

1919

19

Pearl Harbor

1 Katie Hironaka Interview
2 Date: 3/9/95
3 Experiences at Heart Mountain Relocation Camp
4 Heart Mountain, Wyoming.

5 SM: I am in San Jose, California with Katie Hironaka who was at
6 Heart Mountain, Wyoming during WWII and why don't we begin
7 if this is a good place for you, by giving me a little
8 background about when you were born and where and where you
9 were living about the time of Pearl Harbor.

10 KH: I was born in Militan Corners which is a little town outside
11 of San Jose. Of course now they don't have that name any
12 more now they call it Chicochino, California. I went to the
13 Orchard Elementary School which is actually very close to
14 where I live now and I was living with a caucasian couple
15 when WWII started. And of course it was such a shock to
16 myself and I believe that the people I was living with when
17 the war started, but she wasn't going to let that bother
18 her, but before you know it even that very day she would get
19 all kinds of phone calls from her friends who are caucasian
20 like as if I was going to do something to this lady.

21 SM: (can't hear what you are saying here, this tape has a lot of
22 static in it and isn't picking up the audio as well as it
23 should)

24 KH: Yes, uhuh, I was living with them and I was their
25 housekeeper, cook and housekeeper for the couple and so I
26 remember her getting these calls and them telling her
27 "aren't you afraid to have Katie there?" You know like as
28 if it was my fault that the war had started which you know
29 that I am the innocent one just living there and working
30 there.

31 SM: And you had lived there all your life.

32 KH: Well not all my life.

33 SM: But at least in the general area.

34 KH: Yeah cause it was right here in San Jose where I worked, by
35 that time I guess I was around about 17 or 18.

36 SM: What year were you born?

37 KH: No it was more than that, I was about 20. I was born in
38 1919 so I am 75 right now and I always remember that but
39 then you know it didn't bother her. She didn't think I was
40 going to do anything to her, just because Japan is the one
41 that started the Pearl Harbor. But then eventually they
42 would have curfews and all that so then even with myself I
43 guess I must have just decided that maybe I should leave you

developing enemy image
husband in US Army

Katie Hironaka
Page 2

- 1 know, because there was, I guess for her it was such a
2 stress with all their friends thinking I was going to do
3 something.
- 4 SM: They continued then?
- 5 KH: Uhuh and so it was hard for her. Of course she didn't think
6 I was going to do anything, but you know how it is sometimes
7 it is other people that make you start to think things
8 different.
- 9 SM: Did you start thinking differently?
- 10 KH: No I didn't because I thought well gee I'm not going to do
11 anything to her, she gave me a nice home to live in and you
12 know I had my room and board there and all that and I was
13 happy there.
- 14 SM: Did you find outside of the home that people treated you
15 differently?
- 16 KH: No because everything happened so fast. I went to live with
17 my mother. At that time my mother and dad were alive and
18 they were living with my brother and his wife and child so
19 there wasn't room for me to go back there.
- 20 SM: So you actually left the house?
- 21 KH: I left her house because I had to go someplace. I went to
22 live with my mother and dad.
- 23 SM: Did they live in the area?
- 24 KH: Yes, not too far away.
- 25 SM: Were your mother and father born in Japan?
- 26 KH: Yes they were. And of course the thing about it at that
27 time oh I am kind of forgetting some of the things. At that
28 time actually I was married already. I forgot I was married
29 already and living with this family and my husband was
30 serving in the United States Army already before Pearl
31 Harbor came about. He was already in the service.
- 32 SM: And people still made comments?
- 33 KH: I know those were one of the things that were really sad
34 when you think about it. That people didn't know you know,
35 but then that is what happened so that is why I was all

- 1 alone because my husband was in the service.
- 2 SM: Was he in Europe?
- 3 KH: He went to Europe, eventually he went to Italy.
- 4 SM: So you ended up in very small quarters.
- 5 KH: Well the thing about it is my husband was in the service and
6 then I found out I was pregnant and the war started you know
7 it was like you know. No, I wasn't pregnant then, I am
8 getting so confused.
- 9 SM: Well if you had a baby in Paomona which you told me before we
10 started taping, you must have had the baby sometime in the
11 summer of 1942?
- 12 KH: In July. She was born July 15th.
- 13 SM: July 15th, so you probably were pregnant so that means you
14 got pregnant some time in the fall.
- 15 KH: And then the way it all happened is that when Pearl Harbor
16 came about and then they had all these signs on the windows
17 about the oh they called it "Japs" then and everything that
18 you had to get out of this area. Japs
- 19 SM: What did the signs say?
- 20 KH: I can't even remember that well.
- 21 SM: So you said there were signs in the window and you said they
22 referred to "Japs."
- 23 KH: Uhuh and ah anyway we had to leave. It was like we had to
24 leave this area and the way it sounded, it sounded like if
25 you left this area and go toward the valley that you
26 wouldn't be taken because already it had said all that that
27 you were going to be put into a concentration camp and of
28 course at that time, since my husband was in the service
29 then my inlaws, his parents, thought that they would take
30 care of me. And so they decided that they would leave this
31 area and go to the valley where we went in Rigby,
32 California. So I remember it was about 2:00 in the morning,
33 all so many families, all the relatives we gathered and we
34 went in our own cars in the dark so no one would see us.
- 35 SM: You weren't supposed to leave then? I mean you were under
36 curfew weren't you? So you left in the middle of the night?

