

ORAL HISTORY
GEORGE YONEHIRO
(1922-2001)



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EDITOR'S NOTE

The oral history of George Yonehiro is one of four oral histories conducted by the former California State Bar Committee on History of Law in California in 1987. These were the final oral histories conducted by the committee, and they are published for the first time in the present volume of *California Legal History* (vol. 6, 2011). Yonehiro was interviewed by committee member Raymond R. Roberts on January 21, 1987.

The oral history has been reedited for publication. The spelling of names has been corrected wherever possible, and explanatory notations in [square brackets] have been added by the editor. The sound recording and original transcription are available at The Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley. The oral history is published by permission of the State Bar of California.

As an introduction to Judge Yonehiro's life and career, the obituary published by *The Auburn Journal* at the time of his death in 2001 is reproduced below.¹

— SELMA MOIDEL SMITH

¹ Gus Thomson, "Former Placer County Superior Court Judge passes away," *The Auburn Journal* (March 28, 2001), p. A5.

GEORGE YONEHIRO

Former Placer County Superior Court Judge George Yonehiro is dead at age 78. Yonehiro, who spent 21 years on the municipal and justice court benches before serving as superior court judge from 1985 until his retirement in 1988, died Sunday in Auburn.

A native of Placer County's Gold Hill area, Yonehiro graduated from Roseville High School and what was then Sacramento Junior College.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, Yonehiro and his family joined other Placer County Japanese-Americans who were relocated to Tule Lake, California. During 1942-43, 119,803 men, women and children of Japanese descent were placed behind barbed wire.

In early 1943, the secretary of war announced a decision to form an all-Nisei combat team and Yonehiro enlisted. Yonehiro fought in Italy and France as an infantryman. He served with the all-Japanese 442nd Regimental Combat Team — one of the most decorated American units of the war. Yonehiro was awarded the Bronze Star medal but didn't find out about it until the mid-1980s when he requested a new copy of his discharge papers. By then a colonel in the California State Military Reserve, Yonehiro was presented the award by Gen. Donald Mattson, commander of the California Military Reserve. During the war, Yonehiro also received a Purple Heart medal.

Following the war, Yonehiro entered the John Marshall Law School in Chicago. He practiced law in Chicago for seven years.

Moving back to Placer County, Yonehiro was elected Colfax Justice Court judge in 1964, a position he held until 1980, when he headed both the Auburn and Colfax lower courts. In 1982, he was elected to the newly created municipal court by garnering 23,638 votes to his opponent's 8,674.

When Gov. George Deukmejian appointed then-attorney Jackson Willoughby to a Placer County Superior Court seat in 1984 over Yonehiro, the veteran jurist quickly announced that he would challenge the appointment in the June primary. Yonehiro won easily and was sworn in early the next year at St. Joseph's Parish Center with 300 people present.

Yonehiro is survived by his wife of 47 years, Miyoko; daughters Melissa Yonehiro Caldwell of Sacramento and Alison Dee Miller of Seattle; a son, Marcus Yonehiro [U.S. naval officer on active duty in the port] of Yokosuka, Japan; a sister, May Sagara of Granada Hills; and three grandchildren.

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Q: It is January 21st, 1987, and I'm in the chambers of Judge George Yonehiro. He has consented to give us a few of his thoughts and reminiscences about the practice of law as it pertains to him. So, let me start off by asking when your earliest ancestor came to the United States or to California.

YONEHIRO: Initially, my dad was a newspaper reporter for an Osaka, Japan, newspaper. He got sent to the Hawaiian Islands to cover the Japanese immigrants there. He so loved the climate and geographic area of the islands, he resigned from the Osaka, Japan, newspaper and took on employment with a Hilo, Hawaii, newspaper.

Q: When was that?

YONEHIRO: This was 1912. He stayed in the Islands for seven years, doing newspaper reporting work. Also, during the course of seven years, he joined the United States Army. In that way, he was one of the few Asiatics who became automatically eligible for naturalization.

Q: When he joined the Army, was that the regular Army or the reserves?

YONEHIRO: The regular Army. He was stationed at Fort Shafter, just before the early part of 1918. He must have got in shortly before the declaration of World War I by the United States. I think that was the early part of 1918. America was involved in the World War for only a short time — a year or less — and during the '19, possibly '17 or '18, period he was with the regular U.S. Army — infantry.

Q: Stationed in Hawaii?

YONEHIRO: Yes, Fort Shafter. After he concluded his service with the U.S. Army — around 1919 — he came to the mainland. While he was in Hawaii, he held a close friendship with a person who had a gambling den. His buddy and he came over in 1919 to the mainland, and he urged him to join in gambling activities in the city of Sacramento. By that time my dad had gotten married. He felt that he couldn't raise a family in a gambling atmosphere, connected with a gambling enterprise, so he decided to become a farmer. He always felt that the rural atmosphere was most conducive to raising children. He was a very poor farmer, always a good newspaper man. He always maintained contacts with various newspapers. During the course of his career, he one time held paid correspondence with five newspapers and he did work for various newspapers until he was seventy years of age.

Q: Where did your mother come from?

YONEHIRO: My mother also came from Japan. During the period my father was in Hawaii he had visited Japan two times. On the second visit, just before he left for the American mainland, he married my mother. They were both from the Honshu Island. There are three major islands in Japan. The middle Island is Honshu. They are both from the Hiroshima area.

Q: And when were they married?

YONEHIRO: They were married in 1917.

Q: So they evidently met in Hawaii?

YONEHIRO: No, sir they did not meet in Hawaii. On one of my dad's visits back to Japan, he met my mother.

Q: I see. And where were they married?

YONEHIRO: In Japan, sir.

Q: Your mother, then, was never eligible for naturalization. Or was she, by virtue of her marriage?

YONEHIRO: No, sir, she was not. There was an Asian Exclusion Act which was not repealed until the early part of the 1950s. And then Asiatics became eligible for citizenship. At that time my mother, of course, made application and was subsequently naturalized.

Q: Could your father own any property for the purpose of farming when he moved to California?

YONEHIRO: Yes, he could, because he was a citizen. But the Asian Exclusion Act precluded Japanese nationals from owning property.

Q: Sometime during the marriage, you and your brother were born.

YONEHIRO: Yes, I have an older brother who was born in 1919 and a younger brother was born in 1925, and a sister was born in 1923. I was born in 1922.

Q: Were your parents living in the Sacramento area at the time you were born?

