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Interview with

ALAN TANIGUCHI

March 18, 1995

Place of Interview: San Antonio, Texas

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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and

University of North Texas Oral HIstory Collection

Alan Taniguchi

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello March 18, 1995

Place of Interview: San Antonio, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello, interviewing Alan Taniguchi for the University of North Texas Oral History Program and the Admiral Nimitz Museum. The interview is taking place on March 18, 1995, in San Antonio, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Taniguchi primarily in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was a Japanese-American internee at the Gila River Camp in Arizona during World War II.

Mr. Taniguchi, to begin this interview, just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. Tell me when you were born and where you were born.

Mr. Taniguchi: I was born on September 13, 1922, in Stockton, California.

Dr. Marcello: Tell me a little bit about your early education.

Mr. Taniguchi: I was brought up pretty much in a Japanese-speaking family. I guess that was my first

language, until I started going to elementary school in Brentwood, California. I went to high school there in Brentwood, at Liberty Union High School. I just got a reunion notice, so it is fresh on my mind. Then I started at the University of California at Berkeley in 1940. I tried to stick out another semester after Pearl Harbor, but that was a little tough, so I only did three semesters of work at UC-Berkeley.

Marcello: It was at that time, then, that you became a part of the internment program of the War Relocation Authority?

Taniguchi: Right.

Marcello: Let me back up and get some more details. Let's talk about your parents. Were they born in Japan, or were they born in this country?

Taniguchi: They both were born in Japan.

Marcello: When did they come to this country?

Taniguchi: Let's back up just a little. My grandfather came first, in 1906. He worked in California in the orchards and farms, and he brought his wife and his son, whom he had left in Japan, to the U.S. in 1914. Then, in 1921, my father went back to Japan to take a bride. I was the result of their union in 1922.

Marcello: Once in this country, what was your father's occupation?

Taniguchi: Farming.

Marcello: As an owner? As a renter? As a sharecropper? What do you know about the nature of this farming experience?

Taniguchi: As you know, there were alien land laws in California, so my father was able to purchase some acreage through a legal age Nisei. Our farm, when we left in the evacuation, was on our own land. In addition to that, my dad was leasing maybe another couple hundred acres, so his operation consisted of two hundred plus forty acres.

Marcello: What kind of crops were being grown on this acreage?

Taniguchi: There were some orchards. I recall some almond and walnut orchards. That's maybe on thirty or forty acres of it. The rest of it was truck farming. In terms of produce we grew tomatoes, celery, lettuce, strawberries, and so forth.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit more about your education from grades one through twelve. I'm assuming that during that period, you were essentially going to integrated schools, that is, there was a mixture of Anglo and Asian children, whether they were Japanese, Chinese, or whatever.

Taniguchi: Yes.

Marcello: What early experiences did you have with bigotry, for want of a better word, during your school years? Can

you relate any experiences that you possibly had?

Taniguchi: Individually, at the kids' level, I can't say that there was anything that evident.

Marcello: Let me come at it from this angle, then. Among your friends, those with whom you socialized, did you have both Anglo and Japanese friends, or were most of your friends mainly restricted to Japanese kids?

Taniguchi: I came from a smaller community where there were few Japanese, so I probably had more non-Japanese friends than I did Japanese friends, as far as at the school.

Marcello: Did you grow up mainly in Brentwood?

Taniguchi: Yes.

Marcello: What efforts were made within your family at that time to maintain the Japanese heritage, or, on the other hand, did they want to become 100 percent Americans and try as much as possible to get away from the Japanese heritage?

Taniguchi: There definitely was a Japanese language school established in the community. My mother was into a lot of flower arranging and that sort of thing. I think my father wanted me to take some martial arts courses, but we weren't a large enough community. I did involve myself in some kendo practice in Stockton, which was about thirty miles away.

Marcello: You mentioned the Japanese language school, so evidently there were enough Japanese families and

Japanese children in the area that the Japanese language school could be maintained.

Taniguchi: Yes, it was a large enough community to maintain Saturday classes, with one Japanese schoolteacher handling all levels. Maybe fifty families made up the community.

Marcello: What did the curriculum consist of in the Japanese language school? Was it strictly the teaching of the Japanese language, or was it also the Japanese cultural heritage?

Taniguchi: Only when it was attached with the language and the reading and writing and speaking of Japanese. That essentially was the main part of this Japanese school, because it was a scattered area, not like the city Japanese schools.

Marcello: Was there any emphasis upon patriotism, celebrating, say, the Japanese victories in China or Manchuria or anything like that?

Taniguchi: There was; there was. In fact, as we go on here, my father was not a WRA, or War Relocation Authority, detainee. He was a Justice Department internee. Therefore, we didn't evacuate as a family. My father went much earlier, like, the first part of February, before FDR's [President Franklin D. Roosevelt] executive order.

Marcello: Let me ask you this then. Was your father active in

organizations such as the Japanese-American Citizens League?

Taniguchi: The Japanese-American Citizens League, I personally don't consider that that one would be dangerous in the eyes of the United States officials.

Marcello: I think it was just the opposite. It was like a Chamber of Commerce organization.

Taniguchi: That's right. He was involved somewhat with the kind of patriotic stuff, vis-a-vis Japan's invasion into China.

Marcello: Admiral Togo's victory in the Russo-Japanese War, that sort of thing.

Taniguchi: That's right. I think there's an explanation to that. If you like, I want to give you a copy of about twenty pages that I have put together on my experiences.

Marcello: Sure. We can even add that to whatever you tell us today. If you have it, I'd love to have it.

Taniguchi: There is a whole history of the kind of things that led to internment. Eventually, after my father was taken by the Justice Department, at one time he had signed up his family for repatriation. He thought he had reached the end of the rope, as far as his adventure in the United States was concerned, because of the various kinds of barriers that he faced, such as alien land laws. He really couldn't become an American citizen until 1952.

