



## Ruth Tanbara Papers

### **Copyright Notice:**

This material may be protected by copyright law (U.S. Code, Title 17). Researchers are liable for any infringement. For more information, visit [www.mnhs.org/copyright](http://www.mnhs.org/copyright).

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
WITH  
RUTH TANBARA

for the  
ST. PAUL-NAGASAKI SISTER  
CITY COMMITTEE  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

March 28, 2003

**Interview with Ruth Tanbara**  
**St. Paul – Nagasaki Sister City Committee Oral History Project**

**Interviewed at**  
**Mrs. Tanbara's home**  
**Afton, Minnesota**

**Interviewed on**  
**March 28, 2003**

**Interviewed by**  
**Barbara W. Sommer**  
**with Yoshi Tani and Linda Hashimoto van Dooijeweert**

*The following oral history interview was made with Ruth Nomura Tanbara of Afton, Minnesota. Mrs. Tanbara is the last charter member of the St. Paul Nagasaki Sister City Committee, formed in 1955. During this interview, Mrs. Tanbara described meeting Louis Hill, Jr. who was the driving force behind the formation of the committee and his asking her to become part of the committee. She remembered being with Mrs. Hill when Mrs. Hill entertained atomic bomb survivors from Nagasaki at the Hill's home, leading tours to Japan which always included a trip to Nagasaki, and visiting the A-Bomb Survivors Hospital in Nagasaki several times. She talked about other people with the St. Paul-Nagasaki Sister City Committee and other incidents from her life. The interview was made on March 28, 2003, for the St. Paul-Nagasaki Sister City Committee Oral History Project. The interviewer is Barbara W. Sommer.*

Ruth Nomura Tanbara	RT
Barbara W. Sommer	BWS
Yoshi Tani	YT
Linda Hashimoto van Dooijeweert	LvD

Tape One Side One

BWS: What can you tell us about Louis Hill, Jr. and the St. Paul-Nagasaki Sister City Committee?

RT: Well, I don't know if Rebecca Overman's<sup>1</sup> name is there. Her husband was my insurance agent, Howard Overman. She just all of the sudden took interest in me because I'm Japanese and her husband had the fire insurance on my house. I'm sure that's how she got acquainted. She knew Mr. Hill. They were both Republicans, weren't they?

BWS: Were they? I think so.

---

<sup>1</sup> The name is spelled either as Overman or Overmann. The former spelling is used throughout the transcript.

RT: I think that's how he got my name. He came over. I was working at the St. Paul YWCA and he said he wanted to see me. So I went down to the cafeteria and he came in there. He [his office] was in the First National Bank building. It's across the street. So he came over and he said, "You know, I feel so bad about those people in Nagasaki after the [atomic] bomb [was dropped]. I want to help them." He said, "I know the mayor of Nagasaki." That's what Mr. Hill told me. He said he went to Nagasaki so that's how he got acquainted with the mayor at that time [before World War II]. I didn't know what he was going to ask me, so I thought, well, I must be - the only other lady I knew who was Republican was Mrs. Overman, Rebecca Overman. He said, "I want you to be the president of the Nagasaki Sister City Committee." I said, "Oh, I've never been president of anything. I wouldn't know what to do." He said he didn't have time to do it, so he said, "We'll have a meeting every month and I'll teach you." And I said I had better ask my husband, because I didn't do anything without his advice. So he said, "Why don't you bring your husband?" I said, "Oh, he is too busy building up his own business and I don't want to interfere, because he's got salesmen coming from all over the United States. Sometimes I go to lunch with him, but I don't want to get him involved. He's too busy." So Mr. Hill came one day and he said, "You know, I feel so bad about the people in Nagasaki after the bomb." He said he knew [President] Dwight Eisenhower. Well, he wasn't president, but he was an important man. But they are both Republicans. Mr. Hill used to go skiing in the northern part of the United States, in Maine. I said, "My! You certainly go to the best places to ski." He said, "Oh, the best place to ski is over there [referring to Europe]." So he knew Eisenhower and he said, "We have got to do something for the people in Nagasaki." When he came over to see me - but I'm sure it was Mrs. Overman. I didn't know any other American ladies. He said, "You know, I have to do something to help the people in Nagasaki."

BWS: Why did he say Nagasaki and not Hiroshima? Why Nagasaki and not any place else?

YT: That's where he had been and had met the mayor, so he knew the mayor.

RT: See, Hiroshima was bombed and Nagasaki was the only other city. So he said he felt so bad because he knew the mayor there. He said he wanted to do something for them. So I said, "I think that's real nice if you want to help them out." He said, "I want to have a committee that will work with the people in Nagasaki and we'll send things to them." Well, you know I used to see people on tours to Japan. See, I worked at the YWCA and some of them were staff members and a couple of board members. I was going to see if I could find the pictures because I've been going through some old pictures. So they went with me to Nagasaki [1964] and we went to the hospital and we saw some of the survivors. When we got there, we took flowers to them. When they saw us, and saw that I was Japanese, they just all started crying and I started crying myself. I should have brought them sheets or pillowcases or blankets, but I didn't know any better. I could speak enough Japanese so I talked to them in Japanese and they were all crying there because they never thought we'd be friends. I was trying to find a photograph of that scene because I took some girls from the YWCA. They wanted to take a trip, so I



said, "Well, I don't know what it is going to be like," but I said, "I'm going to go over there because Mr. Hill feels sad about it." He said, it wasn't the city itself, it was the people he was concerned about.

YT: Do you remember, in 1975, you took a couple of women. I can't remember their names.

RT: I don't remember what year it was.

YT: It was 1975. You took me and my husband and then my mother-in-law –

RT: Wasn't Mayor [George] Latimer with us?

YT: No, that was later. That was 1985. But in 1975 –

RT: I remember your mother-in-law.

YT: She was 90. That was the time we brought [bed] sheets from St. Paul to the hospital and we also gave flowers.

RT: Oh, yes. I thought, I should have brought them some [more bed] sheets and pillowcases. You know that cots they had at camp, little wooden things and they were sleeping on those! And all those ladies in that hospital and they were crying because they said in Japanese, we never thought you would be friends with us again. And I told them that – see, I know enough Japanese to talk to them so I said, "Well, I'm so sorry that happened." I said, "I had no idea they were going to do this." And they said, "How was Hiroshima?" That was the other city that was bombed. I said, "I don't go there because I am only supposed to come here." There were several from the YWCA staff who went with me because they just wanted to go. I was trying to find a picture. I suppose I could find it if I looked hard enough. I moved here but I didn't do the moving. The bank moved me so they threw away a lot of stuff that they didn't think I needed.

BWS: The first time that you went back after the war; were people generally happy to see you? Did they know that you came from St. Paul?

RT: We both cried. And I thought, I shouldn't have brought the flowers, I should have brought them pillowcases and sheets, because they were all torn, you know. And they are in these wood and metal beds, like you go camping. We both cried. They were glad to see us. I told them that we were from the United States and we came to be friends. I don't remember their names but anyhow, I remember that it was a sad meeting. The girls that I went with – you know, I took people from the "Y" staff because they wanted to go. I would have looked up those pictures of them. Anyhow, we were there.

BWS: Was it hard to get into visit the hospital? Did you have to work hard to get there?

RT: It was in the hospital. It was just the barest room you ever saw. I mean, wooden and metal little beds and they were crying, and I said, "We should have brought them some sheets and blankets." I think they served us some tea and then we got to talking. The Nagasaki Japanese language is a little different than regular Japanese. Like people in Texas, they speak different from here. I remember we ended up just crying there. It was so sad. They were glad to see us, but I was crying because what I saw there was just the barest kind of a bedroom you saw. I said to one of the girls, "We should have brought pillowcases instead of these flowers," and she said, "Well, we can do that later."

YT: It says here that in 1964, you led a tour to Japan. It was the first visit by American Nisei to Nagasaki. It says here that you brought cotton sheets for that hospital in 1964.

RT: Did we?

YT: Yes.

