

Interviewee: Natalie Ong

Interviewers: Tian-Tian He, Xingyi Li

Date/ Time of Interview: November 16 2017

Transcribed by: Tian-Tian He, Xingyi Li

Audio Track Time: 1:33:22

Background:

Kayo Natalie Hayashida Ong (Natalie Ong) was born in 1941 on Bainbridge Island, Washington, a small agricultural island close to Seattle. She is a third-generation Japanese-American; her grandparents immigrated from Japan to Washington in the early 1900's, and her parents grew up as berry farmers on Bainbridge Island. Natalie's family was forced to go to the Japanese internment camp in Manzanar, California, in 1942 during World War II. A portrait of her mother, Fumiko Hayashida, evacuating with Natalie in her arms, is one of the best-known photographs of the Japanese internment. They stayed for three and a half years and when they returned to Bainbridge, their family farm and house were in ruins. The family then moved to Seattle, where Natalie finished her schooling and attended the University of Washington.

As a student, she met her husband Albert Ong and they moved to Houston for Al's job at NASA, soon moving again to El Lago to be closer to the Johnson Space Center. They adopted their son Gary from Korea and daughter Paula from Hong Kong. Natalie spent her time volunteering to help with her children's activities, and served as an El Lago City Council member for 12 years.

Natalie continues to live and volunteer in El Lago with her husband.

Setting:

The interview was conducted in the afternoon of November 16, 2017 in the fifth floor of Fondren Library, Rice University. It was a one and a half hour interview with Natalie Ong for Houston Asian American Archive. The interviewee Natalie Ong and her husband Albert Ong were both present.

Interview Transcript:

Key

NO	Natalie Ong
TH	Tian-Tian He
XL	Xingyi Li
-	Speech cuts off; abrupt stop

...	Speech trails off; pause
<i>Italics</i>	Emphasis
(?)	Preceding word may not be accurate
Brackets	Actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

TH: My name is Tian-Tian He.

XL: My name is Xingyi Li.

TH: And uh, we are here on November 16th, 2017 interviewing Natalie Ong for the Houston Asian American Archive.

NO: Yes, my Japanese name is Kayo. So it's Natalie - Kayo Natalie, and Hayashida's my maiden name, Ong, O-N-G. And Al and I have been married for over 51 years. But we haven't - we started in Seattle, so my family, my background is in the Pacific Northwest. But we have lived in Houston since '67, and in the city of El Lago, which is a suburb of Houston, since 1969.

TH: So uh, where and when were you born?

NO: I was born in - on February 20th, 1941, on a little island, Bainbridge Island, which is a ferry ride from downtown Seattle. It's an agricultural community; my father and my grandfathers were berry farmers. So my grandparents emigrated to the Seattle area in like 1906, 1904, the turn of the century. So my parents, both my mother and father and their siblings were all born in the US. So I would be what they'd consider in the Japanese community as a *sansei*, which is a third-generation. And my kids and grandkids would be *yonsei* and - I don't know what the fifth would be. But yes, so my connection to Japan is not very strong. Uh, because I am Japanese and my face is Japanese, and my grandparents came from Japan, when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor I think the biggest thing was all Americans, including Americans of Japanese descent, were taken away from their homes and moved inland into concentration camps. And a lot of people in Texas don't know that had happened to Americans who not only were children, but born in the US.

TH: So how old were you at the time?

NO: I was 13 and a half months, so I was a baby. And my mother was in her thirties, early thirties, pregnant with my brother when that picture was taken, I think you saw that picture of uh, a woman carrying a baby as they were leaving Bainbridge Island to go to California. Yes.

TH: So do you have any memories of that at all?

NO: No. You know, I - I don't remember what happened [laughs] 13 months ago, let alone what happened when I was 13 months. Yeah, I really don't. I've heard stories, and like most oral histories you know stories might not be true. But I've heard stories, and I've certainly regretted not asking more questions of my father and mother during that period. So I appreciate what you guys are doing to try to get some oral histories while that or - oral history is still, you know fresh in people's minds. 'Cause you do forget.

TH: Um, so what are the stories that you remember?

NO: What do I remember, not probably of that period. I can remember stories af - you know, second and third grade, those kinds of things... after we returned. And one of the stories of our family is that because my parents were American-born, they were able to own property. There was the exclusion, where you couldn't - not only marry, but become citizens or own property if you were not American-born. And since my father was, we had a place to come back to after the uh, concentration camps, the American concentration camps, the relocation where they relocated us. So we had a place to come back to, and a community that welcomed us, which was kind of unusual too, 'cause Bainbridge Island was a small community, and I think the uh Japanese and the American families knew each other quite well. There was only one high school, so all the kids either went to two different elementary schools, and then merged into the one high school. So the families knew each other quite well.

TH: So you were able to return to your hometown?

NO: We were able to return to our home, yes.

TH: And your, your actual house too?

NO: Yes, and the actual house that my father and my uncles built, on property that my grandparents, you know, had farmed, strawberry farmers.

TH: Um, did your - I mean like, did your parents know how long you were gonna be in the camp, or did they, did they bring property?

NO: No, they had no idea how long they would be away. In fact, I've asked them, you know, why they wore their nicest clothing - 'cause they said, "Well, we didn't know where we were going, we didn't know how long we would be away," and as it turned out going from Seattle to the deserts in Mojave, California, was quite a change. And, they could only carry - take what

they could carry. So can you imagine, my mom being pregnant, I had an older brother who was only - who was only 18 months older than I. And then me, and she being pregnant. She said most of what she could carry was - and then we had to bring the bedding, the sheets for the beds, so what you had mostly were diapers and sheets. And you know, each child was allowed to bring a toy and I, there's a picture with me holding some soft animal or, of some sort. But at 13 months I probably didn't realize what I was holding.

TH: Um, so uh, what would - like how did the people persuade the Japanese to evacuate? I mean, what were the consequences - I haven't studied this so -

NO: Oh, you haven't studied, I did say that you probably needed to look into it. It was the, the FBI came. The armies with guns and rifles with bayonets on it, they said "You're going," they gave us seven days to close up our business and of course this was in March, and our crops would have been harvested beginning in May and June, so it was a *really* difficult time for our family. And, economically, we really lost the crop for that year. And subsequent years, 'cause you can't just plant them and expect them to be marketed the next year, you have to wait two, possibly three years in order to - so we were, we were quite disadvantaged financially, but we did have some place to come back to, but when we came back, our equipment was gone, the house was a mess, I, I re - I don't know what happened to our, our horse, but we - because I vaguely remember when we bought another, got another one. Back then you know, if you're a poor farmer, you used the horse to plow, yeah. And I really do not remember any of that, but I've been told, that hey, at least our family was together. But it was a real hardship.

TH: And how old were you when you came back?

NO: When I came back, I was there for three and a half years, can you imagine? Being away for three and a half years, that's a long time. So I came back like at four, you know 'cause I left at 13 months. Four and a half, time to go to kindergarten, yeah.

TH: Um, was there any like adjusting to the outside world after you'd like kind of grown up there?

NO: Well for me, personally, you know being that young, and - you know, no, I did not have any time or any adjustments to make. I do know that our family certainly did. Mom said she - she was a stay-at-home mom of course, three kids, or two kids before the war. But um, she cleaned house for a dollar an hour, had I think four different places that she cleaned, so that uh, because like I said there was no income coming off the strawberries for the first year or so. Fortunately, you know we did have some savings, but I'm sure that that was soon gone, if you have you know two years of no money coming in.

TH: Um, okay, so could you describe sort of the living conditions of the camp?

