

Oregon Cultural Heritage Commission Oral History Interview

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YOUNG: This is our interview with Mathias Uchiyama on November 21, 2014, for the Oregon Cultural Heritage Commission's *Uprooted* exhibit. I thought we'd start with you describing your early life, when your parents immigrated to the United States, those details.

UCHIYAMA: Okay. My mother and father were—my father came first to America. I think he was in his teens. And he decided to get married after being here for a while, and so he wrote to his mother and father in Japan, and they arranged a picture-bride marriage for them. And so in 1914, my father left Oregon and went to Seattle to pick up his wife. And they got married in a Buddhist temple in Seattle. And brought his new wife back to Oregon. And at that time, he was working in Airlie, Oregon, the other side of Philomath. And my mother used to tell me that when she got here, he didn't have much for her and if it wasn't for the trunk that she brought and all her quilts and things, there would be nothing.

And so my early beginnings was at Airlie, Oregon. And then they later moved to Kings Valley, Oregon, which is up the road a ways. My father worked in a sawmill at that time, and they had a small farm there in Kings Valley. And from there, my parents had six children and then we moved to Cornelius, Oregon, and that's where I was born, Cornelius, up in the hills above Forest Grove.

YOUNG: So everyone else was born in Kings Valley and you were born in Cornelius? Is that right?

UCHIYAMA: Yes, uh huh.

HERMANN: Let me fix this real quick.

UCHIYAMA: Did you want me to speak up more?

HERMANN: Oh, no, you're fine.

YOUNG: So did your parents operate a farm when they were in Cornelius?

UCHIYAMA: Yes.

YOUNG: What did they grow?

UCHIYAMA: They grew strawberries.

YOUNG: So it was a truck farm, primarily.

UCHIYAMA: Um, yeah, I guess it would be called a truck farm. It was on the hillsides, mainly hillside farming, off of logged-off ground, where they would clear the stumpage out during the wintertime and then whatever they cleared in the winter, then in the spring they would farm that land. So every year they used to do that. And they would plant strawberries in the spring and reclaim the lands.

YOUNG: Did they buy the land?

UCHIYAMA: They were in the process of buying the land, and of course there was an old, old homestead. And the property, I think, if my memory serves me right, the property, they bought it for about \$25 an acre at that time, which is really unheard of now. But that's how—so we were in the process of purchasing. We were the only family within miles—only Japanese family within miles of other families there.

YOUNG: Did you ever interact with other Japanese families?

UCHIYAMA: Yes, we used to—the Japanese people in the Tualatin Valley used to have different and times in which they would get together, picnics. And so we would get together with other Japanese people, it was always a fun time of getting to know people.

YOUNG: And in February 1942, the evacuation order comes out. Do you have any memories of that? Of knowing that something significant was happening?

UCHIYAMA: Yes. I think the ball started rolling when we heard the news of the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

YOUNG: Right.

UCHIYAMA: And so, instinctively we knew immediately that something's going to change for us. We didn't know what it was, but in the early part of 1942, we were told to go and register for the evacuation. And there we received our—I think we had kind of a precursory examination, and then we got our nametags and identification tags at that time.

And then in May of 1942, I got an early release from grade school, and I remember my teacher was very sympathetic. She was the wife of

Austin Scrafford, who was the superintendent of schools in Washington County. And so I left grade school early—it was an eight-pupil, one-room schoolhouse. So I left school.

And then we were processed, as I mentioned, processed for evacuation. And within two weeks we were at Forest Grove bus depot, and we were put on Greyhound buses with the rest of the Japanese people in the surrounding area. So we had U.S. Army guards that were on each bus to escort us to the assembly center in Portland.

We arrived at the Portland International Livestock Exposition Building on Swift Boulevard soon after. And I found that one thing I noticed, remember, was that it was surrounded by a cyclone fence and then it had guard posts on the four corners.

YOUNG: Do you remember seeing the fence and the guards?

UCHIYAMA: Yes.

YOUNG: That sticks out in your memory.

UCHIYAMA: Yeah.

YOUNG: Did you ever have school friends or anyone try to visit you while you were at the assembly center?

