

Interview with

# Margaret Nakamura Cooper

conducted by IdaRose Sylvester

for the “Understanding the History of Housing in Mountain View: Stories of Racism, Anti-Discrimination, and Movement towards Inclusion” project by the City of Mountain View’s Human Relations Commission,

in collaboration with Senior Lecturer Michael Kahan and team from Stanford University.

Mountain View Historical Society  
Mountain View Public Library

Conducted on July 1, 2022

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of “Understanding the History of Housing in Mountain View: Stories of Racism, Anti-Discrimination, and Movement towards Inclusion” is to document the history of discrimination and efforts to fight discrimination in housing in the city of Mountain View, California. Some of the information collected was shared with the public at an event sponsored by the Mountain View Human Relations Commission, held on July 26, 2022. In order to make the interviews available to researchers and members of the public, they will be added to the historical collection of the Mountain View Historical Association (MVHS) and/or the Mountain View Public Library (MVPL) and made available for public use. They may also be shared with other libraries and collections, including those at Stanford University.

## BIO

IdaRose Sylvester was an interviewer on this project representing the City of Mountain View Human Relations Commission, as Vice Chair, and the nonprofit Mountain View Historical Association, as board member. She has lived in Mountain View for almost 25 years, and works as the executive director of a local nonprofit. She lives in the Varsity Park neighborhood of Mountain View, the development of which played an almost forgotten role in exclusionary zoning practices south of El Camino Real.

## ABSTRACT



Margaret Nakamura Cooper is a Japanese-American born and raised in Mountain View, California. In this interview, she speaks about her upbringing and childhood in Mountain View, her and her family's internment in 1942-1943, and her life after that. Her father was a farmer and when she was growing up, she said she did not feel much discrimination (or couldn't remember). However, she describes internment as a difficult time for her and her family, describing how all aspects of relocation (the cold, growing their own food, falling behind in school, her brother passing) affected her life afterwards. After this, she says she lived a happy life and was grateful for all the opportunities that came after (going to Mills college, becoming a Disney cartoon artist, traveling the world with her husband and children). She currently lives in Santa Maria, California.

Date of Interview: July 1st, 2022

Interviewer: IdaRose Sylvester:

Interviewee: Margaret Nakamura Cooper

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 0:02

Oh, wonderful. Okay, wonderful. So I'll repeat a little bit of what I just said for the purposes of this recording.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 0:09

I better click continue here, right?

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 0:11

Oh, yes, yes. Permission. Yeah.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 0:16

Okay.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 0:16

Just give me a second. Shame on me. I lost my place already. So I'm IdaRose Sylvester, and I'm an interviewer working with the city of Mountain View's Human Relations Commission in partnership with the Mountain View Historical Association and Stanford University on a project entitled "Understanding the History of Housing in Mountain View: Stories of Racism, Anti Discrimination, and the Movement Towards Inclusion". The purpose of this project is to document the history of discrimination and efforts to fight discrimination in the city of Mountain View, California. Some of the information collected will be shared with the public at an event sponsored by the Mountain View HRC scheduled for July 26th, 2022. So today is July 1st, 2022, and I have the pleasure of interviewing Margaret Nakamura Cooper, forgive me there. And we are doing this meeting today on zoom, for safety reasons, and also because Margaret and I are located in different cities. So really quickly, Margaret, can you state your name? So we get it correct, including the pronunciation, since I actually messed it up.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:25

My name is Margaret Nakamura Cooper.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:29

And where do you currently live?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:31

I currently live in Santa Maria, California,

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:34

A beautiful place. How long did you live, in total, in the city of Mountain View?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:41

Well, I lived there from the time I was born until evacuation after World War Two, when Japanese Americans living on the coast were interned, first at Santa Maria, I mean Santa Anita racetrack. And then the more permanent relocation center in Heart Mountain, Wyoming.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 2:12

And after that experience, that horrible experience, did you come back to Mountain View?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 2:16

Yes, we came back actually to the very same house.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 2:20

Oh.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 2:20

This house, it was a handmade house made by my father who was neither a plumber nor an electrician, but he made this little cottage all by, well, not by himself. He did have help from neighbors, but he had no real education in any of the electricity or plumbing or anything like that. But yet he managed to put together this little house and it consisted of a living room, and then a kitchen and two bedrooms. And originally we lived in that house until the evacuation.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 3:11

I will definitely ask you more about coming back to that house in just a few minutes. Do you know if that house still exists either at the same location or?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 3:19

And I have no idea if it still exists because when we came back, we had to have a bigger house and my mother knew, had a friend, Mrs. White, who was related to her brother-in-law, who was a builder. And this was a time when houses were being built and small communities. And, this man was planning to build a community of houses in an apricot orchard, but in this apricot orchard was an old Victorian, I would say Victorian house, because I think it was at one time a stagecoach stop from San Francisco to other cities like San Jose down the Peninsula. But it was so old that each room had a fireplace and it was, I don't know if - I think at one time the fireplace may have been used, but by the time we lived in it, we had a little gas heater inside that hole. But this friend of my mother's friend said that we could live in it. And I think it was very cheap. It was \$35 a month or something, he said, because I'm planning to knock the house down and we're going to build a bunch of little knit, little houses. So in the meantime your Japanese friends can live in it. And so we lived as soon as we came back and we sold the little handmade house and my father... We lived in this Victorian house that - it wasn't exactly falling down, but it hadn't been painted in years. And, amazingly, the roof didn't leak. It was two stories. And, with marble mantle pieces, they were very shallow, but I noticed they were in the marble and we didn't live in the upstairs. We just lived in the downstairs and the ceilings were very, very high, maybe 15 foot ceilings. And so it was cool in the summer, but we did have to warm it up considerably in the

winter.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 5:58

Oh my gosh, I imagine, I wonder whatever became of that house.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 6:02

But they tore it down. Unfortunately; nowadays they probably would have refurbished it and may have turned it into a museum because it was really quite a historical building, I imagine.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 6:16

Oh boy, we can have a very long conversation about the meaning of preservation in Mountain View. I don't know that things have changed as much. Well, anyway, I'm going to take an action item to try to track down the house your father built, or at least - did you not remember the street? It was on... I know you've mentioned it.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 6:38

The history of this house is kind of interesting. Originally he built it on Dale Avenue. Now Dale Avenue was off of the El Camino on the left side. I want to keep saying the left side, but... And, a guy by the name of, with the last name of Dale lived there, Jimmy Dale, I think it was. And his father or his grandfather probably built it and owned it. Our house that my father built was set back from Dale Avenue quite a bit, because I remember before I went to school, I would go walk to the mailbox and pick up the glass bottle of a quart of milk that the milkman would leave there. And that was one of my earliest memories, because that was before I went to school.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 7:50

Beautiful memory that takes us to a specific place in time.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 7:54

