Mr. Shiroma: My aunt and uncle had neighbors that took care of things in their garage, so when they came back they were still there.

Mr. Metzler: So sometimes you could store things with your friends.

Mr. Shiroma: Our group only, but not the others. Because they had no time.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, dear. So, each of you tell me about what you remember when the authorities first came and accosted your house, and confronted you with...

Mrs. Shiroma: I was nine, so I don't really have a recollection. The only thing I remember is going to the train station, seeing the soldiers there, and getting on the train and taking this long, long, trip on the train to Poston. And my sister at that time was running a very high fever because she had the red measles. And when we got there, this was late at night, my mother was asked to just sit back, and sign papers, and that was unnatural, because she had to stuff canvas bags with hay, which were to be our mattresses. She had to do it for all of her family, which was all of us. My sister, me, and my pa.

Mr. Metzler: They make their own mattresses.

Mr. Metzler: So you two had not met...

Shiromas: No, no.

Mrs. Shiroma: We lived in the same block.

Mr. Shiroma: It was family style...And the same families ate together, etc. We're talking about years and years.

Mr. Metzler: Let's go back to you, Takeo. Tell us what you remember about when the authorities came to your house.

Mr. Shiroma: No one actually came, because it was a slow process. We were the last group from Los Angeles to leave. You had time, time to leave.

Mr. Metzler: Did somebody send a letter, or make a phone call?

Mrs. Shiroma: It was posted on telephone poles, all over. There was a curfew – an eight o'clock curfew. You could not be on the street after eight o'clock.

Mr. Shiroma: And on the other hand, I remember a Sunday, there was a wedding, and at the wedding reception the groom was taken in by the F.B.I right from the restaurant.

Mr. Metzler: So they were able to find out who were likely to be Japanese-Americans by whether you were going to a certain school or whether you were a member of a certain church, or whether you took a certain...

Mr. Shiroma: Most of those people.

Mr. Metzler: And so then they came and took the people even if they were at a reception to a wedding.

Mr. Shiroma: Oh, yes. Immediately.

Mr. Metzler: How were you treated when they took you to the train, do you remember?

Mrs. Shiroma: Usually very helpful, as the Quakers, the Friends. Very charitable, gave coffee to the people. I don't know if we had tea. I remember the coffee and doughnuts.

Mr. Shiroma: When they came to visit us in camp.

Mr. Metzler: After you left the train? These Quakers, were they in L.A.?

Shiromas: Yes.

Mrs. Shiroma: I do remember one thing. After the war broke out, the owner of the house that we lived in wanted us to move. And my mom and dad said, "Oh, we have no where to go." So some minister came, I don't know which church he belonged to, but I remember his name was Reverend Nicholson. He talked to the landlord, and said that it wasn't the Christian thing to do. He said, "Okay, they can stay." And that is how we were able to remain in that house until we had to go help my uncle and aunt move. I do remember that.

Mr. Metzler: Well, let's go now to your experiences on the train ride when you were taken from California and you ended up in Arizona.

Mr. Shiroma: We were separated from old friends, and then as time went on, we made new friends. Talking about your friends for sixty years.

Mrs. Shiroma: In fact, that was a dividing line in our lives. Before camp, or after camp.

Mr. Shiroma: Or what camp were you in, or...did you know somebody there? It's a small world.

Mr. Metzler: So on the train ride, how long did it take to get to your destination?

Mr. Shiroma: Oh, it's just a long way.

Mrs. Shiroma: Started in the morning, and ended up late at night, so (discussion follows) twelve hours. See, I was nine, he was sixteen, so his memory would be a little better than mine.

Mr. Metzler: Well, you were at an impressionable age at that point, so it must have been a real high impact experience. So, okay, Roberta, when you arrived there at the final destination – tell me how that worked and how ...

Mrs. Shiroma: It was dark and dusty, because they hadn't really completed building the camp. The barracks were up, it was just tarpaper, just a wooden frame building. A room this size would house the four of us.

Mr. Shiroma: And another family...sometimes two different families in one section.

Mr. Metzler: This room measures about twelve feet by eighteen.

Mrs. Shiroma: That would be for four people and my uncle and aunt would be on the other side of the room. A rope with a blanket was used to divide the room.

Mr. Shiroma: That would be two families in one room.

Mr. Metzler: And so you had to make your own beds then, is that right?