Marcello: Getting back to the point that you made a moment ago about him being a Department of Justice detainee, I'm assuming, therefore, that the FBI or some other government organization had perhaps had their eye on his activities for some time, particularly as conditions between the two countries continued to get worse.

Taniguchi: Yes, I think that is true, whether it was a studied approach or not. I think they kind of skimmed off those people who appeared to be the leaders in the community: Japanese schoolteachers, Buddhist priests, etc. They were taken early on.

Marcello: As conditions between the United States and Japan worsened--and by this time you would have been late into high school and on into college--do you remember any family discussions or apprehension concerning what might happen if the two countries did come to blows? Can you remember any family discussions?

Taniguchi: Oh, yes, lots of them. I touch on that pretty well in my paper [presented at the Admiral Nimitz Museum Symposium]. Even on the first day after I returned from the semester at UC, our first conversations were pretty strong arguments about the matter with my father.

Marcello: Expand on that.

Taniguchi: I think, for one thing, that I told him it was

foolhardy for Japan to think about attacking the United States, and that in the long run technology and machines were going to overpower Japan. Those were probably the exact words that I used at the time in my discussions with Dad. So, all through the evacuation period, I got pretty far apart from my father. I resisted, as far as his intent to go back to Japan on the Gripsholm. See, I was a minor yet, so he had signed up the whole family. I caused a lot of trouble for him, too, among his peers, of all the people that were in the Justice Department internment group. For me to say, "Heck, no, I'm not going back to Japan" was a losing-face situation for him among his peers. It was a very traumatic situation for us.

Marcello: It's interesting that you mention that, but I think, to some extent, it's natural in a way, this tension between first generation and second generation. I think that happens in a great many immigrant groups, not only the Japanese-Americans, but Italian-Americans and others as well.

Taniguchi: I think that was really pronounced and exacerbated with a war that brought it together.

Marcello: You, of course, had been born in this country and had been educated in this country, and even though you were Japanese, there is no way you could avoid the American culture and everything around you.

Taniguchi: Exactly.

Marcello: So what you're saying, in effect, is that he seemed to be very pro-Japanese and sympathetic toward the Japanese and Japan in this coming showdown between the United States and Japan.

Taniguchi: Yes, that might go contrary to the arguments that Japanese nationals, or Nisei, Japanese-Americans, would have caused any trouble because of the war. That's kind of proven out by the fact that the Japanese in Hawaiian were left there. Another way to put it is that Japanese are law-abiding. Even in this situation, I think, as Mei Nakano [another speaker at the Admiral Nimitz Museum Symposium] said, "If somebody says you have to do this, we usually do [it]."

Marcello: Yes, she made that point just a couple of hours ago when I interviewed her. The idea was that if the government says, "This is what you must do," so, therefore, you do it. Obviously, Pearl Harbor must have been everybody's worst nightmare come true, relative to your family and so on. What was the reaction? Do you recall? Would you have been away at Berkeley at that time?

Taniguchi: Yes, I was at the university when I got the news.

Marcello: What was your reaction, if you can remember?

Taniguchi: I was staying at a boarding house. It was an all-

Nisei boarding house. The unusual thing about my being at Berkeley at the time was that we lived across from the Berkeley National Guard Armory. On Sunday mornings we had a ritual of reading the Sunday paper, after a late breakfast, on the front porch, right in front of the Berkeley National Guard Armory. When we heard the news, of course, we were dumbfounded in a way. Many of us wondered, "What the heck is next," as far as we were concerned. I don't think there was any great surprise, in terms of the kind of things that might happen to us. There was this tension. It wasn't just Pearl Harbor. There were tensions before that. We were kind of down-and-out then.

Late in the afternoon, we saw movement and activity at the armory. We saw barricades go up. Then, all of a sudden, on the radio we were told that we were under curfew now. Then, the following day--like some of Mei's comments [reference to a presentation made by Mei Nakano at the Admiral Nimitz Museum Symposium] on her train with the baby, going from the camp out, how self-conscious she felt--I went to Economics 1A the next morning at 8:00 to a 1,200 seat lecture room. I guess I could be excused for being a few minutes late, but the lecture had started. When I opened the door and walked in, even through the back door, I felt like the whole 1,200 other students

noticed me coming in and looked back at the door. That was the kind of feeling I had.

Marcello: How did Pearl Harbor affect the rest of your college career at this point, that is, up until the actual internment? How did things change for you at Berkeley, in terms of the attitude of fellow students and things of that nature?

Taniguchi: I didn't feel that, as a student, that much. You asked about certain kinds of bigotry. It might have happened back through the elementary and high schools, but I heard more than I actually experienced. There was an American Legion medal or something, and there was one teacher that was my advisor, who later told me, "You had the points to get it, but you were denied it. There was a big argument that really you had the grades to be the valedictorian, but they shoved you down to salutatorian." This kind of thing, which it later came to me.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. I should have picked up on this earlier. Was there an emphasis in your family that you had to excel in education?

Taniguchi: Yes.

Marcello: Not simply because it brought honor to the family, but also because of what it meant to excel in education in an American school.

Taniguchi: I think that pressure was always there. I might just

insert that I never saw the kind of bigotry, discrimination, and outright anti-Japanese feelings and treatment that my father did. Maybe because of that, and even to his dying day, he felt that we just have to do better than everybody else.

Marcello: This was the same feeling that Mei Nakano mentioned earlier, too.

Taniguchi: Is that right?

Marcello: Yes. You remained at Berkeley how long, then, after Pearl Harbor?

