

OREGON HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY HISTORY PROGRAM

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW

WITH

Albert Oyama, M.D.

Interview conducted July 16, 2000

by

Tadaaki Hiruki, M.D.

SUMMARY

In this interview, University of Oregon Medical School alumnus Dr. Albert A. Oyama talks about his experiences as a Japanese American, a doctor, and military veteran. At the age of sixteen, he was interned with his mother and sister at the Minidoka Relocation Center in Idaho; his father, who was a prominent newspaper publisher in Portland, was detained by the FBI on December 7, 1941, and was not reunited with his family until 1945. Dr. Oyama talks about the reactions of his fellow high school students to the news of his family's internment and about his experiences in the camp.

Dr. Oyama's postsecondary schooling was interrupted by World War II: he was drafted into the Army after the end of the war in 1946 and sent overseas to Korea. He talks at length about his experiences there, and he contrasts the "third-world" atmosphere of liberated Korea with the much more developed society in occupied Japan. After his return from Korea, Dr. Oyama graduated from the University of Oregon and went on to the Medical School in Portland. He talks about his student years, his experiences in the Nu Sigma Nu fraternity, and other Oriental American students at UOMS.

After finishing his internship at St. Vincent Hospital, Dr. Oyama entered the internal medicine residency program there. After only a year, he switched to pathology; he talks briefly about the training he received. He joined the pathology department of St. Vincent's immediately upon completion of the program, and rose through the ranks to become chief of the department in 1983. He talks about the department, the various residency programs, and the laboratory facilities at the hospital, and touches on the relationship between St. Vincent's and the Medical School. He discusses his work in blood banking, and talks about his involvement in some of the national organizations. He notes that he has never faced any overt prejudice during his career and that his Oriental heritage may in fact have made it easier for him to advance, since his colleagues often remembered seeing him at meetings.

Dr. Oyama also talks briefly about his upbringing in a Japanese American household and about the type of household he established for his children. He comments without regret on the Americanization of successive generations of Japanese American children.

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Interview with Albert Oyama, M.D.
Interviewed by Tadaaki Hiruki, M.D.
July 16, 2000
Site: Dr. Oyama's residence
Begin Tape 1, Side 1

HIRUKI: This is an OHSU Oral History Project recording of Dr. Albert Oyama at his residence in Lake Oswego, Oregon, on 26 July, year 2000, in the afternoon [noise in background].

OYAMA: That's my wife. Maybe you want to stop.

[Tape stopped.]

HIRUKI: Okay. We usually get people to acknowledge that they understand that this interview is for the historical record; it is not a media interview.

OYAMA: Yes, you have explained that to me, that this is for historical record, and I'm fully aware of that.

HIRUKI: Okay. Oral history, as a technique, tries to find out the who, the what, the where, the when, and the why, with all of the human perceptions of the time surrounding events, so perhaps we could start with who you are.

OYAMA: I was born in Portland, Oregon. My father ran the Japanese newspaper. He was from Japan, Yamanashi-ken, and he ran the Japanese newspaper here in Portland before the war, the war being World War II.

I was born in Portland, my sister was also born in Portland, and the two of us grew up in the outskirts of Portland in an area called Montavilla. Are you familiar with that district? It's on the east side, close to Eighty-second Street. But anyway, we did not grow up in the downtown Nihonmachi [Japantown] area.

HIRUKI: Was there any reason for that?

OYAMA: No. Well, he was a newspaperman, and he had a house out on Seventy-ninth Street, on the east side, and so both of us—my sister and I—were both exposed totally to the American culture, with very few Japanese friends. We went to Vestal Elementary School in Montavilla; I was the only Japanese in my class. There was a Chinese girl in my class, but we were the only two Orientals in the class. I graduated from grammar school out there, went to Washington High School here in Portland, and was in my junior year when World War II broke out. Our family was evacuated and we spent the war years in the Minidoka Relocation Center.

My father, being a newspaperman and an influential leader of the Japanese community in Portland, was picked up by the FBI on December 7 and immediately interned, and we did not see him again until 1945. So he was interned in various places, including Montana, New Mexico, and Louisiana during the war in a separate internment camp for the leaders of the community.

HIRUKI: Can you tell me a bit about what that was like from a child's perspective, all the time surrounding that?

OYAMA: For him?

HIRUKI: Or for you.

OYAMA: Well, for us, of course, we were—

HIRUKI: Do you remember the day that it happened?

OYAMA: Yeah. December 7 was when he was taken in, and after that, of course, they closed down the newspaper. We were then evacuated from Portland. We had to leave Portland, and went to the assembly center here in Portland in May of 1942.

HIRUKI: And what do you remember about that?

OYAMA: There were, I would think, about three or four thousand Japanese that were in the assembly center from Portland and the surrounding vicinity. And then, from there, we were transferred to the Minidoka Relocation Center in Idaho, and that was around September or October of '42 when we were transferred there.

I stayed there for one year. I finished high school and then left to go to college from camp. I went to a college, Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas, and spent one year there.

HIRUKI: How did you pick Kansas?

OYAMA: The United Methodist—no, United Christian Church in Minidoka offered scholarships to various students who had graduated from camp, and so I received one of the scholarships. The one that I received was to this Methodist college in Winfield, Kansas.

HIRUKI: Did you know much about Kansas going there?

OYAMA: No, nothing at all [laughter].

HIRUKI: What were your impressions?

OYAMA: Since this was in 1943—end of '43 and first half of '44—it was during the height of the war, and therefore there were very few male students attending the

Southwestern College, so perhaps only a handful, a dozen or so male students there; and about—I think there were about six or seven of us Japanese Americans that were students there, so it was a rather unusual college experience.

I found out that I didn't particularly like Kansas [laughs], as a state or place to live, so as soon as one year was up I left and came back towards the West Coast.

HIRUKI: What didn't you like about it?

OYAMA: I think it's just not a very pleasant place to live. It's cold in the winter and hot in the summer and the weather is not at all like it is here in Oregon, and I would much rather come back to Oregon than to live in a place like that.

I also worked for a short while in Chicago when I left camp, one winter there, and that was a horrible experience. Every place that I've been exposed to in the United States I have always felt that I don't want to live anywhere else other than in the Northwest, so that's been my whole life experience.

I was in the Army and had my basic training in Alabama. There again, that was a horrible summer [laughs] that I spent down there, and I never wanted to live in the South. So it just seemed like coming back to the Northwest was the natural thing that I wanted to do. And so I did come back after the war.

HIRUKI: I guess, just getting back to camp for a moment, was that the first time, then, from the sounds of it, you'd spent any time with a large number of Japanese Americans?

OYAMA: In camp?

HIRUKI: In camp.

OYAMA: Yes.

HIRUKI: What was that like?

OYAMA: Well, I should say that although I lived out in Montavilla, I did partake in some of the Japanese community activities in the downtown area. For example, I was in the Japanese Boy Scout troop that had a drum and bugle corps here in Portland, so I was a member of that. Dr. Nakadate, that you interviewed, was the scoutmaster, at that time, of our troop. And then I went to the Nichiren Buddhist Church. Although I don't consider myself a Buddhist, I did go to the church and their Sunday school because my father was a member of the Nichiren Church here in Portland. So I did have some exposure to the Japanese community. But going into camp with, you know, several thousand Japanese was certainly a most unusual experience for me.

HIRUKI: What was unusual about it?

OYAMA: Just not seeing that many Japanese at one time, and only Japanese, since there were, of course, no *hakujin* [white people] present in the camp.

The camp experience was certainly an eye opener and an educational experience.

HIRUKI: You were how old at that time?

OYAMA: I was sixteen when we were evacuated, and so I finished my senior year in the Minidoka High School. It was interesting primarily because the Minidoka camp included all the Japanese from the Portland area as well as the Seattle area, and so we met a lot of new friends. I was elected student body president at the Minidoka High School the senior year, and so I was in the midst of all the activities that were going on, and, therefore, it was a very pleasant, enjoyable year for me, in contrast to the fact that we had been evacuated from the West Coast.

For most of the Issei, obviously it was a very sad situation for them. They lost a lot of property and money and belongings. For my father, he was interned all during this time, separated from the rest of his family. But, as I say, for the younger generation I don't think the experience was a total, devastating type of experience.

HIRUKI: Well, what was that like, not having your father there?

OYAMA: Well, as I say, we were all in the same situation, and so I don't think—I don't know how many men were evacuated separately, but probably somewhere around thirty or forty or fifty Issei were taken in and separated from their families. So it wasn't just us that had this experience; it was shared by many other families as well.

HIRUKI: But sixteen is a time when many adolescents become quite rebellious and this sort of thing.

OYAMA: Oh, yes.

HIRUKI: Do you think that your experience changed your experience at that age? What you went through, did that change your experience of age sixteen, versus other people?

