

Japanese-American Association of Lane County, Oregon - Oral History Collection
Ken Nagao – Part 5

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Interviewee: Ken Nagao

Interviewer: Elizabeth Uhlig

Transcriber: Ingrid Ockert

[00:00]

[EU] Ken, one thing we were just talking about during the break, this is part five of the Ken Nagao interview, talk a little about skating, your ice skating.

[KN] It wasn't ice skating, it was roller skating. If we had had an ice rink in Eugene when I came to school, I would've taken ice skating, because I really wanted to be an ice skater. I never learned how to roller skate when I was a kid. I went to one skating party in the ninth grade or so and couldn't stand up. So when I came up here, when I first came up here, I wanted to stay away from the Hawaiian kids because I wanted to get into doing what other folks up here do. Then, the second term that I was here, someone twisted my arm to come and join the Hawaiian Club at the University. As soon as I joined, they made me the social chairman, and the vice president, and the kids wanted to go skating, and I didn't know how to skate. So before the skating party, I went over to the skating rink and took lessons, just to learn how to stand up. Of course, they don't want to just teach you how to stand up, they teach you dances to begin with, and spins, and jumps, and things like that. So I really got into skating. When I was in the fourth year of architecture, when everyone frowned on all my social activities, like skating at least once or twice a week, playing basketball once a week, going swimming another time, fishing another time, wondering what I was doing and being able to finish my projects, so I was actually secretly taking lessons and skating too. And I learned how to dance. After the first year, they said, "You know, you should enter a competition" [laughs]. Set me up with a partner, skated some dances. We failed miserably, we never placed or anything, finally, after I came back from the Air Force, the first year I was back, someone saw... I had taken lessons in Texas when I was in Air Force and really advanced quite a bit taking lessons there. And when I came back, somebody forty miles away, up at Oak Ridge, saw my skating and decided that I needed a partner from up there. And that was Kate Jaspers. You know Kate? She's a little taller than I am, so she always had to wear her hair short when I skated with her. So then that meant driving up to Oakridge at least once a week, for a dance skating lessons and practice. That eventually got to be five times a week, when we were skating really heavily and placing in competitions. Finally, in '67, it's been a long time ago, you know, we actually won an Oregon State meet. We won the Northwest Regional Meet and Dance. And because we won that meet, we had to go back to nationals, in Lincoln, Nebraska, to skate. Of course, we didn't place in the top ten there, but we still thought we did really well by winning the state and regional meet and going there. Meantime, both of us

were trained as judges and we were invited to almost every meet in Oregon to judge. Then it became every meet in Washington and every meet in California. It took tons of time, away from work and everything, to travel to these meets and judge. We had to be at the meet at about 5:30 in the morning because the even started about six or six thirty. Some of them went to almost midnight for three days or for a whole week; Friday, Saturday, Sunday, or sometimes just Saturday and Sunday. We even went to Reno to judge a Tri-State meet there with tons of skaters. I could even remember one event where we had to judge sixty dance teams in one event [laughs]. But judging was a lot of fun and I even went to the National Academy in Colorado Springs, the Olympic Training Center, paid our way there. Once there, they picked you up and trained you at the center. So I stayed there for several days, got more training, came back, and advanced even further in judging and stuff like that. That all ended when I got appointed to the State Board of Architectures because what was supposed to be eight meetings year, ended up being really time consuming, so I couldn't continue the skating judging. So that's when I quit judging, retired from judging [laughs].

[05:07]

[EU] Do you still do skating?

[KN] I haven't put on a pair of skates for many years. Actually it's probably been about...well Kate and I skated in about 1970, and then she moved away. Seventeen years later, she came back and we were entered in a meet, just for fun, and we won that meet. And she continued skating for another couple of years when she became pregnant with Elizabeth, her last daughter, who just got married this year. But she couldn't fit into her skating outfit; I didn't even know she was pregnant. I refused to skate anymore. But I continued to judge until I got onto the State Board, like I said. That was really enjoyable and I even helped train judges after going to the national training center. That still actually helps evaluating things today. You know, when you're a judge, you can evaluate something, and put a score down, evaluate building systems it's so simple to do because of that kind of training. So now, I'm evaluating scholarship applications, I'm the State Scholarship Chairman for the National Wild Turkey Federation also, that's another hat [laughs]. And then the Asian American Organization of Oregon, we do scholarships every year too. Luckily, I have a committee to evaluate both of those.

[EU] What do you judge with the, Turkey, the Wild Turkey?

[KN] These are academic scholarships for high school seniors. And the organization gives out about \$350,000 worth of scholarships, every year, to high school seniors.

[EU] This is a hunting group?

[KN] This is a hunting and conservation group. We help develop habitat for wildlife. The habitat we develop for turkeys are also great for other animals, elk especially, and butterflies and things like that. Thousands, millions of dollars goes into habitat restoration from the funds we generate

from our auctions. And if you read Mike Stalberg's article in the paper last week, he listed the top organizations for donations to be given to, for the least amount given to the administrators, most coming back to the states, from the National Federation of Turkey, the federation is the second highest ranked. We complain that not enough comes back to the state, but still we're amongst the top. But I was really surprised when I found out that they gave out \$350,000 almost every year in scholarships. And this year, our scholarship winner for the state, had a 4.18 GPA; A pluses in all his advance placement courses, a kid from Bend. Last year, our student here from Churchill won it and he had a 4.0 plus average plus also. But they have to write essays about how hunting and being outdoors with family really affected their life, you know. That's really nice. They have to have a valid hunting license to make sure it doesn't go to the wrong people who can BS their way through. And so, it's nice to see that.

[08:52]

[EU] Any other organizations? Any other activities we should cover?

[KN] Oh, I've been supporting the State Youth Outdoor Day for the last three years. It's about four years old, we didn't know about it the first year. Then I met someone who was involved with that organization at an event for the Ducks and an event that I belong to. They said, "Why didn't the Turkey Federation show up?" I said, "We didn't know about it." So ever since then, we've been doing this event that attracts six hundred youngsters every year now. At first it was a hundred and fifty and when we got involved, we spread the word throughout the southern part of the state here, we got a lot more kids up there. You know, it's not about hunting or anything. They learn how to fish, they learn how to tie flies, they learn how to make bird houses, duck houses. We teach them safety aspects of turkey hunting. We teach them how to make turkey calls. We actually make them for them. And then there's a turkey pen down around the corner from where we have our booth and we test the turkey calls of those turkeys there. So the kids are able to use the calls and get turkeys to gobble. It's really fun. But you know, I think we're going to lose what we call hunting heritage here, if kids aren't taught to enjoy the outdoors. Because there are probably too many teachers that teach kids not to hunt. That's been a really big thing that I think is happening here. And those same teachers don't even teach the kids to fish, or teach them to use the outdoors in a good way. That's why I think society is going the wrong way. It's not the hunting, but I like kids to be able to go outdoors and learn how to enjoy the outdoors, you know? Besides the art and music, outdoors is really something else too.

[EU] Okay, thank you Ken.

[end 11:09]