Taniguchi: We didn't finish a semester by Christmas. I came home for the Christmas holidays, and that's when our arguments around the potbelly stove went on. Of course, a lot of other Nisei came around, and I got involved in talking with them as well. It was that kind of Christmas break. I didn't know whether I was going to go back or not, but I did go back to finish the semester, which ended toward the end of January, if I recall.

Marcello: You did finish that semester?

Taniguchi: Yes, I did finish that semester.

Marcello: The semester's over, so I assume you came home again at that point.

Taniguchi: Yes.

Marcello: At this point, we're almost to the stage where we can talk about the executive order establishing the War

Relocation Authority. Where were you and how did you receive the news that the evacuation was to occur?

Taniguchi: You know, I can't remember whether I went back to school after the semester ended. Oh, I know what it was. I did go back for the spring semester. Then I got word that my father was taken in the first part of February. That's when I came back home, and I did not go back to Berkeley.

Marcello: So you, in essence, dropped out. You had enrolled for that next semester.

Taniguchi: Right.

Marcello: But you dropped out and came home. What was the situation at home, when you got there?

Taniguchi: I was only thirty miles away, and I drove back. The FBI was there. The local constable was there. There was a deputy and a justice of the peace from Brentwood. The constable and the justice of the peace were longtime friends of the family. The FBI and the deputy, who was the FBI's deputy, were not. I came back when they were still going around searching through the house.

Marcello: Did they find anything?

Taniguchi: Yes, they did. The next day's paper said there was an armory at the Taniguchi residence. It amounted to my hunting rifles. My father had a shotgun. There was a camera. They said there was a short-wave radio, but

it was the short-wave console radio that used to sit in the living room. It was no special short-wave radio. And we had a couple of flashlights. That came out on the news as an arsenal.

But they were going through the rooms, and when I arrived this deputy approached me. It was noon. It was lunchtime. My mother had set out lunch. A Japanese family still ate Japanese food, so there were chopsticks and rice and so forth on the table. The deputy approached me and said that he, himself, came from Ireland when he was six years old, and he was 100 percent Americanized. "Here you are, eating rice with chopsticks. You'll never get Americanized." He was kind of nasty about it. There was a fellow who boarded at our house. He was a Nisei, much older than I was. He jumped up and said, "Goddamn it, you still eat your Irish potatoes!" The guy drew his gun. At that time, the FBI agent was on top of him and stopped the whole situation. That was my first reception at home, my first encounter with the law, after Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: I meant to ask this earlier, and I neglected to do so. How many siblings did you have?

Taniguchi: I had one brother.

Marcello: Older or younger?

Taniguchi: Younger, four years younger.

Marcello: So was he at home while all this was going on, also?

Taniguchi: Yes.

Marcello: So they take your father away at that point?

Taniguchi: Right.

Marcello: What was your reaction, and that of your mother and brother?

Taniguchi: We were expecting it because by the first part of February, this was a pattern that was going on all over California. The leaders were being taken. In fact, my father's suitcase was packed, so that was no big deal, except for the FBI. I think this was later.

I'll go on to the next one. They took him to Stockton, and they had him in the San Joaquin County Jail. But the FBI person knew a lot of Japanese families in Stockton, and he was a friend of my father's cousin. My father's cousin even found out before a lot of other people, because he heard it from the FBI agent. So he called us--my father's cousin called us--and told us where he was going to be and so forth.

I think Dad was in jail there a couple of days, but apparently the county jail was really a bad place. So, when my father's cousin went to see him, I guess he asked the FBI agent whether he could do something about moving him to a better environment. Apparently, the FBI agent decided immediately to just transfer my

father early from there to Sharpe's Park, which is the immigration center in San Francisco. That is the successor to Angel Island, which is the Ellis Island of the West Coast. San Francisco's here; we lived here; Stockton was over here [gestures].

Marcello: So they're kind of like in a row?

Taniguchi: Yes. So, in order to go to San Francisco, you had to go by Brentwood again. The agent brought my father by the house on the way from Stockton to Sharpe's Park to visit with us for a while. While they were doing that, he [the agent] came and took me for a walk around the farm and told me that he had told my mother that my father would be back shortly. He wanted me to know that he didn't think he would be back shortly, that all of a sudden I was going to be kind of head of the family for a while. He warned me of that. I appreciated that. I had a lot of respect for this agent. But that's the way it was, up to that point.

Marcello: So what happens next?

Taniguchi: Next comes the executive order. When we heard that, the only thing we could do was to start out trying to prepare for evacuation.

[Tape 1, Side 2]

Marcello: The order has come down. You're preparing for the evacuation. Let me break in with a question. What's going to happen to your land? Some you leased, but

some you owned. You have a house, a home, and all that sort of thing.

Taniguchi: Crops in the field.

Marcello: What's going to happen to all this?

Taniguchi: That was a pretty tough thing for a nineteen-year-old to assume. I had my brother to help me. The first thing we did was to round up all the farm equipment that was scattered around the different pieces of leased land. Then my brother got hurt in the process, because he was fourteen or fifteen years old. So he was laid up until we left. So I was by myself.

The worst thing in my recollection, in the experience of this whole thing, was the period in which I was trying to sort out things and get ready to evacuate. The so-called scavengers, the opportunists, started coming around.

Marcello: This was going to be my next question. Who's going to do you a "favor" and take this land and property off your hands?

Taniguchi: I did as much as I could to sell some things. My uncle was farming separately. I had him to consult with. He had to worry about his own things. Cars, we sold. Kitchen household stuff, we sold. Crops, I just decided, "Whoever comes along, I'm going to just sell them to him for whatever we can realize out of it." Some of them may have been fairly valuable cash

crops. I don't know. I can't recall how big the celery was or how big [this] was or [that] was. It wore me out, my having to deal with this situation, in terms of people who were offering us five dollars for the refrigerator and a hundred dollars for your car.

