Interview of Bill Hosokawa – October 22, 1991

From the Archives of the Wyoming Department of State Parks & Cultural Resources

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- Subject: William (Bill) Kumpai Hosokawa.
- Occupation: Editor and columnist for the *Denver Post*.
- Born: January 30, 1915, Seattle, Washington.
- Died: November 9, 2007.
- Interviewer: Mark Junge.
- Interview date: October 22, 1991.
- Place of Interview: Lakewood, Colorado.
- Topic of interview: racial discrimination and Japanese internment during WWII at the Heart Mountain Relocation Camp east of Cody, Wyoming.
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Transcriber's notes: I have added some reference footnotes to this transcript where I thought appropriate. In most cases I have deleted redundant ands, ers, uhs, buts, false starts, etc. If I deleted an entire phrase, I have inserted ellipses … Where you find brackets [ ] I have added words for explanation or to complete an awkward sentence. Parentheses ( ) are used for incidental non-verbal sounds, like laughter. Words emphasized by the speaker are italicized.

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Introduction: By Sue Castaneda, Program Coordinator

November, 2007 (Background music plays)

Bill Hosokawa, a former editor and reporter, died late last week. He was 92. During his 38 years at the Post, he held several positions including War Correspondent in Korea and Vietnam. He was a columnist, editor of the Sunday Magazine, and Editorial Page Editor. He was also among thousands of Japanese-Americans forced from their homes and into internment camps by the government during World War II. He was profoundly affected by his time at Heart Mountain Camp in Cody, Wyoming. Hosokawa was just 26 when he was sent from his home in Seattle to the camp in 1942 with his wife and infant son. While at Heart Mountain, Hosokawa organized and became the editor of the Heart Mountain Sentinel, a newspaper distributed to camp residents. He was released from Heart Mountain in 1943. What follows here is an interview with Hosokawa in 1991 by author and historian Mark Junge for a book titled The Wind is my Witness.

This podcast is a production of the Wyoming State Archives, the Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources.

Heart Mountain: One Man's Struggle Inside a Japanese Internment Camp.

Chapter 1: The Japanese, The New American Enemy

Mark Junge: Today is the twenty-second of October, 1991. My name is Mark Junge and I'm talking with Bill Hosokawa in Lakewood, outside of Denver, Colorado.

Well, let me start out by just asking you some basics. When and where, what date were you born and where were you born?

Bill Hosokawa: Let me start with my father. He was born on a very small farm outside of the city of Hiroshima, Japan. He was sixteen years old when he came to the United States as an immigrant. He liked what he saw. He went back home got married, brought his bride here to the US, and I was born in Seattle, Washington on January 30, 1915. My father, having come to the United States so early, was indeed among the pioneers of the Pacific Northwest. It was nothing but a frontier at the time he arrived. I went to the Seattle public schools. I was graduated from the University of Washington in 1937. As I got out of school, there were two strikes against me: one was, this was the middle of the depression, and very few jobs were available for anybody; the second strike facing me was that I was of Asian parentage, and there was a lot of hostility toward Asians on the Pacific Coast. If my schoolmate, classmate, John Smith, and I, Bill Hosokawa, went to apply for the same job at the same time, [and] we had absolutely identical grades, you know who would have got the job.

So in 1937, uh, '38, I headed out to the far east and I worked for a little over a year on an English language newspaper in Singapore and then I went up to Shanghai and worked about a year, year and a half up there. I could see that war was coming. The United States and Japan were on a collision course, and so I headed back to the US in July of 1940—’41. I had got as far as Japan when all shipping, commercial shipping across the Pacific was suspended. So I went back to Shanghai and booked passage on an American ship. Things would be very different if war did come, and I wanted to get out of there before the shooting started. Some of my friends were stuck there. They waited too long and they were promptly put into Japanese civilian prison camps.

But I got back to Seattle as I say late in October of ’41 and I was looking for a job and not doing a great deal. On the morning of December 7, 1941, I was out in the yard raking up leaves when my mother told me that I had a phone call. I went to the phone and there was a friend of mine, and he said, “Have you been listening to the radio?” and I said, “No.” And he said, “Well, the Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.” And I thought, Oh, boy. It’s really hit the fan now. It was a very dark moment, partly because I knew that we, Americans of Japanese parentage, would be having a very difficult time because of the long history of anit-Orientialism on the West Coast. And this was a feeling that was intensified by racial differences. The German-Americans in World War I had a terrible time. In all parts of the country. And they were white! And you couldn’t tell a German-American from an Irish-American or a French-American.

Well, you *could* tell a Japanese-American. He had certain facial features that identified him immediately, and there had been a lot of discrimination based on race on the West Coast and I knew that that would rise to the surface. It had been pretty well contained up to that time, through the ‘20s and the ‘30s, but I knew it would surface again, and sure enough it did. At first there were political leaders saying, “Let’s not be guilty of bashing”—that’s a new word, but—“bashing these Japanese-Americans like we treated the German-Americans in World War I.” But pretty soon that sort of feeling was overwhelmed as Japan continued to score military victories in the West Coast. There were people saying, “Well. Blood is thicker than water. Here these Japs have been in our midst for 20, 30 years, we don’t know what they’re thinking. They must be loyal to the Emperor, and when the word comes from Tokyo they will rise against us. There are spies in our midst. Who knows what they might do to sabotage the war effort. We’ve got to do something about it.”

Mark Junge: Was there hysteria?

Bill Hosokawa: Indeed there was, yes. There was a great deal of hysteria.

Mark Junge: I’d like to ask you this: People, in a way, I think, forgive themselves for what was done to the people of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast. I think they sort of tend to forgive themselves by saying there was hysteria. Everybody was hysterical. And that—and you can’t blame people when they’re hysterical. But in your book you develop another idea. The idea that—wait a minute! There were certain key individuals all the way along the line here.

Bill Hosokawa: Well, the FBI had been watching the community very, very carefully during the period in which we were moving toward war. On Pearl Harbor Day, and the next day, the FBI swooped down on the Japanese-American communities and picked up aliens who were considered potential dangers to the national security. I emphasize the word ‘potential’. Because none of these people was ever tried on charges of sabotage or espionage. Since there were no trials, there were no convictions, and we must assume under the American system, that a person is considered innocent until found guilty. Well, none of them was ever found guilty. But, J. Edgar Hoover, who was the head of the FBI at that time, said, “We have the situation well in command, er, under control. We don’t have to worry about these people. We know who they are; we know what they’re doing. And we have picked up the ‘potentially’ dangerous people who we have identified over a period of time.”

Now these were aliens. And they expected to be picked up. They were aliens because of the laws of the United States that persons of Asian ancestry could not become naturalized.

Mark Junge: Was that the 1924 law?

Bill Hosokawa: No, it goes back a long time before that. The US naturalization laws very early said you had to be a free, white person to become a naturalized citizen of the United States. The word ‘free’ is in there because there were indentured servants that were brought to the United States. And they had to serve out their period of indenture before they became free. And after the Civil War, the words ‘Persons of African nativity’ were added to the immigration, uh, to the naturalization laws so that Blacks could become naturalized citizens. After the Chinese began to be brought to the United States to supply a demand for labor, some of them tried to get citizenship and they took their cases to court. And the court ruled that you, John Chinese, are neither white, nor of African nativity, and therefore you are off in limbo and there is no provision made for you to become a naturalized citizen. And that same law applied to the Japanese-Americans. And my father had been in this country for over forty years, but the law said, because of your race you cannot become a naturalized citizen.

Now in one of the hearings that preceded the evacuation, there was a mayor of San Francisco, as I recall, was testifying to the, before the Senate, uh, House Committee, and he said, “We have in this community a gentleman named DiMaggio. And Mr. DiMaggio has three sons who play baseball in the major leagues. And Joe DiMaggio plays center field for the New York Yankees, and he’s called the ‘Yankee Clipper.’ Can you imagine Mr. DiMaggio being disloyal to the United States?” Of course it was difficult to see him disloyal to the United States. But the point I want to make is that Mr. DiMaggio could have become a naturalized citizen of the United States if he had desired. My father could not, because the law said he could not.