OYAMA: I think what I'm trying to say is that I did not feel that the government had really done a marked disfavor to me, because at that age, you know, I had no financial responsibilities or anything, I was still in school, enjoyed meeting a lot of new friends, and I had a very exciting—I don't know how pleasant, but an exciting year as far as being in the activities at the school. So I was not totally disappointed or at a loss because of the evacuation. I think I had a chance to broaden my exposure and experience to other things by having had this. I think a lot of the Nisei didn't look upon the evacuation as a real bad thing, because at our age it was much simpler for us to leave Portland and go someplace else, compared to the Issei, of course, who had much more responsibility to take care of their families.

HIRUKI: Well, growing up in your neighborhood, I guess you had a lot of friends, non-Nikkei friends, at that time.

OYAMA: Yes.

HIRUKI: What were their feelings about you having to go away?

OYAMA: I did not face any out-and-out prejudice. I think those who were fairly close to me felt that this was a wrong thing, but, of course, they're all young people still, and certainly not old enough to fully understand or realize the importance of all this. I had no one say anything bad to me as far as my friends were concerned. They were all more or less sympathetic of the fact that we were evacuated from the area. So I did not personally meet that much prejudice of any kind.

HIRUKI: And people who did have friends, I guess, had people who looked after their things for them while they were in camp? Was that the case with your family?

OYAMA: Yes. My dad had—his newspaper business was all stored in the basement of a Nisei friend who had a hotel downtown, close by, and so all of his printing presses and type—it was all Japanese type—was stored in the basement of this hotel; and so that was all taken care of. As far as the house, we were renting the house. Of course, we had to sell the car, and lost all the furniture and everything. There was no way of keeping all that.

But interestingly enough, the printing press and the type were confiscated by the U.S. Navy during the war and used to print propaganda leaflets in the Pacific against the Japanese military. So that turned out to be a sort of interesting [laughs] occurrence of the use. We never saw the printing press or the type after that, of course. It was all gone, and nothing was ever heard about it again.

My father did put in for loss—you know, after the war you could put in to claim losses. He did put in a claim, but nothing ever became of it.

HIRUKI: Was that common?

OYAMA: Yes, I think so.

HIRUKI: People not getting their losses back?

OYAMA: Yes, very much so.

HIRUKI: Until 1988, I guess, until the redress agreement.

OYAMA: Yes, right.

HIRUKI: And then you said about the furniture, did you just more or less close the

door on your house and leave?

OYAMA: Yes. Everything was gone, right.

HIRUKI: And what sort of things did you take with you?

OYAMA: All you could take was what you could carry, so clothes was about all. There was not much else that you could take.

HIRUKI: Did you know you were going to Montana?

OYAMA: No, no, we went to Idaho, a camp in Idaho.

HIRUKI: Right, sorry.

OYAMA: So you could just carry—I think we had duffle bags that we filled with clothing, and that was about all that we were allowed to take.

HIRUKI: Was it in school where your first ideas of becoming a doctor germinated?

OYAMA: No. After the war was over and we came back to Portland, I got a scholarship to Pacific University in Forest Grove, which is thirty, forty miles away from Portland. My sister, during the war, got her nurse's training through the Cadet Nurse Corps, which was a U.S. government sponsored training course, so that—

HIRUKI: In camp?

OYAMA: No. You could leave camp—she went to the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Wisconsin. She spent three years there and got her RN training. The idea was to train nurses and then have them go serve in the armed forces wherever needed. However, when she finished her training, the war ended, and, therefore, she did not have to fulfill that obligation to go into the service. So she came back to Portland and was working as a nurse at a hospital here.

When I came back and was at Pacific University, I didn't know what I wanted to do. But she says, "Well, why don't you come out to the hospital and see what the doctors do there?" So one day I went with her to the hospital. There were a surgeon and an anesthesiologist there who got along real well with my sister and invited me into the surgery room. So I put on a gown and went in and watched an operation, and I thought, gee, this is really very dramatic and very interesting and something that I would certainly like to follow through with; and so at that time I decided to go into medicine. I then went to the University of Oregon in Eugene and finished up my premed education there and then applied for medical school at the University of Oregon here in Portland.

HIRUKI: Was there any thought to doing any of that at other institutions?

OYAMA: Going to other schools?

HIRUKI: Yes.

OYAMA: No. I just assumed that, being an Oregonian, that the place to get your education was in Oregon, and I did not even apply to any other schools. I just applied to the University of Oregon Medical School because I assumed that that would be the place I was going to go to.

I did win a scholarship in my last year down at the University of Oregon in Eugene. There's a scholarship called the Mackenzie Scholarship. You probably have not heard of it, but it was a scholarship offered in honor of Dr. Mackenzie, who was, I think, one of the first deans at the Medical School. But anyway, I got this Mackenzie Scholarship and, therefore, more or less, I was assured that I would be able to attend the Medical School. I got the scholarship in December; the interview for the Medical School was in January, and so when I went to get my interview... [Pauses].

HIRUKI: What was that like? Where was the interview held?

OYAMA: The interview was down at Eugene, because most of the applicants for the Oregon Medical School were either from the University of Oregon in Eugene or Oregon State University in Corvallis, so the interviewing team came down to Eugene to interview the students.

HIRUKI: Who made up the team?

OYAMA: Let's see. [Pauses.] I think they were faculty members, but I don't remember specifically. I don't think there was a dean; I think there were three or four faculty members that came down and conducted the interview.

Of course, we were all quite—well, I don't know if scared is the right word [laughs], but concerned whether we'd be accepted or not. But during the interview I mentioned—or, they knew that I had gotten this Mackenzie Scholarship, and they told me right then that, you know, "We've never turned down a Mackenzie Scholarship winner." So to me that was good news that I was as good as in, even though the acceptance letters had not been sent out. So from there I was very fortunate in that I already knew then that I was accepted for the medical school for the following year.

HIRUKI: And so when medical school started, then, I guess your family was still here in Portland?

OYAMA: Yes. My father couldn't run the same type of newspaper as he had before because he had no press and no types. He had, oh, I think somewhere around ten or fifteen employees that ran the newspaper with him. But when he came back, he started a mimeographed edition of his newspaper, so he was putting out a hand-written—on a stencil sheet, hand-written Japanese characters twice a week as a newspaper for the benefit of the

communications here—the Japanese people here in Portland. At that time he had a Japanese section and an English section. There was a Nisei girl that did the typing for that part of it. So he put out a newspaper twice a week after the war.

HIRUKI: So the language in your house growing up was Japanese?

OYAMA: I would say half and half. My father, of course, spoke very good English, my mother spoke fairly good, not excellent but fairly good. My father, of course, was exposed to all kinds of *hakujin* people in his profession, and, therefore, he spoke and understood English very, very well.

HIRUKI: How old were they when they came from Japan?

OYAMA: From Japan? After the war, you mean, or when they first came?

HIRUKI: When they first came here.

OYAMA: When he first came, he had graduated from Waseda University in Tokyo, and so he must have been in his late twenties or early thirties.

HIRUKI: Had he studied English, then, in university?

OYAMA: Yes. He knew some English.

He worked up in Seattle for a while, and then he came to Portland and took over the Japanese newspaper that had been previously started here in Portland.

HIRUKI: What was it called?

OYAMA: *Oshu Shimpo*.

HIRUKI: Meaning?

OYAMA: *Oregon News* [laughs]. *Oshu* is the Japanese word for Oregon; *Washu* is for Washington; and *Kashu* for California.

HIRUKI: And so he was with the newspaper, then?

OYAMA: Yes. He was in that business.

HIRUKI: Did you get a sense for being in a newspaper family growing up? Were there reporters coming over or parties?

OYAMA: Oh, no, no, nothing like that, no.

HIRUKI: A different world, then, that your father just went to work.

OYAMA: Yes.

HIRUKI: And your mother was at home?

OYAMA: She was at home. She did some housework for some Caucasian families, just to help out in the financial side, I think. She would go out and work for two or three days of the week. This is after the war, when we came back.

HIRUKI: What were their feelings about you becoming a doctor?

OYAMA: Oh, I'm sure they were very pleased, especially since my sister was a nurse, so going into the medical profession was considered to be a nice, good profession. So I'm sure they were pleased.

My mother died in the flood. There was a flood in Vanport. I don't know if you— Vanport flood, does that mean anything to you?

HIRUKI: Yes.

OYAMA: She was one of two Japanese who died in that flood. That was in 1948. So that would have been before I started medical school. I started medical school in '49, so it would have been the year before when she died.

HIRUKI: How was it that she was away from the family at that time?

OYAMA: I was down at Eugene, my sister was at work, my father was at his office, and she was at home by herself.

HIRUKI: Oh, the family house was there?