RT: I told all of the people on my tour. I think there were ten of us. If I look, I could find the names of those people, but you don't need that. Anyhow, they cried and they were glad to see us because they thought we were all enemies. I remember that I wish I brought something for their beds or something. It was the funniest kind of greeting because we were both crying. They thought all the people in America were enemies and I said, "No." I told them we were friends from [Japanese phrase] – that's YWCA. I told them we were going to be good friends and if there was anything we could do, why, we would help them. So we came back and Mr. Hill said, "What do you want to send them?" I said, "Well, the library is going to get rid of a lot of children's books." They offered to give me a lot of their books, but I said, "They don't read English over there!" So I said, "I didn't know if that will help them, but we'll send them some anyhow." Mr. Hill and his children came to help me pack that stuff and they took it and sent it over [1966]. When I got there, I said, "We should send them money so they can buy good blankets and sheets because India has a lot of cotton and they can buy it from there much cheaper than if we sent it." So we sent them some funds. Every one of them on my trip – I only took ten at a time. They all gave ten dollars and we just left it there. We ended up by crying. It wasn't kind of a happy welcome at all.

Later, many years later, I remember Mrs. Hill – you know, Louis Hill's wife – invited me to lunch at her house that is out in the country. She said, "You stay here, Ruth, and I'm going to go to the airport and meet three girls. They are going to be my guests today at lunch, too." She said she wanted me to speak Japanese to them because they don't know English. So I was sitting there and all of the sudden, three Japanese girls came. They came from the airport and they were all wearing hats. Not the straw hats. They were made out of kind of like straw made out of cotton, but they were black with wide brims. I said, "Do you want to take your hat off?" And Mrs. Hill said, "Oh! Don't take their hats off, Ruth." She said, "These girls are invited by three big hospitals in New York and their doctors are trained to take care of patients who have wounds." She said, "These girls have wounds, so don't let them take their hats off." I was speaking Japanese to

them that we were having lunch and they had a Chinese cook there so he had made rice and some Chinese dishes. We ate, but I didn't hardly talk to them. Then they asked me, where did I come from? I told them that my parents came from Japan, but I was born in this country. But I said I knew enough Japanese, but there was a little difference in their language. You know, Nagasaki Japanese speak a different dialect. They were not educated to speak the same dialect as the people in Tokyo city.

YT: Dialect.

RT: See, my parents taught us Tokyo Japanese. Then, we had a Japanese student come on Saturdays. He wanted to learn English so we learned Japanese and he showed us how to write with a brush. We used to make sumi [ink – made from charcoal and water], you know. He taught us how to speak Japanese.

YT: Ruth, getting back to your visits.

RT: My brothers, you know, they thought it would be fun to have a young Japanese man learn some slang. So my brothers were giving him fun – and I said, "Don't use that in front of anybody because that isn't proper." I didn't know how to say the word slang in Japanese, so I told him, "Don't use it, just know that there is a slang language here."

BWS: When those women came to Mrs. Hill's house, they were on their way to the doctor?

RT: They were going to go to the special doctors who performed a surgery on them.

YT: They burnt their hands, for instance?

RT: They had a knit hat with a wide brim. Mrs. Hill told me not to let them take their hats off. They were all going to take their hats off.

BWS: Why did they come to Minnesota? Just to see the Hills?

RT: She went to the airport and brought them to her house. They had a big farm, the Hill farm. I can't remember the name.

BWS: North Oaks. Was it North Oaks?

RT: I had no way of going there, but did you know Mrs. Heckman?

BWS: I have heard of her.

RT: Mr. Heckman was Mr. Hill's manager. So, Mrs. Hill thought, "Well, Ruth has to get there." She [Mrs. Heckman] was a teacher in tailoring at the "Y," so I got to know her well and she is a near neighbor, lives about three blocks away. I asked her to take me out there and these girls were just arriving from the airplane.



BWS: So they went on and got their treatment.

RT: They went on to New York.

BWS: Did the Hills help take care of them? Were they trying to help them?

RT: Oh, I think she paid the whole thing.

YT: That is conjecture. It is hard to know.

RT: Mr. Hill's grandfather built the railroad from Chicago to Portland and he used Japanese laborers from Japan. Esther Suzuki's father was one of those laborers. After they had been here a couple of years, my father heard about them and he used to invite them on Sunday for a Japanese meal. They would all cook it together and my father made foods, all kinds of Japanese sushi. They used to come on Sundays when it was their day off from work. One year, my father said – this is right after the earthquake in Tokyo, so it must have been about 1923 – he said he was going to Japan and see how the earthquake affected Tokyo because his whole family – his relatives were over there. So these laborers who were railroad laborers, they said they would go. Esther Suzuki's father was one and there was another man who was a tailor. He had learned tailoring in New York, Mr. Miura. And then there is Mr. Yamamoto. They were all single men and my father said, "Well, they've got to grow up and have a family" because they were about the age when they should get married. So my father went to Japan in 1923. Then they all got married and they came back and I know that when Mrs. Suzuki came, my mother said she was from the country, so speak real slow in Japanese. I remember.

BWS: Did you have to do that here?

RT: She was so bashful that she hardly raised her head.

BWS: Did you have to do that here, too? Did people know Japanese?

RT: Yes. They all brought back wives.

BWS: But when they were in St. Paul, were there people who –

RT: But I remember this tailor was a real good tailor. He learned in New York and he made my mother a couple of beautiful suits. She had them and she always took good care of them. Esther's father came back with his wife, who had lived in the country in Japan, so she didn't know anything about America.

YT: Esther is in our book.<sup>2</sup> One of the women.

---

<sup>2</sup> John Noboya Tsuchida, Editor. *Reflections: Memoirs of Japanese American Women in Minnesota* (Covina: Pacific Asia Press, 1994). The reference is to Esther Suzuki (Tori).



BWS: Okay.

YT: This is kind of Esther's background. If Esther were alive yet, she would be here because she knew her much more.

BWS: Okay.

YT: [speaking to Ruth] I was telling her that Esther is in our book.

RT: Yes, she is in the book.

YT: She is this one, right here (pointing at picture). Here she is.

BWS: Was she on the Committee with you?

YT: No, she wasn't ever on the Committee.

BWS: She didn't go to any of your Sister City things? She wasn't on the Sister City Committee?

RT: She graduated from Macalester College.

YT: It's all in here.

RT: There are two graduates from Macalester who were honored. You can call Macalester and get it, because they sent me the whole picture of Esther and this Negro woman who were early graduates and all their history. I sent it all to Portland, Oregon [where Esther grew up].

YT: Ruth, she was mainly interested in ties with the Sister City – the St. Paul Nagasaki Sister City part. So if we could get back to it.

RT: She would come to the meetings.

BWS: Did she come to the meetings? But she wasn't ever on your board, was she?

RT: She wasn't on the board. Oh, she was so busy. You know, her father is a good storyteller and she took that on and she grew up and that's why all the pictures she has, she is always laughing or something. Esther used to take me to the luncheons and board meetings at Macalester.<sup>3</sup>

YT: She was responsible for getting me on the board [referring to the Committee], though.

---

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Tanbara was not on the Macalester board, but would accompany Esther to the board luncheon meetings.

RT: I had her in kindergarten, when she was little. I knew many young Japanese people here.

BWS: You asked Yoshi to go on the board [Committee]? And Linda, was your mother on the board [Committee]?

LvD: No. She worked at the "Y."

RT: I knew Linda when she was a baby. I did! Her mother was the first secretary at the YWCA. She typed, you know. The lady, the staff member that she typed for, came just last week, here, and they brought a dinner for me. The other girls that had been associated with the "YW," but that was so many years ago. They come every year.

BWS: So you had the "YW" and then you had the Sister City. And this was where Yoshi came in, was with the Sister City.

YT: I also knew her from the YWCA because I was on the board there, too.

RT: Do you remember when we used to teach cooking?

YT: Do you remember, you were kind of responsible for asking me to be on the "Y" board, too, but I remembered when it was that you asked me to be on the St. Paul-Nagasaki Board. It was after 1975, after the trip that you took my mother-in-law. Do you remember that year, do you remember we were caught in a typhoon? In Hong Kong, do you remember that? We celebrated your birthday.

RT: I don't remember that. I have to think about it a little bit.

YT: We ended up in Hong Kong before coming home and we were in a typhoon. It was in October, just when it was your birthday and we celebrated your birthday. That was in 1975. You don't remember that?

RT: I don't remember that.

YT: You don't remember that trip to Japan?

RT: I remember your husband's mother went to Japan with us.

YT: That was her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. That was the year but she didn't come with us to Hong Kong because she stayed with some relatives, but the rest of us went to Hong Kong and we got caught in a typhoon and we celebrated your birthday. You don't remember that?

