

John Fujinari

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Question: The first thing I'd like to do is if you'd give me your first and last name just so I can get it on tape.

Answer: ok. Now? John Funjinari.

Question: Great. Now you're another unique one. A transplant.

Answer: Yeah. I was born and raised in Palo Alto, California.

Question: And your Dad was Issei

Answer: Yeah. He was Issei and so was my mother, and they grew up together living close together in Japan, so they knew each other before they came to the United States and got married.

Question: So they got married here?

Answer: Yeah. In San Francisco.

Question: Oh, really. How come they came to the States, or why?

Answer: I really don't know what motivated them to come to the United States, but I guess it was for a better life.

Question: And what did your Dad do?

Answer: He was a farmer all his life.

Question: Boy, that's amazing to think of Palo Alto nowadays.

Answer: Oh, well, Palo Alto, we had a rural community there, too, and I was born and raised in Palo Alto, and we had practically all the family was born in and around that area.

Question: How big were your family, brothers and sisters?

Answer: I had 2 older brothers and I had 3 older sisters and one younger sister.

Question: Wow. A handful for Mom and Dad. I guess Dad wanted people to work in the farm, is that...

Answer: Oh, I guess that was the idea, 'cause we all worked, I remember working when I was very young on the farm.

Question: What did the, did he raise a variety of

Answer: A variety of vegetables and berries.

Question: Good place to grow up as a kid?

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Answer: Oh, I think it was, yeah. We went to Palo Alto to all the schools in Palo Alto, and oh, I think, well, we were always poor, but you know, we're farmers, so in those days, farmers barely made a living.

Question: There's a lot of peo., still, just come out of the depression, and so everybody was, a lot of people were, but I assume just today like it is in California there were extremes, but

Answer: Well, basically, Palo Alto was a rich man's town, and we were, of course, the poorest in town.

Question: Was there a pretty good Japanese-American population down there?

Answer: In Palo Alto there was only a few Japanese families living there. In the next town south was Mountain View and they had an awful lot of Japanese families living there because they were all farmers and that was a real farming community there.

Question: Was that ever an issue growing up for you in schools? Were you looked upon differently, or did you just kids are kids, and

Answer: You know, I lived all my life where there was always prejudism, but in school, there wasn't that much prejudism that I saw. I got along good with all the students. When World War II came along, they were all for me. The teachers were for me, and when I had to evacuate, all my friends used to send me letters, including some of the teachers, and so they really were supportive. And one thing was that most of my friends and even some of the people that I didn't even really know came to me and they wanted to know why I was being told to evacuate because it was, you know, against the constitution of the United States, and they were really for me all the way. But I encountered lots of prejudism outside of school.

Question: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

Answer: Where was I at Pearl Harbor?

Question: When it happened.

Answer: December 7, 1941, the whole family, well, most of the family were out working elsewhere, but me, my father, my mother and a sister, we were farming, so at 5 o'clock in the morning, we're up in the morning, out working in the fields all day long, and about sunset, my mother came back to cook dinner and my father helped me crate all the vegetables and everything, and I was waiting for the truck driver to come in and pick up the produce for the Monday morning market in San Francisco, and he got off the truck and says, Hey, John, he says, what do you think about the war? And I says, What war? And he says, You didn't know? He says, You been working all day and you didn't know there was a war going on? I said, No. I said, What war you talkin' about? He said, Pearl Harbor was bombed, so he said You better go in. I'll do all the loading so you go in and tell your family. And turn the radio on and listen to what's going on. So I said, Where's Pearl Harbor? He said, That's in Hawaii. I said, God, you know, that was really something. When I went inside and started listening to the radio, then all the impact came. I was, all of us

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were afraid that something really bad was going to happen to the family, because of the prejudism that we experienced all our lives.

Question: You were a little older than a lot of.. you were what, 18?

Answer: Yeah. I was a senior in high school.

Question: A senior in high school, so you were old enough to really have knowledge of the world...

Answer: Oh, yeah. I was really devastated, and I knew something bad was going to happen. You know, not, more than what other people would, the Caucasians would have in their mind, because we lived in prejudism all our lives and I knew that with this face of mine, lots of bad things would happen and it did.

Question: Do you remember your Dad's response?