Mrs. Shiroma: It's not the frame bed as we know it, but a cot. Don't forget it's government issue. And the building was very cold in the winter, because it's not insulated. And very hot in the summer. It would get up to 120 degrees in the sun, so I don't know what it would be in the shade – maybe 110. The winters get cold enough to freeze the water.

Mr. Metzler: So you went there in May?

Mrs. Shiroma: May of 1942.

Mr. Metzler: So summer was just coming on then. And what about sanitary facilities, cooking facilities, that kind of thing?

Mrs. Shiroma: When we first got there, everybody got sick – we don't know why. We don't know what the deal was.

Mr. Shiroma: Maybe the water.

Mrs. Shiroma: We don't know if it was...

Mr. Metzler: Was it dysentery?

Mrs. Shiroma: Yes. When we first got there, and when we were there for awhile, and everything was all right.

Mr. Metzler: So did you go to a separate building for things like showers and toilets?

Mrs. Shiroma: Yes. The hardest thing was taking a shower in front of everybody else.

Mr. Metzler: No privacy.

Mrs. Shiroma: No. It was a latrine.

Mr. Metzler: I guess they had the men's section and the women's section.

Mrs. Shiroma: Yes, separate. And the washbasin was one long – I don't know how they do it in the army, but a latrine.

Mr. Metzler: And no heating in the winter?

Mrs. Shiroma: We didn't get the heating till later. There were oil-burning heaters.

Mr. Metzler: So the families units were kept intact. I mean, you could stay with your family, you weren't sleeping in a large barracks or anything like that.

Mrs. Shiroma: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: Did you both arrive at about the same time?

Mrs. Shiroma: Probably the same time, but we didn't know each other.

Mr. Metzler: You hadn't actually met. So how many people would you estimate were at this camp?

Mrs. Shiroma: I don't know, but my father...

Mr. Shiroma: It was at Poston, it was the second largest city in Arizona at the time.
Twenty thousand.

Mr. Metzler: So there were twenty thousand Japanese-Americans at the camp?

Mr. Shiroma: There was another camp on the other side – ten thousand.

Mr. Metzler: Where is Poston located in Arizona?

Mrs. Shiroma: Right by Havasu.

Mr. Metzler: Close to Havasu City.

Mrs. Shiroma: Right by Parker.

Mr. Metzler: Just over on the border then.

Mrs. Shiroma: About fifteen miles from Parker.

Mr. Shiroma: Parker was the train station. Parker was the entrance to Poston.

Mr. Metzler: You mentioned earlier that this was an Indian reservation that they located the camp in?

Mr. Shiroma: Yes

Mr. Metzler: So they were using government land. So what Indian tribe?

Mrs. Shiroma: It was the Mohave Indians. There is a museum located there now. You really appreciate everything that you have. And we farmed...eventually.

Mr. Metzler: Not at first.

Mr. Shiroma: We had a good group.

Mrs. Shiroma: Each block had their own crop. I don't remember how many people were on one block...do you remember? About two hundred? Or were there that many? I don't remember.

Mr. Metzler: Had a lot of blocks.

Mr. Shiroma: In groups of four. One block there were four of us to one quad. Then middle quad.

Mr. Metzler: So how many of your personal belongings were you able to take with you? Just one suitcase?

Mr. Shiroma: Well, something like that.

Mrs. Shiroma: I can remember the night before we left, my parents didn't know where we were going. As a child, I remember the anxiety. My father painting the I.D. number for each family member on each suitcase. I don't remember how many clothes we took, but it wasn't very many. Probably one or two.

Mr. Metzler: So just your basic clothing, and other important things.

Mrs. Shiroma: Right. Possibly everything we had.

Mr. Shiroma: And everything was numbered.

Mrs. Shiroma: Your family number.

Mr. Metzler: What furniture was provided for the place where you lived? A bed...

Mrs. Shiroma: That's it.

Mr. Shiroma: That's it.

Mr. Metzler: No chairs or anything?

Mrs. Shiroma: No, no.

Mr. Metzler: So when you ate a meal, you ate a meal military style.

Mrs. Shiroma: In the mess hall.

Mr. Metzler: Mess hall style.

Mr. Shiroma: We built some of our own furniture.

Mrs. Shiroma: Out of wood. You should see some of the beautiful wooden screens...carved...just amazing that people could have time.

Mr. Metzler: There was nothing else to do.