YONEHIRO: Yes, we were living in Gold Hill. I was enrolled in Placer County. During that period, hardly anybody was born in hospitals — they were mostly born at home, attended by midwives and physicians. I was born in the [inaudible], so actually the Gold Hill area was the closest post office. The address was Newcastle. I am registered as being born in Newcastle. My mother was attended by Dr. George Barnes. I suppose in lieu of fees he had the honor of me being named after him.

Q: You were then originally registered and baptized by the name of George. That is not an anglicized version of a Japanese name?

YONEHIRO: No. My younger brother was named Earl. That is on his birth certificate, as is my sister May, whose name appears as May on the birth certificate.

Q: How about your older brother?

YONEHIRO: The older brother, Horace, was actually named Hohei. Later, he adopted the name Horace before he went into graduate school.

Q: Gold Hill is the nearest post office to Newcastle?

YONEHIRO: Gold Hill at that time did not have a post office. Newcastle was the closest post office to Gold Hill, sir.

Q: Newcastle is directly south of Auburn — I guess about halfway between Auburn and Roseville.

YONEHIRO: Yes, about three or four miles west of Auburn.

Q: And your early schooling — you went to high school in Roseville, was it?

YONEHIRO: Yes, I graduated from Roseville High School in 1940 and attended then Sacramento Junior College. It is now City College. I graduated from Sac JC in 1942. I was relocated.

Q: We're getting ahead of the story now. I want to go a little bit slower. Sometime when you were in high school or college, did you take up flying?

YONEHIRO: Yes, when I was attending Sacramento Junior College I enrolled in the Civilian Pilot Training Program, which was a federally funded program. After World War II broke out, it was . . .

Q: You're talking about the war in Europe?

YONEHIRO: Yes. When World War II started. There was a department called the Aeronautics Department which was affiliated with Curtiss-Wright, an aeronautics engineering institute. The affiliation was such that a two-year course of studies in the aeronautical department qualified for two years of aeronautical engineering credit. Aeronautical engineering was not too complex in those days and usually the required course of studies entailed three years of application for an engineering degree in aeronautics.

Q: How did you find out about the bombing at Pearl Harbor?

YONEHIRO: By radio on Sunday afternoon, December 7, I believe.

Q: Where were you at the time?

YONEHIRO: At home, sir. We were outside, hoeing around the yard — cleaning the yard. And one of my brothers or sister came running out, stating what she or he had heard on the radio.

Q: And who was at home at that time, do you remember?

YONEHIRO: The whole family was home, sir.

Q: Including your brother who was in the Army?

YONEHIRO: No, he was on active duty. I'm sorry. It was just my younger brother, my sister, my father and I.

Q: And what was the first effect that Pearl Harbor had upon you or any member of your family?

YONEHIRO: My dad came from a long line of warriors — samurais. Also, his short military stint with the U.S. Army had given him that type of posture. So from the earliest childhood we were always counseled, trained and instructed to grow up and face life as a soldier — not in the sense of doing active duty as soldiers, but philosophically and morally and physically to always be a soldier. Whenever we cried as children, my dad would say, “A soldier would never cry,” or, “What are you going to do when you get into the Army or when you grow up and become a soldier?”

Q: And what was his reaction then to the news of Pearl Harbor?

YONEHIRO: His reaction to the news of Pearl Harbor was actually, I felt, one of mixed emotion, concern for his older son, who was already in service and could become involved in warfare and concern for his possible immediate or future safety. I discerned that very strongly, sir. My father loved his children very closely.

Q: I want to jump ahead to another character that we're going to talk about later. Your future wife had occasion to visit Japan in the summer of 1941, didn't she?

YONEHIRO: She visited Japan after graduation from high school in 1940. In September 1940 she went to Japan and she came back to the United States in June of '41. So she just made it back on one of the few last boats coming back to the United States.

Q: Were you ever in Japan prior to World War II?

YONEHIRO: No. I have never been west of San Francisco, sir.

Q: Have any of your brothers or sisters been to Japan?

YONEHIRO: Yes, all of my brothers and sister have visited Japan a number of times.

Q: Were they there before the war?

YONEHIRO: No, sir, except my older brother, who was born in Japan.

Q: I see. He is Horace. And he is the older one who was on active duty on December 7?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: Let's talk a little about Horace later on. We're not going chronologically. Did he stay in the Army?

YONEHIRO: Yes, he stayed in the Army and he was discharged around December, 1945.

Q: And where did he serve in the Army?

YONEHIRO: A substantial amount of time was spent in the continental U.S. He went through the military intelligence school at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, and then he got assigned to the Pacific Theater as a military interpreter.

Q: Do you know what outfits he served with?

YONEHIRO: I believe I recall the 7th Cavalry.

Q: And the 7th Cavalry saw active duty, at least in the Philippines?

YONEHIRO: Yes.

Q: I know that you're far too modest to volunteer these things, so I'm going to suggest that you tell me if your brother was awarded any particular citations or medals for his service in the Army.

YONEHIRO: I don't think so. I really don't know. I haven't really discussed that too much with him, and he has never volunteered that.

Q: At the occasion of an award to you, it was said by one of the generals from California that your brother was awarded the Silver Star.

YONEHIRO: That was my younger brother, Earl.

Q: Oh, I've got the brother mixed up. I'm sorry.

YONEHIRO: My younger brother, Earl, and I were members of the 442d Regimental Combat Team, and he was awarded the Silver Star.

Q: Immediately after December 7, you said that the first effect upon you was that you were grounded. How were you told that?

YONEHIRO: I was advised that by a Signal Corps lieutenant who had taken over the then Sacramento Municipal Airport. The Signal Corps took

over the Municipal Airport and were in control of the airport, and I was advised by the lieutenant that I was grounded and also advised by the CAA authority man at the Sacramento Municipal Airport, that I was grounded.

Q: What other things affected you immediately after December 8?

YONEHIRO: A few weeks after December 8, we received public notice that our travels were restricted.

Q: That was a public notice in the papers?

YONEHIRO: A public notice in the papers that people of Japanese ancestry were restricted to about a fifty-mile travel radius, which did not restrict me from attending classes at Sacramento Junior College.

Q: But other than that, there were six members of your family, and five of them American citizens, but all of you were placed under that travel restriction?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: Did you notice any particular problems with relation to your education at Sacramento College.

YONEHIRO: No, sir.

