

CHIYENO SHIMAJI

MRS. YAKUMO: Today is April 3, 1980. I, Kazuko Yakumo, am privileged to interview Chiyeno Shimaji at 33800 Road 172, Visalia, California, 93277.

Where and when were you born?

MRS. SHIMAJI: I was born on the island of Hawaii in Hilo, Hawaii. At a place called Amauru.

MRS. YAKUMO: Does this place called Amauru still exist?

MRS. SHIMAJI: Yes, it does. When I visited Hawaii recently, it was still there.

MRS. YAKUMO: You were born in Hawaii which makes you an American citizen, namely that you are a Nisei, second generation Japanese. Did you go to Japan from there?

MRS. SHIMAJI: No, I did not go directly to Japan. When I was two years of age, I was taken by my father to Sacramento. I don't remember the details, of course, because I was very young. But when I was 3 years old, then I was taken back to Japan.

MRS. YAKUMO: Do you remember that period clearly?

MRS. SHIMAJI: No, I don't remember. It's not clear to me at all. However, the major events such as returning to Japan, I do remember.

MRS. YAKUMO: Where did you return to in Japan?

MRS. SHIMAJI: It was to a suburb of Hiroshima. Presently, because of the redistricting and rezoning, it is within the city of Hiroshima. But, at that time, it was not within the city boundaries. It was in the suburban area. However, I do not remember very much about the location.

MRS. YAKUMO: What happened then?

MRS. SHIMAJI: As I indicated, I was brought by my parent from Hawaii to Sacramento when I was two years of age. And then, for reasons that are not clear to me, my parents were divorced. And for this reason my mother returned me to my father's parents in Japan. My father's brothers were all in the United States around in the Sacramento area. My grandfather died when I was quite young and, therefore, I do not remember very much about him. I do remember, however, the funeral that was held for him. But, as a result of his death, I was raised primarily by my grandmother until I was 14 years and 9 months of age.

MRS. YAKUMO: What were the circumstances under which you returned to the United States?

MRS. SHIMAJI: When I was 14 years and 9 months of age, my father remarried, and for that reason he called me back to the United States. In June of 1917 I left Yokohama on the ship Seiyo Maru for the United States. However, at that time, there were so many people who wanted to go to the United States that the people who were allowed on board were selected by lottery. And, therefore, I spent about a month in Yokohama during which time I lived a very luxurious life of living in Japanese

inns and taking trips to the city of Tokyo. But, finally, I was allowed on board, and the ship stopped off in Hilo, Hawaii--but finally made its way to San Francisco.

MRS. YAKUMO: And then what happened after you arrived in San Francisco?

MRS. SHIMAJI: I went to Parlier where my uncle was. My mother and father were in what was then called season camp, probably a migratory camp, working. And, therefore, I stayed with my uncle in Parlier. So I stayed at my uncle's place while my father and stepmother were out working in these migratory camps. And then, that same year, 1917, about November or December, my father and my uncle jointly bought a ranch.

MRS. YAKUMO: What did you raise on the ranch?

MRS. SHIMAJI: We raised about the same things that we are raising now, namely peaches and grapes.

MRS. YAKUMO: How large was the ranch?

MRS. SHIMAJI: It was 40 acres. I just remembered now, but I took a bus from San Francisco to Parlier where I was met by my uncle who had an automobile. And, as I said, I stayed at his place until the end of 1917, about November or December, at which time my father and my uncle jointly purchased a ranch. And then, early the next year, my uncle sold his share of the ranch to my father and returned to Japan. So you could say that my uncle just bought the ranch and cultivated it in preparation for crops and then sold it to my father so that he could reap the rewards while he, himself, returned to Japan.

MRS. YAKUMO: Were there many Japanese who owned ranches in those days? And also were there very many Japanese in your area?

MRS. SHIMAJI: There weren't too many Japanese who owned ranches, however there were quite a few. Well, not all that many, but more than a few Japanese who were living in the Parlier area. There are Japanese who are still living in that area who were living there when I was there.