Yes, yes. And- where was I going with this? Oh, and then, because my father was an alien, he couldn't own property. So he had - see that's another interesting point that people from Japan were not allowed to become naturalized and therefore, unless they did have children and the children turned 18, they could put the property in their 18 year old kids' name. Now see, because the kid was born here and a citizen, so therefore he could own property, so he'd be an American citizen and not a subject of Japan. So anyway, my father had very small kids. I was not even in first grade when we had to move, because his lease ran out. His lease ran out; he had to move to another farm. He grew raspberries. And so when he had to leave, he brought the house with him and he moved it.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 9:11

To?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 9:11

San Antonio Road. And Calvos lived there. Now, I think I wrote another memoir about the Calvos.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 9:21

Yeah.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 9:22

And, and, Eugene Calvos was, the patriarch came from Spain. I don't know whether he was leaving the country because of Franco<sup>1</sup>, but he was also an immigrant, but a very kindly one. And, he rented, he sublet actually a few workers to my father and my father, as a single farmer, occasionally did hire a few Braceros<sup>2</sup> during - or actually, some people from Oklahoma. Of course, they call them Okies. There was an Oakie woman who was very, very, very pregnant and she picked berries. And then one day she wasn't there. And my father asked where she was and the husband said, well, she was down in the creek bed where they lived and had her baby in the creek bed. So things were pretty rough during the Depression. And this was, say, 1936 or so that this happened. I do remember that it really was shocking to me even then that a woman could have a baby in a Creek bed.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 10:45

It is shocking to think. It's actually really important to remember that something like that happened in your lifetime and not technically that long ago, and still happens probably in the United States, probably as well among farm workers. So it's a lot to think about, a lot to process, but I would like to take a step back and talk a little bit more about your parents' story, because obviously they are hugely instrumental in your life. I could tell your connection to them. I also sense that they had some... they were both very different. They had different backgrounds. So can you tell me a little bit about your parents, especially when and what brought them to Mountain View?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 11:26

Well, my mother and father were not typical Japanese couples because my father was an alien. Came from Japan in 1916, during World War One, and was promised citizenship if he went to enlist in the war, this is World War One, but he took a train to Washington, New York or Washington. I don't know which, and when he got there, he got the Spanish flu, Spanish influenza; millions of people died around the world. He didn't, he almost died, but the orderly who took care of him said to my father, everyone who sleeps in that bed does not die. And my father believed him. And of course he probably told that to everybody who slept in that bed. [Laughs] But anyway, my father came back without his citizenship. And he did, eventually after World War Two, gain his citizenship naturalization in 1950-something. I think that's when they changed the law and allowed people. What I didn't know until my mother was a hundred, she told me that when she married my father in 1921, she lost her citizenship. Even though she was

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<sup>1</sup>Francisco Franco was a general and the leader of the Nationalist forces that overthrew the Spanish democratic republic in the Spanish Civil War (1936–39); then he was the head of the government in Spain until 1973 and the head of state until his death in 1975.

<sup>2</sup>“Braceros” were Mexican workers who came to the U.S. in the 1940s through the Bracero program, which was a farm labor agreement for seasonal workers between the U.S. and Mexico

born in this country, she was born in San Jose and was English speaking. English was her first language. She could speak Japanese, but English was her first language. And yet for 11 years she was a person without a country. She had never been to Japan. She was born in this country, but she couldn't be considered an American, even though she was born in San Jose. And I didn't think that was possible, but of course, lots of things are possible, like citizens being interned with no cause. So anyway.

**IdaRose Sylvester:**

So your mother regained her citizenship.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:**

Yes. She regained her citizenship 11 years later, I think in 1930 something. And I think, the Cable Act<sup>3</sup> was rescinded and the League of Women Voters<sup>4</sup>, which was one of the institutions that helped, overturn the Cable Act. So after that my mother regained her citizenship. And so, however, every time something legal had to be done, it was my mother who had to sign the papers because my father was a non-citizen. Luckily my father wasn't your typical Japanese, I'm the boss of this household sort of thing. So it worked out okay. But unfortunately, my brother was only three years older than me. And so he was, say, 14, 15, and he was interned as well, he was not old enough to go in the service. But of course, a lot of American-born Japanese-Americans were reassigned or something because they weren't allowed to be in the army. Later on though they allowed them. And so they showed their patriotism by dying in huge numbers. And getting lots of awards and so forth.

Anyway, I dunno how that - oh, but I wanted to mention that the Calvos, that Eugene Calvo, that whole family was just incredibly amazing. It was a family that was an immigrant's dream. He came here with nothing and yet his children all became college graduates. One became mayor of Mountain View, Victor Calvo. Then I think one of their daughters, my good friend Trini Calvo, had a daughter that became a Ninth Circuit judge, and was on the short list for Supreme Court. Of course, Sonya Sotomayor<sup>5</sup> got that post, but every single one of those children and grandchildren were outstanding. Today I still contact my old trainee friend who lives in a facility, but we have still kept in touch all these years. When I first met her I was in first grade, and that was a long time ago.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 17:03

You know, you're actually, I think you've predicted some of my questions. I'm definitely very curious about the context of where you lived and you're telling me some wonderful stories, about the Calvo family, about your friend, Tracy - or Trini, I'm sorry, your friend Trini. What were

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<sup>3</sup> Congress enacted this law in 1922 to restore citizenship to U.S born women who married noncitizen husbands and lost their citizenship under Expatriation Act of 1907

<sup>4</sup> Referring to the League of Women Voters, presumably the Los Altos-Mountain View division; they are an organization "working to expand and protect voting rights"

<sup>5</sup> Supreme Court Justice since 2009.



your family and your friends like? Did you have other friends of different races and ethnicities?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 17:33

You know, I'm really surprised. I'm thinking back on this. I had very few Japanese-American friends, part of the reason was we lived on this farm. It was a huge, gigantic acreage with the Calvo family and our family, the only ones there. Their kids and our kids were about the same age. So we became very close friends, and it's just that closeness that we had that we just seem to have clicked. And of course we were both poor at that time. Of course later, when we were interned, Mr. Calwell became quite rich because he grew vegetables, and this was the time of dehydration and freezing, and they needed all that food for our armed forces. So I think that he really - and then of course they had what was known as Braceros, and the little homemade house that my father built while we were in camp. Mr. Kelvil said, is it okay if the Braceros there was a Bracero who came every year, if they, occupied your house while you're gone, my father said, sure. And so when we came back, he said, "When you come back, we're going to tell the Braceros that they have to leave. And I'm sure they'll make sure that the house is clean". So that's why we had a place to come back to where most other people didn't. And I remember Maggie Macedo was a girl about a year or two older than me. She used to come during the harvest season, she walked to school with us and we'd walk through the orchard of Joel Pear. Now, I think the Pears were a family that had orchards. And funny thing I remember the Pears had some white dogs. It's funny, things you remember,