Answer: Oh, he was, I know a lot of things were going through his mind. He was a quiet man, and I knew about what he was thinking, about the same thing that I was thinking. My mother, for the first time in my life I'd seen her cry, because she herself said that things are going to be, we're going to feel the effects of this things, our whole family, and you know, it all happened after that.

Question: When did you, 'cause a number of things I assume. One: I know the evacuation which we'll get to, but did you start to see an increased amount of prejudice?

Answer: Yeah. A few days after the. It was only a day after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, I was walking home from school and a guy gave me a friendly smile and says, Hey, kid, come on over here. I want to talk to you. He parked his car on the side of the road. So I walked across the road and I said, What do you need? He said, Come closer to me, so I stepped in closer and he leaned out and spit on my feet and he said, Now all you Japs get the hell out of this country and don't come back, and he put his car in gear and sped off and I picked up a rock and I threw it at him. And I hit the car but he didn't stop.

Question: And was he an older...

Answer: Oh, yeah. He was like about 35 or 40 years old. And things like that happened all along. See, we didn't go to camp. We evacuated on our own, and we had a, my mother's uncle was in Colorado and when we found out where he was, we decided to evacuate on our own and while we were traveling, well, there was me, 2 sisters and my brother, my older brother. We were driving to Colorado, and my mother, father, and my little sister was on a train, they left on a train, and all the way from California to Colorado, people wouldn't sell us food and half of them refused to sell us gas, and in Elko, Nevada, we really had a tough time, because it was just about midnight, we're out of gas, and we stopped in the only station we could find, and the guy refused to sell us gasoline, and a friend of his finally got him to sell us gas and there's a lot of threats in between, during the time that we're getting this gasoline, but it was precarious.

Question: Were they outwardly, did they make derogatory comments about.....

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Answer: Oh Yeah. All the time.

Question: So they weren't subtle about it. They didn't just ignore you?

Answer: No. no. They said, Hey, you Japs, get the hell down the road. We don't want you around here, and they said, We're not going to sell you any gas, and we had, and this friend of his said, Oh, why don't you sell it. Get these Japs out of here. He said, Sell them some gasoline and get them the hell out of here. We don't want them here. And so after about 10 or 15 minutes of arguing between those two, they decided to sell us some gas, so we got the gasoline and went on.

Question: Do you remember what your feelings were? Did it create fear or anger or both?

Answer: Well, you had to have some fear, but I was feeling more angry than anything else. I guess it was about 50/50.

Question: Now when you left Palo Alto, the farm, house...

Answer: Well, what happened was, we had planted, we were harvesting our winter vegetables, and had already planted most of the crops for the coming year, and that was our supposed to be our income for the coming year, see. So we left the farm, everything, all of our equipment there. We didn't own the farm; we were just leasing the farm. We left all of our equipment there and left everything in the house, and boarded it all up, and the owner said that he'll take care of everything while we're gone, and unfortunately, he died during the war. So when we got back there, there was nothing left, and so we had to scramble for ourselves once again.

Question: How old was your Dad when he came back?

Answer: Well, let's see.

Question: Roughly.

Answer: Let's see, 1947 he was 61 years old. He died after we came back to California. Two weeks later, my mother, who was 57, died, because my Dad died of a heart attack and my mother died of cerebral hemorrhage, and it was caused by my father's death, because her blood pressure was up too high.

Question: Broken hearted.

Answer: Yeah. Yeah.

Question: So that, I mean, that had to just. Here your Dad had worked so hard, and at almost 70 years old had to start over and

Answer: Oh, that was. What was really getting to him was, he was telling my mother one day, he says, You know, we're too old to really start a new life because he says, By the time we get started, be too old to work another farm. We don't have any experience in doing anything else, and they were really worried, you know, and they were living with me because I got out of the Army and I came back to Colorado and I decided to go back to California by myself. But they wanted to come with me because I had an older brother that was in the Army, my other brother was married,

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and all the family was scattered around the United States by then. And my older brother was still overseas and he got discharged and took a civil service job in Tokyo, and he lived the rest of his life there working for the United States government. So they couldn't go with him, and they couldn't go with my other brother, so they wanted to come with me, so I took them back to California with me, and I bought a little lot and built my own house and they lived with me for about a year before they died.

Question: When you went to Colorado, you had a cousin in Colorado, is that right?

Answer: Yeah. My mother's uncle lived there with his family. So all the cousins were second cousins to me.

Question: So what did you do in Colorado then?