OYAMA: Yes, we lived in the Vanport area. A lot of the Japanese, when they came back, they didn't have any money to buy houses or anything, so there were quite a few that were living in the Vanport—that's the low-cost housing area that sprang up during the war to house shipyard workers here that came to Portland to work in the shipyards.

[Pause.]

HIRUKI: Well, maybe we could talk about your starting medical school, then. What was that like?

OYAMA: As I say, there were three of us that were accepted that year, in '49. There was...

HIRUKI: Three of? Oh, three Japanese-Americans.

OYAMA: Three Nisei. George Hara, this Art Matsuda, who died, and myself, and there was one Chinese fellow that was also accepted.

Since I had the scholarship, I didn't feel that there was any limitation or quota or anything, since there were three of us that were accepted that year, and so any kind of quota-type situation never occurred to me. I just assumed that the school was willing to take good students and not in any way limit the number of Orientals that were being accepted.

HIRUKI: Did you learn otherwise subsequent to that?

OYAMA: No, no. I never felt any prejudice against us. All during the school we were, as far as I'm concerned, treated as equals during medical school. We joined one of the—there were three medical fraternities that were affiliated with the Medical School. Two of them had fraternity houses close to the campus.

HIRUKI: Do you remember their names?

OYAMA: No, I don't. I just remember the one that I went into, which was Nu Sigma Nu. The one that the three of us went into, we went into because they did not support a house on the Hill. Since the three of us lived in Portland, we didn't have the need for belonging to a fraternity to have housing. So we just considered it was the thing to do to join one of the fraternities, so we joined Nu Sigma Nu, which was the one that did not have a house on the Hill. We felt no prejudice or restriction as far as joining the fraternity. We did all the activities that everybody else in the fraternity did, so I thought that everything was fine.

I did not run into any kind of prejudice that I was aware of in medical school. I thought the education was fine. I was treated, as far as I'm concerned, equally and fairly throughout all four years. The only thing that I ever noticed was that many times the instructors could not pronounce my name properly. [Laughing] They'd call me Omay or Omaha or something. But, you know, that's not prejudice in the real sense, that's just they don't pay attention to how Oriental names or Japanese names are spelled and pronounced. But I don't think my education suffered in any way because of being an Oriental.

I was selected to AOA [Alpha Omega Alpha]—you're familiar with the AOA?—in my senior year; so, there again, I think I was looked upon and treated equally as far as the Caucasians were concerned, too. So my experience in medical school, I thought, was a very good experience.

I guess I feel that if you're a good student and study hard and do the right things, whether it's in high school or college or medical school or professionally afterwards, you're going to be looked upon as a good member of society. Perhaps that's not true if there are other reasons.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1/Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

OYAMA: ...there that when the war broke out, the Caucasian farmers thought this was an opportunity for them to gain by getting rid of the Japanese farmers who were doing so well down there. So prejudice was very high. Same way with the fishermen down there in California, same thing: they were successful, and therefore there was much prejudice against them. I don't think we had that much prejudice here, although there certainly were some community acts. Are you familiar with Hood River, and the problems they had in Hood River?

HIRUKI: No.

OYAMA: There were lots of farmers and orchardists in Hood River where they raised apples. The community riled up against the Japanese that were present in that area. I think there was certainly some of that in Portland, but as far as my personal self, I, was concerned, both during and after the war I did not feel I had suffered any real prejudice from any of the other people around me.

Before I finished medical school, I was an extern at one of the hospitals, St. Vincent Hospital, here in Portland. I enjoyed my externship; I enjoyed being with the doctors there. So when I finished, I wanted to intern there, so I applied there. Of course, everybody applied at two or three different places, but St. Vincent's was my first choice, and I got accepted there. So, there again I felt that I was being treated fairly and equally.

Art Matsuda, the other graduate with me, he was also accepted at St. Vincent. George Hara was interested in obstetrics, and so he applied to Emanuel Hospital which was on the east side here in town, known primarily for its OB/GYN service. And he was accepted there. So, we all were accepted at our primary choices.

HIRUKI: This was 19...?

OYAMA: That was in 1953.

HIRUKI: Had you known Dr. Hara and Dr. Matsuda before?

OYAMA: Yes. Dr. Hara lived in downtown Portland, grew up in Portland, so I knew him. Dr. Matsuda did not grow up in Portland, so I did not know him until I met him down at the University of Oregon in premed education.

HIRUKI: What was your favorite class in medical school?

OYAMA: [Laughs] I don't think I had any that was a favorite as such. I think I enjoyed all the classes. I certainly did not think of pathology as a career at the time I was going through medical school. That didn't come until later on.

HIRUKI: What kind of exposure did you get to pathology training at medical school?

OYAMA: Not anything unusual.

HIRUKI: Was there a course in pathology?

OYAMA: Oh, yeah, there was a pathology course.

HIRUKI: Who taught that?

OYAMA: But I don't remember that much specific about the course, other than just routine learning about diseases and how they affect the tissues. We used the microscope of course, and studied tissue pathology. But, as I say, that was not primarily in my mind or anything at all. That came later on, after my internship was over.

HIRUKI: What were some of the teaching techniques of the time?

OYAMA: As far as pathology?

HIRUKI: Or medicine in general. Let's start with pathology.

OYAMA: Well, when I finished my internship at St. Vincent Hospital, I felt that I was not ready to force myself out on the public [laughs], so to speak. I did not think I had enough training to start practice, although it was legal to start practice after one year of internship was over. And so I thought I wanted some more training. I decided that of all the residency programs that were around, I thought internal medicine was the most interesting. So I applied for an internal medicine residency at St. Vincent Hospital, and I was accepted. So I spent one year in internal medicine. I enjoyed the year very much; it was very interesting, and I learned a lot.

In the program at St. Vincent, the second year of the internal medicine residency included six months in a basic science: you could take pathology or neurology or whatever you wanted to, for six months. And so I decided to take pathology because then I didn't have to leave the hospital; I could stay right there and not change my whole living situation. So I applied for six months of my second year in pathology.

While I was there, during that six months, I enjoyed it immensely. It seemed like every day there was something new, something different to study and learn from. It just opened up a whole new world to me, as far as learning was concerned. And so, after my six months was over, or just before my six months was over, I decided that I would like to go into pathology. So, I applied to the intern-resident committee to spend one year in pathology instead of going back to internal medicine. And the committee realized that I was interested in pathology, and was probably going to stay, so they said alright.

So my second year of internal medicine I spent entirely in pathology, and therefore that served as my first year in a pathology residency program. So then I stayed on in the pathology department and took three more years, and finished my training there in pathology.

Before I finished, the senior pathologist at the hospital was going to retire. So that left

an opening for me and the junior pathologist said, you know, “We’d like to have you join our group.” And so I was able to join in as soon as I finished my training; I stayed right on at that hospital. I stayed on there all during my professional life, in the path department.

The senior, the one above me, died in 1981 or ’82, and therefore I then, more or less, automatically became the director of the department, which I directed until I retired in 1992. So my whole life is strictly at Oregon Medical School and St. Vincent Hospital here in Portland.

HIRUKI: In terms of the teaching of pathology at that time, what was basically the routine, or the way of teaching during your residency?

OYAMA: During my residency? What did I do?

HIRUKI: Or what did you learn? How were you taught?

OYAMA: There were two pathologists in the department, and they had organized the pathology residency program there two years before. But I was the first resident to finish all four years of training in that department. Two years of the training were in anatomic pathology, and two years in clinical pathology. Anatomic pathology was primarily surgical pathology and autopsies; clinical pathology was at first, of course, learning what all the clinical laboratory tests were, and then introducing new tests as they came up, to develop the clinical laboratory section.

Since I was the first one, there were lots of newer things that were coming along that had not been introduced into the clinical laboratory, so I was able to look into all those things and expand the versatility of the clinical lab while I was in my training.

HIRUKI: Can you name some examples?

OYAMA: Different ways of performing tests: for example, we got a grant from the Oregon Heart Association to look into, or to obtain an electrophoresis unit—electrophoresis had just come out. So we got a grant from the Oregon Heart to study the electrophoresis patterns of patients who had come into the hospital with heart attacks. Various things like that. We were able to develop and expand the laboratory facilities by having, or setting up new tests as they came along.

HIRUKI: How many classmates became pathologists? Was it a very popular career option?

OYAMA: No, I don’t think pathology was very popular. I don’t know, offhand, of any other classmates that went into pathology. We had graduated around 70 students. I, of course, have not kept track of them closely at all, but I don’t know of any. I probably only know of about twenty, thirty of them that I was aware of what they ended up as; and I’m sure none of them in pathology. Most of them, as you’d expect, ended up in either surgery or internal medicine. Family practitioners were very popular at that time still. But I don’t know

of anyone else that went into pathology.