**IdaRose Sylvester:**

The visuals, yeah.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:**

We must have walked a mile because we walked from our house on San Antonio road through the orchard, through the pear orchard and down Rangstorff. I think it was Rangstorff. And then to the corner of Regnstorff and El Camino Real where the bus picked us up. Now occasionally my father or Trini's father would drive us to school on the truck if it rained, because they didn't want us to walk in the rain to the bus stop. So they gave us a ride and we'd ride in the back of the truck. And, well, it rained in the back of the truck too, but it was not such a long ride. But anyway, it's funny, things I remember, like that sort of thing. Trini and I would have lunch together when lunchtime would come, we'd sit around the oak trees on the elementary school. The elementary school used to be right on the El Camino Real. And I remember when they moved my house, the house mover, moved the house on a moving trailer. And it was recess and I could see my house going down El Camino Real. And that was an amazing sight. I'll never forget that, to see your house going down like that.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 21:38

It's not something you see very often at all anywhere. We just tear them down now.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 21:43

Exactly.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 21:44

Gosh, these memories are amazing. They're actually some of the most vivid memories of Mountain View that I might have ever heard. I'm curious, I don't want to bring up something because I think I know the answer to this, but it sounds like you're you and your family had wonderful relationships with people of different backgrounds who were part of your life. But did you feel in Mountain View in general that there was a different attitude towards people of Japanese descent before the war?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 22:12

Not really. I wasn't really aware of that. I mean, because my good friends, like the Calvo, I mean, they were great. And then occasionally when we would have an annual picnic with the Japanese community - now that's when I met a lot of Japanese people. And by the way, Norman Mineta<sup>6</sup>, who was a national figure, probably the most famous Japanese American, was a family friend. My mother and Mrs. Mineta were pregnant at the same time with my younger brother. I had a younger brother, 18 months younger than me, and he and Norm were - my mother and Norm's mother were pregnant at the same time. So they were bidding who was going to give birth first. Norm had such an amazing memory. He, when my mother turned 99, he was Secretary of Transportation at that time. He took the time to write a handwritten- well, not handwritten, it was typed, but, it was on official stationery, White House stationery with "Secretary of Transportation" on it - and wrote my mother a lovely little, very short note, congratulating her on her 99th birthday. And he named her by her Japanese first name. Very few people knew that my mother, known as Nellie Nakamura, also had a Japanese first name, "Yaye" And her mother and very close family friends would call her by that first name. Secretary Mineta wrote, addressed her as Yaye. So my mother really appreciated that. I have that letter, I framed it along with the envelope that says Secretary of Transportation. That's one of my good memories about Norm and his friendship with my family. Also he, his mother, his parents were go-betweens for my uncle and aunt, Roy and Pauline Rudo. When they got married, they had to have - they didn't have to, but the tradition was to have what they call baishakunin<sup>7</sup> [媒酌人] which is the go-between. And it was a formality, but it's kind of like having a godmother or godfather, I guess. I don't know. But, when they got married, the Menendez were there. the minute his parents were there with baishakunin.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 25:24

Oh my gosh, these stories are amazing. I'm learning so much from you. I just want to thank you for what you're doing for me on a very personal basis. And I know I'm losing all my objectivity

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<sup>6</sup> Mayor of San Jose, CA from 1971-1975, also served in presidential cabinet for George W. Bush and Bill Clinton.

<sup>7</sup>Sort of like godparents - usually a more prominent family that could take in another child. In marriage, you had to have a sort of "sponsor" or "go-between". Because the Mineta's was a prominent family, and Norman's father spoke English, and also had an insurance company as well, it made sense to choose.

again, but I live to learn.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 25:43

You know, everybody learns something, you never know what you're going to learn and who you are going to meet up with.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 25:52

I'd like to meet as many people as possible for [inaudible] and walks of life and everything else that I can. So that's my secret to that. But I'm getting a very vivid picture of what your life was like and what it was like to be Japanese American, specifically in Mountain View before the war. I'd like to shift us to talk a little bit more about what happened at the start of the war. Starting with a question that I think is something you've touched upon in the past. Why do you feel Japanese Americans were called out?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 26:33

Well it's because I think there was a history of discrimination against not only Japanese, but Chinese; the Chinese, before the Japanese, were utilized as workers to build the railroads. And then when their usefulness was diminishing, then they sort of had an Exclusion Act<sup>8</sup>. I don't know too much about that, but then they got the Japanese to come and they didn't want them to become professionals. They wanted them to become farmers, and they didn't want to give them citizenship because that would give them more sprint. But amazingly after World War Two, not long after, the tide had of discrimination had changed. Even though we were at war with Japan, suddenly, having war brides come home with the service people, things changed quite a bit. Although when my husband and I married in 1953, there were very few interracial marriages, very few.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 27:59

In some states it was illegal.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 28:02

It was an illegal, yes. And I think it was illegal even in California, up to 10 years before we were married. I didn't know that, I'm not sure, but we met in college and we were both in the art department together. When you get people together, young people together, they're likely to fall in love and get married. Which we did. My husband and I both worked as artists at Disney studios and worked on *Sleeping Beauty*. We had a really quite, interesting life. And then we quit there and lived in a VW bus in Europe for a year. And that was quite an adventure. In fact in July, well, yeah, it is July now. End of this month, this daughter of a coworker, an animator from Disney, the coworker had a little daughter that was six years old when we met her. And now this six year old is 70-something years old, and she's coming to the United States and her grandchildren are driving her from Chicago to LA on Route 66.

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<sup>8</sup> The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was extended until 1943, only allowed small quotas of teachers, students, and merchants

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 29:45

Oh my gosh.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 29:48

Route 66 apparently is very famous among Europeans.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 29:53

Yes, I think even more so than among Americans,

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 29:58

I think more so, so that's going to be interesting. Here's this six year old turning into a 77 year old, but here I was in my twenties and now I'm 91. So that's kind of amazing to me as well.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 30:19

It's amazing how much one can see in a lifetime, especially one like yours and your mother's, which -

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 30:28

Right.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 30:29

But also at the same time to think about how short that period of time is, even when it's long. Yeah.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 30:35

When you're talking about history, it is a short time.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 30:39

It's our book. It's one of the reasons that history - doing this kind of work, thinking about history, fascinates me because we're making history every moment we breathe. And so how do we make the most of that? How do we capture what matters from this?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 30:53

It reminds me, I want to send you a book. It's a book that my brother... I'm going to show you the book just a moment.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 31:05

You mentioned the book in the podcast, and I was going to take a note to ask you if I could get a copy. So thank you.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 31:13

Here's the book.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 31:14

Oh, it's beautiful.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 31:16

Yes it is. And these are photographs of my mother and father and all these pictures are from my mother's album. She saved every picture she ever had. Here she's three months old.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 31:36

