

Interviewee: Daniel H. Watanabe  
Interviewers: Christopher Chan, Anthony Rogers  
Date/Time of Interview:  
Transcribed by: Christopher Chan  
Audio Track Time: 1:25:06

**Background:**

Daniel H. Watanabe was born in Los Angeles in 1929. At age six, his family brought him back to Japan where he was brought up, in the suburbs of Tokyo, during the Second World War. With the American occupation, Watanabe joined the U.S. military and worked as a bilingual specialist with American intelligence, throughout the Korean War. After the war, he returned to the States to finish his education and PhD in Microbiology. He later moved with his lab to Houston's Baylor College of Medicine and has stayed ever since. Today, he continues to teach as a professor at the Houston Community College.

**Setting:**

The interview focuses on Dr. Watanabe's personal experiences between his childhood in war-time Japan, and post-graduate academia in the United States. The interview was conducted in the Fondren Library at Rice University. Dr. Watanabe brought along with him copies of the local Japanese newspaper, as well as a large copy of historical Japanese Texan genealogies.

**Interview Transcript:**

**Key:**

Daniel Watanabe (**DW**)

Christopher Chan (**CC**)

Anthony Rogers (**AR**)

AR: This is Anthony Rogers

CC: And Chris Chan

AR: And we're from Rice University with the Houston Asian American Archive Project, and we're here today with Dr. Daniel Watanabe. So could you start off telling us where you were born?

DW: I was born in Los Angeles, and I'll give you the age—date of birth was 1929, so that makes me 81 years old. I lived in Los Angeles until I was six years old. I went to Japan with my parents, because my father had wanted to start a business—my father was a Japanese national. My mother was a second generation

Japanese American. And this was, you know, before the days before there were any war clouds mov—Impending, but upon arriving in Japan, and within a matter of a few years, the war starts, so we were sort of there during the war period. I was just a kid so my experience was very brief, but after that, after the war ended, I finished high school, and immediately, since I was—I was going to return to the U.S., however, I would've been drafted since I was that age, so I opted to enlist in the U.S. civilian army, and served in the U.S. uh occupation troops for three and a half years, during which time I did a lot of intelligence work for general headquarters—that's just what they called MacArthur's headquarters, as an interpreter and bilingual specialist. When the Korean War started, we were also dispatched to Korea to interrogate Koreans, prisoners of war, because they spoke Japanese. So I'd spent a year in the uh war zone. Then, I came back to the U.S. and then since then, I went to college, et cetera. So I came back in the '51 or '52—somewhere about that time. Then, I've been here ever—ever since, going to school, graduate school, and all that.

What brought me to Texas, is that I was a faculty at uni—the medical college in New York City, and our principal, an investigator at the New York Medical College, transferred his grant and research team to Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, and all the staff researchers came with him, and I was one of them. That's the reason I came to Houston, and I've been here ever since.

AR: Could you explain what it was like moving from the United States to Japan when you were—when you were younger?

DW: Well, since I was quite young, I don't know, my impression was, I suppose, kind of new and so...Oh, when I went to Japan, I didn't speak a word of Japanese.

AR: Oh... [all laugh]

DW: So I had to take something or I couldn't go to school, so I had to take one year off to learn the language, but I had no difficulty, I don't remember having any difficulty. Uh, there was a little prejudice, because, you know, I'm a Japanese-face guy from America, so I'm practically some kind of foreigner, and oh, another thing too, we didn't have crew-cuts—you know we all had long hair like you do today, and Japanese, all had crew-cuts. So I was—I stood out, and because of that I was uh, you know, harassed, I have a—I was bullied, I guess. I was a little bit different. But soon, I got myself a crew-cut, so I looked just like anybody else so...then, for me at that age, I didn't really think too much about anything—it ended when the war started and all that. Uh, other than the notion that I come from a different place, uh I think I was as much of a Japanese as the others—it couldn't be so noticeable so to speak... So, we saw everything, we saw the bombing of Tokyo and the war effort, food rationing, uh and the way things were run at that time—air raids on a daily basis and all that kind of stuff. Until the surrender, then things really changed with the occupation, It was the American landing. And then uh it uh so it changed the entire mood, so to speak. Again, since my family all spoke English, uh and uh so we sort of fit in that quite well. Only then, even my father, who was a Japanese national, was starting to

recognize—be, be recognized, and he was a very good bridge to bridge the gap between the occupation troops and the Japanese natives, so to speak.

AR: What did your father do?

DW: My father was an aeronautical engineer, and he was a very good mechanical and all that. He, by the age of twenty-one, in Los Angeles, he actually designed and assembled a flying aircraft—five of those, in his garage. [CC and AR laugh] He's a real pioneer in that—in that sense. This was the days when uh the Lindbergh had not flown the Atlantic. There was a big prize out for anyone who circumnavigated the globe on a sole flight. There was a big prize for that from an English—English publisher, so my father was thinking well he was going to build that plane to do it, and he had built one. He had a pilot—see he wasn't a pilot himself, and aimed at that, so he had some very big dreams. Unfortunately the last airplane that he built, during the test flight, it ran into the Rocky Mountains, [CC and AR: Wow] and crashed and killed the pilot,[CC: Oh wow] then he gave up the idea. He blamed it—blamed it on the plane, but it was simply a—a natural disaster, not a mechanical failure or anything.

CC: Was your father in L.A.?

DW: Yeah, yeah uh-huh.

CC: When did he move to the United States?

DW: [Sighs] I don't know the exact year, but he came to the U.S. when he was sixteen years old to study.

AR: And where did you live in Japan?

DW: Mostly in the Tokyo area.

AR: Oh okay.

DW: Yeah.

CC: So how did your parents feel about moving to Japan?