UCHIYAMA: No, I don't think so. But then they checked us for contraband. We weren't supposed to bring any cameras or short-wave radios or things like that. I had a great time there, in the sense that there were so many other young, little guys to play with, my age. I was nine years of age at that time.

YOUNG: Could you talk to me a little bit about your brothers John and George, voluntarily evacuated and what that was like, or your memories of that?

UCHIYAMA: Well, one of them was going to University of Oregon in Eugene, George, who was the younger of the two. And he waited up until the last minute that he could possibly voluntarily evacuate, and he told me that when it came time, he packed his bags and "hightailed" it—that's his terminology, hightailed it out of Eugene. Of course, he went through Eugene to Portland, and then Portland to Salt Lake City. But he said that he sat very low in the Greyhound bus to get out. And I think there must have been a curfew at that time. And so that was his account.

My oldest brother, John, he was going to, I think, the University of Oregon Medical School at the time. And he did pretty much the same thing. They got on the bus, but separately, they got on the bus. And then they both ended up in Salt Lake City where they continued their education.

HERMANN: We're going to pause for a minute; we're getting a little bit of interference. Not bad, just a little bit. Okay, we're rolling.

YOUNG: So we were discussing—John and George voluntarily evacuated and went to Salt Lake City. Did you keep in touch with them throughout the war?

UCHIYAMA: Yes.

YOUNG: But they never came and visited, or did they?

UCHIYAMA: After we left the assembly center, yes, they came back during the winter.

YOUNG: Because you were outside of that zone, so it would have been no problem.

UCHIYAMA: Yes, right.

YOUNG: So speaking of—so you were in the assembly center, do you recall how your family learned about the farm labor needs in eastern Oregon?

UCHIYAMA: I think that there was small meetings that my dad attended and he learned that there was farm work available, outside of the assembly center. And it's interesting because a lot of people that went out to the FSA camp in Nyssa, many of them were from the Fukuoka prefecture. So there was kind of a loose knit clan type of thing, and so they were kind of looking out for each other. So they must have discussed that. That's how my dad realized that there was opportunities still available yet. And he used to tell us, "We just can't stay in camp here, in the center because we've got mortgages to pay." And he was paying on this homestead property, and so that was the added impetus for us leaving the assembly center. He said, "We just can't afford to, we'll lose everything." So we found that out that we had—this is our break, that we would leave camp.

YOUNG: Do you recall any of the family names that were from that same prefecture?

UCHIYAMA: Fujiis is the prominent one, Kidos. I'm not sure about the Iwasakis, I'm not sure if they're from Fukuoka or not. But a lot of them settled in Gresham. They were from Gresham, I should say. Mishimas, although I don't remember Henry at that time, I think he came later. The first group was all young males, weren't they? I think they were the test case. If they made it okay, well then they'll go ahead for us, I guess.

YOUNG: I think it was mainly bachelors, and Kayno Saito was in that group.

UCHIYAMA: I remember the name, but too young to remember.

YOUNG: Do you remember the trip from Portland to eastern Oregon?

UCHIYAMA: Yes. We called it the “sore arm” trip. Sore arm because we all had inoculations, shots. And I think the tetanus shots were the worst, that made the arm sore. I called it the midnight ride to eastern Oregon, to Nyssa, because we had sore arms, so when we laid back in the old Pullman seats, it still ached. I think they took us by bus from the PI Building to the Union Station in Portland, and put on a train car. It was an older Pullman car, I think. And we went to sleep, and we woke up somewhere around La Grande, Huntington, and we woke up to sagebrush. And that’s very characteristic, everybody saw that, I think, and the Snake River, of course. We came to Ontario and their train station, and we debarked from there. We got on a truck and then went to the FSA camp center.

YOUNG: Any first impressions of the FSA camp? Going from the assembly center to canvas tents and—

UCHIYAMA: My first impression was kind of sagebrush, and I called it the Alkali Flats, that area. It was just a flat place. I think it was surrounded by irrigation dikes. And they had whole rows and rows of tents on wooden floors, I think it was wooden floors. Other than that, I don’t remember that much more about that.

YOUNG: And your family was just in the Nyssa camp for a few weeks, I believe.