MRS. YAKUMO: And then what happened, did you go to school?

MRS. SHIMAJI: No, I did not go to school. I stayed at home and helped with the housework. I graduated from grammar school in Japan and two years, I believe it would be the equivalent of junior high school which ended in June and it was immediately after that that I was called back to the United States. But that was the extent of my schooling. Since I was proficient enough in the Japanese language from having been raised in Japan and having gone to Japanese schools, there wasn't any reason for me to attend a Japanese school here in the United States. And, therefore, I just stayed at home and helped my stepmother with keeping up the home. It was suggested several times that I study something such as sewing or some other sort of thing that would help me in work or possibly marriage, but, actually, I was so busy helping around the house, that I finally never got around to attending any school at all. Now that I think about it, however, I do recall that there were friends of mine about my same age in Parlier who were allowed to go to a school of one kind or another during that time.

MRS. YAKUMO: Are you saying that there were quite a few young people

such as yourself, who had been raised in Japan who were in the same area as you?

MRS. SHIMAJI: Yes. There were quite a few children about my age who had been called over to the United States by their parents.

MRS. YAKUMO: What did people, such as yourself and friends that you had about your age, do for entertainment? For example, you didn't have any movies at that time, did you?

MRS. SHIMAJI: Well, there were quite a few motion pictures from Japan that we were able to see. There was a man named Mr. Setoguchi who used to show Japanese motion pictures every week at the Visalia Buddhist Temple.

There were quite a few Japanese in Visalia at that time. There was quite a large Japanese community there.

MRS. YAKUMO: Did you have any problems because you did not have any Japanese style goods or food during that time?

MRS. SHIMAJI: Not at all. Even at that time there almost everything that we wanted was imported from Japan. There was even a Japanese restaurant in Visalia and particularly when it came to the staples of Japanese cooking, namely miso and soy sauce (shoyu) there was more than enough that was imported from Japan, so we never had to worry about the lack of those staples.

As an example, Reverend Itohara, who used to be the minister at the Visalia Buddhist Temple, when he first came to the United States he would have problems getting Japanese staples, such as Miso and shoyu and, therefore he--before he came here he sent a large supply of both miso and shoyu (soy sauce) to where he would stay. But once he got there, he found he didn't have to have sent them at all. Because he could get all he wanted just from merchants in the city of Visalia.

MRS. YAKUMO: Did you young people get together and have activities or have any special projects that you engaged in?

MRS. SHIMAJI: No. We didn't gather too much in particular. Since I was always busy at home helping my stepmother, I really didn't have much of a chance to get out and go out with the young people as a group. However, in spite of that, I don't recall that there really were too many group activities for people my age.

MRS. YAKUMO: And then what happened? You continued living in Parlier, but when did you marry?

MRS. SHIMAJI: I married my husband, who died in 1971.

MRS. YAKUMO: How did you get married, or rather, how did your husband propose? Was it an arranged marriage?

MRS. SHIMAJI: It was an arranged marriage. I understand that my husband came to our ranch to see what I looked like before he actually proposed marriage. But, at that time, I was working and I was wearing a broad-rimmed hat and, therefore, I guess he couldn't see my face. But I understand, although I don't remember very clearly, but I am told that

my husband saw me under a better light without a hat at the movie when we went to a movie in the city of Parlier.

MRS. YAKUMO: What is your husband's full name?

MRS. SHIMAJI: My husband's name is Kei Shimaji. The first name of Kei is not an American name it's a Japanese name for which there is a Chinese character, which is used to write the name. It is a Japanese name, not an American name.

MRS. YAKUMO: And after you married, where did you live?

MRS. SHIMAJI: After we married, we went to my husband's ranch. He lived in Reedley, and he had a large farm there. My husband had contracted to work a ranch where Reedley College is presently located. And it was a rather large operation that he was responsible for. My husband was quite successful. I don't remember his name right now, but it was a man who graduated from a university in Japan who secured this particular position for my husband at which he was quite successful. This person, who placed my husband in this particular ranch, returned to Japan not long after that. He was also very successful. Now that I recall, it was in February of 1921 that I married.