Went inland to avoid evacuation
"concentration" camp

Katie Hironaka
Page 4

- 1 KH: Yes we did.
- 2 SM: That was kind of a daring thing to do wasn't it?
- 3 KH: I know, but I was going along with whatever my inlaws were
4 going to do, that is what I am going to do to because I
5 didn't know how to take care of myself because I was still
6 young at that time and so I went with them to Salmar first
7 because they had a relative among them that said they would
8 put us up in the garage. They had a garage for the car.
9 They said they would put us up so there must have been four
10 of us families. We all slept in this garage. It was like
11 one big happy family although they weren't really relatives.
12 We stayed there for several days until we could find a place
13 to live. And then of course my family, myself and my inlaws
14 we found an old abandoned house out in Ridley, in the
15 grapevine somewhere. So I don't know how my father-in-law
16 got ahold of the owner or, I only remember that we got to go
17 in there and stay there until we found something a lot more
18 comfortable because at that time that house didn't have a
19 sink, it didn't have a bathroom, it didn't have water, it
20 didn't have anything. It was just an abandoned old shack,
21 that is what it was and so we had to build our own bathtub
22 outside and make a toilet outside and water, we had to pump
23 the water outside.
- 24 SM: I guess I am not quite clear why that was better than
25 staying in San Jose.
- 26 KH: Because we felt that if they said you won't be put into a
27 concentration camp if you go to that area well that sounded
28 better than being put in a concentration camp.
- 29 SM: Oh, and you were thinking concentration camp?
- 30 KH: Oh yes, that is what my inlaws were thinking too.
- 31 SM: And they actually used that word, concentration camp?
- 32 KH: Oh yes.
- 33 SM: Because it is so often referred to as relocation camp.
- 34 KH: Well the way I look at it is, they ^{fedo?} just wanted to make it
35 sound better. They didn't want to make it sound as bad as
36 to say concentration camp.
- 37 SM: How were you feeling at this point? I mean here your
38 husband is gone, you are newly pregnant, you are losing your

Scared / frightened
Pomona

- nothing like your
own mother
(during labor)

Katie Hironaka
Page 5

1 job, you are moving, do you remember some of the feelings
2 you had?

3 KH: Well I think I was just more scared than anything. Just
4 scared and frightened and actually I don't know what I am
5 doing sort of and I am just going along with these adults
6 because see I am still 21 you know and so I am just doing
7 whatever they said they were going to do, I just went along
8 whether it was right or wrong. Just like accepting it, like
9 I have to accept it. And I remember doing that. That is
10 what I did before I went into the camp. So that is the
11 reason why I didn't enter the camp from San Jose. See my
12 own parents entered the camp from San Jose because they
13 lived in San Jose and they stayed here and waited until it
14 was time you had to leave. With myself I can say it was
15 like I kind of ran away with my inlaws.

16 SM: So you stayed with them until? I mean how long? Were you
17 out longer then because of where you were living?

18 KH: Oh yes, I was out longer than what my parents were which was
19 just only so many months because I think my parents went in
20 in February and I didn't go in until June.

21 SM: I don't think anybody went to the camp until August or
22 September, but people did go to the assembly centers.

23 KH: Assembly Center yeah that is what I mean. My parents went
24 to the assembly center around February and I went in May or
25 June. I think it was in June out to Pamona. And the reason
26 why I had to go into Pamona was because, see my inlaws went
27 to Arizona, the camp in Arizona because that is where anyone
28 who lived in the valley which is you know Visalia, Ridgley
29 or any of those cities around there, they all went into
30 Arizona. But myself, because I was pregnant and it is my
31 first child and you know you are frightened and all, I
32 wanted to be with my parents, my own mother and have the
33 baby with my own mother there because you know there is
34 nothing like your own mother. And so that is where I had
35 written to General DeWitt, asking permission if I could go
36 and join my parents who were in Pamona and I explained to
37 them that my husband was in the service and you know all
38 that explanation I had to do. And of course, they gave me
39 the permit to go so I rode the train from Ridley. They sent
40 me the ticket to ride the train from Ridley into Pamona
41 Assembly Center.

42 SM: And by that time you must have been pretty far pregnant.

Pregnancy @ Pamona

labor - very
painful

Katie Hironaka
Page 6

- 1 KH: I was, I was, and that is why like I say I was in that camp
2 and within a month I had the baby in Pamona. Because I know
3 she was one month old when we went to Wyoming.
- 4 SM: When you were living in the valley and you were pregnant,
5 did you get any care? Were you able to see a doctor?
- 6 KH: Oh yes. I went to a private doctor.
- 7 SM: And then what happened when you got into the camp?
- 8 KH: Well the camp, they had doctors there, they had a hospital
9 there. I mean they had all the facilities for you to have a
10 baby you know so that was good.]
- 11 SM: How was your pregnancy? Was it easy or hard?
- 12 KH: Well you know first time having a baby, anything like that
13 isn't easy. I mean having a baby isn't easy and especially
14 when you don't know what to expect. It is very painful. I
15 can only say it is very very painful. I don't know if you
16 have had children or not, but it is. Of course some people
17 have it very easy. It just depends I think.
- 18 SM: You are talking about the actual labor and birth?
- 19 KH: The labor and all, it is a very painful ordeal to have to go
20 through. But of course, you know, if you want a child it is
21 either that or have the ah...
- 22 SM: Do you remember what your labor was like? You said it was
23 painful and hard, do you remember what the doctors and
24 nurses did to help you?
- 25 KH: Well not too much because all they would say is just hang in
26 there and it is like there isn't too much they can do to
27 help you really.
- 28 SM: Do you remember what your labor was like in the beginning?
29 Did you have contractions, did your water break?
- 30 KH: Oh yes, my water broke when I was in the camp building, you
31 know, where we had one big room in the assembly center at
32 Pamona. Well I was living with my mother, my father, my
33 brother, his wife and the child in this one big room and
34 that is where my water bag broke and that is when it
35 happened that I had to tell my brother, please take me to
36 the hospital because I knew that something was going on.
37 And that is what happened.]