Mark Junge: Would your father have been—

Bill Hosokawa: He certainly would have! And he applied almost immediately after the laws were changed in the 1950s, or the early ‘60s.

Mark Junge: ’52, the McCarran act? Or something like that?

Bill Hosokawa: Yeah, right there. Uh huh. He’d come to this country as a boy of sixteen. He spent forty years here. Why wouldn’t he want to stay here? His family was here. His children were born here. We had sunk our roots into this country, into the soil of this country.

Mark Junge: When did he die?

Bill Hosokawa: He died in, uhh, fifty—fifty-three.

Mark Junge: Bill, what was his reaction at the time?

Bill Hosokawa: Oh, he was very—at the time of Pearl Harbor? (Affirmative) He was deeply depressed. He was frightened. He was angry. Angry that Japan would start a war in this manner. And he was—he feared for the future. Because he had been here for so long he knew the latent feeling of hostility toward Orientals on the West Coast. But he was very, very angry at Japan for starting the war in that way.

Mark Junge: Had he, or you in your youth on the West Coast in the Seattle area ever encountered any explicit acts of discrimination? I mean, you said if there was a job available, John Smith would have gotten it rather than me, or he would have gotten it first. Did you experience an insulated childhood more or less, in a Japanese-American community, or did you experience, I mean, were you out there sort of having pot shots taken at you?

Bill Hosokawa: I was a Boy Scout, in a troop of Japanese-American boys. I had to pass a swimming test to get a merit badge. I went to a swimming pool, one of the downtown places, and I tried to get in to pass my test. This was a designated place where Boy Scouts could go. And they would not let me in there.

In college, we had what we called Junior Journalism. Junior year, all the journalism majors concentrated on journalism courses and during the Christmas vacation we divided up into teams and we went to newspapers in various parts of the state to work with the working reporters to get the experience, to go with the police reporter down to the Cop Shop, and so forth. I was not permitted to go on that trip. And I asked my Journalism advisor why. And his answer was, “I don’t think the publisher of a newspaper would welcome you.”

Mark Junge: What did you do for experience, then? Did you just not get it?

Bill Hosokawa: I couldn’t go with the rest of the kids that I was with. I got a job on a Japanese-American paper.

Chapter 2: Surely the Japanese Have Spies—

Bill Hosokawa: Well, I'm sure the key individuals knew what was going on there. Their tactics were pretty crude, but they knew what was going on. But getting right to the weeks after Pearl Harbor, keep in mind that there was tremendous anger over the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, followed by the loss of Wake Island, within weeks, by the defeat of, loss of Hong Kong, the loss of Singapore, then Corregidor, the Bataan Death March, and it began to look like Japan was unstoppable. So there was a lot of fear on the West Coast. Hysterical fear. If you think about the logistics, how are they going to sail an invasion army across five thousand miles of ocean and land them on the West Coast? But there was fear that there would be an invasion. That sort of thing could feed on itself.

Mark Junge: Certain key people, though, who maybe fanned the flames, were people who had an axe to grind?

Bill Hosokawa: Yeah, there were some of those. Politicians who jumped on the bandwagon. They were aware of the fear out there, so they got up on their soapboxes and [said], we got to do something about this terrible situation!

Mark Junge: Should have been some mitigating influences along the line of the whole bureaucratic process. Because as you mention in your book, the relocation effort took eleven months, or something like that, and by that time, the tide of war had changed, had turned.

Bill Hosokawa: The tide of war changed in May of 1942, after the Battle of Midway. And the evacuation had just barely started at that time.

Mark Junge: Certain individuals who were making decisions in the bureaucracy, though, must have recognized that, and they could have been ameliorating influences on the president—

Bill Hosokawa: They could have been, but they weren’t. But there was really mass hysteria. There are any number of stories. Like, the lantern, the light that was being swung as a signal, on a bluff overlooking the ocean. They said, somebody’s signaling to a submarine out there. And they went and investigated, and found there was an old farmer, a Japanese farmer, who had to go to the outhouse, carrying the lantern with him. (Laughs)

Another case where there was a red light swinging, like this, on a high hill, and this was five hundred miles inland, and somebody called the Sheriff , there’s a Jap signaling a Japanese spy plane or something. So they went up there. And it was a red light on a barbed wire fence that had been strung there, and had been there for years, so that people wouldn’t run into the barbed wire fence. Been there for years!

And there were stories about arrows, quite round things, shaped like an arrow, pointing at the Boeing Aircraft factory in western Washington. And they went there and found that these were white caps put on tomato plants. And the field was pointed in that direction and had been that way for years, and here were these caps on the tomatoes! (Laughs) But those things got in the paper.

Mark Junge: You know, when we were talking about uh—when I say we—a group of people, my wife and I were up in—where was it? Well, it doesn’t matter. Rock Springs, I guess. There was a group of people, and I was telling ‘em about your book, *Nisei*, and how it moved me, and one lady says, “Well, you know, of course, that there *were* Japanese spies.” I hadn’t gotten to the point in the book where you explain that there was no espionage. But the one thing that I think about in retrospect now, is your incident, the incident that you describe that took place in Hawaii. There was one incident. You remember what that was? The Japanese pilot?

Bill Hosokawa: Oh, the pilot that landed on Niihau? Yeah. Niihau was a very sparsely populated island, a very small island. And the pilot had to land there because something happened to his plane. And eventually he was killed by a Hawaiian who just picked him up and bashed him, bashed his head against a rock, killed him. But there was a guy there, uh, who probably was very much confused, and my recollection is that he wanted to help this pilot, but he too was killed by the people on the island. And the first prisoner of war in the US of World War II was captured by a Japanese-American in the Hawaiian Territorial Guard.

Mark Junge: How do you deal with—are you surprised with people who, even today, say, well you know, of course, there were spies?

Bill Hosokawa: You can't deal with 'em. No matter what you say, no matter what kinda proof you present, their mind-set is such that they *know* that happened. They'll go to their deaths fully convinced—

Mark Junge: One of the purposes of … this book *Nisei*[1]—one of the purposes was to, I understand it, prevent this sort of thing from happening again. Does it ever frustrate you to see this kind of thing even today?

Bill Hosokawa: I guess you'd say it frustrates me. It disgusts me that people can be so set in their beliefs that no amount of proof, no documentary material, nothing will convince them that they are misinformed. Well, what can you do about that? There's a lot of friction between the United States and Japan. A good deal of that I think is due to American resentment over Japan's economic power. The country that was in ashes fifty years ago is now a major economic power, second only to the United States. And there's a lot of feeling that US jobs are being taken away by the Japanese.

Detroit's in a tough way because the Japanese have been able to produce excellent automobiles at a reasonable price, well designed, and Detroit is saying today, admitting that they were asleep and allowed the Japanese to take over. But be that as it may, there's a good deal of resentment in the United States that Japan is taking US jobs. Well, they don’t take into consideration that the people who are buying the Japanese goods are Americans. And the reason they buy Japanese goods is that they are superior products at a reasonable price.

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[1] *Nisei*: *The Quiet Americans*. By William Hosokawa. New York: William. Morrow & Co., 1969

So for a long time instead of saying, hey, we’ve got to wake up here and improve our workmanship, improve our product, it was easier to say, damn the Japs! We don’t see as much of that out here in the West largely because we’re not industrialized here.

Chapter 3: Public and Private Sentiment

Mark Junge: I don't think you come down hard enough on Roosevelt in your book, *Nisei*. I have a feeling—and—excuse me, I don't mean to criticize you—but I have a feeling that you—the book was written in '69?

Bill Hosokawa: Yes.

Mark Junge: —I have a feeling that because of all the post-new deal works that came out in favor of Roosevelt—like Schlesinger's got a whole series of books—that maybe you were just a little reluctant to criticize him personally, saying that perhaps he had bad advisors, perhaps he had a busy schedule, perhaps this, perhaps that.