MRS. YAKUMO: Were there very many marriages during that time?

MRS. SHIMAJI: No, there were not very many at all. As a matter of fact, there were so few that the wedding ceremony was held in Fresno. The Fresno Buddhist Temple, the building, had just been built for about a year or so, I don't remember exactly, but it was approximately a year. And our wedding was the very first wedding to be held there.

MRS. YAKUMO: And then what did you do?

MRS. SHIMAJI: After several years, we moved from where we were to another ranch. As a matter of fact, my husband, in addition to operating the ranch for this person, had also owned a ranch of his own, and it was there that we moved. It was a rather small ranch of only 40 acres, but that was where we lived. And after living there for a rather short time, we then moved to Dinuba. After a short period there we bought some land in Dinuba, and we lived there for about two years and after that period we moved to a place in northern Dinuba where we were for another four years or so after which we moved to Visalia. So, therefore, we lived in Dinuba for about four years before we moved to Visalia.

When we came to Visalia we purchased the ranch that used to be owned by Mr. Tojiro Hatakeda who presently lives in Sanger. It was his ranch that we purchased when we moved here to Visalia. Mr. Hatakeda wanted to return to Japan and that was why he sold us his ranch. He sent his children on before him and then sold the ranch just before he left himself. At that time the oranges, which we still cultivate, were still rather small. But the original oranges and grapes that we are growing here now are the ones that were here when we bought the ranch. As a side note, unfortunately after Mr. Hatakeda sold us the ranch and was actually on the ship to Japan, the war started and because of the conditions of war, the ship turned around and returned to the United States before Mr. Hatakeda could get to Japan. So he sold us the ranch without ever being able to return to Japan.

MRS. YAKUMO: Then you went to relocation camp from here in Visalia, did you not?

MRS. SHIMAJI: Yes. In August of the next year, 1942, we were sent to Poston.

MRS. YAKUMO: What happened to this ranch during the war when you were in the relocation camp?

MRS. SHIMAJI: The farm really belonged to us, but because of the Alien Land Laws, the deed of the ranch was in the name of my cousin. However, my husband was also cultivating some land under contract to a Caucasian farmer nearby in addition to cultivating our own land. And it was this Caucasian farmer who said he would see to it that a suitable person would take care of our ranch while we were in relocation camp.

MRS. YAKUMO: So then the Caucasian farmer who saw to it that your farm was cared for was very kind and helpful, was he not?

MRS. SHIMAJI: Yes, he was quite kind to us. And he even made a trip to see us in camp. However, the person he leased our farm to while we were away was not a particularly careful person and when we returned we found that there were more than a few things that were not where they were or they were not around anymore.

MRS. YAKUMO: So when did you return to your ranch?

MRS. SHIMAJI: It was in May after the war ended. However, we did not come directly back to our ranch. The person who was caring for our ranch was still living on the ranch, so we stayed at the Visalia Buddhist Temple, which was being used as a hostel under the direction of Reverend Kawasaki. And so he stayed there for about a month until the person who was living at our ranch found a place where he could move. And then we moved back ourselves.

MRS. YAKUMO: We heard that there were quite a few Japanese in Visalia before the war, but that relatively few Japanese returned after the war, and the few that did were those who owned land in this area, is that correct?

MRS. SHIMAJI: Yes, that's true. We felt that if anything that we had-- whether what we had was in money or land, if it was going to be taken away from us, that it would be taken away from us; so that there was no point in trying to convert land to money and putting it somewhere if it could also be taken away. So, we decided that if it was going to be taken away, we may as well have land taken away from us. Also, we didn't have any particular desire to return to Japan, because our children were already grown and they were used to the United States, and they had no desire to return to Japan. So we returned to our ranch.

MRS. YAKUMO: When did you return to Japan for the first time after coming here?

