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Interview no. 813

Rosa Kondo Honda

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE:	Rosa Kondo Honda
INTERVIEWER:	Victor M. Macías González
PROJECT:	World War II
DATE OF INTERVIEW:	January 28, 1994
TERMS OF USE:	Unrestricted
TAPE NO:	813
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TRANSCRIBER:	Michelle L. Gomilla

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

American citizen of Japanese and Mexican ancestry; born on February 28, 1915 in El Paso, Texas; daughter of a Japanese national/proprietor of a grocery store in South El Paso; grew up during the Great Depression; attended Bowie High School; married Julio Honda on February 20, 1938, a Japanese citizen residing in Cd. Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico; lived in Cd. Juárez until early 1942; expelled from Cd. Juárez after bombing of Pearl Harbor and incarcerated in Mexico City with other Japanese.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Recalls her experiences as one of the few non-Mexicans enrolled at Bowie High School; social activities; economic conditions during the Great Depression; El Paso movie theaters; evidence of discrimination against Mexicans by Anglos; reaction of Japanese community to bombing of Pearl Harbor; discusses confiscation of her U.S. identification card by U.S. officials during an attempt to cross the international border to visit her parents in El Paso; subsequent expulsion to Mexico City; Recalls hardships endured while in the Mexican capital; living conditions, treatment by Mexican officials of Japanese detainees; private Japanese school in Mexico City; Reflects on Japanese assimilation into Mexican society; views of the Mexican people.

Length of Interview: 1 Hour, 20 Min. Length of Transcript 46 Pages

Interview with Rosa Kondo Honda
By Victor M. Macías González
January 28, 1994

Esta es una entrevista con la señora Rosie Honda, el veintiocho de enero, de mil novecientos noventa y cuatro, El Paso, Texas.

M: Good morning. We'd like to start first with a couple of biographical questions. If you can state your name, your age, and then tell us a little bit about your parents.

H: Okay. My name is Rosa Kondo Honda. My mother was of Mexican descent and she came by accident to the United States.

M: When?

H: Oh, it must have been around 1907. She grew up with her grandparents, so she considered the uncles as brothers and sisters. But, anyway, there was only one girl left at home. And the grandmother and the girl- and my mother- came to El Paso because the husband of the grandmother of my mother came here. He was in mining, you know, they worked in the mines. I don't know what kind of mines he worked, but it was mines- either silver or gold, or whatever.

And somebody from the United States went to Chihuahua, Mexico. They were looking for some miners that would come and work here. Not here in El Paso but between Deming and Silver City [New Mexico]. He was just starting to open up a mine. He wanted somebody who knew what to dynamite- the hill or the mountain- to open up the mine. So I don't know how long he stayed. He was my great-grandfather. Anyway, he was killed.

And my mother and her grandmother, and her aunt, came to El Paso to see if they could get some kind of recompense for the death of the grandfather. So I don't think they had too much money- but they had money- and they came to El Paso. And they had some papers and they tried to get some kind of settlement with the owners of the mine. When they found out that they were not going to get a penny, they were out of money and they had to stay here and work. It was the grandmother, and her daughter, and my mother. But my mother was only about 9 or 10 years old. So she was sent back to Mexico and my great-grandmother and her daughter stayed here in El Paso.

So, afterwards, my mother came and I think it was in 1908 or 1907. That was the way my mother stayed here in the United States. [S]he met my father and got married and we all started to be born.

M: What was your mother's name?

H: Maria Bobadillo Kondo.

M: And your father?

H: His real name was Yashi Henry Kondo. And my father came the same way, not because they were in desperate need or anything. He just didn't like the tradition or customs of the Japanese people.

He had an older brother and he had to be under his older brother because even if the father was there, at [a] certain age, I guess, he is supposed to be the boss, or whatever, of

the family. And he is responsible for everyone and for discipline and everything. Any my father didn't like it. That's why he came to the United States. He came to San Francisco. He says that he was there when the earthquake [hit] in San Francisco.

M: 1905?

H: So that must be around that time. And I think [that's] why he came to El Paso was [because] he was very afraid of tuberculosis. And he knew that, you know, the climate was very much like Japan['s] and there was a lot of tuberculosis, I guess, at that time. Anyway, he came to the dry climate, I think, because of the fear of tuberculosis.

I don't know who taught him to read and speak English. But he knew how to read and speak English. So that was one advantage for him. But my mother never learned to speak English. And...

M: How did they meet?

H: My father was working (chuckles) as a cook in a restaurant in south El Paso. I guess it was [on] 3rd and El Paso [Street]-someplace around there. And my mother was the dishwasher or the waitress. I don't know what. But, anyway, that's where they met. And they got married and I was the first-born. I had an older...

M: Did you have older sisters?

H: I had an older sister....Yes, of everyone I was the first-born. My mother had a child by another marriage. So I was

the first one of my father. You know, because we had the store my father was the one who took care of us. He was the one that said, "You cannot sit on the table and have breakfast without brushing your teeth, combing your hair, and washing your face and hands." My mother, I think, she was so busy doing all the housework with six kids and then helping my father in the store.

M: How were your brothers and sisters called? What were their names?

H: My older sister is two years older than I am. And her name is Juana Padillo Santoscoy. Then, it's Rosa- which I am- Kondo Honda. I married a Japanese citizen from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. My younger sister is named Margarita Kondo Flores. And then my oldest brother. My brother was named Henry Kondo. The next brother was Robert Kondo and the other one was Alfredo Kondo. And then ten years or eleven years after there was born another son and his name is Reymundo Kondo.

M: So your parents met, they got married. What was the reaction of your family? What did they think?

H: My great-grandmother was very opposed to my mother marrying a Japanese man.

M: What did they say?

H: I was not a very curious person, you know, trying to find [out] things. When I first started reading- because I loved to read- and when I found out I could read and understand a book like- what was it? I think [I was] in fourth or fifth

[grade] when I read my first book and it was *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table*. And I was very surprised to learn that I could read the whole book and understand it. And from then on I used to get as many books as I could. And I was left more to myself, I guess, because I wasn't close to my younger sister nor to my older sister. I was more to myself, I guess, because I liked to read and that would make me unaware of the other people.

