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This interview was conducted with Fred Shiosaki on July 12, 2012 in Spokane, Washington. The interviewer is Danny Beatty.

DB: Today is July 12, 2012. I am here with Fred Shiosaki, and we're going to do an oral history. I'd like Fred to start by giving some of his earliest remembrances of fishing, fly fishing, and also get the history of his life. So I'm going to turn it over to Fred at this time.

FS: Hi, this is Fred Shiosaki. I'm a Spokane native. My parents immigrated here in about 1915, and they set up a laundry business in Hillyard, and I grew up in Hillyard with a whole series of Caucasian friends. There were very few Japanese families out there, so anyway. So I grew up there, and my father being a Japanese he liked to eat fish. And so when we were kids, he would take us on Sunday, that was the only day off we had. We would go perch fishing any place that had some kind of fish in it, and I know that every once in a while he'd keep a squawfish or a sucker, and I tried to think of what he did with them. But anyway, he was—as time allowed, he really liked to fish. And so we did fish when we were kids, and as we grew up and grew older, we lost interest. Actually I lost interest in fishing and got interested in chasing girls and drinking beer and going to college and all that kind of stuff.

The war started of course the end of 1941, and I was just graduating from high school that year, and of course we as a Japanese American, we were all very suspect, and so some very unfortunate things took place, and it turned out that we were classified enemy aliens and weren't eligible to be drafted, and so I started college. And of course college has lost—I was going to go to Gonzaga and they lost all their male students, so they turned it into a school to train naval reserve officers. Well, if you want to be really out of place, [be] a Japanese American civilian going to a school where they're training naval officers.

Fortunately in early 1943, they announced that they would not draft Japanese, Japanese Americans, but they would allow them to volunteer, and so I volunteered. And I ended up in an all Japanese American infantry unit for the 442nd Regimental Conduct Team. And all the enlisted personnel were Japanese Americans from the mainland and from Hawaii. About two-thirds of the outfit were guys from Hawaii. We trained down in Mississippi, so you can imagine that a bunch of, I guess we weren't enemy aliens, but we looked like it. Imagine us being down in Mississippi where of course the black racial prejudice was rampant, and the first thing that the white officers told us that, remember down here in Mississippi you're a white man, and so it was pretty strange. We ended up, you know, you're not to use black facilities. You're not going to associate with black people. You're not supposed to go in a black restaurant. It was, I would say, an extreme form of paranoia as far as we were concerned.

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Fly Fishing Collection

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The unit that I belonged to was about two-thirds, I'd say, two-thirds Hawaiian Japanese Americans and one-third of them were from the mainland. And many of those guys from the mainland came out of those, they called them relocation camps. In Germany, they were realistic about them and they called them concentration camps, but most Japanese Americans who lived on the West Coast were placed in these camps. And we got together finally in Mississippi, and it's strange these kids came out of the camps, and it was in Mississippi as I pointed out we were white men. It was a strange experience.

But we did end up as an infantry unit in Italy. We were committed to battle just north of Rome, and we fought there for several months up and through—up to September. And as the war developed in Europe, they moved us from Europe, from Italy, into the south of France, and we hit the line around where France, Switzerland and Germany come together in an area near a place called Bruyeres was the town, but we were part of the—we were attached to the 36th Division, which was Texas National Guard, and it turned out that we saved a battalion of Texans who were cut off by the Germans and then cut off for seven days. And after a bloody battle, my company, for example, started with 200 men, and when that battle to save those guys was over, there were 18 of us left. But anyway, you're looking at an honorary Texan, and so, yes, the governor of Texas some years later made us honorary Texans. So you know, I have license to do whatever I want to in Texas, I understand. I've never been to Texas lately, so, but anyway.

As far as, and it's interesting, like I say, my father fished for food. He liked to fish. But when I got back from the service and casting about looking for things to do, and I found that there were fly clubs in town. Of course I was busy going to college and couldn't do much about it, but later on I joined a group of guys who were part of the original Inland Empire Fly Fishing Club. It was a great organization. I did join them, and I wasn't much of a fly fisherman at the time, but over time I went from ineptitude to I was almost, almost a fly fisherman, you know. I got fair at it. I don't consider myself a fly fisherman yet because I tend to be a little sloppy in my casting, but it's been the really one of the joys in my life, to be able to fish and have fly fishermen who are friends like that. So over the years, from 1960 until today, I consider myself some sort of a fly fisherman.