"called for her mother"

alone

Katie Hironaka

Page 7

mattress for bed because of preg.

- 1 SM: So he took you to the hospital.
- 2 KH: And so I am in the hospital and I think, I can't even
3 remember, I think it was at night time. I remember it was at
4 night time because she was born the following evening.
- 5 SM: So it was a long labor?
- 6 KH: Yes, it was about 6:00 or something.
- 7 SM: Do you remember if you walked around or were you in bed?
- 8 KH: Oh all I can say is I always remember this, I sure called
9 for my mother. That I can always remember. When that pain
10 really came, oh I remember yelling for my mother. And that
11 goes to show you your mother is so dear to you. 
- 12 SM: And she wasn't able to be with you?
- 13 KH: Of course not, it is not like now days, now days they even
14 let their husbands come in the labor rooms and the mother I
15 guess I don't know.
- 16 SM: And you would have liked to have had your mother?
- 17 KH: Yeah, at least holding your hand or something you know.
- 18 SM: So you must have been pretty alone.
- 19 KH: Oh I was alone. Like I said because my husband wasn't even
20 around. So it was more like I guess I just had to think of
21 my mother mostly at that time being that my husband wasn't
22 there even if I yelled or what you know. But I was in the
23 hospital for 13 days. Because in those days I guess the
24 facilities, for me to go back to where I was in the camp
25 house which is that one big room, it is not very comfortable
26 even the beds aren't comfortable you know, it was those army
27 beds and they let me have that because at the time I went
28 there I was pregnant so if you were pregnant at least they
29 gave you a little bed. Otherwise like my parents and my
30 brother and his wife and all the rest of them, they slept on
31 like a cot and they had to stuff straw, it was like hay, but
32 it was straw, they had to stuff in the bag and sleep on
33 that. But because I was pregnant they gave me a little
34 preference, they gave me a little mattress for my bed. So
35 these people were a little considerate. And so like I said
36 I stayed in the hospital 13 days. So no wonder when it was
37 time for me to leave I couldn't even walk. Because see they
38 didn't let you walk around in between time. They just let

13 da pp stay
breastfed
train ride
- so hot
- mother cared for baby

Katie Hironaka
Page 8

- 1 you stay in bed all the time so your legs were so numb that
2 you couldn't even walk. But otherwise it was ok.
- 3 SM: The longer you stay in bed the harder it is to get up isn't
4 it?
- 5 KH: Oh boy it is. I always talk about that to the mothers.
6 Especially now, boy the mothers go home the next day, I mean
7 I am saying they go home in two days at the most. I say,
8 gosh I stayed in there 13 days. I always remember that.
- 9 SM: Did you breastfeed your baby or bottle feed?
- 10 KH: Yes I did.
- 11 SM: Breast feed?
- 12 KH: I breastfed the baby which you know I wanted to do at that
13 time and I am glad that I did because transferring from the
14 Pamona Assembly Center and going on the train for so many
15 days to Heart Mountain, Wyoming, if I didn't breastfeed I
16 don't know where the milk would have come from. Because I
17 didn't see anybody with babies that they would have to have
18 milk, you know, but being I fed the baby I didn't have to
19 have milk from wherever.
- 20 SM: So it made it easier?
- 21 KH: It made it easier for me, uhuh.
- 22 SM: Tell me about the train ride.
- 23 KH: Oh well the train ride, oh it was so hot, I always remember,
24 and it wasn't the nicest train either and I remember being
25 with my mother and dad because I went there to live with
26 them. Of course he did a lot of the caring for because you
27 know, like I say it was my first baby and I am still young
28 and I don't know exactly what to do with a new baby so my
29 mother actually took care of the baby most. Of course you
30 know it is so hot and I am so afraid of that little tiny
31 thing because actually she was only four pounds and 15
32 ounces so she was real tiny. Of course I am frightened to
33 even do anything to the baby so she would bathe the baby in
34 the sink where everybody washed their hands.
- 35 SM: On the train?
- 36 KH: On the train, because there was no other way that you could
37 make the baby comfortable either. So I remember her always

1 taking it to the sink there. To our basin and washing the
2 baby up trying to make her comfortable.

3 SM: It must have been hard trying to change diapers and being on
4 a train.

5 KH: It was hard. And you just had your one seat so you had to
6 just do everything right there. No it wasn't the most
7 nicest thing to remember. It really wasn't.

8 SM: A hard trip. How long did it take?

9 KH: Gee, did it take about three days?

10 SM: That's a long time.

11 KH: It could be. All I knew is it was hot. Cause it was in
12 July.

13 SM: You said the baby was a month old when you went.

14 KH: She was born on July the 15th in the Pamona Assembly Center
15 and then she was a month old, so it was in August 15th when
16 we were traveling on the train to Heart Mountain and in
17 August it is hot. So that is why it was so hot too. So
18 anyway, that's the way it all went.