M: And when your parents got married your father worked in the store or how did they...

H: No, he was working as a cook in several places. When they first got married they stayed here- I don't how long- in El Paso. Then he found a job in Silver City with a company- I think it was the mines- and they stayed there for about a year. Then they returned to El Paso again. That's when he opened the store at 1119 South Stanton [Street].

M: That's where the Chamizal [Park] is now?

H: Yes.

M: What kind of a neighborhood was it? What were the people like around? Do you remember? Did you live in that area?

H: Yes, we lived [in the] back of the store. So that's why my father was the one that took care of us and knew if we were late to school or we didn't get in on time going home or whatever.

Well, there were 100 percent Mexican people. Even the school I went to, I think, I was the only one [in] the first

grade, which was the Aoy School. And I was the only one that had another name besides López, Martínez, and all those. But when I went to high school there were several [students] with Anglo names like Jones [or] Wilson.

M: What school did you go to, El Paso [High]?

H: Bowie.

M: Bowie, oh.

H: Bowie, Bowie High School. And we were not- well, like today- forced or encouraged to speak English. So everyone spoke Spanish- that's what we spoke at home. So it was unnecessary, really, to speak English because we were living in South El Paso. And, like I said, 100 percent of the people were Mexican [and] Spanish-speaking.

M: What did you do for fun?

H: I beg your pardon?

M: What did you do for fun?

H: My father used to take us [out] every Sunday. During the winter months he would take us riding in the car. He always had a car. And he took us, you know, near the mountains where the sun was shining very brightly. And he always thought that we had to have enough sunshine that in order not to get sick with the tuberculosis- which he was very afraid [of] all the time, I guess. And on Sundays they took us riding in the car and we had picnics. We had, you know, all the family and one or two other [friends] who....Because we were such a large family we all had friends, or whatever, and there was always

two or three persons with us.

When we grew older, we had two or three parties at home which was just the radio, and dancing, and playing games. That's about it.

M: Your parents, were they always looking?

H: Yes, yes they were there.

M: In that respect, were the Japanese parents any different from the Mexican parents?

H: Well, like I said, my father was the one that put all the rules and we went by what he said, not (chuckles) by what my mother said. So I'll say we were raised by Japanese tradition or customs, or whatever.

M: So you were growing up in El Paso in the Depression. What were conditions like? Did you notice any changes?

H: Oh, yes. There were a lot of kids my age who couldn't go to school because they didn't have a pair of shoes, or a coat, or a sweater to go to school. So they couldn't go. And sometimes, you know, they used to ask us for twenty-five cents in grammar school or school supplies. Then later on it was fifty cents. But they didn't have the twenty-five cents or the fifty cents. So, a lot of kids didn't go to school. That's why we didn't have a high school until....I think that the first graduating class was in 1930 from Bowie because there wasn't enough people- boys and girls- going to school in high school. They just had to quit because they didn't have anything to eat sometimes and they couldn't send their

children without anything. So they didn't go to school. And I realized that when we were in high school because our principal knew a lot of kids went to school without any breakfast. So, what he did was- I don't know how he got it- but he would sell us a very good bowl of chile beans and a bun for three pennies because that way, at least, they were not giving out the food. We were paying something and we didn't have a cafeteria, in the first place, until late. I think I was a sophomore when we got the cafeteria.

So it was a very hard time for everyone, even my father. [But] we never lacked food. We even had a turkey. We never missed a turkey on Thanksgiving when the rest of the people around there couldn't afford [to buy one]. What they ate most was *salchichón* (bologna) because that's all they could afford.

M: Tell me a little about when you started dating. How did you meet your husband?

H: Well, I don't want to say it but it is true. Like I said, in high school I was not popular with the boys for whatever reason. I thought it was because I was part Japanese and I was different from the other girls. That's what I thought. I don't know why I think I wasn't attractive. But anyway, I never had a boyfriend from school. But boys around there who were working- there was a boy very interested in me. But we didn't have dates because my parents wouldn't permit it. But they would let us go to the movies on Sunday once in awhile and the boys would be there. My younger sister was the one

that arranged everything. They would tell the boys that Sunday we were going to the movies and the boys would be ready around there and would walk with us to the movies. That was the dating we had. I guess my father, his Japanese, [or] whatever, didn't want us to go with Mexican boys. But he didn't, you know, say "I don't want you to invite those boys," or anything.

But when I was twenty-two years old there was a man- he was much older than we were- and he was interested in me. But the thing was that I heard that he was married. And I didn't love him, or like him, or anything. It was just something that, because all the girls had boyfriends, I just wanted to have somebody to go out with. (chuckles) Anyway, my father thought I was seriously thinking about him and so he arranged for me to marry my husband. That's a tradition in a Japanese family. I didn't want to. I told him twice that I wasn't going to...because in the first place he was living in Mexico. I didn't want to go and live in Mexico. I didn't know what I thought, that maybe later on I could come into the United States with my husband because I was an American citizen. And according to what I knew, I thought that I could get papers from my husband and live in the United States. But I went two or three times to the consulate in Juárez and they never told me, "There's no law that your husband could come into the United States." But they just left me, you know, hanging, and I thought that I had to get some papers or something else.

And I went two or three times over there and they never told me, really, "Why are you trying to get your husband across because the Immigration Department has said that no Japanese can immigrate to the United States?"

M: What year was this?

H: I beg your pardon?

M: What year?

H: 1938.

M: Let me ask you a question about movie theatres. What movie theatres did you go to? Alhambra?

H: No, no, no. What was the name? Eureka?

M: Ah, Eureka!

H: Eureka, yes! And what was the other one? The Palace, I think.

M: The Palace...

H: And the Texas. I forgot the name of that one...

M: Texas Grand Theater.

H: Yes, Texas Grand Theater.

M: Were the movies in English or in Spanish?

H: Oh yes, in English.

M: Did they say no Mexicans can come in or anything like that?

H: No. I think that the Mexicans at that time never were really discriminated [against] because we could go in. They considered me a Mexican so I could go anywhere and nobody told us anything.

There was one time when I was working. I was working at,

I think the name was, what was the name of it? Well, anyway, it was the building next to Kress's...

M: The Caple's Building?