Oh.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 31:37

This is a teenager here with her sister. She's a hundred years here and she and my father were married and this is them in Los Angeles. But I'm going to send you this book.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 31:51

Thank you. I will send you my address. You could send it to the Mountain View Historical Association PO box, but it would get squashed.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 31:59

Oh yeah. Yeah.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 32:00

I will send you a better address.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 32:02

Give me a better address.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 32:04

Would it be possible to get two copies, one for our archives and one for my personal archives. Thank you. I will send that over after the call. Thank you so much. I'm actually honored to read that book. Yeah. And as I've hinted, I love memoirs.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 32:19

Oh yeah. And this is written by, not by me, but by a professional writer, who's written other books. I'm trying to think of another book that actually made it into libraries. It was about Caucasian people who were kind to the Japanese Americans during the war

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 32:43

I will look into it.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 32:45

Yeah. And the author's name, his name was Siegel, Spiegel. S-H-I-E. And, and the seagull is S-I-E-G-E-L or S, I don't know. But he has written other books; it's well worth looking at because it not only tells my mother's biography, but my grandmother's story. And of course it's interspersed with about 150 photographs. I think it will be interesting reading. I did give the first edition to the Historical Society, but the second edition is more interesting to get the pictures at the front. And some of the titles or the print are different.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 33:48

Excellent. We would love and cherish a copy of that, so thank you. If we can go back a little bit, to the, about your personal experience with internment, I have a variety of questions specific to you and your family's experience. And again, what it was like specifically in Mountain View when you, when your family was preparing to leave. So when you found out that this was happening and you had to prepare to leave, how did you personally feel?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 34:24

Well, I was naturally crestfallen because I thought I was an American, and I was being told that maybe you're not an American. Maybe your an enemy... I'll send you, I'll forward you a memoir. I wrote about that experience.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 34:47

Please do. Yeah.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 34:50

Yeah. I will. I'll make myself a little note.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 35:00

I mean, how you feel makes perfect sense. And if I'm doing the math right, you were def- you were around 12, so an age where you're really starting to understand a little bit about the adult world and your role in it, right. Impressionable time.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 35:15

Yeah.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 35:17

So here you are, basically an adolescent, you're feeling that you don't belong. What was the Mountain View community like when they found out about what was happening?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 35:32

What's funny is that, is how I have blotted all that out of my memory. I didn't have cousins or other people to talk with or communicate with, and of course, as soon as we found out that we were going to be interned, well, we were not allowed to meet with other people. In other words, they discouraged us to, because we might be spies.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 36:00

Passing on the knowledge. Right.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 36:01

Yes. Right, right. So anyway, it was mostly, more of a closeness between me and my mother, with our family. And then my parents were very good about not making us hysterical. In other words, they calmed us down. My mother made me in a couple of outfits to make me feel like this was going to be a vacation. I don't know that... anyway, I think my parents did a lot to just sort

of assuage our ears.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 36:47

Do you remember how your personal friends, like your friend Trini and then your neighbors, the other Calvos, do you remember how any of them reacted?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 36:56

Well, of course, Trini and the Calvos were really, were sad that we were going, but they were very helpful in taking some of our furniture and things and putting it in their barn and just putting things and then making sure that the house was not going to be vandalized or anything. But the one thing that I didn't think I mentioned, my father had had a fairly new car which was a black, I want to say Buick, but it was fairly new. Maybe it was brand new. I don't know. But when people found out that we were going to be evacuated, there was a man that came to the door and said, I want to buy your car. And he gave a price. I don't know how much it was. \$900, let's say. And, so my father said, okay, but he said I have to use it until I go. So just come right before we go. And then we can make the transaction then, but a day before we were to go, he comes and gives my father \$90, a pittance compared to what it really was worth. And so this happened a lot. My father lost that, his car. But if he said no, the car would just rust in the garage and maybe he didn't know whether he would ever come back. Nobody said you're coming back. So he thought, well, maybe \$90 is better than nothing. So that's typical of what happened to a lot of people who sold their things for nothing or plowed up their crops because... So that was a very sad thing, but we lost less because we had less to begin with. Some people lost a lot because they were fairly well off. But, anyway, that's the way it was.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 39:10

So thinking back to the process, there was that period, the very short period of time where everyone met at the Mountain View train station. And we do, in case you don't have photos of that, Mountain View Historical Association has quite a good number of photos of those days. What do you remember of being there at the train station?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 39:37

All I remember were these saw horses, they made kind of like a fence around it. ...it wasn't really, but it made me feel like cattle in Kentucky and the compound. And nobody came to say... I don't remember that anybody came to say goodbye. They may have, but I can't remember too much about that. I blotted out, a lot of memories, and my brother has remembered even less than myself. He's 95. And he says he can't remember a lot of this stuff.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 40:29

I'm guessing that the fact you don't remember anyone saying bye is because nobody did.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 40:38

Yeah.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 40:41

I'm having a very vivid sense of what it was like at that train station. And based on the photos I've seen, I'm definitely sensing that moment in time, so you mentioned, from the train from Mountain View train station, you were taken directly to Santa Ana [Santa Anita] racetrack. And then how long after that 'til you went to Heart Mountain<sup>9</sup>?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 41:01

We were at Santa Anita for approximately six months from April to September. And then it took three days to go to Heart Mountain, and we were in Heart Mountain from the fall of '42 to the fall of '43, I think. It was approximately the beginning of the school year. I started junior high school at Minneapolis in the fall. I think I was about a month late.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 41:50

So how did you get to Minneapolis from Heart Mountain? What was it like?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 41:55

The reason that that jump happened after we were in the relocation camp for a while, like the government decided, they didn't really want to keep us all there. And they knew we weren't spies. So they said, if you can find a job that's not on the coast, on either coast, we'll let you go. In fact, I think they didn't even mind us going to the east coast because there were people that went to New York or New Hampshire, whatever. The Quakers were especially kind, and they found universities that would accept these young people who were in the middle of college and put them in schools in Chicago or wherever. And so I credit the Quakers with doing quite a bit and some of the other churches didn't do anything. So, it doesn't say too much about religion, although I think Quakers have always been very kind to the unfortunate.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 43:12

I think that's in the founding, the fabric, the DNA of Quaker's religion by the service-style mission. Oh my goodness. So you were at Heart Mountain, you were still there for at least a year, it sounds like. And interned for at least a year and a half. So during that time, you were either at the racetrack or at Heart Mountain, tell me what your life was like for your family. And also tell me how you personally felt during that experience.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 43:52

Well, there was very little privacy. I'm thinking back now, for my mother and father, they had absolutely no privacy because your entire life was within this one room. And all six of us were just crammed into one room and these metal beds were just one against the next. And there was not much room for walking around. So very little privacy. There was a coal stove that we put coal in and a pot bellied stove. And it did keep us warm or fairly warm, although it was cold enough inside the barracks that we somehow, somebody got some jello and, and tried to make

