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"Japanese American Farmers' in the San Fernando Valley before and  
After WWII Oral History Project"

**SHIBUYA CHIYO MURO**

Oral History Interview

San Fernando Valley

Interview Conducted by Dina Nim

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**Mrs. SHIBUYA CHIYO MURO**

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION

Narrator: Mrs. **SHIBUYA CHIYO MURO**

Length of Interview: 40 minutes

Place: Community Center

Subject: Japanese American Farmers in the San Fernando Valley

Interviewer: Dina Nim

**Interviewee:** Mrs. Shibuya Chiyo Muro (SCM)

**Interviewer:** Dina Nim (DN)

**Subject:** Japanese American Farmers in the San Fernando Valley before and after WW2

**Interview:**

[00] DN: How was the San Fernando Valley like when you were growing up?

[00:05] SCM: We moved from Monterey Park in 1926. Where my dad had started the flower growing business, he was farming in Monterey Park when we were very young. I was about 10 years old when we moved there. My dad started growing gladiolas. When we were young we all had to help on the farm. We went to school there, of course. My brother and I and the younger sisters, we all went to one school, one room schoolhouse there was located within one mile. My brothers all went to San Fernando High School.

[00:54] DN: Can you tell me what it was like and how it's changed?

[01:03] SCM: Oh yes. It was just Sagebrush. There were hardly any houses there. We all started working. There were few other Japanese farmers there. My dad though it would be a nice place for children to grow up. We had about 15 acres. That's when my dad started farming.

[01:35] DN: What were the demographics?

[01:37] SCM: The people? I don't know.

[01:47] DN: Were there other Japanese Americans living in your area?

[01:50] SCM: Yes, there were few families living there.

[01:56] DN: What other ethnic group lived there at that time besides Japanese Americans?

[02:02] SCM: There were many Caucasians. There were very few other nationality people, they were mostly Caucasian.

[02:12] DN: Was there Filipino, Chinese or Korean?

[02:14] SCM: No, not that I know of.

[02:21] DN: Do you still remember their occupations?

[02:24] SCM: Some of them were working in the area; they had their own business in town. There were some orchards there as well.

[02:41] DN: For your parents, can you tell me how your parents ended up in the San Fernando Valley?

[02:48] SCM: I think my dad's lease was up in Monterey Park and he started looking for a place to start rather than leasing the ground, he decided to buy. That's why we moved to the San Fernando Valley.

[03:07] DN: When you arrived to the San Fernando Valley, when did you move here?

[03:13] SCM: 1926 or 1927.

[03:18] DN: What area did you live in the San Fernando Valley? We have a map here, you can show us.

[03:37] SCM: We were five miles east of San Fernando town. [Looking at the map] Let's see here. Here is Burbank. We lived here by Hansen Dam. Can you see that? We lived around here.

[04:24] DN: Can you describe your farm?

[04:26] SCM: Yes. It was not only gladiolas; there were other varieties of flowers that my dad grew. Other than gladiolas, we started pansies, sweet peas... I remember very clearly because I remember as a young girl, we all were out there picking sweet peas for the market when the big earthquake in Long Beach happened. We were out there stringing. That I remember clearly. I cannot remember what era it was, it must have been the 19--- I don't quite remember when, but it was Long Beach earthquake.

[05:20] DN: How about your house, what did it look like?

[05:26] SCM: My dad built a beautiful one. Four bedroom house plus two duplexes and also a flower barn and a huge warehouse in the back. When you think about it, I am amazed at what he had accomplished.

[05:47] DN: How did your parents become farmers?

[05:52] SCM: When my dad first came to America soon after the earthquake in San Francisco, he came in there to San Francisco and started working for the railroad. Then he went up north for a while. He started coming back with different friends. He was a part time cook and worked at that. Then he started working on different little ranches that is when he became interested in farming.

[06:35] DN: How many acres was your farm?

[06:38] SCM: 15 acres that I remember.

[06:43] DN: Can you tell me what your father's daily routine was?

