

California State University  
Northridge - Ovaitt Library

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

**Mrs. HAZAMA**

Oral History Interview

San Fernando Valley

Friday, April 9<sup>th</sup> 2004

Interview Conducted by Henderson Lee

CSUN, Department of Asian American Studies  
California State University, Northridge  
18111 Nordhoff Street  
Northridge, California 91330-8329

**Mrs. HAZAMA**

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION

Narrator: Mrs. Hazama

Date of Interview: April 9, 2004

Length of Interview: 54 minutes

Place: Community Center

Subject: Japanese American Farmers in the San Fernando Valley

Interviewer: Henderson Lee

Interviewee: Mrs. Hazama (HA)

Interviewer: Henderson Lee (HL)

Date: April 9, 2004

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

[00] HL: My name is Henderson Lee and today is April 9<sup>th</sup>, Friday. We are in the community center right now at 10:15am. First of all I would like to get a sense of how the San Fernando Valley was like when you were growing up there. Mrs. Hazama, can you tell me what it was like and how it has changed?

[00:29] HA: I really grew up in Arizona. After I married I came to the San Fernando Valley. We really lived in Los Angeles for a while so it was around 1953 that I came to the valley. I don't know anything about it before then, except for what my in-laws have told me. I thought you wanted the story of the in-laws. As for the change, what I remember is that my mother in law used to say it used to be 120 degrees in the summer in the Valley and they could grow watermelons in Sylmar, but now you cannot because it's not hot enough. I remember my father in law saying that they lived in Sylmar where it opens up into Newhall, that's why the cold wind, would come rushing through that gap in the mountains. The wind was so strong that when he was plowing the land with the horse, the horse couldn't stand up and would fall down. That's how strong the wind was in those days. Of course by the time I came to the valley there were a lot of new homes built and new swimming pools. That brought the climate way down. I have never experienced 120 degrees, 105 was the highest when I came here in 1950s. So that was a change that I know of. I remember my mother in law saying that she loved Japanese eggplant and always grew them around her house because she liked the eggplant pickle. By the time I came, the smoke was all over the valley, it would kill of the eggplant flowers so that she couldn't have her beloved eggplant anymore. That was another change in the climate.

[3:17] HL: Since you came in the 1950s, what do you remember about the demographics about that time?

[3:30] HA: By the time I came, the place where my in laws farmed, it was right in the center of Sylmar. In fact he had an opportunity to buy all the land he was farming which was Sare and Foothill. That's practically the center of the town. If he could have bought that land he could have been a millionaire. Of course they didn't have any money in the depression years.

[3:58] HL: Were there any other Japanese American families living in your area?

[4:03] HA: Yes, I remember a very good friend of my in laws; they lived about a mile down the road from them. They were farming too, the father passed away early and so I think the mother quit farming.

[4:23] HL: Were there any other ethnic groups living there at that time?

[4:29] HA: I never heard of them speak of any. My husband loved Mexican food. My in laws used to say every time he was gone they would know that he had gone to the Mexican family down the road and he was eating their tortillas. He loved Mexican food so there must have been Mexicans.

[5:14] HA: Can I tell you one thing that I thought was funny, when they first came; they didn't know any English of course. They had to go shopping and they didn't know how to say eggs, they would make the round thing, they would bring out a ball or something. A person had to pretend like a chicken with the egg coming out. That's the way they bought eggs. I remember my mother in law saying she didn't know how to say size 4 and half, she had small feet, she would go to Penny's and say I want half past four. I remember her saying that Penny's was very discriminatory. She and her friend would go to shop and they would always be the last ones to be waited on. I those days they were like that to the Japanese. But then my in laws were so highly praising their neighbors who were Caucasian. This Caucasian family was good to them. Every thanksgiving, the lady would roast turkey with all the trimmings and bring the whole thing over for the Hasama family to eat because she didn't know how to cook turkey in the beginning. They were such a lovely Caucasian family. When I first met them, she said oh you are a brave little girl! They sent me Christmas card for 50 years after that. Our children too. They were very nice. There were bad Caucasians but there were good ones too.

[7:37] HL: I would like to know about how your parents ended up in the San Fernando Valley. But it's your husband's parents.