Q: Was there any immediate reaction one way or another so far as the students in general were concerned towards Asiatic students?

YONEHIRO: No, sir.

Q: About how many students were there at Sacramento College, if you remember, who were of Japanese ancestry?

YONEHIRO: I would say about fifteen percent.

Q: Was there a tendency of those of Japanese ancestry to stay together for mutual comfort?

YONEHIRO: No, sir. I did not notice any prevalence for people of Japanese ancestry to congregate together for mutual comfort. You must remember, sir, that we were all of college age, late teens. And although I graduated from Roseville High School, by that time there were a lot of students from the Sacramento area I had made friends with. Younger people's emotions didn't run as rampant as adults'.

Q: Now we're covering the period of perhaps January and February of 1942 where your travel was restricted. Did anything else affect you as far as governmental actions were concerned at that time?

YONEHIRO: Well, those governmental actions that affected all Americans, such as rationing of tires, rationing of gasoline. Although because we were farmers, we had unlimited amounts of gasoline. But those who lived in the more urban areas were restricted, I believe. But I never realized the limitations because we were in agricultural pursuits.

Q: I notice on the wall of your chambers a framed copy of a newspaper poster. Can you read it for me?

YONEHIRO: "Headquarters Western Defense Command and Fourth Army, Presidio of San Francisco, California, May 7, 1942. Civilian Exclusion Order No. 47[:]"

1. Pursuant to the provisions of Public Proclamations Nos. 1 and 2, this Headquarters dated March 2, 1942, and March 16, 1942, respectively, it is hereby ordered that from and after 12 o'clock noon P.W.T., of Thursday, May 14, 1942, all persons of Japanese ancestry, both alien and non-alien, be excluded from that portion of Military Area No. 1 described as follows" (and it gives a popular description of a portion of Placer County).

2. A responsible member of each family, and each individual living alone, in the above described area will report between the hours of 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M., Friday, May 8, 1942, or during the same hours on Saturday, May 9, 1942, to the Civilian Control Station located at: Loomis Union Grammar School, Loomis, California.

3. Any person subject to this order who fails to comply with any of its provisions or with the provisions of published instructions pertaining hereto or who is found in the above area after 12 o'clock noon P.W.T., of Thursday, May 14, 1942, will be liable to the criminal penalties provided by Public Law No. 503, 77th Congress, approved March 21, 1942, entitled 'An Act to Provide a Penalty for Violation of Restrictions or Orders with Respect to Persons Entering, Remaining in, Leaving, or Committing any Act in Military Areas or Zones,' and alien Japanese will be subject to immediate apprehension and internment.

4. All persons within the bounds of the established Assembly Center pursuant to the instructions from this Headquarters are excepted from the

provisions of this order while those persons are in such Assembly Center. (Signed) J.L. DeWitt, Lieutenant General, U.S. Army Commanding.”

Q: Thank you. Just as a note in passing, do you remember who was governor of the State of California at that time?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir. Governor Warren.

Q: And the president was Franklin Roosevelt, of course. Did some member of your family attend that general assembly in the Loomis area?

YONEHIRO: Yes, my father. He received instructions. I was at school at the time this notice was posted. If I recall correctly, it was about six days before the actual exclusion date — the actual date we were subsequently ordered to depart from the area. So, I received a telephone message from my dad asking me to either come home that day or the next day, because of the posted notice.

Q: And what instructions was your father given, so far as leaving the area was concerned?

YONEHIRO: My father was given instructions in a printed form and also verbal instructions to prepare to be moved to the assembly center area, that the only properties that could be taken would be that that could be hand-carried.

Q: Was any provision made so far as the Army or the government was concerned for relief from taxes on your property, or someone to look after it in your absence?

YONEHIRO: No, sir.

Q: About how much time was your father given from the date of that notice to the time that he had to leave?

YONEHIRO: About five days. He advised me six days prior to our leaving. He attended this meeting, I think the next day — I was home by then — and he left about five days later.

Q: You were required, then, to finish up as much as you could with your school work?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: Was any provision made for you to continue your work at some other place, or continue it by correspondence?

YONEHIRO: No, sir.

Q: What did you and your father and rest of your family do in the next succeeding five or six days?

YONEHIRO: We prepared to move. We assembled as much of our movable household goods as we could. We moved them to our tank house. We had a three-story tank house. Bigger items, like pianos, like refrigerators and ranges, we just left in the house. We were all under the impression that we would be back in a few weeks or a few months. Livestock — we took the chickens and the turkeys over to a Caucasian friend — told him to take care of them, or eat them up, or whatever he wanted to do. The one horse we had left we moved to a pasture owned by another Caucasian. The horse was quite elderly, and I think my younger brother, who assisted my dad in moving the horse — I guess they had tied the horse behind the truck and towed the horse and made the horse run too fast. Anyway, they later reported that as soon as they got to the pasture, the horse keeled over and died of a heart attack.

Q: When you said that each person could take as much personal property as he could carry, was that in the form of a suitcase or a trunk?

YONEHIRO: Yes, a suitcase.

Q: And how many of your family were in this relocation plan?

YONEHIRO: The five of us — my father, my mother, my sister, my younger brother and myself.

Q: Then the only one not immediately affected by this was your older brother.

YONEHIRO: Who was on active duty in the Army.

Q: Then sometime in the middle of May, 1942, you were required to relocate. What happened? Where did you go?

YONEHIRO: We assembled at one of the fruit sheds in Loomis. A bus — Greyhound, or whatever the bus line then was — took us to what is now the Camp Beall area and there was an assembly center where we stayed for

about a month and a half before we were further transported by train to Tule Lake, California, in Modoc County.

Q: When you went to what is now Camp Beall, were you put in barracks, or tents?

YONEHIRO: Barracks, sir.

Q: And were you put in as a family unit, or did they separate you?

YONEHIRO: Family unit, sir.

Q: During that period of time, how were you served meals?

YONEHIRO: In mess halls.

Q: Cafeteria-style?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And the family would go together?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: Were there any restrictions on your activities while you were at that first relocation center?

YONEHIRO: No, sir. There was a type of curfew — I can't recall the hours — but, actually, there was nothing to do after the sun went down.

Q: Were there any restrictions on the news that you received — newspapers or radio?

YONEHIRO: There were no newspapers admitted to the camp. Some of the people had hand-carried, as did our family — radio sets. The only outside news we got, was over these radio sets.