19 SM: That's the train ride, and then do you remember when you
20 arrived at Heart Mountain?

21 KH: When we arrived at Heart Mountain we were assigned different
22 barracks. You probably seen pictures of there and so I went
23 and I lived on block 8, now what was that number, I just
24 remembered the other day, block 8 16D.

25 SM: 16 D? Was that the whold family or did you have your own
26 place?

27 KH: No I lived in 16D with my mother and dad and the baby and
28 myself. The four of us lived together. But it was just one
29 room, actually just one room, like just this one room and
30 that is it. And you had to just make yourself as
31 comfortable as you could.

32 SM: How did you do that?

33 KH: Well, lets see, how did I, well of course I couldn't do too
34 much because I was busy with the baby, but my dad kind of
35 built, he got some, I don't know where, when I think about

1 it I wonder where did they get the lumber, you know, I keep
2 wondering myself. But they must have had lumber that was
3 left over from the building of barracks that they had left
4 there so a lot of families got the lumber and they made
5 their own partitions. Like make it into another room. It
6 is one room but they put partitions. So I had my little
7 part with my baby and then my parents had their little part
8 and then we kind of divided I would say where the stove,
9 they had a big pot bellied stove to keep the place warm and
10 so they kind of put a divider. That's all it was. It
11 wasn't something that went all the way up to the ceiling, it
12 just went so far.

13 SM: Just to give you a little privacy?

14 KH: Yeah, uhuh. That is the way we just kinda lived in Heart
15 Mountain, Wyoming.

16 SM: Did you take anything with you for your living quarters?

17 KH: Well actually the only thing I had was clothes. That is all
18 I had, didn't have anything else. Because they had a mess
19 hall where we went and ate three times a day.

20 SM: Did you have things you needed for your baby?

21 KH: I had brought all the baby clothes and everything and in
22 time we used to send out for it like in Sears or the
23 catalog. And then of course as time went on they built like
24 a commissary. They built a place where we could go and buy
25 clothes and then they built a place where it would be a
26 canteen where you could buy some (?) on your own, they had
27 that which was you know, at least they were trying to
28 provide for us.

29 SM: So you must have been on one of the first trains that went
30 to Heart Mountain?

31 KH: Well I guess.

32 SM: It seems like you went late in August and some people got
33 there a little later. Some people have said that when they
34 got there it was a snow storm right after they arrived.

35 KH: Well we must have been maybe more or less the first ones,
36 because I know that all of these barracks were bare and it
37 was just like whoa, what ah, I mean it is hard to describe
38 how you felt it really is.

laundry

no doors → bathtubs/showers

Katie Hironaka

Page 11

"I have to accept it"
bitter

- 1 SM: How did it look, tell me a little bit.
- 2 KH: Even where we did our laundry. They did have a laundry room
3 which was you know away from your home, what we called home
4 at that time. And that is where they had all the tubs to
5 wash your clothes and of course nothing was machines, you
6 had to use the scrub board and then they had the bathtub and
7 the showers all in this one building and of course you
8 needed the bathrooms. They didn't have doors and the where
9 they had the bathtubs and showers they didn't have doors
10 either so you just had to accept it and no matter what if
11 you wanted to take a shower you had to just close your eyes
12 and say "well we are all the same."
- 13 SM: But that was something that was probably hard to ...
- 14 KH: It was, it was hard I think more for some people than for
15 others. But I don't know, I guess with myself everybody you
16 know didn't accept it the way I did. I just felt that, even
17 now in my life now I feel that I have to accept it so I have
18 to go on and that is kinda the way I felt at that time.
19 Although I felt kind of bitter to think why are they putting
20 me here and here my husband is serving the country why is it
21 that they don't let him come home to be with me. You know,
22 I couldn't, that is one of the things I always keep thinking
23 about and I do mention it to other people that I cannot
24 understand this country doing that. You know, put me in a
25 camp and take him to serve the country and really, I really
26 feel that I don't care who I talk to that I think was wrong,
27 was very wrong and I am sure that you might think so too.
- 28 SM: What does your husband say, did he agree with you about
29 that?
- 30 KH: Well no because when he came home from the service we really
31 didn't talk about it anymore because it was all done. } classic
- 32 SM: You didn't talk about the camp?
- 33 KH: No because he wasn't in the camp he was in the service. See
34 it was me that was in the camp and he came to visit me
35 there.
- 36 SM: He could come and visit but you had to stay inside?
- 37 KH: Oh yeah, uhuh he came to visit just once before he was going
38 to go to Europe, before they were sending him to Europe.
9 But I mentioned myself that I have always felt that way that
40 gosh that was certainly wrong, you know. I could kind of

Camp as "protection"

"this is the way I have to live"

Katie Hironaka

Page 12

1 understand that they put us in the camp in a way to protect
2 us. I could understand that a little bit.

3 SM: Well tell me about that.

4 KH: Because you know why there are so many people that are so
5 narrow minded that they don't understand anything. Even to
6 this day that we, the Japanese people started the war and it
7 is not us, it is Japanese people but they were from Japan
8 not from this country. I was born here, to me this is my
9 country and I don't think anything about Japan. This is
10 where I was born, this is where I went to school, this is my
11 country. But even to this day there are so many people that
12 are so ignorant that they go "oh you are the one that
13 started the war."