[7:47] HA: My father in law was single at first so he worked for a man that owned the Valley and Burbank. They planted all the oranges, lemon and avocado trees in the Valley, he told me. He and this brother in law which is my mother in law's brother. The two of them planted all the trees. He was very good with the fruit trees. Even after he started farming on his own, he planted a dozen fruit trees around our yard. He would like to pick the oranges, peaches, prunes and apricots. He would sell it by the roadside. He knew enough English by then to say, "May I help you?" He liked to wait on customers. It was nice. He would always come inside the house and start cooking the

smelly stuff that was to taste the trees. He would take a branch from one tree and stick it on to another tree. That's how he grafted them. He was very good at it. One tree had dark pink flowers and two different kinds of fruit. He did things like that, he was very good, he was good at farming too. In the olden days, they grew watermelon and honeydew and all the fruit. By the time I was married into the family, they were just growing tomatoes and cabbages.

[9:58] HL: When did your father in law arrive in the Valley?

[10:05] HA: My husband was born in 1918 so it must have been 1917 or so. Then he was single before that, so maybe he came in the early 1910s. He was farming in 1917 when my husband was conceived.

[10:32] HL: Do you remember where your family lived exactly in the San Fernando Valley?

[10:43] HA: The town of Sylmar. They lived at Sear near Foothill where they were farming.

[11:00] HL: Is it still a residential area?

[11:07] HA: It is the town of Sylmar now.

[11:10] HL: They just changed it to Sylmar lately. Do you know how many acres the farm was?

[11:23] HA: Well, at least 20 because I remember my husband saying we only had those 20 acres. It was 20. Every morning he would make the rounds of the 20 acres to see if any gophers were caught in traps. That was his job upon waking up.

[11:48] HL: Can you tell me your father in law's daily routine?

[11:53] HA: He caught his gopher and then he had to do all the farm work. Then at night time he went to the market. I want to tell you about his most impressionable story. It was during the Depression when nothing was sold. The family had five children besides the one they had left in Japan, the whole family had taken all day to pull carrots and wash them, tie them and put them in crates. Then he loaded the full truck. He went to the market but nobody would buy them. Finally he found a Chinese man to pay 20 cents for the whole carton of carrots. But then the Chinese man decided that it was too expensive even at 20 cents. He said no, I cannot buy, I don't have money. My father in

law tried some more but had no takers. Finally he had to drive the truck back to Burbank, it was halfway home. He stopped and dumped the whole thing out. He told this story, I don't know how many times. I was thinking it must have been the lowest point in his life when he had seven mouths to feed and they worked the whole day and he couldn't sell anything. I told my husband that if things get bad just remember that your father's story. He could not even sell a whole carton of carrots for 20 cents.

[14:32] HL: What about your mother-in-law? She also farmed?

[14:46] HA: It's a personal story. She always worked from dawn to dusk. Before I came, they had one daughter and five boys. The daughter did all the cooking and the house cleaning. After she was married off, then I came and did all that. She loved to go outside and work. She would say I would rather work on the farm instead of watching your kids. That's what a good worker she was. First thing I woke up in the morning and she's gone already. She is hoeing or something. She didn't come home until it got dark. One time I commented to her, that you are such a hard worker. Her answer was, not half as hard as it was in Japan. She had married my father in law and they were going to come to America together but they didn't have enough money for fare for both of them. She had to stay behind, without her husband she had to look after her mother in law who was very strict. Japanese mother in laws are very strict but she was especially strict. You could tell that her youngest daughter had married off and didn't like her husband. She wanted to come home, but the mother in law said once you are married, you are married. You cannot come home for any reason. The poor girl committed suicide. That's the kind of mother in law she was. My mother in law broke one bowl one time. She was so scared to tell her mother in law that she had broken one of the dishes. She was wondering what to do when another sister in law took her place and said mother I broke this bowl. I dropped it. My mother in law used to tell that story so many times but each time her eyes would fill with tears that she had such a good sister in law. She must have suffered. That's why she was always good to me. Her husband finally came back after three years to take her to America too. She got pregnant and her mother in law said, you cannot go when you are pregnant. So she had to obey her mother in law. Then they boy was born. She thought she could bring the baby to America with her but the mother in law said that if you take this child with you, my son will never come back to Japan so you have to leave him here. Mother in law being very submissive obeyed her. She said forever after she could hear the little boy who was starting to talk say, mommy hurry back. But then she could not hurry back because they never had enough money. They never had enough money to call the boy to America. When they did have the money, my father in law hoped to go back to Japan, a wealthy man, so he said we go to keep that boy there so he can take care of the land. So that boy grew up by himself while his grandmother was living, it was alright but after she died my father in law's brother