NO: Well, I have seen pictures, and my mom said that when we went, we had mattresses stuffed with, with hay - straw. They had uh, because it was an army installation, of course it was the WRA, World - War Relocation Authority or something like that. But it was the army that was the DOD. So we had army rations, army blankets, army cots. She did say that they were issued a mop and a bucket. And of course it was just a room, with the cots and the bedding - um, with the cots - actually, mom said there were two cots only for our family. Since I was only 13 months, I slept with my mother, and my older brother slept with my father on one of the cots. And um, my brother was born in August, and he said the people in the - there was - there were varied shops, different shops, and people were, were assigned to do jobs either to sustain the, the camp, either um, you know working in the mess hall, or carpentry shop, and my father said that uh, the people in the carpentry shop made a little, a little uh crib-like thing for my brother when he was born. Yeah. And there was a potbelly stove there, and mom said that because she had little ones, instead of going to the mess hall three times a day when they would bring (?), the little ones got to go to a mid-morning snack and a mid-afternoon snack. And I think all the Japanese, you'll read a lot about everyone's experiences. Depending on your age, you had a different experience. I certainly had an experience just, being with my family, so I didn't see anything different. Mom and dad would have different w - different experience trying to cope with you know living in those kinds of conditions when they were, you know quite well-off before the war. And of course the teenagers, who had a great time, because instead of being in a farming community that they have to walk or whatever for miles to get to the next families, they were able to just go down the block or go down the street or whatever, so they had lots of activities for teenagers. Dances, and movies, and parties and all that. And, these teenagers didn't have to work in their f - in their family farms. So they had a pretty easy time, a nice time, yeah.

TH: So who would organize that?

NO: It was the government, it was uh - it was uh, executive orders signed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and there are a lot of discussions as about to why that was done just to the Japanese, and not just Japanese aliens, but Japanese - most of them were Jap - uh, were American citizens. They were not from Japan. The older generation had the choice of - we all had a choice I guess of moving inland, but you know, if you have three little kids and you're - you were hoping that you could get back soon, you didn't want to start a life inland. But some did. And like I said, those that were born in Japan were given an option to go back to Japan, but a lot of them, you know, would have no life in Japan. It was an executive order. It was a command from the President, who was the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, who asked that the military round up every Japanese, and put - and move them away from the West Coast. Because, I think they thought that a Japanese could not be trusted, whether it was your great-grandparents who, you know, was in Japan... and anyway. It didn't happen to the Italians in that way, it didn't

happen to the Germans in that way, it happened to the Japan - Japanese. And there are a lot of reasons why they think - it was not just prejudicial, but economic - the Japanese were making a lot of inroads in the farming and had some really nice properties in California and in Washington State. So you have people saying that part of the reason the executive order was signed was not just a war *necessity*, but economics and war hysteria, and prejudice.

TH: Um, were - was everyone aware at the time of the reasons why you were being interned?

NO: Do you mean my family or the other Japanese-Americans?

TH: Yeah, your family and everyone in general. Like, the teenagers seemed to be having fun but like, did they know that this was -

NO: Did they know why... I think they knew why, but you know, everybody now has so much more political clout than they did back then, 'cause my father said, "Well we just did what the government told us we should do, we were Americans, we wanted to be good Americans," you know, we didn't have any alternatives. What could we do? When the government says "go," you go. Like the stop sign saying stop, you stop. You don't just go on ahead and say, "Oh, well I'm American, I can do whatever I want." No, you can't. There's always somebody telling you what to do. And of course, I'm sure they were shocked that the Japanese - their parents' parents' parents' families would wage war on America. So it was - I think there was a lot of things going on. I can't imagine having seven days to decide whether you were going to stay or go with the government, promising that they'd take care of you, or, you know, what? What would you do?

TH: [laughs] I don't know, I would - I would move back to China.

NO: Yeah, but if - if you've never been there, like my parents had never been to Japan. My mother did, because my grand - on her side, our, her mom and dad were quite wealthy and they did very well. And so they would send the kids back in the summertime, and all. So- but if you, if like my father, you know he didn't even speak Japanese. And he, his parents left before - before the war, and left him and his older sister in charge of [laughs] the kids, in fact uh, I saw something when (?) my father would say that it was really my, my older sister that taught me to speak English. Yeah, anyway. Yeah, [TH: So-] I wondered those questions too, and I wish I'd asked my family.

TH: Um, like afterwards, did they feel like it was in - unjust?

NO: Oh, of course. Yeah.

TH: But at the time, they didn't?

NO: At the time, I guess they, like I said, they just chose to do what the government told them to do, with promises that they'd be taken care of, and you know hopefully, they would have a place to come back to in a few months. Little did they know that it would be three and a half years, oh my gosh. You know, maybe they would have chosen to do something else, had they known, but nobody knew, when the world would end or how it would end, or how it would affect them personally. 'Cause in the meantime, there were - there was litigation and judicial [AO coughs] questions being raised and you know, the courts getting involved too, when they were first put into the, the camps, yeah.

XL: So at what point did you realize that oh, like your family were sent to the concentration camp? Like did your parents told you after you, you got back?

NO: Uh, you know, they always talked about "camp", and it wasn't something that I felt I had ever (?) had a bad experience with. I did know they moved off the Japanese-Americans, and I do know that we came back, and tried to resume life, which we actually didn't because my father left farming and went to - our family moved to Seattle so he could have a regular paycheck with Boeing company. 'Cause when you're a farmer you don't really know what your regular paycheck is going to be like. S - and I never, I should have asked a lot of questions, but I was in a community that accepted us, and everyone in the area, all the Japanese-Americans, went through, most of them - there are a handful of family friends that chose not to, to go to the relocation centers. But most of, most of the kids, just you know, grew up - that was just part of where they grew up, and everyone had a shared experience in that. So we didn't think of it as being terribly unusual, I didn't anyway. When I got older, married, and came to Texas, and nobody in Texas knew that that had happened to the Japanese-Americans. And that it was, you know not just, not just those that were immigrants from Japan, but those that were born in the US, their children, and that's a lot of - that's three generations that had to go off, yeah. So I - but I don't recall a lot of what happened after that, like I said. I've heard stories. And I've been on pilgrimages, where we actually have visited the sites where we were incarcerated, either in Manzanar, California, or later, the Bainbridge Island group moved to uh Minidoka, Idaho, where most of the Seattleites and most of relatives and friends had been moved to. So I had been to those centers and you can see that there are army barracks, and you can see that there are wood floors with knots (?) and you can see that there - at that - they should have been isolated, now, it's getting to be very - there's a lot of development around there. But you can see how they were moved into an isolated area... with barbed wire fencing and guards, sentry guards, and, you know, censored mail and a lot of things that you wouldn't expect that would have happened to Americans.

TH: Um, so after you had gotten back, how did the - your community feel about the internment?

NO: Do - are you talking about the community of Bainbridge Island on the whole or just the Japanese-Americans?

TH: Yeah. On the whole and also like how much of Bain - Bainbridge Island was Japanese, that had been um interned?

NO: Well, there were 270 people on Bainbridge Island that were asked to leave. Some chose to go inland I think, there were three big families that did, but most of them have a shared experience in, in having been rounded up and put on a boat, shipped, uh, taken to Seattle, which is you know like - right now, with those big ferries that they have, it's like 40 minutes away but back then probably was an hour, hour and a half away. Put on a train, not knowing where you were going, the trains had uh blackout uh shades so you couldn't see in or out, or they couldn't see in. A day and a half later, we were in Manzanar, California. Now when we came back, we were actually welcomed by most - not everybody, even now, even now, people don't want - want Bainbridge Island to be lily-white. They don't want, you know, Filipinos or Japanese, or Hispanics, or anybody. Prefer it to be white. But hey, that's not the way it is. But on the whole, the island was very welcoming, and uh so I think most of the kids just picked up at school like they did before, and you know I remember school activities, I remember getting bussed to school and all this other stuff and having most of - most of the Japanese that were my age were relatives [laughs] they were cousins. But most of my friends were Caucasian, so I don't feel like I had you know any bad feelings about coming back. Now, when I moved into Seattle, I think being a big city, it was - I mean I remember being called names and, and stuff like that but, you know, I don't, I don't remember much else. My best friends are still either Japanese or Chinese, from those days.

XL: So did your parents give your English name?

NO: Yes, Natalie.

XL: Okay.

NO: Yes, right, when I started school, when I entered kindergarten, you know, my dad said hey you know you get married, your middle name is gonna become your maiden name - should be Hayashida. So he didn't give me an American name, he gave my brothers Neal and Leonard, [laughs] which I think is kind of unusual, but - and he gave me Natalie. So I've always - in fact, it was a shock to learn that Natalie wasn't on my birth certificate, it was always just Kayo Hayashida.