RT: I don't.

BWS: What did you do for the birthday?

YT: We couldn't get out because of the typhoon, so we celebrated her birthday just in the hotel. The hotel was all tied down.

BWS: To protect you from the typhoon.

RT: One year, do you remember a Japanese gardener who made the garden in St. Paul Como Park? Well, he invited us to go to visit his home. Mayor Latimer and Mrs. Latimer, he was the mayor of St. Paul and he wanted to visit Nagasaki because it was the Sister City. So I said, "You go down to the bank and make your reservation and I'll make mine and if anybody else wants to go, why that's just fine." Yoshi and her husband went.

BWS: Yoshi – she has some pictures to show you.

RT: Well, she remembers that because George's mother went.

YT: But you don't remember that typhoon?

RT: She wasn't a young one, but she was as young as everybody else.

YT: That's when we visited the hospital, too. We visited the atomic bomb hospital too, and we brought flowers and we brought sheets. I have it down someplace.

BWS: So you were helping out.

RT: The first time I went there after the bomb, was with just American people. They were from the "Y" staff.

YT: Our trip, too, we were all American.

RT: You were there?

YT: Yes. We were Niseis, but we were Americans, so we were all Americans.

RT: You went with us when Irene Tacke was there, did you?

YT: No.

RT: That's the first time I went after the [atomic] bomb. I said to them in Japanese – see, Nagasaki people, they speak a different Japanese than people my parents. They [Ruth Tanbara's parents] spoke real classical Japanese.

Tape One Side Two

YT: Is this Mr. Matsuda?

RT: These are the gardeners, aren't they?

YT: Yes, two gardeners.

RT: They are the gardeners that made the Japanese Garden in Como Park in St. Paul.

BWS: (looking at photos) Isn't that nice? Do you want to have her talk about that a little bit? About the garden? Or do you want to go back a little further? Is there anything else about Louis Hill that you would like to tell?

RT: Well, I worked at the "YW" and they had a big building on Kellogg Boulevard at that time. He called up and said he was coming over to see me. See, Mrs. Overman, Rebecca Overman, they are both Republicans so she knew him and he found out about me through her.

BWS: Tell me a little bit about Louis Hill.

RT: He came over and he said, you know, he felt so bad about the bombing in Nagasaki, Japan, and he said he knew the mayor and he said he wanted to help the people there. So I thought to myself, what is he asking me to do? I said, "I'm going to go over there one of these days and see how things are." He said he wanted to be friends with the people, because he knew the mayor. He had been over there before the war. He came over and he said he thinks he should establish a committee. I said I thought that was fine. I didn't know him until - I didn't know what to say, but I think Mrs. Overman was a good friend of mine. Her husband was our insurance man. See, that's how I got acquainted with her. She was very active in the Republican Party.

BWS: Louis Hill stayed on the committee all the time, though, didn't he?

RT: Yes, he did. He said he didn't have time to be the president or the committee chairman. But he said he was interested in it. He said, "If you'll be the president of the committee," so that's how I got to be on the committee.

BWS: What did he do then? Did he help you?

RT: Yes. I said, "Well, I've never been president. I'll be the secretary." "Oh!" he said, "No, you be the president and I'll meet with you every month and you tell me what has happened." I said, "Well, I'll just send you the minutes." He said, "No, you come over and have lunch with me." At that time, the St. Paul Athletic Club didn't allow women in there. They had a closed entrance where you had to show your card, that you were a member. So I told him, "I'll just be the secretary and I'll take the minutes." And he said, "Buy anything you want and just charge it to me." I said, "No, I don't do that.



I'll pay for it and I'll send you the bill later at the end of the month." I said, "There won't be many things. I'd like to have a good secretary's book and I've got my own pencils." Every month, he would call me up and he said he was going to meet with me for the agenda for the next meeting. So I met with him at the St. Paul Athletic Club, which was just for men, and I was the only woman in the dining room. I told him one day, I said, "Why don't you bring Mrs. Hill?" He said, "Well, she is too busy." She had a hobby – I don't know what she raised on their farm, but I have a feeling it was cows. I'm not sure because it wasn't pigs. She was so busy with that. That was her hobby, see.

BWS: So she didn't come? Did she not come to lunch?

RT: No, she didn't come to the meetings at all, no.

BWS: This was really Mr. Hill's interest, wasn't it?

RT: I can't remember her first name [Elsi].

BWS: It wasn't Mari. That was their daughter. But she didn't – it was Mr. Hill who really...?

RT: Well, he had a first wife and then they separated because she was more like a social lady. But this Mrs. Hill was from Denmark. She was his secretary at first. She was very concerned about all the different things. We became better friends because she got to know all these people and then she'd invite these girls from Japan who were hurt. She really was wonderful and not one of these leaders who has to be out in the front. She was always in the background. I'll never forget how kind she was to all the Japanese. You know dignitaries who would come. They didn't speak English so she would invite me to their dinners or luncheons and they wondered where I had learned my Japanese. I said I learned it from my parents. They didn't want me to forget it so they had a young student come every Saturday and we learned Japanese and even learned how to write with a brush. And then we taught him English. He came regularly and he came about three or four years. I don't remember his name and I don't know where he is now, but he even learned the American slang. My brothers taught him slang. He said he had better learn it so he will know it's something he shouldn't use.

BWS: Mrs. Hill would have you come out to talk, to make sure people from Japan were comfortable and to help her and be there when she entertained people, then?

RT: Yes, she was very good to me. She was from Denmark and she was his secretary. Then they got married. She said, "I'm Mrs. Hill now, Ruth." I said, "Well, that's nice." I can't remember her maiden name.

BWS: Fors. F-O-R-S. A very Danish name.

RT: She was very quiet. She taught me a lot of things about how the Japanese had suffered – because she studied it. She studied all the books on it and everything. It was

only through her that I got acquainted with all these problems. But these girls from Japan, they were going to New York to have their wounds taken care of. She invited them to lunch and I was sitting there. They talked to me in Japanese and they said where did I learn my Japanese? I said, "It is different," but I said, "My parents taught me how they speak in Tokyo. I think it is a little different from the country Japanese." I said, "Can you understand me?" They said, "Yes." But they all wore their hats and I didn't know why. I was going to have them take them off, but she [Mrs. Hill] said, "Oh, no! Don't let them take their hats off. They are girls who have been wounded in the atom bomb." She said, "They don't have any hair and their wounds are not healed yet. But the doctors in New York are going to work on them for three years." I remember one girl could hardly hold her chopsticks. So I said, "Do you want use an American spoon?" They didn't know what that was, so I taught them and they ate their meal with a spoon because they could hardly hold a chopstick.

BWS: Why?

RT: They asked me how I came here to America and I said, "I didn't come here, I was born here." That really interested them. But I never saw them after three years. I don't know if they got well or what. But she wouldn't let me take their hats off.

BWS: Well, it protected their heads, didn't it? It protected the wounds.

RT: I can just see them – [gesturing toward her neck] down here it was all raw. It was just red, you know. I went to Nagasaki several times after that and the doctor who was over there, he and his wife had a scholarship from the University of Minnesota. He writes to me now. I mean, he sent me a calendar, a Japanese calendar, and he said his daughter is now – you know, she was just a little three-year-old when she was here, she's grown up and she's a model in Tokyo. She models American clothes in Tokyo. That's a good sign that at least she at least grew up from the days I saw her. She was just a little child.

BWS: One of the nice things about St. Paul-Nagasaki was meeting people, I would think. You must have met a lot of people back and forth, in Japan and here. Did you?

RT: Yes.

BWS: And the friendships that you made.

RT: I made a lot of friends through my relatives because they were very active.

YT: How about because of the Nagasaki exchange? The Nagasaki Sister City? Do you want to name some them?

RT: Well, you went on a trip with us. I used to go quite often.

YT: Mr. Matsuda? And you knew all the mayors. You knew all the mayors of Nagasaki.

RT: Yes, I guess I knew a lot of people. But Mayor [and Mrs. George] Latimer from St. Paul went with us. Well, you were there.

YT: Yes.

RT: Because I saw a picture of that.

BWS: Mayor Motoshima? Was that one of the mayors? Do you remember that name?

RT: Motoshima? Yes.