[06:52] SCM: He worked out in the field. He did plowing, he did all the planting of different types of flowers that we raised.

[07:05] DN: What about your mother?

[07:09] SCM: My mother was a helper.

[07:15] DN: If they worked for long hours on the farm, how about their relationship.

[07:23] SCM: Oh, very nice. We all worked. We all went to school and would come back, change our clothes go out in the field and help.

[07:35] DN: Did your mother work outside of the house?

[07:38] SCM: No, she was a farmer's wife and worked in the field as well.

[07:46] DN: Who was responsible for the house duties? Taking care of your brothers and sisters?

[07:53] SCM: WE all did. My sisters and I took care of the cooking and housework.

[08:01] DN: Did your parents hire anyone on the farm?

[08:05] SCM: Towards the end, we had a couple of Mexicans helping. We all helped as well.

[08:16] DN: Was there anyone else living on the farm?

[08:22] SCM: Yes, we had two couples living there. Japanese middle aged couples living on the duplex.

[08:35] DN: Who made the key decisions in your family regarding moving, property and how was the money spent?

[08:46] SCM: You want to know about what?

[08:49] DN: Who made the key decisions in your family?

[08:53] SCM: My dad, everything was my dad.

[08:59] DN: Did you or your parents participate in any kind of strike?

[09:04] SCM: No, not that I am aware of.

[09:11] DN: What kind of discrimination did your parents face?

[09:23] SCM: No, not that I know of. I cannot say that there was any.

[09:33] DN: Is there one memory of your parents that you would like to share with us?

[09:48] SCM: The way they worked, morning up, sun down, they were constantly working. I always appreciated my dad the most, how he was able to handle eight children on the farm. I had an elder sister who was born in Japan. She came over and married early. We had the eight children in the family. My dad was lord and master.

[10:34] DN: Start with yourself, can you tell me about yourself? Start of by telling me what it was like growing up on a farm.

[10:49] SCM: We all did what we had to do, work on the farm. We had Japanese schools on Saturdays. Then we went to church on Sunday, which was run by a Caucasian pastor but he was very much into China at that time because he had lived there for so long. It was very nice when I think about the discipline that we had to go through. I think it paid off in the long run.

[11:28] DN: When did you start working on the farm?

[11:32] SCM: I started working probably at six years old. At that time in Monterey Park, my dad grew potatoes so the youngsters had to gather them when they were ready to be gathered.

[11:52] DN: Can you describe what your daily routine was? What did you do every day?

[11:59] SCM: It was really just going to school and helping on the ranch.

[12:09] DN: DID you have any responsibilities inside the house?

[12:19] DN: We had to help with the cooking, clean the house, do the laundry.

[12:31] DN: Did you have to take care of your brothers and sisters?

[12:33] SCM: Definitely.

[12:43] DN: Are you a younger sister or older sister?

[12:46] SCM: Yes, I have two younger sisters left right now out of nine. The rest have passed away.

[12:56] DN: Did you and your brothers and sisters were treated equally by your parents?

[13:03] SCM: No, I think at that time were treated more to be men, I guess. They learned strong work habits from dad. They were the boss.

[13:24] DN: Who is the oldest in the house? Brother or sister?

[13:28] SCM: I have four older brothers, and then I came next any my three sisters followed.

[13:37] DN: Did your family want you to grow up and take over the farm?

[13:42] SCM: Yes, I think my dad wanted my brothers to continue with the farm. My dad had a stroke at the age of 68 and he was invalid for 10 years where my mother took care of him until he passed away.

[14:03] DN: Was family life different for Japanese Americans than others living in the area?

[14:25] SCM: I cannot say too much on that because it was just farm people to begin with, it was just farm life.

[14:37] DN: Did your parents have time to spend with you?

[14:42] SCM: Oh sure. We would be out in the flower barn and all be talking with one another. We carried a lot of conversation in the barn. Whatever had to be done, we did it together.

[15:01] DN: Which parent tended to be more strict?

[15:03] SCM: My dad.

[15:06] DN: Do you remember you or your siblings getting into trouble?