Marcello: It was literally a "fire sale" that was being conducted here.

Taniguchi: Yes, except that after a few days of that, I decided, "I'm not going to do this." Then some Caucasian friends suggested, "Maybe you're going to be back. You don't know when you're going to be back. You ought to store this stuff or do something like that. Don't give it away." There again, there were some who gave me good advice, but as the days closed in, they came back and offered me some ridiculous prices for things.

At one point, I said to my uncle, "Isn't there an Italian farmer up in the foothills who comes often to visit with my father? Maybe he'd like to expand his operation into this area and assume some of this stuff." What happened was, I made a lease with this farmer that he would take over the whole operation: the house, the equipment, the crops, if there were any to save, to take them to maturation. All I would ask for is that he kept up the property and paid the taxes on it. That was the kind of arrangement that I had

made.

Of course, that had a sad ending, too. The papers drawn up with him put the time period as the end of the duration, which was one year after the end of the war. So when we went back to assume our stuff, to try and get started again, he wouldn't give it back to us. So we had to buy it back from him, a year's lease from him. That was just reminding me again of the stuff that I was dealing with before we evacuated.

Marcello: Let me go back, because I don't understand this part. You work out this agreement, and he will keep up the land and pay the taxes for the privilege of cultivating this land for the duration? The duration meaning what? The end of the internment?

Taniguchi: No, the end of the war.

Marcello: The end of the war.

Taniguchi: Technically, it turns out that the duration, the end of the war, was not the end of the fighting.

Marcello: It was when the peace treaty was signed?

Taniguchi: Whatever it was, right. Anyway, it was later.

Marcello: As I recall, it was four, five, or six years after the end of the war.

Taniguchi: No, this was a one-year slip somehow. I'm not sure. Anyway, we had to pay the last amount of money that was left from before the war to buy back the right to use our own land.

Marcello: Well, at least you did get it back.

Taniguchi: Yes, we got it back.

Marcello: Unlike a lot of Japanese-Americans who didn't.

Taniguchi: See, because of the alien land laws, my father bought this land in another party's name, so the land was intact. Upon return, after the camps were closed, someone mentioned that sentiments were not good yet. There were sons being killed and all that sort of thing. We weren't very well-received back to Brentwood, shall we say. For farming, the problem of laborers to harvest was a disaster. People had been working in the defense plants and so forth and doing well, so people to work on the farm were not available. I used to even recruit some of my classmates at Berkeley. I returned to Berkeley after the war. I used to bring some friends from Berkeley over the weekend to help harvest. That's why my father's return for that one year to farm in California came to an end. He moved to Texas. That's why I'm in Texas.

Marcello: The process of liquidation or transferring is taking place preliminary to this move. Let's assume that it's time to move. What do you take with you?

Taniguchi: Sixty pounds of baggage per person.

Marcello: Consisting of?

Taniguchi: Mostly clothing.

Marcello: How about kitchenware?

Taniguchi: No, none of that. In fact, there were enough precedents of other communities moving before we were moving that the word got around. The best way to pack up your stuff efficiently, to get the most into sixty pounds, was to sew duffel bags. So my mother sewed three duffel bags. The pattern and color of those bags remains vivid with me because they were my brother's and my bedspreads, the base of them. It was a draw string duffel bag, three of them--three bags.

Marcello: It must have been huge.

Taniguchi: Yes, it was huge. Clothes are bulky. Of course, we didn't know where the hell we were going. We thought that for a cold climate we needed more clothes. We might need more warm blankets or something. So blankets, pillows, and sheets did go in there. So that's why it was bulky.

Marcello: Where was the central meeting place or gathering place?

Taniguchi: The gathering place was a little town in the general community we lived in. Brentwood was one; Byron was another; Oakley, Antioch, and that area. Byron became the point of departure. That's where we had to go at a given time and a given day. Our friends drove us there.

Marcello: How was your mother taking all this: the fact that

she was separated from her husband, that she was leaving her home?

Taniguchi: I think my mother probably took it the worst of all. I may have put her through even more of a trauma, because of the knocking of heads I'd done with my father over a period of time, until we went back. My brother, as I told you, hurt himself just a week before evacuation day. He was bedridden, so she had to look after him as well. So she had a tough time.

Marcello: Where do you go from this central location point, which was at Byron?

Taniguchi: At Byron we were loaded into busses, and we went to Turlock, which was a couple hours drive.

Marcello: What happens there?

Taniguchi: Turlock County Fairgrounds. Mei may have mentioned that all the assembly centers in California were either racetracks or county fairgrounds.

Marcello: Yes, she went to Santa Anita.

Taniguchi: Mainly because you could enclose the grand bleachers and the grandstands. So that's where we went. Of course, a few days prior to this evacuation day was hectic for everyone. If I recall right, I went to the assigned room, and there was a cot and a straw mattress in the corner. I laid those out, and the first thing I did was to sleep for twenty hours.

Marcello: What else can you tell me about your living quarters?

Were all three of you together here?

Taniguchi: Yes. I don't remember that situation as much as I do the Gila Relocation Camp.

Marcello: How long were you here at Turlock altogether?

Taniguchi: About three or four months, maybe five months.

Marcello: What did you during that time there? How did you occupy your time, I guess is what I'm saying?

Taniguchi: Recreation is one thing. Maybe some of my training that I've pursued subsequently depends on that kind of experience. There was kind of a camp government that had to be established. There had to be postal clerks; there had to be mess hall cooks; there had to be all sorts of people. I ended up, having been in architectural school for a few semesters, in the sign painting department. There were lots of signs to paint. In a way, the camp's government kind of evolved as the needs arose.

Marcello: Who was responsible for organizing this camp internally? The inmates, if you may use that word, or were there camp authorities who organized it?