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<sup>9</sup> Heart Mountain Relocation Center was an incarceration center in Park County, Wyoming where Mountain View Japanese-Americans (and others from California, Washington, and Oregon) were sent when they were forcibly removed from the west coast during WWII.



some jello, but it froze so hard. [Laughs] So actually all our meals were in the mess hall. The food was, I mean, adequate, it was not all that tasty, but, you know. Once the farmers got going, they did amazing things, especially in Wyoming where not much was grown, except sugar beets or something like that. Well, these farmers who knew how to grow things, they grew a lot of their own vegetables. And in fact, they grew so many root vegetables, they built a root cellar to store potatoes and beets and things like that. And they even, I think, had extra to give or do an export to other cities in the area like Cody, or, I think Cody was the closest town. I remember once my teacher-all the teachers were Caucasian- decided to take a half a dozen of her students to her home in Cody, which was maybe 15 miles away. She could only take whatever could fit in her car. Maybe it was five or six people, but I remember walking into this little house, I don't know whether it was a house or an apartment. She went to the refrigerator to get some Coke, or I think it was Coke. And she poured Coke into the little cheese glasses and passed them around. And I was so amazed by this special thing that we got, this Coke, and then going into her dining room, she had a lace tablecloth on her dining room table. And I thought, wow, this is fancy because of course we were eating at the mess hall and that wasn't too fancy for us.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 47:08

How did she get permission to take some of her students?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 47:11

They were pretty liberal about allowing people to get a pass to take into town. In fact, there was a story. I don't know if you know the story about how Norm Minetta first met Senator Alan Cranston. No, Alan Simpson was the Senator from Minnesota, but he was only 11 years old, same as Norm Monetta was 11, and they were Boy Scouts. And so, Alan Simpson's father, I think, was a scout leader, and decided to take his Scouts over to the camp and just to be friendly. And so that was when these two boys, Senator Simpson and Norm Minetta were 11 year old boys. That's when they first met and they kept in touch and they were pen pals for all those times. And then when Norm became mayor of San Jose, he got a letter from Alan Simpson who was some state official. And then throughout the years, as they went up in stature, they kept their friendship. And even, when they had these reunions at Heart Mountain, Alan Simpson and Norm Minetta would also always be the keynote speakers. And they would be like because Simpson must be six foot six, and Norm Moneta is maybe five foot five, but he was a typical short Japanese.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 49:01

Very short. The one time I met him, I remember that. Plus his kindness. Quite a man. I know that the experience, even though there were moments of hope and moments of people who were doing their best and people really coming together, I know that it's the experience that really impacted you. How did that time impact you? Not just in the moment, but how did they influence the rest of your life?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 49:38

Well, it made me, it sort of made me feel that, in order to feel that I was competent or good enough, I had to be twice as good as the next person in order to be -so, even to this day, I have that feeling that maybe I'll be accepted as somebody if I'm very, very good at whatever I'm doing, so I can continue to have that feeling. And then another thing is that, I don't know whether Napoleon said it, but what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. That's another thing. And then another thing that I remember is when life gives you lemons, you make lemonade. So I probably would think of that to make a positive view.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 50:47

I think very well at that, I think. But, I'm curious, you leave and you go to Minneapolis, but what happens in Minneapolis and how and when do you all come back to Mountain View? I think you all came back.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 51:04

Yes. When the war was over, then we were given permission to come back to California, but unfortunately most people didn't have anywhere to go back to. They sometimes were put up in churches or lived in trailers or did other things temporarily until they got back on their feet. But we made that transition pretty well I think. Of course I was a kid and my parents might have something else to say about that. And of course, my father being a farmer, had no farm equipment. So he did what a lot of Japanese farmers did. They became gardeners. So then the Japanese farmer became a gardener because all you need is a pickup truck and a lawnmower. Or you can just go from house to house and pick up easy money. So that's what my father did.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 52:10

So that was his career, the rest of his life?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 52:13

Yes. For the rest of his life. I kinda think that this whole internet thing was the hardest on my father, his generation, people who were not efficient at English. I mean, he could speak basic English, but he didn't read novels and things like that. And, although he was very handsome, a handsome man, when he dressed up, I mean, he looked like a professor. In fact, one time, one time, my mother's best friend, Janet Winters, took my mother and father to Stanford as her guests because she was a poet, a writer and a poet, and they were having a reception. So my father dressed up in his suit and tie, and my mother and he went took Janet Winters to Stanford and they went to this reception. And while they were having their -their [unclear] -a man comes up to my father and says, "And what department do you teach at?" And my father was so embarrassed because he was just a gardener. He was not a professor. So he told my mother, "I'm never going to one of those things again.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 53:42

[Laughs] Did he?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 53:44

Which reminds me, Janet Winters was the wife of Iver winters who was a professor of English at Stanford. And they lived only within walking distance of my parents' home. Now, my parents bought a house on Jordan Avenue, I think for, say, \$10,000, I want to say \$10,000, in 1948 or '49. It's a third of an acre within walking distance of El Camino Real. And recently after my mother died, it went to a nephew, a grand nephew, he sold it for over \$2 million. I mean, real estate has just done amazing things in those days. And of course in the 1930s, Mountain View was a little one-horse town with a lot of, with just a few farmers and people like that. And now of course, Silicon Valley, there's nothing but gentrification that's happened up there.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 55:12

You, you and I lived in Mountain, I think you left Mountain View in the early sixties. If I'm not mistaken, you and I are climbing a mountain. He was separated by at least 40 years. The town we both love is practically two different places. So it's interesting how we both love something so different, but I think for many of the same reasons.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 55:35

Oh yeah.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 55:36

So I think it's very interesting to compare and contrast.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 55:42

Yeah. But I want to tell you a story about my mother's best friend and about housing because when my mother and father were living in that old Victorian house that they were going to, that they tore down; they bought this third of an acre on Jordan Avenue. And, they, my mother on the back of an envelope, drew a little design for a small house, but it had to have three bedrooms. And, and it had to have certain features that my mother wanted, so she had Nelson - I remember the architect's name, Nelson, Ax Nelson<sup>10</sup>. And I think he was, I don't know, somebody who went to Africa to help the Africans. Anyway, he was a do-gooder, I mean, in a good sense. He was the architect of his mother's house, built this little stucco house. But my mother at that time was a little afraid that... sometimes people might torch the house because these incidents were happening to Japanese-American people who lived in the neighborhood and people didn't like that idea. So they would trash or torch the house.