TH: Did you ever go by your Japanese name?

NO: Ever? I'm sure that in camp, I was probably called Kayo. But I don't remember, you know, res - having my friends call me that at all. In fact, it wasn't until 9/11 that I had to really be careful about putting Kayo in there because all the official passports [laughs] all these other documents have it down as Kayo Hayashida on, yeah.

TH: Um, just going back to like um, when you entered school, um, in kindergarten, I just find it really interesting that like the US like explicitly said that "we can't trust the Japanese, we have to put them in camps." And -

NO: Well see yeah, that's from the federal government. Not necessarily from little Bainbridge Island. Yes, okay.

TH: Yeah, yeah, and then like the war is over and then they sort of like have to take that back and be like "no, you're normal people again."

NO: Hmm, so you - I, I do know that the community was very accepting of their neighbors, they always called us neighbors. They didn't call us *the Japanese* or whatever, and I think that made a big difference. Because in all - it was a real community. And now it's, it's a little bit different. But I think back then - and like I said, because there was only one big school, the families knew each other through school activities, whether it's academic or sports, or whatever. And you know the Japanese I don't think isolated themselves. We went to churches with them, I mean so I think there was a lot of integration, and most, like I said, were born in America, they weren't, they weren't foreign-born, and America was their only country they - they knew and their lifestyle and all. So they were very accepting, which I thought was very nice. And if you go to Bainbridge Island now, they have a memorial wall the names of all the uh, Japanese families - uh, Japanese, period - that were taken off the island. And there's - starting a process of um, making - and it is part of the national parks system. And I think that's, a lot of people will hear the story of what happened to the Japanese on Bainbridge Island, and how unjust it was, and yet there are people now that say oh, they couldn't be trusted. You know, so it was a good thing because we didn't know what would happen. But three and a half years, that's a long time. Now a lot of people didn't stay that long, but they didn't close the camps, we didn't leave until three and a half years, yeah.

TH: People could leave voluntarily, or?

NO: People - it's - the whole issue started going through the court system. And eventually, they, yes, they said [scoffs] you know, they're truly trusted. So if you had a job or a sponsor, you were allowed to move away from the West Coast. So a lot of families settled in Salt Lake City and Denver, even Chicago, or New Jersey, you know, 'cause they only were al - they only were uh, prohibited from living on the West Coast, because they thought, well that's too close to Japan

and, you know. But they didn't do it - they didn't do it to the Hawaiians. And at that point, Hawaii was 40 percent Japanese. But it would've been devastating for their economy, the whole - Hawaiian - to uh, you know put their Hawaiians - their Japanese descendants in the camps. So, and why they did it on the West Coast, I don't know. For a lot of reasons like I said, you know, political and economic and racial. But coming back, I think I was fortunate to come back to Bainbridge Island, who accepted us, and um, I don't remember anything bad happening on Bainbridge, but again, I've - I was ten when we moved to Seattle. So I was quite young, and I think kids were nicer then, [laughs] maybe, I don't know. Yeah, and I never asked my parents about stories, maybe they had some issues. But um, you know, I know that my mother and father were both active in the community. So I think it wasn't like they didn't know us.

TH: So why were kids nicer back then?

NO: Why were kids -

TH: Why were kids nicer?

NO: Why were ki - they were probably born - raised that way. You know there wasn't that you and me sort of thing, us or them. Yeah, I - I think it was a different time. And like I said, Bainbridge was unique, it wasn't a big city, it was a very small community, and you know, there were mostly working, hard working people on the island and they probably shared a lot of experiences, and I think that makes a big difference when you share experiences, you can relate to the other person even if they look different from you, or act and speak differently. And most of the Japanese spoke English, I mean English was their first and only language. It's not like - even in Houston, you go to Chinatown and you hear all these different languages being spoken.

TH: So it's kind of like there was less awareness of people's race?

NO: I - I don't know if it's an awareness of people's race, it certainly is an acceptance of them. Uh, I'm sure they knew that you know there were Japanese or Filipinos or whatever on the island. But I, you know, I really can't answer that 'cause it's really my parents that probably could answer that better than I. Yeah, 'cause I was just a kid. You know, we, we did the same thing, I think, the other families did. Was a farming community, so you didn't go bopping next door to go visit your neighbors. You'd have to walk quite a ways. And it was a community that didn't have - we had one movie theater, and you know, so it wasn't - it wasn't a, a m - there wasn't a place like a mall where everybody would congregate. 'Course I was ten, what do I know. [laughs]

TH: Um, okay. I'm gonna go back to like your family from Japan, and then I'll like go - go to your schooling. So uh, did you say it was your grandparents that migrated to America?

NO: Yes, uh huh.

TH: So um, where were they from in Japan and why did they migrate?

NO: Uh, I'm sure it was economic like it is with most, most migrations you know, a chance to have a better life. But I think the Japanese were a little different in that they came to make their money, and go back to Japan and live like millionaires, which you know my mother's side did until they were - the house was bombed and they were - and the money was worth nothing when they got - after the war - during the war and after the war.

TH: Wait, literally bombed or -

NO: Yes, literally bombed, yes, it was on a run, I think coming back from Tokyo or something, I mean the, the Americans, if they had some bombs they would - it was a - what my aunt, who was American-born, and moved back to Japan with my [phone rings] - said that, that the planes would come over and their house was so big it got bombed right away, yeah. So they ended up living in the, in their farming shed or barn or something like that for most of the, most of the uh, duration of the war. And I think it was - I'd like to talk to my aunt a little bit more. She's 96, or she was when we visited her what, two years ago? So she's older than that now. But she was 13 I think when my grandparents moved back to Japan, having made their millions and wanting to you know retire in Japan. And so she has um, she has some recollection of that time, I should talk to her more. But she also had a hard time [phone rings] because she was American living in Japan, and Japan was bombing them. So she must have a real interesting story, and I need to talk a little bit more to her about that. And then my grandparents spoke English so that was kind of unusual too, at least my grandfather did.

TH: Um, they learned English in Japan?

NO: No, they - by virtue of coming over, to America, and you know, being an American, working and, and living in America for all those years, having their kids, dealing with schools and businesses and whatever. Yeah, you learn Japan - you learn English. And now on my father's side, I don't know that much about them, they were in Hir - Hiroshima. My mother's side was in Wakayama, which is south of Osaka. But my father's side was in Hiroshima and I was able to go and meet my father's youngest brother, who had gone back with my parental grandparents to Hiroshima. And they lived up in the hills, away from the city, which he - they did say that they remember seeing the big cloud. Yeah.

TH: So how did - what was your grandparents' profession?

NO: Farmers, yep, they were - raised strawberries, and uh on my mother's side, he was a little bit more of an, a businessman, he managed um, apartments, hotel - a hotel, and that's where my mother's siblings, youngest brother - younger brother was born in Seattle. And uh, mom was born on Bainbridge, and you know so and he did some lumbering, because by then Bainbridge Island was just trees. And so there was, he did some lumber - lumbering work for the sawmill there. But mostly, it was clearing the land and growing your own berries and having all these kids to help you work in the field. [laughs] I think that's typical of any agrarian society, you know.

TH: Okay, and sorry if I'm like repeating questions but so your grandparents went back to Japan after they had made money?

NO: Yes, right. They had their - all this American money, which was worth probably three or four - three hundred or four hundred times more than a - one little yen would be. So of course they went back, bought property, you know, I remember going into this little shop when I visited on one of my trips to Japan, uh, I went into this little shop in this town that my father was - my grandfathers had known and they said, "Oh, you're a Nishinaka! I remember when your grandfather came in, he had this gold watch and this top hat." So yes, that was the reason they thought they would live like kings going back to Japan. Because you know if you had a thousand dollars American, it probably made you very wealthy in Japan, which was a very poor country at that time.

TH: Um, were there a lot of people migrating to America from Japan? ...Was it like a trend?