DW: Uh...as, well, let's see, I didn't know—had no notion what it is. My father wanted—Oh, I'll tell you one of his—why he had to go back, he was doing very well in Los Angeles, but as a Jap, he couldn't get a job as an aeronautical engineer. They won't hire a Japanese. So there was a Jap—a job discrimination for his talent, so, besides he had a few patents, so he wanted to go start a business in Japan. He had capital, patents, and he wanted to go back to Japan and start his own business. Everything was all set up. Except that the war started. So that's the ... otherwise he would've been quite successful. He personally knew the engineer who built the Spirit of St. Louis for Lindbergh. He knew almost all the heads of the American aircraft companies—it was like a—uh circle of people in that time. We're talking

about Boeing, Curtis, uh, all those American aircraft companies, which were just starting to become giants in their industry. So after the war ended, he had the chance to get invited and went back to see all of them too. So had he lived—he died when he was fifty-seven, of stomach cancer—he, that's, he could go any further. He was just about been able to get into that. As I said, he knew all these big names, personally. So, that's kind of unfortunate. And also it was just now—until now, he was a returnee from the U.S.; the Japanese thought he might possibly be a spy from there or something, [CC: Oh, I see] that type of thing, so there was a prejudice on him, I'm sure. I know I've heard that the secret police were shadowing him during the war years.

AR: So, why did your parents move back to the United States in 1951?

DW: Why did I?

AR: Oh, you didn't, just you? Your parents didn't move with you?

DW: No, my parents stayed there because he was just starting, [AR: Oh, okay] he was in good shape, and all that kind of thing, and my brother stayed there to go to university there. I came back to the U.S. because I wanted to go to college there.

AR: Oh, okay.

DW: Yeah.

CC: Did your family considered themselves Americans in Japan?

DW: My mother did, certainly, because she was American-born, she's a second generation. And my father, well he's just as fluent and used to American ways, so then, so he could've come back to the U.S., or—wherever he could find a good job and all that. As I said, he just never had that chance. He just died rather on the young side. On account of that. It was kind of unfortunate.

AR: Did you have a job at all when you moved to Japan?

DW: No, I was still a [kid]—barely finished high school. So no, no. I didn't. No, no.

AR: Oh, okay.

CC: Did you attend public high school in Japan?

DW: Yeah, sure, of course. From grade school up to high school. That's the reason I could speak the language. There were several people of that type, in which uh they were either sent as a bilingual specialist from the States to join, during the occupation to join Japan, or some of them were recruited just like me at that—we were all trapped—we couldn't go back during the war time. So—and they were badly in need of bilingual specialists, and we were doing some very important intelligence work. That was kind of an interesting...

AR: Why did you decide to study bacteriology as an undergrad?

DW: I liked science, chemistry, physics, but I wanted som—to handle something living, and so instead of plain zoology, I thought studying germs and things like that might be interesting. That's the reason why I went into that. I used to dabble in nuclear physics, and a lot of other areas, but the bacteriology and microbiology appealed to me most. And officially, I ended up with my PhD in Virology, study of viruses.

AR: So where did you study as an undergrad?

DW: I went to Penn State for bachelors in bacteriology. Then I went to the University of California at Berkeley to get my Masters in microbiology now. Then I got married and had a job briefly and went to New York to—on my first job to work with a drug company, Stallion Drug, but uh with a Masters degree, I wasn't getting anywhere, so I went back to graduate school. By then I had two kids, but I continued by PhD work and I went to the medical school with the State University of New York, and got my PhD there.

AR: So how did you meet your wife?

DW: I went to Japan, it was something like a traditional arranged marriage type of thing. Although I did meet several candidates, but it ended up with the traditional uh way, that somebody in the family goes in, as in-between, as a matchmaker, to do that, so yeah that's the way. My wife was planning to study in the U.S., so she was studying English, and you all prepared to go to the States, anyways so. That was one of the things on paper.

AR: What year were you married?

DW: Yeah, yeah.

AR: Oh what year?

DW: Gee, when was it, I have it down somewhere. [searching through papers] 1964.

AR: Were you married in Japan?

DW: No, we were married in Berkeley, California.

AR: And when were your children born?

DW: They were born in Albany, New York, around the years '64, my son was born '64 and my daughter, '67.

AR: Where did they attend school?

DW: They—ever since—wherever we went. From there we went: Albany, to Syracuse, New York, where I did my graduate studies—that's where the medical

center was, my PhD, we were there briefly. My first job after getting a PhD, I went to Des Moines, Iowa to teach at a medical school, so we were there only two short years, then we came back to New York, stayed in the suburbs, Hartsdale, which is suburbs in New York, and I was a Faculty at the New York Medical College.

AR: And you said your wife wanted to come to the States to study also?

DW: At that time, she was prepared to so one of the reasons was that I thought it would be kind of harsh to take a Japanese woman, just simply—just because you married, to take her away from her family where she lived and brought up, to a foreign country and all that, so it would've been kind of cruel, so I thought maybe somebody who was already prepared to go abroad, had an advantage.

AR: Where did she study?

DW: I beg your pardon?

AR and CC: [overlapping] Where did she study?

DW: Oh, she went to the...one of the few, uh several years ago...maybe it'll come up. It's one of the few Catholic Universities in the Tokyo area. The name just skips my mind right now. This was why she acquired the English background.

CC: So she ended—did she end up studying abroad in the U.S.?

DW: No, she never went back to school.

CC: Is she initially from Tokyo?