**IdaRose Sylvester:**

In what year?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:**

Neighbors. They didn't know, they were afraid, but yeah. And so, Janet Winters, my mother's

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<sup>10</sup> From Margaret: "Ax was probable short for Axel. He was a builder of homes but also adept at designing them so no other professional was used to build the house. He was a Quaker and friend of the Duvenecks and Winters both friendly to helping the downtrodden."

good friend says, “Well, what we'll do is we will put the house in our name. And then in a year after you live in the house as renters, then you'll get the house back”, They made some kind of a, I don't know how they did it. They sold them the house for a dollar, or, I mean, they did something to make it so that the owner was still Caucasian and not Japanese to begin with for one year. And then at the end of the year, when the neighbors found out that these Japanese people living there were okayt, and they weren't going to torch their house, then my mother and father got the title of the house. But see, but the thing is, we went out on a limb to do that, you know? And then of course, another name comes to mind is Duveneck. I don't know if you've heard of the Duveneck. Oh, of course. Well, I'll tell you a story about the Duveneck annex. I was a counselor there at the Hidden Villa Ranch<sup>11</sup> for a couple of years. And Mrs. Duveneck took a liking to me, and she had heard that I was, I liked some artist. I'm trying to think of the artist's name now, but anyway, some artist I knew, I just casually said this artist's name and she kept it in her head. And on her own, she goes to Mills College finds out that this guy by the name of... trying to think of the name now... my senior moment has come. Turns out that he used to go to teach a summer session there. So she thought, oh, Margaret would really like it if she gets to teach, take a class from Fletcher Martin was his name. But actually I had mentioned David Stone, Martin, which is another Martin that I was interested in, and not Fletcher Martin. But of course, by the time she had made all these moments without telling me, she says, she calls up my mother and says, tell Margaret that I will pick her up and take her to Mills College. And I've made arrangements for her to work for the drama coach. I'm trying to think of his name now. He has a little four year old boy that maybe she could be an au pair for this little boy. And that would be in exchange for her being there. And I still remember the address to that place. That was Number One Min-Kwon road. And it was Ming Quong Road<sup>12</sup>. I mean, sounds very Chinese-y but, also the house was a stucco house with a tile roof. So maybe that tile roof kind of gave you a little feeling of Chinese. I don't know, but it was a beautiful campus then. And, probably still now. And even then it was kind of a ritzy, a small college girls college to go to. And so for that one summer - I didn't have the nerve to tell Mrs. Dubrovnik that Fletcher Martin was not a David Stone Martin. She never did find out, but nonetheless, Fletcher Martin was a fantastic artist in a different way, but I really got to enjoy him and in fact, Fletcher Martin took a liking to me and to a Mexican artist, young man, and invited us to Omar Khayyam<sup>13</sup> in San Francisco for the last dinner before he left to go back to Florida. So, here I was, maybe not even 20, maybe 18 or 19 and eating at Omar Cayan's in South San Francisco. It was really elegant. He even invited us to the train when he left and this other kid, I can't remember this Mexican boy's name, but anyway, we had quite a summer, but that summer was wonderful. And in fact, the

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<sup>11</sup> From [https://www.hiddenvilla.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/HV\\_History.pdf](https://www.hiddenvilla.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/HV_History.pdf): “Through summer camps, school programs, workshops, performances, corporate programs, rental facilities and more, Hidden Villa serves over 30,000 visitors each year. Hidden Villa’s focus is on environmental education and sustainable agriculture, while sharing an abiding respect for all living things as an essential part of the mission.”

<sup>12</sup> Was within the confines of Mills College

<sup>13</sup> From Margaret: “Persian mathematician who wrote the Rubaiyat. Wm Saroyan owner of the restaurant named Omar Khayyam in San Francisco was a famous writer who was a friend of this artist and owed him favors.”

drama coach had an emergency, said they were putting on the play “Noah” and it had to do with animals and stuff. And so he said “the giraffe got sick and we want you to stand in for the giraffe.”.

**IdaRose Sylvester:**

Giraffe understudy. [Laughs]

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:**

I was a giraffe I didn't have to say anything. I just wandered around but yeah. [Laughs] Right, exactly. And I wore those papier-mache things. Just being there on the campus, rubbing gambles on all these rich kids was just an amazing, amazing experience for me, a poor, racial person. And, so I just got a taste of how the other side lives.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:03:44

Is this experience with the Duvanics and with Mills. Did that bring you to your career in animation or?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:03:53

Oh, no, my career in Disney. That was my husband's idea. When he was a young high school kid, he was the art editor of his high school paper, and he did all the cartoons. And so his dream was to work at Disney to be a cartoonist. And as a matter of fact, when we were roaming around Europe, in our VW bus, we settled in Barcelona and we stayed there for a couple of months, in a Pension<sup>14</sup>, and he did a hundred storyboards of us of a car, of a comic strip, and he was going to sell it, so he was very, very, serious about this cartoon thing. And when we lived in New York, he went to, I can't think of the [name], the syndicate, it was the biggest syndicate. He got a very nice rejection letter saying that they liked his cartoon work, but they said, in order for them to put it in the paper, they'd have to bump one of the others off so that they could make room for him. And that was in the time of King Rue and another comic strip that was very popular in those days. But anyway, my husband made the effort and got a very nice rejection note. And so that was part of our career. And we've ended up actually both becoming teachers because we got a teaching credential at the same time, we got our bachelor's degree in art.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:05:48

Okay.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:05:49

Because we knew that the chances of becoming rich as an artist were practically nil. So the teaching credential was our insurance policy. And then as it turned out, you don't get rich being a teacher, but you do have stability.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:06:12

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<sup>14</sup> European Apartment

That rings true today, too. There are jobs for teachers.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:06:15

That's true. One of the few professions that offer a pension, so I get a pension.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:06:27

What did you wind up teaching? After.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:06:29

I was a special ed teacher, I taught kids with dyslexia. These are kids with normal intelligence, but who have kind of-

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:06:41

Learning challenges.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:06:43

And have trouble reading and writing because they see things differently.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:06:49

Right. Oh, I think you were a little bit ahead of your time. What does your husband wind up teaching?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:07:01

Well, he was an art teacher, of course. So being an art teacher at one time they were cutting back on the arts. So they asked him to teach a history class, which he did, and then he liked it so well that when he retired, he said, I want to take a ship and be like Magellan and go around the world. So actually we did, we took a container ship that went from Long Beach around the world, 17 ports, and ended back in the Long Beach; went through the Panama Canal and the Suez Canal, both. I didn't have to pack and unpack. And, it was very interesting. I thought it would be boring, but it was not boring.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:07:54

You seemed like you were uniquely suited for each other in many regards, and it really weighs. It's really hard to find. How do the two of you meet? It sounded like you met when you were both quite young.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:08:06

Yes. But the trip around the world, we were retired, so we're not young then, but I think you hit the nail on the head. We were both willing to do stuff that other people necessarily would not have done. So, those are the times that we treasure the most because my husband took a sabbatical leave for a year. And we took our 3 sons out of school and put them in French schools when we lived in France and he did watercolor paintings for a year. And I learned how to make mayonnaise and Poireaux<sup>15</sup> soup. That was an adventure. I mean, living out of your own country

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<sup>15</sup> Poireaux soup is an onion leek and and potato soup common in France.

and trying to - of course we had our district school district paid, three quarters paid. So our checks went directly to the Bank Populare<sup>16</sup>, and I wrote checks in French. No, that was quite a thing. I was the check writer, and then this was before credit cards, so it wasn't writing checks. But that was an adventure in itself.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:09:30

When you both traveled together around the world, did you feel - this is one of the more personal questions I think I have. How did you feel, as a Japanese-American, that people accepted you and did you feel that people accepted mixed race couple, you as a mixed-race couple?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:09:50

You know, it's funny, but when I was with Brent, because of his attitude towards me, I never felt different from him, in other words, racially. So I couldn't see myself unless I passed the store window and I could, I glanced over there and I saw this tall, blue eyed blonde, and this short Asian lady; who's that?