Bill Hosokawa: Yeah. Well, the records show that the army was getting a great—the war department in Washington—was getting a great deal of pressure from General DeWitt on the West Coast. John L. DeWitt. De Witt was a wishy-washy sort of guy, likely to accept the advice of the last guy he talked to. And he was getting advice from people like Earl Warren who was then the Attorney General of the State of California. The chief law enforcement officer of California. And DeWitt was pleading to Henry Stimson, the Secretary of War, that he was getting a lot of pressure and they needed to do something. Henry Stimson would try to get ahold of Roosevelt before he authorized EO—Executive Order—9066, and Roosevelt, the records show, said he was too busy to see Stimson, but he conferred with him on the telephone, and his advice was, "Well, be as reasonable as you can." So here was this president, the great—lower case—'democrat' deeply interested in human rights—kissing off the Bill of Rights with, "be as reasonable as you can." Within two years, he was to agree to the request, the plea if you will, of the Japanese-Americans to open up military service. And he wrote in his statement that Americanism is a matter of the mind and heart, it has never been a matter of race or ancestry.

Mark Junge: Don’t you ever think, Bill, or haven’t you ever thought about Roosevelt in those moments? How could he write off a hundred’n-ten to a hundred’n twenty thousand people, just like that—“Be as reasonable as you can”—knowing, *knowing* what was going on somewhat at least, on the West Coast?

Bill Hosokawa: Well, I’m inclined to think that Roosevelt was thinking in global terms and he was thinking about the liberation of Europe, and thinking about all those ships being sunk in the Atlantic, and thinking about his relations with the Soviet Union, so a hundred’n ten thousand people on the West Coast really didn’t mean a great deal to him. I think this was one of the great errors of his life. One of the people who had very deep concerns about the evacuation was Senator Taft of Ohio, and he was a very conservative Republican. And if Taft had risen in Congress in the Senate, and said, “Mr. President, I have deep concerns about what we are about to do.” If he had raised the issue, if someone had had the guts to raise the issue in Congress, we might have had something else happen. Now there were people who were prodding at the conscience of Americans on the West Coast. Church leaders, for example. Educators. Various people who—we would call them Civil Libertarians today—people who had deep feelings about the Constitution. People who had deep concerns about what was being done. But they were quickly condemned as ‘Jap lovers’. They were condemned by newspaper editors, by public figures, by politicians, who were very quick to jump on the bandwagon.

Mark Junge: It seems to me that this sort of sway that the perhaps the radical anti-Japanese held, at that time, it seems to me that at least to a Japanese-American, to a Nisei, or an Issei, or a Sansei[2], would cause a person like yourself to say, wait a minute! Democracy is supposed to eventually allow things to work properly. Things will eventually work well, if you just allow these freedoms to work. To me it’s a real statement about human beings. I mean, to me it was a *failure* of democracy.

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[2] Issei refers to Japanese-born Japanese immigrants; i.e., the first generation. Nisei refers to the second generation, and Sansei to the third. In Japanese counting, "one, two, three" is "ichi, ni, san.”

Bill Hosokawa: The commission that investigated the evacuation in the early 1980s found that the evacuation was the result of "a failure of hysteria, a failure of political leadership."

Mark Junge: So the *system* doesn't fail; it's the individuals!

Bill Hosokawa: (laughs) Well, yeah, you could say that. But the system failed us. But it was individual leadership that allowed the system to fail.

Mark Junge: Well, where were people like Westbrook Pegler[3] and Walter Lippmann[4] and some of the journalists, some of the respected journalists? I think Pegler and Lippmann were two examples you give in the book.

Bill Hosokawa: Pegler was *not* a respected journalist. He was well read, but he was not respected. He's the guy that said, "Let them suffer," referring to us. But Walter Lippmann was one of the great disappointments. Walter Lippmann had a position in the media at that time that has never been repeated. Almost anybody of any influence read Lippmann twice or three times a week, however often he wrote his column. He was a very thoughtful man. I think he was genuinely disturbed by what was happening on the West Coast. But he committed the cardinal error of failing to talk to people on various sides of the issue. He talked to people like Earl Warren, people in charge of, people in power on the West Coast, and he got only their side of the story. I don't think he ever talked to a single Japanese-American. There were Japanese-American spokesmen, primarily in the Japanese-American Citizens League who could have given him a more balanced picture. But he did not talk to them. And so he wrote the column saying, "We have to remove these people from the West Coast as a national security measure." He was as responsible as anybody in swaying public opinion to support that action.

Mark Junge: What about the Jack Carberry thing? Or the, the Best—what's his name?

Bill Hosokawa: Well that's jumping up a number of years, but—

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[3] **Francis James Westbrook Pegler** (August 2, 1894 – June 24, 1969)
[4] **Walter Lippmann** (23 September 1889 – 14 December 1974)

Mark Junge: Isn't that the same sort of thing, though? The lack of information?

Bill Hosokawa: Well—No, there's a big difference there. Carberry was sent up to Heart Mountain to *get* the place. He and his editors had their minds made up. There're a bunch of incompetents, pampering the Japs in the camp at Heart Mountain, and the *Denver Post* was out to expose the camp. See, the *Denver Post* was, at that time, opposed to anything that the New Deal did. Anything that Roosevelt did, except declare war. There was a knee-jerk reaction: It's them democrats in Washington that's screwing up the country! And there was a man named, um, I think it was Earl Best, who was the steward at the camp. He had charge of bringing in food supplies and distributing food to the various mess halls. And Best was fired for incompetence. He came down to Denver and went to the *Post* and said, "I've got a great scandal for you. They're pampering the Japs there. They're bringing tons and tons of meat that's unavailable to the people outside the camp, and these people are living off the fat of the land. They've got a three-year supply of canned goods in the warehouse." And so on, and so on, and so on. And the people at the *Denver Post* bought that story, hook, line and sinker. And they sent Jack Carberry up there, to Wyoming, to do some investigating. I'm pretty well convinced that Carberry had his story written before he ever went up there. But that sort of thing was going on in other camps. We had a lot of very hostile press.

Now you mentioned Senator Robertson a while ago. E. V. Robertson[5] lived within a few miles of the camp, but he never visited the camp. And the *Heart Mountain Sentinel*, the newspaper that I was editing at that time, sent him a telegram inviting him to visit the camp and see for himself what it was like. And we published the text of the telegram on the front page of the *Heart Mountain Sentinel*. He never replied, he never came to the camp, but back in Washington he was the "expert" on how the camps were being mismanaged and how the dirty Japs were being pampered. And that sort of kicked the guy who was down. [That] activity was very harmful to us.

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[5] Edward V. Robertson was a Wyoming Senator from 1943 to 1949.

Mark Junge: I'm trying to find that driving—the key to the whole relocation idea, the WRA [War Relocation Authority], and I'm wondering if it's a matter of, on the part of certain particular individuals, political leaders, as you mentioned, who are just politically unsophisticated, historically unsophisticated, that allow them to be swayed by other people, or whether there's a feeling of pressure on them from the masses who are hysterical. What is the mechanism there that causes this thing to—the lever to trip and the whole to go into operation?

Bill Hosokawa: Yeah. Well, there's a little of all of those elements that you mentioned. There's a long history of anti-Orientialism that led to most of the Western states having what were called anti-alien land laws. It said, in California it said, a person who could not—who was ineligible to citizenship—another word for Japanese—a person who was ineligible for citizenship could not buy real estate. You could run a farm for three years, but you couldn't buy it. So you went to the farm and farmed for three years and then whatever improvements you made were left on the farm and you had to get out and find another place to farm. Well, under circumstances like that, you aren't gonna build a nice home for your family, because you're gonna lose it. So, the guys who were backing that law said, "Look at these damn Japs, they don't care about the country. They don't care about their homes. Look at the kinda shacks they're living in." A vicious circle!

Mark Junge: A Catch-22.

Bill Hosokawa: Yeah.

Chapter 4: Executive Order 9066

Mark Junge: Looking back on that, I feel a little bit of animosity inside of you about that. You still remember these things pretty clearly.

Bill Hosokawa: Yes, of course I remember them. I don't think I should say that, uh—no let me say definitely it's not animosity, it's something that *happened*. And you're asking me direct questions whether I experienced those things. And naturally, one does not forget those things. But I'm not *hostile* about it. I want to make damn sure it doesn't happen again.

Mark Junge: Stepping back, maybe a step further now, why did you want to be a writer? When did you have first thoughts about being a writer?