DW: Yes, Tokyo suburbs, actually, the Chiba area, right next door. Well one of the interesting things about her family is that she comes from...her father was a middle school principal, and my mother's side is a Buddhist—priest who was dispatched by the Japanese government to go to Hawaii to administer the necessary rituals for the Buddhists who immigrated to the U.S., because there was a need, you do need a priest married and to have a—burial service, funeral, that type of thing. So he was one of them, and quite a high-ranking Buddhist minister too.

CC: So he was a Buddhist minister...

DW: That's right, yeah.

CC: And so, he could be married?

DW: Yes. He went to Hawaii first, then he moved to San Francisco, they were there for the San Francisco earthquake, so he moved to Los Angeles, and I think that's when—where my mother was also born, and after that we were born.

CC: Did you speak Japanese at home?

DW: Of course while in Japan...no, this is something interesting, while in Japan, even during the wartime, my father said, 'You're not going to forget English, so we're going to use English.' But you'd have to be careful. [laughter] And so that's the only reason I retained my English. Otherwise I would've had nobody to speak to, so that really helped quite a lot. But as I said—when I went to Japan, I didn't know a word of Japanese, even though I was six years old, only knew English. So, but it also helped having English at school, it was an easy task.

AR: Can you talk a little bit more about what it was like being a bilingual specialist?

DW: Uh, yes. I think this was kind of interesting. During the occupation of forces, there are several tasks that the U.S. Allied Forces had to do, is set up military government, to have liaison with the Japanese government, police forces and everything. To make sure that the occupation went smoothly. Also the Far Eastern Tribunal—the war criminal courts was in session. They needed interpreters there. They needed postal inspectors and other people to investigate crimes or any type of...legal matter. In order to rewrite some of the laws, or some of that—they needed a lot of bilingual specialists. I was attached to what we called the Allied Translator and Interpreter Service, we call it ATIS, and it was directly located under the G2 sector, G2 is the military intelligence, you know. And we were under that. I think in our group we had about, at least 200, even 300 (? Japanese word) Japanese Americans there, and it was quite busy. Now what—one thing that we were doing, and I can say this today, the Russians captured all the Jap—Japanese soldiers in Manchuria and China at the end of the war, and contrary to the Geneva Convention, they took them all to Siberia and used them for forced labor. And only later did they release them to allow them to come back to Japan, and some of them never came back to Japan. And—once they started to release them, after three, four, five years, they were coming back they were being pathwayed to Japan, this is what we wanted to do: we interrogated these repatriates, we call them, Japanese prisoners of war, and gather intelligence from them. So when the soldiers came back on the returning ship, they were interrogated by some of us to find out if any of these are worth interviewing. And with that they went home. They were allowed to be called back at government expense to come to Tokyo, to our place, office, to be interrogated. This was strictly voluntary, too, but you know they get paid, fed and all that kind of stuff, including the cigarette ration. And this is what we were doing secretly—this was all confidential. In those days—the U.S. had very little military intelligence about Siberia of what the Russians were doing. And the Japanese were 100% cooperative, because they didn't like the idea of being kept as prisoners of war with those number of years—free labor and what, or, you know. That's contrary to the Geneva Convention—you're not supposed to do that. So, they were, they were—really saying all the information they knew. The interesting thing is that the Soviet forces, the educational level, at least on the Siberian side was very low. Their skills and everything is such that they can't—they can't drive the vehicles, they can fix their car, they can't fix their weapons, all that kind of stuff, well, they had the Japanese POWs do it for them, they had the Japanese POW driving the—company commander around on a car, because the Russians didn't have a driver who could do that. So the

Japanese served in an extremely important aspect of that, so they saw places, saw the level intelligence. Some of them were actually hired to do some technical work, which we found out quite a few things through this information. It was very interesting. This, I forgot the exact date of when it was, but through their testimony, we found out that the Russians had an atomic bomb. It's not through the sources from the tested in the Earth somewhere. We got that information through our interrogation of the Japanese prisoners of war. We learned about their secret high-speed telecommunication services and their code that they used between Siberia and Moscow. So those are some of the very interesting topics that we learned about. So it—it was very valuable information.

Now in Korea, that's a different thing. When the Korean War started, this was what we called, strategic information—we actually need information on the front, and we needed to know directly. We personally did not go into the combat front, but we just interrogated POWs we captured. Now the Koreans spoke Japanese if they're older than fifteen I would say, they all spoke fluent Japanese because they were under Japanese occupation for all those years. Now, even though these North Koreans, were somewhat opposed to the U.S. policy and all that, somehow or another, we were able to interrogate or find out and get specific information I mean, of how many people were there, what kind of kind of level of discipline, what kind of weapons did they carry, and all that kind of stuff. So it was very, day-to-day information of what's going on in the war front. Until the Chinese took up their side, and joined, and then they started pushing down there. Then the population changed. Now we got Chinese prisoners of war, which we didn't have any Chinese Americans who can do the interrogation. So until we got some, you know, a few months later, a really funny thing happened. We used the trusted people, the South Korean POWs, you know we had trustees at that time, that can speak Chinese, so we used them as our interpreter, so they will ask the question in Chinese, he will talk to me in Japanese, and I will write the report in English. And it worked out. Now, there was a major attitude difference—because the North Koreans were very stubborn. The Chinese soldiers, even though they are supposed to be volunteers, was a totally different. I mean it's a difference between a crude bumpkin and a city gentleman. It's that different in terms of quality in training or whatever. And the Chinese POWs are extremely cooperative, they did not object to saying—of course they probably didn't say everything that was true maybe, but we had no fuss. The North Koreans wanted to indoctrinate us, who were asking the questions. The North—Chinese POWs did none of that. They were just special forces that were helping the war effort—they just happened to be opposite from us. So, we had a very good relationship—it was kind of fun. So that's the experience.

AR: Can you tell us just for so we can right it down in the archive, what year did you do all this?