Taniguchi: There was not a War Relocation Authority yet, at that time.

Marcello: You were essentially under the military here?

Taniguchi: Yes, but there were camp directors assigned from the civil service or something like that. There was a skeleton staff that administered this place. But the

call for help went out pretty fast to nurses and doctors to man the clinic. We seemed to just fall into place, as the needs arose. Some people didn't work ever, for the rest of their stay in incarceration. At each place, at Turlock as well as in Gila, we were in there as early volunteers to do whatever was needed.

Marcello: How about your mother? How did she occupy her time during this period, this four-month period, here at Turlock?

Taniguchi: At Turlock, I don't think she did much at all. I think she was just keeping our spirits high, or she did whatever she could, laundry and so forth.

Marcello: In the meantime, had you had any contact in any way with your father through mail or anything of that nature?

Taniguchi: Yes, some, but they moved the Justice Department internees around a lot. I think he went from Sharpe's Park to Missoula or Bismarck, one of those places up north. That was pretty temporary. He came back to Santa Fe, then to Lordsburg, back to Santa Fe, and then the Crystal City Camp was established, which was the Immigration and Naturalization Service/Justice Department Camp. They created the Crystal City Camp for the family reunion camp.

Marcello: Crystal City, Texas?

Taniguchi: Yes, that's right. That was established, and when my father was moved there, my mother and brother were allowed to go and join him. Those mothers and children came from all the camps around the country. That's where, I guess, my mother's trauma even kind of amplified when I said, "No, I'm not going." So I remained at Gila until I could find something else that I might do. So my brother and my mother left Gila Camp to join my father at Crystal City.

Marcello: Why did you not want to go to Crystal City?

Taniguchi: I just felt that was not for me. It all started with arguments back then. As I told you, I think he had already signed me up to repatriate on the Gripsholm. That was not for me. So it was a kind of a separation. At that time, I did not know what that meant. I didn't know whether I was going to see my mother and brother again or see my father again. It was that kind of an unknown situation on the part of everybody. I happened to remain.

There was another party. There was one man that was picked up at the same time as my father, a day or two after. His wife was all by herself, so somehow we just took her in as part of our family. She even had the same registration number and all.

So I stayed back in Gila River, until I heard from some of the places I was planning to go,

including an application to the University of Texas. I had a hard time getting clearance because my father was under another jurisdiction. Even when I tried to volunteer for the service, I was still 4-C.

Marcello: Let's back up to Turlock again. You were there about four months. What were your living quarters like? Describe what they were like here at Turlock. You mentioned that you had the cot and the mattress.

Taniguchi: What our unit [building] was--and I don't recall the size of it--such that four of us could fit in there. That's all about it was. We knew this was pretty temporary, so we didn't go to any trouble to do much with the place.

Marcello: What might be the specifications of this area?

Taniguchi: I'd say it might have been sixteen-by-sixteen or sixteen-by-twenty feet.

Marcello: What kind of privacy did it have?

Taniguchi: Maybe we had more privacy there than in the final camp. We got one of those horse stalls, is what it amounted to. What they did was, they went in and put asphalt paving down, because that would be the fastest way to put a floor down. So when I told you about my plopping down on this cot, when I woke up, the bed legs were sunken in, and I was sitting on the floor (laughter).

Marcello: Describe the move from Turlock to the Gila River Camp

in Arizona. How does this come about?

Taniguchi: I think it was predetermined by blocks. I think we had sixty-six blocks in our camp. I think we were being moved as facilities were being finished at Gila River. Let's say it was a trainload. Maybe that was the measurement of what could go at one time. We were put into busses again and taken to the railroad spur in Turlock and loaded onto a slow train. Some people said we had to keep our shades down, but I don't remember that. They said we were blacked out in the car, but I don't remember that. It took several days, because it was wartime, and the rails were busy. Priority stuff went by, but we were always sidetracked somewhere. Then we arrived at a railroad spur in a place called Sacaton or Casa Grande. Maybe it was at Casa Grande where the siding was, because there was no town there. Then we were loaded onto trucks, GI trucks, and guarded and taken into the camp.

Marcello: How was the military treating you all along the line, whether it's at Turlock or on this trip? Are they simply doing their job, or are they harassing you in any way, or are they more or less indifferent?

Taniguchi: I think they were just indifferent. I think they were doing their job.

Marcello: You get to the Gila River Camp. Let's suppose you and I are going to take a tour of this area. First of

all, describe what the terrain is like outside the camp.

Taniguchi: It's desert, with lots of Saguaro cactus. I guess the enclosure was already there.

Marcello: What did the enclosure look like?

Taniguchi: The enclosure was a twelve-foot barbed-wire fence, with enough strands to keep you from going through.

Marcello: How about guard towers?

Taniguchi: Yes, guard towers were maybe a hundred feet apart. Guards were up on top.

Marcello: Armed, I assume.

Taniguchi: Yes, there were machine guns up there.

Marcello: They did have machine guns. I was wondering in my mind whether we were talking about men with rifles or with machine guns.

Taniguchi: I think they were machine guns, as I recall. Of course, there was one entry point to the camp. I think, eventually, the MP's [Military Police] were garrisoned there, but I don't remember what configuration.

Marcello: There was some sort of a guard shack right there at the entrance.

Taniguchi: Right. Then there was another camp, Gila Canal, which made it Gila River One and Two. Gila River One was the larger one, or should I say the Gila River Two was the larger one? The first one that filled up was less

than half-size, 5,000. That was filled up. There was some communication between the two camps because they were five miles apart, but you had to have a pass to go from one to the other.

Marcello: You were in Gila River One?

Taniguchi: Two.

Marcello: You were in Gila River Two. Let's suppose we're inside the camp now. Describe what the barracks look like, first from the exterior and then on the interior--the typical barracks where you lived.