After I joined in with the other pathologists, pathology expanded very dramatically. Our residency program was very successful; we had from six to eight residents in training all during that time. Our pathology department expanded from two pathologists to, when I retired, there were six pathologists that were present. So the laboratory and pathology in general did expand quite rapidly. I don't think it was only at our hospital; I think the same thing held true at most of the hospitals. Although, the others in town did not have residency programs, but pathology did expand enough that there were several pathologists at all the hospitals at the time I retired. I think most of them had around four or five pathologists.

HIRUKI: Is there still a residency program at St. Vincent's?

OYAMA: They just closed it up two years ago.

HIRUKI: What had happened, leading up to that?

OYAMA: Over a period of years, most residency programs had to be affiliated with medical schools, in order to continue maintaining them. The Oregon Medical School did have a pathology program, and I don't think—I've been out for eight years, but I don't think the pathologists who handled St. Vincent's program felt that they wanted to join in or affiliate with the Medical School; rather, they just decided to stop the program, so they dropped out.

HIRUKI: You mentioned you became the boss after a certain period of time. Were you comfortable in that role?

OYAMA: Yes. Having been there for twenty years, before I became the chief pathologist, I knew everybody. I had already taken part in hiring and firing medical technologists all during that period. I was familiar with all the technologists. Certainly, after twenty years, I was familiar with all the surgeons and the internists. We get to know practically all of the hospital medical staff because of our connections with the surgeons, of course, through surgical pathology, the internists through the clinical laboratory tests. So I felt very comfortable when I became the chief pathologist.

When the senior pathologist died and I became the chief, it was, as I say, more or less automatic. I think everybody felt that I was the natural person to succeed as the chief pathologist, and therefore they did not have any period of applications or anything like that; they just appointed me, the hospital supervisors just appointed me as the chief without any application forms or other people applying for the position. I think it was more or less assumed that I would take over when the other person died.

I felt that I was well accepted by the medical staff. I became president of the medical staff in 1971 or '72, shortly before—Dr. Inahara was president also. I think he was three or four years after I was. But anyway, I was elected president of the medical staff and I assumed from that that I must have been accepted by the medical members of the hospital staff. Being

selected as president, I think I must have earned respect from the medical staff in order to be accepted as the president. So, I don't feel that there was any prejudice against me; maybe twenty years [laughing] being in the same location, growing up with the same physicians is enough to override any kind of overt prejudice of any kind. At least, I didn't feel that there was any.

As soon as I finished my training, I became the medical educational director; they asked me if I would be the educational director for the hospital. So I was then in charge of the residents' and the interns' program for several years. And so, right off the bat, soon as I finished, I think I must have been well accepted by the rest of the medical staff as well as by the hospital administration—otherwise, I don't think I would have been selected to be the educational director for the hospital.

So, as I say, I think if you're doing everything properly and paying attention to what you should be paying attention to, then things go well for you. I think if you *don't* do what you should be doing, or you're doing underhanded things, then you run into trouble. I've never felt that I've had to do anything underhanded or anything like that in order to get accomplished what I want to accomplish; so I think my medical life and career has been a very fine one and one that I can be proud of and not feel that I've done anything or had anything done to me that I'm not proud of.

HIRUKI: You've mentioned a couple of times that you didn't feel that your heritage was a detriment to you, but are there any ways in which you feel it might have been an advantage to you?

OYAMA: Advantage? [Pauses.] I can't think of any except that when you meet somebody, the advantage is that they remember you, because you're Oriental. And so when I go to national meetings and things, you know, people come up to me and say, "Hi Al," and I sometimes can't remember them, but they remember me because, being an Oriental, you know, you sort of stand out from the rest of the crowd. Because of that, I think I probably got along well with the pathology organizations nationally.

There's the American Society of Clinical Pathologists, ASCP—are you familiar with that organization? I was on the Board of Directors; I was elected to the Board of Directors of that organization back in the late '70s, early '80s. I'm sure part of that was because I was more recognizable than maybe another pathologist from Oregon. I think that experience was certainly a good experience.

Also, being an Oriental, I suppose I got exposed to other pathologists, because I certainly received a lot of offers to go to different places. Going to national meetings and being—you know, work your way up in the different departments and organizations, you get familiar with the other pathologists. For example, there's a hospital in San Francisco, a children's hospital, that wanted me to go down there as a pathologist. There's a hospital in Salt Lake, the Latter Day Saints hospital—and incidentally, the chief pathologist there was a Nisei from California. But he offered me a position in blood banking there. I got offered a position at the University of Nevada Medical School. I got offered a position in [laughs]

Fargo, North Dakota.

Anyway, I think the medical world certainly was opened up to me, and again, I felt that this was all part of the natural acceptance that a pathologist or physician would have in being asked or invited to practice in different parts of the country. I didn't feel—of course, I wouldn't know, but I didn't feel that I was being prejudiced against because I was an Oriental, but probably was identified more because I was, so that people recognized me and remembered me more than an average *hakujin*.

I don't know—am I coming through [laughs]?

HIRUKI: How about in terms of your leadership or managerial role? Any parts of your upbringing or your life experience that you felt you could draw upon to get you through that, the demands of those positions?

OYAMA: As far as being department head? Well, so much of that is learned by observing those that are above you. I'm sure I learned much of my—how to get along with people and how to handle people from the pathologist who was the chief pathologist before me. Of course, there were certain programs that the hospital offered: for example, they have a medical physicians leadership program where the presidents of the staff and various officers from different hospitals get together and have conferences. I went to a number of those conferences, in Idaho, Washington, and Hawaii, to learn the leadership role and how you should lead the medical staff.

Is that what you mean, those kinds of things?

HIRUKI: Yeah.

OYAMA: That's probably the best exposure that you get, by learning and listening to other people that have been in the same footsteps ahead of you.

HIRUKI: So would you say that being the department head was easier than being the class president back in high school?

OYAMA: [Laughs] Well, I suppose, in that by the time that the senior pathologist is getting ready to retire, you're already working into the footsteps of that person; you're already doing the duties that you will have to be performing fulltime, when you become the head. Well, just like in your residency program—my senior year of my residency program in pathology, when I finished that and started working the next day, all I did was change from a white intern's uniform to a long white jacket that the pathologists wore; but I did the same thing the day before as I did the day after, you know, when I finished. So, in that fashion, you're always already learning and doing what you're going to be doing in the future, so it makes it very easy to step up into another position.

HIRUKI: So being in one place, in one job for a whole career, how does one not get too bored? Did it help being in pathology?

OYAMA: Yeah. The one thing that everybody mentions is, speaking figuratively, inbreeding. How do you keep from being inbred, when two or three, four pathologists are in just one place, and not exposed to others? Well, that 'not exposed' is the thing that is really important, in that you are exposed to others. For example, you go to meetings—I would go to three or four pathology meetings every year on a national basis, and maybe a half a dozen more local-type meetings, so you're always exposed to and talking to other pathologists. The pathology journals that come out: whether you're in Johns Hopkins or Mayo Clinic or Portland, you're reading the same journals that everybody else is reading, you're reading them at the same time that everybody else is reading, so you're still being exposed to the same types of papers and developments and news that everybody else in the country is being exposed to.

So, you're not isolated in the sense that you're just listening and doing what your own small community or area has to offer; I think you're being exposed to the national scene even if you don't want to be [laughs]. So there is no such thing as inbreeding in the sense that you're just in your own community and not listening to or being exposed to how other people are doing things.

So we always felt that—especially when you have a training program in your hospital. We had pathology residents, surgery residents, medical residents, OB/GYN residents from the Medical School who used to rotate to our department; ENT residents from the Medical School used to rotate down to our pathology department. So we had ample exposure to all the other professions and developments occurring in those fields as well as just in our pathology field alone. So, we did feel that we were keeping up with medical knowledge in general, and not just being isolated in our own small area.

HIRUKI: Was St. Vincent's unique in its relationship with OHSU in that way, or were residents going to other hospitals?

OYAMA: Yes. When I was in my training—the two pathologists at St. Vincent had both been at the Medical School before. So, when I was in my training, they sent me up to the Medical School Pathology Department to weekly meetings up there. So I was exposed to all the pathologists there, and clinical pathology the same way. When I was on clinical path, the chief of the Pathology Department at the Medical School, a fellow named Dr. Hutchens, Tyra Hutchens, invited me up, so I used to attend the meetings there. When I finished my training, I gave lectures on blood banking in the clinical pathology department to the medical students; and my senior pathologist and myself gave lectures to the anatomic pathologists: we talked about the respiratory tract and the GI tract, specifically, to the medical students.

So, we had a very close relationship with the Medical School which we maintained all during my career. And as I mentioned, the residents from the Medical School's OB/GYN Department used to come to our department to study for three months; ENT residents used to come and study in our department, pathology, for three months. Surgery residents from the Medical School, they would go to the Medical School Pathology Department and the pathologists there would just give them a bunch of slides to study [laughs]; so they wanted to

go some place else where they could learn more pathology, so we set it up so they could rotate down to our department.