Question: Well, they had a little farm and we helped him briefly on that farm a few months and then I rented a farm right near them and we raised cabbages and onions and things like that, and just to get me by, and after the crop was sold, well then I joined the Army, but as I said to you before that I had a heck of a time getting into the Army.

Question: So take me through. First of all, you decided to join.

Answer: Yeah. I wanted to volunteer and they wouldn't.. In 1942, in I think it was about July of '42, I wrote to all the Armed Forces and the Coast Guard even, asked them to let me volunteer and they. Well, of course, my draft classification was 4C, which was enemy alien, and so I got all the, I got 3 replies. One from the Marine Corps, one from the Navy, one from the it was really from the Selective Service, and they had talked to the U.S. Army about me joining. And like I said before that you know, when I was talking to you back there, that the Navy sent me a letter. My letter.. written all across the face of that thing with red crayon, just two words: No Japs, and they sent me an official letter behind that, signed by Lt. Commander and all it said was No Japs, and then the Marine Corps sent me a letter. It was a cordial letter saying that, At this time we can't accept you because of your Japanese background. And the Army, this Selective Service person, head of Selective Service arranged for me a meeting with the Army. And so I went to see this colonel in Denver, Colorado, and he, we went to lunch together, and he said that he'll try his darnest to get me in But they weren't taking anybody like me in the Army at that time, so he said, Don't give up. He said, Things will change, and then when it did change, well I joined the Army and went to Camp Shelby, trained with 442 and, like I said, I wanted to, I felt that being in the 442 was racial discrimination. It was segregation and so I volunteered for the parachute troops, and I served with the 101st Airborne Division overseas.

Question: Was that, To get out of the 442, was that a challenge again because they're saying, Well, you're Japanese and this is where we're putting all the Japanese.

Answer: Yeah. That's the way I felt. I felt that I should be able to choose any branch of the service I wanted to because I felt I was just as much a U.S. citizen as the President of the United States, and but, of course, that never happened. Finally got into the service. After I got out of World War II and came home, I got badgered

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into joining the Reserve, and they wouldn't let me alone, and they kept coming back to where I was working and they really pressured me, so just to get rid of them, I signed up and then here come the Korean War, see.

Question: Let me back up just a little. So you ended up, you started in the 442nd,

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Moved over to the

Answer: 101st Airborne Division.

Question: And where did you train for that?

Answer: In Ft. Benning, Georgia.

Question: And that's paratroopers.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: So were you the only Japanese-American?

Answer: No, there were about 13 of us that volunteered out of the 442, and we went, there was about 3,000 people from all of the country that joined the parachute troops, and about 850 of us ever graduated. Because the training was so rigorous that every day thousands would drop out, and so what happened was that, I mean, hundreds would drop out, until there was only about 850 of us left, and so we went overseas together and everybody I trained with, the only person that I ended up training with was a sergeant that came to the paratrooper with me from the 442 group and we ended in the same company and the same outfit overseas as replacements, and I don't know where all the rest of them went.

Question: Was that still tough there, I mean, did you face discrimination there?

Answer: No.

Question: So by that time, you had fought hard enough that

Answer: Yeah.

Question: You were another soldier.

Answer: Yeah. Yeah.

Question: So you ended up where in Europe? You ended up in Europe, correct?

Answer: Yeah. I was tail end of Bastogne. We got into the 101st Airborne Division, and then through the rest of the war.

Question: Do you remember your first combat jump?

Answer: I didn't make a combat jump.

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Question: Oh, you didn't have to.

Answer: took me in, they took us replacements and we jumped off the end of the truck.

Question: All that training gone to waste!!

Answer: Yeah. And then when the war ended, just before the war ended I think it was when I got transferred to the 82nd Airborne Division, and we went into Berlin as occupational troops in Berlin, and I got my discharge, so I went home and then as I said, I got taken back in the Korean War for awhile, but I didn't go overseas. I spent my time in Ft. Lewis, where I met my wife Rosie.

Question: Uh, huh. How did you meet Rosie?

Answer: Well, a friend of mine in Ft. Lewis asked me if I wanted to go to New Year's Eve party because he said his girlfriend is giving a New Year's Eve party and she asked him to bring a couple guys from the camp, and so we went over there and I saw Rosie sittin' there with this boyfriend of hers. What I thought was a boyfriend of hers. And, well, that's a long story, but after I went back to camp the next day, he says, this friend of mine says, You meet anybody that you liked? And I said, Well, yeah, there was one girl there that I really liked, but seems to me like they're gonna get married tomorrow or something like that, and he said, Oh, Rosie. He says, my girlfriend told me that Rosie broke up with that boyfriend of hers. So he said, I'll get you her phone number, so that's where it all started.