UCHIYAMA: Yeah, it was only about two weeks, and then the government allowed the farmers to have—so that we could live on the farm—under the watch care of the farmer. So we went out to the Denham Ranch. Again, I think about eight miles north of Ontario, on Oregon route 201, I think, where there was a farm, called the Denham Farm. It was right on the Snake River, or close to the Snake River. And that’s where we met the Sumidas. We went out there to hoe sugar beets.

YOUNG: When we interviewed Alice Sumida, she remarked that she had never seen a family work as hard and fast as your family that they could never keep up with how quickly your family thinned and hoed the sugar beets.

UCHIYAMA: Yeah, I’m sure that that impressed her. She was a very lovely lady. But I think that both Mark and Alice, they weren’t used to farm labor. I think they were fairly, independently wealthy so they went more into—in town, that type of work that one does, so it wasn’t farm labor. So that’s the reason.

YOUNG: What kind of housing did you live in when you moved into the Denham Ranch?

UCHIYAMA: It was a little cabin. It had a screen porch on it. I think it had two or three bedrooms, and no running water—or there was indoor plumbing let's say, but they had water in the sink.

YOUNG: And then, what do you recall about the farm labor, particularly the sugar beets? I'm assuming everyone in the family worked in the strawberry fields before the war, so you were used to farm labor?

UCHIYAMA: Yeah. It was a harder type work. It was a harder type work. It was work that required a lot of bending. That's why Alice talks about bending over all day long, and much of that is true. But when we got into hoeing the sugar beets, they were a little bit bigger, so we used the long-handled hoes to hoe. And that was part of it. I didn't work too much because I was too young. I was more the water boy. I went out there to supply the water for the workers. And that picture that you have is where I just woke up and just got out to the field, and I don't know what I was thinking or anything. I think I was just sleepy.

YOUNG: Do you recall if your parents or other family members were part of a work crew on the ranch, or they just worked for the Denham family and tended those crops?

UCHIYAMA: That was—yeah, we just worked on the Denham farm. Of course, after sugar beets had grown, we did move off the farm soon after that.

YOUNG: Did you harvest the sugar beets that year?

UCHIYAMA: No, we did not because that's where—and my understanding was really the hard work because they were so heavy. They weighed five, ten pounds easily. I was starting school then, so we moved off the farm, closer into Weiser, closer to the bridge, basically, Weiser Bridge.

YOUNG: So you attended school in the Weiser area?

UCHIYAMA: Yes, the first school I attended was the annex school, which is where there was one other Japanese family, I think they were from Hood River, the Nakamuras. George and I, I think we were in the same class, so it was good to have him as a classmate. He was very brilliant. He was smart. But we got beat up a lot.

YOUNG: Really?

UCHIYAMA: Got beat up a lot.

YOUNG: Because you were Japanese American?

UCHIYAMA: Uh huh.

YOUNG: So you faced significant discrimination at that school?

UCHIYAMA: Yes, and it was a school that—the teacher had a difficult time because we were a bunch of rowdies anyway. And we gave the teacher a very hard time, so it wasn't all the other boys' fault or girls' fault. It was probably the most difficult time I'd had during the war to speak of. For example, I was riding home on my bicycle and a sugar beet truck came zooming by, and there were two teenagers coming home from high school. And they threw a sugar beet, which weighed five to ten pounds, and knocked me off my bicycle into a barrel pit on the side of the road. And I think I said some things that probably weren't too pleasing to others, but that's part of life, I think.

YOUNG: Your brother, Sam, was also in school at this time, right?

UCHIYAMA: Yeah, he was a sophomore in high school. He rode the bus to Ontario from where we were staying, close to the Weiser Bridge on the Snake River.

YOUNG: Did you share your experiences at school, or compare them with his?

UCHIYAMA: Yeah, his was pretty, I think, pretty mild because by that time there were quite a number of Japanese American people in Ontario. And so his was a little bit different. And they were older students, high schoolers. But grade school was difficult.

There was one incident that—when one fellow kept really giving me a bad time and I told one of our veterans that came back on furlough. So he, in his uniform, met up with this individual. And he [Tom Kinoshita] said, "If I hear anything else about you giving this young guy a bad time, we're coming after you." And so ever since then, the episode was closed. But for a nine-year-old, I think maybe I took it too serious, but anyway, those are things of the past.