NO: I - no, I can't answer that, but I do know that most, you know they had to come from Japan [laughs] all the - all these 270 families - uh, 270 people, excuse me - that came, that had to leave the island during the war. Their parents or grandparents came from Japan, yes. So the migration was - but on my um, father's side, they first went to Hawaii. And I think they were there in Hawaii for about a year 'cause my brother - my father's older sister was born in Hawaii. And at that time, so there was an older son and then uh the daughter that was born in Hawaii. And then my father was the third child. And then there were three other boys, and uh one died in infancy, one was one that I met in, in Japan, when I went to Hiroshima for the first time. And the other one that died on Bainbridge.

TH: Um, so how did your parents meet and then end up in Bainbridge?

NO: How did my parents meet - well I think, I got the impression that my grandparents on both sides knew each other some way, somehow, even if they were from Wakayama and one was from, from um, Hiroshima. Most of the, most of the Japanese that came ended up being farmers. Working for others, leasing the land or whatever, because you could not own land until you were - unless you were American-born and uh 18 or whatever. So the farm was the - my grandparents'

farms were actually in the name of my mother's older sister, or my father who was the oldest son then, American-born. And I think most uh, yeah because that area must have had good land, everybody wanted to be farmers. And you'll find the - all over the Northwest, doing farming. Whether it was truck farming for vegetables, berry farming for berries, or what. That's how they made their living and of course you know, so they had a lot of kids to help on the farm, and, you know they were able to uh, to uh feed their families by having farms. So I don't know, I mean they were not educated. I don't believe that they had an education to fall back on, like new immigrants would, they would come with education. They wouldn't come with just a knapsack and a shovel, thinking that they were going to make it big in the gold mines or whatever you wanna say.

TH: So um, your parents were like, childhood friends?

NO: Oh, how did they meet. Well, like I said, Bainbridge is a small island, and there were just handfuls of Japanese families, and I think you know they met that way. My father was six or seven years older than my mother. And I'm sure you know they met at school, or - or whatever. Or friends of friends, because I'm hearing that you know someone was their best man, someone was you know, went with him, so they - all those families, the Japanese families on Bainbridge, probably knew each other quite well. So if you have a young, pretty girl and a young, handsome man, they're probably going to be [laughs] - as a matter of fact, my mother's sister married my brother's brother. You know, so there were a lot of - and then Seattle was not that far away. My mother tells me stories, there were - there were four really sweet girls, she was one of them. And these boys would come from Seattle to come visit, and my grandfather had one of the few cars on the island, and he would go meet the ferry and bring them over. Or they would walk from the ferry to go visit the Nishinaka farm. And the, and the four beautiful girls. [laughs] I don't know, my - I don't know how true that is. It's just a story I heard from my mom, I don't think her sisters have verified that, but [laughs]-

TH: It's the legend.

NO: It's fun anyway, yeah.

TH: Okay, so finally we'll move to kindergarten. [laughs] Um, so, what was like the - the makeup of the student body in your school? So would there be like only one elementary school, middle school, high school, that you go through?

NO: Well, they had two elementary schools when I went to school. And in my classroom, there would be me and two cousins [laughs] that were Japanese in the same grade. And in my brother's grade which is a year older than - two years older than me - you know he had himself and lots of

others then, he probably had four or five Japanese in his class. Is that what you were getting at, how - ?

TH: Yeah.

NO: Yeah, so it - there were - there were quite a few Japanese families on Bainbridge Island. I mean, more than just a handful, probably at least ten I think, ten families, I'm sure. And what else did you - I'm not sure I'm answering your question.

TH: Just um, just like how did you interact with the other kids and like -

NO: I think normal. You know, I just remember just normal stuff. I really don't remember being exceptional, I had - got very good grades. But you know we would play at recess. I see pictures and I'm thinking, "oh we're wearing skirts!" [laughs] And you know, and even now, um, on Bainbridge it's nice because you go through grade school, junior high, high school as a class, and you, you know each other very well. It was a little bit different when I moved to Seattle, when I was in the - ten, so that's fifth grade. But it's the same sort of thing, you go to a community grade school, you go to a community junior high, community high school. I - I don't think that we were treated any differently. Of course there was a lot more that were not related to me when I went - when I moved to Seattle. Most of the kids in the class were not related to me any longer.

XL: So um, besides the Japanese student body, uh were all the rest of the students Caucasian?

NO: Yeah, most of them were just Caucasians, few Filipino families that had come to work the fields, yeah.

XL: Was it like a large school or only a small like community?

NO: It would be a small school, and maybe the classes were 20 kids, 25 maybe, not like it is now. I mean it was a rural community.

XL: That's um, the - your primary school or kindergarten?

NO: I'm - I'm talking about primary school, yes. [XL: Okay. Mmhm.] Because I only lived on Bainbridge until I was in the fifth grade. And it was different when you got to Bain - uh, Seattle, because it's a much larger community.

TH: Um did your parents raise you with Japanese traditions and Japanese food?

NO: Really not, because they were born in America and that was the only thing they knew. I in fact they're - it was mostly American food. I don't think I had sushi, now I did love tuna. But I don't think I was really - had a lot of sushi. The [inaudible] with the raw fish. It was pretty - but, but we had rice, it wasn't like potatoes. We would have rice but we'd still have meat and vegetables. American style. And not necessarily-

TH: Just with rice?

NO: It's what?

TH: Just with rice?

NO: Well it was rice and meat and potatoes. I mean separately or whatever. but we did have a lot of casseroles. But we did - when we first moved to Bainbridge we had a wood stove, it wasn't like we had a you know a big oven where you can make these huge casseroles or whatever. When we - by the time - time I was ten, we had a regular stove but um I do remember that old wood stove.

TH: Yeah because I imagine it would be hard to find Asian food in a small town.

NO: Yes that's right, not only because they have to come on a ferry to the island - there was this one guy that would come with a panel (?) truck and that was a big thing when he came. I forgot what was his name because he had - he had some Japanese food that you could buy. Yeah. Because I think the family didn't go to Seattle very often... And maybe once a year to buy shoes or school clothes. You know, that for sure and maybe friends or whatever. Because there were a lot of Japanese families that did not come back to Bainbridge. They didn't own the land, they were leasing, or if they were buying the land, they didn't have any money to keep the payments up so they lost the land. So there were a lot of families that didn't come back to Bainbridge Island after the war. And most of them ended up in Seattle. So there were friends in Seattle that we could go visit.

TH: Okay so um, when you were ten you moved to Seattle so your dad could work at Boeing?

NO: Yes.

TH: Okay, um, so how was that? How did it compare to Bainbridge?

NO: For me, or for him?

TH: Yeah, for - for everyone you know. [laughs]

NO: Mm, I don't know if I could answer that. I do know that it meant a steady paycheck, like I said farming wouldn't give you that. And I do know that um, there was probably very lean years, trying to get back established in the farming after getting back, 'cause like I said there would be two or three years where you wouldn't have any income. And two families lived together. So that must have been hard on them. When we moved back to Seattle, um, my mother got a part-time job working with, with old family friends that got her the job. And she was you know just working after [inaudible], she was home by the time we got home from school. Yeah. And I know I wasn't happy, because I, I didn't want to leave Bainbridge, and my friends and cousins and this other stuff and, so I got the biggest bedroom. [laughs] Uh but I don't know what else. And then I made friends, you know, it's not like I'm terribly shy, so it wasn't that difficult. And Seattle was fun, because the Chinese and the Japanese community, you know, co-mingled. I'm not sure they do that very much anymore, but um, anyway.

TH: I mean, you would've gone to a bigger school, right?

NO: Yes, definitely.

TH: And did, um, like the composition of the students change?

NO: There were more Asians, more - more Chinese... I don't know if there were that many more, I'm thinking of my elementary school. In high school, there were quite a few more Asians, and like I said more Chinese probably than Japanese. But in our - it was, it was certainly more blacks and Asians in Seattle than there would be on Bainbridge Island, yeah. But I think they all got along pretty well.

TH: Did nat - nationality didn't play a part at all, or?