DW: This was from 1951, '52, '53, then we were dish out, I came back to the States and then went to college some. Uh yeah. So this was—as soon as the war started, and the war started in 1952, in 1951 I believe, during the summer months or

something. By that fall, we were asked to help to on a spend temporary duty in Korea to interrogate the POWs. It was an urgent thing. So uh...

AR: Upon your return to the United States, did you face any sort of discrimination for being Japanese?

DW: No, no.

AR: None at all?

DW: No. I don't recall any...at that time, even though I heard from all the people who were here, you know, about the concentration camps. I heard from my relative that they all went to camp. Well, I don't have that experience, I don't know. But the thing is, they didn't want to talk about it. I think it was embarrassing or what—they just wanted to forget it. So, I learned very little from my relatives, they just didn't tell me. So—and on the other hand—I suspected that we might find some...but no, surprisingly, no. It was...at least you know that was a learning experience. So that was I guess, a kind of surprise, I thought they might... I think it's only a local thing. The discrimination threat and so forth of sending the Japanese or Japanese Americans to concentration camps, is because of sheer number—that's, that's what caused the scare. They did it on the west coast—you know they didn't send anybody in Hawaii, you know that don't you. Too many—they would all be gone! I mean, the economy will stop. So, isn't that funny, and that's closer to Japan! And they didn't do anything with the people there. But in the Hawaii (?) yes they did. Canada they did a little bit. But the Canada they didn't send them to camp, they just sort of restricted their movement in their town. So—and even Texas, only the head of household were sent to camp. The families, no. It's a—it's a quite a different in terms of treatment. Texas had about four to five camps. One or two, I guess. They also include Germans, Italians, which, you know, you would expect, you probably would have enemy aliens. But the Japanese are very few, and even then, most of them are released before the end of the war.

CC: What about um in Tokyo, did you ever face discrimination from—because during the war because you came from the U.S.—

DW: Yes, we did. Yes, they, I think our neighbors were...not that freely open-minded. I think if anything, our parents, must have felt that. I'm sure my father was probably watched very closely because his time of spending in the U.S. and all that. For us kids, no, not really. Surprisingly, as long as I didn't use English, you know, you couldn't tell. No, fortunately, and then after the war of course, things changed around—now, we had a sort of advantage, so. It was kind of funny time period to go through that.

CC: Was there um a lot of anti-American propaganda in Tokyo at that time?

DW: Oh yeah, you bet. You know, the 'White devils,' everything you can think of. A lot of progaganda. The thing is they did that, and every country probably did that, and when you really see it, we can see the people, something like that, it's totally

different. The Russians told their Japanese POWs that the Americans and English are barbaric. They're raping your wives, your mothers, and your daughters. They're robbing things, they're—they're getting drunk. So tell that it's not worth going back to Japan. And it's a bunch of lies all along. Now, when they came back to Japan, it was totally the other way around. I mean, everything is peaceful, orderly, there's the laws obeyed. Well, there were some Americans that might have gone wild, but you know, they weren't raping women or any kind of stuff. So you know they did a lot of propaganda in that way. It's a very interesting thing to observe in Japan: within—within a year, the U.S. army—or, armed forces had set up camps in the country to station the troops. Normally, each camp, you have your own guards—you have your own soldier to do it. Well we were hiring Japanese police to do it. I mean, he was your enemy just yesterday; he's now guarding your gate! And it's amazing. And there was not a single disruption, demonstration—anything. We just went so smoothly, that it was unbelievable. So uh, I think these stories are not that well known, but it was really amazing.

AR: Was there reaction at all to the bombings in Nagasaki and Hiroshima?

DW: That, see, not as you think it was at that time, because they didn't know what it was. It was only a few years later that they saw how—the extent of how horrible it was. When they dropped that bomb, they just mentioned, a new type of bomb, was bombed, and cause severe damage. That's it. No totals, nothing. Of course you don't give away that kind of damage like that. But I was already very interested in science, I knew. And I was—I already knew that there is such thing as a possible atomic bomb, and—I surprise myself too, thinking, 'Gee that must be the atomic bomb that they used. If it was, it's really serious.' So, no but people didn't realize it until later, then the stories, documentation, movies, about how many died, at the same time, and then the subsequent cause of cancer and other diseases as a result, later on. So that was—that took several years.

CC: Was there a fear during the war of American bombings all the time?

DW: Yeah, sure, yeah. It was a saturated bombing. Although, depending on where you were...certain places were fairly excluded. Like, there's a section, part of the Tokyo downtown area, that later on it was a first class office complex area, over near the Tokyo central railroad station, right in front of the imperial palace. Those were purposely not even scratched. It was that—type of precision bombing. Because they had the idea that if we're going to occupy that, we're going to use those buildings. Yeah, yeah this was all planned. It's what happened, and yea, they did that. I lived in the suburbs of Tachikawa, and the Tachikawa area is equal to from here to uh...let's say maybe Galveston—pretty close. And there's an army airfield—well that was bombed. But the houses about it weren't touched. And even though Tokyo burned, the Tachikawa city area was hardly touched, and hospitals were not touched. No, it was pretty...accurate target destruction. But it's—otherwise, it was kind of difficult, certain areas did burn down because—the houses being made of paper wood, would simply burn so quick, you couldn't stop it by the block or

anything. It would only just keep on burning. So a lot of neighborhoods just flattened out.

AR: This is a bit of a transition, but what was it like m—what's Houston like when you moved here?