YOUNG: It seemed like—as you mentioned—Ontario and Malheur County had a strong Japanese American community. Did you find a similar community in the Weiser area? Did your parents go to church? Was there a Buddhist church? Were there outlets?

UCHIYAMA: Yeah. The high schools and the grade schools were different. We had a teacher—and Jack Naganuma mentioned Adelia [Routson] Parke, and she was a very stalwart lady, and she had control of our class, and it was quite a change. She was part of the old, pioneer stock. She was the one who made us study, which I am indebted to her for that. She was a very lovely lady, but she had control over class and that made the difference, I think. I think, by and large, my school experiences made me very bitter and

resentful. But there was no physical expression of that. You know it's there, but that didn't change until afterwards, yeah.

YOUNG: Did you parents continue to do farm labor when they moved to Weiser?

UCHIYAMA: Yeah, during that time they worked for lettuce growers, it was called Hopper and Walker Company. And their business was just to raise lettuce in that area for the war effort. So we worked for them for several years, our family. And essentially, by the fall of 1942, we were free from the War Relocation Authority. They had no more jurisdiction over us. So my mother and father began renting a farm, so we had a small farm then. And my father, he was a very honest person and so people liked him. And opportunities came to him because of that, so he was able to buy a farm then. After renting, he bought a farm. So our family soon after, probably within—by the time of 1944, we were on our own farm, either renting or buying it. And then we would still work for the lettuce company.

YOUNG: What did you grow on your own farm?

UCHIYAMA: It was typical things like onions, potatoes, sugar beets. But it was a different type of farming than we were used to. Even though it was harder work, my father really thought it was a blessing to be able to farm in Idaho or eastern Oregon because of the water, the reclamation projects. But the work was harder, I think. It was longer days and the weather was drier. But I remember them—my dad would be talking to my mother at night, and he says, “Mama, this can only happen in America.” These advantages—and these are all after, seemingly, trials that would come into our lives. He took a more philosophical outlook on it, and realized that it was really for the good, similar to what the Iwasaki girls were talking about. I think “all things do work together for good....”

YOUNG: It's my understanding from talking to some other Nisei that there were Japanese Americans who came and worked for your family at that farm, is that correct?

UCHIYAMA: It was more like an exchange, exchange of help. During the early days when America—if there was a need for barn raising, they would come together. It was kind of a need like that. Only if it was farm labor, they would help each other harvest. They would help each other get the seed in the ground. There was a lot of—you don't talk about that too much, but there was a lot of that going on. I know my mom and dad got a lot of help from our Japanese neighbors.

I noticed that there is such a thing as the Fukuoka effect. The Fukuoka ken, or the province people, kind of looked out for each other, took care of each other. We had been characterized as a clan that were not

always brilliant, but naive. So I guess that means we were simple people. But I didn't realize until later what a rich culture that I came from, and it didn't diminish my loyalty to my country at all. I love both countries because I saw what both of them really stand for.

YOUNG: I want to go back to something you mentioned a few minutes ago. You said that by the fall of 1943, the War Relocation Authority didn't have jurisdiction over your family.

UCHIYAMA: Yeah, I think it was more earlier than that, the fall of 1942 probably. Because we were allowed to go any place other than the war zone back here.

YOUNG: Did you father or mother ever talk about that later on life? Or did you research any paperwork from your family that you know they got an indefinite leave, permission, or anything of that nature?

UCHIYAMA: You mean to come back here, to the war zone?

YOUNG: No, just to have the freedom to move wherever, outside of that particular zone.

UCHIYAMA: No, we didn't actually get any written statement or anything from the War Relocation Authority. But we had our own car, so we could go any place other than back across the—I guess it would be the Cascades, wouldn't it?

YOUNG: And speaking of that car, do you remember how you got it? Because obviously you came by train and someone must've gone home and gotten the car for you or—

UCHIYAMA: It was our longtime friends that we'd had, the father and his son. We had the car stored in Forest Grove, in storage. And they drove it out for us, which made Sam very happy, I'm sure. He was sophomore and just growing up, and he was a good brother.