YT: I think this is the one [hold up photograph]. And he visited us. Then in 1975 when we went, it was Morotani. Do you remember Mayor Morotani?

RT: I remember him. [looking through photos]. There is our niece.

BWS: What about Mayor Morotani. He was there for a long time. Wasn't he mayor for a long, long time?

RT: Yes.

BWS: Did he come here?

YT: He came over here, too. And we went over there.

RT: Then there was a younger mayor after that. Remember him?

YT: Was it Ito?

RT: I can't remember his name, but he was the mayor for a long time. The younger mayor followed him. But this doctor that we knew in Nagasaki –

YT: Iwanaga.

RT: That's another lady. [looking at photo]. Her husband had a hospital in Nagasaki and Mrs. Iwanaga was his wife. The doctor passed away but she writes to me every Christmas; I get a nice letter from her. She is still living.

BWS: You've made really close friends in Nagasaki, didn't you?

RT: Do you want to write to her?

BWS: No, I just think it is nice that you made such good friends.

RT: She sends me Christmas cards [and the famous Nagasaki cake].

BWS: Was she part of the committee?

YT: I even played golf with them when they came over here.

RT: Her husband was president of a Rotary International. She said that when he went to the meetings, she was going to just stay in St. Paul. So she stayed here and waited until he came back. But I visited them in Japan.

BWS: So you would visit back and forth? You had friends over there that you'd go see and take groups of people here to visit?

RT: Well, I would go to see that doctor. He sent me a calendar – it's in my bedroom. You know, in Japan, every year is an animal and this year it is a sheep, so he sent me that. His daughter is big enough now and she's a model in Tokyo.

BWS: What about Mayor Latimer? You said Mayor Latimer went with you?

YT: You talked about that year in 1985 when Mayor Latimer came.

RT: You can talk to him, he knows and remembers, because he said he didn't want to take his camera because he wouldn't be in the pictures. So he said, "Ruth, do you mind taking my pictures?"

YT: Here are pictures of her at the Okunchi Festival. This is 1985.

BWS: Oh, my! Look at this!

YT: And here is Mayor Latimer.

BWS: Who is that? That's Mayor Motoshima?

RT: Yes, I can see him right here.

YT: Do you see yourself there?

RT: Here I am, right here.

YT: She remembers that a little bit better than the 1975 trip.

BWS: That must have been quite a group, almost a delegation.

RT: See, my brother-in-law is here, right here?



YT: Ruth, how many years were you president?

RT: I think I had two terms, didn't I?

YT: Yes, I think you were. How many years would that be?

BWS: How many years was there per term?

RT: I think it was three years, two or three years. Now, what is the name of the lady who followed me? Do you know?

BWS: I can't remember.

YT: Was there a lady that followed you? I thought maybe --

RT: Her husband was with Northwest Airlines.

YT: Jim Aldridge followed. And Steve Gadler followed. When I was on the board, the committee board, it was Chuck Evans. So there must have been -- I'm not sure.

BWS: Chris Rossow was much later.

YT: Who was before? After Chuck?

BWS: You must have had some nice trips to Nagasaki.

YT: He was a long time. No, after Chuck Evans -- his wife is still living.

RT: I remember that man. What was his name? I can't think of it.

YT: Chris ???.

BWS: There was one that had kind of a nickname. Is that the one?

YT: Fricke?

RT: Chip [Walter] Fricke. He was a good one for a long time.

YT: He did a good job.

RT: You have some good pictures.

BWS: Oh, look at this! Here in the City Council chambers.

RT: I had all those pictures. But when I moved, I wasn't there when they moved my stuff, so the bank just threw everything away.

YT: I can't find a 1975. Somebody has it.

BWS: You were hoping maybe she did. When you would go over there, what would you do? You would visit the hospital and then you would have meals.

RT: I got to eat at the Garden because Masami Matsuda is the one that built St. Paul's Japanese garden so he always invited us and his family invited us to a good supper. Yoshi, you were there.

YT: Yes, I was. In fact, I've been twice because you took us there before, too.

RT: See, I had a lot of these pictures but when they cleaned my apartment, they threw everything away.

BWS: Why did you have Mr. Matsudo come back over here? You had the gardener come here, you said. You had Mr. Matsuda.

YT: Here is Mr. Matsuda's garden where we were entertained. Remember his house?

RT: There is Mr. Matsuda there. [looking at photos]. You went through the whole garden.

YT: Yes, you did too. Because you were there.

RT: Yes, I was there.

YT: Remember, we had lunch?

RT: I had a lot of these pictures, but bank threw away all my things.

BWS: Did you entertain Mr. Matsuda when he came here?

YT: See, this was the one that she was part of it [referring to a photo]

BWS: And he did that beautiful garden at Como Park.

RT: She's got good pictures.

BWS: She said you took some of them.

RT: I had a lot of pictures but they cleaned out my place.

[discussion in background about photos]

RT: Mr. Hill didn't write a book of his own, so all his friends wrote a book. Did you know about that? See, I had a copy but my nephew wanted it so I said, well, I can't use it anymore so I gave it to him.

BWS: You are in that book. [background discussion]. You are part of that book, too, aren't you? You are in Mr. Hill's book because you had a lot to do with some of the things.

RT: Did you get a copy of it?

BWS: I've seen it, yes.

RT: Where did you get it?

BWS: Somebody loaned it to me.

RT: You know, there is a nurse that comes – remember that girl? She used to do all artwork.

YT: It was Evelyn Mitsch.

RT: Evelyn! She was an artist so every time we stopped any place, she would sit down and draw and then she made Christmas cards out of them and gave them to her friends. But she had diabetes and I remember she used to always carry oranges in her suitcase. I said, how many oranges do you carry and she said, "I carry about nine oranges." I said, "Well, I'll carry some in my suitcase in case you run out." And when we went to Greece, they were selling oranges at every corner.

BWS: You didn't need to carry them, did you?

RT: Oh, they had wonderful oranges in Greece!

BWS: [discussion about a question]

RT: I had those pictures in my apartment and I don't know where they went to, because I didn't get to clean my apartment. The bank cleaned it and they didn't think any of them were important. They just threw it away.

BWS: That's too bad.

RT: Well, the first couple of days, I just cried about it. But I thought, well, I'll have to find out... if I needed it, I could get them. My nephew is redoing some for me but I don't really need it anymore.

BWS: But, it's nice to know where it goes. You would like to know what happened, I'm sure.

RT: Yes.

BWS: Do you remember some of the other presidents? You mentioned Steve Gadler, Chip Fricke, Jim Aldridge.

RT: Jim Aldridge came after me.

BWS: When did Steve Gadler come? Was he after?

RT: Oh, he was one of the early ones. There was one man who was in the army.<sup>4</sup> He was stationed in Nagasaki and he was an American officer and he was the first president, because I followed him.

BWS: Oh, really? So he had been –

RT: I don't remember –

YT: Steve Gadler.

RT: He died.

BWS: He was there during World War II? Is that right?

RT: I don't know what he was doing over in Nagasaki but he was there. I remember he came back to the United States and he was in the army, see. And he said he can't continue that and work. He didn't have time for committee work, but he said – I can't remember his name, but he was the first officer, I think, of the St. Paul-Nagasaki Sister City Committee.

YT: You mean, you weren't the first one? You weren't the first president?

RT: I don't know if he was the president but he was the first officer. That's all I remember. I remember – if it was him or not. There is a man who just loved plants. He had them in his basement and he had boxes with dirt in it and he had all these seeds from Japan and he would grow them. He was the first president, but he was in Japan at the time, but he said he didn't have time for it. That's how I got this job.

BWS: A big job.

RT: I can't think of his name.

YT: It wasn't Steve Gadler?

---

<sup>4</sup> Mrs. Tanbara is referring to Steve Gadler, a retired Air Force colonel who was stationed in Nagasaki shortly after the bombing. Walter "Chip" Fricke, another SPNSCC president, was also a soldier in Japan at the end of World War II.



RT: No, it wasn't Steve Gadler. That was way before his time. He lived in this house in St. Anthony Park and he had a big garden in his basement. He had a lot of boxes of dirt, you know, and he was growing these things. You don't remember?

YT: Was it Jim Aldridge?

RT: No, no. It was before Aldridge. This was in the early days. Because he lived in Japan. You don't have his name?