In that period of course, I always intended to remain active doing stuff like that, and I first of all was asked, first of all by the governor, to serve on the original Fish and Wildlife Commission, and I joined the first one under—gosh, was it, it wasn't Governor-- It fails me, but I did about 1980 I started with part of the Fish and Wildlife Commission, and I served for eight or nine years on the commission. And I chaired it for one year. It was a very edifying experience and good to be able to work at that level, setting seasons and establishing take levels and all that kind of stuff, and working with the staff. And I find that I still meet with the regional office on matters of fishing and stuff like that, just to help. I don't know whether advice works or not, but I at least meet with them on occasions. It's been a very good relationship that I've had with the department over the years.

DB: Go ahead. Now, with this department, I understand that they're naming a regional office after you. Is that right?

FS: I'd like to be modest about this, but—

DB: Well, go ahead.

FS: --but anyway, I was just out there just in the last week, and I was asked to meet, well, with the director, the state director, and the regional officers, and they said, Well, Fred, we're going to name the regional office after you.

DB: Is this a new building?

FS: Well, it's, no, it's been there for about 10 years.

DB: Oh, okay.

FS: But it's, yes, they—don't ask me. I had nothing to do with it other than to tell them how to spell my name, you know.

DB: Well, what you've had to do with it is all your years of work—

FS: (Inaudible)—they know other people like you who have worked hard at this thing too. And of course, maybe it's a matter of being in the right place at the right time, but they did name the building after me. And in all modesty, I say there are other more deserving people than me, but—

DB: But besides the Fish and Wildlife, you were also involved with other state agencies that were involved with the environment.

FS: Yes, yes.

DB: Go ahead with some of that.

FS: Well I was asked to serve on the—just a minute, I just lost it—

Technical difficulties

FS: Okay, well I was asked by the governor to set up an environmental affairs group, so that we would oversee the various aspects of environmental control here in the state. And so I served on that board for some years. At one time they were all under one department, and the citizens' group was responsible for passing the regulations and making recommendations for control. And so we did that for several years.

DB: So you got involved. Do you think that being involved as a fly fisher got you thinking about these other environmental issues? Was there a connection at all there?

FS: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. I mean, when you're out, you are fishing and you recognize that there's a need for clean water and control of the environment around these bodies of water and to make sure that, you know, that crap doesn't get into the water system, and to control the use of extraneous stuff there. There're some really wild men out here in this part of the country who would do almost anything to kill fish, unfortunately. So anyway, yes, it was part of being involved in that I did join the Fish and Wildlife Commission. And I always felt that it was an important part of that, the things that the commission did, that we needed to put controls on things that ended up being—

DB: You were also involved with the Inland Empire Fly Club in the administration of the club at one time.

FS: Oh, yes, I went through the chairs, and yes, I was president of the club, you know, and so, yes. We did some good things. Well, they still do. But as I said, we did, if you recall, we did put on that national federation thing here in Spokane.

DB: Now, tell us about the 1980 FFF Conclave—how did you get involved in being chairman?

FS: Anyway, you asked about putting on the federation meeting here in Spokane in 1980, and as I recall, there were a number of people who were in favor of it, but it ended up that everybody else seemed too busy to really take over. And so I, along with raising a family and trying to do a job, I took over putting that thing together. I tell you, it was a really satisfying affair. We got national, international fly fishermen here, and we-- The one thing that I was really tickled about, we were able to get some of those Easterners fishing up here, and they were really just amazed that we would go fishing in June, I mean in July and August, up in the mountains around here. And I just remember sending some guys out with our guys to go fishing up in Coeur D'Alene and stuff, and they were pretty—it was quite the—

DB: I remember, it was a very successful—

FS: It was a great meeting.

DB: You had a beautiful site to hold it, with the river and the—

FS: Yes, yes. As a matter of fact, didn't we have casting demonstrations down on the river?