Mrs. Shiroma: Right. I don't know where they found the wood, but eventually they would make wooden walkways through the rooms, and you would walk on these wooden ... and then they made wooden clogs, which is wooden flip-flops.

Mr. Metzler: So what did you do with your time when you were there? You were a nine year old girl – do you remember what you did?

Mrs. Shiroma: Oh, sure. I went to school. I had to go to school. There were volunteers from outside. My sister had one from New York. We had a missionary from Japan. She was a missionary in Japan for thirty years, and decided she wanted to volunteer for this. But I also had a teacher who was a missionary in China, and we had her for a teacher also. My first teacher was a woman that had graduated from U.C.L.A., and she was my fifth grade teacher.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about your school. What was your teacher like?

Mr. Shiroma: When I got to the camp, I was a junior. I had one more year to go. Our classroom was outside.

Mr. Metzler: Just around a campfire?

Mrs. Shiroma: Eventually, they were taught how to make adobe. And it is still standing there now.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, so there was school for the children, now did you finish your school while you were there?

Mr. Shiroma: Yes. My diploma was from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Mr. Metzler: So how long were you in the camp?

Mrs. Shiroma: Two and a half years.

Mr. Metzler: Until the end of the war, was that right?

Mrs. Shiroma: No. No, the war was still going on. And he left earlier. He was already out of high school.

Mr. Shiroma: Trying to find a job.

Mr. Metzler: So you went back to Los Angeles? So roughly when was that?

Mr. Shiroma: It was ...

Mr. Metzler: 1944?

Mrs. Shiroma: Weren't you out when ...

Mr. Shiroma: We went as a group to Utah for agriculture.

Mrs. Shiroma: What had happened in Utah was that there was a shortage of men. So they went out and worked on the farms during the summer.

Mr. Metzler: Was this in the program?

Mr. Shiroma: Yes.

Mrs. Shiroma: This was some years after we were in camp.

Mr. Shiroma: And then we worked alongside German prisoners of war.

Mr. Metzler: So when was this?

Mr. Shiroma: 1944.

Mr. Metzler: So tell me about the Italian and German prisoners. What was that like to interact with them?

Mr. Shiroma: (Garbled)

Mr. Metzler: So you worked at the same site, but you didn't mix with them.

Mr. Shiroma: Right.

Mr. Metzler: So you got your diploma, and then you went to L. A., and then you went and did some work in the Utah area...

Mrs. Shiroma: No, Utah was during the camp, and then...

Mr. Shiroma: I came back to the camp, and then left for L. A.

Mr. Metzler: So Roberta, back to you, now. You were in school, but you were nine through twelve?

Mrs. Shiroma: Right. I was still in junior high. So because of the housing shortage, my mother rented one room from one of her friends, and what she did, she rented rooms out to help people out. And the camp also had a hostel, so a lot of people would stay there. But we were lucky enough to know people who owned a house. So she rented a room from them, and I went to junior high.

Mr. Metzler: Were all Japanese-Americans put in these camps, or just some of you?

Mrs. Shiroma: Everybody.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, going back?

Mr. Shiroma: Going back east.

Mrs. Shiroma: Every Japanese on the West Coast had to move.

Mr. Metzler: So they were concentrating on the West Coast, because they were concerned about a possible invasion, and cooperation with the Japanese.

Mrs. Shiroma: Exactly.

Mr. Shiroma: Some chose to go East.

Mr. Metzler: And did you know some people who went?

Mrs. Shiroma: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: And so they would go to New York...

Mrs. Shiroma: Chicago. (?) was not big because of the President.

Mr. Shiroma: (?) of the protection in people seeing him. Of course, we all had jobs then.

I was getting \$16.00 a month in the mess hall.

Mrs. Shiroma: You were getting \$19.00.

Mr. Metzler: I guess that was pretty good pay back then, huh?

Mr. Shiroma: It also helped to use the mail order.

Mrs. Shiroma: Oh, the Sears catalog was...

Mr. Shiroma: And Montgomery Ward.

Mr. Metzler: Really in demand.

Mr. Shiroma: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: So everybody had the same pattern and Sears clothes on? You didn't have any alternative.

Mr. Shiroma: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: So what sports did you play?

Mr. Shiroma: Baseball and basketball.

Mr. Metzler: What about you? What did you do for recreation when you weren't in school?