BWS: I've got Steve Gadler and Jim Aldridge and Evelyn Mitsch.

YT: That was in the '60s.

RT: Steve Gadler had a house in the residential section of St. Paul. I think he planted some seeds in little boxes to see if they would grow. But I can't remember.

#### Tape Two Side One

RT: George's mother was with us one year.

YT: Actually, this committee on the Nagasaki side was run by the city itself. On this side, it was a volunteer organization. Therefore, when we went over there, it was very official. The 1985 trip was an official trip from here. It was the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration. However, when Ruth took us, it was a very small group. At most ten. So we were not really an official group. But even if we didn't go as an official group, the city plugged in. So we met the mayor. We would exchange...some of these large pictures, these were taken by their official city photographer. These are some that my husband took, too. You can see the difference.

BWS: They look very official and everything.

YT: Like I said, I wish I could find that book (the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary book). I think it someplace with my family.

But does this help answer your question?

BWS: That helps a lot.

YT: Just because Ruth went along, although it may have been for others just a trip for Japan, always there was this trip [to Nagasaki] and always it was a little more formal.

BWS: A little more important.

YT: Right.

BWS: Or a little more recognized. It wasn't just a tour group coming. It was somebody from St. Paul and somebody from your committee and that made it a more...

YT: Yes, just because. Although the rest of them were not part of the St. Paul Committee, but because she was there, that made it more official. When they came over here too, there were official events but at the same time, some of us on our own would entertain them.

BWS: Which encouraged friendships.

YT: Right.

BWS: Because wasn't that – that was what Mr. Hill wanted. He wanted friendship.

YT: And when they came over here, too, it didn't mean that the city plugged in right away, either. I mean, we were lucky if we could get the mayor to participate. You see what I mean?

BWS: But in that situation, there was still was friendship. You were making personal contacts. And that was important.

YT: Absolutely.

BWS: And that helped, didn't it? It helped promote some of the ideas and friendship.

YT: And the friendship, she was a part of the friendship. But then you had Rotary exchange, too, that involved students. And then you saw the pictures of Anita Pampusch in the groups. You had the Junshin and St. Catherine's exchange.

BWS: The colleges.

YT: So they were exchanges back and forth in those years, too.

BWS: So you really started something quite big. When Mr. Hill came and said, "Help me get going."

RT: He felt so bad about the people in Nagasaki. He said, "I've got to do something to help the people."

BWS: And look what he did to help: the friendships and the tours and the YWCA – you said you helped with the YWCA over there. From the YWCA here helped the YWCA over there.

YT: Was there a YWCA in Nagasaki?

RT: I think the YWCA in Nagasaki – they is a teacher in Nagasaki. A lady, she belonged to the YWCA in Nagasaki. She and I became good friends. She came over here to visit with the some of the Nagasaki people at one time. I know her husband acted in the Nagasaki Sister City, too. When he passed away – she still writes to me, the doctor's wife.

YT: Was she a member of the YWCA in Nagasaki?

RT: No, I think her husband had a hospital in Nagasaki.

BWS: Yes, right.

RT: It was one of the bigger hospitals and she writes to me now, every once in a while.

BWS: You still have that friendship that started because of all the work you did.

RT: Yes, it was so many years ago. But there is a lady who comes to read the Bible here on Sundays and she brought a friend, some Japanese student from the university. They had lived in not Nagasaki but near there. So they came and were surprised that I could speak Japanese. They don't speak a lot of English, you know, so I thought I had better speak in Japanese. She writes to me every once in a while and tells me where they've been and where they are going. I think that the scholarship program between the countries is one of the nicest things that happened because they get to know a little bit more. I know one time I had been traveling in Japan and I went to Pearl Island. I got so fascinated because these girls there in their swimming suits and they are going down to get these oysters and the oysters had little pearls inside. I was sitting there just watching all those girls. They were down in their swimsuits and they would bring up oysters and see how big the pearls were. If they were too small, they'd throw them back. I knew the man who – I was staying at this hotel and he's ringing a bill and he came over because I was on this side of the river and he said, "We're going to close the dining room. Don't you want your supper?" I said, I told him in Japanese, "No, I'll eat tomorrow morning." He said, "No I'll bring it over." He said he had to close the restaurant. I was there until around eight or nine o'clock. But I wanted to watch the pearl divers because you never see that in America and I told him that. I brought some of those pearls they threw away. I mean, they are in oyster shells but there is a little pearl in them and I was going to give one to a lady who comes to read the bible. I said, "Well, this is an act of God so I'm going to give it to you."

BWS: When you first got started, going way, way, way back again, way back, did you work with the Festival of Nations?

RT: I don't know when I started that. I can't remember how I started but I remember having a Japanese food booth in the Festival of Nations a long time ago. And I said, "I don't know what I am going to serve because these people never had Japanese food." I can't remember what we served the first year but a lot of people wanted the Japanese



food so after that, that's all I made was rice and sukiyaki and then we'd have a salad. And then I had a box, an empty carton, and it said it had a hundred and some odd dishes in the plastic. And I remember that. Those dishes were in that box, but the box was empty – you know, a big carton full. So when they moved my stuff over here, why, some of it came in that.

BWS: How long did you work at this festival? You worked for a long, long time on the Festival of Nations.

RT: Oh, yes! It was a long time ago. When did I come to St. Paul? 1932, maybe?

YT: No, in the '40s.

RT: In the 1940s.

YT: Yes, just after the war started.

BWS: And the Festival of Nations started right after the war, in 1947.

RT: When I got married I went to San Francisco one day with my husband. He wanted me to meet his friends in San Francisco. One man was head of the Japanese American Citizens League and he was just starting to get the Japanese American newspaper out, the *Pacific Citizen*. My husband named that paper the *Pacific Citizen*. But my husband said he would take me to San Francisco and met Mr. Kido and then each time, the head of the Japanese group here, he said, trying to get all the Japanese organized. Well, I think I met him then. Then, he introduced me to the International Institute lady and it just happened that the Japanese social worker for the International Institute in San Francisco died overnight. She got sick and passed away. She called me up and she said, "Ruth, I want you to help us out. My worker has passed away and we have so many state checks to deliver." She said, "We'll give you map of the city and addresses to these places." Well, you know, I didn't know San Francisco so the state social worker had the checks and her name was Maude Woodmansee. She said she would take me a few times to show me where it was. I had never been in a big city like San Francisco and I didn't know there were Japanese men who had been in jail. They had jumped ship and they swam ashore and they got caught. It was near Treasure Island. I told them, "I don't think I can do this kind of work. I'm not really qualified." "Well," she said, "will you do it because the other girl died and they are waiting for their state checks." So I went to these – you know, those San Francisco homes are tall, three or four stories, so I had to go up there. I went with the state social worker a couple of times to see what she did. But she said, "Ruth, you know how to do it now, you just go and deliver them." Well, I went up there. I had never seen a Japanese who had been in prison. And they got the foot in the door so I wouldn't shut it. And I looked at them and I thought, "Gee, that's funny." So I talked to them in Japanese and they respected me after I talked in Japanese and I told them that I was taking this state social worker's place because she had too many places to go. She was ready for retirement but she was going to have to stay on until they could replace her. So she told me, she said, "You go with



your hat and gloves so they know you are just a visitor. You're not going in there to stay." And I was scared to death. You know, I was just a new bride. I didn't know anybody. There was a Standard Oil station across the street. You know, those homes in San Francisco were three, four stories high. My husband took me to the district in a car and he said he would wait for me. So I told him, "You need to talk to that Standard Oil station man, if I don't come out in ten minutes," I said, "You come and get me!" "I don't think it will take long. I just have to deliver this and get them to sign it." Well, these Japanese men had been in prison. They didn't talk the Japanese that I knew. It was more – it was very common. I mean, they knew words that only men would use. So I told them that I was there to give them their state check and I wanted to see them sign it. That was one thing they had us do so they could go and get it cashed. And they had their foot in the door so I wouldn't shut it and I was scared to death. So I thought, "Well, I have to do it. This other lady did it." But she always wore her hat and gloves. So I did the same. I thought, well, they knew I was just a visitor. I had to do that for a couple of months, because they lost their worker. I used to go down to a San Francisco street – you know, I came from a very wholesome, Portland [Oregon] community and nobody ever did anything bad there. You know, they went to church and they went to different meetings but they never had anybody out of prison. So when I went there, the man had his foot in the door so I wouldn't shut it, see, and I was scared to death, but I wore my hat and gloves and I had this check and I had to have them sign it. Then I told them to go to the store and they would cash it for them. And this man says to me – I never heard that kind of Japanese before because my folks talked regular Japanese. So he said, he asked me where I came from. And I told him, I said, "I'm the new social worker," I told him in Japanese, I said I was the new worker and I said, "I am just here to give you your check." I told them in Japanese. And he said then, "Are you coming every month?" I said, "I'm coming in place of the other lady, but she might come with me a couple times so I can get acquainted with people. But I don't know how long I'll be because I don't live in San Francisco, I live in Berkeley and I don't know if I can get over here every time." At that time, we had to take a boat to cross. So the man said, "Where are you from?" I told him that I was born in the United States. I didn't tell him where I was from. And they had their foot in the door so I wouldn't shut it. I got kind of scared. The American social worker said, "Ruth, when you go there, always wear your hat and gloves so they know you are not going to stay there." So I had to buy a hat. Oh, I never saw such Japanese men before. [inaudible]

BWS: For the Festival of Nations, were you trying to teach people about the kind of Japanese things that you knew? The thing you had been taught?