YOUNG: And these same friends, did they watch over your property in Cornelius?

UCHIYAMA: We had a friend from the Midwest. He was a bachelor, but he loved to "ride the rails". And he was probably a holdover from the Dustbowl days, and he just used to hop on the train in Kansas. I think he was from Kansas. And his name was Jim Byers. But he'd ride the rails and then he'd work for my dad in Cornelius. And then as soon as the crops were done, he'd get back and ride the rails back home again. And he used to do that every year. It was because of that faithfulness that my dad trusted him. And so, he told him he could just take over the farm, keep whatever profits, just

take care of it. And that's what he did. I think he did that for three or four years, and protected it.

YOUNG: Once the war ended, your family remained in Weiser?

UCHIYAMA: Yes.

YOUNG: And what happened to the Cornelius property? Did it eventually get sold?

UCHIYAMA: No, it's still in the family, so my sister's son has it now.

YOUNG: Is it still a farm?

UCHIYAMA: It's still a farm. It's more dry farming of grains now, but it's still there. My cousin lives nearby, cousins. The Nakaos, they live nearby the original family farm.

YOUNG: Oh, that's Lea's family? Correct? The Nakaos? No.

UCHIYAMA: No, that's my cousins from my mother's side.

YOUNG: Do you know why your parents decided to stay in Weiser rather than return to Oregon?

UCHIYAMA: I think it's because of the farming opportunities. I think it's because of the water being able to irrigate, and more control of the weather—not weather, but the farming situation. My mother used to say that he had better health. Whether it was water or—but that's why they stayed. They felt that it was a better place to be. I was alluding to the fact that they prospered. If we were to stay in Idaho—the farmers here, or in the Tualatin Valley, or here in Washington, they'd say that this is the best place to farm if we were farming.

But I think it's going back to Old Testament history. The Israelites, they left from Egypt to the Promised Land. And the promise was they were going to have rain, and their farming conditions—so I think, taking up on that, it seems like wherever God wants you to be, wherever Providence wants you to be, that's the place to be. And I think that's in reality what my mom and dad probably realized.

YOUNG: So you don't think they felt anger that this had happened to them?

UCHIYAMA: No. I think they were thrilled at the fact that there were better opportunities. The neighbors on both sides were just as good. In other words, I think they were making the best of it. And it was better for them because they profited and they prospered because of that. I think the Iwasaki girls portrayed that perfectly. And they weren't just rationalizing

and taking a positive outlook on it. It really was better for them, whatever their mood. They really realized that, that it was the best place for them at that particular time.

YOUNG: Did you graduate from high school in Weiser?

UCHIYAMA: Uh huh, 1949.

YOUNG: How have you felt about what happened to your family. (phone rings)
Maybe we'll pause.

YOUNG: In what sense? [Young, responding to Uchiyama's statement about photographer Russell Lee and his artistic contribution to the Japanese American story]

UCHIYAMA: Because I think if it wasn't for him, it wouldn't be a complete story.

YOUNG: Without having that strong visual to it?

UCHIYAMA: Yeah.

YOUNG: When Susan first contacted me she said they didn't have any photos of you at that age.

UCHIYAMA: Yeah, I'm sure we didn't.

YOUNG: Because if you can't bring a camera in—

UCHIYAMA: That's true. But I thought that his photos—and it was personal, you know. It brought back remembrances that—rather than a destructive remembrance, it was really more positive. And I really came away—looking at those pictures, and I really thank you for sending them, being so thoughtful to do that—that I wanted to know more about this guy. But yet I knew that he had a lot of problems of himself. He had a hard time himself. But yet, he set himself aside to take pictures for us, and not just the Japanese Americans. It was the other people. I mean he seems to have a knack—actually it was a love and a compassion that you don't see very often. It's classic. So it just made me just appreciate him and love him more, even though I can't even remember him. I said, "Oh, I wish I'd remembered him," you know?

YOUNG: Yeah.