[15:12] SCM: Let me see. I am trying to think. Not that I... No trouble, no.

[15:37] DN: Did your parents try to instill the traditional Japanese customs and values inside the house?

[15:44] SCM: Oh yes. When we went to Japanese school, they wanted us to learn tea serving. They would have someone come in and show us some dancing. Yes Japanese culture was connected with school.

[16:04] DN: How did you react to that?

[16:09] SCM: We accept it. A lot of things we accept on the farm.

[16:14] DN: Do you remember getting sick or any of your family members getting sick?

[16:19] SCM: Definitely. I remember one incident. I don't know whether it was my dad or brother that had accidentally poured solution to be used on the farm and it went into our water pipe, and so into our kitchen. At lunch everybody drank water, I guess I didn't because my mother and I were the only ones that didn't get sick. Before you know it, everybody was on the floor laid out. Bodies just all laid out. We called my neighbor across the street. She said give them some black coffee. We poured coffee into everybody and then they recovered. It was really scary. I will always remember that. Fortunately neither my mother nor I were hit I guess because we weren't water drinkers or something. That's what stands out right now.

[17:32] DN: Do you recall your mother giving birth?

[17:37] SCM: Oh yes. She had three after me so I remember vaguely. I had to help her with the laundry when they came.

[17:51] DN: Did someone come to the house to help her give birth?

[17:57] SCM: She had what they called --- uhh what is that called? The lady that comes to the house and assists with the birth? We had the two family couples that worked for my folks so they helped.

[18:15] DN: Did she go to the hospital?



[18:17] SCM: No, it's all at home.

[18:20] DN: Who helped take care of her and the baby after birth?

[18:25] SCM: We had the two couples so they helped.

[18:32] DN: How soon did she return back to work?

[18:36] SCM: That I don't remember. I am sure she recovered quite soon. We all worked.

[18:46] DN: So when your parents didn't work, what kind of family activities did you do as a family?

[18:53] SCM: We had picnics and my dad would drive all the way down to White Point and we would go swimming or go to the beach. It could be a park too. We would go to picnics.

[19:10] DN: What kind of occasion or holiday did your family celebrate?

[19:16] SCM: It was mostly New Year's. I remember the workers and the men folks would get together and have their card games.

[19:34] DN: Did you have family vacations?

[19:41] SCM: Hardly. It was just when we would go out a day at a time that we would go to the beach or to a party. Other than that, no. We would go to a restaurant to eat.

[19:56] DN: Can you tell me a little bit about your school experience?

[20:04] SCM: We went to a one room schoolhouse. That was quite an experience moving from Monterey Park. After I graduated from elementary school we went to San Fernando Junior High School and then San Fernando High School. That's about our life was like.

[20:35] DN: Was there a lot of Japanese Americans in your school?

[20:40] SCM: There were quite a few Japanese Americans.

[20:52] DN: Do you have any friends besides Japanese Americans.

[20:58] SCM: Oh yes, most of our friends ended up being Caucasians.

[21:06] DN: Do you remember what their parents did?

[21:16] SCM: I don't remember too well but I guess they must have farmed as well.

[21:26] DN: Did people treat you differently because you were Japanese?

[21:33] SCM: Yes. It was most noticeable when we moved to Idaho. That's when we felt the most discrimination. Every time we would go to a shop, they would serve the others first and we would have to wait.

[21:58] DN: You mentioned you attended Japanese schools, how was it like? Did you like it?

[22:11] SCM: I think we could have done better. We were so eager to learn English, the American language I think. We had problem with English I remember.

[22:29] DN: What were some activities you did for fun?

[22:37] SCM: We had our family so we made up our own games.

[22:44] DN: What community activities were your family involved with?

[22:50] SCM: Everybody had their own group of people. I think they had friends and they would get together.

[23:00] DN: Were you involved in any community activity?

[23:04] SCM: As we grew older, yes I think so. My dad was involved with the flower market so there were activities there that we would attend.

[23:19] DN: Can you tell me a little bit about your dating?