RT: See, I worked for a while in the San Francisco International Institute. That's how I got on doing social work. And that lady gave me a reference when I got to St. Paul, would I see this Alice Sickels who was the president in St. Paul. So I went to her and I showed her the letter and she said she knew Miss Watson in San Francisco and she said, "Do you want to be a social worker?" And I said, "Oh, no! I just came here to help out in case you need somebody to translate for you." I said, "I don't write a lot of Japanese but I can read most of it." So that's how I got acquainted with Alice Sickels. Then all these people came out of [Japanese relocation] camps, you know, later. She assigned one

of her social workers to go with my husband to find houses for these Japanese people who came out of camps. She had lived in Seattle so she knew Japanese people, Mrs. Sickels. So every day, they would go out every day to find an apartment or a house where these people could live. And they were successful. They would find someplace where they could live. But you know, you come to a strange city and you don't know where to go. So, I borrowed money from my insurance policy to give them enough money to buy clothing and food and pay their rent. And I told them whenever they were ready to return it, it's all right. I told them they could just wait awhile because I didn't need it right away. And they wrote it all down in Japanese, wrote down the amount. Do you know, that every one paid it back in about a month? Then, every month they would come over and bring me sushi or something they made of Japanese foods. Every month they came over and brought a Japanese dish. They made tofu. You know, that's bean curd. Then, every month they came. You know, I had a lot of plants given to me. And I always did have a lot of garden planted, like geraniums and others. They made tables for me out of wood and they brought it and painted it all and left it there. So I never regretted helping them. It was a long time ago and I borrowed the money from the insurance company to help them out. They gave me the money and I returned it when they repaid me. Many years later, they always brought something that they made and some of them made little tables for me to put my plants on. They were real friendly. That went on for a long time. Now their sons and daughters are going to college and they are writing to me and they said they're going to college. They wanted me to know they're going, so I established an Earl Tanbara scholarship from the memorials I received [when her husband died]. I said, "Well, this can help you." So I get letters of thanks now. I remember they used to bring all kinds of things they made. Everybody did.

YT: [Mrs. Alice Sickels] - was she still president when the Festival of Nations started?

RT: What was this?

YT: Alice Sickels.

RT: Alice Sickels was the general secretary.

YT: Did she start the Festival of Nations?

RT: Yes, she was the head of it. She started it. I had that book on the Festival of Nations. Do you have the book?

YT: She has. Linda has one.

RT: I had one, but somebody took it. I had to get rid of everything because I moved without being there. The bank threw away a lot of my papers.

BWS: Was she [Alice Sickels] the person who asked you to start being part of the Festival of Nations?

RT: No.

BWS: She didn't ask you?

RT: No. At first, we just had a booth. We had a booth of our own and a lot of Japanese came to the Festival so they used to make the rice. We used to make sukiyaki and rice. We didn't have the other things.

BWS: What else did you do?

RT: We didn't enter the program, I don't think, then. We were busy getting the Festival of Nations food booth.

YT: There were other aspects to it.

BWS: So the other things that were done for the Festival of Nations were not....

YT: She's been active in the food booth part of it.

RT: Mr. Hill is the one that started that Nagasaki Sister Cities, because he wanted to help the people.

BWS: Yes. From that, then you came right into the St. Paul and Nagasaki from the Festival of Nations?

RT: I think we were in the St. Paul-Nagasaki Sister City before the Festival. We didn't know any children that would dance. You know, they were small yet. We just had the food booth in the Festival.

BWS: And the food booth made money for your St. Paul-Nagasaki Sister City Committee?

RT: They didn't make the money for Nagasaki. They were separate.

YT: The food booth was, in the beginning, you were helping with the food booth but it wasn't just for the Sister City, Nagasaki. It was only after the Nagasaki Sister City wanted to have a fundraiser through the booth, so... You kept helping. Even from before, and gradually when it became a fundraiser for the Nagasaki-St. Paul Sister City Committee, you kept helping them.

LvD: I have food booth 1992, St. Paul-Nagasaki Sister City Committee (referring to a photo)

RT: In my younger days, I was very active.



BWS: Did you bring a flower arranger in? Someone to do the flowers?

RT: You mean in Japan?

BWS: To the Festival of Nations.

RT: Mrs. Yamamoto was a flower arrangement teacher in San Francisco. So she was staying with the family that – I don't know the name of the magazine but this family knew this lady who was a flower arrangement teacher in San Francisco and they used to put her flower arrangements in their magazine. I don't know the name of the magazine but it was a woman's magazine. Anyhow, I knew that lady from San Francisco when I lived there and I went to her classes. So we invited her and she came and lived with the editor's family of that magazine. I can't remember the name of the magazine now. But she lived there and she did the flower arrangements for their magazine.

BWS: So she came in...?

RT: Then, one day [1947]...she lived in Des Moines or some other city and so I said, "We're having a Festival of Nations, so we'll come and get you and you can stay at the 'YW'" – this was in the old building – and I said, "And you do the flower arrangements for the Japanese booth and show them the art." The art of flower arrangement. Then, she also studied sand painting – do you know what that is? You know, Japanese people do a lot of sand painting. I took some lessons but I'm not that good and I don't have the equipment. So she brought all her stuff and she showed it at the Festival of Nations.

BWS: Was it a good thing to do? Were people interested?

RT: Oh, they were! They just all looked around. You know, it was just like a real scene on a beach, the way the sand is all white, very fine. Then she had little rocks.

YT: Are you talking about Mrs. Ando that did the sand paintings? Akiko's mother.

RT: That was after. Mrs. Ando came when – what's her name? You know, her daughter.

YT: Akiko [Sako].

RT: She came – I don't know what year it was, but I remember I took her to lunch. I took Akiko and her mother to lunch. I know we knew Dr. Sako before they were married. So he went to Japan and he brought back Akiko and then her mother came. One day, I thought, I should take them to lunch. So I went to some restaurant and took them to lunch. You know, when she opened up her purse, she opened up her purse she had lots of greenback and not little – there were twenties and fives in there. So I said to her, "You shouldn't carry that in your purse. You should put that in a bank and you can write a check." I told her how she could write a check. So I told her to ask her husband, who was Dr. Sako. He was a good friend of my husband.



Tape Two SideTwo

RT: She could open a checking account and put that money in there and get these blank checks and she could write them. So I taught her how to do that.

BWS: You helped her to do that.

RT: [Yes, I explained that she should ask her husband to help her open a checking account at the bank.] That's Mrs. Yamamoto.

YT: She is the one that did both the flower arranging and the sand (1947).

BWS: She did the sand painting?

RT: Yes.

YT: It says that she did the sand.

BWS: She came from Des Moines.

RT: Yes, she was my teacher. She was very famous. One day, I went to church early and she's got a stepladder on the stage and she's way up there. I said, "What are you doing up there?" She said, "I'm doing a special arrangement for your church. I'm in heaven!" [laughter]. She had made some arrangement up there and she came down. She's a tiny woman, but strong, very strong. She was my teacher when I lived in San Francisco.

BWS: Did she come back? Did you have flower arranging and sand and other activities at the Festival?