Q: Were you permitted to send any letters out or send any packages out from that camp?

YONEHIRO: Those letters were initially submitted for censorship and then sent on.

Q: And then, we're to April or May?

YONEHIRO: We went in the latter part of May, and I think, in the early part of July we were sent by train up to Modoc County to Tule Lake, California.

Q: Tell me what Tule Lake is like as far as the weather is concerned and the general geography.

YONEHIRO: Tule Lake is an old dried lakebed surrounded by barren hills out in the desert — more or less, sagebrush. Tule Lake Assembly Center consisted of some seventy-odd barracks, I believe.

Q: Were they constructed for the purpose of interning the Japanese, or were they used for some other purpose before that?

YONEHIRO: They were constructed for the purpose of interning the Japanese. Interestingly, there were remains of older, decayed structures — a few buildings that were remnants of detention centers for Italian and German nationals who had been detained there during World War I.

Q: To your knowledge, was there any mass internment of Italians or Germans during World War II?

YONEHIRO: No, sir.

Q: What was it like when you were at the war relocation area at Tule Lake?

YONEHIRO: Life was like in any assembled area where you had limitations. The camp proper were military, tar paper covered barracks.

Q: How many people were allocated to each barrack?

YONEHIRO: Each barrack was divided into about four apartments. And a family occupied each apartment unit, or a number of people occupied each apartment unit.

Q: In each apartment unit, was there a division for bedrooms and living areas?

YONEHIRO: No, sir.

Q: It was just one room?

YONEHIRO: Just one big room, and if you wished to do so, you could scrounge around — there was scrap lumber, or lumber that you could possibly purchase at the exchange. From pieces of lumber you could make your own partitions.

Q: Were you able to take money out of a bank account, if you had a bank account?

YONEHIRO: If you had a bank account, you could send for it, yes. You could send for it, withdraw money.

Q: Other than that, was there any source of income for any of the people at Tule Lake?

YONEHIRO: Yes. If you wished to work, there were three classifications of work. Professionals, were paid \$19 a month; clerical and blue collar were paid \$16 a month; unskilled labor was paid \$12 a month.

Q: What type of labor did the professionals do?

YONEHIRO: Doctors, lawyers did the usual type of work that they would have done on the outside.

Q: I don't know if you remember or not, but was it possible for a citizen of Japan living in California to be a lawyer prior to World War II?

YONEHIRO: No, sir. I believe you had to be a citizen of the United States to take the oath at that time.

Q: Were there any entertainment facilities available at Tule Lake?

YONEHIRO: Those that you made for yourself. There was no such thing as a theater or other place of entertainment. It's what any group of people would facilitate for themselves.

Q: What language was commonly used at Tule Lake?

YONEHIRO: English for the younger people, and, of course, Japanese for the older people.

Q: Could you give an educated guess as to the percentage of people at Tule Lake who were American citizens?

YONEHIRO: I would say about two thirds.

Q: How long did you stay at Tule Lake?

YONEHIRO: I stayed there off and on for about seven or eight months.

Q: What was the occasion on which you could leave?

YONEHIRO: Work furlough, sir. There was a bunch of young fellows going to Idaho to work in the fields and I took that opportunity, and I think I was able to leave camp for approximately four months that way.

Q: And while you were in Idaho on this work furlough, were there any restrictions on your activity?

YONEHIRO: None other than that type of restriction that applied to any civilian of Japanese ancestry. Some limitation on travel. Idaho is still in the Western Defense Command Zone.

Q: Would you give me your impression of being confined and in camp?

YONEHIRO: My impression as to those of older Japanese — I could only surmise — but I had a lasting impression, very moving, of how younger, especially those of tender years, felt about confinement. Even at the assembly center where we were located, near what is now Camp Beall, after the first few days, after the first week or two, after the excitement and the novelty of meeting new people, seeing new things, experiencing new daily routines, the youngsters, the very young children started to whimper. All over camp you could hear little kids crying. They wanted to go home and they couldn't understand why they couldn't go home. They wanted to go home, I guess, to their familiar house, their toys, pets, or whatever they left behind, and they really couldn't understand. It's like when you take younger children out for an evening, and after they get tired of visiting, they want to go home. And you can give them relief on the outside by taking them home. But there, the mothers and fathers could do nothing but tell them, "You can't go home."

Q: Did your father or your brothers or sister take advantage of the opportunity for work furlough, or was it offered to them?

YONEHIRO: It was offered to them. In the meantime, my younger brother, who had received a scholarship to Antioch College in Ohio, got the opportunity to leave. After a few months, after scrutiny and clearance by the FBI, you were free to leave the relocation center and get out of the Western Defense Command Zone, which extended as far east as Ogden, Utah, if you were engaged in lawful activities — employment or school.

Q: And did your brother then attend Antioch College?

YONEHIRO: Yes, he did, sir.

Q: And how did he support himself while he was there?

YONEHIRO: He had a full scholarship from a firm of lawyers named Lowell Brothers, here in Auburn. They gave him full scholarship tuition and dorm fees and he also got a further grant from the school itself. Antioch was one of those progressive schools that believed in classroom attendance one semester, work experiences one semester — the kids got paid for work experience. He took pre-med and I think he worked in some hospitals every other semester.

Q: Where is he now?

YONEHIRO: He is in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is one of the few physicians to have a PhD in surgery. He and twenty other physicians formed a medical center about twenty-five years ago. Now they have over 300 physicians in their medical group.

Q: I've got to go back then and ask you, how much education did your father have?

YONEHIRO: My father had what is in Japan called a central school, or mixed school, that is, high school — three years of central school. My mother had approximately the same.

Q: How about your other brother and sister and your father — did they leave the Tule Lake Relocation Center?

YONEHIRO: Eventually. My brother, like I said, went to school; my sister stayed with my folks. They were transferred to another relocation center in Amache, Colorado — in southeastern Colorado.

Q: Were you with them at that time?

YONEHIRO: No, sir. I had already left the Tule Lake center. I left in the mid part of '43, and I had gone to the Chicago area.

Q: Your mother and father and your sister May were relocated to Colorado at what time, do you remember?

YONEHIRO: In 1943 — the end of '43.

Q: And did they stay there till the end of the war?

YONEHIRO: Yes, they did.

Q: And, after the war?

YONEHIRO: May I correct that. My father left several times on these work furloughs — he went to work on a farm in western Nebraska several times while my sister and mother stayed at camp.