wanted the land and the inheritance. He treated that boy so meanly and made that boy sleep by himself in the barn. He died in the Japanese army. Mother's other two sons were in the US Army. She was glad that they were in Europe so the brothers would not have to fight each other. The poor boy in Japan died in war. When he died, my mother in law said she dreamt that he was by her bed. She woke up with a start and saw her son standing there. She took down the date because it was so vivid, that was the day he had died in Japan, But he came to her in a vision. That's my mother in law's story.

[20:47] HL: Also, did you know that if the pay your parents in law received was sufficient enough to make a living at that time?

[20:59] HA: Did they make enough money? No, I think they were poor.

[21:07] HL: Who was responsible for the household duties and taking care ---- actually I will ask from your husband's point of view. Taking care of his brothers and sisters.

[21:25] HA: After the big brother in Japan, who they never met, my husband was the oldest after him, so he took care of them.

[21:45] HL: Did his parents hire anyone to work on the farm?

[21:49] HA: Yes. One family, a couple to work for them.

[21:57] HL: They were not related, just neighbors right?

[21:59] HA: Yes.

[22:00] HL: Was there anyone else who lived on the farm?

[22:06] HA: I never heard them mention anybody else besides that young couple.

[22:12] HL: Who made the key decisions in the family, regarding moving, property and how money was spent?

[22:18] HA: I am sure the father in law. The male is always dominant in Japanese families.

[22:32] HL: Did you or your husband or his parents participate in any kind of strikes?

[22:38] HA: Not that I know of.

[22:43] HL: What kind of hardship did your parents in law face from the society?

[22:47] HA: Like that Penny's incident. They were the last to be waited even though they were there first.

[23:08] HL: Besides those two stories, is there anything your parents in law would like to share?

[23:15] HA: I guess that's it.

[23:20] HL: Let's start talking about growing up on the farm. I would like to know from your husband's point of view. Do you know at what age he began to work on the farm?

[23:39] HA: They all worked when they were children. My brother in law said that he didn't grow tall because his parents made him carry that heavy sack full of melons on his back.

[23:56] HL: He cannot even walk straight because of that.

[24:02] HA: After school, they must have all gone out to the fields.

[24:08] HL: Do you know what his daily routine was? Did your husband have any specific chores or responsibilities?

[24:29] HA: Since he was the oldest he had to take care of his siblings. As soon as he could drive he went to the market for his father.

[24:45] HL: Do you know that if your husband would feel that his brothers and sisters were treated equally by his parents?

[24:52] HA: I never heard him complain, so I am sure that they were – of course there was only one girl in the family, so the mother favored the girl.

[25:09] HL: Your husband is the eldest son, so his parents gave him responsibilities. Besides the daughter, I think the parents must have also favored him as the favorite son?

[25:21] HA: YES.

[25:23] HL: He did not have to go into the army?



[25:26] HA: He didn't have to go into the army because his parents are getting old by then. He had two brothers in the US Army so he stayed home to take care of them.

[25:42] HL: Did his parents want him to grow up and take over the farm?

[25:46] HA: I am sure it was taken for granted that. My husband had good grades in school and his friend went to UCLA and he really wanted to go to school. Of course they had no money and he had to continue on the farm. They didn't believe much in education which I think was wrong. In those days they would say why graduate from college when all the job you can get is a fruit stand? Even if you had a degree.

[26:28] HL: Because of the racism?

[26:38] HA: I remember him telling me that the valedictorian of his high school graduating class was a Japanese girl. Oh she was so smart he said. But going to higher education was out of question because girls were second class citizens. Why educate a girl when she is going to get married off? That was their attitude in those days.