DB: Yes, yes!

FS: And we had a bunch of kids come down, and we tried to teach them how to cast on the river here.

DB: Right, right up in front of the center.

FS: Yes, yes, it was a very satisfying meeting, and I was very tickled, really pleased with it.

DB: Tell us some about your fly fishing experiences. You mentioned earlier that you do go to Hawaii occasionally.

FS: We go every winter. As I say, I was in the army with all of these—

DB: Is there any fly fishing in Hawaii that you're— No?

FS: No, no. I was just trying to think. My friends took me out somewhere, but I can't remember it, and it wasn't fly fishing. I have a friend, a guy, a friend who lived there on the big island, and he took us out fishing somewhere, but I—

DB: But fly fishing?

FS: No, no, well there is that river that flows down on the east side of Hawaii. Now why did I go up there? They said it was fly fishing, but I never did catch anything.

DB: Okay, where have you fly fished and where have you liked to go fly fishing?

FS: Well, living here, I'm primarily a still water fisherman.

DB: Okay.

FS: And there are a whole series of lakes here that are just great fly fishing lakes, and you start up north there, and there's Bayley and Perkins and all of those-- Bayley is a fly only lake, and there are a series of small lakes around here. And the south of town, of course, there are the regular lakes that are not just fly fishing but bait fishing. But at certain times of the year, they have great hatches. For instance, Amber Lake has a great mayfly hatch for instance.

DB: Do you go over to the Potholes area?

FS: Well yes I do. I go to the Potholes occasionally, but that's a long pull, and we go in there at certain times. I remember when they had those Lahontan cutthroats in—

DB: Lenore?

FS: --Lenore, and that was great fishing. God, those are big fish.

DB: Were you involved with the department when they were making that transition?

FS: Yes, yes, we were part of that.

DB: And those fish came from Nevada or—

FS: Yes, they were out of that Nevada—they were up in the—

DB: Tell us a little about that. It's a story of why that lake—

FS: There's that series of lakes along there, below Dry Falls, and Dry Falls was good enough water for regular trout, but those below that got alkaline, they got more and more alkaline, until they got down to Lenore there, and they didn't think it would hold fish. But then the department got in contact with the Nevada Fish and Wildlife, and they were able to get those Lahontan cutthroat. And for several years, that was great, great fishing, but we have not been back, and I don't know what it's like anymore, but it was—and they were big trout, and God, they were, I know—

DB: Was [that] your involvement with the Department of Wildlife or with the fly club in getting the idea of Lahontan Cutthroat or both?

FS: Well, you know, for both. We were, you know, our club has always been active in this sort of thing, and so they offered assistance, and I think they helped actually do those kinds of things. The Game Department did the work, but the actual working down at the lake, we had guys down there. And the other clubs around there all helped with that then, you know. It was an effort by the fly club, all the fly clubs.

DB: As I remember, the council, the state FFF council had gotten involved. There was even a symposium there at Dry Falls State Park, and you were involved with all those things in those days.

FS: Yes, yes, yes, you're right. I did. I can remember that now. You've got to excuse me.

DB: You brought a lot of people together, almost a training session of what in the world it is these fish required.

FS: Yes, yes, we were able to—well of course, in those days I was involved with the FFF and with the state federation, and so we were able to get people in to help, and so that was, you know, was one of those efforts that the fly fishing community, they were able to put it all together. But there were other people involved that actually worked (inaudible). You've got to give credit where credit is due.

DB: Right, I understand that, but you were certainly part of it, in a big way.

FS: Yes, well, some way.

DB: Ah, you're being modest. So, have you done any fly fishing trips away from Spokane?

FS: Well—

DB: You know, what is called destination fishing--

FS: Oh yes, well, I went to Christmas Island once.

DB: Okay. Well, tell us about that.

FS: Well, Christmas Island, you know, it's—friends talked me into this, and so we said, Okay, well we'll go to Christmas Island, but the secret was, the three of us took our wives as far as Hawaii and left them there. That's the secret. They had a week of pooping around there in Hawaii, and we were down there at Christmas Island. And it's interesting. The fishery is, well, you know, they're big fish and they run hard and stuff, but you know, being a trout fisherman, it didn't have quite the—it didn't have quite the appeal that the trout I-- I guess I'll always be a trout fisherman.