YT: I'm not sure because I've always helped with the food, although this shows [a photo] me with Evelyn Mitsch. This is the couple that she mentioned.

RT: Is the St. Paul-Nagasaki Sister City having an anniversary?

YT: Yes, in 2005, Ruth. In 2005 they will celebrate 50 years. That's why Barb is here.

BWS: You're in a lot of pictures, Ruth.

RT: I know that's you. Who are these other people?

YT: That's Evelyn Mitsch. Then the one that you hear from, Shiozaki. You remember? Mr. and Mrs. Shiozaki?

RT: Is that my brother-in-law?

YT: No. I'm talking about the other Shiozaki. He raises roses. Remember, he raises roses?

RT: That's Judy's husband.

YT: No, no. His wife –

RT: Oh, she had a greenhouse. She wrote me a card.

YT: Yes, right. Right. Right. Recognize them?

RT: You're lucky to have all these pictures.

YT: You took this. See, this is from you. You took that picture.

BWS: You took a lot of pictures.

RT: I had three or four cameras.

BWS: You'd go all the time and take pictures. A lot of people from the Sister City Committee did the Festival and they helped you with the Festival of Nations, didn't they?

RT: Yes, they did.

BWS: Over the years, you had some good helpers? People who could help you make the food and sell the food?

RT: We were so active in those days, weren't we?

YT: Right.

RT: Yes, I did. And we had to have committee meetings and I used to have to remember which ones they were. We used to meet at the International Institute. I remember meeting down in their room there. A long time ago.

BWS: Can you tell me about Nagasaki Road here in St. Paul? About naming it?

RT: Did you know that after the war, the Boy Scouts and then St. Paul, they were going to send a totem pole?

YT: A totem pole.

RT: It's so big that they didn't know how to get it over there, but the Northwest Airlines offered to take it over there. And they planted it right in the heart of Nagasaki. It's still standing there! They put some banners on there and I think the Boy Scouts of St. Paul went over there to dedicate it.

BWS: So people in Nagasaki know it came from St. Paul? That was a way of saying, "We're Sister Cities?"

RT: They know that we are sister cities. I don't keep up with them now but in my day, we knew most of the people who were involved. They used to write to me. Dr. Iwanaga's wife – he passed away, but he was the International Chairman of Rotary Club. Not just locally, but the international. So when he would go to those meetings, she said she didn't want to go because they were always in Florida or some place, so she stayed right in St. Paul. We'd have lunch or dinner together and then we would go out to Como Park to see what else we could do. I kept up with them for a long time. But now, I don't go there.

BWS: Did your committee name a street in St. Paul after Nagasaki? Did you name a street here? Do you remember doing that?

RT: We had a street in Nagasaki –

YT: That is named St. Paul.

BWS: That is named St. Paul.

RT: There was a street in – what's that island across the river in St. Paul?

YT: Harriet Island.

RT: We had a street there, but I don't know if they kept it up.<sup>5</sup>

BWS: Really? That's what I was wondering.

YT: I was wondering, too, because there were a lot of things that happened.

LvD: I think they tore it up to build something.

RT: Do they have that street there?

BWS: I wanted to ask you if they do. I don't know. I haven't seen it.

RT: I used to go over there when it was Nagasaki Road. But I don't go anyplace now.

---

<sup>5</sup> In 1961, the City of St. Paul changed the name of Airport Road to Nagasaki Road.

BWS: Did you have to have the City Council in St. Paul? Do you remember what you had to do to get the city to name that street? Was that a lot of work?

RT: I don't know who did it, but one day, there were some businessmen downtown in St. Paul, from the bank. There were five or six men who were going to have a meeting. And I thought, I'm not going to that meeting because it doesn't sound – it sounded more pro-America. I just thought, I don't want to go and – I wouldn't know what to say. So I didn't go into the meeting, but I remember they were prominent businessmen in St. Paul and they named that street in Japan. Nagasaki Road. Did you know that?

BWS: Do you mean in St. Paul?

YT: In St. Paul.

RT: Then the Boy Scouts went over there and took the flagpole –

YT: The totem pole.

RT: And it is so big, it took Northwest Airlines to deliver it.

BWS: They're huge, aren't they? They're huge.

RT: That's all I remember.

BWS: Okay. Because I kind of wondered about that Nagasaki Road in St. Paul.

RT: That's in St. Paul. It was on Harriet Island but I don't know if it is there now. I remember going there a couple of times.

BWS: Just to go?

RT: I don't know.

BWS: The gardens at the Como Park are very pretty. They are very beautiful gardens.

RT: That's still there.

BWS: Yes, aren't they pretty? It took a lot of work on those.

RT: You know, that Nagasaki Road, it gets flooded several times, so I didn't keep up with it. I remember them having the interest in naming Nagasaki down there by the river. It's too long ago. I can't remember what happened.

LvD: I heard that they had to take it down with the renovation.



YT: Because a couple of years ago when we entertained some visitors from Japan, we used that. There is a big –what is that space there, down there on Harriet Island? There was no mention of Nagasaki Road at that time, so I think it's gone.

LvD: What a pity.

BWS: And it's not been picked up by anything else.

LvD: I think we are trying to work on it.

BWS: Okay. So that's one of the things that happened when you were real active, though. As you said, you were very active. You did a lot of things!

RT: In my younger days, I had two brothers. They always took me every place where they went and I went to a lot of events that I probably wouldn't have gone to.

BWS: Do you remember Nagasaki sending artwork over here? Sending pictures by school children or rice painting or anything over here to the United States?

RT: I still write to that doctor's wife! She sends me a letter at Christmas, a letter telling me what she is doing. Well, she's not young either anymore, because we are about the same age.

BWS: Where are some of the pictures that the City of Nagasaki sent?

RT: See, I moved out of my apartment. I wasn't there.

BWS: Yes, they weren't with you. I wonder if the Institute of Arts or one of the places, because you have beautiful gifts and things.

LvD: We have storage at Landmark Center.

BWS: That's right! Landmark Center. Down at Landmark Center, I think you had some very nice gifts from Nagasaki.

RT: Yes.

BWS: The city would send gifts over to St. Paul because you are sister cities. Some beautiful art.

RT: I remember somebody sent me, I think it was in the shape of a fish, but it was a tortoise. It was clear and a dark green. But I don't know where that is now. I don't have it here. They have a lot of coral. It's a gemstone, but I think I gave all that away except I had one pin with a little coral in it. I think I had that left here. Kimi Hara, you know, my friend, she was taking nurses' training at the University of Minnesota. Every year they had a jewelry sale. I'm not good wearing jewelry, I just wore my ring and that's about it.

Everybody used to give me jewelry for Christmas presents. I had a big tray, like that [illustrating] and I had them all in there. Miss Steinbeck, she was a sister of the famous John Steinbeck. She was Executive Secretary of the YWCA in St. Paul.<sup>6</sup> When I lived there, I used to go down there and volunteer. She had just come back from China where she had been the "YW" person. I remember, I helped her at the "YW." I volunteered there because she didn't know anybody in St. Paul and I knew most of the people. One Sunday, I invited a few of my friends to a dinner and my mother prepared this dinner and Miss Steinbeck came. She said, "What's the purpose of this dinner?" I said, "Well, I'm so sorry." I said, "You know, I've been wearing my diamond ring. I just got it last week." I said, "I just wore it but nobody noticed it." And my mother thought that was real funny! She used to just chuckle about it. I said, "I'm going to get married and I'm going to move to California." She said, "You are?" and I said, "Yes, I am." She said she was going to be the YW person in Los Angeles. She was going to be the general secretary there. I said, "Well, I'm not going that far south, but I might run into you." Well, she was so devoted to the Japanese, because she had been in China. But she was so devoted that when she got older, she went to Los Angeles and became the YWCA secretary there. One day, she sent me a box. It wasn't very thick. I couldn't imagine what she was sending me. She sent me all her jewelry! You know, pins and rings and bracelets! Lots of pins. She said, "Ruth, I've gathered this all my life and I want you to have it." Well, I'm not really one that wears jewelry but Kimi Hara's nurse's club at the University of Minnesota, they used to have a jewelry sale every summer. So I called her up and I told her, "I'm going to give you all this jewelry that I received. I got some other pins, too. The only thing I'll keep are my pearls and my own diamond ring. I don't need any more." So I used to give it to Kimi Hara for the nurses. They had a sale every year. I just gave her the whole tray. She said, "You're going to give all this?" I said, "I don't use it and I don't want to give something I received, so you just sell it and make money for your nurses' organization." Every year when I had this tray full of pins and bracelets.