Mrs. Shiroma: We would go swimming in the canal.

Mr. Metzler: Which canal is this?

Mr. Shiroma: The irrigation canal.

Mr. Metzler: The canal that comes from the Colorado River?

Mr. Shiroma: Yes, it was just a mile from the Colorado River. People now spend a lot of money to do that, so we did it free. My group, we would catch fish, and cook at the mess hall.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about the food. You said it got better after you were there a while. What was it like at first?

Mrs. Shiroma: I can't remember about the food. I can remember not wanting to eat it. I would just look at it.

Mr. Shiroma: Cereal, and like that. Nothing fancy.

Mr. Metzler: Hot meals?

Mr. Shiroma: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: Did you have meat?

Mr. Shiroma: We were given a supply of meat. One thing at a time, and then you would get tired of it.

Mr. Metzler: I'm sure the cuisine wasn't really great. But it was sufficient.

Mrs. Shiroma: Yes, and really nutritious.

Mr. Metzler: And did it change over the period?

Mrs. Shiroma: Yes, it got better. We were lucky, because the chef in our block was a very good cook. So the food in our block was very good. So what people would do was, because they knew we had a good cook, and the food was bad in their block, they would come over for lunch.

Mr. Metzler: And so you had lots of friends!

Mr. Shiroma: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: And so they allowed you to have livestock.

Mrs. Shiroma: Eventually.

Mr. Shiroma: My brother-in-law had chickens.

Mr. Metzler: Did you have to provide the livestock yourselves, or did they provide it?

Mr. Shiroma: The government provided it, and we delivered it to the different mess halls.

Mr. Metzler: They put some by, and then...

Mr. Shiroma: And we did a lot of camouflage work for the government.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about that.

Mr. Shiroma: The women sewed.

Mr. Metzler: And so they would sew these nets?

Mr. Shiroma: Something like that.

Mr. Metzler: And so that was for use by...

Mr. Shiroma: The government would use that hand labor.

Mr. Metzler: To help supply things used by the Army, I see. So what else comes to mind that you would like to describe about that time that you were there?

Mr. Shiroma: One thing that...before the war, most of this group of people had a life style that was the highest in the United States. They live longer, that's the difference. All their lives they worked, and in addition had their own hobbies. They were very creative.

Mrs. Shiroma: We had some really beautiful things.

Mr. Shiroma: We still have some.

Mr. Metzler: Before you went to the camp, what kind of foods did you eat in your home life? Was it more Japanese style, or more American style, or was it a mix?

Mr. Shiroma: It was a mix.

Mrs. Shiroma: We had a variety...there was Italian food, Mexican food, Japanese food.

Mr. Metzler: I know a lot of the other groups, for example, Italian-Americans, seem to continue to eat the foods they are familiar with.

Mr. Shiroma: The difference is that we would go to somewhere for good Italian food, and then Chinese food.

Mrs. Shiroma: Going back to the barracks - after a dust storm, we would sweep the dust through the holes in the floor.

Mr. Metzler: Let the dust go through the cracks in the floor.

Mrs. Shiroma: Exactly.

Mr. Metzler: And so the next ones... (garbled). Were there a lot of them there?

Mrs. Shiroma: We were in the desert.

Mr. Metzler: And so it was very cold at night, and very warm during the day.

Mrs. Shiroma: Exactly. There was a lot of wildlife, rattlesnakes, they would come up to the camp. Snapping turtles, eventually, because we had time to make koi

ponds, we would go to the river and get the carp. We had carp in them instead of koi.

Mr. Metzler: Had a lot of carp. That was all you had. Did you have any interaction with the local population, other than the Indians and the people living in the towns?

Mrs. Shiroma: Some of the reaction was not good, in fact one of my very good friends was in the army. When he came back to visit the family, he was trying to get a haircut in Parker, and the barber said, "No Japs." "We don't cut hair for Japs."

Mr. Shiroma: That happened to ...

Mrs. Shiroma: My father did some work for a professor at the University of California at Berkley. And he would do interviews like we're doing now. But he was doing it secretly, and it was very dangerous to do that, because they thought he was a spy. My mother was transcribing for my dad.

Mr. Metzler: What about books, newspapers?

Mrs. Shiroma: Eventually at school we would get a paper.

Mr. Metzler: Was it a newspaper, so you could see what was going on?

Mr. Shiroma: No – just school events.