H: That was the only medical laboratory and my sister started working there and she progressed to a higher job. And she said, "Do you want to go and work there?" So I went. It was mostly like handy girl or whatever. I took the results of the [tests] because they sent everything there for analysis. And I took the reports back to the doctors and I would bring specimens because they did research on that. So I worked there until I got married. Before I worked at J.C. Penney['s] as a clerk.

M: A lot of the old *exiliados* were working in those department stores.

H: Yes. You know, when I was in high school one of the teachers told us a very discouraging thing. [S]he said, "Don't you start taking shorthand and typing because there are no secretary jobs open." Well, I don't know what she wanted us to [do]. Well, I started to take typing. It was hard for me because my hands are very short and my fingers are short. So I just left it and I never took shorthand. But my older sister, she took shorthand and typing. So she more or less knew that. But where she worked she didn't have to type or get dictation or anything.

M: So what happened at the Kress Building where they were discriminating against you?

H: I beg your pardon?

M: You said they were discriminating against you.

H: Oh, I forgot. Yes. That was the first time and the only time that I felt, I don't know....You know, it feels so bad when people say those things that you feel like you're nothing or you want to cry, you want to....I don't know what.

We were working with a doctor and he was on the third floor of the building. And we were waiting for the elevator. There was a boy, or whatever, who managed the elevator. So when we were waiting for the elevator to take us there was another lady. And so, just as soon as the boy opened the door, we went in. And then the woman said, "I'm not going with colored people in that elevator." So, I don't know, I guess she thought we were going to go out but the boy took us up and she stayed there. What he told us later was that he told her, "Well, I'm colored people by the way you're thinking, so I cannot take you up. You have to walk [up] the stairs."

M: ;*Qué bien!* (laughter)

H: But, you know, it makes you feel like you're nothing. I almost cried and I was....You get to feel like you're [only a] little something and you want to hide because it's very insulting to be....In the first place, the Mexicans, they are not considered colored people. If she thought I was Mexican, but I don't know....And she was an Anglo. I guess she came from the south[ern United States] someplace.

M: ¡Gringa loca! Well, let's go back to 1938 to when you got married.

H: I got married on February 20, 1938.

M: In the Catholic Church?

H: In the Catholic Church. Yes, my mother was a Catholic. Although I wasn't really into religion, but I wanted to please my mother so I went through the *sagrada corazón* and my husband had to convert into Christianity or Catholic[ism]. He went for lessons for about two or three weeks before we got married.

M: Let me ask you a little bit about your husband. You said he was Japanese-Mexican. Where was he from?

H: He was a Japanese from Japan. He had come to Mexico, I think, in 1925.

M: What was he working with? What was he doing?

H: [He owned] a grocery store.

M: In Juárez?

H: In Juárez.

M: What was the name of it?

H: Alianza. I don't know if the Victoria is still there- the movie.

M: Sí, sí, the [Cine] Victoria [movie theater located on the corner of diez y seis de septiembre and Francisco Madero].

H: It was across the Victoria but it wasn't the Victoria at that time. There was another store there.

M: On [the] 16th of September [Street]?

H: In [Francisco] Madero [Street].

M: There's an old jewelry [store] there.

H: Yes.

M: And what did you sell, just groceries?

H: Groceries.

M: And after you got married you went to live there?

H: Yes. Well, I had to go to live [in] Mexico. That's the trouble with what they did with me- that they couldn't let me come into the United States. In the first place, I was born in the United States. I was an American citizen. All my family lived in the United States. And you know, at that time, Juárez was a very small city and there was no roads and a lot of things didn't come from Mexico. So everybody had to depend on El Paso for all their groceries, their clothes, and everything.

When the War started there was a rumor. I don't think it was true, but we lost all our customers because they were saying that [if] any person who went into a Japanese store, that their crossing card would be taken away because they didn't want the Mexican people to do any business with the Japanese. So, even if we had stayed, it was worthless because we couldn't sell anything. All the customers left because they were afraid, because they depended so much on the United States- on El Paso- for all their living and everything, food and clothing and everything.

M: Did you have difficulty getting supplies to sell?

H: No. After the War it was in December. We stayed in Juárez January [and] February. On March- [in] the last week- we left for Mexico City.

M: Explain that. Give me a little bit more detail.

H: After the War ended I couldn't go to El Paso. Most of the Japanese men were bachelors but two or three got married around the time when I got married. But they brought their wives from Japan. And this couple had a child about a year old and they wanted to celebrate the first year of the child. And they invited a few people and they had....Just eating Japanese food. That was all it was. The party was all that, but they were concentrated- I think there were about eight to ten men- in one house. The Americans thought they were having a meeting for something or another.

M: Sort of spying?

H: Yes. So, according to them, there were one or two American soldiers who were with the other Mexican soldiers who went to the house and got in and searched all the house and detained the ten men in- I don't know what you call it in English- la Guarnición de la Plaza.

M: La Guarnición de la Plaza.

H: So they took them there and they stayed there for about two or three weeks.

M: Detained?

H: Yes, they were detained. I don't know what because my husband wasn't there so I didn't know. And we couldn't, you know,

telephone. We had telephones but we didn't phone one another because we were afraid that the Americans were watching us. So we didn't and...

M: So you were at the party when people came and took all the men away?

H: Yes, and took all the men and they searched everything.

M: What about the women? What happened?

H: No, the women were left. And then I decided, well....You know, rumors start. I didn't get the paper so I didn't really know what was happening. But by rumors we heard that all the Japanese people were- ancestry, not Japanese people, but anyone who had an ancestry of Japanese- supposed to move from the border towns and the coastline. But you know, like rumors, I don't believe really that whoever was in charge of that would be spying on everyone to see if they went to a Japanese store or anything. But I didn't believe that. It's just that the people were afraid and they heard rumors and everything. So I didn't pay too much attention.

When they took those men- and they were retained- they started saying that we all have to leave. So I went to the General at the *inmigración* [office] and I talked to him and I said, "Listen, I'm an American citizen but I can't go back to the United States. But I want to know if we are supposed to leave Juárez, the border towns?" He said, "Yes, eventually everyone will have to leave. Everyone with Japanese ancestry has to leave."