Bill Hosokawa: (laughs) I wanted to be an engineer. I couldn't handle the math! Asian kids are supposed to be smart in math, but I wasn't. I had enough credits to get out of high school in three and a half years. They allowed you to do that in those days. But I wanted to go back to school and play football. So I went back for the fourth year and I played football—not very well, but I enjoyed it, and because I had all my credits, I had a lot of free time. So I took shop, a lot of shop, and I took some journalism, and I liked the journalism, so I decided to pursue it.

Mark Junge: You were also good in it to begin with? I mean, sometimes people go to their strengths, if they get good grades, or commendations of one kind or another—

Bill Hosokawa: Well, I got good grades and I liked it, and I think it just drifted that way naturally once I became exposed to it.

Mark Junge: I wanted to get into the camp a little bit, but before we get into the camp business, I guess an earlier point I was trying to make was, I think, a point you made in the book, and that was, I believe what you're trying to say in *Nisei* is that there was hysteria at the time, but *really*, had we, had a certain few key individuals had consciences, and had been conscientious and moral and ethical about this whole thing, we maybe, through a series of circumstances, could have averted what happened. Is that true?

Bill Hosokawa: Yes. Absolutely! If someone in Congress—the whole evacuation was justified by an Executive Order, it was called Executive Order 9066, signed by Franklin Roosevelt, President Roosevelt, on February 19, 1942. This was two and a half months after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Suddenly they say, "Well, gee whiz! Something might happen here. We better get rid of these guys." So Roosevelt signed the Executive Order 9066. The impetus for that, the pressure for that, came from the congressional delegation on the West Coast, primarily California, which has been called the fountainhead of anti-Orientialism in the United States. And there've been books written with titles like *California's War against Japan*. Roosevelt signed this and with a stroke of a pen, he suspended the Bill of Rights for a specific minority in the United States. The Bill of Rights provide that you're entitled to your right to pursue life, liberty—the word liberty's very important—is guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. I think it's the Fifth Amendment. And then it's either the Sixth or the Seventh Amendment that says that you're entitled to a quick—to face your accuser and entitled to a trial. And the Fourteenth Amendment is a due process amendment, as I recall, saying that you are not to be deprived of life and liberty, or property, without due process of law. No, due process is the Sixth, I think, and the Fifteenth is the equal, equal protection of the laws. I'm a little mixed up on that. But Executive Order 9066 in effect suspended all that. It gave the military the authority to remove any and all persons from sensitive areas on the West Coast. The military interpreted "any and all persons" to mean all persons of Japanese descent. What was a person of Japanese descent? Anyone with as little as one-sixteenth Japanese blood. A man named Adolf Hitler said if you were one-eighth Jewish, you were a Jew. The US military said one-sixteenth.

There were a series of evacuation orders issued up and down the coast. Certain areas were to be cleared of all Japanese on such and such a day. Usually got a week or less of notice. We were allowed to take only what we could carry. And for farmers, that meant abandoning their crops, the grocery store operator tried to sell his business and if he couldn't sell it, he just locked it up and left it. We were moved a thousand or so at a time into temporary camps which were built on racetracks, fairgrounds, anywhere where there was an open space and access to water and sewage facilities and so forth. We were held there temporarily until inland camps could be built. And the camp at Heart Mountain Wyoming was one of those, one of ten inland camps that were built.

Mark Junge: Where did you first go? What temporary camp did you go to?

Bill Hosokawa: We were at Puyallup, Washington. The state fairgrounds in Puyallup, Washington.

Mark Junge: Your whole family? You were moved as a family?

Bill Hosokawa: Yes. Families were kept together.

Mark Junge: Do you ever think about all the—you mention this in your book—but do you think about all the things that were burned and thrown away, all the history that went down the drain?

Bill Hosokawa: Yes. Oh, yeah, I think about it. I don't sit around brooding about it—but there were diaries that the elderlies kept—they're great diarists—and there were a lot of cultural things, there were letters from Japan from the members of the family that had been left behind, and things like that were all burned or dumped because the fear that any connection with Japan would be interpreted as sentimental ties, cultural ties, maybe political ties with the old country.

Mark Junge: Plus, they couldn't afford to take it.

Bill Hosokawa: There was no place to take 'em to, no. But the destruction was mostly because of fear. The loss was, the physical loss was in furniture, cars—there are authenticated cases of used furniture dealers driving down the street in the Japanese residential areas, “Hey you Japs! You’re gonna get kicked outa here tomorrow. I’ll give you ten bucks for that refrigerator. I’ll give you fifteen bucks for that piano. I’ll give you two dollars and fifty cents for that washing machine.” And the material loss of the evacuation, just the physical material loss has been estimated at 300 million dollars, in 1942 dollars!

Chapter 5: Arrival at Heart Mountain

Mark Junge: We had you at the Puyallup retention—

Bill Hosokawa: Yeah. P-U-Y-A-L-L-U-P. Indian word.

Mark Junge: Okay. We had you there with your family now. Could you talk a little bit about going from there, from that temporary place to Heart Mountain—

Bill Hosokawa: We were at Puyallup about three months while the government was building the inland camps. At first the government's intention was to build a series, fifty, sixty, maybe a hundred temporary shelters, inland, until the Japanese Americans could be relocated somewhere where they would be accepted, where they could be checked out and it could be made certain that they were not a security risk. But in the spring of 1942, the Federal Government had a meeting in Salt Lake City in which the governors of many of the western states were invited to come and the federal people told them of their plans to scatter the Japanese-Americans from the West Coast and various parts of the West, and almost unanimously they raised their hands in horror, and said, "Well if these people are too dangerous to be left on the West Coast, we sure don't want 'em in our state!" And you can't blame 'em for saying that. But the one man who said, "They will be welcome to come to my state. They have done nothing wrong, you have not charged them with anything, except being of the wrong race, so if they want to come to Colorado that's okay by me." And that was Ralph Carr[6], then the Governor of Colorado. Because of the hostility the government dropped its plans for numerous small camps and they decided that they needed to build detention camps that could be guarded by troops and so they set about looking for federal land that would be suitable for this purpose. The land had to be fairly remote from any large populated area, and have access and have water and power, and about the only land that was available was Federal land. Bureau of Land Management land, mostly, and so ten sites were selected and one was Heart Mountain, Wyoming, on the bench lands between Cody and Powell. Power was available from the Buffalo Bill Dam[7] and water was also available from the reservoir behind Buffalo Bill Dam, although it had not been brought down to the camp site at that time. It had to be—the ditches had not been completed. These camps were built in a big hurry; they were very crude camps, built very much like military camps very close to the theater of operations. Camps in Wyoming, the floors were built up off the ground and framed with 2 x 4s with eight inch planks that were the walls, and they were covered with black tar paper. And there were no inner walls. The inner walls, the wallboard was put in later by the residents themselves. They were imperative in that area where sub-zero temperatures were common in the winter time.

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[6] Ralph *Lawrence* Carr (December 11, 1887 – September 22, 1950) was the 29th *Governor* of *Colorado* from 1939 to 1943

I reached Heart Mountain in the middle of August. The camp was far from complete at that time. The barracks were going up very rapidly. The carpenters kept just one step ahead of the train loads of evacuees that were coming in every two or three days. The trainloads, oh, about five to six hundred people on a train.

Mark Junge: Do you distinctly remember the trip out to Wyoming?

Bill Hosokawa: My situation was a little bit different from most of the, the rest of the people. The people in Puyallup, from Seattle, were—it had been announced that they would be going to Minidoka, Idaho, near Twin Falls, Idaho. And suddenly I got, one afternoon I got a—was summoned to the camp director's place and he said, "I've got instructions to tell you that you're not going to Idaho, you're going to Wyoming." I asked, "Why?" and he said, "I don't know. I've told you all that I know. Anyway, you have to be ready to go in three, four hours." There were four, five other fellows that were notified at the same time. I've never found any documents to tell me why I was selected to—separated from my group. But my conclusion is that they saw me, the military saw me as a potential troublemaker who had asked tough questions, and I had been active in the self-government in the camp, had gone to the camp director and said, "Look there's a sick child here and the hospital facilities, the medical facilities are totally inadequate. You owe it to us to do something about this. Take 'em out to a hospital outside the camp or get 'em the kind of medical—" and I had been kind of a spokesman saying, "look this food is intolerable." Or, "The toilets are completely plugged up and you've got to do something about getting this situation straightened out." And I think that they saw me as a potential agitator, so they separated me from my constituency and put me among a bunch of strangers, over whom, presumably, I would have no influence.