14 SM: They say that to you?

15 KH: No, but there are people that sound that way, that is the
16 way they talk. And so I could understand this part,
17 although a lot of my friends don't understand this part,
18 because I am trying to be understanding I could understand
19 yes they probably put us in there to protect us because of
20 these ignorant people will come and harm us if we were here.

21 SM: Do you think that was a real possibility?

22 KH: I think it could be part of why they did that although they
23 should have explained it to us a lot more because they
24 didn't explain anything. If they had explained it to us I
25 think a lot of people would have kind of understood it. But
26 that is why I feel I kind of think of that way that maybe
27 that is why they did that because this country wanted to
28 protect us from these ignorant people who would come and
29 harm us, bomb our house or set it on fire or things like
30 that.

31 SM: Did you ever feel in danger at the camp?

32 KH: No, I never felt that in the camp at all. Although I saw
33 the guards on the towers and all that, I just wasn't going
34 to let that get to me. I just felt that well, this is the
35 way I have to live, not that I like living this way but what
36 else can I do, that is the way I always felt.

37 SM: But you didn't feel personally threatened by the guards?



38 KH: No, although I have heard where the guards have hurt some
39 people. They have, they have because I have heard of them.

true
or,
not?
(I doubt
it)

danger
seen from
both sides
w/ 5 ft apart

"no Japs allowed" - Powell/Katy
wondered if someone was going to
come & attack you

Katie Hironaka
Page 13

- 1 SM: What happened?
- 2 KH: Well like someone got near the fence or something and then
3 they were shot at, things like that.
- 4 SM: You really heard that happened?
- 5 KH: I really heard that. Not where I was.
- 6 SM: Not at Heart Mountain you mean? 
- 7 KH: Not unless it was there but I was not aware of it at all.
- 8 SM: Did you feel any kind of prejudice from people in Powell and
9 Cody or did you ever go out?
- 10 KH: Oh I did. I could see that because I went out. I went out
11 I guess shopping or something, I know I went. We had to get
12 permission to go for so many hours or something and I could
13 see because they had signs. They had signs, I saw the
14 signs, no Japs allowed.
- 15 SM: Do you know what town that was?
- 16 KH: It could have been Cody. It had to be Cody or Powell, that
17 is the only place I went.
- 18 SM: The signs were actually in the window so you probably didn't
19 go in those stores.
- 20 KH: No, well and then after that we never wanted to go back
21 there either. You know we went because we wanted to get out
22 and go to a town, you know, because you are so used to go in
23 shopping in a town and in your camp it is not like that at
24 all so like I said we did go, but we really felt really
25 uncomfortable trying to like you are always looking around
26 wondering if someone was going to come and attack you. But
27 then after that I never went back, went just the one time.
- 28 SM: So it wasn't very hospitable to go out?
- 29 KH: No because nobody would treat you like you are wanted or to
30 say hi, come on in or something. You know, it is just a 
31 little town.
- 32 SM: So go back and tell me about just daily life in the camp,
33 how you passed the day.
- 34 KH: Well of course with myself, I think my life was quite

boring
no social life

Am "living in the sticks"

1 different because I had a baby. It is different from the
2 ones who were still going to high school, having a good time
3 and they had dances and things like that in the school. So
4 my life was kind of boring I guess you would say because all
5 I did was take care of my baby and that was about it and
6 then talk to the people who lived in the other barracks so
7 there wasn't no social life for me.)

8 SM: You didn't have any social life?

9 KH: No, not at all, not at all, just taking care of the baby.
10 And then of course I didn't stay in Heart Mountain all
11 through the time of the war, Because before my husband went
12 to Europe he was stationed in Illinois in Ft. Sheridan and
13 so my husband wanted to have me come there with the baby and
14 of course they gave me permission so I happened to go out
15 and join him there and I lived in Ft. Sheridan, Illinois in
16 one of the barrack there.

17 SM: Was that before or after he went to Europe?

8 KH: No, before.

19 SM: So you went out for awhile?

20 KH: I went out for awhile and I lived there I must have stayed
21 there over a year because I got the permission to do that.
22 And then of course he was going to be sent away to Europe
23 and then of course I had this skin disease on my hands, I
24 forget what the name of it was, I just couldn't do anything
25 because it just broke out so bad on both of my hands. It
26 was like an exema. And then my husband was going to go to
27 Europe anyway and so I had to write again to ask permission
28 could I go back into Heart Mountain again because I had no
29 place to go again because he was going to be gone and I am
30 having trouble with my hands and I just couldn't do anything
31 and I still had the little girl, she was only two so if I
32 went back in the camp at least my mother was there and she
33 could help me with the little girl whatever has to be done
34 until my hands were healed so that is why I had to go back
35 into camp.

36 SM: So you went back into Heart Mountain. How was that going
37 back to Heart Mountain after being out?

38 KH: Well it just felt, I don't know, it is hard to explain how
39 it felt. It just felt like you were just going into the
0 sticks. I call it going into living in the sticks. And
41 that sort of was.