Mexico wasn't at war at that time so whatever was happening was from the United States. And you know he said, "Well-" and I was sitting [like this]. He put his hand on my leg and he said, "Oh, you don't have to leave. I'll see about you." So -I knew I was young and kind of stupid in that sense but I knew that wasn't right (chuckles)- I said, "Why should I stay even if I can stay? All by myself I can go back to El Paso. So why should I stay in Juárez?" So I left with my husband because after[wards] the detainees- the eight or ten Japanese men who were detained- were told, "We'll give you a week."

What the Mexican government really wanted was money. *Como dicen*, "*Río revuelto pescador sin mar.*" So the Mexican government knew that [t]he[y] could make money you know. [It's] not the Mexican government, it's the employee. So as soon as the men put up the money they were told, "We'll give you eight days and in eight days you have to go. So just put your business or whatever you're going to do with your business and....But in eight days you have to leave." So...

M: The party was on December 6th or 7th?

H: No.

M: When was the party?

H: I think it was at the first week of March or second week, something around there.

M: So you had to leave by April?

H: We left by April. And I remember that it was April because

when we went to Mexico....And, like I told you before, they wanted to send us to El Perote [a jail fortress in the port of Veracruz. The German and Italian P.O.W.'s were kept there by the Mexican government] but because Mexico was not in war with Japan. They had an ambassador and the ambassador from Mexico...I guess he kind of helped us so that we wouldn't be sent to the...

M: Perote.

H: Perote. They just wanted to concentrate us in [a] certain place.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning of Tape One, Side B

M: The question I have is did all the Japanese from Juárez leave at the same time?

H: No. They didn't. It was just about maybe thirty people. There were about eight or ten couples and the rest were bachelors.

M: Did they take the children also?

H: Yes. Maybe that was an arrangement by whoever was taking charge of us over all the Japanese that were leaving. We were not supposed to take anything except our clothes, so we had to find out where to leave our few [pieces of] furniture [or] whatever we had. Everybody sold the[ir] stores. They gave it away, really, because we wanted to leave and the only people

who wanted to buy it- they knew they could take advantage of us and everybody just sold whatever they could get.

M: And did they take you first to [Cd.] Chihuahua and then...

H: No.

M: Directly?

H: No, we went directly. At that time it took two days.

M: *En tren?*

H: *En tren.* And we went on second-class.

M: Did they give you food?

H: No. (chuckles) The Mexican people or government employees were telling us to leave but we had to pay a certain amount to leave.

M: How much? Do you remember?

H: Seventy-five pesos for each one of us.

M: That's a lot of money then.

H: One thing that I want to make straight is that when the first time that I told you that the soldiers went into the house where they thought the meeting was being held, there were two American soldiers with the Mexican soldiers. So that made it officially, I guess, that it was the United States government who didn't want us on the border town and not the Mexican government.

M: Who was giving orders to whom?

H: I don't know. I never asked.

M: Did they look American? Did they have American uniforms?

H: No, they knew they were American uniforms.

M: They were green...

H: Because soldiers...

M: So they gave you eight days to leave. Everyone sold their things and they took you to the train together, or how?

H: No. Everybody was on his own. The government didn't help us--neither the government of Mexico. They never do so we didn't expect anything. But the American government didn't either.

M: When the eighth day came did people come knocking to your door?

H: No. We went voluntarily. Like I said, I went and talked to the General and he said, "Eventually, everyone has to go out." Looking back, I think that was the best thing that we did.

M: On the eighth day everyone, all thirty of you...

H: About thirty people...

M: Together?

H: Together, and there...

M: Went to the train?

H: Yes. And there were soldiers in the train, Mexican...

M: Looking at you?

H: Yes.

M: Guarding you?

H: Guarding you.

M: But they didn't push you on the train...

H: No, but they were guarding us, just seeing where we left or if we got off the train, I guess, or whatever.

M: So you got on the train at the station. You had to pay for

your own food?

H: Yes.

M: You had to pay for your own ticket?

H: Yes.

M: You had certain costs because you had to spend a lot of money.

H: Yes.

M: And then [in] two days you arrived in Mexico?

H: Yes.

M: What happened in those two days?

H: Well, you know, like I said, I was born and raised in the United States. Because my mother could cross- she looked Mexican- and that was the only time she crossed, just to say goodbye. When we decided to leave I tried to see my father and say goodbye. Do you know what they did? And [to] my father too? They told us to meet at the bridge.

M: The middle of the bridge?

H: In the middle of the bridge- where they had the immigration offices. And we met. My father was there and my son and I were there. And there was some kind of government official. He was, you know, watching us to see what we were talking about. And we were supposed to speak in English so he could understand [us]. And any kind of paper that was passed through he had to see what it was. So that gave me to understand that they didn't want me just because I was Japanese. They didn't want me to cross the border just because I was Japanese.

I grew up thinking that there wouldn't be any war, that....You know, during your school years, the history books tell us the First War [WWI] was something terrible. But that from now on we were not going to have any wars because of the Kellogg peace or something. I don't remember. I was horrified when I read about the wars and those things. So when I read about the pact that the League of Nations made, or whatever, that [said] there was not going to be any war, I was, you know, without any fear of the War or anything.

And you know, that's one of the worst things- that innocent people in a war are the ones that suffer just as much as the other ones, the guilty ones. Like I said, neither of the Japanese that I knew- because I knew most of them in Juárez and here in El Paso. They were so busy raising their kids and working and everything [that] they had no desire to, you know, sell something, I guess, or to give information to Japan. I don't think anyone was really interested in supplying information to Japan because we had to work so hard and it was during the Depression that everybody was just thinking about something else and not Japan or anything. They had come for a better life so they were trying to do that.

M: Let me ask you a question. What happened in those two days when you were on the train?

H: Well, we didn't have food. I thought that if I ate something I was going to get sick because when the train stopped there were people selling things and they were not very sanitary, I

guess, and- neither my boy- I didn't give him anything.

M: How did people treat you?

H: You know, the Mexican people had nothing against us. When we left there were a lot of people there to tell us goodbye and good luck.

M: How did people react in the community? Did they say it was bad [or] good?

H: No. Well, they really didn't know. They realized that everyone, mostly, had a crossing card- and what they were protecting was the crossing card- so they thought that it was right what the Americans were doing. They needed that card to cross. They were afraid that the American government would take it away.