Taniguchi: The typical barracks was twenty feet wide and 120 feet long. They were divided into twenty-by-twenty modules. They were on piers just stuck in the ground, quickly built, so the floors weren't very tight. I think in the Arizona camps, at least, the exteriors were white rather than just the tarpaper black of the northern camps.

Marcello: Was it a wooden frame building?

Taniguchi: Yes, it was an all-wood frame building. The modules were twenty-by-twenty, and they had gabled roofs, one gable all the way through.

Marcello: Exposed beams, I suspect.

Taniguchi: Oh, yes, everything open. Partitions for the modules only went up to plate height, so you had that triangular opening over to the next apartment. Four of us occupied the twenty-by-twenty unit of four

hundred square feet.

Marcello: How many of you were there?

Taniguchi: Four, including that lady that was with us.

Marcello: I see.

Taniguchi: My brother, my mother, myself, and this lady.

Marcello: What kind of entry would there be to this module?

Taniguchi: Our module was on the end, so we had a door on the end. The others, between the end units, had doors to the broad side of the barracks. It had, like, three steps up to it because the floor was elevated off the ground.

Marcello: Did each module have an outside door?

Taniguchi: Yes.

Marcello: What might you find in each one of these modules?

Taniguchi: On the inside of the modules, the studs were all exposed. You had just a board floor and a board exterior wall. For the partitions between the units, I believe they had gypsum [dry wall] board on both sides, and open above. This camp, as I mentioned earlier, was still under construction, so we didn't hesitate in trying to rummage some stuff to do a lot of improvising by ourselves inside.

Marcello: What did you do? You used your early training in architecture (chuckle)?

Taniguchi: We did some very innovative kinds of things. Somehow or another, the sheets and bedspreads became kind of

screens between posts and what-have-you.

Marcello: This would be within your individual module?

Taniguchi: Yes, so we would have sleeping cubicles.

Marcello: What did you have in there besides a cot? Obviously, you didn't have any furniture, as we think of furniture.

Taniguchi: There was an oil-burning stove, a space heater.

Marcello: I know what you mean.

Taniguchi: That was it, except for the cots and mattresses that were already stacked in there when we arrived.

Marcello: Describe the mess facilities.

Taniguchi: The mess was central. I'm trying to think how many barracks there were in a block. I think there were six barracks to a block, with three here, three there, and then the latrine [gestures]. One of the corner ones was a double barracks, which became the mess hall.

Marcello: So each block would have its own mess hall.

Taniguchi: That's right.

Marcello: I'm assuming there would be common tables and so on. Cafeteria line?

Taniguchi: No, I think the girls were waiting in there, so I don't remember a cafeteria line. I think you just went in the mess hall and sat at a barbecue-type bench seat.

[Tape 2, Side 1]

Marcello: You were discussing the quality of food when the tape ran out, so go ahead and pick up the story at that point.

Taniguchi: Do you want this more or less personalized?

Marcello: Sure.

Taniguchi: We were one of the first arrivals at the Number Two Camp. They were needing a lot of volunteers for distributing food staples, ice, and milk. Ice was very much in demand in the Arizona desert, and this was August or September, if I recall. So the bunch from Brentwood--we were all together at the time--we kind of volunteered to take on all that. We found the best mess halls, so we ate well (laughter). Every mess hall got the same stuff. I think the quality of food varied from mess hall to mess hall, depending of the creativity of the cooks there. We knew which ones were better ones, so we ate fairly well. Ice and milk were necessities, especially with kids that needed the milk. Of course, everybody needed the ice. That was our means of getting fed well. We were popular, very much, with the mess hall crews (chuckle).

Marcello: What other kinds of jobs or assignments did people have in the camps? Obviously, there would be people to run the mess halls. There would be people like yourself and others who were distributing the food. What were some of the other jobs that were necessary

to keep the camp running?

Taniguchi: I think that kind of evolved. I was temporarily doing this, but eventually I ended up in the public works department.

Marcello: Doing what?

Taniguchi: Doing drawings, layouts for converting barracks into classrooms, all that sort of thing. Then there were farmers that started farming. We even had a hog farm and all that, eventually, because it was possible in that climate. The land was as rich as you can get it, if you can irrigate it, and we had a well large enough to do that.

Marcello: Plus, I'm sure you had people there who had an agricultural background.

Taniguchi: That's right. We had schoolteachers, postmen, security, and others. Eventually, I think, there was a private outfit that set up a camouflage netting factory near the camp, and people could work there if they chose. It meant a lot more money.

Marcello: What kind of wages did you make working in the public works department?

Taniguchi: I managed to get nineteen dollars a month. I think there was some wrong numbers thrown out today. I think Mei threw out some wrong numbers.

Marcello: Yes, she mentioned sixteen and nineteen dollars to me. Nineteen dollars meant the highest paid jobs.

Taniguchi: Sixteen and nineteen, that's right.

Marcello: I assume that some sort of an educational system or program was also established for those of school age.

Taniguchi: Yes, through high school.

Marcello: Did you have enough Japanese in the camps to be teachers, or did they have to bring in outsiders?

Taniguchi: They brought them in, and the American Friends Society was a great, big piece of the evacuation infrastructure.

Marcello: At this particular camp or all over?

Taniguchi: All over.

Marcello: Interesting. I didn't know that.

Taniguchi: The public works director was an architect from Pasadena. He was a conscientious objector. I worked under him. There were teachers, but a lot of the teachers came from within. There were enough, maybe not certified, who were able to teach.

Marcello: So, in one sense, life goes on, and you make the best of it with what you have.

Taniguchi: That's right. I think I stated in my paper that even private enterprise sprung up.

Marcello: Such as?