BWS: You were involved in everything, weren't you, in a way? You helped so many different organizations.

RT: I knew all the Japanese in the Twin Cities. But the nurse's association needs fundraising things. I used to just send her the whole tray. And it wasn't just cheap jewelry. They were either sterling silver or 10 caret gold. I gave it to her twice because I had so much and I knew that Miss Steinbeck wouldn't like it if I didn't wear it and this way, at least it's giving somebody else a pleasure.

BWS: You did that and you did the St. Paul-Nagasaki Committee and then of course, you had all your YWCA. So you were busy yourself, weren't you? You were very busy.

RT: Well, I was on a lot of committees. I did all I could.

BWS: And you led your tours. That must have taken a lot of time, leading the tours.

---

<sup>6</sup> Should refer to Portland, Oregon.

RT: When I lived in Portland, my family always helped at the church and they did things for the community, too. I worked in the council's office one year and I was teaching how to make leather gloves. I learned from a Danish lady and I had quite a big business in San Francisco. Well, this girl worked for the Japanese Consul and she couldn't come to my daytime classes, so I said, "Why don't you come over to my home in Berkeley and I'll teach you there. You just come a couple hours, twice or three times, and I'll show you how to do it." So she came one night and about two or three days later, the war started and we had to move all the Japanese out of California and that oceanside. So she was there and she said, "Ruth, you get your family together and move out to our farm." I said, "Where do you live?" She said, "Well, it's not far from Fresno, but it's out of that western defense command area." So I said, "What would we do? We're not farmers. We won't know what to do. We'll be in the way." She said, "No," she said, she has to go back there herself because they were evacuating all the Japanese out of California. So we went there and they had a Mexican family – they had a lot of laborers there. But they moved the Mexican family out of that big house and I remember my husband's father, he's painting the kitchen. They had a big beehive in the pantry, just millions of bees and I said, "I'm scared to go in there." He said, "Well, don't go in there unless you cover yourself." So I never went in there, but we called the beehive man and he took them out and put them on the road with the little hives. And I remember, I never lived out in the country before, so it was quite a change. We were ready to go to the next town to buy some farm shoes and overalls and then a man came to take all the Japanese out of that farm area. A general came. So this girl that I knew there, her parents owned the farm, she went down there because she knew all the Japanese in that town and all around the countryside there. She went down to help this general. The general said, "When I lived in Portland, I knew a Japanese family near me," and he said, "I wonder where they are?" She said, "What was their name?" Well, he couldn't remember the name but he said he remembered that there was a boy named Paul. Well, she wouldn't know him. She said that he said that there was a daughter named Ruth and we walked to high school every day, 17 blocks. When it was snowing, her mother and father gave us a ticket to go on the streetcar. So she said, "I'll send Ruth down here and see if she remembers that." Because she didn't think that I would know him. "My land!" he said. You know, he's all grown up and he's a general and his voice is – I remember his voice. And he said, "Don't you remember me?" And I looked at him and I said, "I should remember you because I recognize your voice, but I can't remember your name." I said, "I remember your first name." He said, "What was it?" And I told her – and he said, "That's my name!" And it turned out that general was the same student that we used to go to high school with. He said, "Remember your parents gave us a ticket to go on the streetcar when it rained or snowed?" And I told him, "Yes, I remember. You're so grown-up now that I couldn't recognize you!" And do you know, he's the one that said he has to take all the Japanese out of that area and put them in camps. So I said, "Where is that camp going to be?" He said, "Don't you know anybody in Chicago or New York? I can send you over there." He said, "I have troops moving all the time." So I said, "What would I do there?" He said, "Don't you have any friends in the Middle West?" I said, "Well, we have a friend. I'll call him up." And I called up this Mr. Matsushita. See, we had just entertained his wife. She had come to San Francisco and she went to Los Angeles. I remember her having a bad cold. So I told her, "When you get to Los



Angeles, it will be warmer and you'll get over it." And she died over there! So this man said he had just came back from her burial and he said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "Well, we're going to move out of California and we wondered if there was a place near St. Paul where we could live. We can rent a house or something." He said that his house is empty because he was a cook for the Catholic priest out in Stillwater. That's not far from here. He said, "I go there and I live there and I cook for the Catholic priest and we go fishing in the afternoon." So I said, "Well, can we rent your house then?" He said, "That would just be fine." So we came and the general put us on the train and we had to make a stop at a junction and I had called my friends in San Francisco and they brought a lunch for us. They packed a lunch. Then we came to St. Paul and we got in this man's house. It was a five or six room house, so I said, "We'll stay there but we want to pay you the rent." He said, "No, you just stay there and keep the place clean and keep the electricity going and the gas and the water." He was a cook for the Catholic priests out on the St. Croix River. There is a big church there. So he said, "You come out and visit us on Sundays." That's how we got to St. Paul.

BWS: Say that again. You didn't what? You didn't go to camp?

RT: No, we didn't go to camp. We came right from Readley (California) to St. Paul.

BWS: When Mr. Hill got close, after many years with the Committee, he was given a special award by the Japanese government.<sup>7</sup>

RT: Yes.

BWS: Can you tell me about that?

RT: I remember there was an American man who was a representative of the Japanese government in the Twin Cities. [W. Soren Egekvist]

BWS: When Mr. Hill was given his award by the government.

RT: I don't know who did it, but he was appointed the Japanese Consulate from Minnesota and he had a sign outside his door, a great big sign and he had the Japanese crest, you know, that gold crest? Then it said on there, "Consul for the Japanese Government."

YT: Honorary Consul General of Minnesota, I think.

RT: Yes, he was a Honorary Consul.

BWS: So is that the person – how did Mr. Hill get this award? Tell me about that.

---

<sup>7</sup> In 1987, Louis Hill, Jr. received the Order of the Rising Sun Golden Rays with Rosettes, bestowed by the Emperor of Japan. A private ceremony of presentation was held in Chicago and the SPNSCC honored him at a luncheon in the Summit Room of the St. Paul Athletic Club



YT: He got the Emperor's Award from Japan. Do you remember when Mr. Hill received that award from Japan?

RT: Yes.

YT: People received awards –

RT: We had to go to the library and find out a lot of history about Mr. Hill. The Japanese Consul – Egekvist.

YT: Yes.

RT: There are two libraries in St. Paul. One is the public library and one is a reference library and it has the history of the entire Hill family in there. So, we had to go and find out all about Hill's family and what he did and we sent it to the Consul in Chicago. I think he got the honor over there, but we had a special dinner for him in St. Paul because of the honor. I remember the luncheon was at, I think, a special dinner there. I don't know what building that was.

YT: I remember going there, too. Was it the Athletic Club then? What do you think it was? I can't remember.

RT: I remember the Consul. Mr. Egekvist had to go to the library twice, because this Japanese consul wanted more detailed information. So we went down there and he had his secretary type the whole thing and we sent it to the Japanese Consul. I think Mr. Hill went there to Chicago to get the honor, but we had a special dinner for him in St. Paul to have people here know he received it.

BWS: Did you nominate Mr. Hill? Or did the Japanese government ask you to do this?

RT: Yes.

BWS: The Japanese government to do this?

YT: Usually, someone here makes the initial recommendation.

BWS: That's what I thought. So, it came from the United States and your group because you wanted Mr. Hill to have an award?

RT: Yes. We went to the library twice because the Japanese government wanted more information. So we went in there and we wrote everything there was on it. Have you gone to the Hill Library?

BWS: Big. Very big. You had a luncheon for him here? At the Athletic Club?

RT: We had a special luncheon meeting at the St. Paul Athletic Club.

YT: We're not quite sure where it was. I remember being there.

RT: And I remember, Mr. Heckman was there. Al Heckman. He was there. They showed us this plaque that he received. I think there was a story in the paper about it.

BWS: Yes, there was. A very nice story in the paper.

RT: Mrs. Hill was a very special person. She took care of those three girls [from Nagasaki who suffered head wounds in the atomic bombing] and she said she was going to keep in touch because they were going to be in the hospital three years. She said she may even go over there to see them.

End of interview