M: And when you arrived in Mexico City what happened? Were there officials there?

H: Yes. There were some people waiting for us, I guess from the embassy. They had reserved a hotel for us. But we were the lucky ones. We had a little more money than the rest, so we stayed in a hotel for about eight days and we had to pay everything.

M: Oh, you had to pay everything?

H: Yes.

M: Not the Japanese government?

H: No.

M: Okay. And what happened in those days? What did they tell you? What did the Japanese officials say?

H: We had no contact with them. It was somebody else who....You know, that's the way the Japanese are. They trust someone with a little more, I guess, schooling or whatever, and they put the trust on that person and whatever that person says, it's official.

M: Who was your leader of the group?

H: There was a man by the name of Raul Ito. He had more money than anyone else and he was the one that had the last say in everything. So when we got there we, I guess, somebody was there to meet us and they told us where to go and everything but we had to pay everything from our own money.

M: And how did you survive when your money ran out?

H: They decided after about a week that we couldn't go and pay [for a] hotel and having to get our food from restaurants and things like that. So they decided they were going to rent an apartment and live all together- all that group that we went.

M: Like a *vecindad*?

H: Like a *vecindad* [or] *común*, or whatever the hippies had. We all gave whatever we were supposed to give and the food was prepared by all the women and they built a table and some chairs. And that's where we had our [meals]. They rented three apartments and the bachelors were living about ten in each apartment. But where I was living at that time there were two bedrooms. And I took one of them and another couple took the other one. And we had the kitchen and the dining room there so, for me, it was very convenient because I didn't

have to go upstairs or downstairs or anything. Everything was there. We were supposed to pay [a] certain amount everyday for everyone except the children. But like my child, he wasn't very healthy I guess and... What we had for breakfast everyday was *frijoles*, a *bolillo*- well, bread- and sweet bread, and coffee. That was the breakfast and anybody who wanted something else would have to pay for it or bring it or whatever. At that time I didn't know that the beans were so rich in...

M: Protein.

H: Protein. So we always bought eggs for my son and milk. And we had to boil the milk. And in Juárez that was the same thing. We didn't have pasteurized milk. And so that was another thing that I needed to come to the United States [for] -the milk for my son. And it was a special milk that he had to take because he was very weak when he was born. The doctor was saying that he wasn't going to live. He was very weak.

Anyway, when we left, he wasn't a healthy child. He already had an operation here in the United States. But because we were here, I knew where to go and where the hospitals were and everything. But when we went to Mexico- oh, it must have been about less than a year- he had to have another operation and I didn't know anyone. We didn't know anyone. We were new there. So, after about a week [of] trying to find someone who, according to what everybody said, was a good doctor....And he was operated [on] in Mexico City.

So that was a very hard time for us because here we were without spending our own money and having to have those bills from the hospital and the doctor and everything. It was something that I never would have imagined that it would be like that.

But after staying for about, oh, I think it was four or five months living in the same commune or whatever [it] was called, I told my husband, "We don't have money just to go on living like this. We have to do something." So we started looking for a little *changarrito*- or little store. What they call them there is not stores but....Well, I can't remember the name right now. Anyway, we found a little store and we bought it but they didn't have any place for us to live. The room that they gave us was on the outside and it just had water. They had no sanitary...

M: Facilities.

H: So we had to go out and go into a....They had a big door that we had to open to go to the bathroom. So we stayed there only about four or five months. Then my husband found another place and we moved to the other place and at least it had a room and a kitchen and a bathroom and the place for the store. So that's how we went through all those four years that the War was on.

M: And what happened? Did you hear anything from the government, anything from the Japanese embassy?

H: No. On June the 25th, I think, or 24th, Mexico declared war.

So the ambassador left and all the people that were connected with the embassy. So we were left on our own.

M: So you almost had your own little jail. You, yourselves, were in charge of your jail.

H: Something like that. We couldn't go out of the city without permission. We couldn't open a little *changarrito* without any permission and they wouldn't give us permission. Well, I guess, (chuckles) there was one thing. I was the one that was working. I was raised in the United States- I didn't think about the (chuckles) *mordida*- so it never occurred to me that was what they wanted.

M: And were there any anti-Japanese things? Did they do anything?

H: No. Not even after Mexico declared war.

M: Why do you think they didn't do anything?

H: I think that Mexico wasn't really interested in the War. It was just something that, I guess, [t]he[y] wanted to cooperate with the United States- that's all. So that's why [t]he[y] declared war.

M: How do you think they took the Italians and the Germans to Perote?

H: Like I said, because there was an ambassador. That's why they didn't send them.

M: Not even after the War?

H: Not even, no. Not after Mexico declared war against Japan, no. I think, you know, when Japan went to attack Pearl

Harbor, Germany and the Italians were already fighting with the English and they had gone with the Germans. So that's why, I guess, they detained them. They were afraid. Maybe they found something, I don't know. But we were left in Mexico City. In the city limits we were free to go anyplace. We weren't detained or anything.

M: Were there people watching you at times?

H: No, I don't think so, I don't think so.

M: What did you do together as a community? Did you do any parties?

H: No. It was...

M: It was sad times, no parties?

H: No, at that time, it wasn't appropriate for parties or anything. The only thing that happened was- because all the Japanese were concentrated into Mexico City- there were a lot of weddings. Boys met girls and they started getting married.

M: So there were other groups?

H: Oh, yes, yes.

M: How many do you think there were?

H: At least one hundred- from outside Mexico City. At least one hundred people.

M: So you think there were five hundred Japanese?

H: Japanese.

M: And what happened to the children? Were they going to school?

H: My son was three years old. He was three years about a month before we left. So, at first, I was not interested in trying

to find out where [a] school [was], or whatever, until he was about five. So everybody started saying that they were going to send their children to a Japanese school.

M: You set up a Japanese school?

H: Yes. There already was [a school] established there.

M: Oh, it was already there.