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:10:18

Just again, you're telling me how the two, are you sort of where the perfect compliment that you were. There's differences and no emphasis.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:10:32

Yeah. Yeah. So I couldn't see myself. I mean, if I could see myself, I might've felt differently, but somehow I felt like I belonged, there was no...

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:10:45

So when you came back to Mountain View though, right after Minneapolis, did you start to feel a sense of -

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:10:58

I, yeah, that's when I felt, gosh, it's all these, these kids that I knew when I left, I was going into seventh grade. And when I came back, I was a sophomore. So, I knew these people, but they didn't change that much. And I know that they knew who I was, but just kind of looked through me. Like they never knew me, you know? And the only person that I'd socialize with was Trini. We caught the bus together. Now she was one year ahead of me because she was about six or seven months older than me. And, oh, here's another thing: my mother took me to school when I was six or five, I guess. I can't remember how old I was, but anyway, I was in school and struck up a friendship with Trini for a couple of weeks or a couple of months. I don't know how long, but some lady told the principal that I was two months under age or whatever it was where the cut off was. And so the principal had no recourse but to tell my mother that I had to wait until next year or so. So I had to leave school, after meeting my good friend Trini. And then of course we moved the house and when we got to the new ranch, lo and behold there's Trini, and we

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<sup>16</sup> Bank Populare was the bank on the main street of Canet Plage where we lived.

recognized each other even after a year. So that was just a, really a good, a good omen. It was really great.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:12:48

So it sounds like she was someone who did when you came back, welcomed you back.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:12:53

Yeah. Yeah, of course, because for a few months or so, I can't remember how long we lived in that, my father's home built house and the Calvos still lived at that ranch and same place and Trini and I would catch the bus at the corner of San Antonio road in our driveway. And that was near the railroad tracks and the Pachetti's<sup>17</sup>, I don't know if they're still around...

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:13:24

Thanks. So other descendants probably are by different names. We have that a lot when people say, "oh, I'm descended from, like..." It's a wonderful thing. Oh, I lost my train of thought, just left the station. Speaking of trains. I do have a question. So, reentry into Mountain View definitely sounds like it was a mixed bag.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:13:55

It was a mixed bag. Yeah. But the thing is-

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:13:59

[inaudible] he was gone at that point.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:14:01

Yeah. But there was something about the high school, even though most of the kids were kind of aloof. There were a few that really, I became very close to. In fact, the two girls were really good friends. They invited me. One of them got a used car, a Jalopy, really of her parents. And somehow her parents allowed her to drive that Jalopy to Fallen Leaf Lake. That's near Lake Tahoe. With Fallen Leaf Lake, me and this other girl. So the three girls, we were high school seniors. I think it was between our junior and senior years. We drove all the way to Fallen Leaf Lake. And there were tent cabins there and we rented a tent cabin. I think Stanford has added a little enclave there. I remember one incident when I slathered cold cream on myself and I swam across one of the arms of Fallen Leaf Lake and the girls rented a rowboat and they row boated with me. In case something happened.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:15:30

Smart.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:15:33

Boy, was it cold! I tell you that was snowmelt. And the funny thing is I still swim today.

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<sup>17</sup> Pachetti was the name of the property owner



**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:15:42

That was something you were doing this morning.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:15:45

Yeah. Yeah. So I still love swimming. I had my two younger sons to become high school swimmers and water polo, and now they don't swim anymore. And I'm doing all this.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:15:59

You keep saying, it's the best exercise anyone could possibly do. I loved it at one time, but access to a pool has been an issue.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:16:09

You know, I belong to a health club and it's free because my health insurance pays for it.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:16:18

That's excellent.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:16:20

So, it's free for me. So I just take advantage of that.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:16:24

I should look into that.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:16:26

Check your insurance company because not all insurance companies - mine is United healthcare and they take care of...

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:16:37

Preventative medicine, right. They're smart. So I've got a couple of more questions. I know you need to run relatively soon to get to the, is it *The Sound of Music*, the musical or the movie?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:16:51

Oh, well do you mean tonight? The musical, it's a Pacific, PCPA and the Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts. It's live theater and I've got new hearing aids and apparently there's some theater technology where the sound goes from the stage right to your hearing aid. So I'm going to ask about that.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:17:23

Oh, I miss live theater. It's so good to be there.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:17:27

Oh, it's wonderful. I've seen *The Sound of Music* a couple of times before, but it's still a great, great musical.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:17:38

It is. Now you're making me want to go to the theater. First things first, this is probably way

better than theater for me. I'm trying to think. Sort of a strange question, but from the experience that the Japanese Americans faced in World War Two - experience is not the right word, the core, was there, what was the lasting impact on Japanese Americans? Did anything good come of it?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:18:11

Yes. I would say the good thing that came of it is that, shortly after the war ended, the whole terror, the whole feeling for Japanese people changed. I mean, all of a sudden it became fashionable to eat Japanese food, Japanese architecture, and a lot of Japanese things. So that part was good. And as a matter of fact, more intermarriages happened and in fact, I have three sons and they're all married to non-Japanese people. One is married to a Peruvian. One is married to a Luxembourgish girl. And the third is married to an American whose mother is of Swedish descent. And her father was born in Baghdad, Iraq.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:19:14

Wow.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:19:15

So that is an international bunch of kids.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:19:22

A true melting pot in your family. It's wonderful to hear that. I don't know if it, what drove it, if it was guilt on the part of the American people or what drove people to be curious about Japanese and embrace Japanese culture. Did you sense that the opportunities as people became more, I guess, accepting of Japanese culture, do you think that the opportunities Japanese Americans had in their careers and in school and socially, do you think those changed too?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:19:52

