

e-Mail Interview Questions

JUSTIN: “I have some questions for you below.

Please feel free to answer only the ones that mean something to you.”

1) Can you describe your life before the attack of Pearl of Harbor?

SAB: Our family of nine, lived on a vineyard farm. In 1940, we were able to buy our first vineyard farm in the name of my sister who became 21 years of age. All immigrants from Japan were denied ownership of property due to discriminatory laws. We were relatively poor, but we lived a very happy life, and especially after being able to own our farm. We loved working on our farm and also doing “migrant type” work, to earn more income for our family. We had many good friends, relatives, neighbors, and school friends and their families. I enjoyed school up through six years of elementary grades. I was proud to be an American. We were a close-knit family doing everything together on the farm.

MARION: My family was truck farming in Salinas, Ca. My parents worked hard and were doing successfully. They raised all kinds of vegetables and went to the various markets to peddle their vegetables. They were at the height of their earning ability. There were lots of children in the neighborhood so we children had lots of fun playing together. Our landlady was a widow caring for 4 foster children, our age. We had lots of friends and for New Year’s we would go to each other’s homes to share in the various Japanese foods our mothers made. My grandparents lived nearby so I would stay with them because my Aunts were close in age to me. Life was good.

2) Did you experience anti-Japanese sentiments before the war? If so, could you elaborate?

SAB: I personally did not as a child. I was conscious of the fact that neither of my parents was present for parents and teachers’ events at school, like my classmates’ parents were. I knew discrimination existed in our country, but it didn’t seem to affect me directly.

MARION: I was too young to be aware of discrimination then.

3) How did the attack directly affect you and your family?

SAB: Quite drastically and shockingly. We were working in front of our house one Sunday, and when we arrived by our house, we took a break and turned on the radio. I vividly remember the radio program being interrupted by a “news flash,” “Japan is bombing Pearl Harbor!” I remember saying, “What a stupid thing Japan is doing! Who do they think they are, bombing our Country!” But within a week or two, we began hearing anti-Japanese remarks and newspaper articles saying that we were loyal to Japan, our enemy! That was such a ridiculous idea, but the anti-Japanese sentiment became so strong and no voice rebutting those accusations, we were all in fear. Like all the Japanese people, we began to bury, burn and destroy anything we had that might associate us with Japan—photos, magazines, phonograph records, Japanese newspapers, etc. Rumors and reports that all the Japanese people on the West Coast should all be put into concentration camps, caused us great alarm, but we knew that we were Americans and our Country would never do such a thing. But we worried about our parents who were prevented from becoming citizens due to discriminatory laws.

MARION: Our lives changed overnight. We were behind barbed wire confinement. Our name changed from Nakamura to #13141. My mother pounded it into our heads that we must remember our family number in case we got lost we could identify ourselves only by our number. In our confinement all the barracks looked alike so we could easily get lost. I was not used to the foods they fed us. After being in the Salinas detention center we were shipped by old, dilapidated trains to Poston, Arizona. Salinas has cool weather but Poston had 120 degrees in the heat of summer. It was hot and dust storms so thick we could not see and we had to cover our face with a wet towel to protect our eyes, nose, and mouth. My parents protected us by not telling us where we were going and why we had to leave our homes so suddenly. We were told we could take two bags per person. We were not told where we were going. We just did as we were told.

4a) How did you feel about Executive Order 9066? Did you feel that any part of it was justified?

SAB: As a child, I didn't know about EO 9066. I knew that was May 16, 1942, when an Army truck came to our farm and our family of nine had to leave our farm and taken to be put into the Fresno Assembly (Detention) Center at the Fresno Fairgrounds, now surrounded by barbwire fences, with Guard Towers with soldiers with guns pointed at us, and nightly headcount of us in our barrack by the MP, and a floodlight that scanned the tar-papared barracks all night. After five months, we were sent to southeast Arkansas (Jerome and Rohwer Relocation (Concentration) Camps for the next three years. Three weeks after arriving in Jerome Concentration Camp, it turned unusually cold with snow, and with no heat in our barrack, my 61-year-old Father caught pneumonia and died on Nov. 17th, 1942. Of course, none of the EO 9066 was justified, not only because we were 100% loyal Americans and our parents loved their "adopted country" despite the fact they were denied citizenship after being a contributing resident for over 30 years by 1942.

MARION: I was a child when EO9066 was signed. Our culture protected us as children. As children we grew up with certain words drilled into us through hearing and seeing: 1) haji: we do not bring shame upon our family, friends, country. 2) gaman: we take whatever is thrown at us; we do not fight back. 3) giri: duty to family and others. 4) on: honor and responsibility to people who have done a great deed for us; to our country. 5)shikata ga nai: things are the way they are and you have to accept it, go on with your life. 6) Enryo: to act in humility, don't brag. 7) Kodomo no tame: for the sake of the children, protect them. 8) Shinbo shitte seiko suru: Out of adversity good will come.