"You are just like me"

Katie Hironaka
Page 15

1 SM: When you were in Illinois did that year go ok for you?

2 KH: Yes. In fact it was a captain's wife that I first went to
3 live with because of course my husband was in the army so he
4 was living in the barracks with all the other soldiers but
5 when I came I couldn't go live in the barrack so he found a
6 place with the captain and his wife and little boy. She had
7 three floors in her house so they allowed us to go and live
8 on their third floor and she was really very nice which was
9 good, but it surprised me because I am from California,
10 never lived back east never gone back east and people back
11 east, especially like these caucasian people, they have
12 never seen Japanese people in their lives and so it was
13 really kind of funny in a way. So when I went to live with
14 this captain's wife she knew I was a Japanese, but this
15 other lady I remember her. She couldn't hardly wait to see
16 this Japanese who was coming which is myself because she
17 said I have never seen a Japanese in my life. She didn't
18 know what they were like or what they looked like or how
19 they talked or anything and it was kind of funny. So when I
20 met her for the first time she was like "oh my goodness, you
21 mean you are Japanese?" I said yes but I was born in
22 California not in Japan and I was talking english just as
23 good as she was and it was like she was so shocked she
24 couldn't hardly believe it. She said "you are just like me,
25 you talk like me." I said of course because I am an
26 American, Japanese American and it was kind of funny in a
27 way. But then they were nice, they were very nice.

28 SM: So you didn't experience any, well from what you have told
29 me so far, you weren't afraid for your well-being?

30 KH: No because in Chicago everybody was nice. It seemed like
31 the people back east were different than the people from
32 California. The people from California were the worst I
33 would say. They were sort of like I say very ignorant. But
34 people back east they just took you like you were just
35 another human being and they were nice to you. There
36 certainly was a difference in the people. I don't know why.

*Well, she
wasn't
Black!*

37 SM: Well I suppose it was just like blacks in the south and
38 their experience with prejudice perhaps in other parts of
39 the country rather than the original areas where they were
40 more prejudice than others against a certain ethnic group.
41 So you went back to the camp out in the sticks after living
42 in Illinois for a year, and then did you stay there for the
43 rest of the...

44 KH: For the rest of the, until the war was ended.

barracks: cold/dust
"you always think about
your child, not
yourself"

Katie Hironaka
Page 16

- 1 SM: With your parents again? Did you live with them again?
- 2 KH: No, I went to live in another little part of the barracks.
3 They had barracks for couples, much smaller. It was not as
4 big as my living room, I guess it was like my dining room.
- 5 SM: Not much room.
- 6 KH: But it was for a couple, you just had your bed there and
7 that is the most important is your bed and your stove.
8 Every barrack had a pot bellied stove that we burned coal
9 in. That is how we kept warm by burning coal.
- 10 SM: Did you get cold?
- 11 KH: Oh that is one of the things I remembered, because it was
12 myself and my little girl and there were times when the cold
13 wouldn't come in because that is how we kept ourselves warm
14 by burning the coal and the train would come in and bring in
15 the coal and put it for every so many barracks they had one
16 pile of coal so we would have to go and help ourselves to
17 the coal. But there were times when it didn't come in and I
18 remember how cold it was. Because we aren't used to that
19 cold weather because California is just such a beautiful
20 place, beautiful weather.
- 21 SM: Probably your barracks didn't have much insulation either?
- 22 KH: Oh no, no, they were cracks all along the floor so it was
23 very dusty. Dust would come in through the crack. It
24 wasn't that nice.
- 25 SM: Were the summers any better?
- 26 KH: Well of course it was warm in the summer and we had the cold
27 snow in the winter and the dust storms we would get every so
28 often in the summer. And I remember, especially when we
29 couldn't find coal, I remember digging as far as I could to
30 even find pieces of coal to keep warm. I guess more because
31 I had my little girl. You know, you always think about your
32 child, not yourself.
- 33 SM: How did she do at the camp?
- 34 KH: Well I think with children they just kind of go along, they
35 get used to it. Because see she was so tiny when she went
36 into the camp that to her this was fine, this is the way
37 life is. Because you know you are only a month old so you
38 are raised there so you just live that way because you think

ears "bad" due to cold!

Katie Hironaka
Page 17

1 this is the way we are supposed to live. And then I think
2 about it then even to this day my ears are bad because we
3 had to line up to go to the mess hall to eat and it would be
4 freezing, the snow, and we would have to wait in line to get
5 in and I always remember, I never had any problem with my
6 ears until I had to line up and then my ears would get so
7 frozen even if I had a scarf on. Because we are not used to
8 that real real cold weather and then you have to wait in
9 line outside not like you are waiting inside and I know that
10 is why my ears have become so sensitive so I always have to
11 even now, when I go out I have to put a scarf on otherwise
12 my ears start to hurt. So that is one of the things I
13 experienced and I told them it came from that.

14 SM: How was the food once you got in?

15 KH: Well, the food, we had a lot of sardines and they had lots
16 of bones. That's the ones I remember the most, sardines.
17 Not the ones in the can but the regular sardines they
18 brought in, the fresh ones. We had a lot of that, I know
19 that, we had a lot of them.

20 SM: What did you feed your daughter?

21 KH: Well when she was a baby I would give her milk.

22 SM: You kept breast feeding?

23 KH: No, I didn't keep breast feeding all the time, because by
24 the time I left the camp she was 10 months old so at that
25 time I was still breast feeding her which was probably a
26 good thing because I had to ride the train from Montana and
27 take another train. I guess it was because I was young I
28 could do all that. I could never do all that now. As far
29 as her eating, they did give baby food. You were only
30 allowed a certain amount of baby food. That's what she had,
31 baby food.