UCHIYAMA: But he made it his own, not to do that, not to interject himself into the picture. I think one of the reviews says that, "Lee's quietly passionate images are masterful works. They set a high standard for a kind of

reflective journalism that reminds us that a fine artist may tell you most about himself when he focuses on others.” I think that’s what really captured it for me. And it’s no wonder that we’re celebrating and looking at his pictures again. There’s always good that comes out of stuff like that, you know when people give of themselves. That’s why I’m impressed about your interests, you guys’ interest in this whole thing because it’s a good thing, you know? If you love your country, this is one of the areas in which maybe this is our calling, your calling. It’s great stuff, isn’t it?

YOUNG: Yeah.

UCHIYAMA: And I’m sure this must be embedded in you, other than the purpose of just existing, right?

YOUNG: Yeah.

UCHIYAMA: There has to be something more.

YOUNG: Yeah, I love Lee’s work. I think he’s never gotten the recognition that he deserves.

UCHIYAMA: Yeah.

YOUNG: But he was a—his biographer, F. Jack Hurley calls him a taxonomist. He just wants to dissect every scene and he wants to capture it like a scientist, but it’s so rich as a researcher.

UCHIYAMA: Yeah, and he did it.

YOUNG: And he did it. I mean we have fifteen photos of your family alone.

UCHIYAMA: Yeah, otherwise they would have just gone into oblivion. And all the other pictures—I’m sure he took some of Dustbowl people and miners?

YOUNG: Yeah, he took about seven thousand, about six years.

UCHIYAMA: Wow. Miners and—

YOUNG: African Americans in the South.

UCHIYAMA: Yeah, and the Spanish Americans.

YOUNG: Yeah, so you’ve been researching him a little bit? Have you looked at some—

UCHIYAMA: Yeah, that’s how far I got—I wanted to know more about him.

YOUNG: I have a biography of his, I'll send it to you.

UCHIYAMA: Okay, I appreciate that. And this is not new, because I heard somebody else, in a review of him, say "it just makes you want to know more about him."

YOUNG: Yeah. I do know—I think that he never had a hometown necessarily. He moved around a lot as a kid and his mother died when he was quite young so he wanted a sense of place. So I think that was part of his obsession as a photographer was capturing a place. And I think he does that with the Nyssa photos. He has a really famous series called Pie Town in New Mexico, and he just wants to capture that place as best he can.

UCHIYAMA: And I don't think he was trying to demean them.

YOUNG: No.

UCHIYAMA: He had a genuine interest in it, in the people. I think, as you might have mentioned too, he had the compassion and the love for people. It's really good. It's good stuff. And that's what I thought his pictures in general brought out. Like for example, he took some Pentecostal pictures, of Pentecostal religion. He didn't make fun of them. I noticed he never made fun of them, like handling of the snakes and stuff like that. He never made fun of them. It was a point of interest that he wanted the people to know, you know? One of the quotes says, it's him speaking, "I know you're having a hard time during these really stressful times, but I want to take pictures of you. So that everybody else can see and appreciate what you're going through." That really determines that part of his character, that is really commendable to me

YOUNG: Yeah, it think he adds a lot of dignity.

UCHIYAMA: Exactly.

YOUNG: I think he tried very hard in taking pictures of these farm labor camps and foresights to show that these are Americans, not enemies, they're Americans—and emphasizing that dignity.

UCHIYAMA: I think that FSA really got a good photojournalist when they got him because he contributes to so much good. It isn't just in the pictures, but his character just kind of comes out.

YOUNG: So when you saw these photographs, did it bring you right back to that time?

UCHIYAMA: Yeah, but I can't remember him. It upsets me.

YOUNG: It seems it was just an afternoon, though, an afternoon more than seventy years ago.

UCHIYAMA: Yeah, that's true. But that's him, you know. He'd probably say, "Why did you stay out of the pictures?" He'd probably say, "That's the plan. That's my plan." He must've realized really to do a good job in photojournalism is to do just exactly what he did. So I'm not really surprised that I don't remember him or my brothers and sisters don't remember him.

YOUNG: Yeah, and maybe that's right. Maybe he was just very subtle and very much in the background, so it wouldn't be this intrusive person.

UCHIYAMA: Yeah.

YOUNG: Because if he had a big, boisterous personality, then everyone would have remembered him.