NO: Did the fact that I was Japanese play - I, I think not. I'd like to think not. You know, 'cause I wasn't unusual. Everybody had Japanese friends, or everybody knew other Japanese. So I wasn't unique. Now, when we moved to El Lago, that was un - that was a little bit more unique. When we moved to Texas, the little town of El Lago, which is near Seabrook, probably Al and I were the first Asians that a lot of people knew. And they would ask if I was Hispanic [TH and XL: [laughs]]. They didn't know that - what a Japanese looked like and it's - you know, the same old thing, "Gee, your English is so good." And uh, "Where are you from?" You know, those kinds of questions that I - first I thought, "Gee, how strange," but if they see a black, they don't think the black is from Africa, but if they see a Japanese or a Chinese, they think they're from Japan or China. So that's been - that was an awakening. It was nice that I had Al. And we got involved, I never worked outside the home so I was always a volunteer in the community. So that probably -

there was a good side and a downside to that, if you're looking so different, everybody knows you [laughs] and you're expected to know them, yeah.

TH: Okay, um, so in high school, what extracurricular things did you do and what um, what hopes did you have for the future, like your job, did you want to get married, did you want to travel?

NO: Hmm. Yeah, all of the - [laughs] all of the - travel, I think, is not appealing to me until I got married and we had all that extra money that you could use to travel. But I expected to go to the University of Washington and I did. I expected to work a while and get married, which I did. Um, what else? [laughs]

TH: Did you have a dream job?

NO: Did I have a dream job, I worked at the University of Washington for a professor that took to me and said come work for me, 'cause he was going to be the new graduate school of business dean. So I went to work with, with him, it was a small school at that time, the business school was just - used to be in arts and sciences, and then they split off and started their own college of business. And so I really got in at a good time but I only worked for two years, because Al left Boeing to go work for NASA and that's how we ended up in Houston.

TH: OK. Where did you and Al meet?

NO: Where did we meet? At the bowling alley.

TH: Oh [laughs]

NO: There was a Friday night mixed [inaudible]. He was a young NASA, I mean a Boeing engineer from A&M Texas, and I was still going to the University of Washington but it was a mix young, young. It wasn't love at first sight, I don't believe. [TH and NO: [laughs]] So we dated for maybe five years before he needed to come back to Houston because his dad had died and his mother wanted him to help with the family business and come back to Houston. So he was getting ready to move back and that's like "wanna come?". [laughs] So romantic. [NO and TH: [laughs]]. So anyway, that's how we ended up in Houston and we lived in Houston for two years, across the street with his mom and dad's grocery store that I worked at in mid-week and he worked on the weekends, but eventually we found a place in El Lago and bought a house and moved there and adopted our kids, and had the typical suburban life that most people have, except I got involved in a lots of volunteering and got on City Council and did that for twelve years. And still volunteering and not working.

XL: Um what did you do in the City Council?

NO: What did I do in the City Council? Well, it's an elective position, we have a mayor and five council members, four council members. Five? Four, I think four. And you know you set policies, you know we ran like a little government to make sure the garbage was picked up, make sure that there is a police presence. And you know, loose doge, those are probably the main things, but the infrastructure. So I did a lot of everything, the areas of responsibility that I enjoyed was interfacing with neighbor and city and uh streets and sidewalks because I think those are important. So, but it's a small community, probably as small as the most small community associations so it's not a big deal.

TH: Um I just wanted to get like the moving straight. So you met Al in Seattle?

NO: Hmm.

TH: And then you moved to El Lago?

NO: No, [TH: Or Houston?] we moved to Houston and lived in Houston on the West - what does it call? The Westend? Westend of Seattle [she said Seattle but she means Houston] before we moved to El Lago. And he was commuting, driving every day from Johnson Space Center into Houston back and forth on the Gulf Freeway. And you know, I just said that it was time that we moved away from the store, but even after we moved from the store, every Saturday, he would come in and work at the store. But at least it didn't take an hour and a half from work to home, you know. It was a - came to be a 20-minute commute when we moved to, to Hous- to El Lago.

TH: So how did Texas compare to Washington?

NO: Oh how does Texas compare to Seattle. Well we switched our seasons, we play in the winter here and stay in the summer whereas normally, you know, would be the other way around. And it took me two summers to make me really decide that I wanted to make Texas our home. But it doesn't take long if you get a paycheck every two weeks. [laughs] And you get to know your community and your neighbors and you start a life here. You had to be flexible wherever you are. Yeah. So I don't mind the transition, I think I'm a loyal Texan now after fifty years? After fifty years of living in Texas.

TH: You said earlier something about um.. like going to El Lago was the first time people really noticed you for being Japanese?

NO: Yeah, being something different it was like what are you? You know that's mostly what is was. They didn't know whether we were Japanese or Chinese or Koreans or whatever. But

mostly it's what are you sort of thing. But then I realized it was because they - Texans hadn't seen a lot of Japanese, even now. There are a very few Japanese Americans in Texas and they are spread all over. They are not concentrated in the Chinatown or Korean town that sort of thing. And I think maybe the way we acted so American might have put them off now wondering where we were. I'm just thinking about that now. It could have been "what are these people?" I don't know. [TH and NO: [laughs]]

TH: Since you don't have the accent...?

NO: No, but we didn't have an accent. Do I have an accent?

TH: No.

NO: I don't think so. But I remember going to the Book Mobile, you know, just bicycling to the Book Mobile, we don't have a library in our community, the book mobile would come once a week or whatever. And they said "Oh you have to get your parents to sign card" [laugh] And here I am. So I don't think - I don't think Texans back then were aware of a lot of third generation Japanese in their states. And even now.

TH: Except in Houston, well, I don't know about the Japanese communities but there are a lot of Chinese.

NO: Yes, a lot of Chinese. And Al's family has been here since forty-what?

AO: Forty-five.

NO: 1945. So we know a lot of the Chinese Americans. But not the ones that are a generation that came after them from China, either from Taiwan or Mainland China.

TH: Um so when you moved to Houston, was there a Japanese community? And did you get involved in the Asian Community?

NO: I didn't get in - there is a um...we get involved with the Chinese community only because Al's family had been in you know in Houston for such a long time and his older siblings, they had groups and the dragon years, and who else honey? (To Al) The Chinese Baptist Church. There were some Chinese organizations that... I didn't know any Japanese. But because of his family, we did participate into Chinese things. Once we lived in El Lago, there was a Japanese American Citizens League which I had been activate in Seattle so there was a chapter here so we went to a meeting and joined. And are members there now.

TH: What did you do there?

NO: What did I do there? Oh we just socialize, you know, there is a structures, and there is a meeting, you know. You collect dues and that kind of thing. But the Japanese community is so small compared to the other Asian groups. And it's so spread out. You know it's not like, I mean we lived in, there's Bellaire, League City, there's El Lago, there's ...you know all over, and they congregate in one area on a Sunday afternoon. The only thing I really like about is the potluck. So kids to have some Japanese food usually that other people would bring or they would buy from a restaurant and bring it. Yeah. So there's that aspect. But the - I think all over, I don't care whether you are in Seattle or Houston, the Japanese communities are being lost by intermarriage mostly by - by uh not having the political bind. All different now. And by dispersion in the population, there's a lot of reasons why just the Japanese's groups aren't tending to be more Asian like the Texas Asian Republican or whatever that is now. So I think there's - I see a change. Yeah even with my family now, you know, there are very few of us that are a hundred percent Japanese or a hundred percent Chinese. You know the interracial, intermarriage you know has made a big difference in that. I feel for all ethnic groups. I don't care whether you are Jewish or Chinese, or Blacks.

TH: Uh was there any pressure from your family for you to only marry Japanese or Asian?

NO: For my family because I'm third generation and Al was there - they knew him quite well there was not. I think the more resistance was they knew that when we got married, we would be moving to Texas. I think that was the harder thing. Now for his family, who is - his mom and dad were both born in China. And I think they certainly remember the atrocities that the Japanese did to the Chinese and the fact that he's male I think makes some difference. You're probably Chinese and aware of that. So I think there was a little reluctance but his older sisters - two older sisters had married Hispanic and Japanese so I think it was easier for them to accept. And um I don't know, you have to ask him that question, but I never felt like I was an outsider unless they would all be speaking Chinese and I was thinking they were talking about me. [laugh] But I think eventually, I mean his sisters, families and siblings were very, very welcoming so I didn't have that problem with them. But I think - and you know his mom really was not that way either.