4b) What happened to you and your family when Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066?

SAB: I wrote what happened in my answers above. We were among the few who were fortunate to have friends who took care of our farm while we were imprisoned for three years. Of course, we lost the lucrative years of farming during WWII, we lost our freedom and rights of citizenship, and our normal family life was destroyed, including the untimely death of our Father. We were humiliated, and guilt and shame, which were not ours, were put upon us wrongly. We could do nothing but bury them within us, and move on to do as best we could in the sad

situation. I use the metaphor of “incest” to describe the trauma we all experienced. We were like innocent children with no voice and no power, and no one to advocate for us, as we were being violated by our Country that we loved, respected and deeply loyal to.

MARION: We had to leave everything behind stored in our landlady’s barn. Our car was left outside in our yard. When we returned to claim our belongings everything was gone. Our car was just a shell. We had nothing. We were told we could only take two bags per person when we went into the camps, so we had to leave everything else behind. My mother packed one bag with kotex pads as my sister and I would be using them in the future. We did not know where we were going at any time except that we were to go to the Salinas Rodeo grounds.

5) How did you feel as a Japanese American?

SAB: Before EO9066, I felt like a normal Japanese who was a proud American. After EO9066, we could not feel proud of being a “Japanese,” and had to be proud that I was a “Japanese American.”

MARION: Before EO9066 I was a normal happy kid. After EO9066 and being incarcerated I felt “bad” being a Japanese. We were made to feel we started the war. It was not a good feeling. When our young men volunteered from within the “camps” to serve our country, I felt proud and happy. When we returned to California after the war, some people still hated us and treated us badly. We were the low man in society, in jobs, in housing. It was a difficult time for us as Japanese. We did not go on welfare even though we suffered.

6) How did you feel about how your community treated you?

SAB: It was sad that Lt. Gen. John DeWitt (who was a racist) and the authority of our nation’s leaders, with the aid of the racist Hearst Newspaper, overwhelmed and duped the public into joining the anti-Japanese sentiment. Those who knew different seemed powerless to protest, although some did to no avail. When we were incarcerated, it left a vacuum and an opportunity for many from Arkansas, Oklahoma and other states to come to the West Coast for jobs and residence. Many of

these knew very little about the Japanese people, except to believe what the anti-Japanese propaganda was telling them.

MARION: I guess our culture kept us strong. We were treated badly but we had to go on with our lives as best we could. And, we did. This is truly a testament to our Issei folks and our culture.

7) Have you heard of Fred Korematsu and his resistance to E.O. 9066?

SAB: Yes, I am quite familiar with Fred Korematsu and his refusal to obey Gen. DeWitt's Orders. I consider Korematsu, Gordon Hirabayashi, and Min Yasui, as our Country's heroes. JACL, years later, apologized to them for having demeaned them harshly, and recognized them properly, though not all JACL'er agreed to this apology. I had the opportunity to attend Korematsu's coram nobis trial at the Federal District Court in S. F. in November, 1983.

MARION: No, not as a child. I did learn about him in my adult life.

8) Did you agree with JACL's stance of non-resistance, non-protest of Executive Order 9066?

SAB: Originally, thinking we had no other option, I assumed that our Government was totally responsible. With more information, I realized two things. The JACL leaders succumbed to the anti-Japanese pressure and took the accommodation stance to win the approval of those in power. Being young and taking on the impossible role of representing the Japanese community, he seemed to have been influenced by false reports fostered by the propaganda of anti-Japanese factions on the West Coast. That led him to cooperating prematurely with the idea that the mass incarceration was the best way to demonstrate our loyalty as Americans. He did try to object but again, the long used method of accommodation and kowtowing to the people in power to be accepted as good Americans by them, led him to recommend cooperating with DeWitt's Order. This also stymied any change of protesting against the injustice being perpetrated against us.

MARION: In learning some facts, Mike Masaoka was only in his early 20's when he was the head of our National JACL. He had to think what he thought would be best for our Issei, women, and children, to "protect" them. On the other hand, he was living in Utah, and only heard the rumors of what was going on the West Coast, so I think he somewhat misinformed.

9) Can you describe the events that led to your internment?