[27:10] HL: Was the family life different for Japanese Americans than it was for the others living in that area?

[27:24] HA: Well.. I think they managed alright. That's the way I feel. Of course I am an outsider.

[27:35] HL: So when your husband was growing up, did his parents have time to spend with him?

[27:42] HA: I doubt it. They were such hard workers. Even after I came, my mother in law was never at home. She was always working on the farm. My father in law came home and he would fix the broken chairs and things like that. He loved animals. He went about feeding all his animals. He would tell the possum, here little boy, you came home. He had rabbits and chicken of course.

[28:29] HL: Do you know which parent tended to be stricter?

[28:39] HA: I guess the father in law.

[28:43] HL: Do you know like in what ways?

[28:51] HA: Since I wasn't there when they were growing up I really cannot say.

[29:04] HL: Did your husband ever tell you that when he was growing up, he was scared of his father?

[29:10] HA: No, he never said that. I remember his cousin saying that. He was a very bad little boy. He was very intelligent. He would take the hammer and my father in law would scold his niece and say that's dangerous. Ever after the hammer was called dangerous. I want that dangerous! The father in law didn't get after the boys when they were bad.

[29:56] HL: Were there any other people living in the house besides your parents in law and your husband's siblings?

[30:04] HA: Not that I know of, except for that young couple.

[30:11] HL: Did your parents in law try to instill any traditional Japanese customs inside the home?

[30:19] HA: YES, I think all Japanese families tried to. The emperor's birthday, they always hung his picture up there, they bowed to it. They had respect for elders then. They bowed low to the teachers which now you don't hear. All of them are good points that they brought.

[31:11] HL: How did your husband react to that? Did he like to practice that because your husband grew up in America, does he like the way his parents instilled traditional Japanese ways?

[31:34] HA: He was a very good son. He never resented his father instilling all these Japanese culture on him. I think he carried his own too. He never rebelled.

[31:52] HL: Since he was the eldest son, he needed to be the model to his siblings.

[31:55] HA: Right.

[32:00] HL: Does your husband remember getting sick or any of the family members getting sick when they were growing up?

[32:09] HA: Yes, the fourth brother was very sickly. They thought they were going to lose him.

[32:21] HL: Who would take care of his brother during that time?

[32:28] HA: My mother in law.

[32:32] HL: What was the medical care like?

[32:37] HA: Since my brother in law got well I guess it was alright. It took him quite a while, like a year. I cannot say if the care was good or bad.

[33:01] HL: Does your husband recall his mother giving birth? Is there an experience in particular that stands out?

[33:15] HA: No, he never mentioned.

[33:19] HL: When your parents in law didn't work what kind of activities did they do as a family? Did they have family activities together?

[33:29] HA: The only thing I remember is that they had cottage meetings, that's church related in different formal houses. I guess that was their whole social life. Church life was mother's social life after I got married into the family. I am sure it was that way before I came too. They were one of the first Christians in the Valley. The first ones to get baptized. Mother had to postpone it one year, I was 18-19 when the flu epidemic was going around and they said, oh you are pregnant, we don't want you to die from that sickness. They held her back so she was baptized later. It was in the San Gabriel River I heard her say. It was the only flowing river at that time.

[34:41] HL: Where is the San Gabriel River located?

[34:43] HA: In East Los Angeles.

[35:14] HL: Is there any kinds of occasions and holidays that your family in law celebrated?

[35:18] HA: New Year's was big. They cleaned the house three days before and cooked for three days more. Friends went to each of his home. It was one big holiday of the year.

[35:45] HL: Besides New year's, are there any occasions that the family celebrated together?

[35:51] HA: Americans celebrate birthdays a lot. I don't remember celebrating anyone's birthday in those days. That was after I married in. Later when my children were born we always celebrated birthdays.

[36:12] HL: Did they have any family vacations?

[36:20] HA: During the depression there was no money to go anywhere. I remember my husband saying that they went to where is that one beach that they felt comfortable in, where all the black people go. I remember him saying he always loved going to the beach. Then he had a good time in the boy scouts. The Caucasians all loved the Japanese to come in, I thought that was nice.

[37:04] HL: Let's talk about social relationships. Can you tell me a little about your husband's school experiences?