Q: And is it true that your mother and sister fell in love with Colorado?

YONEHIRO: Yes.

Q: How long did they stay there?

YONEHIRO: Forty years, sir. Almost forty years, until my father expired in 1982. Then about, six months later, my mother left Colorado to live with my sister in Southern California.

Q: You said that you left the relocation center permanently in the middle of 1943.

YONEHIRO: Yes.

Q: And where did you go?

YONEHIRO: I went to Chicago, sir.

Q: And for what reason? Why did you pick Chicago?

YONEHIRO: Because the Chicago area was one of the few places that offered employment. While we were at camp, recruiters would come in from major companies and offer jobs, and like I said before, the only way you could leave camp was to pursue other lawful activities. So, you had to have a job when you left.

Q: And what job did you have?

YONEHIRO: Initially, I signed up to work for a cold storage plant in Detroit, Michigan. I worked for them for about a month and a half, and the cold storage plant got too much for me. I went back to Chicago, because I had a number of friends there, and I went to work for the Simonize Company in Chicago.

Q: Were you ever involved in any military activities in World War II? Did you enlist?

YONEHIRO: Yes.

Q: And to what outfit were you assigned?

YONEHIRO: The 442d Regimental Combat Team.

Q: I guess that we can take judicial notice of the fact that it is the most highly decorated unit of any kind in World War II, isn't that correct?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

Q: When you were with the Regimental Combat Team, were you stationed in the United States?

YONEHIRO: For training purposes. And then we were assigned overseas and I served in combat in France and Italy, sir.

Q: And, did you see your brother at that time?

YONEHIRO: Yes, my brother was in the same unit. And I saw him not too frequently, but every once in a while.

Q: Were the majority of the recruits in the Regimental Combat Team from Hawaii or from California?

YONEHIRO: I would say two thirds were from the mainland, California, one third from Hawaii. The original unit was a Hawaiian National Guard Unit. The original was called the 100th Battalion, which became the 1st Battalion of the 442d Regiment.

Q: And the regiment saw action in Italy and in France?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: Did you receive any awards or decorations for your military service?

YONEHIRO: Subsequently, I did, sir, a Bronze Star.

Q: You mean you found out about it subsequently?

YONEHIRO: Yes.

Q: At the time you didn't realize you had been awarded it?

YONEHIRO: That's right.

Q: When were you discharged from the Army?

YONEHIRO: February 1946, sir.

Q: And where?

YONEHIRO: In Chicago — Fort Sheridan, Chicago.

Q: And then, what? The next event in the life of George Yonehiro?

YONEHIRO: I stayed on in Chicago and eventually — like all veterans, I wasn't too proud to work, and I thought I'd buy myself a little business and went broke as a gas station operator in nine months. I felt that the study of law would certainly be better. I picked up some more pre-legal units at the then Roosevelt College — named for Eleanor Roosevelt, it subsequently became Roosevelt University — and from there, I went to John Marshall Law School. I graduated from John Marshall in 1954, got admitted in January 1955, because the Supreme Court did not meet in December of '54. But I passed the bar the first time, which I was quite proud of. And I practiced in Chicago until November or December of '61, and we moved out to Colorado.

Q: How did you support yourself when you were in law school?

YONEHIRO: I worked full-time for the Simonize Company and attended law school evenings, sir.

Q: And how many years did you attend law school?

YONEHIRO: Four years, sir.

Q: You took the bar in Illinois?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And when you started practice, what type of practice did you have in Chicago?

YONEHIRO: Anything that would come. Like all new lawyers, general practice and then eventually, the area I was practicing in. I had two offices — a Loop office for prestige (in the Loop you could rent offices for \$60 a month, then) and a southeastern side office for practicality. The southeastern area became subject to an urban renewal program. And I got deeply interested and became a specialist in that area of condemnation.

Q: Were your clients chiefly of Japanese ancestry?

YONEHIRO: No, sir. Mostly Caucasians. About twenty percent Blacks, very few Japanese.

Q: Sometime in this period, did you get married?

YONEHIRO: Yes, in 1954, on Valentine's Day — how romantic — Koko and I got married.

Q: And where was Koko from?

YONEHIRO: She was from the Los Angeles area. She was born in Burbank and grew up in the El Monte area. She attended El Monte High School.

Q: Was she relocated at the beginning of World War II?

YONEHIRO: Yes, she was.

Q: To where?

YONEHIRO: She was relocated initially to Calleri Assembly Center in Calleri, California. Then she got transferred to Gila Relocation Center in Gila, Arizona. And then, eventually, transferred to Crystal City, Texas, which was an internment camp. Her father happened to be at one time a president of the Japanese Association — a social group in El Monte — and for that reason he was interned along with what they considered dangerous aliens — Japanese nationals.

Q: And as a result of that marriage, you have children. What are their names and when were they born?

YONEHIRO: Melissa was born in 1958; Marcus was born in 1959. Melissa is presently working in the development department, KVIE, educational TV, Channel 6.

Q: Did you meet Koko in Chicago?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And what was she doing there, at that time?

YONEHIRO: She had come out, I guess, seeking her fortune in Chicago, and I met her in Chicago.

Q: You told me that after a few years in Chicago you decided to try your luck at the practice of law in Colorado. Was that because your parents were there?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And where did you move to in Colorado?

YONEHIRO: Glenwood Springs, Colorado — about 175 miles west of Denver.

Q: And did you practice law there?

YONEHIRO: Briefly, sir, for a short time.

Q: Did you have to take the Colorado Bar Examination?

YONEHIRO: No, sir. I was admitted to the Colorado Bar on a motion made by a resident attorney.

Q: Then you made a subsequent move from Colorado. To where?

YONEHIRO: To Placer County.

Q: And for what reason did you return to Placer County?

YONEHIRO: Basically, initially, because at that time I was deeply interested in representing an investment group in Chicago, and they asked me to look up potential land development possibilities in California and Nevada and five western states. And I thought there were high potentials for investment in this area, and because I was a native of this area.

Q: And what type of investment were they interested in?

YONEHIRO: In possible commercial development.

Q: When you moved out here you had the children?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And where in particular did you move in Placer County?

YONEHIRO: Applegate, California, approximately ten miles east of Auburn.

Q: And what kind of office did you set up, or what did you do in Applegate?

YONEHIRO: For land investment purposes?

Q: No, offices.

YONEHIRO: Our office was at home. On instructions from Chicago, I would go weeks at a time and look up potential areas for development.