DW: You know, I thought I liked it because, after living in the New York area, which is very metropolitan, one of the best things I liked is that international, the scenery here, the variation of the nationalities, available type of culture, stores, and of course—the distance from the seashore and all that. The only thing that I didn't expect was the heat. I've never lived with such hot heat. Although, Des Moines, Iowa was pretty hot in the summer, but at a point it was deadly cold out there. Syracuse was deadly cold. Even Albany was very cold. But other than that, no, I really liked the city climate. Also, one thing I go to know was, among all the major cities I've lived, I found Houston to be more accessible to people who you can, if you really want, if you make an effort...I lived in many places, but...because of what I did, maybe, or I was involved in the leadership in the Asian community, I got to know every single mayor since 1981—every one of them. I get to meet all the chancellors and presidents of all the universities. Let's see, I always knew several city councilmen, and also get to know some of the leadership in the Asian community. And before that I didn't know other ethnic groups. But you know you come across these Chinese, whether its Mainland or Taiwan, the Filipinos, Southeast Asian, Vietnamese and all that, I've never had that much access to people like this. Also, Houston has a sizeable Japanese trade mission here, business corporations, I sort of get to know all of those people. I really enjoyed that privilege, its very unique. And overall, you can golf year-round, and shopping is very good. Living expenses is a lot less than most major cities of this size.

AR: Where did you first live, when you moved to Houston?

DW: Well, when I came back to the U.S. I lived in Philadelphia with my uncle briefly and you know that's a big city. And I liked it. It's old-fashioned. Then I lived—I went to Penn State so that's nowhere. [laughter] You know it's way out there, like Texas A&M, it's really hidden out in the middle of nowhere. It's a college campus—town, so that's good. Then I lived...let's see, came back, oh from there, I went to Berkley to get to go to graduate school. Okay. San Francisco bay area is great. I mean, you know, just living there, even for a graduate student it's a fabulous thing. I wish I could live there again. Right. Then I got married and then came back and then my first job was in Albany, New York, where Stallion Drug Company was there. And I had an important job there. But even though Albany is the capital of New York State, it had nothing. Really nothing. Then I decided to go back to graduate school, went to Syracuse for the graduate work. Syracuse is a somewhat small town. Didn't have much. So it—I don't think there were even a hundred families there. There certainly is no—Syracuse probably had two Chinese restaurants. I think that's about the only thing they had, in those days. Then I got my first job as a— did my PhD at Des Moines, Iowa at a medical school there. Well ever been—I don't know if you've ever been to

Des Moines, Iowa. Don't know if you've ever been to Des Moines, Iowa. It's peaceful, very rich town on a farm belt. And even though the Korean –I mean Vietnam War was going on, everywhere they were demonstrating and all that kind of stuff. Nothing in Des Moines. You don't even hear any disturbance. In those days it's where you can- you don't have to lock your doors anywhere. You can leave things in your car and unlocked and nothing will be stolen. It is a totally different, peaceful community. The biggest excitement was the circus came into town. [laughter] This is true. Believe me. I was shocked. That's the biggest thing that you know, for them. So I got out in a hurry, [laughter] and two years later I went back to the suburbs of New York City and lived in Hartsdale, New York, which then was nice. I mean I loved the access to New York City, and all that. Then I—you know I was a professor at New York Medical College there, doing full time research. Until, as I said, my boss decided to move his research grant to Houston, which was his hometown. But, as I said, Houston –I was kind of reluctant because it is after all a southern state, that's how I felt, and it's gonna be different. I've never been in the South. But surprisingly it worked out nicely. So...and I said that the international part, I think it was really good.

CC: You said that Houston had more international scenery than New York. Can you explain more of that? The people or...?

DW: Ah well of course New York has it. Chicago has it. Los Angeles has it. I would say there—I thought it was a bit liaison between them. They're not entirely separate. It's not a ghetto. The enclaves are like that. You see. I mean New York has this Jewish enclave, Italian, Hispanic, Puerto Rican type of thing...it's not that—strong. Although right now, since then, is a little tendency for that, but...no, I think because of that it's a good thing.

AR: In what area of Houston did you live in first?

DW: I came here to inspect the area and on day three I put down a down payment to buy a house on Alief.

AR: Oh, okay.

DW: Yeah, and I've lived there ever since.

AR: I was actually there the other day. [laughter] So can you explain what you do at Baylor College of Medicine now?

DW: Ah no. I lived there about seven, eight years ago. We lost our grants, so our group disbanded. But I always taught at Houston Community College so I've been part-time at Houston Community College since 1981, and I'm still teaching.

AR: So what do you teach there?

DW: Microbiology. So I'm one of the longest part-timers there. Yeah and I still will continue to do it, since I enjoy doing it.

AR: And what did you do at um Baylor College of Medicine?

DW: I did cancer research using viruses as a model. You know it's—that was my PhD thesis.

AR: Have you noticed how Houston has changed since you came in the 80s to now?

DW: Let's see, in what way can I describe that? Um...other than it's getting a little bit more crowded [laughter]...I think when I—in the 80s it still had the image of a cow town. I mean, you know, you really expect cowboys to be walking around the streets and all that kind of stuff. That image has certainly changed. There are a lot of transplants coming from the West Coast or New York or some other place—are coming in. Even some of the Japanese-Americans who opted to come over here to work with the oil companies. You know, there's quite a few new businesses starting to come in, because the pay is good. I think the—the make-up has changed. By the way, the Japanese-Americans here opened up, as you see in this book—they were farmers, and starting rice farming and all that kind of stuff. Well there are a few still doing that, but that's not what they do anymore. They're practically—many of them are professionals. They're in business. Integrated quite a ways, both men and women. So, other than what changes, I don't know. I think it's getting a little bit more sophisticated, so to speak. I think culture-wise, education level-wise, it's come—it's advanced quite a lot. It doesn't have that cow town image. It's—the quiet part is nice, to have that as a history, or tradition. But you don't need that. And of course—the interesting thing here, one is having NASA here to attract the highest density of computer, electrical, space engineers than any other place in the U.S. That's all that we're—maybe gonna start missing that. And the medical center is one of the world's top and that attracts a lot of people, including a lot of business, scientists, and patients. I mean, I do a lot of interpretive work for the Japanese patients who come in here and it's—indeed a place to come to. And it's not too much mention anymore but...without much publicity, you know heads of state or many important people from South America and other places come here to get treatment here: for surgery, for cancer treatment, all those kinds of things. So you can't beat that. You just can't. There's no other place. Even though New York has it. Other—some cities will have a Sloan-Kettering Institute. Other types of extensive care but we have the top, I think. So that's a very good one. I'm glad I got my treatment at one of them. You know I had a bypass surgery about ten years ago, so...what else do you wanna ask?