DB: Do you visit your daughter in Japan?

FS: Only once. My daughter's lived over there 20 years, but she comes home. Well, she comes here every, well at least once or twice a year, and she'll be-- Her school she gets—the summer break is the month of August, so she comes home in August.

DB: I was wondering it if you'd ever tried fly fishing—

FS: No, no, we've gone to Japan, but I've never fished in Japan.

DB: Oh, okay.

FS: I do have—a cousin of mine is a fisherman, and he's offered to take, when we've visited him, he had this big long bamboo rod with a stick with something tied on the end, and he's offered to take me down the river, but I—

DB: They have a whole different—more unique, but a whole different way of fly fishing.

FS: Fishing, and of course they fish to eat, the damn things you know, so no catch and release in Japan, you know. I think so.

DB: I didn't know—

FS: Yes, yes, but anyway this cousin, yes, he's a fisher—I guess it runs in the family. But anyway, he's a fisherman.

DB: Do you still eat one once in a while?

FS: Very seldom, and only something we buy at the meat market. I never eat trout. It's just something that I just-- I trained myself not to do that.

DB: Oh, okay. That's okay. I haven't quite gotten there—on these put and take trout, I don't have any problem taking some once in a while for supper.

FS: No, no. I don't know why, you know, I'll eat a piece of tuna fish and maybe a piece of salmon once in a while, but I'm really not, not really much of a fish eater anyway.

DB: Oh, okay, I see.

FS: We tend to be—at our house, we tend to be kind of vegetarian.

DB: The Inland Empire Club has given you some special recognition over the years. You were the fly fisherman of the year, one year.

FS: Oh, yes. Yes, right, right.

DB: And you received the Ed Wolfe memorial award. Now, I don't know what that is, so I'd like you to explain that.

FS: Well, it—for those of, who try to make the fishing environment better and help improve the fisheries and stuff. That's what it's all about. It's not just being a fly fisherman, but working on our fly fishing environment, and that's what—

DB: Who was Ed Wolfe?

FS: Ed Wolfe was an old, old, one of the original members of the fly club, older than Vern. And it was certainly a good thing that they did that. He was a great guy. He was one of the elders in the fly club.

DB: I see.

FS: But then, we can say I'm one of the elders now, so.

DB: Yes, I understand that. That goes with the territory.

FS: Yes, it does.

DB: Are you still involved? Do you still go over to the meetings of the commission, or you're still involved with the region -- biologists and so forth, no?

FS: Do I? I still, you know, I still work with the local office, but I don't range any farther than that. And if they need some help in there or need some help from our guys, I do that. But no, I don't go to—

DB: I realize—just things that they can't get done—

FS: Yes, we provide help for it, things that—

DB: You're not doing the biology or anything—

FS: Oh, no, no, no, no, good night, no, no, no, no.

DB: Okay. You've done a good job of kind of condensing a lot of years. Is there anything that we've missed that you'd like to more emphasize with the fly fishing?

FS: Well, one of the things that really, that our fly club does that pleases me to no end is that we—there's a boys' camp here, and every year we take the whole crew out. Our guys take them out and they take them fishing all day and take them to breakfast and take them to lunch, and I tell you, those young men, those young guys, I hope, I think we're making fishermen out of them because they really enjoy themselves. Every once in a while, one of the guys says, Boy, that was a real brat. But nevertheless, they—I think you get a lesson in manners when it comes to fishing, so. Yes, that's one of the things the fly club does. And we, you know, I'm sure, I know we do other good works around (inaudible).

DB: And you started that?

FS: No, no, no, no, no.

DB: No? Are you one of the members helping with the program?

FS: I have been, anyway, but yes, it's been great, a great program.

DB: Okay. I got the impression that maybe you were one of the instigators of it.

FS: No, I don't think so, no, but it's been going on for so long that I cannot take credit for it, really.

DB: Oh, okay, okay. You said you conceived and promoted a statewide kids' fishing only-- Oh, OK, that was through the Fish and Wildlife service.