[37:14] HA: He worked hard to get good grades and although he wanted to, he couldn't go to college.

[37:23] HL: Does he remember the ethnic makeup of his school?

[37:39] HA: He never mentioned it, so I cannot say.

[37:51] HL: Do you know if your husband did any activities for fun in school?

[37:59] HA: I think he had to hurry home from school to work. They did have a baseball team; they went to Japanese school on Saturdays.

[38:30] HL: Your husband used to go Japanese school only on the weekends or did he go on weekdays too?

[38:37] HA: Only on Saturdays.

[38:40] HL: Did he enjoy it?

[38:43] HA: To eat the lunch I think and to play with his friends, yes.

[38:53] HL: Let's talk about dating. Does anyone in your family or your husband's family date or marry outside of your ethnicity?

[39:06] HA: Not in Hazama's family in those days.

[39:08] HL: Can you tell me how you met your husband?

[39:14] HA: His cousin, the one who was bad, he went to Japan and I was in Japan. We worked together there. He contracted TB and was brought back to America to get well. He landed in Olivio hospital. At that time, I was working in Los Angeles. It took me two hours from LA to go to the hospital because there were no freeways in those days. I had a hard time finding him. He was at the end of fifth bed with TB. There was a long hut for all TB patients. My husband to be was there visiting also. We got introduced. Later on he got a little better; he couldn't go out on date so he asked if I would like to go out with his cousin. I am forever grateful to that hospital and I still volunteer there.

[40:38] HL: Was your husband your first date?

[40:40] HA: NO.

[40:43] HL: Can you tell us about your first date?

[40:48] HA: I really don't remember much about him. He didn't make too much of an impression on me. My husband did because he was tall. At that time all the Japanese men were so short, I was thinking isn't there anybody who is 5'6 at least. They were all short. When my cousin said do you want to go out with my cousin, I forgot what he looked like but I remembered he was tall. I thought gee, I could wear my high heels!

[41:27] HL: Can you also describe your wedding?

[41:31] HA: We had it in a small church behind the Methodist Church on Normandy. They had an adjacent chapel. That's where we were married. I didn't want a big wedding. About 50 were there.

[41:58] HL: What was the first job that you acquired or your husband acquired?

[42:06] HA: He was a hauler. He went to different farms to pick up all the produce so that all the farmers wouldn't have to go to the market individually.

[42:19] HL: What about you? Did you work any types of jobs before the War?

[42:25] HA: I was in Japan during the war. As soon I graduated high school, I went to Japan because my mother had died.

[42:41] HL: Growing up, did you or your husband experience any racial backlash or stereotypes?

[42:51] HA: When we were first married, we wanted to live in Glendale because he worked in Sylmar and I worked in LA. We thought Glendale would be the right spot in the middle. First the lady said, I'll rent to you. But when we started moving in she said that the neighbors didn't want us. We couldn't live in Glendale.

[43:35] HL: Since most of the questions we asked were about your husband, can you describe a little bit about yourself. You were born in Arizona?

[43:39] HA: No, I was born in San Jose, California and then my father went to Arizona when I was one year old because they had the big Santa Fe railroad strike. The company brought in all the Japanese to break the strike. The Japanese being hard workers did break it, so the workers lost. Ever after they were prejudiced against the Japanese. They built a beautiful swimming pool and children were so happy but they wouldn't let us in. They remembered that strike.

[44:37] HL: What did your parents do in Arizona?

[44:41] HA: Worked for the Santa Fe railroad.

[44:46] HL: Your mother too?

[44:50] HA: No, my mother stayed at home.

[44:56] HL: IN Arizona, were there a lot of Japanese there?

[44:59] HA: It was a small town called Winslow. It used to be a stopping point for locomotives. The next big stop was Albuquerque, New Mexico. They greased and cleaned the engines. That's the work my father did. During the depression when the Japanese farmers were having such a hard time he had a job, so I never experienced being poor as some of the Japanese farmers did.

[45:38] HL: Your family stayed in Arizona until before the war when you moved back to Japan, right?

[45:51] HA: Then my father came back by himself. I was left there stranded in Japan during the war. Gee I worried about my brothers and sisters.