SAB: I'm not sure what you are asking. I'll answer in this way: Following the racism and the "yellow peril" campaign against the Chinese in America in the 1800's, the same campaign against the Japanese immigrants of Japan was begun when immigrants from Japan were brought to the West Coast for the labor force. So, the 40-year history of active anti-Japanese movement up to the time when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, became a very important factor in the mass incarceration of Japanese people living on the West Coast in 1942. This anti-Japanese movement was failing, even though discriminatory laws, such as, the Alien Land Laws and the Asian Exclusion Act, hurt the Japanese immigrants immensely. but by the end of 1941 Japanese American farmers controlled 42% of the commercial truck crops grown in California - 22% of the nation's total – even though they tilled only 3.9% of the state's farmland. As much as 90% of California's artichokes, cauliflower, celery, cucumber, peppers, strawberries and tomatoes were Japanese American grown, most of them on land formerly considered undesirable for farming due to alkaline, hard-pan, parched, or hilly terrain. Japanese American businesses such as urban neighborhood fruit stands, grocery stores, florist shops, restaurants, dry-cleaning establishments and other businesses were flourishing in spite of discrimination preventing entry into other professional endeavors. So, when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, it was the opportune time for the anti-Japanese groups, once and for all, rid the West Coast of all the Japanese population. The anti-Japanese factions began to exploit the war hysteria, and flood the media with rumors, lies, and propaganda, to dupe the public and influence politicians seeking votes. Hawaii in 1942 had a population of 158,000 people of Japanese ancestry, but Gen. Delos Emmons, Commander there refused to follow the racist Orders of Gen. DeWitt. Also, it was only on the West Coast that there was this history of strong anti-Japanese

movement. This movement's lies, rumors and propaganda were swallowed hook-line-and-sinker by the racist Gen. DeWitt. Politicians seeking to be elected joined the anti-Japanese movement to get votes. Attorney General Earl Warren (the civil rights champion of the 1960's) became a strong supporter of Gen. DeWitt's racist order, testifying before the Tolan Committee in 1942, saying, "The very fact that the Japanese people had not committed any crime is proof that they will, when the right time comes." Can you believe that he was willing to express such logic? Well, he got his votes that November to be the new Governor of Calif. He apologized in his 1977 Memoirs, but refused to apologize publically as he was asked to do.

MARION: I was too young to answer that question. I did not know of the long history of discrimination and prejudice against the Japanese. Our people worked so hard just to survive. Our hard work made the "others" jealous and wanted us out. This is so sad to me.

10) Can you describe your experience in the internment camps?

SAB: I was 12-16 years old when I was in the concentration camp (I was not in an "internment camp." See "Power of Words" document. I strongly urge using correct terminology in your Report.) As a teenager in the camp years, I played from sunrise to sunset. I only slept in the barrack. There was no family life. We all ate in the mess halls with our friends, never as a family. My study habits suffered a lot, with average grades, not like the top grades before and after the camp years. Growing on the farm, I studied hard and worked hard in the fields, but there was nothing to do in the camps but to play. Jr. High years without a close family life in camp probably affected me adversely in ways I am not aware. I know that when my father caught pneumonia and died three weeks after arrival in Jerome concentration camp, I did not grieve the way I would have if we were living on the farm. While he was dying in a makeshift barrack hospital, my family couldn't find me because I was playing monopoly with my friends in his barrack room. When my family finally found me, I was rushed to the hospital. The funeral experience was nothing like it would have been on the farm with close relatives and friends present. For me, it wasn't strange that my mother had her Christian minister friends to conduct a Christian funeral service for my father. We were Buddhists,

and I never ever saw a Christian church building, or knew anything about Christianity. Then, four Sundays after the funeral, my mother had all eight in the family baptized at the Christmas Sunday Service held in a barrack. Of course, I had not idea of what was going on, or that we were being baptized. I just did what I was told to do. Since then we went to S.S. but it meant very little to me. Only after we returned to Caruthers and started to attend the local Methodist Church, did I begin to learn about Christianity, but unfortunately it was under very conservative teaching, which I had to unlearn over many years, beginning in my college years.

MARION; Life in camp for me was different for me than for girls my age. At the time I was 9 to 12. My mother had a baby so I did all the family laundry and ironing for 9 people. I did not have time to play with other girls. I had only one girl friend. My only joy was reading. Books were sent in from churches so I read many books for my enjoyment. We did not eat as a family the whole three and a half years we were incarcerated because my parents worked in the camp kitchen. We ate foods we were not used to eating, lamb, horse meat, wheaties, orange marmalade, apple butter and lots of pancakes. One day, my sister and I were invited by my sister's friend to stay in her barrack room overnight. I was 10 years old. During the night her Issei father molested me. I was so traumatized that no voice came out to scream. I could not tell my mother what happened to me.

11) How long did you stay in the camp and what were the circumstances of your release?

SAB: We were in the three camps for a total of three years--the Fresno Detention Center, the Jerome Concentration Camp, and Rohwer Concentration Camp. President F.D. Roosevelt waited until he was reelected in Nov. of 1944, before he ordered the camps closed. So, starting in 1945. we were ordered to leave. Our family asked to be released in April of 1945 to return to our farm and home in Caruthers, California, 15 miles south of Fresno. We were fortunate to have a home to return to. We were all given \$25 per person and a ticket to our destination, which for us, was to Fresno. I remember the long 3-day train trip from Fresno to Arkansas in 1942, but for some reason, I can't

remember any details of how I got from our barrack in Block 25 in Rohwer to the front steps of our house in Caruthers in 1945. Perhaps it was due to the apprehension of returning, or was it like the final end to a nightmare that we were subjected to for three long years?