[23:24] SCM: Oh heavens. My parents were strict. They said since I was the oldest of the girls I had to set up an example. I had to get permission before going out. Yes I had few dates.

[23:40] DN: How was it? Was it hard for you to go out?

[23:47] SCM: They came. I had friends from LA and Orange County. It was nice. I have good memories.

[24:00] DN: Did anyone in your family date or marry outside your ethnicity?

[24:12] SCM: No, they all married Japanese.

[24:19] DN: Can you tell me how you met your spouse?

[24:24] SCM: I met him at a picnic. That's how I met my husband.

[24:31] DN: How was your first date?

[24:36] SCM: We used to go up to Snow Mountain. There was a party up there. They were his organization.

[24:47] DN: How was your wedding?

[24:51] SCM: It was very sad, because it was after I came back from San Francisco that we decided to get married. He was from Hollywood so we decided to get married there. George made plans and we got married on Wilshire in a small church. Only my brother was able to attend. No one else was able to come because of the five mile radius that parents cannot move or travel outside of that. My oldest brother was the only one that was able to come. It was just George, his father and his close friend and myself. I think that was it.

[25:54] DN: What was the first job that you acquired?

[26:03] SCM: I was working on the farm, then we went to Idaho and still I worked on the farm, I came back and had children. My youngest one was in junior high when my husband decided that I could go out and work. In the meantime he wanted me to stay with the children. It was after my second son was ready to graduate high school that I decided I would work for the school district. That's how I started working.

[26:41] DN: What kind of job were you able to take before the War?

[26:47] SCM: I went to West Valley Occupational School and took up key punch operator. Soon after I worked for the Los Angeles County as a key punch operator from midnight to six in the morning. After that my friend asked me to work for the school district. I did. I started working as a clerk typist and I ended up working as a secretary before I retired.

[27:29] DN: Did you face any discrimination at work?

[27:32] SCM: Oh no.

[27:36] DN: For the internment, can you tell me about the time immediately before Executive Order 9066?

[27:56] SCM: That was when we had to evacuate? We were living in Hollywood so we decide to come and join my folks. We went to Manzanar together. We were all excited but my husband had this brand new car and he had to sell it for \$300. All we had was \$500. We joined the San Fernando group.

[28:31] DN: Can you tell how the social climate was like back then in 1930 until the day of Pearl Harbor?

[28:43] SCM: The public? I think it was okay.

[28:55] DN: How did people regard the Japanese Americans?

[29:01] SCM: We were treated okay. We had no discrimination. We worked easily and were friends with the Caucasians.

[29:18] DN: DO you remember Pearl Harbor day?

[29:22] SCM: Yes. I was in San Francisco. I was visiting my friend in San Jose at that time. I remember clearly that we were going to deliver his produce up in San Jose and they refused the truck to come in. That's what was fixed in my mind.

[29:47] DN: How did you or your family react to the news?

[29:50] SCM: We were shocked. It was devastating news.

[29:57] DN: What were the impacts that have on you and your family?

[30:02] SCM: We all went to camp. Two of my brothers went into service. It split the family in a way. The rest of them just stayed in Manzanar but my husband and I stayed there for three weeks when the call came in for volunteers to move up to Idaho because most of the sons were being taken into service and they asked for volunteers to go up and help on the farm. Naturally my husband took the bait and we signed up. There were 20 couples that left with a bus load of workers to go into Idaho.

[30:57] DN: Did your parents or your family members get taken away prior to internment?

[31:05] SCM: My brother in law. My oldest sister's husband was taken. One by one they were being picked up. He was in the PTA in a Japanese school in Dominguez Hills. When he heard one by one were being picked up, he was prepared. I remember when they picked him up it was a sad site. I stayed with my sister because I felt she needed somebody there when he was eventually taken. He had a suitcase already packed. The two men came after him. I stayed with my sister for a while because she had two small children at that time.

[32:10] DN: Before you went to camp, what did your family do with the belongings and property?