Q: And that would include all other areas in California?

YONEHIRO: Yes.

Q: Then did you decide to resume the practice of law?

YONEHIRO: Yes, I did. But I was not a member of the California Bar. I took employment initially with the County of Placer in their Assessor's Department. Then I went to work at Sacramento Municipal Utility District in their Land Department, when they were developing the Upper American River Project. While I was working at Sacramento Municipal Utility

District, the former judge of the justice court, Alta Judicial District, had decided to retire and I campaigned in 1964 for that position and won the election.

Q: At that time to be a justice court judge, was it necessary to be a member of the Bar?

YONEHIRO: No, sir. You took a qualifying examination.

Q: And did you take that examination?

YONEHIRO: Yes, before I ran for the office.

Q: And what year was this?

YONEHIRO: 1964.

Q: And do you remember how many people ran against you?

YONEHIRO: Yes, three others ran against me. One was the city attorney of Colfax, one was the former clerk of the court, and the other was the Democratic Central Committeeman.

Q: What was the general geographic area of that judicial district?

YONEHIRO: Extending a few miles north of Auburn, clear up to the Donner Summit.

Q: What were some of the localities or names of towns in that area?

YONEHIRO: Dutch Flat, Colfax, Norden, Silver Springs, Emigrant Gap.

Q: At least half of those were place names associated with early mining activities in the Mother Lode country.

YONEHIRO: Yes.

Q: I guess the other half were associated with the railroad?

YONEHIRO: Yes.

Q: About how many people were in that district at the time?

YONEHIRO: About 12,000 registered voters.

Q: And can you tell me your best guess as to those voters who were of Japanese heritage?

YONEHIRO: Just our family and one lady — a Japanese war bride.

Q: So, if any voting was done on the basis of race or heritage, you were only assured of three votes.

YONEHIRO: Yes.

Q: Were you forced into a runoff?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And then eventually you were elected?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: This was in 1964?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And where was the courthouse located at that time?

YONEHIRO: Colfax, sir.

Q: And what type of facilities were available?

YONEHIRO: The court was in the old City Hall building in the City Council chambers.

Q: Colfax, at that time, probably the only claim to fame was that it was a stop on the railroad, right?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: How busy were you as a justice court judge — was it a full-time occupation, or could you do other things?

YONEHIRO: I could do other things, but I decided that if I were going to become a judge, I would devote full time to it. Initially, the pay was less than what I was earning at Sacramento Municipal Utility District. If I recall, it was about \$6,800 or \$6,900, just a little short of \$7,000, but I decided to devote full time to it, improve the type of job that others had regarded as just part-time supplement to their other activities or occupations. The following year, the supervisors awarded me with recognition by making my court the only full-time justice court judgeship in Placer County, and raised my salary to \$900 a month.

Q: I know that when you first took over as a justice court judge, you had a tremendous idealism so far as judges were concerned in the practice of law,

but one time I think you told me that one of your initial impressions was disillusionment the way that justice was handed out prior to your election.

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: Tell me about it.

YONEHIRO: One of my first impressions is of the former judge. He remains unnamed, and he has long been deceased. The former judge used to sit in the back end of the little courtroom and observe me, especially when I was in small claims matters. And after the conclusion of one of those small claims cases he came in the back room where I was drinking coffee, sat with me and he said, "George, you're doing those cases too fast. Take them under submission. What you do is tell them you'll decide later, go on home and see which one will bring you the chicken or the ice cream, or whatever they want to bring."

Q: I take it, you didn't follow his advice.

YONEHIRO: No, sir.

Q: Now, some time during this period when you were a judge of the justice court, you engaged in a few writing activities, didn't you?

YONEHIRO: Yes.

Q: Tell me about those. Tell me about the first occasion in which you followed in your father's footsteps. I guess prior to this you had done some writing.

YONEHIRO: Yes. I was always interested in creative writing and short stories. When I was going to Sacramento Junior College and also to Roosevelt College, and in between, I wrote and had published by *Bluebook Magazine*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and *Collier's*, short articles. At that time, the prevailing rate — the high was 2 to 2½ cents a word; low was about ½ cents a word. So you got a few dollars, but the dollars went far in those days.

Q: Did you author the articles under the name of George Yonehiro?

YONEHIRO: No, sir. Patrick Shanagan.

Q: Did you use the same Irish alias for all of the articles you published in national magazines?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir. Or some other of that sort. George Yonehiro would never sell. But Patrick Shanagan would sell, and there were a few others that I adopted from time to time.

Q: Did you continue any of this writing after you returned to California?

YONEHIRO: Yes, I did, when I started getting to factual, because non-fiction paid a little better, for even the shortest article. I believe it was *Newsweek*, or one of the national news periodicals, just a one-paragraph item would give you \$14–\$50, which is a lot better than pounding the typewriter at short stories and getting only a few bucks.

Q: From 1964 on, how long were you a judge of the justice court of that one judicial district?

YONEHIRO: Till 1980, and then the Colfax-Alta Judicial District was consolidated with the then Auburn Judicial District. In 1980, I became judge of the consolidated district.

Q: How many JP's were there in Placer County prior to the consolidation?

YONEHIRO: Seven, sir.

Q: Do you remember any of the JP's who served with you at that time?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir, Howard Gibson.

Q: He subsequently became a superior court judge.

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: Who else?

YONEHIRO: Wayne Wylie, who also became a superior court judge. Robert Fugazi, who has recently retired from the Tahoe Judicial District.

Q: But at the time of his retirement, was he the equivalent of the municipal court judge, by virtue of salary and activity?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir. He was one of the few remaining circuit judges.

Q: And how about another JP?

YONEHIRO: There was Frances Raines in Forest Hill who never had formal — yes, she did — she had a year or so at McGeorge Law School.

Q: And how about the JP in — was it Loomis or Lincoln?

YONEHIRO: Bob Young?

Q: Wasn't Dick Couzens a JP?

YONEHIRO: Oh, yes. Richard Couzens was initially appointed to the Lincoln justice court and then because Judge Wayne Wylie got elevated to the superior court, there was a vacancy in the Auburn Judicial District. The supervisors decided to hold an election for that office. Richard Couzens won the election, was judge of both Lincoln and Auburn Judicial Districts. Richard was, in 1980, appointed to the superior court.

Q: Now, after the consolidation of the Colfax and Auburn Judicial Districts, I presume that, of necessity, you were a full-time judge.