Taniguchi: Such as barbers. They'd have a chair outside on the patio. The "oldest profession" [prostitution] was around, too (laughter). There was a lot of that going on.

Marcello: Maybe there's a transition here from the world's oldest profession to my next question. What sources of recreation were available in the camp (laughter)?

Taniguchi: We played a lot of sports with teams between blocks. Blocks were big enough to field a team, I think. Maybe sometimes you had to combine some blocks, but we played a lot of sports. There was a baseball league. There a touch football league and a basketball league and so forth. Then there were, for the older men, hobby shops. There was a tremendous amount of crafts being done in the camps, not only in this one, but throughout the system of ten camps, using whatever was the native material. I noticed there were some fancy sculpture items that were created in the Arkansas camps, from those knobs of the cyprus trees. In Gila there was some almost fossilized wood that you could dig up. They called it ironwood, and they used to make lamp stands, canes, and that sort of thing. Some very nice things were made.

Marcello: Were these for one's own home furnishings or to occupy time, or was this done commercially, also?

Taniguchi: Not commercially. It think it was done more as a hobby. The lady folks did a lot of sewing and knitting. They even had flower arrangement classes. There were a variety of things that they carried on into the camp from their previous communities.

Marcello: Do you find that, generally speaking, there was a conscientious effort made to be 110 percent Americans in these camps?

Taniguchi: By whom?

Marcello: By the people inside, by the Japanese.

Taniguchi: Oh, no. Sometimes it's hard to separate people who should have been picked up by the FBI or not. That was pretty arbitrary. People that I described, like my father, were very nationalistic at the time. There were a lot of those in the Gila Camps as well.

Marcello: They were in the camp, and they made no effort to demonstrate 110 percent Americanism.

Taniguchi: No.

Marcello: How about organizations like the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and so on? Did they exist?

Taniguchi: Yes, they existed. I think, among the Nisei, among the American-born, those who went to the public schools back there still had a pretty good patriotism in terms of American values.

Marcello: There are those generational differences and tensions that we talked about earlier that were still there.

Taniguchi: That's right. Among the Issei in the camp, there were lots of Japanese nationalistic types.

Marcello: What was your own attitude about being in this camp? Obviously, you would have liked to have been on the outside. As you look back, were your feelings ones of

resentment or resignation? How would you describe your own feelings?

Taniguchi: I think that there was a kind of resentment. It was more not the environment that I was in there, physical or otherwise, but what this evacuation process made us go through. I explained the emotional kinds of things. My mother and I, every night in the pre-evacuation days, all we could do was have a sob session.

Marcello: I should have probably mentioned this way back at the beginning of the interview. Was there any kind of processing that took place? In other words, did you have identification numbers or things like that? Were you fingerprinted?

Taniguchi: Yes, we were given a number, and to this day I think I remember it.

Marcello: What is it?

Taniguchi: It was 7434 or something like that. That was given to us in Byron. Either that or we went to Byron to pick it up before we went.

Marcello: And it stayed with you all the way through.

Taniguchi: That's right. The number was stenciled on the duffel bags. Everything was stenciled with that number.

Marcello: I do know that, at one point in the internment camp experience, there was an attempt made to have the Issei renounce their Japanese citizenship. Do you

remember that occurring?

Taniguchi: I don't remember it as being just that, but there was a loyalty oath situation.

Marcello: I guess what I'm thinking is, if they renounced their citizenship, they would be citizens of no country. They couldn't be Americans.

Taniguchi: That's right.

Marcello: Do you remember that occurring and what the reaction was?

Taniguchi: No, I don't think the Issei had to renounce their Japanese citizenship, because there was no alternative to that situation. But the Nisei were given a loyalty oath. As I recall, the two principal ones were, "Would you bear arms against Japan?" and "Would you declare your loyalty to the U.S.?" It was a stupid questionnaire and a loyalty oath request at the time. They created a bunch of confusion and dissension between family members.

Marcello: Which then leads into my next topic. You mentioned in one point during the interview that you volunteered for the military.

Taniguchi: This I did after I left the camp.

Marcello: How about while you were in this camp? Did the military come around looking for volunteers for the service?

Taniguchi: Oh, yes. There was an order that allowed for

Japanese-Americans to volunteer, and then later on, some were drafted. I'm trying to think when that was.

Marcello: I know that out of the camps they formed a couple of the regimental combat teams, which were sent to Europe.

Taniguchi: That's right, yes. The 442nd [Regimental Combat Team which consisted of Japanese-American troops] was formed out of the camps.

Marcello: I think it saw duty mainly in Italy, did it not? Maybe in southern France, also.

Taniguchi: Yes, in Italy and in France.

Marcello: When did you leave the Gila River Camp?

Taniguchi: I left the Gila River Camp on the first week of 1944.

Marcello: How did that come about? What was behind the decision to leave?

Taniguchi: My family was already gone.

Marcello: They had already left that camp.

Taniguchi: I had intended to leave earlier than 1944. I think they left in March or April of 1943 to join my father. But, as I mentioned, some of my things weren't working out, because everytime I applied to a university, they'd come back and say, "No, we can't clear you for the university." Eventually, they gave me a clearance to relocate out. So I followed a couple of my friends who had relocated to Detroit, and I left the camp in the first of 1944 for Detroit.

Marcello: Is this kind of what we called the resettlement process?

Taniguchi: Yes.

Marcello: Did you have to have  sponsor or something like that when you went to Detroit? By sponsor, I mean at least a job.

Taniguchi: I think in my case there was a technical college there in Detroit, and I got accepted to that, although I didn't intend to totally go to school. So I went out there, and I got a job. I went to night school.

Marcello: When you left the camp, when they resettled you, they weren't going to resettle you west.

Taniguchi: No, we couldn't go into the west.

