

Keeper of the Flames Critique

For my final project I interviewed a resident at the East San Gabriel Japanese Community Center for the Keepers of the Flame Project at. The resident is a second-generation Japanese woman born in 1932 in Pahala, Hawaii. As a young adult, the interviewee moved from a predominantly Japanese community in Hawaii to Los Angeles. While she did not go to an internment camp during the war, her husband, who was born in California, did. Based on this information there were certain points I wanted to focus on during our interview. Because she herself is not from Japan, I wanted to learn about grandparent's immigration story. Also, I was interested to hear about her experience moving from a small, rural Hawaiian community to the culturally diverse city of Los Angeles. After World War II, I anticipated that this transition would accompany struggles relating to racism. Knowing that she worked professionally until late in life, I wanted to investigate the challenges she faced as a post-war Japanese woman who balanced a professional career and raising a family. To connect the interview with some of the themes we covered in class I wanted to hear her perspective of what it is like to be Japanese-American and what connection she felt to Japanese culture. Also to relate to class themes, I wanted to hear more about internment camps. Because the interviewee was never interned I asked about what she knew of her husband's experience in an internment camp in Arizona and his return to Southern California.

I believe my interview was successful in addressing the topics I intended to cover. The resident was talkative and willing to share many of her memories from growing up. I think the most successful parts of the interview were when she described her life growing up in Hawaii, particularly how her life changed when the war began.

I found that when I asked more specific, leading questions during the interview her

responses were not as free as when I asked more general questions. For example, when I asked her about her trip to Japan, she responded candidly. She included numerous anecdotes and lasting impressions of the people she met there. However, there were some matters that she was very brief on. When I asked her to explain why she decided to move away from Hawaii to live in California, she tersely responded by saying, "It was time to move on." Also, when I asked her to explain specific instances of racism that she had encountered, she was also brief describing the abstract differences living around people of different races.

Both of my interviews were about an hour, which was brief compared to the estimated interview time. Many of the questions that were provided were focused on emigration from Japan and experience in internment. Because she was not familiar with her family's emigration story and also had not been in an internment camp I ran out of questions faster than I had anticipated. While others reassured me that the second interviews they had felt more productive than the first, I was concerned that I had exhausted all the questions. During the second interview I sensed that the resident was more at ease. It turned out that even though the first interview had a lot of breadth, many of the topics were covered superficially. Even though there was not a lot of entirely new material covered in the second interview, she was more willing talk in depth about the topics we had already covered in the first interview. For example, in the first interview the resident talked about her husband's experience in internment very briefly. During the second interview, the interviewee elaborated on her impression of internment as an outsider. She described the community that formed between Japanese families after returning home after internment. Also she told me about her experience visiting the internment camp with her husband as an adult.

I found that the interview was more successful when I asked her to recount memorable

experiences from her past than when I asked her about more abstract things. When I asked her about her topics such as her cultural identity or how being Japanese affected her experiences in Hawaii and California, her answers were more vague. There was also a miscommunication that happened when I asked her about instances of racism that she had experienced as a Japanese woman in California. Instead of responding by recounting an instance when she felt marginalized, she talked about personal prejudices she had against other races. Having lived in a community of mostly Japanese people in Hawaii, it was very different for her to transition to Los Angeles, which is a very diverse city. Her explanation of her own personal prejudices was still relevant commentary about her transition to California. However, I did not realize that she misunderstood my question until I transcribed the interview.

When I was transcribing the interview, I had to make a few subjective decisions. Had I transcribed the interview exactly, it would have been much harder to comprehend. At times the interviewee went off on tangents, starting a sentence, mumbling, and then trailing off. When I transcribed the interview I made the decision to edit some of those instances out. Overall, the entire interview process was a very positive experience. She was very open and seemed to enjoy recollecting stories from her past. I was impressed with her stories of how she overcame struggles both in Hawaii and in California, and was glad I had the chance to meet her and record her stories.