TH: Yeah. So I think it's kind of cool that um like in America all the Asians mingle together while they would never do that in their home countries so...

NO: Maybe you are right. Yeah, and like I said in Seattle, particularly I think the American born Chinese, Japanese. I remember my brothers, my uncle saying "oh you mean that kid is Chinese?" [laughs] He thought that Al was Japanese, [laughs] but anyway, yes, there's a lot of...because they grew up in America, you know, with American foods and all, then I think the differences is the ones that are coming from China or Philippine - Philippines or whatever now, have a

different culture than the American-born kids. And now your kids. So you're the generation that my grandparents would be. Were you born in America?

TH: Yes.

NO: See that would be my parent's generation. And I would be your kids. And your kids' kids will be my kids and you know, so if you go down there, you eventually...I don't care where you are living in, America or Britain or France, you would eventually take on the culture of the community that you are raised in. So I felt American and I thought I act American too. But I love the fact that I can be Japanese and go for that wasabi [laughs] and you know, love some of the Japanese traditions that I have tried to teach my kids.

TH: So what would you identify yourself as? Like more Japanese, more American?

NO: American for sure. But I'd like to say not Japanese American, but I'd like to say American with Japanese descent. You know - and that's I think this Chinese American, Philippino American, Japanese American. I think they'd say American of Chinese descents or American with Japanese descent. I think that the American part should be stressed first. Do you plan on uh raising your family and stay in America?

TH: [laughs] Yes, definitely stay in America.

NO: Yeah. And I sometimes wonder about why my grandparents would choose to go back. But I guess...

TH: Yeah and did they... How old were your parents when they went back?

NO: I - my father was seven I think he said? Yeah.

TH: So who took care of them?

NO: His older sister. Yeah his older sister did but she was only a year or two older than he. So I don't know exact...Oh there was an older brother too that was born in Japan and he stayed in America. So I think the family did that on my mother's side, of course she was in...I remember she said she was - she had finished high school when they went back so and then she went there and said "Oh, such a foreign country, she wanted to come back to America as soon as she could even if she had gone back several times to go - to spend summers, go to schools. And I am not sure exactly whether that's right or not because I should have and I didn't ask them a lot of questions.

TH: So-

NO: So- what was that?

TH: Sure, go ahead.

NO: I was going to say - what are you trying to find out about what I was feeling about being Japanese in America?

TH: Yeah. Did you... um were you conscious that you were different? Or were you treated differently?

NO: Yeah I'm always conscious of being different because I am so darn short. [laughs]

TH: That's not necessarily a Japanese thing.

NO: Well no, that's what I mean. I'm trying - I'm trying to be funny to say yes. But you can feel different by your physical appearance, not just your nationality but definitely. Yeah, people know I'm Asian, they may not know what I am or where my grandparents came from or what generation I'm in, but most, especially in El Lago, we're a very small community. Most people know that we are one of the few Asian families, perhaps the only one in our whole city. Yeah, outside the apartments, I don't know about the apartments but in our residential. There's some Chinese families now, at least Chinese last names.

TH: Um also, um in my experience I feel like Chinese Americans have their own sort of, their own unique identity that's not Chinese or American. So, is that the same thing for Japanese American?

NO: Well, that's what I'm trying to say. I feel like, I feel like I'm more American. I love Japan. I love to visit it, but I still consider it as a foreign country. But I do identify probably more with Americans with Japanese taste. Does that... you know I don't know how to describe that...yeah I - I'm proud of being a Japanese descendant and I love things Japanese most - for the most part. And the thing about being American - I mean being married to a Chinese and having a Chinese name, if I want to be Chinese I can, if I want to be Japanese I can. [laughs] So I - like I said, I don't feel like - I just feel like I'm me. Yeah. And I've had a lot of privileges for being married to Al. [laughs] And I think we have a very good life.

TH: Oh and how's your cultural identity changed over your lifetime? Have you - as you've gotten older and want to learn more about Japan?

NO: You know that's a good question. I think it's true, yes. I think travel does that and not necessarily travel to Japan but just traveling and saying you know there's a lot of different culture and I really and truly don't know that much about mine. And maybe it's time to do a little bit more reading and do a little bit more, more traveling so that certainly is true. But I still identify mostly as being American rather than being Japanese. Yeah and maybe in my parent's generation, they might have identified as being more Japanese. I don't know, I really never asked them that question. And my grandkids are all bi-racial so it's like I don't know what kind of questions to ask them. Although our granddaughter did say she wanted to be more Asian right? Yeah so I like the fact that Americans are more, on the whole, I think are very open to immigration and very open to having their neighbors being a different race than they are, on the whole. Especially in a cosmopolitan town like Houston.

TH: Right. Um so could you talk about adopting your kids?

NO: Can I talk about it? Ummm...what do you want to know?

TH: Umm. Where did you adopt them from?

NO: They - they - our older son Gary is Korean and our daughter is from Hong Kong. And presumably, a Chinese. And both of them were in the US to be adopted by other families who chose to let them go again so we were in the situation that we took older children. And I don't know what else you want to know. They were five and seven, almost seven, when we got them. That's considerably older. But they were with other families before we adopted them.

TH: Um like what kind of traditions did you raise them with?

NO: That's a great question. They are really raised mostly American with Chinese and Japanese food thrown in. Being here in Texas, there wasn't a lot of um Chinese or Japanese traditions or celebrations that we would handle. (To AI) Did we do any of them? Was there any Chinese celebrating? We would go to the cemetery - we would do that - kind of to honor your family. We would do that...the Japanese.

TH: Is it Sao Mu?

NO: I forgot what it's called.

XL: Is it Tomb Sweeping like day?

AO: Hung Sum?

NO: Hung Sum is the word. Cantonese. So we would do that periodically, maybe two or three times a year. And for the Japanese, there really - there really didn't do anything. Yeah, my fault I guess. [laughs]

TH: I mean you aren't raised with them either. So.

NO: I wasn't raised but I was raised with Japanese food and hearing - hearing Japanese words being spoken. And uh-

TH: Did you speak Japanese?

NO: No. And my father didn't. My mother because she had some education in Japan, in the summer times, would go spend time there, knew Japanese. But when she - first time I went to Japan with her. She tried using her Japanese - they couldn't understand her because she had the old pre-war Japanese [inaudible] Japanese - so they had a hard time understanding because language changes. Yeah. So I have Al, Al actually has actually taken some Chinese classes, I mean Japanese classes at Rice. Because he worked with NASA in the international space program so he worked with the Japanese and I think they allowed him to take some Japanese classes. [laughs] But um yeah that's a good question, do I identify myself as Japanese? I don't know. Um what does it mean to be Japanese? You know, my parents, there's nothing I can do about that except go under the knife. You know so - and because maybe if I stayed in Seattle and I were closer to my mom and dad, but being here for those fifty years and just seeing them two or three times a year it's not the same. And of course they grew up without their parents because their parents went back - went back to Japan. So they were on their own and they were pretty much American. Yeah.

TH: And how has the attitude toward Asians in America changed over the years?

NO: How has it changed? I think as Asians become more politically powerful or more economically powerful, there's more push against them. And I think it's the same sort of thing pre-war with the Japanese. You know once they've got economically independent and their presence of themselves they became more aware of that community and maybe a little envious, maybe - maybe more prejudicial. I don't know. But I think Houston's pretty good as far as race relations. But I may be wrong because we really don't live in Houston, you know. We are out in suburbia and that's a little bit different. But even the church that I go to, I'm probably the only Asian in the Methodist church. Yeah, there's not a lot of other faces in the community.

TH: Uh did your parent pick up Christianity or going to church uh just from living in America?

NO: I think I started only because during - during the internment of the Japanese, there were - there were missionaries that came and I know that part of my family are Catholics because the Catholics were trying to help the Japanese. And I think that was so when I came back - when we came back to Bainbridge, there was the Japanese Baptist Church that - I mean the minister would come to Bainbridge and we would go to Sunday school. My parents never went but they would allow us to go and I would go with older cousins or whatever. So I did go to a Christian church and Baptized. So I don't know what your question is getting at actually. [laughs]

TH: Just... 'cause like in your ancestry, Christianity doesn't go all the way back.