Marcello: You went east.

Taniguchi: That's right, outside of the six western states.

Marcello: So what happens when you get to Detroit?

Taniguchi: Detroit was a boomtown during the war. Detroit had open arms for Nisei to come there. I never saw so many bus drivers and streetcar drivers who were Nisei anywhere in the world other than in Japan. I took a civil service test, and I qualified for a drafting job. So I went to work for the city of Detroit in the Public Lighting Commission.

Marcello: How long did you do that?

Taniguchi: I did that until I left in January of 1946.

Marcello: Was it during this period that you volunteered for the

service?

Taniguchi: Probably the early part of my stay in Detroit.

Marcello: How did that turn out? What happened?

Taniguchi: They would not look at me any other way than the 4-C. That was because apparently we had to be cleared of the suspicions in order to be taken into the service. I suppose our Selective Service Boards had our records. I know that one of the statements that came up was, "Because your father is under the jurisdiction of the FBI, you're not desired." Where that information came together, I don't recall.

Marcello: When do you get reunited with your family?

Taniguchi: Father had signed up for the Gripsholm. The exchange was going to come pretty soon. My mother was totally broken down about the situation of my staying and the rest of the family leaving. On the Fourth of July, 1944, I came to San Antonio, and I went to Crystal City. I had pre-arranged, before coming down, with the director of the Crystal City Camp, that I wanted to visit my folks. I told them why I wanted to come down. I wanted to change my father's mind about the exchange. The other alternative was, "if I can't change his mind, I may want your help to take my brother from there back with me to Detroit."

Maybe that was the second most traumatic meeting I ever encountered. O'Rourke, the camp director,

said, "We usually do not let visitors inside the camp, but we know what you're here for, and I want you to go in and stay overnight with your parents."

Marcello: Describe the meeting with your father and mother.

Taniguchi: We were glad to see each other and all, but the worst thing I encountered was that my father's peers came as a delegation to really chew me out.

Marcello: You were the disobedient son.

Taniguchi: That's right. Of course, that in itself was kind of face-losing for my father, that he didn't have that control over a son. It ended up pretty sad as I left, but I finally got him to say that my brother could come with me later on. I had written to my brother. Finally, I was able to convince everybody that my brother could join me. I guess what happens now is a thing that remained between my father and me for a long time, until he died. There was this tension. But because of that, my father did not repatriate, and the family stayed. That's almost kind of the end of the story.

Marcello: They stayed in Texas?

Taniguchi: We went back to California.

Marcello: To clear up the land business?

Taniguchi: That's right, and he farmed one year. He found that the sentiment wasn't quite ready, and the labor situation was bad. While he was in Crystal City,

Texas, because of his tomato-growing expertise from California, the Texas A & M [University] Experiment Station in Eagle Pass, which is just the next town, asked the camp to loan my father to them for some of his tomato experiments. They were always trying to develop a tomato that was suited for the heat and this sort of thing. So my father got to know some of the staff at the Experiment Station. Through them, he learned about the lower Rio Grande Valley. When I came down from Detroit, when he was released, one thing he wanted was for me to drive him down to the Valley to see what the heck was down there. After seeing that, we drove back to California and got the farm back. He tried one season, one year, of that. He said, "I'm through here. I'm going to Texas, the Rio Grande Valley." That's how we got down to Texas.

Marcello: Did he reestablish himself in farming in the Rio Grande Valley?

Taniguchi: Yes. He established himself to a point where he felt he could retire. My mother and my father moved to Austin, and they both passed away there, after several years of being in Austin.

Marcello: Were those last years fairly happy for them?

Taniguchi: Yes. I think what happened is that my father was very nationalistic generally. At some point, he totally flip-flopped and really became a real "peacenik." My

wife would call him "the first hippie in Texas," as far as that goes. Then he built the garden in Austin, the Japanese Garden, with his own hands. He looked at that as a way of looking at life through gardens, rather than through wars perhaps. So they had a fairly good life after they moved to Texas.

Marcello: Just for the record, then, you obviously continued your formal higher education. Where did you finish your bachelor's degree?

Taniguchi: I went back to California.

Marcello: You got your bachelor's at Berkeley in architecture?

Taniguchi: Right.

Marcello: Where did you go from there?

Taniguchi: The deluge of GI's was coming back to colleges in the States on the GI Bill. While I was in Detroit, as I told you, I went to night school. I developed quite a few extra hours, and when I went back to Berkeley, things were crowded. The dean called me in one day and said, "You've got enough hours to graduate." So I graduated with a B.A., a four-year degree, but I think I had enough hours to get much more, 170 or 180 hours, by the time I finished my design studios there. I was short on design because I had built up so many hours elsewhere that they told me to just graduate. They graduated me in 1949. I never did go on to graduate school.

Marcello: For the record, then, you became the dean of the College of Architecture at UT [University of Texas at Austin]?

Taniguchi: Right.

Marcello: Before that, you were at Rice?

Taniguchi: No, I went from UT to Rice.

Marcello: And you held a similar position there, is that correct?

Taniguchi: Right.

Marcello: Are you still there, or are you retired?

Taniguchi: I'm retired from academia, but I still maintain a practice. They may have told you that I have designed the addition to the Nimitz Museum. My son is an architect, and he's going to be carrying on. So I have a little more time to waste.

Marcello: That, I think, is a fitting end to this interview, Mr. Taniguchi. A Japanese-American who was put into one of the War Relocation Camps ends up designing the addition that goes onto the Nimitz Museum. What irony!

Taniguchi: That's right. I don't think that was planned. I think it happened that I went through the usual process of procurement by the state. It was a competitive thing, and I ended up with that job.

Marcello: Well, I think that's a good place to end this interview, and I want to thank you very much for your

time.