H: But when all the people came there were a lot of more pupils. So, "Well," I said, "I'll send my son to the Japanese school." And it was very far from where we lived and he had to have a bus. The bus would pick him up and take him back. But it didn't work because the man who drove the bus lived near around where we lived and he was the last one to be taken home. And most of the time he came home around 9:30 p.m. or 10:00 p.m. and I said, "No, it's not going to work," because he would be asleep at the back of the bus and he hadn't had any supper or anything to eat. So, I said, "No." So he went [to school for] about two months.

M: And then he went to a Mexican school?

H: Yes, to a little private school that was not too far away from where we lived.

M: And there was no trouble with your son?

H: No.

M: He was fine?

H: No. The only thing that he complained [about] was that the teacher was very strict. And you know when he came to El Paso- when we came back from the War- he already knew the

multiplication table up to six and he was only six years old. And he knew how to read in Spanish. He went to Aoy [Elementary School] and he started in the first grade. But he was pushed up to third grade immediately the first year because he knew all those things- and he just went about four or five months in Mexico in the Mexican school.

M: The Mexican schools were a little bit more advanced.

H: Well, it was a private school. It was a very small school but they taught them a lot of things that I guess in the United States they don't. You know, they go very slowly in the United States. In Mexico, when you start, they start teaching you everything.

M: What do you remember? Did he say anything different from the Japanese school, from the Mexican school? Did you remember anything that was particular? Did they do any Japanese culture classes?

H: Oh, yes, yes.

M: Okay, what did they do?

H: I don't know- I think he was four- but he came [home] one day very sad. He said, "You know what? The son of the teacher died and they had a funeral and we were supposed to...." I don't know what he was supposed to do. He started to count in Japanese. He started to bow like the Japanese people. And, you know, he called his father *oka-san*.

M: Which means? He called his father *oka-san*?

H: That's father in...

M: In Japanese?

H: In Japanese.

M: Oh, it's good. I thought the machine was stopping or something. It's looking fine. So he was learning a lot of Japanese cultural things?

H: Well, yes. You know, he was in kindergarten so....

M: This tea's very good.

H: It's supposed to be good. Haven't you read that green tea is very good for something or another? That has tea and rice.

M: Oh, it has both.

H: There's a little something other than...

M: I thought it was my cookie [that] had fallen into...(laughter)

H: No. (laughter)

M: Okay, so there was a lot of Japanese culture that was popular with children while you were in Mexico City. Did anyone say anything about that being wrong or...

H: No. The Mexican government didn't care.

M: It was almost like if they were going to do anything to you (inaudible remarks)

H: *Como dice el dicho..."Pobre de México..."*

M: *"...Tan lejos de Dios, tan cerca de los Estados Unidos"*. Don Porfirio [Díaz] said that. (laughter) Yes, that's unfortunate for Mexico. Let me see, do you have any questions?

H: The thing was that I found out I wasn't interested in Mexico when, you know, I was living here in the United States. But when I lived in Mexico City, I found out that it had culture,

it was very different from where I had lived. Mexico City was very pretty at that time. I loved it when I went. You know, there was the old buildings and the old churches and I just loved everything about it. And, you know, under the circumstances that I lived in Mexico City, I had very good recollections. One of the things that I miss is the unity of the Japanese people. Anything that happens to one of them, all [of] the Japanese people get together and try to help one way or another.

You know, in Mexico City we had to go for certain things for the store. So my husband, one day, went to pick up some cigarros (cigarettes). And on the way home he was hit by a car. And I didn't know until very late. The first thing they did was to call one of the Japanese men. And he was the one that took care of everything so I didn't have to worry about what am I going to do. The boy who hit him paid for everything. And they took him to a clinic- or whatever it was- and they gave the first aid there and everything. So I didn't have to do anything and that's why they feel something against the Japanese- because they are so together. If anybody gets sick one of them would go around the other Japanese and, you know, anything they could give to help a man or woman who is in the hospital. Those are the things that I missed because....and it was the same way here in El Paso but after the War there were very few Japanese. In Juárez, though, it's the same thing. About 80 percent of the Japanese

stayed in Mexico and they are doing very well.

M: They stayed in Mexico City.

H: Yes.

M: Not very many came back?

H: No. It was just people who had family here and they wanted to....One thing that I want to tell you [is] that the first group that left was....We did alright even if we had to pay [for] everything from our pocket. But when the government, or whoever- the United States government or the Mexican government- said, "You have to leave now the border cities and the seaports or the coastlines," they were sent to some property that belonged to the government of Chihuahua. The land was virgin. They had to clear the land. Do you know they gave all those people a kind of a barn to live [in] altogether. There was no rooms. Everybody had to live there or sleep there whichever way they could. So, anyway, they stayed there for about two or three months working for without any pay. They just sent them, you know, whatever little they could get and they had a very hard time. So, looking back, I said, "We did the right thing." Because we left before they really forced us to leave. Those people, really, they were writing all the time and saying all the hardships they were going through because it was an isolated place.

M: In the *sierra*?

H: No, someplace between Chihuahua City and....I'll think about it. But anyway, everybody was, you know....The Japanese men

had Mexican wives. They left with their husbands and they were there. And they tell me later, "Oh my goodness, it was hard to breathe. Why didn't we leave before....?"

M: And when did you know things were okay at the end of everything?

H: When I read that they had bombed Hiroshima- I just heard about Hiroshima- I said, "The War is over. I'm not going to stay here anymore. I'm going home." So I wrote my parents and they said, "Well, come to Juárez and maybe we could, you know, you could cross over." And I did. From the train, somebody was waiting for me and they took me in a car and we crossed the border and we had the bags and everything. They never stopped me or arrested me or anything. They said, "American citizen?" and they just let me go.

M: Your father, was he interned? Did they try to take your father?

H: No. My father was lucky. That day that the War started they had left about 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning to go to Los Angeles. My brother was living there and he had some kind of a trouble and they were going to see if they could help him. They stopped him on the way but they just questioned him and said, "As soon as you get to El Paso go and report that you are back in El Paso." So that's what he did.

The only thing that one of my brother says- he was the only one that was helping my father at that time- [is] that every so often the F.B.I. men would go there. They would

close the store and they would line them all [up]- or everybody who was [in] the family living there- and they would go and search everything in the house and see what....I don't know what they were searching for but it was every so often- in a regular way- but it was not every month. It was about every three months or every four months, or whatever.