UCHIYAMA: Yeah, and I don't think the story is really complete without him. In other words, talking about him.

YOUNG: Yeah. Well, why don't we segue then into looking at the photographs of your family and you could walk me through some of them.

UCHIYAMA: Okay.

YOUNG: So I'd love it if we just would walk through each image.

UCHIYAMA: Okay.

YOUNG: And you could tell me what you remember of that and of each family member.

UCHIYAMA: Okay.

YOUNG: So this is you in July of 1942.

UCHIYAMA: July of 1942, yeah. So that would be definitely the Denham Ranch then.

YOUNG: Right, okay.

UCHIYAMA: And I think I just woke up 'cause I was allowed to come out to the field, and I was the chief water boy.

YOUNG: So you would give water to everyone in a ladle or something?

UCHIYAMA: I think we had a gallon jug. I don't think we had separate cups either.

YOUNG: And you're in a sugar beet field?

UCHIYAMA: It's in the sugar beet field. This was at the Denham Ranch, off of Oregon 201, close to the Snake River. Did you want me to go on?

YOUNG: Sure. You can go in whatever order.

UCHIYAMA: This is my sister, May. She was my second oldest sister, and she was the bohemian of the family. She brought art into our family, but I'm really not quite sure how well it took. But she was a violinist and she also played the bass fiddle. And she played two years in the Portland Junior Symphony Orchestra.

This is my dad at the Denham Ranch. He's hoeing sugar beets. He had a sixth grade education. He was a planner. He planned things for the family. He wasn't brilliant, but he was kind. And then he loved me a lot.

This is my mother. She had a second grade education. She was small, but she was powerful. She could do the work of two men, but she was kind.

YOUNG: She has very kind eyes.

UCHIYAMA: Yeah. She used to tell me when I had the critical spirit, she said, "Don't put your faults on the shelf and criticize other people." Pretty good for a second grader.

This is Lea and this is May. They were very tight and they kept in touch all their lives. They lived in the same city. I think the ground must have been pretty hard here because they are lifting up the hoes in order to break through the crust.

YOUNG: And the long-handled hoes were used for what?

UCHIYAMA: Hoeing. After the sugar beets gets big, and they could stand some abuse they were able to use the long-handled hoes to take out the little weeds that would compete for nutrients.

Lea just graduated from high school and she had a Caucasian friend that she was missing. But she was a good sister. She's still alive.

May is—this is after she moved into Portland. I think she was taking some schooling then, but she was evacuated with us. She was the bohemian of the family, in the sense that she tried new things. And she was the first to move away from home, so dad always called her the bohemian.

This is my father hoeing. And he wears his typical—we called it Congo hat, but I guess it's a Panama hat, isn't it? He was a good dad. He used to always carry me on his lap and call me his buddy.

This is Minnie. She's the oldest daughter and probably one of the most giving persons that I'd ever had in my life. She sacrificed herself for the family, for us younger siblings, so that we could go on to school. And she went to business school, but that's about all that she had. I think she was probably one of the least appreciated members of our family, but she was a very lovely, lovely lady.

Sam would deny that this is his photo. But I know for certain because he has his mouth open all the time especially when he's working and trying to cut out those tough weeds. And Sam, this is you!

This is me. I don't know what I was thinking, but I'm still picking at my fingernails. I was the chief water boy and probably a little sleepy yet.

This is the first picture of the family taken on the Thayer farm. It was the first farm that we were transported from—first farm we worked after being transported from the Nyssa FSA camp.

YOUNG: But who's missing in that photo? Could you walk us through all the names?

UCHIYAMA: Okay. This is Lea; this is May; and this is my father and my mother; and this is Sam; and this is Minnie. Can I say something about them?

YOUNG: Oh, sure.

UCHIYAMA: As I mentioned, Minnie, this lady, is perhaps the most kindest person I've known, and she truly was a big sister to me. And as mentioned before, she's perhaps the most unappreciated member in our family. And she suffered a lot. She died at sixty-two.

May was the—May, this lady here. May was the musician in the family, played in the Portland Junior Symphony. She brought art into our family, and she disciplined me at an early age. And as I mentioned before, she was the bohemian of the family.