NO: Right.

TH: So, um...like did you - have you ever gone to an Asian church or?

NO: We've been to funerals and marriages and other functions at Buddhist churches yes. Shinto, I've never been to a Shinto church. But the Japanese, I don't know about the Chinese. The Japanese are very open, I talked to my cousins in Japan and I'll ask them about you know, "why did you go to that temple and are you Buddhist or are you Shinto?" And they say we are all, you know because Buddhism is the way of living, Shinto is the way of honoring your ancestors, and Christianity, hey, who knows. [laughs] So one of my cousins was saying, "we accept all three." You know, why would I have to be one way or another? Of course that doesn't say much about their loyalty. But, you know, and I - I'm a Baptist in Seattle but not down here because it's a different church. In the Southern Baptist than it is in the American conference that we had in Seattle area. But I can't say that I am a loyal church goer. I'm not, yeah because as I got older, I got a little different feel about churches and how they're a business, you know. And they are looking out for their own interest instead of the interest of the community many, many times. And they're not as Christians, as I think they ought to be. So anyway I'm not a - I'm not a real avid church goer. I could worship my, my God in my own way at home.

XL: So um so where did you - where did your kids locate?

NO: Where did what locate?

XL: Uh where did they go to? Um where did they settle down?

NO: I can't hear you.

XL: Are they still in Texas?

XL: Well your kids.

NO: My two kids. Oh.

XL: Yeah.

NO: What are they doing?

XL: Mm-hm.

NO: One is working and living in Seat...I mean in Houston. I get Houston and Seattle confused. In Houston. And the other is in Porter, Texas but works in Pasadena. He's the one that has three grandkids.

XL: Okay, so they are both in Texas.

NO: Yeah they're both in Texas.

XL: Do they visit you a lot?

NO: What was that?

XL: Do they visit you a lot?

NO: Not really, you know. [laughs] First of all, Al and I are so busy doing our own things. Coming and going. And you know, my kids' kids are going to be teenagers. The grandkids going to be teenagers. They don't like to come visit grandma and grandpa. And the other one works on the weekends, a lot. And we just yeah, but we like each other. [laughs]

AO: Most of the time.

NO: [laughs] Most of the time.

TH: So what do you guys do for fun?

NO: What do we do for fun?

TH: Do you still volunteer?

NO: Well Al is on the - yeah I still volunteer some, not much. Because Al just retired. Well he retired from NASA ten years ago but he just retired from a second contractor about four months ago. So we do a lot of - well first of all we had to catch up in what we let go around the

housework, we are in our first and only house for fifty years. So there are a lot of thing we need to do and we love to travel. We take at least two international trips a year and various national trips. Back from Hawaii, not too long ago. Other trips in the US. So we are in that stage where we can afford and enjoy going to - on travel and we enjoy it so we do it.

XL: So how many time did you go - did you visit Japan?

NO: We've been to...I've been to Japan maybe five times? I don't know. Al more because he would go on work. And when he goes to work, sometimes I would go with him and sometimes not. But I - you know the first time I went with my mother I think it was '81 and we probably have...I may have gone more than that. We went last year or two years ago? Maybe two years ago was the last time. But we don't just - we usually go on a tour or we go on business. Yeah. So I like Japan although because of my face they push me around like I'm a regular, [TH and XL: [laughs]] you know. [TH: Do they speak Japanese?] If you are American looking, they give you space. They are very, you know, they don't shovel you around, they think you're just a Japanese who doesn't know any better, you know, they push you around. It is kind of funny because I know enough Japanese to...If I say "Excuse me" or you know. They would say "Oh my god, the face." I could say - I know the word "face" and they say something about "I didn't know she was not Japanese or something like that." [laughs] But in China, they would push you around whatever you look like. [laughs]

TH: Unless you are very blonde and blue-eyed.

NO: Yes maybe, maybe. Yes so it's - what I like about travel is that when you come back and really appreciate what you have. Yeah.

TH: Um so do you think you could live in Japan ever?

NO: I could live anywhere I think. Yeah. I think I am very adaptable. I would maybe not like it but I think I could live in Japan for sure yeah, because Japan is changing. It's not so foreign anymore, unless you get out in the country. And I'm sure it's the same in Beijing or you know Taiwan. Big towns.

TH: So what - when did you start volunteering for things and what kind of organizations?

NO: Well the kids are always what start you in volunteering. The swim clubs, swim teams, you know, gymnastics, PTA. That's really how I started volunteering in school activities because like I said Gary was five when we got him and Paula was seven, so they were already going to school. It wasn't that I had to nurse them or change the diapers or whatever it was immediately school activities, softball, baseball, we both did things like that. And then on my own I uh started

helping the community, helping start the community newspaper. Covering the police department, covering city hall, and eventually it just morphed into, you know if you are covering what's happening in the city, you get to know a lot of people and you decide, "well, maybe I could make a difference by being on City Council". So for twelve years, I was in City Council and that was mostly my volunteering. And after that, it's you know, even now I just do a little bit with - with our garden club and I'm still volunteering with the environmental group. And I volunteer with the lead women voters. And I volunteer with the Republican women's group. So that's pretty much what I'm doing now was volunteering for those organizations. But I'm pulling away because it's time for the younger people to step up. I've been doing this for so long it's like, you know, I don't want to be committed to the third Wednesday or the second Tuesday or this. I want to give me that investment club, let me make some money here, [laughs] let me - let me do some fun things that I personally enjoy. So I've learned how to say no to the people who say "oh come, we need you on the board, we need you to do this, we need you to do that..." And I would say, no I am not interested in it. Did there, been there, done that. I think that's something you are going to hear a lot and now that Al's retired, you know. I mean we can go gambling on a whim without having to look at your calendar and say oh gosh I have a board meeting, oh gosh I got committed to do this or do that. So life is a lot easier at 76 than it was at 56, yeah.

TH: So when you were on all those boards and City Council, did leadership or managing things or organizing things, did that come naturally for you? Were there any challenges?

NO: Umm, for any woman it's a challenge to learn to speak up. And I don't know if I still - if I have learned that yet. But I think if you know what you are doing. If you ask questions, people are really willing to help you. So I think you know, I don't think it was a particular challenge. Sometimes it's an asset to be different, to look different. And - but I don't think it was particular challenge once I got to know you. And maybe I think it's a secret to be out there and let people know that you know what you are talking about and you really have some ideas of what might be done. Yeah but there are prejudices and there are people that don't always agree with you but that's life. And it's certainly a part of a political life, you know, you don't always get your ways and you chip at things and then eventually you hope that you could steer the group, or you can just quit.

TH: Do you remember any really obvious discrimination?

NO: Hmm, since I lived in El Lago you mean?

TH: Um in like your volunteering sort of businesses?

NO: Oh my volunteering. Gee, I don't know, I guess not. Because I can't think of anything off hand. Yeah. Hmm. And you know that I was one time called "Jap" and I said wait a minute and he said "Oh this is Jewish American Princess".

TH: Oh my god. [laughs]

NO: And I said, I don't like that. I mean so that - you know he said, "Oh I didn't mean that, I mean Jewish American Princess." Sure.

TH: What year was that?

NO: Oh what year? It was on City Council. But I mean I, you know, it's just, anyway, there are those times when they'll say when they bring up the Ellington. They have the [inaudible] recreation of Pearl Harbor bombing. I think people have said the Japanese did that or the Japs did that or something. And people do think that I have real ties to Japan whereas you know, my only tie was my, my American-born aunt, who speaks English and that's why I don't have to learn Japanese to visit her. You know.

TH: Oh you also said that "it's an asset to look different sometime"?

NO: I said what?

NO and TH: [laughs]

TH: Like looking different can be an asset?

NO: Yeah.

TH: Why?

NO: Um...well if you say "vote for Natalie". They would say "Oh I remember meeting her because she is the only - she's the only Asian I've ever known or whatever." That could be an asset. It can be a liability too. But sometimes they are more likely to remember you if it's you know, because you're so different. I don't care whether you are in a wheelchair like the governor is. Or have a face like me. Yeah. There's something different about you, some people remember it in a good way and not just bad way.