AR: So how often would you go back and forth to Japan?

DW: I'll be lucky that I can go back every three or four years maybe. But before that I used to go back once every one or two years. My wife goes back every year. And it's—right now I had a lot of conflict, because I teach year-round, so I haven't had a chance to spend—if I go there I want to spend two, three weeks, maybe more to make it worthwhile. But you know, I think that I'd like to do.

AR: Would you take your children back, when you used to go?

DW: Well, they're all grown up right now. They're all married, so...

AR: But when they were children...

DW: Yeah, but I would suggest—they never, well we took them there when they were six, seven, eight, when they were quite young yet, still in elementary school. But since then they've never gone back there so about—but I think they ought to do so.

AR: Did you teach your children Japanese?

DW: I—we tried but—and we even had a tutor at some time, but they didn't like it, so we stopped. [laughter] They didn't do it. Now they accuse us not enforcing that. They tell us 'why didn't you force us to do it?' You know, because being a bilingual really is an advantage. Really is. Believe me. So...any other things about the Texans or anything?

AR: Could you explain your—you were part of the—you were president of the Japanese-American Society of Houston, right?

DW: Yeah, I was the—president twice. Yeah.

AR: Could you explain what the organization does?

DW: It is a organization to promote the exchange of ideas and cultural—a learning, business contact between the two countries. And it's a—it's worked out very well. Many of them are expatriates from Japan who have experience, so they want to remain with the people—keep in touch with the Japanese. Many of them want to do business with Japan. Or they want to go to Japan in the future. Therefore we promote a lot of scholarships and exchange students, so we do that. I think that's the attraction. So that's what they're—they do. Economy-wise, Japan used to be a very important one, although it's changing into China now. At one time, Houston was extremely concerned of the depressed status of the city. The mayors promoted the trade with Japan, so it was a good idea to have an association with the Japan-American Society with promotes this. And it's—actually it's worked quite well. I've gone there a few times on behalf of the city. You know, Chiba city is a sister city to us, which is right next-door to Tokyo, and I've been there several times. Once with the mayor: Mayor Brown at that time. So it's been—it's a very

good interaction there. Now not as much, but there is a lot of things to learn or to have—exchange, actually. And I think—I don't know how strong the interrelationship is between say, the city of Houston and any one of the sister cities in Europe or other places, but I think ours with Chiba is a very strong one. You know, in the beginning of this year, the mayor of Chiba was here, and they were promoting an exchange of businesses and international conventions and that type of promotions, they were doing here. I was interpreter for the mayor when he came here, so I know about that. So I think that's been a very good practice.

CC: What about the Japanese community in Houston? Have they been growing recently or how is the situation?

DW: On the other hand, I think, if anything, the number—the total number of Japanese companies have decreased slightly. Each company has also decreased their staff slightly. So not as active as before but it is still the very important one because it is probably the strongest city in the South with a contingency of Japanese companies. Also, Houston is the stepping-stone to South America. All the dispatches, technical staff, or people on special missions going to South America will stop at Houston, not Florida, but Houston to go south. So the consulate general here is a very important one, and has also a very important one to play as a stopping point to check with before doing that. Now it might not be as active. I'm not so sure. But it's still among the areas with Japanese corporations—I think it's still going very strong. If anything, they tend to hire maybe more non-Japanese in their staff. It's kind of interesting to be associated with, as to what they're doing. I don't know if the now the consulates are acting like that—I've know all the consulate generals, every one of them, for the past thirty years, and it's nice to have associated with them, besides being invited to very nice receptions. Anything else?

CC: What are some of your hobbies that you do in your free time?

DW: I personally is—mine is community service I think. I like to do that. And this is why I volunteer for a lot of things, I've volunteered for those organizations. I volunteer with the Asian American Festival Association. As a matter of fact, I was the first president of that, when it started twenty years ago. I think it's dying out right now. Glenda Jo is gradually relinquishing that. I don't know why it's coming apart. APAHA is probably doing a little bit more on that, but I know what they've been doing so —other than that, I like to just keep track of what's going on in the community. Oh by the way, I'm also the Japanese editor of this newspaper. [paper rustling] It's a monthly newspaper. You can keep the copy.

CC and AR: Oh thank you.

DW: Some of it is in English right now so you can read it. It's supposed to have been all in Japanese, but now we use a lot of English in it to [overlapping AR: Could you—I'm sorry] accommodate Japanese—Americans who can't read Japanese.

AR: So could you talk a little bit more about this newspaper?

DW: That's—it's been going on for about twenty years, and it was a Japanese community newspaper, that had only Japanese in it, and it was the only news-source for people who weren't too good in English. And uh—so that's the way it started. Now, the editor passed away suddenly about one and a half years ago, and his wife took over—who's American. She doesn't know any Japanese, [laughter] so I volunteered to do the Japanese editing for her. We have a few reporters to cover that. Basically, we'd like to have it both in English and Japanese, but that's kind of difficult to accommodate, so some articles are strictly, only in English, some of them are only in Japanese.