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[7] Originally known as the Shoshone Dam and reservoir, on March 11, 1946 the following resolution was approved: *Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United. States of America in Congress assembled, …* the name of the Shoshone Dam and Reservoir in Park County, Wyoming, is changed effective February 26, 1946, to the "Buffalo Bill Dam and Reservoir".

Mark Junge: Put you away from your family?

Bill Hosokawa: No, my family went with me. So I was shipped on a train with a guard and we changed trains at Billings, Montana, and then took the Burlington train down to Deaver, and a fellow from the camp met me there and drove me to the camp. I was one of the first to show up at the camp.

Mark Junge: Do you recall your feelings at the time when you first stepped out of the truck or the car and got to the camp and saw what you saw?

Bill Hosokawa: I thought, Jeez-us! (Laughs) Here's a bench land that's dry and dusty and sandy, with sagebrush and the buffalo grass that can hold the dust down pretty well. But there were three, four hundred guys working there, and trucks running back and forth, and bulldozers, and backhoes putting in water lines. The place was all torn up. And any puff of wind would raise a great cloud of flour-like dust. And I thought, this is desolation; nothing but desolation. But at least it was, the area was larger it was not quite so confining as the temporary camp that we were in, in which we were housed in long rows of—really, chicken coops.

Mark Junge: Did that mountain mean anything to you at the time? Did you think you'd be looking at that for a year or so?

Bill Hosokawa: Well, I was impressed by the sight of that mountain. And at that time, there was no fence around the area. And some weeks later they put up the barbed wire fence, and they put up the watchtowers.

Chapter 6: Camp Life

Mark Junge: Was camp life for you, Bill—I know it wasn't exactly the same as the others—but was camp life in general, once you got into it, was it pretty hum-drum? Our existence today, your existence here, my existence in Cheyenne, in ways gets to be sort of repetitive and redundant and I wonder if things became sort of mundane, you know, after people finally got settled into their little cubby-holes?

Bill Hosokawa: Well being in prison isn't much fun, whatever way you look at it. What you could do was limited, within barbed wire. You settled into a routine which was rather dull. In my case I remained very active running the paper and doing other things. Physically of course, we lived in these rude barracks, and we had to go to a mess hall to eat, we went to a central sanitation building which might be fifty yards away for toilet facilities, for showers. You woke up to the mess hall gong, so it was not a normal life. On the other hand, the discomfort was comparable to that faced by young men in the military. So if you were young and single, that was no big deal. If you had young children, if you were old, it was quite uncomfortable. We did everything possible to keep people busy, interested, a lot of, all sorts of hobby shops. We played softball, English classes for the older people, there was a lot of visiting back and forth. You could stay up as long as you wanted. There was no curfew.

Mark Junge: Why weren't there any Japanese classes?

Bill Hosokawa: The emphasis was on Americanization. You are in the camp because you are Japanese. We want to make you an American. Younger people, most of them, spoke no Japanese. Born in America, the product of the American school system. There was no more reason for us to speak Japanese than second or third generation Italian or German would speak Italian or German.

Mark Junge: Okay. But there were classes in sumo, or judo at least, and then they tried to get a class going in sumo, I'm not sure they ever did.

Bill Hosokawa: Really not classes. This was part of the recreational activity. There was judo, there was judo classes outside the camps, there were classes inside the camps. There was baseball, softball leagues, in the camp.

Mark Junge: Well I know it would be wrong to assume that the Nisei wanted to be Japanese in their ways, but on the other hand there was retained, I assume, among members of the population—

Bill Hosokawa: Yeah. I would bet you that there were as many boxing classes as there were judo classes, I have no doubt.

Mark Junge: But you know, you also speak in your book very lovingly, very endearingly, about the food. Little, I suppose, you mention something in there about holidays, and what you did when families got together. So it's interesting, in that you say there was this strong identification on the part of the Nisei toward America and American values and American life.

Bill Hosokawa: Yes, there was. That took a beating, because there's some of us who are 110% American. And there were some who were not. If there were some, we said, "Look. We've got to become Americanized. We've got to do this. We've got to salute the flag, and we got to do this." And there were others who said, "You think you're so damn good, why don't you walk out of the gate? If you think you're an American, stand up for your rights." They're hard to answer.

Mark Junge: Did you feel the same way? That these people were laggards?

Bill Hosokawa: Yes I did. I felt that if we wanted any kind of a future in this, our country, our only country, we had to take that extra step to demonstrate that we were worthy of this country. It would have been easy to say, as many of them did say, "if you want me to fight for my country, open the gate. If you want me to serve this country, let my family go back to the West Coast." And that was awfully hard to argue, I guess, that kind of logic. But there were others who said, "We've got to make the best of this. After the war we will win our rights. How can they turn down people who have shed blood for this country." And that's the way it turned out.

Mark Junge: Did you or any others who wrote editorials like that have to take flack from people who, maybe afterwards, said, you know, you were encouraging us to fight! I mean, especially during the Vietnam era. Did anybody ever come back to you?

Bill Hosokawa: I was gone from there when the big fuss was going on.

Chapter 7: The Heart Mountain *Sentinel*

Mark Junge: Who started the *Sentinel*? Whose idea was that?

Bill Hosokawa: One of the first guys I met at the camp was a fellow named Vaughn Mechau. He was information officer there and he had been a newspaper man and he and I hit it off very early. He was my boss and I was his right hand man.

Mark Junge: At the information office?

Bill Hosokawa: Yeah. And he said, "Everybody's going to have a job here. And I think we could work together in this information department." And one of the first things we did was we put out a kind of a handbook, a mimeographed thing that we could pass out to the people when they first arrived there. You are living now in Heart Mountain Wyoming, Park County, the elevation here is such, the nearest towns are such and such, and these are some of the regulations, and so forth. Washington said that it was—the headquarters of the relocation authority—said it was alright for evacuees to put out a newspaper for the town. So Vaughn Mechau asked if I would like to be the editor, and I said sure, I'll take it over, and I was able to go in town and talk to Jack Richard[8] about gettin' the paper printed there. I think the impetus came from this director from Washington saying that we could have a newspaper.

Mark Junge: Can you describe those very early days, the back shop the advertising, the, you know, all the things that you've worked with over the years in other newspapers? What kind of facilities, what kind of conditions were you working in?

Bill Hosokawa: Well we had a room in one of the barracks. We let it be known around the town that we were looking for people with newspaper experience that would like to work on a newspaper. The first thing to do was to build up a staff on the editorial side, the news side, and the business side. We sold the paper, I think, for two cents a copy, but we had to have advertising. We had the camp canteen where you could go to buy toothpaste and stuff like that, and we got them to buy an ad, and by that time Sears Roebuck, or Montgomery Ward, or maybe both, were doing business in camp. People needed a pair of socks, there's no place to go buy a pair of socks, you sent off to a mail order house. And we got them to advertise. We figured we could publish an eight-page weekly. I kinda dummied out the whole thing. The page one would be page one, and page two would be this kind of news, and page four would be the editorial page, and these columns on page five, page six we'd have some local social news, page seven would be sports. Jack Richard showed me the kind of headline type that would be available, and so we worked up a head schedule. It was like starting—it *was* starting brand new with a newspaper! And we got a guy who had some art background and he designed the logo, page one, the *Heart Mountain Sentinel*[9].

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[8] Jack Richard ran a local photographic studio and published a newspaper, *The Cody Times* that eventually merged with the *Cody Enterprise*. Richard photographed in the Yellowstone area from the 1940s to the 1980s.

Mark Junge: Who was that?

Bill Hosokawa: Fellow named Neil, uh, Neil—can't remember his last name. But we had a lotta talent. Neil went on to, after he got out of camp, he went to New York and became the designer for Columbia Records, for their albums.