Question: Was your experience, now Korean you said you didn't end up going overseas? You ended up

Answer: No, I stayed in Ft. Lewis, and since my mother and father was, had already died, I had the younger sister that was still in high school and she was living with me, and when I had to go to report back to the Army, I applied for a hardship, no dependency discharge. I couldn't get that dependency discharge, and so one day a Rabbi was walking by and he says, he sat down next to me. I was sitting in the one day of sunshine we had in Ft. Lewis, and he sat down and was talking to me and he said, you don't look very happy today. I said, No, I'm not happy at all. He said, What happened? So I told him about my discharge application being turned down, and he said, Do you have a copy of your application? I said, Yeah. So we went into the barracks. I showed him the application. He read it over and he says, Change this word to this and this to that, and this to that, and then he says, change your application from dependency to hardship discharge because he says, You're legal guardian, aren't you, to your little sister. I said, Yeah. And she's living there alone? I said, Yeah. She's living in my house, going to high school, so we sent that letter and then that proved to be a good thing because, so I have lots to thank that Rabbi about.

You know, one thing that I was thinking about was I had that letter from the Navy saying, Thanks for being there after all those years. Well, I worked for about 25 years along with the Navy, and it's ironic, because first experience with the Navy said, No Japs, and now they're sending me this kind of a commendation kind of a thing. And so all these Navy guys were born after World War II really, including all the officers, and so one of them stopped me and asked me about, said, What's this I hear about you guys having to lose your citizenship and having to go to camp? And

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I says, Yeah, that's true, and so I was telling him all about it, and he got interested in it and then I guess he told some of the others and so one by one they're coming to ask me about all of the, my experiences, and one Navy officer says, You were a paratrooper? He says, I can't believe that you were a paratrooper. I says, Well, look how old I am now. I said, I gotta bring you a photograph of me when I was a paratrooper. He says, Yeah, you better bring that. So I brought my photograph and I was showing them. They said, My God, you don't look like that. It was a good experience to be working with all those Navy guys.

Question: Do you think that reflects a change in our society?

Answer: Yeah, I think so. I think after World War II, the 442 and the 100th Infantry and the Military Intelligence Service had really gone out and made a name for themselves and that broke the ice, I think. That allowed, well, for instance, before World War II, if you got a college education, where would you end up? You'd be a farmer or a garner because of this Japanese face. And after World War II, and all this publicity about the 442 and 100th Infantry and the MIS, I think that broke the dam, and so if you got an education, you were almost assured of a good job. And after I got my engineering degree, I went to apply at Hewlett Packard, and I still felt discrimination, because I walked into that office and I said, I want an application for an engineering job, and that young girl stood up on her desk and practically yelled at me saying that, We don't hire Japs, so forget it! SO I said, I had a few words to say to her about that, and then I left and I was working for an outfit called Verion Associates, that had, was in San Mateo, California, for awhile, and then I heard that Boeing was hiring and they had a representative there in town, so I went to make the application and they hired me as a design engineer, so I rushed home and I said, Hey, Rosie, I says, I got a job with Boeing. We're moving to Seattle. That's her home town, see. And so we moved to Seattle and I worked for Boeing for close to 10 years, and then our group at Boeing was transferred to Huntsville for that moon shot, and the whole group went there and I was the tail end. I was supposed to leave about 2 weeks after the rest of them left, and a neighbor of mine said, Hey, Lockheed is hiring on Hood Canal, and I said, They are? He said, Yeah, you don't want to go to Huntsville, he said go talk to Lockheed, so I said, Thanks. SO I ran over there and I made an application and that was on a Wednesday and then the very next day they called me and wanted me to come to work. I said, Wait a minute. I've got to send in my resignation to Boeing and all that, and I said. I may take a couple of weeks, and they said, Well we'd like to have you start Monday if you can. So anyhow, so Boeing gave me a separation that afternoon. Thursday afternoon, so I went to work for Lockheed, and worked with the Navy for the rest of my career.