XL: So going back to your college experience, so what's your major?

NO: What was my major? In Business and administration. I ended up with a degree in business but I started off in sciences. I wanted to be a medical technologist and uh one of the classes you know actually had you go down to the lab and see. I was like "I don't want to do that." In lab testing body fluids and using a chart to compare what the percentages are and writing it up. So I thought well I got all these math and science credits maybe I will go into education. And University of Washington was great, they also had another class [laughs]. Very early on in education, where they had you one day a week to go to an elementary school or junior high and high school and kind of you know see how it is and I decided "I don't want to do that either". So I actually quit school for a year because a friend of the families said I need a secretary or we need a receptionist, come work for us. So I worked in his office and loved working, you know, but I also knew I wanted to go back to school and get a degree. And at that point the quickest way was to get a general business degree [laughs], which I did, yeah.

XL: So did your parents have any expectation for you?

NO: I think they expected like every Asian parent, hey expected a lot out of their kids but um I never got - I never got the feeling of pressure. Maybe my brothers did because they didn't do as well in school. But I think I was pretty well self-motivated, got a scholarship. So I think there were - you know my expectation were... I mean I didn't feel the pressure on me. I just did it because that was me.

XL: So did you and Al have any expectation for your kids?

AO: Respect your parents and study hard and no disgrace your family.

NO: Yeah I think that disgrace in the family is really very Asian. You know the, the Japanese have a word for that too. You don't bring shame upon the family sort of thing. I think that's something that I had heard.

TH: From your parents?

NO: I don't know if that came from my parents or from... I don't know who it came from, but yes, it's the same sort of thing. I have asked a lot of questions of my family and my relatives in Japan. And I think maybe I'm learning from them, some of these things. Because as I said, my aunt is American born. Her brother who is American born also has family so I have cousins there that are half Japanese, half American. So I think they talk a little bit more about the shame. Don't bring shame on the family and how you should be very careful who you marry. I mean that's - I think those are two very Asian, what do you want to call it, rules? Expectations? I think that's what it is. Get an education, don't bring shame to the family, and marry well. [laughs] And I'm finding also that the Japanese has learned a lot from the Chinese. And it came through the

Korean. And I learned - my dad always said that the Japanese are better. But you know I've learned that through history.

TH: You mean in ancient time?

NO: Yeah, everything that Japanese know came from the Chinese, possibly through the Koreans or morphed from the Korean and the Japanese have made it their own unique things, which is good. So I hope you guys will take what's good in America and make it your own. And take what's good from the Chinese and make it your own too. Yeah.

Interview-Second Part [In this part, Natalie Ong showed the interviewers some photos and archives she brought, including photos related to the internment camp.]

[Video: 0:00:00; Audio: 1:32:46]

NO: This is a picture of my mother and me being left to go to California from Bainbridge Island. Of course I have no recollection of that because I was thirteen-months-old but I look at the shoes and my dad said that I had a red jacket on. And my mother, of course is dressed very nicely. I may have given that hat away one time when we were cleaning out a drawer and I really regret it. The purse is the [inaudible] museum in Seattle.

XL [pointing at a poster Natalie Ong brought]: So what is this "I Am American"?

NO: Oh you know there was a um...there was a um...

AO: Hashtag.

NO: There was a hashtag "I am American". I forget when it was, maybe two - a couple years ago when they were trying to get people...I don't know what was it all about but it was on...

TH: On Twitter?

NO: On Twitter. Yeah it had to be on Twitter with that hashtag. Yeah it's just the resolution on that picture was not good enough. But this is typical of what it looked like in Minidoka. [pointing at a photo of the internment camp] Those are army barracks with the uh black tart. And I am right here and my mother. I could not find my father so I don't know whether he is in here or not. They did allow them to work outside of the camp. My father worked as a butcher and as - and other I think carpentry shop. But anyway afterwards, after they were proven their loyalty and when the beet field there was sugar rationing. And in Idaho, the beet fields were there so the farmers asked if they would allow some of these able-bodied men to come and work in the beet fields. At that point my dad was thirty-five or something, you know, he was not draftable

because he was older. But anyhow, everybody's smiling and working happily, and it's like, I wonder if they really were. So there's those pictures, and I think there is another picture. This is me in the Mess Hall. This is what it looks like inside eventually, you know they put up curtains and stuff but that's my mother and my brother who was born in California and me having...I don't know whether it was lunch or breakfast whatever. The bad thing about eating in that situation in the mess hall—families didn't eat together. You know the little kids did but if you were older, the teenagers would go and they would sit together instead of eating together as a family. So someone had mentioned that it was the breakdown, the starting of the breakdown of families because instead of eating with them as a family, the kids would go off and seek out their own friends and seek out their own age group and - and also get into a little bit more troubles too because you know, they didn't spend that much with their parents because they would get out and do things on their own. So those were some pictures that I brought.

TH: So who was taking the pictures inside the camp?

NO: Uh this picture was taken by the - by the Seattle PI and it is in the Museum of History and Industry in Seattle, MOHAI. Yeah. So that's... I don't know if you use that picture you might have to get an okay from them. And there are other pictures of you know, the families being taken away. There's one of my aunt's picture and her family. I don't know where that is. But anyhow, yes there were a lot of picture taken of the Bainbridge Island and there is a lot and lot of things written about internment and the Bainbridge Island because of the unique situation of the community welcoming them back whereas a lot of the places didn't even want them. So I don't know anything else. So I have some pictures. Those pictures, whoops. Oh here's the picture of my aunt. Here's another one of my mother's older sister who was American born and her four children taken away and everybody with just one toy. She's carrying the truck that her brother had. But you know the father was not there because he was born in Japan so the FBI took the f-him away earlier and he did not move to the camp with their - with his children. In fact, if you were only an eighth Japanese you had to go. Can you imagine that? It's like I don't think people understand like even his wife is foreign born so his child who was born in America had to go. And the child's child would have to go. See those are the three generations. So it was a different time. Yeah.

XL: So was it an article about the...?

NO: Oh there are so many news articles about my mother. Yeah because she a hundred and three and because that picture and she was very vocal. [AO: If you Google her name, it comes up.] So there were a lot of things. It was interesting. [AO: [inaudible]] When she died, I got a call not only from the governor but the governor of the state call me - "I'm so sorry Natalie." Yeah so interestingly, the governor from the Bainbridge Island, that's why our family know him, yeah. But there were articles and there were obituaries published in New York Times and the San

Francisco and Los Angeles. I've got stories from all these people that know the stories and know mom saying that there's a story of your mom in the paper. So she was pretty well known because of her age and because she was willing to talk about it I think too. She wasn't an activist, she was just a farmer's wife. But I think at some point, she decided that she would speak up to and people would listen to her. And that's what happened I think. Maybe that's why I have a big mouth too.

TH: We appreciate that.

XL: [To AO] Oh can you show us the pictures?

AO: Oh if you Google her name, Fumiko Hayashida. Yeah Fumiko Hayashida. There's a lot of images. But I don't know which image is hers because the image. But there are some - there are some movies...What's her name who made the movie?

NO: *Snow Falling On Cedars*.

AO: No not that one. The uh - what's her name? The-

NO: Oh Lucy.

AO: Lucy.

NO: Yeah she had a -

AO: What's the last name?

TH: Was she an actress?

NO: Ostrander.

AO: Ostrander. No she's a - she is the video-

TH: Filmmaker?

AO: Yeah filmmaker.

NO: Yeah. She is a regular filmmaker.

XL: So did she make a documentary?

NO: Yes. She did a documentary like a thirty-minute documentary about my mother. Yeah so that's, that's available.

AO: I think it's on YouTube so you can find it.

XL: Do you know what's the name of the documentary?

AO: It's *The Women Behind the Symbol*. [audio ends at 1:41:01] I'm not sure. Oh yes. Starwater Pictures.

NO: Stourwater Pictures.

XL: Stourwater Pictures. Okay.

AO: Yeah. S-T-O-U-R-W-A-T-E-R.

[Video ends at 00:08:32]