

SAKA TANAKA

MRS. HASEGAWA: Today is July 27, 1980. I, Yoshino Hasegawa, am privileged to interview Mrs. Saka Tanaka of 76 Academy, Sanger, California, 93657.

Mrs. Tanaka, would you please give us your name and where you were born?

MRS. TANAKA: My husband's name is Yoshio Tanaka, and my name is Saka. I was born in Yamaguchi-Ken, Kumage-Gun, Seto, Tabuse-mura, Japan.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where was your husband born?

MRS. TANAKA: He was born in Yamaguchi-Ken, Kumage-Gun, Hirao-machi, Ohno.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was your place in Japan close to your husband's?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes, about two ri. (Japanese miles.)

MRS. HASEGAWA: And when is your birthday?

MRS. TANAKA: My birthday is August 1, 1896.

MRS. HASEGAWA: And your husband's?

MRS. TANAKA: His birthday is December 16, 1888.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where have you lived for the longest period in the United States?

MRS. TANAKA: Here in Sanger.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What year did you leave Japan?

MRS. TANAKA: I left Japan in August 1916.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Didn't it take about two weeks to come across the Pacific in those days?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes. It was by ship. We came to Seattle on the Hawaii-Marun. People were waiting for us in Seattle.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you come directly to Sanger?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How was your trip by sea when you came to the United States?

MRS. TANAKA: It was a long trip. I made friends with a girl from Tokyo. We were roommates since we shared a room for two.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Your husband did not make the voyage with you?

MRS. TANAKA: No, I was alone. I married into my aunt's family. My husband and I are cousins.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was your husband already in the United States at that time?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes, he was already here. I'm not sure when he came, but he went to Hawaii first at the age of 15. He came with Nakamoto's boy, who is Ben's father. They came by themselves, and they were together throughout their lives until Mr. Nakamoto passed away. I heard my husband had been in Hawaii for two years where he worked together with his friends. He went to Hawaii in 1903 and came to the Mainland on March 26, 1906

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many years had he been here before you came?

MRS. TANAKA: He was in Del Rey for a while. He also went to Sacramento to work for a short period after he landed in the mainland. He came to Del Rey and worked at Yokoyama's for a while. Then he worked for some Caucasians and while he was there, there was a fire and everything burned. After that, he came to Fresno. He stayed on the West Side for about eight years. He stayed at the home of an old Caucasian lady in Bowles. Then he raised alfalfa for the old lady for seven years. He was there until I came.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was he farming?

MRS. TANAKA: He had contracted some land and raised grapes. He tells me in those days it was on a cash-rent basis and land was cheap.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Cash-rent? What does that mean?

MRS. TANAKA: He paid so much cash per acre on a percentage basis on what he made off the crop.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When did you come?

MRS. TANAKA: I came in 1916.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You were not a picture bride, were you?

MRS. TANAKA: Oh, yes, I was.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was involved with a picture bride wedding?

MRS. TANAKA: Since we were related, the families knew each other's background. We were cousins. I was out of school, so that was probably why I was chosen.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did they actually send your photo to your husband-to-be?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes, they did.

MRS. HASEGAWA: And his picture was sent to you?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: And you both approved of the match?

MRS. TANAKA: It was enough that the parents had approved.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How did you feel about this arrangement?

MRS. TANAKA: Nothing in particular. After all, it was my aunt's family.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How did you feel about going away, so far, to a new land?

MRS. TANAKA: I didn't give it much thought.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were you aware that you were going to such a remote country? That you would have a hard time?

MRS. TANAKA: No. I didn't think to that extent as I was only 20 years old.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I think all the Issei men and women were very brave.

MRS. TANAKA: I came with Mrs. Nakamoto. We were classmates, so when we came across, there were many others.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many of you?

MRS. TANAKA: There were three of us. The other lady was Mrs. Murase. She was in Reedley. She passed away. So did Mrs. Nakamoto. When we departed from Japan, our family relatives all came to see us off.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you enjoy the trip?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes. It was enjoyable, and I wasn't worried. I had friends, and we all enjoyed it on board the ship. We were all young.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When you arrived in America, your husband was waiting for you?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes. I landed in Seattle. The other two girls passed physical examinations quickly, but the immigration authorities kept me for a while. Something was wrong with my eyes. At that time, they had physical examinations for tapeworms and for eye diseases.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was this after you arrived in Seattle?

MRS. TANAKA: No, in Japan, before I embarked. They wouldn't let you go if you had something wrong. So I failed the test and had to go home once.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then when you were finally allowed to travel, your friends had already gone?

MRS. TANAKA: I was alone, but I shared a room with two people from Tokyo, so I wasn't really alone and didn't feel lonely.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Too bad you couldn't enjoy your trip with your friends.

MRS. TANAKA: That's true. But I enjoyed it until they embarked after we left home.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many weeks were you delayed?

MRS. TANAKA: I came three or four months later.

MRS. HASEGAWA: And when you arrived in Seattle?