[32:20] SCM: What they had to do was sell what they could, or practically give it away, and our neighbor across the street said he would keep the property taxes paid up and could go in and take in any kind of money that he got from the flowers or produce that my dad might have had on the farm. They could keep whatever money if they would pay the taxes on the farm; Which they did.

[33:02] DN: What about the farm equipment?

[33:08] SCM: I think the neighbors said that they would take care of it to run the farm.

[33:13] DN: What did your family do with the family pictures?

[33:21] SCM: We did try to save them but I do remember many of our trunks and boxes were looted. What had happened that our neighbor had rented the main house that had the four bedrooms, plus the duplex, they had rented out to workers. Of course there were children there and they ransacked quite a few items in the boxes. Some of the pictures were missing, some were destroyed. I may have some in the boxes up in Seattle right now. I haven't been able to go up there to check.

[34:09] DN: What did your family decide to take to the assembly center? To the relocation center?

[34:18] SCM: Whatever we could carry. I think it was two packages or two boxes each family was allowed. I cannot remember now. We just took what we would need for everyday living.

[34:38] DN: Was there anything that you wanted to take but you couldn't?

[34:42] SCM: I am sure they tried to save some pictures. My husband and I just took what we needed for everyday life.

[35:00] DN: Which internment location did your family go to?

[35:06] SCM: We all went to Manzanar.

[35:09] DN: Do you remember any Japanese Americans that didn't go to camp?

[35:21] SCM: No, I don't remember any. Oh yes I do remember one family. They changed their name. It sounded like a Caucasian name but the children were our neighbors in Monetary Park. She said they were going to use the J to Z to change their names so they were able to stay in California. Their father was Japanese and mother was Caucasian.

[36:01] DN: For the post internment, I would like to know about life after internment. Were any of your family members released before internment?

[36:18] SCM: No, not that I know of.

[36:31] DN: Where did you and your family go after internment?

[36:37] SCM: I think my dad and mother stayed at camp. But my sister eventually got married and left camp. My two brothers were still in service. The rest stayed in camp.

[37:02] DN: Did you resettle in the San Fernando Valley?

[37:09] SCM: Eventually we did. My husband and I did. My folks moved back to the ranch.

[37:16] DN: Did you return back to your farm?

[37:20] SCM: My folks did.

[37:23] DN: What was it like?

[37:25] SCM: They said it was in terrible shape because of the people renting the main house. The trees and shrubs, it was like a forest. It wasn't cared for at all. They just had a place to stay to go to work.

[37:44] DN: Do you still own the land?

[37:49] SCM: No. My father passed away, my brothers might have run the place and eventually my oldest brother was sick and wasn't able to really manage the farm well and eventually sold.

[38:18] DN: What did your parents do for work after internment?

[38:25] SCM: My father helped with a garden in Manzanar. There was a fish pond with whatever plants they could. It turned out to be a beautiful fish pond they made.

[38:40] DN: What about yourself? What did you do after internment?

[38:48] SCM: I am trying to remember. We stayed with my folks first and then my husband and I worked for a couple in Encino. My husband did the farming and gardening there. Then we came back to the farm to help because they needed some workers. I helped on the farm and my husband went into gardening.

[39:20] DN: Was there any discrimination after internment?

[39:24] SCM: Not that I know of. Not too much. I cannot remember any harsh discrimination. I don't think so.

[39:37] DN: For the conclusion, is there one memory of growing up in the San Fernando Valley important to you?

[39:44] SCM: I loved this place. I loved the Valley. That's why when we were in Idaho when I heard we were able to come back, I insisted my husband that we come back. I said we started here and I wanted to end here.

[40:04] DN: Why do you want to come back here? Was there memories?

[40:09] SCM; I think so. My oldest daughter was 3 and a half when we returned.

[40:17] DN: IS there anything that you want to talk about that we haven't covered?

[40:21] SCM: NO. I think you would have to ask. It's always nice to be back.

[40:31] DN: Thank you for your time.

[40:35] SCM: You are welcome.

**END OF INTERVIEW.**