



Kimiko Tazoi

Civilian

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Interviewer:
Rick Randle

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Rick Randle: We have with us Kimiko Tazoi who has some very interesting experiences that occurred during WWII—one of those was her family. You tell us about it... you were living in California at the time, and then tell us what happened up to when the war started and what happened to you after. Give us a little background of growing up in 1940 and '41 prior to the attack.

Kimiko Tazoi: I graduated from High School in 1941, Lindsay, California, (I have to think back) then the war broke out then the US declared war, and so President Roosevelt signed an executive order, 9066. That meant that everybody on the West Coast; Washington, Oregon, California and part of Arizona had to prepare to leave and all of the families got a family number, and ours was 548.

Rick Randle: And were you shocked when you heard that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor?

Kimiko Tazoi: Yes, we didn't expect that. It was on a Sunday and our neighbor came over and said, "Did you know that Japan attacked Pearl Harbor?" Well, we didn't know Pearl Harbor or Hawaii or anything. We were just a small community in California and at that point that was it for us, you know. We didn't know what to think. And then later on there were fellows who were in the service—the draft was already on then—and they had to mobilize to go to war.

Rick Randle: How long was it after Pearl Harbor did Roosevelt sign that?

Kimiko Tazoi: February of 1942.

Rick Randle: And then you received word that you had to leave for your home?

Kimiko Tazoi: Yes. They divided the zones—A, B, C. A were the ones close to the ocean, then the next one was all the cities along the coast and then C. We were the last ones out because we were a farming community and we had a farm, and June is when we had to get ready to leave.

They told us we could carry what we could take; suitcase, duffle-bags with everything and possessions. You may store your furniture or have somebody take care of it, and so we got ready and we got all of our things. There was my father and my mother and my brother and three of us girls, so there were six of us in the family.

Rick Randle: Were you the oldest girl?

Kimiko Tazoi: Yes.

Rick Randle: And at 19 did you feel like your life was going to be over having to go into a camp?

Kimiko Tazoi: No, because we didn't know where we were going to go. Nobody knew.

Rick Randle: So you had no fear?

Kimiko Tazoi: No, because the Japanese would say, "**shi kata ga nai**" you know you just do what they tell you because you're a native of the U.S.A. and they were not against the U.S.A. either because that's their home since they left Japan and so we just got prepared and did what the government told us to.

Rick Randle: You parents felt OK about it?

Kimiko Tazoi: There was no animosity back then. Everybody else was in the same boat, you know. You just do what the government says, U.S.A., that's own home and that's our country and they told us to do what they tell us to do – pack our bags and carry them. The army truck came to pick us up and took us to a train station and put us on a train and we didn't know where we were going.

Rick Randle: You had to carry everything you own in your suitcase and you had no idea where you were going?

Kimiko Tazoi: Nope. Of course there were others who said some of them were in Arizona, some of them were in Manzanar—that's California because there were ten camps and we didn't know where we were going. I remember the first stop after we got on the train. We went from Lindsay... to Fresno and we were on the train going toward Barstow which is South I guess, and they said we could get out and stretch at Barstow and there was no place to sit. We had our suitcase that we sat on there, and then we stayed there overnight. They said we'll be heading towards Arizona and that's where we ended up, in Arizona.

Rick Randle: So you stayed overnight in Barstow. Did you have to sleep just out on the ground?

Kimiko Tazoi: Ya, in the train. They made a pit stop and to this day I will not eat an apple butter sandwich.

Rick Randle: And why is that?

Kimiko Tazoi: That's what they gave us.

Rick Randle: An apple butter sandwich. Alright, then you ended up finally in...

Kimiko Tazoi: ...Arizona, Parker. Then from there family units got on army trucks and they took us to Poston where we were Poston II. After we got there everybody got a salt tablet because it was so hot, you know, you had to have a salt tablet for heating I guess. And then they said this is your mattress, so they gave us a canvass and filled it with straw and they gave each of us two army blankets and a cot and then assigned us to a barrack. It was four units of 20 x 40, so each family that had more than eight, got two units.

Rick Randle: So the large families got...

Kimiko Tazoi: ... two units, yes. Then we had our meals just like the Army you know. Somebody cooked for us and we could work as waitresses and help serve the meals. There were some of them who were administrators where they had... it was a block. Camp II had 30 blocks

of 12 barracks and the manager and then they had the latrine and mess hall and showers—boys on one unit and women on another.

Rick Randle: And did you get paid if you were a waitress?

Kimiko Tazoi: Yes, I think we got \$16 for waitress, \$19 for a little bit more administration and \$21 as a blockhead, you know, to manage the block. In our unit there were block 27 and 12 blocks, there was a recreation hall and meals where we went to help. So at six o'clock gong everybody would go eat at that time.

Rick Randle: So you got your meals provided but this was \$19 per month you're saying...

Kimiko Tazoi: Yes, but the meals came just like the Army—you get whatever they feed you. But if we were waiting the tables in the morning or getting set up for lunch or something, everybody that did any kind of work and was able to get \$19. And another thing about school... they built a school and where Arizona was so hot, they were able to make blocks of sand bricks, and dried them and then they built the school. Then my sister... she was a junior, had to go to school, and she finished junior and senior year. Her graduation certificate was provided by the Department of Indian Affairs. She went to Ohio on a camp scholarship or whatever they had for them.

Rick Randle: Did they force your family to sell their farm, or did they just sell it because they thought they had to?

Kimiko Tazoi: Well you just had to sell it for what we could get because everybody else that had farms had to do something.