Lea, this lady here, just graduated from Forest Grove Union High School, had a good friend named Muriel Anderson whom she was missing. She tried to discipline me, but I wore her out. But she worried a lot for me, sorry sis.

My mother, this lady here, kept things running at home, although she had a second grade education. It just amazed me how much she knew in such a few years. And she loved me.

Dad was liked and trusted, and because of that opportunities for land ownership came to him. He had a sixth grade education. He wasn't a clever man—that's the word I was searching for. He wasn't a clever man.

But he taught me things that still apply today. He was a houseboy for Sarah Winchester in San Jose, California.

Sam, the brother next to me, he was the only one on the family that could drive. We had a '40 Pontiac brought to us in July, much to his delight. This must have been a tough time for him. Love you, buddy.

This is me. They used to call me Marty. I remember being extremely lonely during these days. Everybody seemed to be leaving, always leaving. I remember I walked to the Bill Wells store on Highway 201, on Oregon slope, with Sam one hot day to buy popsicles. I thought we would never get home.

George and John, the older sons, which are not in this picture voluntarily evacuated to Salt Lake city, Utah. The oldest member of the family was kind, and took later the place of the go-to guy in our family. George almost died of tetanus in the early thirties—he's not in this picture either. He was a kindhearted guy who loved people, and people seemed to love him. It made me want to be like him. I admired him, for he taught me that life is not a competition of self-righteousness, but a seeking and a sharing of the righteousness of God. For which I am indebted to him.

This is a picture of the old farmhouse cabin on the Denham Ranch, where we spent several months before moving to a home near Weiser, on the Oregon side. This is a close-up picture of the cabin. It had, I think, one sink in the house,—which had running water.

This is another picture. Some of the family members had come out and Mr. Lee was kind enough to take our picture. This was dinnertime at the Denham Ranch cabin. You notice that in this photo, you have Lea out behind the flowers, but she was no wallflower. You also see in the background there, May's instrument stand, music stand.

This is me reading the funnies. It seems like that's where the simple things were important to us, and so I liked to read the funnies.

YOUNG: Wonderful. Is there anything else you wanted to add about the photos? You gave us so many great details.

UCHIYAMA: These times at the Denham Ranch, I remember, is that they were not hard times, at least for a nine-year-old boy. You couldn't help but forget that there is a war going on, and everybody is having their trials and tribulations. I don't remember Mr. Denham too much, but I think he was a kind man. He treated us well and took care of us. It's just a small part of our pilgrimage during this time, I think.

I'd like to—if I may—I'd like to say a few things. As would normally be expected, I had a lot of bitterness in my life because of the war. I think that as I grew up, I seemed to get more and more bitter for what had happened in my life and my family's life. But I'm happy to say that that all disappeared because of the fact there is such a thing as forgiveness. And I think it goes both ways. Forgiveness of your own country was a turning point for me because I wasted a lot of time being

embittered and resentful. What I'm saying is that this doesn't need to be, and there is the forgiveness. We forgive because we are forgiven. Providentially we're forgiven. God has forgiven us. So I think it's a waste of time of rehearsing these bitternesses, and it's better, it's much better. You'll live a much better life if you forget those things that are behind and press forward, toward the mark of the expectancy that god has for us. Peace, that's what is important.

And I think this is what the photos of Russell Lee brings out. He must have been a very compassionate person. He must've loved his subjects because it shows up so much in his pictures. Even though he's taking pictures of people in strife and trials, I think that he captures in his pictures—whatever ethnicity it is, whether it's the Chicanos, or whether it's the American Indians, or it's the Dustbowl people, or whether it's the Japanese. He takes the pictures to bring appreciation of what other people like mine—and therefore I think he gives dignity to humanity. I think that I mentioned this because I don't think that the Japanese American story, for one, would be complete without him.

I want to thank you, Morgen, for your interest and your relentless—of showing to we Americans what a great country we are. I say this in the light of the different Fergusons in the world, Ferguson, Missouri. That you need not be—we need to forgive; we need to cast aside, let go of our bitternesses and see the good in humanity. Thank you.

YOUNG: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

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