Mr. Metzler: Information from L. A., or something like that.

Mr. Shiroma: (Garbled.)

Mrs. Shiroma: It was like a community, a regular community.

Mr. Metzler: What about books, were you given access to books to read?

Mrs. Shiroma: People would donate them, and we had a library eventually.

Mr. Metzler: What about security? Were you allowed out of the camp at all?

Mrs. Shiroma: Not generally...they had armed guards.

Mr. Metzler: And fences around it.

Mrs. Shiroma: Yes. Barbed wire.

Mr. Shiroma: If you went out, you had to have a permit.

Mr. Metzler: You could get out with a permit, and you had to get the permit from the authorities. How were the authorities there? Were they staffed with Army personnel, or civilians, or...

Mr. Shiroma: The Army personnel, and then the administration was outside.

Mrs. Shiroma: ???, the person in authority, W. R. A. (?)

Mr. Metzler: Were there a lot of people, or just a few people?

Mr. Shiroma: Quite a few.

Mr. Metzler: Were they armed? Were they like soldiers, or were they just civilians?

Mr. Shiroma: They were civilians, but they also had uniforms like soldiers.

Mr. Metzler: But you don't remember...?

Mrs. Shiroma: I don't.

Mr. Metzler: And one of you said that at first the security was tight. Did it change over the period of time? Did it become more relaxed?

Mr. Shiroma: Yes, it did.

Mr. Metzler: Was it easier to get out if you needed to go somewhere, or was there always...

Mr. Shiroma: You have to go to administration to get your permit.

Mr. Metzler: But they were reasonable in allowing you permits when you needed it?

Mr. Shiroma: You were allowed to sleep out.

Mr. Metzler: Did some folks (garbled).

Mr. Shiroma: There were exceptions to these things. If you were half-Japanese. You have to go to (?). I think it was a quarter? If you were one-quarter Japanese, you have to ?.

Mrs. Shiroma: I think it was even less.

Mr. Metzler: So there were many people who were in the camp, but they were not pure blooded Japanese?

Mr. Shiroma: Like in our group there was...the wife was Japanese.

Mr. Metzler: And the husband was American?

Mr. Shiroma: One of the other races.

Mrs. Shiroma: There was one on our block the husband was Japanese, the wife was Syrian. They had a baby, and the baby had to go to camp. So she came along to take care of her child, and then they left very soon afterwards to go to Colorado. If you left, you had to go East.

Mr. Metzler: So if you had decided that you for instance had relatives in Kansas City or something like that, you could leave.

Mrs. Shiroma: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: But if you wanted to go back home, you could not.

Mrs. Shiroma: No.

Mr. Shiroma: Until close to the end of the war.

Mrs. Shiroma: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: Did they change it then, to where they would start letting you go back?

Mrs. Shiroma: In fact, the government was encouraging people to leave the camp to go back. You could go back to the west then. But there was a lot of anxiety on the part of the people that didn't want to go back. The war was still on.

Mr. Shiroma: There was one camp in Northern California at Tule Lake for people who wanted to go back to Japan sometime, and that's where...

Mr. Metzler: So the people who wanted to go back to Japan couldn't do it because of the war.

Mr. Shiroma: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: And then after the war was over, did they go back?

Mr. Shiroma: I think most of them changed their minds.

Mr. Metzler: (Garbled.)

Mr. Metzler: Now – let me ask you a subjective question. Thinking back, how did you and your family feel about what you were doing? Were you angry, sad, not that upset and understanding – how did you feel? Tell me a little something about that.

Mrs. Shiroma: I feel that, if we had stayed any longer we have ended up with the same problems as the American Indians. The Native Americans. Lots of them had maybe alcoholism, suicide...

Mr. Shiroma: No responsibilities. People to take care of you.

Mr. Metzler: So that was a concern that that might be how this would result if it went on too long.

Mr. Shiroma: You couldn't get a job.

Mr. Metzler: How did you and your family feel? Did you feel angry, disappointed?
How did you feel about the way you were treated?

Mr. Shiroma: When we got back?

Mr. Metzler: When you went. Then tell me how you felt when you got back.

Mr. Shiroma: To go, it was something new. We didn't know what to expect.

Mr. Metzler: So how did you find a place to live when you got back?

Mr. Shiroma: In fact, we went to a defense plant.

End of side one.

Beginning of side two.