MARION: We were in camp three and a half years. I do not know the circumstances of our release.

12) Can you describe your feelings the years following your release?

SAB: Returning to our home was great, but there was a lot of work to do to bring our vineyard farm, which we had bought one year before the war started, to up to the condition we wanted it to be. Everyone in our family worked hard, not only on our farm, but also on other farms to earn needed income for our family. I enjoyed returning to school and enjoyed participating in basketball, track and baseball teams. I had not received any teaching or information about going to college but after graduation from high school, I found myself thrust into going to college along with my classmates. I felt very self-conscious of being a Japanese, I'm sure, because of what happened during WWII. Just recently I realized that before the war I saw myself as a Japanese—no problem. But after Pearl Harbor and being suspected of being a risk to national security (which was outlandish), I had to be called a Japanese American, to distinguish myself from being a native Japanese of Japan. That is still a strong feeling I have, which is unfortunate, because no one needs to apologize for his or her ethnic background by adding a hyphen to one's ancestry. Of course, over the years, I have come to learn more and more of the details of our Government's tragic violation of our Constitution and rights of citizenship, and how it came about without any grounds for "national security," as we were misled to believe. I also have learned how our cultural traits have enabled us to survive, as well as hamper us in dealing with the injustice we suffered, as well as the injustice suffered by others.

MARION: Life was hard following our release. Housing was hard to find for our family of ten. Mother had a baby after camp. Our family lost everything so we had to start from scratch. We could only find work in the labor fields of fruit and vegetables. I worked as a maid after school in the 8th grade in Watsonville. The next year our family

moved to San Jose. Life was still hard so I became a live-in maid for the next six years of school, 9th grade, 10th, 11th, 12th and two years of college. During those years I met an Italian girl who became my best friend. She invited me to live with her family during the weekends when I did not have work to work as a maid. The Frontani family treated me like a member of their family. I really appreciated all they did for me. After college I moved to S.F. to live with my Aunt in a one room apt. What a life it was for us! Our closet was also our “kitchen” where I cooked on a one burner stove, with our pots on the closet shelf!! I was working for an insurance company and needed to find part time work to supplement my income. I interviewed with Milton Mann Photography Studio. I had to do telephone solicitation and when I hung up Mr. Mann asked me to use a Caucasian name because my name sounded too foreign. After using the name “Miss Grant,” I hung up the telephone. I felt such anger I had no words for Mr. Mann, grabbed by purse, glared at him and left. Years later I married a minister and the first church we served was the Westview Presbyterian Church where I used to temporarily live after coming out of the concentration camp!! When we had 3 children I needed to work part time. I went to work as a Community Aide in an elementary school near my home. One day the Principal asked me to do the Secretary’s work, too. I told him it was not in my job description and he told me to do it and the Supt. of Schools told him to tell me to do it. I said oh and left. I went to that Supt. office and asked why he himself did not tell me. He got on the phone there and then and told my Principal not to use his name like that again. This time I felt so wonderful. I got my “power” back. It changed me.

13) What do you think about the US’s apology and redress?

SAB: I appreciate our Country being able to apologize, though half a century too late for those who had already died, and especially for the Issei. The Redress was an amazing accomplishment against all odds, but it was a token penalty assess our Government for it’s crime committed, not a compensation for any loss suffered due to the crime. It was a token reminder, though too mild, that there is a consequence for committing such a crime.

MARION: I feel same as Sab above.

14) What can we do to make sure that the US government does not repeat its mistakes?

SAB: For one thing, our Government, not its people, should never forget this crime that it committed. George Santayana's oft-quoted words apply here: "Those who forget the past, are condemned to repeat it." This applies also to those who don't know the past. That is why our past history needs to be told again and again so people will realize what really happened. We, who were treated so unjustly, must find healing so that we do remain quiet and find ourselves able to speak up against injustice. Only a minority of Nisei is able to speak up. The majority does not want, or are not able, to talk about it, or consider it past history and some even rationalize it by saying, it wasn't all that bad because great benefits resulted from it. How sad that, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."
(Edmund Burke) We all need to be vigilant. Laws such as the Patriot Act and the National Defense Authorization Act still make American citizens vulnerable to misuse of power in Government.

MARION: Those in government have forgotten that they were voted to represent all the people. Instead, self interest groups prevail and all the people are not represented. What happened to us Japanese people was a result of lies and propaganda. Our checks and balances need to protect people from injustice happening. People are more important.