Rick Randle: So you didn't know if you were ever coming back to California?

Kimiko Tazoi: No, we never did know. We never knew where we were going to end up in the first place. We didn't know we were going to be in Arizona. Some of them who had left

voluntarily, if they had family out of California, that's where some of them loaded their belongings or whatever. At that time there was gas rationing anyway and they couldn't go very far.

Rick Randle: If you had relatives that lived on the other side of that line, could you go live with relatives then not have to go to the camps?

Kimiko Tazoi: Well, there were quite a few who were able to do that, yes, but we did not. All of our family were on the coast or in Japan.

Rick Randle: How long were you there?

Kimiko Tazoi: I spent three Christmas's there and got out just after 1944, so about three years. I was telling my friends a while back, I said, "You know what? We didn't cook did we?" She said, "No, we didn't cook anything."

Rick Randle: Were you treated humanly?

Kimiko Tazoi: Oh yes—no problem there. Some of the... what do you call them? Parents send them to Japan to be educated and so they had that feeling for Japan so they would be radical about it, but the rest of it, it was OK. They said the kids were having a great time, and I guess we were. Arizona, where we were, in Poston, we'd get sandstorms. I saw the soldiers in Iran after the first sandstorm and sand was flying all over in their faces and everywhere, and eating it and sleeping in it and I thought, "Oh my gosh!"

Rick Randle: It brought back memories. Well you had no air conditioning in the summer. I can imagine it was just as hot as it could be.

Kimiko Tazoi: But we tolerated it because we were used to heat because Fresno, California was hot in the summer.

Rick Randle: Did you have any friends your age that went to fight for the United States?

Kimiko Tazoi: After they had the draft, yes there were. One block had 13 young fellows. I'm not sure how many went from our block.

Rick Randle: But most all volunteered who were eligible.

Kimiko Tazoi: Yes, they were all volunteers. And while we were still there they would say that this mother lost her son so you'd walk around and you'd see a gold star in the window while we were in camp.

Rick Randle: Now looking back on it, what is your opinion on that decision, having experienced it?

Kimiko Tazoi: It is what they say in Japan... “**shi kata ga nai**” you can't do anything about it so you just do what you were asked to do. There was no such thing as disloyal or anything. Who are you going to be disloyal to or who are you going to fight? At our age that's OK.

Rick Randle: And when did you hear that the war was over?

Kimiko Tazoi: I was already in Utah.

Rick Randle: You'd come to Utah.

Kimiko Tazoi: Oh ya, 1944 and the war ended in August 1945. I remember that day because it was my mother's birthday.

Rick Randle: And then you met your husband after he got...

Kimiko Tazoi: Yes... I didn't know where Utah was, even when we were studying geography, because we never expected to be leaving California or anywhere. There were ten camps and we ended up in Poston, but there were others in Manzanar, that's California, and there are a couple

of friends that live around here now, that were in Arkansas and Idaho and another camp in Arizona. Poston had three. Gila, Arizona had a camp, Colorado, Idaho.

Rick Randle: Explain about the Gold Star Mothers. That is amazing to show the loyalty and patriotism of even those incarcerated. So you said there was one Gold Star? Were there Blue Stars in the window?

Kimiko Tazoi: No, the only one I recall was a gold star. I imagine there were others but in our block I noticed there was one but several different blocks might have had... you know, because we got to know quite a few of them. I worked at the library, and they'd come in and they were young boys.

Rick Randle: Was there barbed wire around the camp and were there guards around?

Kimiko Tazoi: I suppose there were, but not where we were.

Rick Randle: You didn't feel like you were in a prison camp necessarily.

Kimiko Tazoi: No. They had work for the young people and so they were making camouflage nets for the war. So we were loyal. There might have been a few outbreaks but not where we were.

Rick Randle: I don't think there were any outbreaks, to my knowledge, anywhere.

Kimiko Tazoi: Well we heard of some but we were far removed from that.

Rick Randle: Well thanks for much for sharing that. It is so rare to be able to talk to somebody who experienced it, so we appreciate it very much. Could you explain what the Gold Star Mothers were... the definition.

Kimiko Tazoi: After, even just lately after the Korean conflict, or Vietnam, I didn't hear so much about it, but with this Persian/Iraq war, there were mothers who had made quilts and they had gold stars made, and I think it was just locally around here, I can't remember exactly when that was, but there were a lot of them being made and it was to honor the sons who had died in the service. It didn't matter which.

Rick Randle: It was very common in WWII that if you had a son serving, you had a blue star, one that was wounded was a red star and if you had a son that died, you had a gold star.

Kimiko Tazoi: That's what I remember. The only one I knew was the gold star in our camp. Of course there were three camps and we were number two, so different parts of California were sent to different places. The only mode of transportation... if you wanted to go somewhere or if there was something special, then you went on an Army truck or you walked.

Rick Randle: So they'd take you out of the camp to attend...

Kimiko Tazoi: ...another function somewhere. The kids had schooling and there was a doctor's hospital in camp #1 and nurses and a lot of professional people because there were a lot of families that had older sons and daughters that were professional doctors and school teachers.

Rick Randle: So the teachers and the hospital staff were all Nisei individuals?

Kimiko Tazoi: Some, but mostly caucasian administrators. That's the way most places were, but then after awhile then they would be able to get those jobs, so it was just like a little city I guess.

Rick Randle: How many were interned in Poston?

Kimiko Tazoi: I think ten or twelve thousand in ours but I think one had quite a bit more. There were city people.

Rick Randle: Thank you so much!