Mr. Shiroma: People were good workers. It was exciting to be Japanese-Americans.
We had the reputation of being good workers.

Mr. Metzler: The Japanese-Americans had a reputation for being hard workers, good
workers.

Mr. Metzler: And when you went back, Roberta...

Mrs. Shiroma: I was still in school.

Mr. Metzler: And the two of you got to know each other.

Mrs. Shiroma: We already knew each other, because we were in the same block.

Mr. Metzler: And so you were twelve or thirteen when you went back.

Mrs. Shiroma: Right.

Mr. Shiroma: The girls, when they got home with their family, was not the best.

Tape cuts off.

Tape begins again.

Mr. Shiroma: They would go there to a nicer family, a nicer school, they had that advantage. The guys had to go on their own.

Mr. Metzler: So after all of this was over, and the nation started returning back to normal, what business did you end up in? What did you do for a living?

Mr. Shiroma: I tried different kinds of jobs. Settled down mostly in a Hardware company. And night work and ended up working a lot with this company – a good company to work for.

Mr. Metzler: What about you, Roberta?

Mrs. Shiroma: I went to work for a bank for awhile, and then I started working for a wholesale produce company as the office manager, and then now I work for Clear Channel Communications radio station as a credit manager.

Mr. Metzler: What are the aspects of the time you were in the compound that you would like to describe today? I know we haven't hit on all of the interesting things, and I'm just looking for the questions to ask, and so I don't know what to ask, and so I'm going to...

Mrs. Shiroma: We're looking at it from a perspective of long war – full of fun for me, and then I made a lot of friends, and so... fun, fun, fun!

Mr. Shiroma: For all these years, meeting new friends, lifetime friends, we stood together. At one time it was mandatory, and now it is social. We get together. Once a month we go to a different home, and enjoy lifetime friendships. Most important thing.

Mr. Metzler: Children, and children's children. How do they look back on this? I mean, you talk to them about what happened, I'm sure.

Mrs. Shiroma: No, we don't talk about it. That's the thing. We don't talk about it.

Mr. Metzler: Why?

Mrs. Shiroma: I don't know. It's just something we've put...we've pushed it aside.

Mr. Shiroma: The new generation now. They're the ones that...

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about what happened then. So do you tell them what happened, and describe what happened?

Mr. Shiroma: No.

Mrs. Shiroma: Because we went to my uncle's funeral a couple of months ago, and we were just finding out at the funeral that he belonged to O.S.S. Because he could speak the Japanese language.

Mr. Shiroma: Because he was bilingual. He was useful to the government.

Mrs. Shiroma: He never talked about that, either.

Mr. Metzler: Couldn't, I guess, at the time.

Mr. Metzler: So he never talked about it afterwards?

Mrs. Shiroma: No, never afterwards either. So this is the thing – you just push it aside, whatever it is. The memories, or whatever.

Mr. Shiroma: Now that people ask you, this generation is the worst, "what happened?", you know. They ask the question, because they want to know. In fact, her father did so much for that. There was a book that was written about her father.

Mrs. Shiroma: It was written by Dr. Lane Hirsbogoshi, who is at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

Mr. Shiroma: But it finally gives him credit because he has been passed on for years.

It's a shame he didn't get that credit while he was alive.

Mr. Metzler: Well, it was definitely an interesting time, wasn't it? I am particularly intrigued by the fact that Roberta, you said you just seldom really talk about it, you've pushed it all aside. Because even though you enjoyed it as a child, for the adults and parents and family leaders, it was a traumatic time.

Mrs. Shiroma: My parents lost their business.

Mr. Metzler: And so were they able to re-establish?

Mrs. Shiroma: No, because my father was an alien. He could not get a job before the war. He was an electrical engineer. And they said, "Have you looked at your face?" "We can't hire you." There was a lot of prejudice over his face.

Mr. Metzler: And did it get any better after the war was over?

Mrs. Shiroma: For him, yes. Because he was at the university. Academia. You don't find as much prejudice there.

Mr. Shiroma: He died young, though.

Mrs. Shiroma: He did. He was only fifty-one when he died.

Mr. Metzler: And your mother?

Mrs. Shiroma: She lived until about five years ago. She was ninety-one.

Mr. Shiroma: She had a good life.

Mrs. Shiroma: She did.