Absolutely. I mean, when I started teaching, it was unusual for a Japanese person to be a teacher. Now, I mean, there's so many Japanese, and then there's so many mixed marriages that you can't really tell what the person is and so on. And it doesn't matter that much. As a matter of fact, I have three sons and they're all engineers. Whereas if, of course, there's a mixture. They're half Japanese and half Caucasian. But before World War Two, there were probably very few, if any, Japanese. You could go to college and get an engineering degree, but that didn't mean anyone would hire you. See, it's the same thing with any of the professions. I had an uncle that went to the University of the Pacific in 1930-something. And he was working for a law degree and that was very unusual for those days. Of course he passed away. He got TB, and tuberculosis was a critical disease in those days that, if he had finished and not passed away, he would have been one of the first lawyers, Japanese American lawyers in state. So anyway, gosh, I've been blabbing.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:21:34

I wouldn't call it blabbing Margaret [laughs], blabbing is a great word that you feel the word

when you say it, you just know right away what it can mean, but actually let me turn the tables and ask you if there's anything else that you'd like to share. I guess I'm leaving it fairly open. Particularly, as it related to your experience in Mountain View or after Mountain View, anything I've missed or anything you would just like to share.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:22:08

Gosh, I think I've just about covered almost everything. I can email you later if I think of something.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:22:16

That would be great. Gosh. Can you think of anyone else I should talk to? I know that one of our concerns is that many people who hold this history, at the time you were growing up in Mountain View, many of them are gone. But, if you can think of anyone else who might still be here, I'll let you think about that. And you can always call me.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:22:42

Okay. Yeah. My brother was 95. I could mention him, but he's very funny. He'll say to me, I don't remember. But maybe if somebody called, he might remember, I don't know.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:23:04

I found it in my own family that "I don't remember". It was a code for, "I'm not sure I want to talk about it".

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:23:13

Exactly.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:23:14

Or, maybe I'm not sure how to write, sometimes prompting by other people would make it happen. and you're right. Prompting by someone who's not a family member can be ....

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:23:24

Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:23:26

So you had three siblings, is that correct?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:23:34

I'm sorry?

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:23:36

You, did you have three siblings?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:23:38

Well, three siblings. Yes. And my oldest is still living, my oldest sibling is still living, he's 95 and lives in Fremont. And then my younger, the next sibling, 18 months younger than me, passed

away in the internment. You know that, or maybe I didn't say that. In Heart Mountain, right before we were... I don't know how long ago, but anyway, he passed away of spinal meningitis.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:24:19

Oh my goodness.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:24:19

In the camp, but now, we don't know. He may have, might have passed away anyway, had he not been to the internment camp, but on the other hand, it is a disease that is rampant among crowded conditions, you know? So, although my mother was amazing that she didn't, she wasn't, I mean, she naturally was sad, but she didn't blame the internment on that. So she had his remains cremated and buried with my father in the Altimation Cemetery, in Palo Alto. So anyway.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:25:04

I'm so sorry. That is extraordinarily more challenging than losing a sibling would normally be. Which actually makes me think of a question around resilience that I didn't think to ask until just now, but how have you been so resilient and how was your mother, your parents, your siblings so resilient, and I don't want to say forgiving...

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:25:38

I don't know.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:25:40

How do you do that?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:25:42

I don't know. I think actually this experience made us even more determined to make a life for ourselves because we didn't want to say, "Oh, I turned out this way because I was interned. And so therefore I turned out badly". I feel very fortunate. I've had a wonderful marriage, we were married for 65 years. And, we had a similar spirit, I think, and we like the same kind of things. Pretty much all the - we were different in many ways too, we had our ups and downs, but I think we were both forgiving enough to know that nobody's perfect.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:26:33

It sounded like you were very, very aligned.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:26:37

Anyway, yeah. When I think of it, I think, gosh, all the wonderful things that we did together, it was that we both enjoyed those same things. And, so, if I died tomorrow, I'd say, well, I've been blessed with a good life. And then of course, now my children are doing well. I have three retired engineer sons, and my grandchildren are doing *really* well. I have a, my oldest son has a grandson. My oldest son, who lives in Luxembourg, has a son who teaches English, he's 28. That's my oldest grandson. My oldest granddaughter is 23, graduated from Cal Poly in industrial

engineering and has a fantastic job. And her younger brother is a junior at Berkeley. And majoring in chemical engineering. So they're all smart guys. And so I feel, everybody, all my relatives are smarter than me. And I'm just really pleased.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:28:12

I might suggest that there's, I don't think that they're smarter than you. I think you should really reflect upon what you've given them in your children and then through them, your grandchildren that makes them who they are. And I see a lot of who you are in what you're saying about that. I think your resilience, your compassion, your, the way you view the world, I think all of that reflects and got passed on.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:28:46

Anyway, I'm pleased with the way my life has been going.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:28:51

We should all be so lucky to say that for sure. And there's a lot of power in saying it. I know you need to get going. So I'd like to ask you three quick questions that are just part of our demographics for this interview. What would you say is your racial or ethnic identity?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:29:07

My what?

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:29:11

Racial or ethnic identity?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:29:14

My ethnic identity?

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:29:15

Yes.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:29:16

I am Asian American, Japanese American.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:29:21

Excellent. And what would you say is your gender identity?

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:29:25

My...?

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:29:26

Gender.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:29:27

Oh, gender. I'm a female, I think.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:29:33

Yeah, that's fine by me.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:29:37

Nowadays.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:29:39

I think is actually big these days. And would you mind telling us your age one more time? Just for the record.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:29:46

91.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:29:48

Wonderful. Well, thank you absolutely so much. I will send you my address. Feel free to email me anytime. I really hope you make it to Mountain View at some point, and you can come visit the Historical Association, come to one of our meetings, be our guest.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:30:06

Yeah. I used to do that when my mother lived in on San Antonio, when she lived on Jordan Avenue, I could stay, I could stay over there, but now that they sold the property, I've got no place to go. So anyway,

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:30:21

When did, what year did she pass?

**Margaret Nakamura C Mooper:** 1:30:24

Well, she passed in 2010y brother, my younger brother, lived there until a couple of years ago when he passed. And then he willed his house to a nephew, a grand nephew, and the grand nephew just sold it. So it's no longer our house. In fact, I think - I don't know if they've raised it and put something else up there now, but, I'm not sure. I haven't seen it for a long time.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:31:02

I might go take a peek and leave but well, if you want to. We do hope you still come back to Mountain View despite not having a home in Jordan and we will welcome you with open arms when you do that.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:31:17

Oh yeah. Well, I really enjoyed talking to you. And your first name always reminds me of a book title or something.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:31:31

Maybe you're thinking IdaRose from *The Music Man*, since you are a big fan of musical theater.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:31:38

Anyway, it has a historical sound to it somehow.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:31:44

Perfect. Thank you so much, Margaret. I hope we talk again soon and enjoy your theater tonight.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:31:52

We'll thank you very much.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:31:54

Take care.

**Margaret Nakamura Cooper:** 1:31:55

Okay.