FS: Yes, that's right. We wanted it, and we tried to other areas in the state to do that also.

DB: You helped start the—don't let me say what it was. You tell us what it is.

FS: Well, anyway, when our fishing kids—it was a great success here. We went to—at various times we tried to get the other regional offices to set up these fishing kids, and I recall going to Wenatchee and that Wenatchee office and putting one together there, but I never followed up to see what happened. I know they have one out of Olympia at that lake up near Olympia, and the one down in Vancouver has had. Now I don't know whether those things have continued, but we tried to get those fishing kids' programs all across the state.

DB: And, what was the purpose of that?

FS: Well, just, these—well here, in Spokane, there's—it's like, it's a boys' camp, you know, and they are kids who are not quite good in society, and the school out here is run by-Catholic priests. But we take a certain number of those kids out fishing, and inevitably the kids have just a great time. It's a wonderful thing. And every once in a while, we run into a hard case, but by the end of the day, they're willing to concede that it was a good day, yes, yes. So it's been a great program.

DB: You said you don't know if it's spread or what's happened to it. One example I know about is that every June there's one at a lake in Anacortes, and what's happened is it's been taken over by a local fishing club.

FS: Oh, yes.

DB: Now our fly club doesn't, but there is another fishing club that does a day's outing at a lake for children, and they provide all the equipment if the kids don't have their own equipment and stuff—

FS: I know there's one in Wenatchee, and for a while I know there was one in Olympia, and I don't know what's happened to that, but we had several of those. So anyway—

DB: It is going on in Anacortes.

FS: Good. That's a great—it's been, you know, and what's better than to take a kid fishing, for God's sake.

DB: Yes, how well I know. Is there anything you'd like to add to this--?

FS: Oh, well, yes, other than like I-- The one thing that just I'm really happy about is that I've formed friendships over the last 45 or 50 years, and these guys are friends, and they're friends forever. Nowadays, we even talk about stuff that isn't about fishing, you know. I got a couple of guys, we argue about politics all the time, but we've learned-- I can remember on one occasion, two guys ganged up on me. We were driving down to the Columbia Basin. I finally pulled off to the side of the road, and I said, "You SOB's, get out of the car. I'm not going to put up with this crap any more."

DB: Uh oh.

FS: And so they shut up and we talked about something else the rest of the day.

DB: Was that something dealing when you were on the commission?

FS: No, no, this was politics.

DB: Oh, politics. I know every once in a while members of the commission would get—

FS: Oh, yes, we would lock up too. But no, this was politics. Anyway, you know, that cures them, we just learn not to talk politics.

DB: You guys were this way before the big problem we're having now—

FS: Yes, anyway, we've all learned not to talk that kind of stuff. That's a good thing. That's a good way to stay friends. Well, shoot.

DB: So, yes, I understand the organizational part and the friendships you've made.

FS: The fly club has been a source of great comfort and friendship to me, and I'm sure—I hope everybody else is the same. Unfortunately, they tend to be the best friends, you know. You'd like to have them—not a bad idea to have other friends.

DB: Do you tie flies?

FS: Yes, I tie flies, yes.

DB: And do you have a special fly that you've—a certain type fly that you like to use?

FS: Around here, you know, we do mostly wet flies, wooly buggers, and that kind of fly. I try an occasional dry fly, but the only one-- When I used to go to Montana some, I'd tie a bunch of dries, but the lake fishing around here is all mostly the sinking lines—

DB: The nymph—

FS: --nymph-type thing, and yes, once in a while, Amber Lake has a nice mayfly hatch. But it's—

DB: Have you tried the chironomid fishing?

FS: Oh, yes, yes. That's, you know, I just felt (inaudible) well, you might as well use bait because that's what you're—

DB: It does catch fish though, doesn't it?

FS: In the spring, we do a lot of chironomid fishing, and it does work, god, does it work good, yes.

DB: Okay. I can't think of anything else to ask you about. We have touched on a lot of topics. Is there anything further you would like to say about your life in fly fishing, the environment or your years of volunteering with state agencies?

FS: [No].

End of transcript