MRS. SHIMAJI: The first time was in 1961. Until that time, we had to spend a great deal of time raising our children, and we could not take any time off. Therefore, it was not until then that we felt we could go.

There was a 700th Memorial Service for Shinran Shonin. It was 700th

anniversary since the passing of Shinran Shonin who was the founder of Jodo Shinshu, which is the Buddhist denomination of the temple in Visalia. And for this occasion, there was a large memorial service in Japan. The Buddhist Churches of America organized the tour for those who wished to attend this service to go to Japan. So I joined the tour, attended the service, and this was my first visit to Japan since first arriving.

MRS. YAKUMO: Was it very difficult for you to get your papers ready to go to Japan?

MRS. SHIMAJI: Well, as a matter of fact, yes it was. Since I was born in Hawaii, I am an American citizen; that is, I am a Nisei. But I also was registered as a Japanese citizen in Japan. And, therefore, when I applied for a passport some people thought I was a Japanese and some people thought I was an American, so it went back and forth, and it was quite difficult. As a matter of fact, I actually wanted to return to Japan sooner, and we also had the time to do so, but because of various problems in getting the passport, it was not until 1961 that we were finally able to go.

But, anyway, in order to clarify everything, I went to Fresno and clarified my citizenship. Although I was born in the United States, which legally makes me an American citizen, it was almost as if I had to reapply for citizenship.

MRS. YAKUMO: How many children do you have?

MRS. SHIMAJI: I have five children. Two girls and three boys. My eldest daughter is named Midori, who is born in October of 1921. My eldest son is named Tadashi, who was born in January of 1923. My second daughter Miharu was born in February of 1924. My second son Jin was born in December of 1925, and my last son Roy was born in 1927.

MRS. YAKUMO: Do you recall any acts of prejudice or discrimination against you before the war?

MRS. SHIMAJI: No. I did not experience anything directly, myself. However, near North Dinuba in a place called Woodlake, where my uncle first purchased a ranch, the Caucasian farmers surrounding the ranch were very much against allowing him to purchase it. And they raised quite a stir. However, my uncle asked the intercession of the Consulate in San Francisco, and they took the matter to court. And, as a result, the Caucasian farmers lost and my uncle was able to purchase the ranch.

And, from that point on, there was no outward discrimination against us, which does not mean that there was nothing internally among those who opposed my uncle buying the ranch. I'm not sure just exactly how all of this was accomplished, however. But I do know that as a result of this court action, there was no more outward discrimination.

MRS. YAKUMO: Can you think of any other instances of discrimination?

MRS. SHIMAJI: No, I can't think of anything. Well there is one thing that I can recall, and that is that at one time I had a neighbor who would plant grain in his yard. And at that time we were raising chickens, and once when some of my chickens got into the neighbor's yard and started eating his grain, and as a result the neighbor just came

rushing to our door and raised a great fuss. But, then, of course, now that I think of it was our chickens that did get into his yard, and therefore, I think it was quite reasonable that he became angry. And you cannot say that this is a case of discrimination, it was just a case of being at fault for allowing our chickens to get into our neighbor's yard.

MRS. YAKUMO: What organizations are you a member of?

MRS. SHIMAJI: I'm a member of the Buddhist Temple. A member of the Fujinkai (Buddhist Women's Organization), and the Shiminkai.

MRS. YAKUMO: Is there anything particularly happy or sad or something that happened in your life that you would like to record?

MRS. SHIMAJI: Not particularly.

MRS. YAKUMO: Is there anything pleasant that you can recall in your life that you can recall?

MRS. SHIMAJI: No. I can't say that there is anything particularly outstanding that I can recall. However, there is one thing that I think about which gave me a lot of laughter. And that is that there is a Mr. Fujimoto who lives about three or four miles from us who called us one day. And he said an airplane had fallen into his yard and why don't we come over and look at it. And, so, when we rushed over there, he told us that it was April Fools. And although this happened quite a few years ago, I think it caused us a great deal of laughter at that time.