CC: Are you a regular writer, in the—?

DW: Yes, yes. I at least write one article in the—I don't know if I can show you...[paper rustling] I don't know if this—I may not have had anything in this one.

CC: I think you wrote this one on the back.

DW: Huh?

CC: You wrote this one.

DW: Does it say so?

CC: [laughter] Yes.

DW: Okay, yeah. Occasionally I do write. Some of it is written by the—American, the lady, and Norma [inaudible last name] is her name. [paper rustling] Yeah, none of this—I actually contributed one or two articles in it, but other than that, I do the editing to proof-read, to make sure that it is arranged properly, and all that. I also help out some of the advertisements, to proof-read all that. Here is the deputy consulate general right now, and let's see...Anyway—it's volunteer work. I don't get a penny out of it. But it's kinda nice. And the Japan-American Society conducts various programs or—whatever, any organization that has a program, we will publish it to let people know, because a lot of it is not covered in the local newspaper or any other means.

CC: Where is this newspaper usually distributed?

DW: In all Japanese restaurants, and several along Bellaire and Chinatown. Actually there is a list of where they distribute it—on that list, in here. I think that some of them...[inaudible—paper rustling]. There are about twenty or so...yeah. Here is some right here, listed. All of those. It's usually there, and all of these. It comes out around the middle of the month, so you might be able to see it there. We also have a

homepage that we can put it on—on a day's notice we can get a new article in it. We may change to that without a hard copy form.

AR: So how is this funded since it's—it is free?

DW: Yeah, yeah. It's free.

CC: By advertisements.

AR: Oh by advertisements, is it?

DW: I don't know –I have no connection with the financing or the advertising part of it. That's Norma's—the ed—publisher's duty. So it's almost like her—that's her income, so to speak. I don't know if we can continue to publish it or not. So that's one thing that we do. Now other—newsletters that do come out to tell everybody what's going on is the Japanese Association of Greater Houston. This is the Japanese-speaking members. They want to sort of maintain a Japanese language organization, because, you know, as English, it's a little burden for them, so that's the only reason. Then the Japanese Business Association, which is like a Chamber of Commerce of all the businesses. There is also a Japanese Teacher's Association, because there are about, oh, fifty or so teachers doing full-time Japanese teaching in Texas, and about twenty or thirty of them are in Houston. And let's see...one more organization. Oh! JCL. You know about JCL. Japanese-American Citizens League. That's a national civil rights group. And the Houston chapter –I was the president of that twice- those are for Japanese-Americans. Now as Japanese-Americans, we have about eighty families, members, but there are about three times that number that are permanent, you know, residents of this area. They say 'We do not judge JCL.' And it's one of the few. The civil rights issue has lost some of its attraction. And I think maybe because of that it is not as attractive to join. I think that's one of the reasons. The last project that we had is try to change the name of a street in Beaumont called Jap Lane.

AR: Oh, I heard about that.

DW: Yeah, and so that was our last civil rights issue, so they changed that after –we spent ten years trying to change that. And one was Jap Road, instead of Jap Lane, and then there was another one somewhere in Texas that they also coincidentally changed because of this, so I was involved in helping the campaign on that. Then other than that, we don't have any special issue. The nation-wide JCL right now is doing two things: to honor the four forty-second regimental combat thing, the old Japanese-American soldiers that fought in Europe. You know about their story?

AR: No.

DW: It's a four hundred forty-second regimental combat team made up of almost all Japanese-Americans during World War II. They, in the Italian front, when the

twenty-fourth national-guard division from Texas was surrounded by the Germans, they went in to rescue them. And that made them all into heroes, and it's been remembered. So right now they're trying to honor those soldiers who are still surviving. Most of them are in their nineties right now. They're getting old. So those are the kind of things that they did. Other than that –oh! In 2003, we commemorated the one-hundredth year of Japanese immigration into Texas. Do you know that? I don't know if you know that event or not. You can find it some of it on the internet. [papers rustling] I don't know if I brought that. Here. Yeah, I think I did. [digging through things] Yeah, 2004. This is from the Internet. And there's a Fairview Cemetery in Webster, and where the pioneer settlers in the Houston area are buried, and for the first time ever, people in those families were honored and I like to brag about the fact that I organized that. We had –well I don't know if you've seen the first picture with everybody in there?

CC and AR: Mhmm.

DW: That's just part of them. I mean, that many people came from all over Texas, and all—even from California to join that particular one. That's the first time they ever did anything. And it's in honor of the Saibara family, which is one of the families that is listed there. They all get their name in there. You can keep that copy.

CC: Thank you.

DW: And the—also the families that met each other and all that, they really liked it. And it shows—well, you know, there are a lot of other families that came here, that have a tradition, and descendants are still living here successfully, in Texas. So it's—you'll have to take a look at it.

CC: Here you are [hands photos to AR]

[laughter]

DW: Yeah, I was MC for that, and it was very successful, I'm glad to say. There are some other types of things in here about—there's a marker and some highway. [paper rustling] This is also about the Fairview Cemetery I was talking about. It's a small cemetery with tombstones, about forty, fifty Japanese who are all pioneer families, and if you have a chance to take a look at it –I don't know if there's something similar to that –there must be something similar to that in the Chinese groups or somewhere, right? Isn't there? Do you know of any?

CC: Uh, maybe. Maybe.

DW: That's something too. And oddly enough, at one small section here, the very first person who invited the immigration into the Houston area, Saibara [paper rustling] —this is his picture...

CC: Oh, wow.