Mark Junge: I was going to ask you about all that talent, because the last edition of the *Sentinel* indicates that there were like five full staff ultimately. When you combine all the help over the months who … [filled] like a hundred'n twenty different positions all over the country … you did have some talent.

Who did your Japanese edition?

Bill Hosokawa: We had some guys who'd worked on Japanese language papers on the West Coast and they would translate our stuff and then they would cut stencils and mimeograph it.

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[9] A sample of the newspaper can be viewed at http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/kt1489r73m/?order=3&brand=calisphere

Mark Junge: So that wasn't printed in Japanese. Did they have Linotype in those days?

Bill Hosokawa: Yeah. Jack had a Linotype.

Mark Junge: Who operated the Linotype machine?

Bill Hosokawa: Well, one of the people in the camp was allowed to go into Cody and work the Linotype.

Mark Junge: Was he experienced?

Bill Hosokawa: Oh, yeah. And we had a pressman, who could run the press. Jack was running the *Cody Enterprise*[10]. With his staff he couldn't handle our paper, but we had the mechanical people to handle our needs.

Mark Junge: So he wasn't getting the job done before you arrived on the scene and your staff arrived on the scene? He didn't have the people to run the machinery?

Bill Hosokawa: Oh, yeah! But the *Cody Enterprise* was a full time job for these people. Our people went in there and worked what amounted to the second shift on the equipment that Jack had.

Mark Junge: Was Jack pretty receptive to the idea?

Bill Hosokawa: Yeah, he was very friendly and we got along fine. And Jack had a brother who was a Light Colonel in the Marines out in the Pacific, flying planes out there, fighter planes, and we'd come in and ask Jack how his brother was doing, and he understood that we were Americans. It was a very strange situation in Cody. There was an attorney named E. J. Goppert, and another attorney, Al Simpson's father, Milward Simpson, and I think he was the other town attorney. And those two were on opposite sides of almost anything. And Milward didn't like us, so Goppert was very friendly toward us. Milward, many years later, when he was elected Governor of Wyoming, and I was working on the Denver Post, he invited me up for his inauguration in Cheyenne. And I think that was his way of making amends.

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[10] Actually, at this time Jack published his own paper, called the Cody Times, which was merged into the Cody Enterprise in May, 1953.

Mark Junge: Do you know Al?

Bill Hosokawa: Yes, I know Al.

Mark Junge: Wonder what Al's opinion would have been of the act that was passed in Congress and was signed, the bill was signed into law by Reagan that awarded up to $20,000—

Bill Hosokawa: I think he voted for it. He was opposed to it in the beginning, because he didn't want to spend that kind of money. As I recall eventually, as a matter of principle, he voted for it. Al likes to tell a story of how he went to the camp as a Cub Scout. He made friends with the Japanese-American Cub Scouts there. And he went with the one kid to his barracks room, which was maybe a quarter the size of this room here, and his grandmother was sitting in the corner, just sitting there, and Al says, "I saw her, and I couldn't understand why she was there, and I thought of my grandmother, who was back home tending the flowers, enjoying the garden, and here was this Cub Scout who wore the same uniform that I did and he couldn't come out of the camp, but I could go out and come in any time I wanted to. And it made a very deep impression on me."

I don't think Al met Norman Mineta at the time. Norman Mineta was maybe oh, eight or ten years older than Al. Mineta was living in San Jose with his family, and he was taken to the camp when he was a junior high school student. Norman later became the first Japanese-American to be elected to Congress. He and Al have become pretty good friends.

Mark Junge: Were you given more freedom then to go back and forth between say, Cody and the camp, Bill?

Bill Hosokawa: Yes. See, we did our editorial work in the camp. We gathered the news in the camp, we wrote the stories in the camp, edited the material in the camp, and we shipped the copy to Cody during the week as the material was completed. And then on Friday night, we would go in to the—Mechau and I and a few of the staff—I would go in every week and Mechau would go in every week. But we would select people from the staff to go in with us. I would help make up the paper. I handled some of the type and helped the printers who were there. And we buttoned the whole thing up and then we would go out and have dinner, and sometimes we would go see a movie while they were printing the paper. And ten or eleven o'clock the paper would be off the press and we would load the paper in the car and drive back to the camp. I went every week because I was responsible for the paper and the others were taken along as a reward for their hard work during the week and it was a great treat to be able to go into a restaurant and order food that wasn't mess hall food.

Mark Junge: How were you treated?

Bill Hosokawa: We would go to the Mayflower Café. Some of the other people had problems, a lot of the camp people were, especially in the fall of '42, there were farmers from all over the area coming to the camp saying, we want, we need, these people to come help us harvest the sugar beets. People were released to these individual farmers on the condition that they be paid the prevailing wage that they would be protected, and that they would be given room and board. On Sunday, or Saturday afternoon, some of these guys would go into Lovell, or Powell or Cody, get a haircut, buy stuff at the store, and some of them were not very well treated. And there were signs on some of the shop doors saying, "No Japs Allowed!"

Mark Junge: Did you report those things in the paper?

Bill Hosokawa: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Mark Junge: And the paper circulated outside the camp?

Bill Hosokawa: Our paper did not. Our paper was a camp paper. More than two-thirds of the papers were mailed out of the camp by the people who read the paper then sent it off to friends.

Mark Junge: Now you sent your first edition, proudly, I think, to Roosevelt and Dillon Meyer. Did you get any response?

Bill Hosokawa: Uh, I don't know. There may be something in subsequent editions saying Roosevelt's press secretary wrote us a letter of thanks, or something like that.

Mark Junge: The local communities of Powell and Cody then didn't acknowledge the paper at all, if they didn't have copies of it.

Bill Hosokawa: No. They didn't know anything about it.

Mark Junge: What was the purpose of the *Sentinel*? I mean, sure, you're a newspaper man. You've got experience in it. But what was the purpose of this paper? Just to keep busy?

Bill Hosokawa: No. Two purposes: one, to provide the people with information. People need news. People need to understand what's going on. Without something like that the camp would be just rife with rumors. When you get ten-thousand people without too much to do, complaining, unhappy, all kinds of rumors are possible. So we needed to provide the news. Actually, three purposes: second, to provide editorial leadership. Get the people to thinking in a positive manner; third, to give the people a voice. People in California, people in Washington, some of the members of Congress, saw us as easy game, taking pot-shots at us. There was no way for these people to talk back. No way for an evacuee in the camp to say, "That's a damn lie! That's a crock! This is the truth! Why don't you—why can't you understand the issues?" and so many of the editorials in the *Sentinel* were quite militant about that.

Chapter 8: Relationships with Locals

Mark Junge: We shouldn't think that there were just absolutely amicable relationships among all the people; the camp columnists or internees, and—

Bill Hosokawa: There was very little linkage between the camp and the people in the surrounding area. Remember for one thing, that the camp was surrounded by barbed wire and you had to have a darn good reason in order to get in, or to get out. Now some of the church people in Cody and Powell would come in and do some missionary work; visit with the Christian ministers in the camp. Some of the athletic—high school athletic teams would come in and play the football team or the basketball team in the camp. I don't think they had a basketball court, but they did have a football field and so games were played.

Mark Junge: Did they hold their own?

Bill Hosokawa: I think they did pretty well in football, but they couldn't do much in basketball because Wyoming kids are so much taller. For the average guy in Cody or Powell, they never had a chance to come to the camp. They would drive by on Highway 14 which was about maybe a quarter mile from the camp site, and they could see the camp site up on the hill there, but there was no reason to stop in. Though, many of the farmers in the area got boys, young men from the camp to help them with the harvest in the fall of 1942.

Mark Junge: I think it was in one of the first editions, if not the first edition of your paper, Scott Taggart was quoted as saying, in an article that you people had written in the *Sentinel*, and saying, and this is toward the tail end of his quotation, so I'm pulling this out of context. But he said, "I don't think it was right that the Japanese-Americans should speak Japanese when they were in town. I think if they [are] in America they should learn to be Americans and speak American or English." And here was a guy who worked at the camp. And I wonder how much of that attitude you had to run into, even at the camp?

Bill Hosokawa: I'm not quite sure what Scott was referring to. There were older people who spoke very broken English, just like an Italian immigrant would speak very broken English, and they felt much more comfortable in the language, their first language. But two-thirds of the people who lived in the camp were American born. Educated in American schools. And most of them spoke no Japanese at all! But the older people, yeah, you could understand that.