M: (Inaudible)

H: Yes. Because my father told me afterwards that an F.B.I. man came and showed him my husband's photograph. He said, "What is this man doing coming here so often?" He said, "Well, that's my son-in-law, that's why he comes." They were, you know, watching us and seeing what kind of people went into all the Japanese homes and everything. But we know we didn't have anything to fear so....

M: Well, so you all came back to El Paso?

H: Yes. Well, at first, my husband couldn't come into the United States. But later on I tried everything and found out that he could- by my American citizen[ship]- he could cross over and get his papers.

M: And you came over here...

H: Yes.

H: And you opened a business...

H: A store on Santa Fe Street.

M: What was it's name?

H: El Nido de los Pobres.

M: El Nido de los Pobres? (laughs)

H: That's a very, very old building. My mother says that when she came that building was there and it was called El Nido de Los Pobres.

M: So you never changed the name?

H: No. (chuckles)

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning of Tape Two, Side A

M: Your children became educated here in the United States?

H: Yes, yes.

M: And what are their names?

H: Javier Honda. And my daughter's name is Irma Honda.

M: Did they marry Japanese?

H: No, neither of them. My son is working for the school- he's a teacher- and my daughter is working for the government. [S]he has a very good position.

M: They're both single?

H: They are both single. My daughter had a scholarship to one of the best schools on the west coast. She had a scholarship...

M: She had a scholarship?

H: That [was] for girls only. And she was telling me the other day that they were trying to make it co-ed and nobody wanted [to]. The girls didn't want it and so it stayed just a college for girls.

M: What happened to the Japanese community here?

H: It was...

M: Destroyed?

M: Destroyed.

M: What was it like before the War?

H: There was a lot of unity, like I said, but afterwards there were so few Japanese that- and everybody was afraid, I guess- that nobody really tried to get together like they used to and everything had changed. That's one of the things that American people, or whatever, didn't understand, was that they had a very unity. They were stuck together. I didn't get that, you know, discrimination, because we were the only- I guess in El Paso there were others- but that I knew of we were the only part Japanese.

Everybody liked my father. On my mother's side they didn't like [him] too much. But everybody liked him. He wanted to help people I guess and, like I said, I don't remember ever not seeing someone eating with us- someone else besides ourselves. We had plenty to eat and he didn't mind [if] anyone....My mother's family for a long time, you know, just went there and ate the three meals and he never said anything because there was enough food for everyone. That's one thing that- now that I'm old- I'm saying, "Well, my father was a very compassionate person because he never said anything." There were always friends of ours. There was a boy that was a friend of one of my brother's and he said, "No,

I don't want to go eat at home. The only thing they do is *salchichón*." And he still remembers that my mother used to sit him with my father and give him the same thing that everybody ate and *como dice "...en mi casa puro salchichón."*

M: (laughter) Can you tell me about that Casino Japonés?

H: You know, before I got married, we had very little to do with the Japanese from Juárez. We had a Japanese-American citizen league- club. I was one of the oldest so there were about ten or twelve kids. Some of them were 100 percent Japanese, some of them were like ourselves- half and half- and we had meetings. What we had, really, was like a social thing to, you know, to meet and talk. And that was about it.

M: Did you speak in Japanese or in English?

H: No. In the Japanese family nobody speaks Japanese.

M: Oh, nobody speaks Japanese?

H: No, not the children.

M: No?

H: No. (chuckles) Yes, it's very interesting because the Chinese teach the children Chinese but the Japanese don't [teach the children Japanese]. There was a family in Juárez at one time and they had, I think, there were three girls and two boys. And the girls were coming here to one of the Catholic schools but during the War they told them they couldn't cross over. So when we left they went to Mexico City.

M: Also the Chinese?

H: Japanese.

M: Oh, Japanese. I'm sorry.

H: And both their parents- the mother and the father- were Japanese. And one of the girls, I talked to her after. They went to Japan with her mother- the girl, one of the girls- [and] she said, "You know what? Everybody in Japan, they were all, you know, just whispering and I knew what they were saying but I would answer in English."

M: (Chuckles)

H: And, you know, they never spoke Japanese to their parents and they were not interested in learning. Some of them didn't like the Japanese food. They liked their *taguitos* [and] their *carnitas*. (laughs)

M: Completely assimilated?

H: Yes, in Mexico they completely, really, did because most- what I heard- of the second generation of the Japanese in Mexico all had married Mexican girls- but not Japanese girls.

M: The only thing Japanese now is the name?

H: The name, yes. My husband had a brother- he died about three or four years ago in Mexico City- and he had three sons, I think, and [they] all married Mexican girls. And there was another one. (chuckles) My brother-in-law liked to tell me *todo los chismes*. (laughter) And we went to visit- I didn't know him but my husband did- this man who was married and had two sons. I think one of them was around twenty-two or something. And what the man was saying was, "*Mis hijos no se van a casar con ninguna mexicana.*" *Y lo cuando lo fuimos a*

sentar there was a Mexican girl there. (laughter) He said, "*¡Ve! ¡Ve! Hay esta la mexicana.*" (chuckles)

M: *¡No qué no!* Ah, well. So, let me see, do you have any questions? I had some questions about the Chinese... (interruption) What was the reaction of people to Pearl Harbor? How did you learn about this?

H: Like I said, my parents weren't here in El Paso. Afternoon Sundays were spent with my parents. We all got together- all the brothers and sisters- every, every Sunday. And I went about twice during the week to visit them. Anyway, that day they had left, like I told you, for Los Angeles and I went to that party that they were giving to the girl who was going to get married. She was going to Japan. And the men were out hunting- there were about three or four men. And when they came in- it was about 4:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon-and they had the paper. You know, at that time they called it the *Extra*. And [they showed us] where it said Japan [had] just bombed Pearl Harbor. So we ate. I don't think the food didn't taste [like] anything. We were just very surprised and silent. I couldn't imagine anything that was going to happen. I knew it was very bad but I, you know, I...

M: Were you in shock?