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And where did you sit?

YONEHIRO: I sat in both Auburn and Colfax, mainly in Auburn.

Q: But you divided your time between judicial districts?

YONEHIRO: Yes. It was consolidated — one judicial district — but the facilities were apart. I was also appointed to be judge of the Lincoln Judicial District, until the Lincoln Judicial District was consolidated with Loomis.

Q: So, at least at one time, you were a judge of a substantial percentage of not only the geography but of the population of the county.

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: I want to spend a minute or two for you to tell me about the occasion of building the new courthouse in Colfax.

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir. There was a person named Mr. Chase, Earl Chase — a blind man who owned three different adjacent parcels in Colfax. On each parcel he had an old house. Every time there was a vacancy in one of the houses, the city attorney would condemn the house so he couldn't re-let it. On one of the remaining occupied parcels there was an old well. Some kids one evening had removed the sheet metal that covered the old well. The well had long ago filled in to where there was only about two to three feet deep. But on a technicality, the city attorney filed a misdemeanor "dangerous abandoned well" charge against Earl Chase. Earl Chase came up to answer the complaint, and he said he was getting sick and tired of

this harassment: “I will give you the property, Judge.” I told him I could not receive the property, but the county would love the donation, and would he give it to the county for courthouse purposes. He said, “yes, sir.” So it was easy. I walked up to the then chairman of the board and asked him to come to the court and make a formal acceptance on behalf of the county and we did just that. We got a quick title search — everything was okey dokey except for current taxes, and that was the subject property for a new courthouse in Colfax.

Q: And who designed it?

YONEHIRO: I did, sir, together with a structural engineer friend of mine, Carl Schonig, who has long expired.

Q: So that courthouse in Colfax that is still in use today certainly is a memorial to George Yonehiro.

YONEHIRO: Thank you, sir.

Q: When did you pass the bar, or did you ever pass the bar in California?

YONEHIRO: Yes, in 1977, sir.

Q: And did you ever practice law in conjunction with, or at the same time that you were a justice court judge?

YONEHIRO: No, sir, I never did, sir. I am one of the few judges in California who had never practiced California law at all.

Q: Now, in 1980, you were a justice court judge of the Colfax-Auburn Judicial District. And, at that time, that judicial district was far and away the largest judicial district in the county.

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: There was some belief that at that time the population of the judicial district exceeded 40,000 people, was that correct?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And I am told that one of the former publishers living in Auburn filed a suit in the superior court to declare the district to have over 40,000 people in it, primarily for the purpose of making that judicial district a municipal court.

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: When did that happen?

YONEHIRO: That happened in 1981 or 1982. I think it was early '81, by Mr. William Cassidy.

Q: And then, for one reason or another, the Board of Supervisors took some action, pending the determination of that lawsuit, so far as relocating the boundaries of your judicial district, is that right?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And as a result of the Board of Supervisors' actions, a certain number of people were removed from your district?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: So, as a result of that lawsuit, and as a result of the action of the Board of Supervisors, there was a determination that there were not, at that time, 40,000 people in your judicial district.

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: Now, at about the same time, the Board of Supervisors took legislation to Sacramento to create municipal courts throughout the county. Is that right?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir. With the exception of the Tahoe Judicial District, other judicial districts — the proposal was to consolidate all those and make one municipal court district.

Q: So the result of that proposed legislation was that there was to be one municipal court in the entire county except for the fringe area around Tahoe, and there would be how many municipal court judges?

YONEHIRO: Three, sir.

Q: And those judges were to be elected, or appointed?

YONEHIRO: Elected, sir, because there was a brand new judicial district.

Q: When was the election to be held?

YONEHIRO: In 1982.

Q: Do you remember the election of 1982? Did you have any opponents?

YONEHIRO: Yes, I had one, Mr. Phillip Mohr, a lawyer who resided in Roseville and practiced in Wheatland.

Q: And that was for one of the districts?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: Were all of the seats at large? They weren't divided into geographical districts?

YONEHIRO: This was one judicial district, but there were three seats — Seats One, Two and Three.

Q: And which one did you run for?

YONEHIRO: One, sir.

Q: And as far as seats, Two and Three — were they contested?

YONEHIRO: Yes.

Q: Now, the election, so far as Seat One was concerned, was that determined in the primary?

YONEHIRO: In the primary.

Q: And Seats Two and Three?

YONEHIRO: In November, sir.

Q: So at least in point of time when you were elected to Seat One, you then became the first municipal court judge in the County of Placer?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: Can you give me some sort of guess as to the number of Japanese voters in Placer County in 1982?

YONEHIRO: I would say less than one percent.

Q: Aside from any possibility of a marshal or constable, were there any other officeholders in Placer County of Japanese ancestry?

YONEHIRO: No, sir.

Q: So, in effect, you were the first person of Japanese heritage elected to a county-wide office?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: That was in 1982?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And who were elected with you?

YONEHIRO: Judge John Cosgrove and Judge Richard Ryan.

Q: And at that time how many superior court judges were there in Placer County?

YONEHIRO: At that time there were four.

Q: In 1982, at the time that you were elected to the municipal court, who were the superior court judges?

YONEHIRO: Judges Howard Gibson, Wayne Wylie, Richard Couzens and Richard Sims.

Q: Soon after that, there was a vacancy created by Judge Sims's elevation. Was that the first vacancy?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And who was appointed to his spot?

YONEHIRO: Judge Richard Gilbert.

Q: And after that, was there another vacancy?

YONEHIRO: Yes, Judge Wylie retired and Judge Jack Willoughby was appointed.

Q: Then, in 1984, there was a general election in Placer County?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And in the general election, one of the spots to be voted upon was for the superior court?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And did you run for that office?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And were you elected?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: In the primary?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And you have served as a superior court judge since that date?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: So that your experience as a judge in Placer County was that you were elected as a justice of the peace, you were elected as a municipal court judge and you were elected as a superior court judge?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: Sometime after your elevation to the superior court, I think you had occasion to try and recover some of your war records, including a discharge paper.

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: When was that?

YONEHIRO: 1955, I believe.

Q: And what happened on the occasion of your relocating those records?

YONEHIRO: I found I had earned the Bronze Star.

Q: I know that you're not one to count, but I saw a picture of you on the occasion of receiving that award, and it seems to me that there were at least four rows of ribbons. And to that, you added the Bronze Star.