[46:03] HL: They were in Arizona at that time?

[46:07] HA: We all were in Japan, except for my father. We had no way of communicating. I thought my father had died. We were separated for nine years. Then I came back to America.

[46:31] HL: IS there anything more that you would like to add? Anything you want to mention about growing up in Arizona?

[46:46] HA: I had a very happy childhood. I am very blessed.

[46:50] HL: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

[46:53] HA: Two brothers and one sister, they are all living.

[46:56] HL: Are you the oldest?

[46:59] HA: YES.

[47:01] HL: Let's start about internment. I would like to discuss the time immediately before Executive Order 9066. Actually you were in Japan. Did your husband tell you anything about the internment camps?

[47:16] HA: He was at Manzanar. It seemed to me that he found life alright in camp. He left as soon as he could to Chicago. He never spoke much about camp life. I have seen pictures of their mess hall and the plates filled. Gee it made me feel envy, because in Japan we were all starving. That's the difference I remember between camp and life in Japan. They had enough to eat and we were hungry all the time.

[48:03] HL: Does he remember Pearl Harbor day?

[48:07] HA: He doesn't talk about it. I remember he got mad at me for making Jell-O and he never wanted to eat mutton because that's all they had in camp. Jell-O was poured over the hot rice all mixed up so he never liked Jell-O. He told me never to make it.

[48:36] HL: Before your husband was sent to the internment camp, what did his family do with the property and all belongings?

[48:46] HA: They were renting the land. I don't know about the belongings. Maybe the nice Caucasian family took care of it.

[49:02] HL: The couple that worked for them right?

[49:05] HA: The couple that worked for them was Japanese. I really don't know what happened to all their farm equipment.

[49:25] HL: Do you know what his family did with the family photos? Were they allowed to keep them?

[49:33] HA: I remember they had a few. I remember my mother saying that they had to burn all their Japanese books. They buried the Japanese sword that they had. After the war, they couldn't find it.

[50:07] HL: Does he remember any Japanese Americans that didn't have to go to camp?

[50:15] HA: NO.

[50:18] HL: Let's talk about post internment. Was any of your husband's relatives released before the internment.

[50:29] HA: He went to Chicago, and then he called his brother and parents too. They all went to Chicago.

[50:46] HL: They never settled in the San Fernando Valley after that?

[50:50] HA: Yes, they couldn't find any housing after they go back so a very good friend of theirs let them stay until they found a place.

[51:09] HL: Did they return back to their old farm?

[51:14] HA: I think the old farm had been sold so they couldn't return there. But they started farming a different place that was still in San Fernando.

[51:32] HL: What did your parents in law do for work after internment? Besides farming?

[51:38] HA: Farming and my father in law was selling at his little fruit stand.

[51:46] HL: What were some of the obstacles?

[51:51] HA: I don't recall any. I never heard them complain.



[52:05] HL: Is there any one memory about your husband growing up in the San Fernando Valley that was most important to him?

[52:16] HA: I don't recall his mentioning one particular thing.

[52:23] HL: Are there any things that you would like to talk about that we haven't covered.

[52:28] HA: No, I think we have covered everything.

[52:32] HL: Actually I wanted to ask a few more questions about growing up in Arizona. Did you attend Japanese school there?

[52:38] HA: Yes, it was Saturday only.

[52:43] HL: Did you like it?

[52:44] HA: I don't remember hating it. I like studying so I think I took it in stride. I didn't hate Japanese school.

[53:02] HL: You said that your husband was in the boy scouts. Were there a lot of Japanese Americans in boy scouts?

[53:06] HA: No, just a few.

[53:11] HL: Did he have a lot of non-Japanese American friends?

[53:16] HA: I don't remember his talking about them much.

[53:45] HL: Since, their family was Christian, do you remember if there were a lot of Japanese that were Christians at that time?

[53:54] HA: Just the close friends who were all Christians. It was their social life so I think all their friends are Christians.

[54:05] HL: The Church that they went to, was it a Japanese American Christian church?

[54:14] HA: Yes. The ministry from Los Angeles.

[54:23] HL: Thank you so much for your time for the interview.

**END OF INTERVIEW.**