32 SM: When you returned to camp she was two and so she ate
33 whatever you ate?

34 KH: Yes, uhuh, because already she had learned to eat food that
35 we ate when I lived with this family.

36 SM: Did you take her very often to well baby check-ups to the
37 doctor at Heart Mountain?

38 KH: Lets see in Heart Mountain.

Social life: other mothers & babies
movie

Katie Hironaka
Page 18

- 1 SM: She was a little bit small so I wondered if she was watched
2 a little more closely.
- 3 KH: Well I must have taken her. I don't even remember it. I
4 think I must have taken her to the clinic when she was tiny.
5 I think I must have, I don't even remember that well.
- 6 SM: When you came back to the camp and she was two, did you
7 spend any time with the other mothers and their babies?
- 8 KH: We did. Actually that was our social life. Just getting
9 together with the mothers that had little children like
10 myself but we really didn't do much. Although they would
11 have an old, one of the barracks would be made into a
12 theater, you know, so that once in a while I had a chance to
13 go to the theater and leave the baby with my mom and dad.
- 14 SM: What, for a movie?
- 15 KH: Yes, for a movie. Other than that I didn't really have too
16 much entertainment because I guess because I had the baby
17 and my husband wasn't there and I couldn't keep relying on
18 my mother because she wasn't that young at that time anyway.
- 19 SM: Where did you socialize with the other mothers? When did
20 that happen?
- 21 KH: Oh not too much in our barracks. It would be during the day
22 outside. That is about what it would be or sometimes it
23 would be in the house of course then when it was cold no one
24 would go out anyway, they would all stay in their little
25 house.
- 26 SM: But just like any other neighborhood you probably went out
27 with your children and talked with other mothers then. I
28 have also heard other people talk about the laundry room
29 being a place where people met and talked.
- 30 KH: Oh yes because a lot of them would be out there washing
31 their clothes same time you are washing your clothes and so
32 we would visit and chat you know. Actually for mothers with
33 children that was their entertainment, just talking to the
34 other mothers with other little children, not too much going
35 some where. Like if you were a teenager they had lots of
36 fun things to do because they even had ice skating, school
37 dances and that is the reason why when they have had the
38 reunion, I think they have had it twice now in San Jose, I
39 never did go because who would I meet there? Probably
40 people who haven't even done anything but just take care of

- 1 their babies and most of them are older now and it wasn't
2 like if you were in high school then you would meet
3 different other friends that you went to school with and so
4 it is kind of different.
- 5 SM: Yeah, it seems like just a few years of age made a big
6 difference about how you lived. Maybe five years made all
7 the difference in the world.
- 8 KH: Because I know in some of the barracks they would sometimes
9 have entertainment, they would have a program. But I never
10 did go to the program. I guess cause I just felt I had to
11 stay home with the baby.
- 12 SM: When the women got together and talked do you remember any
13 good stories or gossip from the camp?
- 14 KH: No, to tell you the truth I really don't remember anything
15 to say that I can remember.
- 16 SM: Some people have told me there were a lot of good stories,
17 there was a lot of discussion about what was going on and...
18 So tell me now about when you left and what happened.
- 19 KH: Well when the time came for us to leave I didn't leave with
20 my mother and dad. They left at another time. They had me
21 as my own family, just my little girl and myself as a family
22 and that was the worst ride coming home because I really
23 didn't, I had a seat but it was one seat on the train with a
24 stranger and myself and my little girl and to ride for days
25 it is very hard and if that were my husband or something it
26 wouldn't have been so bad, but it was a strange man so it
27 was not like I could say "can you hold my baby for awhile"
28 you know, "I'm tired now let me sleep, you take care of
29 her." Like I say it was the worst ride home. Because I had
30 to more like try to stay up all the time because she wanted
31 to go to sleep well where is she going to sleep? Because
32 she didn't have a third seat she just sat between this man
33 or myself or else she would sit on the other side and so for
34 me I thought oh that was the worst ride going home.
- 35 SM: So did you go back to San Jose?
- 36 KH: No I went to my in-laws. They had already come back to
37 Mountain View, California. They had already found a place
38 which was a barn. It really was a barn. They found this
39 place in Mountain View. I don't know how they found it but
40 they did find it and it was a barn and they put some
41 partitions in the barn and I didn't have no place to go

"no place to go"

1 again. I am always finding that I have no place to go again
2 because where can I go? My husband was still in the
3 service, he was still serving the country. The war ended
4 but you know they don't go right home so my in-laws felt
5 that it was their responsibility to take care of myself and
6 their little granddaughter and so they met me at the train
7 station in Mountain View, because I came in in the evening I
8 remember and then they took they to this home which they
9 called home and that is where I went to live, with them and
10 like I say, it really was a barn. It really was a barn. So
11 then in time my husband was discharged because lets see, we
12 came out of camp, I can't tell for sure, was it in October?
13 Kind of forgot what month it was.

14 SM: It was late then? After the war had ended.

15 KH: Uhuh, of course then the soldiers were discharged. So then
16 my husband, yeah, he came home befor the end of the year, so
17 actually about a couple of months and then he came home.

18 SM: And then what happened, did you settle somewhere else?

19 KH: Eventually we moved to Santa Clara, just so I didn't have to
20 live in the same house, same barn with my in-laws. Although
21 it still wasn't a nice place. But we had to find someplace
22 so we found a place on this farm that had one house with
23 only two bedrooms and a kitchen, which actually wasn't much
24 of a kitchen, but it was a kitchen and I guess a living
25 room, but we used it as a dining room and because my husband
26 had four brothers and one sister so that is a lot of people
27 you know so we couldn't live in that house. So it happened
28 that they had another little house close by that only had
29 two rooms. I don't know what that was there for. So that
30 is where my husband and I and the little girl lived for
31 awhile. It was like well we found something else, that is
32 what it was, we were just moving and moving.