MRS. TANAKA: I landed right away and went through Immigration. We had to stay in Seattle for a while for the authorities to verify whether we were actually cousins before we could leave to come to this area.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you travel by train from Seattle?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes. We rode all night.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you think of America then?

MRS. TANAKA: I thought it was wonderful. It was interesting. My husband's friends Mr. Yoshiki and Mr. Jinde, from the same place in Japan, were waiting for us. They had a restaurant.

MRS. HASEGAWA: In Sanger?

MRS. TANAKA: No, in Fresno. They owned the restaurant together.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was its name?

MRS. TANAKA: Royal Restaurant. My husband had a farm contract, so we left for the farm immediately. In those days, the houses were very poor and shabby.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where was the farm that Mr. Tanaka contracted?

MRS. TANAKA: It was a little farther west than Kearney Park.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was he growing on the farm?

MRS. TANAKA: Grapes. I worked in the fields, too. I just helped a little. My family in Japan were farmers, but we didn't work so hard there.

MRS. HASEGAWA: It was hard working here, wasn't it?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes, it was. Especially in the summer. But during grape harvest, many people came to help. There were many labor camps around here, and they provided workers. My husband also operated a labor camp, and there was a male cook, so I did not have to cook for the labor camp. The workers were Japanese. They came to pick grapes, even from as far as Sacramento.

MRS. HASEGAWA: We no longer have Japanese migrant workers?

MRS. TANAKA: That's right.

MRS. HASEGAWA: They were all young people, so I suppose they must have had a good time living and working together.

MRS. TANAKA: I guess so. I've never been to their camps.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were you at home keeping house?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes. I stayed at home with little to do. I did a little work on our own farm whenever I was needed.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I have heard that Issei women had a very hard time when they first arrived.

MRS. TANAKA: I did. It is hard work to cut dry peaches in the hot summer heat.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you grow peaches, too?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes. We picked them, cut them, and dried them. It was hard work to pick and cut the peaches for drying in the summer heat.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you sulfur the peaches before drying?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes. We placed the cut peaches on wooden trays and stacked them in the sulfur house. Then in the morning, we had to take them out to dry in the sun. They were very beautiful when they were dried.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many days did it take to cure them?

MRS. TANAKA: About a week.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where did you ship them?

MRS. TANAKA: To a packinghouse like the raisin company. We didn't have very much. We put some aside for our own use.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you have children?

MRS. TANAKA: The oldest son Jim was born here. He now lives in Los Angeles.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you learn to cook when you were in Japan?

MRS. TANAKA: My mother was a little weak, so I used to help her. When we had the contract, I used to cook for two other Japanese who worked for us.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What kind of cooking stove did you have?

MRS. TANAKA: I shared a metal stove with others.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Some of the first immigrants had to use tripods and cooked over an open fire. It must have been very hard for many men at the camps using that kind of set-up. How many years did you stay there?

MRS. TANAKA: Not long. A little more than a year.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then you came to Sanger?

MRS. TANAKA: My husband found a job on Round Mountain. We stayed at the Round Mountain place for about one year.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you do at Round Mountain?

MRS. TANAKA: We grew oranges.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was Jindesan there with you when you first came?

MRS. TANAKA: They weren't there yet. Mrs. Nakashima and we were the first ones to go there.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many acres were there?

MRS. TANAKA: I don't know. It was rather extensive.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I understand that it was the oldest agricultural business enterprise in Sanger.

MRS. TANAKA: Yes, that's true.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How about your other partners?

MRS. TANAKA: They came later.

MRS. HASEGAWA: After working at Round Mountain, you bought a store in Sanger in 1920 in partnership with Jinde, Nakashima, Nakamoto, and Yoshiki families; a total of five families. What was your special responsibility at the store?

MRS. TANAKA: I got up early and cooked for all the people.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How was the town of Sanger, then?

MRS. TANAKA: It was good. There weren't many stores. There were only two grocery stores in town, and Hutchison's was one of them.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What kind of businesses were there around your store?

MRS. TANAKA: There was nothing else except one garage, and the Commercial Bank was located behind our store. There were homes. Now there are restaurants and a movie theatre there. When the garage relocated, the Aritas moved in and started their chop suey restaurant on the same block. They operated this restaurant for many years.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was the railroad depot across the street from your store?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did they ship by rail?

MRS. TANAKA: They shipped fruit just as they do now.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What kind of experiences did you have at your store?

MRS. TANAKA: Well, we did have a hold-up once.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was this at night?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes, at night.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was your work at the store?

MRS. TANAKA: I bought supplies for the store and worked as saleslady. Mr. Jinde was the butcher. The men worked on the Roun Mountain Farm.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many salesclerks were there?

MRS. TANAKA: Three of us women.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Who stocked the store?

MRS. TANAKA: Mr. Yoshiki did when he was in. When he wasn't in, the wives did.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where did you buy your supplies?