Mr. Shiroma: She had two daughters. We have two daughters. I have a full time job babysitting the grandchildren.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, granddad has a job now.

Mr. Shiroma: These kids are smarter. First time around, we had the two daughters. They were okay. But now, we have five grandchildren. They're a handful. We love it.

Mr. Metzler: Being a granddad, I'm told, I haven't experienced it yet, is a full time job.

Mrs. Shiroma: It is.

Mr. Metzler: But a good one. Okay, folks. What else can we discuss today? This has been a very interesting discussion. I feel like we have just scratched the surface.

Mrs. Shiroma: Is there anything else you would like to know?

Mr. Metzler: Well, I think I've asked most of the questions that I wanted to ask. I was particularly interested in the feelings that were a part of these times. There was an opportunity for there to be hard feelings, but yet I think in general the Japanese-American community didn't hold the grudge and to step forward instead of gloating over the past.

Mrs. Shiroma: No, we don't. We have a word that we hear all the time. It's called "shigata ga nack". It means, "It couldn't be helped." It's something that happened, and you let it go.

Mr. Metzler: I think that's the easiest way...just get on with things. What do you think we, as a society, should have learned from that experience? You

mentioned earlier that you heard some of the same comments from some people with regard to the Iraqis. Tell me what your thoughts are on that?

Mrs. Shiroma: Oh, I am absolutely against it. I would never, ever, want this to happen to any other American group of people.

Mr. Shiroma: I think the whole country has learned a lot. You won the battle, but we won the war.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me what you mean by that.

Mr. Shiroma: Prejudice and all that. Color doesn't mean anything now.

Mr. Metzler: Do you think the issue around prejudice and racial issues have gotten better, or are getting better in our country?

Mrs. Shiroma: Maybe more subtle.

Mr. Metzler: Still there, but just not as overt.

Mr. Shiroma: The prejudice part has gotten better, but other than that, there is always some country...the enemy...

Mr. Metzler: The human race always has something to have a war over.

Mrs. Shiroma: Right.

Mr. Metzler: Folks, I appreciate the time that you took to come back after you said you would.

Mrs. Shiroma: Thank you for listening.

Mr. Metzler: I think this would be one of the most interesting tapes that we have in our archives, and I mean that seriously. I'm not just being nice because it's the situation from an aspect that we don't hear very much about.

Mr. Shiroma: (Garbled.)

Mr. Metzler: Have either of you ever had the opportunity to go to Japan?

Mrs. Shiroma: Oh, yes.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me what your reaction was when you traveled to Japan.

Mrs. Shiroma: Okay, I'll tell you what mine was. We were there seventeen days the first time we went.

Mr. Metzler: And how long ago was this?

Mrs. Shiroma: 1984. And I said, "Hon, I'm more American. I can't relate to these castles, and another garden, and another temple. I'd rather go to Europe. That's where I wish we were."

Mr. Metzler: I guess you know when you reached that point that America was home.

Mrs. Shiroma: Exactly.

Mr. Shiroma: But for me, I wanted to go to Europe, because of everything you learned in school. But my folks were from Okinawa, both of them. So I wanted to go there...

Mrs. Shiroma: So we did go there last year.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about Okinawa. What was your reaction?

Mr. Shiroma: The people are nice, no prejudice. It was back when they had the...once every five years they have a reunion...I guess you'd call it a reunion. No reason or anything, just to be there. Nobody cares, just want to be there. From Cuba, Malta, or different countries.

Mr. Metzler: Okinawans could have gone ...

Mrs. Shiroma: Yes, every five years – there was even a couple there from Rhodesia.

Mr. Metzler: So they consider themselves Okinawans first and Japanese second?

Mr. Shiroma: Yes. Because first they are Okinawans and then the Chinese took over,
and then the U.S., then Japan.

Mr. Metzler: Occupied by the U. S. military.

Mr. Shiroma: Yes. The ladies in Okinawa live to be a hundred years old over there.

Mrs. Shiroma: In fact, these ladies were talking and they're saying they had gone to a
funeral, and they said, "Oh, poor thing, she was so young!" And
somebody said, "Well, how old was she." "Eighty-nine!"

Mr. Metzler: Is it something in their diet, or something.

Mr. Metzler: Thank you for spending the time. It will be probably a while before we'll
be able to get the transcript to you. I apologize.

Mrs. Shiroma: I understand. And I'll send you my father's book.

FINAL

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