So, we had a very close relationship with the Medical School in many respects. Which I think was another reason why our department was good, in that we were exposed to—had a continuing exposure to the Medical School and their activities.

HIRUKI: We're just coming to the end of the tape here. Before we start another thought, we'll just let the tape run out.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2/Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

HIRUKI: This is side one, tape two of the OHSU Oral History Project interview with Dr. Oyama on 26 July, year 2000.

Now, the other two physicians I've interviewed for this project are Inahara and Dr. Nakadate. Both worked at St. Vincent Hospital as well, and I'm just wondering, is that some kind of weird sampling effect, or was there something about St. Vincent's that attracted Japanese American physicians?

OYAMA: Well, in Dr. Inahara's case, he was a resident at St. Vincent's in surgery, and that's why, when he finished his training, he naturally aimed his practice primarily at St. Vincent's Hospital. So that's why he was there. Dr. Nakadate, I don't even know where he went to medical school, but when he was—after the war, when he came back to the West Coast, he was—perhaps you have the information better than me, but someplace in Walla Walla or someplace like that. Is it Walla Walla where he was?

HIRUKI: Yes.

OYAMA: He was practicing anesthesia there. He wanted to come back to Portland, I knew that at the time; and so when an opening came up at St. Vincent's Hospital I called him in Walla Walla and said, "There's a position in anesthesia open now at St. Vincent's, so why don't you apply?" I gave him the name, and stuff, and so he applied and they accepted him; so he came back to the West Coast.

HIRUKI: How did you know he was up there?

OYAMA: I can't remember. He was my scoutmaster [laughs], as I mentioned, so I knew him, about him, and I knew that he wanted to come back to Portland, and that's why I called him. I can't remember how I knew he was in Walla Walla. I can't think of any connection. But anyway, that's the reason he came back to Portland at St. Vincent's Hospital, and it just so happens that it was—that's why the three of us are there, not because [laughing] St. Vincent's is more friendly to Japanese or anything like that.

There was this George Hara. I don't know if you want to interview him, but he is available. As I mentioned, when he interned, he went to Emanuel Hospital because he was

interested in OB-GYN, and when he finished his practice—naturally his practice was primarily at Emanuel Hospital, so he was there. There was another family practitioner who practiced primarily at Providence Hospital on the east side. Are you familiar with Providence? So I don't think it was—I think it was just coincidental that the three of us are at St. Vincent's.

HIRUKI: The reason I interviewed Dr. Nakadate was because he's an OHSU graduate.

OYAMA: He went out East for his training.

HIRUKI: Oh, subsequent to that. But the basic medical school training was OHSU.

OYAMA: I see.

HIRUKI: When you were going through University of Oregon Medical School did you have a sense of then being a pioneer, almost?

OYAMA: Being a pioneer?

HIRUKI: Yes, as an American of Japanese heritage going through medical school at OHSU.

OYAMA: I don't think I even considered—even thought about it. There were several Japanese American physicians in the Portland area at the time.

HIRUKI: Did you have a chance to interact with them at all?

OYAMA: No, I didn't talk to them or anything.

I'm just trying to think of—I don't think I had any connection with any of them at all, and didn't go into medicine because of them or think about them as far as my being in medical school. No, I don't think there's any connection at all. I can't remember even thinking or wondering if there were other Niseis that had gone through medical school. I don't think that even entered my mind as a question.

HIRUKI: Another funny pattern I've noticed, looking at the alumni records, is that a large number of graduates ended up in Hawaii. Would you have any insight into that, or what the Hawaii connection is?

OYAMA: No. There was one in the class one or two years before me, named Bunzo Nakagawa. Do you recognize that name? He went to Hawaii, but I have no idea why he went there. I don't know if any of my classmates went to Hawaii or not, but I do remember some people saying, well, they just thought that Hawaii was a nice place to practice and so they went there. I think they went to Tripler for their internship, and perhaps stayed on. But, no, I don't know of any specific reason. Did you have a list of names of Nisei from the Medical

School?

HIRUKI: I was looking at class photos.

OYAMA: Oh, class photos. And then, what, that's where they're practicing now, after they finished?

HIRUKI: That's what the alumni records say.

OYAMA: I see. No, I don't know of any specific reason. Hawaii did not have a four-year medical school, so perhaps there were more opportunities to start a practice there.

HIRUKI: Well, I thought we'd turn to your war service, if that's okay.

OYAMA: The what?

HIRUKI: Your time in the Army. How did you come to be involved in the Army?

OYAMA: I turned eighteen when I was down in Southwestern College in Kansas. That was in 1944. So I figured, well, I'd be drafted, because the draft was wide open at that time. So I came back to the West Coast area, and I decided to work on the railroad. So I was working on the railroad. They were accepting Niseis to be on extra gangs, and I worked on the railroad between Spokane and Pasco, which is outside of the Pacific Coast military area.

HIRUKI: What kind of gang did you call it?

OYAMA: It's an extra gang. What it is, is a—a gang is a team of railroad workers, forty, fifty workers, who live in boxcars and travel up and down the railroad tracks to maintain the tracks, to change the ties or change rails and do all the maintenance work on a section of the road. And they had a number of gangs—they called them gangs because we lived in boxcars. I think there were about thirty or forty of us in the gang that I worked in, and we just moved from one siding to another siding and then repaired all the tracks in that area and then moved on to another siding and repaired tracks.

I came up for a physical examination, so I went and got my physical, and I was classified as 4-F. They said I had bad eyes and flat feet. Are you familiar with the term 4-F? This is the Army's classification for a reject: you're physically unfit to go in the Army. Physically fit ones are 1-A. If you're unfit, then you're 4-F. Well, nobody wanted to be a 4-F. I didn't want to be a 4-F. [Laughing] That means you're unfit for any kind of service. So I asked, "Is there any other classification between 1-A and 4-F?" And they said, "Yes, there's 1-A Limited, and that means that you're close to 1-A, but you probably won't be drafted because there's some limitation to your physical fitness." I said, "Okay, I'd rather be 1-A Limited than 4-F, totally rejected." So they put me in 1-AL, 1-A Limited.

That was in—I turned eighteen in '44. So, in '45, the war ended, and so I decided to come back to the Pacific Coast, and I came back and got a scholarship to Pacific University

in Forest Grove, that I mentioned. So I went to school there, and after one year of school there, from September '45 to June of '46, I then, for the summer, went to work for Dr. Inahara's father. Dr. Inahara's father had a farm in Ontario, so I went there for the summer to earn money. And while I was there I got a second draft notice, I guess because in the Ontario area there weren't very many eligible males left in the area to be drafted.

HIRUKI: The Army selected draftees geographically, then?

OYAMA: Yeah, they went by geographic areas.

So anyway, I ended up going for another physical, and I assumed that I'm going to flunk again because of my bad eyes and flat feet. This time I went to Salt Lake City for a physical, and they said, "You're 1-A; you're accepted." This is after the war is over. I said, "That's funny, because I was 1-A Limited before, and now you're telling me I'm 1-A?" And they said, "Well, your eyes are correctible to 20/20, and your feet aren't as flat as we thought they were [laughing], so you're 1-A." So they drafted me in the Army in 1946. This was after the war was over.

I went in at Salt Lake City, and I got sent to Alabama, as I mentioned, for my basic training. I ended up there, spent most of the summer there, and then got assigned to go overseas in November of '46—

HIRUKI: Well, actually, before we go overseas, what was Alabama like? Did you ever get to go outside the base or anything like that?

OYAMA: Alabama was horrible. As I mentioned, I was there in June, July, August, September, the four worst months of the year as far as weather is concerned. It was hot and horrible. We left camp a couple of times to visit the surrounding cities—Anniston, Alabama; Montgomery, Alabama—and the whole South was so, at that time, prejudiced against Blacks that it was a totally bad experience for me. For example, we'd go to town to go to a movie—Orientals are considered whites in the South—we would sit in the main floor of the movie with the Caucasians, all the Blacks would have to sit in the balcony. They couldn't intermingle, sit together. All the drinking fountains, lavatories, everything, Black—well, it used to be Colored at that time—Colored for one and White for the other. So that experience, to me, was—we didn't have very many Blacks in the Portland area, so it was a totally new experience to me. I just didn't realize how horrible things were for the Blacks at that time.

But anyway, I didn't enjoy my experience down there, primarily because of the weather, but also the fact that there was such prejudice that I had not been aware of before. So my experience in the Army was really a very bad, poor experience. I didn't enjoy the Army at all.