Mark Junge: Yeah, I think he was talking about an incident in town, how he encountered some people in a café—and they may have been the Issei. May have been somebody who—

Bill Hosokawa: I want to make reference to your mention of the warm relationship that might have existed between the people in the camp and the people in the surrounding area. I pointed out that there was very little contact between the two groups. People outside were living normal lives. People inside were confined; they were in a prison. If you lived in Rawlins, you wouldn't have much to do with the people in the State Prison there at Rawlins.

There were individual relationships that developed. Ministers would come in, or say, a farmer would come in and there would be a relationship between the farmer who employed a man from the camp temporarily. In the fall of 1942, a lot of the young men in the area had been drafted or had gone off in the service. Others had gone to the West Coast to work in the munitions plants, the aircraft plants, and there was a great shortage of labor. And here were these tons and tons and tons of sugar beets just sitting out there in the fields waiting for somebody to harvest them. The sugar crop would have been lost without that manpower from the camp coming out to help with it. That helped to turn some of the hostility; to fend off some of the hostility. Farmers realizing that they would have suffered great loss without help from the camp.

Chapter 9: Chester Blackburn Remembers the Japanese

Bill Hosokawa: The camp was on Bureau of Land Management property. Belonged to the Federal Government. And the BLM had been trying to build the irrigation ditch down from the Buffalo Bill Reservoir west of Cody. But the ditches had not been completed and that land was just grazing land unless you brought in water. And the evacuees did complete some of the ditches and brought water to the land. Meanwhile, other evacuees, I included, drove tractors and ripped off the brush and leveled the land, and by the time the camp closed there were more than a thousand acres under cultivation. And there was a lot more land around there that could be cultivated, given time. This was darn good land. It would be productive land.

After the war, the government opened that area for homesteading. There were over a hundred 160-acre plots open for homesteading. And there was a lottery held. Veterans who were interested could enter into the lottery. And Chester Blackburn was among those who did that. The winners of the homesteads were able to buy the barracks buildings that we lived in for a dollar or two and haul them off to their own sites, use them for temporary shelter, and then when they got a house built, they could use the barracks for tools, machine sheds, or animal shelters. Chester was one of those who was very sensitive about the whole situation, and during the early winters of his homesteading experience, he began to think about the people who had broken that land for him, and the people who had lived in those shelters and he felt very sympathetic toward the Japanese-Americans.

As time went on the people who had lived in the camps would come back; maybe they lived in Chicago and they were going to visit friends in California and they'd drive by, come by the camp site, and everything was gone by then. Virtually everything, except that tall chimney at the hospital. They would come by Chester’s place and ask him if he could show them the way to the camp site and where the barracks were, and where the schoolhouse was and Chester felt that something ought to be done to help these people. So he was among the very first working to do something about setting up a memorial and there was a war honor roll, a big bulletin board type that, at one time, had names of four, five-hundred camp kids who had gone off into service. The wind and the sand had erased all the names but the board itself was there. But he and some of the other homesteaders got together and built a very nice memorial park. I think without the help of Chester and the people who supported him, that there would be nothing there today except farms.

Chapter 10: No Way to Raise a Family

Mark Junge: One thing that I had to ask, the stores. Why didn't the local population rise up as a group of businessmen and say, we had this camp plunked down in our back yards, and now we don't get a chance to sell things to these people. Why can't these people buy from us? Here they had a camp store—

Bill Hosokawa: Merchants outside the camp? (affirmative) Some of them did come in with specialty items, but early on, the camp set up a cooperative, and the camp stores were co-op and we kept our receipts and got a rebate at the end of a particular period.

Mark Junge: The individual purchaser got a rebate? Where did the goods come from then?

Bill Hosokawa: They'd buy from wholesalers; Chicago, Billings, Denver.

Mark Junge: There must have been some animosity on the part of the local people, then, because here you had the third largest city in Wyoming buying all their stuff from wholesalers.

Bill Hosokawa: Well, sure! We were in direct competition. But they couldn't come in. We couldn't go out. And later on, when we were allowed to go out, people bought in the stores there, but they were in such short supply during the war that many of the merchants resented the evacuees coming in. Meat was rationed, coffee was rationed, canned goods were rationed, so—

Mark Junge: This was partly then the reason for the *Denver Post* and other newspapers jumping on this idea that the internees are well-fed. Did they have a good selection? I mean, if you went to the store, could you, like today, get what you wanted to get?

Bill Hosokawa: No. You could get things like, as I said, toothbrushes and toothpaste, and cigarettes— some cigarettes. You could get pencils and notebooks, and sometimes you could get candy bars. This was a wartime economy. Sugar was rationed. Even canned tomatoes were rationed.

Mark Junge: Where did people get the money to buy in the first place?

Bill Hosokawa: You got paid sixteen bucks a month. And you didn't have to buy any overcoats because they gave you these pea-jackets. You didn't have to buy any food because they fed you at the mess hall. You could spend everything they gave you, which was $12, $16 and $19. On the other hand, that was not enough to keep up your life insurance policy, unless you had a little money set aside. That was not enough to—postage, I think, was three cents at that time, and if you wanted to correspond, and you bought ten stamps, that was thirty cents, that was a pretty good part of your income.

Mark Junge: You ate your meals at the mess hall?

Bill Hosokawa: Yes. Family is built around the meal, in many respects. Dad comes home in the evening and Mom cooks a meal and you sit around and have dinner, have a meal together. The father has provided the food, the mother has prepared it, you tell about what you learned in school that day, what you did, and in some families you discuss the news or whatever. When you line up in a mess hall the food is provided by somebody other than your father, the food is prepared by somebody other than your mother, and you just go through the line and they plop your food on a tin plate. And you don't sit together as a family. You may try, but pretty soon the teenager wants to go over and sit with his friends there. Then all the teenagers are sitting together over here. Parents have no control over the manners, the table manners of the little kids. So the family disintegrates, and the kids lose the respect for their parents. It dehumanizes the father. He's no longer in control. And the kids would say, "Well, you can't boss me around! You don't support me anymore. You don't provide the food. You don't buy my clothes for me anymore.

You're just like the rest of us."

Mark Junge: Did you see that happening?

Bill Hosokawa: Oh, you bet!

Mark Junge: Do you think it had any real long term effects?

Bill Hosokawa: That's hard to say. The families, Japanese-Americans have a very close knit family system. I think it resulted in the independence of the young people at an earlier age. They were more inclined to strike out on their own. A kid straight out of high school would say, "Well, Mom and Dad, I'm going to apply for a leave and I'm going to go to Chicago and look for a job." Many cases the parents said, "Go! Go ahead. It isn't doing you any good to be in this camp." Within a few months after the camps were filled, the War Reallocation Authority changed its policy. These guys that ran WRA had no experience in this line. Several of them went out to the camps—some of them had experience in the Indian service, and they said, "We're gonna have another 'Indian problem' on our hands unless we do something."

Mark Junge: Yeah. Was it tough to have Anglo supervisors, or the guys in key positions being Anglo, instead of being Nisei?

Bill Hosokawa: It wasn't so much a matter of race. It was a matter of competence. My boss was a competent newspaper man. I respected him. But there were other guys who knew much more about the business than their supervisors. The accounting department, or the purchasing department, or the farm department. The guy who was working for the white man knew more about how to run that department than the white man did. And some of the schools. High schools; the teachers among the Japanese-Americans are better qualified than the teachers, the white teachers. They had more education, more experience, and yet they were being paid $16 and $19, and the other folks are getting Civil Service income.

Mark Junge: Which was what?

Bill Hosokawa: Four, five thousand dollars in those days, I guess, a year.

Mark Junge: Was self-government then, was the charter that was established early on, was that all a farce?

Bill Hosokawa: No, it wasn't a farce. It was a good place to let off steam, and get people a chance to govern themselves on internal matters. They couldn't go outside.

Mark Junge: Didn't anybody ever stand up at a council meeting and say, "Look. What are we doing here? We haven't got any control ultimately over our own lives."