DW: And uh, he was a member of the lower house. He was the president chancellor of a leading Christian University. He came to the U.S., was introduced to Houston, to Texas, to start rice growing. He formed a colony. And eventually several hundred people came in here. That actually brought in the Japanese. That's –the descendents are right there. And this is where rice farming started, and so he started all of this. So he's quite an interesting story. [moving books] And actually this book has all kinds of stories about that, a lot of detail. He wrote a diary, which is in Japanese, but one of your graduate students wrote a thesis—translated and wrote a thesis on – and did a study in there and it should be in the files in the PhD records here at Rice. I think Dr. Bardamin may know who it was. So that's still on record. There might be other types of records, documents that are available, telling the history. Also there is a church in Webster called the Webster Presbyterian Church—is which, I think practically was founded by a Japanese-American, who supported the church so they uh it got going and still continues today. They had a little bit of an archive and stories about that. If the Chao Center has time, that's something to look into. They also have a book. I'm not so sure what happened to it, but I have—still have a copy of that. It shows an early history of the Japanese Christians that arrived here in the Webster area, so that's something to look into. So there's several things that the Chao Center can really do, if you really wanna collect the archives of these types of things. And before I forget, this is a—this is a book that I borrowed. It's called the Japanese-American Hundred-Year History in the United States and it was published –what did I say a while ago?- 19...

AR: sixties, right?

[paper rustling]

DW: Yeah. Nineteen something. And it gives all the Japanese –the first generation. They list the families there are. And let me see...[page turning] this is where Kennedy was still alive, so –I can look at the date on this again. [paper rustling] Anyway, there's a section for all the states in here, including one section for Texas. I'm sure this edition is out of print. I don't think 1961, it was published. So this is quite an old one. And here is a section on the Japanese. Unfortunately this is all in Japanese. This is published by a Japanese newspaper company that had an office in Los Angeles. Arai is a well-known name. [reading Japanese names] –here is Texas here. This is starts the (?) history so –it actually tells you the history in the nineteen-hundreds of the who arrived and what they did, the number, the population, each family history, around Houston, suburbs. It's quite –I know some of these names. I used to know this family: Katsuro Kobayashi. Kobayashi's family is still here. Kobayashi is still here. I know several descendants. There's another one, another name in the [inaudible 1 word] area. Saibara. Saibara –this is the one that I talked about. That's the same Saibara –he's the first person, his family here. And it goes til, well, quite a few. So –although Hawaii or California have a larger section,

still it's a significant—I think this is the first ever written documentation of the very first families who came here. So I don't think –there's no other documentation. So one thing's that maybe somebody should translate this and have an English version.

CC: Where did you find this book?

DW: A friend of mine –one of the descendants families loaned me this. As a matter of fact it was owned by this family called Kawahada. Right here. Here's the name of it, one of the girls here. And I happened to know them. They can't read Japanese, so I borrowed it and uh—but I found it –it's really interesting to have a record of all these people. So—and even then, these are already old people, and that's 19...what was that, eighty-something?

CC: Sixties.

DW: So twenty, thirty years ago. So these are something that are available. I don't know. Maybe I could have them—either donate that to your archive or something, eventually. So anyway, I mean you ought to know that something like this does exist and refer to it as history. Now, this guy who did do this research here is back in Oklahoma. That's where he originally came from. Tom Wells. So, he's—I don't think he's following up on anything about the Japanese group anymore unfortunately. It'd be kind of nice if he could update this book but it's a very well-written book. Now, who's this other fellow that wrote the Asian Texans? I'm trying to remember his name. Do you know...?

AR: No, I don't remember.

DW: He did the same thing for all the other Asian groups, so—and part of it has a little bit about the Japanese groups too. I'll try to find that book. And so that should be somewhere in your records somewhere, if you're going to build an archive. Let's see, other than that...another movement right now I—as I said—that four forty-second combat team. They're making a history and honoring them right now. They're gonna make the—I think the country is going to make, some kind of gold medal, or something to honor them before they pass away, some time this year. And they're going to have a celebration in Washington D.C. about that, so I'll—if anything or something comes up I'll let you know about that. Uh...but what other types of things do you plan to do?

AR: This is actually the last cycle of interviews we're doing. The first cycle, they were Chinese-Americans. Second cycle were Indian and Pakistani-Americans, and third cycle were Filipino-Americans, and Japanese-Americans are the last cycle.

DW: Okay. Alright. Did you catch any Koreans or...?

AR: We have not done Koreans or Vietnamese.

DW: You haven't?

AR: Mm-mm.

CC: But we'll probably be continuing this project next summer and after that.

AR: Last summer was the first.

DW: Okay, yeah. Oh, so it's been going on for a few years now?

AR: Mm.

DW: Yeah, well, good luck. And, I think it's worthwhile doing this. Somebody ought to do it.

CC and AR: Mm.

DW: There's no question. And it's something that you can handle, you know what I'm saying? If this is California or something like that, it's over probably.

AR: Mm.

CC: Right.

DW: There's just too many. It's just overcrowded, but here it's manageable. And, well, so I wish you luck on that. Also, are you collecting either photos...

AR: Yeah, we are.

DW: or some type of ...

CC: We are.

DW: If I can find it, this one-hundred year event was filmed.

CC and AR: Oh.

DW: And the JCL group commissioned a videographer to film it, so I just have to find that and I think we can donate a copy.

AR: That'd be amazing.

CC: If you have any pictures...

DW: Yeah, I mean something like that's just worth having, because as I said, it is a significant event to commemorate our hundred years of immigration.

AR: Yeah, we'd like to thank you again for doing this interview today.

DW: Yeah, yeah, yeah sure.

CC: Thank you so much.

[inaudible, then recorder shut off]