I was sent overseas in November and ended up in Korea. I was going to be an infantry replacement, but at the replacement depot they asked if anybody knew how to type, and I said I knew how to type, and so they changed my MOS, Military Occupation Status, from an infantryman to a clerk-typist; [laughing] and so I spent my time pounding a typewriter in

Korea. The Korean War hadn't started at that time. Korea had just been liberated by the Americans. You know, they were under Japanese rule for, what, thirty-five years or something, and so they had been liberated. So anyway, I spent my time in Korea being a clerk-typist in a headquarters company.

HIRUKI: Where did you learn to type? It wasn't that common, I think, back then for men to type.

OYAMA: I learned that in high school. Probably one of the most important courses I ever took in high school was typing [laughs].

HIRUKI: Well, even then, I think, it wasn't that common for male students to take typing.

OYAMA: No, it was not, certainly not for males.

HIRUKI: What moved you to take typing?

OYAMA: I don't remember why, but it turned out to be a good experience for me [laughs].

After I was there in Korea for six months, they disbanded the draft, so all draftees were released and sent back to the States. Before I was released I asked for and got a one-week furlough in Japan, and that's when I went to visit my dad's brother in Yamanashi-ken.

IRUKI: Was that your first time in Japan?

OYAMA: Yes—well, no. Well, when I was two or three years old, my dad had taken our family back, but I don't remember anything at all about that. That was for a visit, a short visit.

But anyway, I came back from the Army in '47, and that's when I didn't know what I was going to do, and that's when my sister said, "Well, come out to the hospital," and I went to see about going into premed.

HIRUKI: How was Portland different from when you left and when you came back?

OYAMA: [Pauses.] Well, I don't think there was much of significance as far as me personally. As I say, I didn't have—being sixteen years old when I left, I didn't have any business or financial considerations. I was a student, and when I came back I was still a student, so my life hadn't changed that much. We did live in Vanport, as I mentioned, where a lot of the Japanese who returned to Portland lived, but, other than that, there wasn't anything that was of real significance. I did not attempt to look up many of my previous friends, *hakujin* friends. Why, I don't know, but I never did look into that very much.

HIRUKI: Have you run into any in the years since?

OYAMA: Yes. One fellow, especially, named Don Petersen, who was a very close friend of mine at Washington High School. In fact, when the war broke out and we were evacuated, Don Peterson got the high school annual, a copy for me, and had many of our classmates sign the annual, and then he sent it to me. So he was very close. He later became president of the Ford Motor Company [laughs]. When we had our Washington High School reunion I didn't see him at that time, but I wrote to him at the time, and he wrote to me and we exchanged a few letters. But he was probably the closest friend.

There have been several other friends that I've run into since then. One girl that was in my same grammar school and high school turned out to be a next door neighbor when my wife and I got married and moved to the east side. She lived in the apartment right across the street from us. So there have been a few run-ins like that, but I have not kept any lifelong friendship type of things with any of the former Caucasian friends.

HIRUKI: Getting back to your time in Korea then, what was it like, if this was just after the Japanese occupation, then, to be an American of Japanese origin in Korea?

OYAMA: As it turned out, it was very interesting. One day I went to the PX to get a haircut, and the barbers were all Koreans, but they all spoke Japanese because of the Japanese occupation. So they asked me if I spoke any Japanese, and I said yes. And they said, well, they have a favor they want me to do. And I said, "What?" And they said they want a raise in their pay. They can't speak English well enough to go talk to the PX director to ask for a raise [laughing], and so they wanted to know if I would do that for them. I said sure. So I went to the PX director and got an interview with him and said that these barbers had been working for so long and many of them had been there since—I can't remember how long the PX had been open there, but they wanted a raise. And the director was very sympathetic, and he says, "Sure, okay, I'll see to it that they get a raise." And so they got a raise, and I got free haircuts for the rest of the time I was there in Korea [laughter].

Another time they asked me to be an interpreter at a trial. Several GIs were on trial. I can't remember if it was a murder or theft or what, but they were on trial. The Koreans wanted me to be an interpreter for them because I could speak and understand Japanese a little bit and they could talk to me in Japanese, whereas they didn't know any English at all. And so I served as a sort of interpreter for a trial, but it was a very poor experience for me because my understanding and knowledge of Japanese was not good enough for the technical detail. I mean, I could ask for a raise for the barbers, but my knowledge wasn't good enough for all the technical things that were involved in a trial, so that did not turn out to be a very good experience from my standpoint.

As far as being of Japanese ancestry, though, I don't think that, other than what I mentioned, had any influence on the way I was treated by the Koreans while I was there. I was just there about six months.

HIRUKI: What do you remember the most about that time?

OYAMA: Well, I remember that we had several passes to go out and visit Seoul and other smaller cities in Korea. There again, it was a very pitiful situation because the whole country was so poor. People had nothing. In Seoul, their capital, there was one electric line on the telephone poles going through the city, and, evidently, that was put up by the Japanese that were there before, the occupation. The country was just—literally had nothing. Everything was torn down and very poor, so we did not feel that it was anything to go out and enjoy the sights or anything like that at all.

HIRUKI: So what was Japan like, then, compared to that?

OYAMA: [Laughing] Japan was entirely different. Japan—well, while we were in Korea, for example, since it was a liberated country, we had to do our own KP—you know KP? Working in the mess hall and cleaning up dishes and stuff. We had to do our own because Korea was liberated. In Japan, when we landed at Tachikawa Air Base and went to get a meal, they had the Japanese doing all the cleaning up. They had tablecloths on the table. I mean, Japan was an occupied country and a defeated country, so the GIs were kings, they lived like kings. You put your boots out in the hallway in the nighttime, and in the morning they're all polished up for you. So the living in Japan was entirely different.

Of course, Japan—I stayed in Tokyo before I went to Kofu, in Yamanashi, and the Tokyo station was all bombed out, so there was hardly anything left as far as the station was concerned, just enough for the trains to go back and forth. The whole city was pretty well bombed out. So it wasn't a very clean city, but you could tell that it was much more developed than Seoul in Korea. Korea was truly a backward country when you compared it to Japan.

So my experience in Japan was a much, much brighter and better experience. At least, it made me want to go back and visit again, you know, after I left there. I saw enough of it that I wanted to go back and see some more of it.

HIRUKI: What sort of things did you see?

OYAMA: Oh, just the standard of living and the way the people behaved and lived in comparison to Korea. Korea was just really a third-world type situation compared to Japan. And although my relatives lived in the *inaka* [countryside] in Yamanashi, still they had a nice house and it was clean and, you know, the farmland was all well kept, so that you could tell that it was a very nice place, not just a torn-down place.

HIRUKI: And how had you known they were there?

OYAMA: In Yamanashi-ken? From my dad. He gave me the address, and all, before I went overseas, and so I was able to find them. They lived in a small community just outside of Kofu. Minobu, is that familiar to you at all? No? [laughs] It was a small city, a rural city. So I rode from Tokyo to Kofu on a train and—

HIRUKI: What was that like?

OYAMA: It was interesting in that the trains were all crowded, so there was no sitting space. I had to stand in the aisle all the way. When I stood in the aisle, I was one head taller than everybody else that was standing in the aisle. The Japanese people were that much shorter. I'm five-foot ten, or I was at that time, maybe not now, but at least I was five-ten at the time, and I was easily a head taller than anybody else that was on that train. So that was quite an interesting experience to realize how small the Asian people were—the same way in Korea. They were all very small in comparison to myself.

HIRUKI: Were you wearing your uniform on the train?

OYAMA: Oh, yes.

HIRUKI: What happened? Did you get any looks?

OYAMA: No. There were enough GIs all over, you know, in uniform on the trains as well, so that—and in Kofu there was a military government team there, so there were lots of GIs. Kofu was the capital, so they had a military government station or a team there, so there were lots of GIs around, so I don't think I stood out.

HIRUKI: Were there many with Japanese faces, though?

OYAMA: No [laughs]. That may have been different, but I didn't feel any special animosity or anything because of that.

HIRUKI: And so what was it like to meet your relatives? This was the first time you had met them?

OYAMA: Yes, it was. I met my dad's brother, his wife, and my cousin, a girl named Itsuko. At that time it was interesting in that she, during the war, felt that she wanted to be a nurse also, so it was just kind of interesting that she had that wish. And then later on, when we went back to visit Japan, we visited with her, and so she remembered me, obviously, and I remembered her, so it was kind of an interesting visit to see her again later on.

HIRUKI: That was after how many years you went back again?

OYAMA: Oh, it must be fifteen, twenty years later. She was married and had a child and so forth.

HIRUKI: And what did you notice about Japan, going back that time, compared with...