Bill Hosokawa: Oh, I'm sure there were people who said that, but I think that the inclination was to do the best with what they had.

Mark Junge: Because I get a little frustrated when I read about the charter, and what they wanted—the internees—what they wanted and what they were allowed to do.

Chapter 11: Intent Versus Truth

Bill Hosokawa: After the war, the American Legion posts in Cody and Powell got together and put up a little memorial, just off the highway, Highway 14, down the hill from the camp. This is what the legend there says:

Heart Mountain Relocation Center, 1942-1945.

During World War II years, Heart Mountain Relocation Center was located on a 740-acre tract of land across the Burlington Northern right-of-way, west ward from where you stand facing the monument and Heart Mountain itself, on the Heart Mountain Division of the Shoshone Project. 11,000 people of Japanese ancestry from three West Coast states were loosely confined by the US Government in this center for about three years. They lived in barracks as singles or as families, according to their marital status. The camp was equipped with modern water works, sewer system and modern hospital and dental clinic, staffed with people from the ranks of evacuees. First rate schooling was provided for the children of evacuees through their high school years.

Bill Hosokawa: Now, I'm convinced that these veterans had put up this monument as a good will gesture. Their hearts were in the right place. But the legend here is very offensive. Yes it's true, there was a sewer system, there were modern water works, there was a modern hospital, and that schooling was provided for the children of the evacuees, but it says nothing about *why* the people were there. The fact that they were confined behind barbed wire, that there were troops there, wearing the same uniforms as the sons of the guys in the camps, the families in the camps, and these people were confined against their will, they had lost their homes, that they were under constant guard, that their rights as Americans had been violated. [There was] this lack of understanding on the part of the people of that area.

Mark Junge: Well, it’s not surprising in that I think in your book, *Nisei,* you mention that the American Legion was one of those forces, one of those antagonistic forces that caused, that helped to cause the camps in the first place. So it doesn’t surprise me.

Bill Hosokawa: Yeah. They didn’t mean to insult anybody. They didn’t mean to rub the noses of the evacuees into the dirt. There’s a feeling among Japanese-Americans who’ve seen it, the people who wrote this were ignorant or insensitive, really didn’t understand what this was all about.

Mark Junge: Would you like to see, would the relocation colonists, or internees, like to see a better display up? I mean, a more informative, accurate display?

Bill Hosokawa: Well, Chester Blackburn and his people have put up several placques up on top there, where the administration building was. It’s about a quarter-mile up the hill. And that tells the story accurately. What I would like to see is this thing re-written. This came up again very recently, and my friend Cal Taggart says, “Well, why don’t you write something that would be more fitting, and I’ll see about what we can do to change it.” I will do that.

Mark Junge: This is a wooden informative sign I think, isn’t it?

Bill Hosokawa: It’s a kind of a—

Mark Junge: —rock cairn or stone monument—

Bill Hosokawa: —yeah, with a bronze thing stuck in there.

Chapter 12: A PositiveSide

Bill Hosokawa: There was a sense of camaraderie in that we were all in the same boat. There was no rich, no poor. We came from varied backgrounds, people could look at Japanese-Americans and say, “Oh, they all look alike!” but they were different. And some were ambitious and some were angry and some were philosophical, and some said, “I’m gonna get the hell out of here as quickly as I can.” And others would say, “What the hell; they’re gonna feed me!”

Mark Junge: Do you think that that camp life brought out the best in some people that would not have been brought out otherwise, or did it do the opposite?

Bill Hosokawa: The main thing—a very important thing—let me rephrase that: A very important thing was that Japanese-Americans lived in Oriental ghettos on the West Coast. We were blasted out of these ghettos, and many, many of these people moved east of the Sierras, east of the Cascades for the first time. And if you were stuck up in Heart Mountain, Wyoming, and you had a chance to go to Chicago, or Philadelphia, or Des Moines, or Indianapolis, you found out what the rest of America was like. A third of those people never moved back to the West Coast. They liked what they saw. They found opportunity—Kids with Phi Beta Kappa keys who’d been polishing apples and stacking oranges—in departments in big corporations back east, utilizing the education and the smarts that they had, which they were unable to do because of the barriers of discrimination on the West Coast.

Mark Junge: Wasn’t some of that opportunity also provided by the fact that there was a shortage of manpower?

Bill Hosokawa: Absolutely! There was a shortage of manpower and guys in the Midwest and the East, who’d never seen an Oriental before, would take these people on because they didn’t have that basic anti-Oriental prejudice. They’d say, hey, this guy can do the job. Give him more responsibility.

Mark Junge: So you’re saying it was a good thing, in a way.

Bill Hosokawa: In that sense, yes.

Mark Junge: What happened to the women. Do you think women changed?

Bill Hosokawa: It did to the extent that many girls, who had been under the thumb of their mothers on the West Coast, were off on their own, working as a secretary in Chicago, or being a health scientist.

Chapter 13: Could it Happen Again?

Bill Hosokawa: I would not want to go through that again. But the experience I went through enabled me to do a lot of things that I have been able to do. It gave me a background that prepared me for the experience, the knowledge that I gained. Thinking back on it now, I wonder how I was able to cope with certain situations, and I don't mean to say that I'm a better person for having coped. It's kinda revealing to think back and say, "I wonder how the hell I got through that situation?"

Mark Junge: Are you ultimately pessimistic or optimistic? Do you think this whole episode can be re-enacted in American society?

Bill Hosokawa: Yes, I think it can. And we got an indication of that during the Iran hostage crisis where the Iranians picked up fifty, sixty people from the US Embassy. Almost immediately anybody from the Middle East with an olive complexion was in jeopardy in this country. And there were rednecks out with baseball bats out to get a A-rab. We had a case here in Denver where some kids had too much beer and they knew there was an A-rab living in that apartment house and they got some baseball bats and they went up to get 'em. And this guy had a rifle and he was trying to protect himself and his family, and he killed one of the kids. He was never charged, but look what it did to his life. There are voices of reason but there are just enough wild-eyed super-super patriots so that this sort of thing could happen again. And it's happening in various places today. Several years ago there was a Chinese kid killed in Detroit by an automobile worker who thought this Chinese kid was Japanese and he was going to restore the balance of trade by beating up this kid with a baseball bat.

Mark Junge: Do you think the same thing could happen to the Japanese-Americans?

Bill Hosokawa: The average guy can’t tell a Vietnamese from a Thai from a Burmese from a Chinese from a Japanese from a Korean. Japanese-Americans today are very well established. There are four Japanese-Americans in Congress. A Japanese-American’s a Federal judge. Lots of ‘em in the state and local justice system. They’re police officers. Presidents of universities. Great physicians, surgeons. Scientists. They’re leaders in their field; business people; financial advisors to some of the big corporations. They’ve made it, quote—*made it*—unquote. But if they would walk down in some parts of town they’d look just like a fresh off the boat Vietnamese boat person. This business of not being able to accept or understand the point that you don’t have to be blonde and blue-eyed to be an American—this happened up in Wyoming: I was the guest at a party at a very nice home in Casper, and one of the guests was a well known political figure, and he was trying to be friendly, and he came up to me and he said, “Mr. Hosokawa, how long have you been in this country?” I looked him over, and he was somewhat younger that I. I said, “Sir, I think I have been in *our* country about 20 years longer than you have.”

But that sort of thing happens. I don’t care anymore, but I cite that as an example of how difficult it is for a person with an Asian background to be accepted and recognized as an American. Now in all my years with the *Denver Post* I never did run into that sort of problem, if you can call it a problem, because I was the guy from the *Denver Post*. And I was accepted as the guy from the *Denver Post*. But without that sort of shield, you do run into things like that. But there are people who still haven’t sat down and shared a meal with an Asian-American. Never went to school with ‘em. There are many people who are completely color blind in this respect. I was up in South Dakota one time, speaking to a writers’ conference, if anybody noticed that here was a person with an Asian face telling them how to write better in English, it didn’t seem to occur to them. But after a while a little old lady came up to me and said, “Mr. Hosokawa, how do you spell your name?” I said, “It’s right here on my name tag.” She looked at it, says, “Oh.

You must be Polish!" (Laughs) Completely colorblind!

End of interview