H: Shock and, you know....But I thought, "Well, I'm [an] American citizen." But still, I was living in another country and all that. The party was just over as soon as we ate, or just looked at the food or whatever, and

everybody went home. So it was a very [big] surprise because none of the women- because the women were the only ones there and my husband and myself....The men went out hunting rabbits or something and they came in with their rifles. (laughter) You know, in the paper I just laughed so much when I read it because there was a doctor in Juárez who- I don't know why, he was a good doctor but he didn't make money- and he left to go to the- I don't know. It's in Juárez someplace and I don't know what they call it. Where they sell stolen or second-hand things...

M: *La segundas?*

H: No, no not [*la*] *segundas*. *Es un mercado*- I don't know what they call it. It has a name. Well, anyway he would go there and buy second-hand....He was a doctor where he liked, you know, [to] work with his hands. So he liked to fix radios and things like that. So he went to look for *herramienta*, or whatever, and that's what he had in his house. He had, I don't know, some kind of communication with Japan and was sending....And I left because I knew what kind of a man he was. (laughter)

M: So they would say he was a spy?

H: He was a spy. Well, he didn't want to pay. The wife was Mexican and she said she wasn't going to pay. So I don't think she paid so he had to stay all the time- three weeks or whatever it was that they stayed.

M: So people paid to get out?

H: Yes, that was why they could go out- [by] paying. But the wife was Mexican and said, "No, I'm not going to pay." But anyway, he stayed there and I think the soldiers took him to the station. And the soldiers were watching him more than the others. If he left the train they would go and leave with him and watch him, what he was doing.

M: You mentioned Hiroshima and Nagasaki. How did the Japanese people you knew react to that? Or how did they think about all of that had happened, now?

H: Today?

M: Yes.

H: We went to Japan. My husband is from the very south and my father was from Yokohama. And, like I said, he didn't come here because they needed the money or anything. He came because he didn't want to be under his older brother. When we went to Japan I was thinking of going to visit my father's relatives but from what I heard they were very discriminating. And I said, "No, I'm not going to be discriminated [against] when I have gone through all this because they think I'm Japanese." So when we went, we went to my husband's home and they treated me [well]. You know, I couldn't understand anything, but they treated me very well.

The southern part of Japan, I guess, it's more open than the cities. It's very strict [there]. Nobody is supposed to be different. Everybody has to be the same and follow the

same rules and follow everything. But in the south I think it's a little more open. And I never felt anything because even Japanese people- now that they have opened factories here in the United States and everything- the families come to live in the United States for about two or three years and then their children get a lot because they are considered foreigners because they were not trained in Japan and studied in Japan. In school they have a lot of problems. The other kids ridicule them and....So I know. And I [have] read a lot of things Japanese and I have found out a lot of bad things about them. (chuckles) But, you know, that's my heritage so I have to know what. And I have read a lot of Mexico because that's my heritage too and I'm not going to say, "I'm ashamed of Mexico or being Mexican," because I know that they had a very high civilization and whatever. It's the government or the employees and not the people. The people are very nice.

In Mexico City we lived in....There were *colonias*. It was mostly Spaniards. There were a few of them who had come before the Revolution. There were two or three doctors around there so....But they were very nice people. My son didn't find anything different the way the boys and the girls treated him than the rest of them. They were a group of kids that didn't make the difference. It was the elders who tried to influence the kids about something. When they are kids they don't discriminate. They just look at everybody as [if they were] a kid. So that's one thing that I found.

I think I found in Mexico more of democracy than here in the United States because everybody is equal. There were no like, you know....At that time, there was the black people that couldn't get into the restaurants, and the movies, and all those things. In Mexico, there were several black people but they were treated the same. They were talking Spanish and they were treated the same. So, in a way, I found out that there was more [of an] open society in Mexico than in the United States.

M: More egalitarian?

H: Yes.

M: Let me go back. What do you think about Hiroshima?

H: (laughs) To tell you the truth, I didn't care what happened. I felt sorry because there were innocent people. Just as I was suffering- for whatever reason, but I was innocent. A lot of people were innocent and they were killed- children, and women, and everything. But that was war. If it finished, the War, okay, I'm free. So that's the way I looked at it.

M: Well, my last question is about the Chinese in Juárez and the Chinese in El Paso.

H: I know very little about the Chinese.

M: Did you ever...

H: No.

M: Nothing?

H: Nothing. You know, at that time Japan was in war with China. Even the Koreans. They don't like the Japanese and I know.

Like I said, I've been reading a lot. They were treated badly because of the way they lived and everything. And they were discriminated [against]. But people who understood the way they lived and everything, they could find a very close relation[ship] with them. But some people just thought, you know, that the Japanese, what they were doing in China and everything, and they just saw that.

M: Well, thank you very much.

H: And I wanted to say this thing. I want this to be a record because a lot of people don't know what happened. And to avoid....You know, sometimes in history that it can happen again. I hope that it won't, because we are innocent and a lot of people suffered from it. Even if you are innocent and the way they looked at the Japanese at that time was like....You know, I heard that in Arizona there's a sign- I don't know if it still does- that tells the Mexicanos, "No entran", something like that. But that's very bad. They don't look at the person. They just hear whatever and they just take the bad things. I know there are bad things in every country but there are good things too. Now I have changed completely. I'm glad my husband is living [and] that he could get his papers and come in and my children, my son and my daughter, got an education here in the United States and that they both have good jobs and that they don't have to depend from us nor us depend on them. For me, it's very good. I'm 78 and I think I have maybe two or three years but I'm

happy right now.

M: Let's hope for ten or twenty [more years]. Japanese look very...

H: I beg your pardon?

M: Let's hope for ten or twenty [more years]. You know how they say Japanese people look very young....

H: It's not true.

M: Of course not, of course not.

H: They work very hard.

M: They work very hard.

H: Like my husband's brother. I don't know how come Mexico doesn't have any social security or anything. So if they want to retire they have to depend on their own self. And my brother-in-law, I think he worked until he was 72 but he used to smoke a lot. And then where they lived there's a lot of traffic. And he died from heart disease. Instantly- he had a heart attack in the morning- and at three o'clock in the afternoon he was dead.

M: ¡Qué trágica! Did you want to say anything about this?

H: No. I can make a copy and take it. Well, thank you very much.

H: Yes, yes, okay.

M: Okay, let me turn it off.

P: This is the end of the interview

End of Tape Two, Side A