OYAMA: Compared to when I first went there? Oh, well, Japan had all been built up, obviously. They recovered from the war very rapidly, as you know. When I first went back to Tokyo, I was impressed that the city looked just like any other American city [laughs]. Even the signs, the neon signs on top of the buildings, Toyota, Fuji, all the signs that we see here in

the U.S. as well, so it just looked like any other big city in the United States. I was not impressed that it looked like a Japanese big city. It wasn't until you got out into the smaller community areas where you could tell that you were in Japan. But otherwise, downtown was just like any other U.S. city.

We stayed in the Shinjuku area at the Keio Plaza Hotel. Although the people were all Japanese, the hotel was just like [laughing] any other Hilton or Sheraton or any other hotel in the States, and we felt very comfortable going there. One experience I remember was when we stayed at the Keio Plaza Hotel, they had an earthquake there, and so the whole building was shaking, but we were told that the hotels in that area, the tall buildings, were all built with earthquakes in mind, and so they were well stabilized to prevent any damage from earthquakes—and there wasn't any. This was a very minor one, obviously, but it was quite an interesting experience anyway. I guess it's something that the Japanese people feel almost like it's part of their daily life [laughs], to have minor earthquakes around them. That's something that we don't feel very often here in the States, of course.

[Pause.]

HIRUKI: Oh, I meant to ask, you mentioned you're a scout.

OYAMA: Boy Scouts?

HIRUKI: Boy Scout. Did you think that had anything to do with—or, helped you in any way with your army experience?

OYAMA: Yes, as a matter of fact, it did. When you're first going into basic training, they need to have patrol leaders. A patrol is ten, twelve men. They have to have somebody leading the patrol, and so they asked had anybody been in the Scouts or had any marching experience, you know, in a band or Boy Scouts or something. And so I said I did; [laughing] so I immediately became a patrol leader because I had been in the Boy Scouts, in a drum and bugle corps, and knew about marching. Since the other men in the patrol, of course, did not have any such experience, I became a platoon—or, a patrol squad leader right away. And so I think probably that had some influence on how I was treated, or looked upon.

[End of Tape 2, Side 1/Begin Tape 2, Side 2]

HIRUKI: We were talking about the personal qualities acquired from scouting.

OYAMA: Yes, I can only add that any activities that I performed in or did in the Army, I felt like I was familiar with what the general idea of what training was, because I had been exposed previously to things like the Boy Scouts. You know, you learn a certain amount of discipline and organization-type activities from the Boy Scouts, the same type of general activities that you have in the service or any other organization from that standpoint; so I suppose I was fully aware of what the leaders were trying to get out of the men. I don't know if that's of help, but at least it kept you out of trouble if you were aware of what they were after.

HIRUKI: Did you have any martial arts experience?

OYAMA: No. They did have judo and kendo in downtown Portland, but because I lived out in the outskirts, I never participated in any of that.

HIRUKI: How about *Nihongo gakko*, Japanese school?

OYAMA: There was a Japanese school out in Montavilla. There were a few farmers that lived out in that area, and we had Japanese school three nights a week, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, in the evening for an hour. But the amount of learning that we had under those circumstances was very small. I don't think I ever got past more than the first or second grade as far as understanding or learning the Japanese language. I was able to speak a little bit, but I could never learn anything more than *katakana* and *hiragana* [Japanese syllabic writing]. I never learned more than maybe a half a dozen or a dozen kanji words, so my Japanese language abilities are very limited, not like the downtown kids. They went every day after school and on Saturday and learned quite a bit.

HIRUKI: Well, I thought in this last half we might talk about family. You mentioned you were married at—when was it? Maybe you could talk about the beginning of your family life.

OYAMA: Well, I got married to my wife in 1951, when I had finished two years of medical school. I kid her and say that I married her for her money, because she had to support me for my last two years of medical school, since my GI Bill money ran out. Are you familiar with the GI Bill? My GI Bill money ran out at the end of my sophomore year, so she financed my way through the rest of medical school.

We have three sons. One was born when I was—the first one was born when I was an extern at St. Vincent's Hospital; and, because my last name was Oyama, the student nurses in the OB department at that time, when I was an extern, said that with a last name like that I had to have a son named Patrick. I used to get some mail with O'Yama. And so our first son [laughing] was named Patrick. The second son is Michael, and the third son is Kevin. So they all have good Irish names [laughs].

HIRUKI: How did you meet your wife?

OYAMA: I knew her from childhood days, in that her parents were also Nichiren Buddhist Church members, and so we probably met through the various church activities, playing tennis or attending Sunday school, things of that nature. So I've known her practically all of my life.

HIRUKI: And what kind of home have you tried to have for your family, or family environment?

OYAMA: I don't understand what you mean. What do you mean?

HIRUKI: Well, I guess, what kind of family environment have you tried to cultivate?

OYAMA: As far as being Japanese, I think our children's exposure to Japanese culture has been minimal, in that they attended grammar school and high school, and they were the only Japanese living out here in Lake Oswego attending that particular grammar school and the high school later on. So all of their growing up has been with *hakujin*. Two of our sons are married, and, as you might expect, they married *hakujin*. One son is still unmarried, the oldest one is not married. But their cultural exposure to Japanese things has been very minimal.

My wife is interested in making Japanese dolls; she took flower arranging from her mother. As far as cooking, we eat mostly, I would think, American food, although I prefer to have rice every evening instead of potatoes [laughs], so we eat rice almost every evening. But as far as other exposure to Japanese things, I think it's been minimal.

One son, he and his wife have very little interest in anything Japanese. Another son and his wife, she is interested in Japanese cultural things. She has a number of Japanese dolls, kimono, other artifacts in her house. She likes sushi [laughs]. So it varies, I guess, from the two families. But we have taken both of them, the two married sons and their wives, to Japan on different trips with us, and the sons both are very interested in going back to Japan again and seeing some more of it. One of the sons' wives is also interested in going back; the other one, I don't know if she's that interested in Japanese things. So there's some difference between the two of them.

But as far as their kids are concerned, I don't think the Japanese cultural influence is going to be very much at all. Very, very little, if any. I think it's totally American culture for the Sansei.

HIRUKI: How do you feel about that?

OYAMA: We don't object at all to the sons marrying *hakujin*. Both of the girls are real nice girls. My wife likes both of them. So as a family situation, we're both very happy with them. That's what the sons wanted, we like both of the wives, so we get along with them very fine. We're very happy with them, and I hope they're happy with us.

We certainly don't try to force any Japanese cultural activities onto them, but one of them likes to go to the Japanese festival, Obon festival, and hear the taiko drummers and things, so that they're exposed to Japanese things, but not overly so.

[Pause.]

HIRUKI: Well, I thought, then, we could maybe talk a bit about your perspective on the area of pathology that you specialized in, which is the blood bank area. Any perspectives from this end of your career, looking back at how things have moved in that field?

OYAMA: Well, I guess I got interested in blood banking primarily because of our connections with the clinical pathology department at the Medical School. In being exposed to blood banking I realized that the blood banking field, as practiced in the private hospitals, was not that great; and as newer tests were being developed, procedures in cross matching and so forth, typing and cross matching to prevent transfusion reactions became much more sophisticated. I wanted to make sure that our hospital was doing everything possible to keep transfusion reactions down to a minimum. And because I was the first one along in our pathology department to take that much interest in the clinical pathology department, I just felt that blood banking was one of the first places that should be developed because of the danger of transfusion reactions. Therefore, I became interested in blood banking. A subsequent pathologist became interested in chemistry; another subsequent pathologist became interested in microbiology; so that we have diversified enough to cover the various parts of the laboratory.

I stuck with the blood bank and became very active with the Red Cross here in Portland. The Red Cross supplied all of the blood in the Portland—well, for the state of Oregon, practically, and southern Washington as well. So I became very active in the blood-banking activities at the Red Cross and served on various committees at the Red Cross. Together with this person from the Medical School, we went around to the various Oregon hospitals and other areas to give talks about blood banking to improve the general blood-banking activities. We gave talks down in Salem; we went to Eugene; we went to Vancouver and gave talks in Yakima, Washington, and Pendleton. So we've been to different areas to promote good blood-banking practice. And I think that has been a very stimulating part of my life in being active in that fashion.

As our St. Vincent Hospital pathology residency program expanded and various residents finished, they went to different cities to practice pathology, like The Dalles and Roseburg, Oregon, Salem and different places. Then they would invite us to go to their hospitals to give talks to their physicians. So that was another way in which we thought that we were spreading the goodwill about pathology to the various areas. For example, in Roseburg, the first pathologist there was the pathologist from our program, that practiced there. Same way in The Dalles, where the first pathologist there was one of our residents from our hospital. So we've had good exposure throughout the state, as far as our training program is concerned, and have placed a number of pathologists in the various hospitals throughout the state.

HIRUKI: What would you say is the most significant thing that happened in your area during your career?