Question: Do you think that what happened during World War II could happen again? With the evacuation and

Answer: Well, it seems like, you know, discrimination keeps popping back up stronger as time goes on. To me, that's the way it feels, but I don't know whether it would really do something drastic like they did to us. I think that the government had to really think hard about that, so I don't think a massive evacuation or anything like that would happen again.

Question: And this is a hard one, because we can't, I mean we can ponder this one forever, but do you think that the evacuation shortened your parents' lives?

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Answer: I definitely feel that it did, because they were still young and my Dad seemed like all his spirit was torn out of him, because he was never at a point where, you know, before the war we were slaving away on our farm and, but you know, he was, the whole family was relatively happy. And it's just the way we were. But after we had to leave the farm and you lost everything, and didn't know where, you know, money was going to come from to feed the family from then on, and so it seemed like his spirit was really burned out from then on.

Question: That seems to be one of the biggest, most damaging thing that happened. The psychological aspect.

Answer: I think it was, yeah.

Question: And your Mom the same?

Answer: Yeah. She was always not the same, really. She, I heard them talking one day, saying that, telling my Dad, You know, she says, we can't stay with John for the rest of our lives. We've got to do something, but she says, What could we do, you know. And they didn't have enough money to buy farm equipment to start another farm. They didn't know, my father was just working part time at the only job he could find, and I know my mother worried about me an awful lot, saying that, you know, we're ruining his life staying with him, and so later on I got her aside. I assured her that she wasn't ruining anybody's life, but I know that really mentally they were, you know, torn up. They didn't know where to turn next.

Question: That's what a lot of people have talked about. The male of the family, the breadwinner of the family, and the family unit as a whole and then the ones that had to go to camp, that family unit was broken apart. They ate in a mess hall, you didn't eat as a family, sometimes you ate at different times, and so it was devastating.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Do you think that, now you have 2 children, right?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Do they know about your experiences? Have they asked?

Answer: Not really. They haven't talked to me much about my past. Every time I'd say, Hey, you guys have it easy, or when I was your age, I had to slave out on the farm and this and that, and they said, Yeah, yeah, yeah, we know all about that. They really didn't, but they didn't want to hear about my growing up laboring on the farm and all that.

Question: What about the evacuation, when you left for Colorado. Do they understand what you and their grandparents gave up?

Answer: Yeah. I'm pretty sure that they knew, but I don't know. They haven't really talked to me much about what happened during those days. But my young granddaughter keeps asking me, so I wrote my life's memories. It's not an autobiography, because I jump around too much to make it kind of an autobiography, but she keeps asking me about the olden days and my Army days

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and things like that, so I wrote this whole life history up to last August. That's where I stopped and I made a reprint of the World War II days, and I thought I'd just give you that portion so you could read it over to see...

Question: That'd be great. So are her questions real broad, just about you growing up or does she come in with some challenging

Answer: Yeah. Like I hadn't given her a copy of my thing yet, and just the other day she asked me what challenges in life that I had overcome, and she wrote a real neat thing at school about it and put my picture at the bottom of the article, and she said, He met his challenges and still is meeting challenges.

Question: And she's 10 years old.

Answer: Yeah. She just became 10.

Question: Does she, both her parents Japanese-American descent?

Answer: Yeah. They are.

Question: So she has, this is a lot of her understanding her heritage.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Does she know about giving up the farm?

Answer: She will know.

Question: She will know. Yeah. 'Cause that's the sad thing. That's where some of this project got started, was that some of this was left out of the history books.

Answer: mmmm,hmmmm. Yeah. I wrote all of my experiences, from the very youngest age that I could remember anything up to almost present day, and I sent a copy to my sister, my older sister and she thought it was fantastic. 'Course she's my sister.

Question: Where does she live?

Answer: She lives in Los Angeles. I have a sister that lives in Palo Alto, a brother that lives there. My oldest brother died while he was with civil service serving in Japan, and I have another sister that passed away. My youngest sister was a nurse in Santa Cruz, California, and she had a heart attack, so she had to quit.

Question: Have you ever as a family, as the kids have grown up now and you're adults, do they ever reflect back and talk about what happened back then or is it something that you just go on with life and

Answer: Yeah, well, there isn't too much talking about what happened. I suppose each and every one of us had different ideas about it all.

Question: And different ages, and different things that were important to them at that time.

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Answer: Yeah.

Question: Well, thank you very much.