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: So, after you came to California — after the war, of course — did you resume any military activity?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: What was that?

YONEHIRO: With the California State Military Reserve, sir.

Q: And what type of work did you do for them?

YONEHIRO: I was director of Logistics; I was judge advocate, and I am presently deputy commander under General Matson.

Q: What rank do you have?

YONEHIRO: Colonel.

Q: I presume that you joined the American Legion?

YONEHIRO: Yes.

Q: Any other organizations?

YONEHIRO: Veterans of Foreign Wars, Sons of Italy, the Navy League.

Q: Let's not skip over the Sons of Italy too fast. I take it you adopted some sort of Italian heritage for that purpose. Did you join the Sons of Italy under an assumed Italian name?

YONEHIRO: No, sir. Japanese and Italian names all end in a vowel, so I didn't have to change my name.

Q: You were convinced that they thought that you were of Italian blood! And what were some of the other organizations?

YONEHIRO: Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Navy League. I joined the Navy League primarily in interest and support of my son, Marcus, who graduated from Annapolis in 1982 and is still with the Navy Department. He has recently returned to Annapolis to teach.

Q: Now, as far as Marc is concerned — did he go to local schools?

YONEHIRO: Yes, he went to Colfax High School and then was appointed to Annapolis in 1978.

Q: So, as a former member of the Army, you decided, for his sake, to join the Navy League.

YONEHIRO: Yes.

Q: Did you go to his graduation?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And he became an ensign in the United States Navy.

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir. And I was very proud, sir.

Q: You should be, indeed. What type of ship was he assigned to?

YONEHIRO: To a destroyer, sir.

Q: And what were some of the places he had served?

YONEHIRO: On one tour he went WESPAC — that is Western Pacific, Australia, Japan, and the Aleutian area. The second two duties or tours were in the Persian Gulf — he served two six-month sea tours in the Persian Gulf.

Q: And now he's doing what?

YONEHIRO: He's been assigned to Annapolis. He's teaching Navigation and Surface Warfare.

Q: Any other organizations?

YONEHIRO: Japanese-American Citizens League, National Guard Association of California.

Q: There was an early California case called *People v. Hall*, and in it, in 1852, the Supreme Court said that Chinese were in fact Indians and couldn't testify in court because there was a restriction against Indians testifying. And towards the end of the opinion, the chief justice made some remark that if he didn't do this that Asiatics would have a foothold and eventually they would want to become jurors and even, God forbid, sit on the bench! You've made his prophecy come true in that at least one Asiatic had the temerity to want to sit on the bench in California. About how many people of Japanese ancestry are there on the bench that you know of?

YONEHIRO: Presently?

Q: Yes.

YONEHIRO: I would say about eight or nine, sir, mostly in the Southern California area.

Q: Are there any others in the Northern California area?

YONEHIRO: The closest, I believe, would be Justice [Harry] Low in San Francisco.

Q: Who is of Chinese ancestry?

YONEHIRO: Yes.

Q: I guess that the most important contribution you could give to us is a viewpoint of the fact that you have reached such phenomenal success in spite of difficulties in World War II and relocation. Tell me some of your ideas about patriotism and service and the fact that you had such an unfortunate beginning with the government.

YONEHIRO: That's easy, sir. I grew up, like I have previously described, under a samurai or warrior father whose philosophy was not stoic as much as to endure and outlast the bastards, if I might use the term. And later, that same type of philosophy was tempered when I was associated for a

time with an older Jewish man who had the Hebrew philosophy, “Stay alive, George, just to be curious.” And I believe that is one of the things that strengthened the Jewish people. Very few Jewish people commit suicide. Stay alive just to be curious. The shortcoming, or some of the adversities that others may seemingly think we have suffered I have never felt too deeply because of the philosophy my dad had impressed upon me to always look forward, never to look behind in time. Time will cure and time will strengthen you. What you may have lost today will be an advantage to you tomorrow type of a philosophical approach to life. All the time we were in evacuation or during the relocation period, my dad had always told us never to be bitter. Bitterness clouds the mind and doesn’t accomplish anything.

Q: I never had the good fortune of meeting your father, but I know indirectly that there were few people who were prouder of his children than he was, and for good reason. All three boys served in the Army under very adverse circumstances.

YONEHIRO: If I might expand on that. I had a homicide case involving two black defendants. One of the defendants voiced his objection based on the premise that I or counsel might be prejudiced. I thought that everyone may be prejudiced towards his defense. I tried to teach him that he really, at his young age — early 20s, I believe he was — didn’t know prejudice. His surname is Porter. For example, I said, “Mr. Porter, if someone contacted you by telephone or by mail, simply by use of your surname, they would not differentiate you from any other American. Anyone who wishes to contact Yonehiro, either by telephone or by mail knows immediately that I am of Japanese ancestry. The mere fact that I was of Japanese ancestry caused me to be incarcerated.” I asked if the mere fact that his name was Porter caused him to be incarcerated. He said, “No.” And I think after that short lecture or advice, he felt differently and he accepted the appointment of counsel and the court.

Q: Do you think most of the people your age carried a lasting resentment?

YONEHIRO: No, sir.

Q: Have you kept track of any of the people who were in relocation centers with you?

YONEHIRO: Yes, sir.

Q: And what has happened to some of them?

YONEHIRO: One of them, for example, is Hije Yago who became the first marshal in Placer County. He was initially an elected constable in the judicial district when it became a municipal court. He was in Tule Lake. And his reaction to the evacuation, to what has befallen the people of Japanese ancestry during World War II is not much different than others I have had contact with. There is no resentment. It is one of life's experiences, and it may be hard to relate to others but the Japanese had long had — not only Japanese, but Chinese — the Asiatic — have had a type of philosophy based on their geographic location, climatic conditions — subject to earthquakes and typhoons and flooding, famines and all that — but it is that type of philosophy based on, or closely related to, religious doctrines. Buddhism is philosophy, pure and simple — more philosophy than that religious philosophy that Christians embrace. By the way, I am a Catholic. Anyway, when you live close to nature — not because of the typhoons or earthquakes or floods — you live to be like one of God's little children or flowers. You learn to bend with the wind. You have to do that to survive.

Q: I can't think of a better expression to end this interview. I thank you on behalf of the State Bar, and I think it goes without saying that your reflections and autobiography as you related today indicate that you have indeed contributed a tremendous amount to the history of the law in California.

YONEHIRO: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity.

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