OYAMA: In blood banking? Various tests that came out during the time that improved the cross-matching technique. I think typing techniques are pretty well organized already, but cross-matching portions were relatively unsophisticated, and so that part probably plays the biggest part.

Because of my blood-banking interest, I became a member of the American Association of Blood Banks, AABB, and became an inspector for the AABB. So I went

around throughout Oregon and California, Idaho, Washington, and helped the program by inspecting the blood banks at the various hospitals. I did the same thing for the College of American Pathologists in their laboratory inspection program. That's why I went to Calgary, to inspect the hospital up there.

By being an inspector you always go to different places and you help them by giving them your experience in how they can improve their laboratories and blood banks, but, by the same token, you learn from them what good things that they're doing. And even from the bad things that they're doing you can learn how to avoid making the mistakes that other places have experienced. So being an inspector certainly improves your own area by being able to make improvements or to avoid mistakes, as I say, that other places have made. So I think St. Vincent's Hospital has benefited tremendously from that standpoint.

HIRUKI: I guess this is coming back to the family thing, but you have a son who's a pathologist?

OYAMA: Yes. My two older sons were not interested in science, so they weren't interested in medicine. My third son [Kevin Oyama] was interested in science, so he decided that medicine sounded good. So he decided to go to medical school and was accepted at the University of Oregon and went to medical school there. Upon finishing school he took a surgery internship, but he didn't appreciate it. I guess he didn't particularly like surgery. So he switched—at the end of the first year he switched to pathology and finished up in pathology. He met his wife [Karen Oyama] in medical school, and she also started off in internal medicine but decided—after he switched to pathology and came home every day talking about pathology, [laughing] she decided to switch to pathology. So both of them are now certified pathologists. He works at Meridian Park Hospital and she works at Kaiser, Sunnyside Kaiser Hospital here in town. So we have two additional pathologists in our family now.

HIRUKI: But wasn't there any encouragement from you?

OYAMA: Well, I didn't particularly say anything, but I guess [laughs] he was fully aware of what my activities were and what my conversations about pathology were, so I assume that it must have had some influence. But I didn't say, "You should go into pathology." I let both of them decide for themselves what they wanted to do. In fact, I didn't say, "You should go into medicine." I think he pretty well decided that by himself also. But I'm very happy that he did.

HIRUKI: They talk about pathology as a "lifestyle specialty." Do you think that helped you be more present as a father than, say, a surgeon, or being on call?

OYAMA: Oh, as far as call and things? Yes, I'm sure that the pathologist's life from the call standpoint is much, much easier than the average physician's. I had very few calls compared to them, right. And it probably does help as far as family ties are concerned. That isn't the reason I went into pathology, however [laughs]. That didn't have—I wasn't aware of that, let's say, at the time that I went into pathology. I think I went into pathology because I

admired the two pathologists that were in the St. Vincent's Hospital department and thought that they were models.

HIRUKI: What did you admire about them?

OYAMA: Professionally they were both so well respected by other members of the medical staff, as well as by the administration. They had a tremendous amount of knowledge. They were always eager to teach residents what they knew and how to look up things when they were not aware of them. They just behaved like you would want to behave, yourself, if you were in the field of medicine. [Laughing] Some surgeons don't behave in the way that you respect. You know, there's—not all surgeons, obviously, but there are some surgeons who are, say, a detriment to their profession as far as the eyes of younger physicians are concerned. I didn't find that to be true with any pathologists that I was aware of.

HIRUKI: Looking back, what are you most proud of in your life and/or career?

OYAMA: Well, I suppose having gone into medicine a person should, how do you say it, pay back what you got from your education. By remaining in the profession as an active member and doing pathology work, that you're paying back to the community or to the state that gave you your education, so that you feel that you've at least done something to have made it worthwhile for the state to invest their resources in your education.

I'm certainly very satisfied with the way my medical life has developed and gone along. When I retired, I decided to stop altogether. They asked me to continue in the teaching program at the hospital, but I thought if I was going to continue in the teaching program, I'm going to have to keep up with all the literature and everything. If I'm going to have to keep up with all the literature, I might as well just keep on working. So, to me it was, you know, all or none, and so I decided to cut it all off together. I know Dr. Inahara still talks about going to surgical conferences once a week up at St. Vincent's, but, to me, I just thought that it's better if I cut off everything altogether. The only time I go back to the hospital is once a year they have a luncheon for retired physicians [laughs], so I go back once a year to say hello to old friends there. But otherwise, I have no connection with the hospital.

HIRUKI: So what are you doing with yourself these days?

OYAMA: Nothing medically [laughs]. We've been doing a lot of traveling. That's why I couldn't have this interview with you earlier. We had just come back last Thursday from a three-week trip to Europe. We've been doing a lot of traveling. We've taken our sons—one son with us each year on one of our trips so that they get some exposure to different cultures. That's how the two of them—we took them to Japan on different years. But we enjoy traveling. I do a lot of reading. I used to do swimming—we have a pool out here—I swam every day in the summertime, but now I've got a bad back and a bad shoulder, so we're getting ready to move down to a smaller place with less upkeep as far as the swimming pool and the yard and stuff, so our life will be cutting down a little bit more in the near future.

HIRUKI: Would you have any—well, you have grandchildren, obviously, so do you have anything to say to the next generation of Japanese Americans?

OYAMA: No, other than, as I say—they're all young. All four of them are under ten years old, so there's nothing much to—

HIRUKI: They'll listen to this tape, then, in a number of years. Anything to say to them?

OYAMA: There's not much to be said as far as their future at this point, other than I think they're all going to be growing up like regular Americans and with very little Japanese-type cultural exposure, and so it's just—you always hope that there will be some influence that they'll remember something about their background, culturally speaking, but if not, that's all right. [Laughing] It's their life.

HIRUKI: If they're to remember one thing of their background or heritage, what would that be, or what would you like it to be the most?

OYAMA: Oh, I don't know, I never thought about it. [Pauses.] I think they have to realize that they look different, you know, and they're always going to look different from the average *hakujin*, so there's going to be some physical and therefore mental or cultural difference that is going to exist throughout their life. And I don't know if that's something that they should try to capitalize on or improve themselves with or act accordingly, but there is going to be that difference that will be present throughout their lives.

HIRUKI: Do you think the world they'll grow up in will be different from the one you did?

OYAMA: I think so. I think they'll be much more assimilated into the American culture. Although there's been a big difference between the Issei and the Nisei, certainly, I don't know if it's going to be that much difference still existing between the Nisei and the Sansei and the Yonsei. You know, the difference is going to get smaller and smaller as each generation occurs.

HIRUKI: Is there anything we've talked about that you'd like to expand on? Or anything that we haven't mentioned that you'd like to talk about?

OYAMA: [Laughs] No, I think you've covered just about everything I can think of.

HIRUKI: What's your favorite memory of medical school?

OYAMA: My favorite memory. [Pauses.] Boy, I don't know. I can't—

HIRUKI: Or feeling, even. Not even anything specific, but...

OYAMA: I don't think of any one experience or one thing. It just seems like the

whole four years is just blended into one big learning experience that I certainly enjoyed. I don't think I've ever felt that I have disliked being in medical school or disliked being a physician. I think I've always felt that it's been a very interesting and different life from other professions and one that I've thoroughly enjoyed, I think, all during my life.

The one thing that is really good about medicine, to me, is that every year there's something new, something different coming up so that you're never standing still. You can always look forward to having something develop that is better and an improvement over things that have already occurred. And I suppose that's true in many professions, but it seems like it's especially true in medicine compared to other professions. I think that's the one thing that has been most interesting about being a physician.

HIRUKI: Well, that's great. There's just a few more minutes left. There's one thing. Dr. Nakadate mentioned the *kenjinkai* [Japanese prefectural associations] as a possible connection between you—because I guess he's from the Yamanashi-ken as well.

OYAMA: The what is?

HIRUKI: The *kenjinkai*, the prefectural associations.

OYAMA: The *Nikkeijinkai* [Japanese American Association]?

HIRUKI: Yes.

OYAMA: As what?

HIRUKI: As a binding thing or playing a role in keeping the community together.

OYAMA: Oh, you're not talking about medicine now.

HIRUKI: No, no. Sorry, I'm shifting gears here.

OYAMA: About the Japanese community in Portland.

HIRUKI: Yes.

OYAMA: Yes, I think that's very true. I think there is a—there has been a need for such an organization, and especially when there were lots of Isseis around because many of the Issei didn't have Nisei that were very good or very active in keeping the Issei in touch with the activities of the area, as well as national activities.

My exposure to that kind of communication is quite large because my dad was a newspaperman, so I've always assumed that people will get their knowledge from newspapers. When my dad died, the Japanese community, the *Nikkeijinkai*, took over his mimeograph machine and another person was doing the stenciling and so forth and that kept up for a few years.

[End of tape and end of interview]

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