33 SM: What happened to your possessions? You must have left those
34 behind before you ever went to Heart Mountain.

35 KH: Well see I didn't have too much, as far as furniture and
36 things because I always lived in with a family so all I had
37 was clothes.

38 SM: So you didn't lose things like a lot of families did?

39 KH: No not like a lot of families because I didn't have anything
40 to say was really mine. I didn't have a home or anything
41 because my husband was in the service.

had had it - doing
all of the work for
the family -
stood up,
for herself!

Katie Hironaka
Page 21

- 1 SM: Were you better off because your husband had been a GI? Did
2 that help you get established again?
- 3 KH: No because he didn't receive anything as far as help because
4 we lived more like with his parents and they are the ones
5 that helped us to get going because they rented a farm so we
6 actually lived with them again but only this time in a
7 different little cottage, like I said the two bedroom thing
8 in Santa Clara and then after that we moved to San Jose and
9 then we lived together again as a big family, one big family
10 with his four brothers, his sister, his mother, his father
11 and we lived together so actually he didn't get any help at
12 all except for what they receive when they get discharged.
13 I think all the soldiers and sailors get a compensation or
14 something that they give you, they call it something else
15 which that won't really take you very far. So then of
16 course he had to go and find himself a job and that is the
17 way it was. He went and found himself a job and he used to
18 work in San Francisco and then I wasn't happy living with
19 all his family because I was starting to have my own family.
- 0 SM: Did you have another child?
- 21 KH: Yeah, I had a little boy after he came back home from the
22 service I became pregnant so I had a little boy so I had my
23 little girl and she was four and then he was born and so I
24 wasn't happy living with my inlaws so naturally we just
25 found a place of our own. We couldn't afford to buy it
26 because we didn't have money anyway so we went, now again I
27 went to live with another caucasian couple out in Evergreen.
28 Now she had what they call a tank house, it was a tank
29 house, you know it was a house that they had the water tanks
30 out in the country. Of course you don't see those things
31 now, but they had this big tank house where the water would
32 go up into the tank. You know that is how you get your
33 water to drink and everything, but it had a room downstairs
34 and a room upstairs and the tank up on the third floor. I
35 would think, wow, a tank house, what if it leaked? But that
36 is where we went to live because this lady, I think I saw
37 this ad in the paper I guess because I just had to get away
38 from his in-laws. I just couldn't be with them any longer
39 with his brothers and because I had to do everything. I had
40 to do all the washing, all the cooking for the whole family,
41 and I felt I've had it. This is enough for me, I am only 23
42 years old and I really did a lot. I had to do so much that
43 I wanted to find my own place. You have your job in San
44 Francisco that is fine, but I don't want to live here any
45 more, even if I have to do a little work and so when I saw
46 this ad in the paper where this lady had advertised that she

"made me strong, made me grow up"

Katie Hironaka

Page 22

1 had this little place and if I would do housework for her
2 once a week that I could come and live there and I thought
3 to myself at that time oh, that even sounded very good so
4 that is what we did. We went to live there and I cleaned
5 her house once a week and I had my two children there and it
6 wasn't a nice home or anything, but for me that was
7 wonderful because at least we were on our own.]

8 SM: You have really had enough people in your life with having
9 young children, your husband gone and moving so often.

10 KH: Yeah I did until finally we were able with the help of his
11 parents to buy a home which was on George Street in San
12 Jose. Then we were on our own. But see I have to say this *much*
13 is my first husband and he got cancer and the year we moved *later!*
14 to this house which was in 1964 we found out he had cancer.
15 He was only 45 and he passed away so I became a widow and I
16 stayed a widow for 10 years and raised my children. Then I
17 met this man that I am married to now. We have been married
18 19 years now. But it is sad because his health is mental
19 and so it is very difficult for me, it is a lot of stress,
20 because he can say one thing now and in about an hour or so *Aiz.*
21 he has forgotten he said it, he forgot I even told him we
22 are going to do this. I mean it is a lot of stress.

23 SM: It sounds like you have had a number of stressful events in
24 your life. When you look back on Heart Mountain and all
25 that time coming and going and having a small child do you
26 think that made any difference in the kind of person you
27 became?

28 KH: Oh I think it did. I think it really made me strong. *
29 Because sometimes I wonder, I look back and I say gosh how
30 did I do all that? I do, I think about it, how did I do
31 this or whatever the things that I did. I really think that
32 being by myself and having the child really made me grow up.
33 Because like I say I was only 21 and so cause I could see
34 even with my own granddaughter who is 25 now to me I look at
35 her now and it looks like she sure could grow up a little
36 more. It looks like they rely on their mothers so much that
37 I keep thinking the parents really baby them a lot. Well my
38 mother couldn't be babying me at all, I had to grow up.

39 SM: Well thank you very much for sharing that with me. It has
40 been very helpful and I appreciate you being willing to take
41 the time.

42 KH: You know what I just remembered, I shouldn't be saying it
43 now, but it is a Steinbeck Library. Have you ever heard,

1 you must have heard of the Steinbeck Library? It is in
2 Salinas and he is a famous painter. Steinbeck, I don't know
3 what the first name is and my tapes are at the library
4 there.

5 SM: Ok, thank you, thank you very much.