MRS. TANAKA: Salesmen came to sell to us. The men went to the Fresno Market early in the morning to buy vegetables and other perishable food.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you get any produce from Round Mountain for the store?

MRS. TANAKA: Nothing. Oranges were shipped to San Francisco.

MRS. HASEGAWA: So the ranch in Round Mountain was separate from your store. What did your husband do at Round Mountain?

MRS. TANAKA: He was kept busy as there was a large packing house there. They went to Los Angeles to buy oranges, and then packed them for the San Francisco market.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Didn't they have enough oranges on their own farm?

MRS. TANAKA: There were some, but they went to Los Angeles with several trucks to get more to take to the San Francisco market.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How did you price the goods at your store?

MRS. TANAKA: I don't know, because the husbands did the pricing, and we women just wrote the amount on the price tags. I have no idea about percentages on pricing. I am sure the profit was very little.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What were your most popular items?

MRS. TANAKA: Everything, especially food.

MRS. 'HASEGAWA: Did you sell clothes?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes. We had a general merchandise store, so we had everything from groceries, clothing, and hardware. When grape harvest time came, a lot of Mexicans came from Los Angeles, and they bought clothes, especially for the women.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Didn't the clothes go out of style?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes, that was the trouble!

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you do with those that went out of style?

MRS. TANAKA: There were lots of those. We left them with the store when we went to relocation centers during World War II.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I understand there was quite a bit of discrimination in Sanger in those days. Is that right?

MRS. TANAKA: I didn't experience it much since we came.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were there any unpleasant incidents when the war broke out?

MRS. TANAKA: Not really. But, at one time, there were no customers. That was about it, no noticeable vandalism.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was your reaction when you learned about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?

MRS. TANAKA: I felt that it was out of my hands, and it couldn't be helped.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did the folks come back from Round Mountain?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes. We all gathered at the house and behind the store, and we went to camp together from there.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you do with the land on Round Mountain?

MRS. TANAKA: We just left it as it was. I don't know what happened. It was probably sold. I haven't heard anything about it.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How did you get to the relocation center?

MRS. TANAKA: By railroad.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then you stayed in the Gila Relocation Center until 1945?

MRS. TANAKA: That's right.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you do while you were in the camp?

MRS. TANAKA: We didn't do much. There were many classes where we could learn to work with our hands.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you learn?

MRS. TANAKA: Nothing important. We bought threads and yarns and spent money trying to learn crochet and knit.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How did you feel about being in camp?

MRS. TANAKA: It was enjoyable. Mrs. Yamane and Mrs. Tsuruta taught us how to knit, and we also learned to make lots of paper flowers. There was nothing else to do.



MRS. HASEGAWA: How was the food that you received in camp?

MRS. TANAKA: Nothing special, but we had enough to satisfy our needs. Of course, there were some foods that we did not like.

MRS. HASEGAWA: That's true for everyone! When you returned from camp, where did you come back to?

MRS. TANAKA: The house behind the store.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What happened to that house?

MRS. TANAKA: There are new houses there now.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you sell it?

MRS. TANAKA: I think so.

MRS. HASEGAWA: And did the people who were your partners each go their different ways after the war?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes. We bought this 27-acre farm with peaches and grapes on the land. The Nakamotos bought land here, too. Jindes went back to Japan. Mr. Nakashima passed away in camp, and she lives in Fowler with her daughter and family. Mr. and Mrs. Yoshiki passed away.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What is Mrs. Nakashima doing now?

MRS. TANAKA: She is living with the Ozakis in Fowler.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was there any discrimination directed toward you when you returned from camp?

MRS. TANAKA: No, not really.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You bought this land, and your husband farmed. What did you do?

MRS. TANAKA: I went to work on a truck farm working with vegetables along with many other women. We picked tomatoes and cucumbers.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where was that packinghouse?

MRS. TANAKA: I worked for the Hirasunas for a long time, and also helped the Kataokas with their vegetables. As far as there was nothing to do on our farm, I went to work with the others. Now our farm is doing very well.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many children do you have?

MRS. TANAKA: Three. Hisao, Jimmy is the eldest child. He lives in Los Angeles.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is he married?

MRS. TANAKA: No. Our second son Harry Setsuo lives here, and his wife is Helen. She is from the Daikoku family from San Mateo.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do they have children?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes, two children.

MRS. HASEGAWA: And your third child?

MRS. TANAKA: His name is Yutaka. His wife is Linda, and they have a son Robbie.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What changes do you see in Sanger?

MRS. TANAKA: It has changed quite a bit. When we came, there were very few homes. There are many houses now, and the city has grown.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What organizations are you affiliated with?

MRS. TANAKA: The Buddhist Church, and formerly the Doshikai.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you still observe any Japanese customs?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes. Mostly in our cooking habits.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did your children go to Japanese school?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes, all of them.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do they speak Japanese?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes, they do. They speak it well.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How about your grandchildren? Do they speak Japanese?

MRS. TANAKA: Yes, they speak it well. My granddaughter writes fairly well, too.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did she study in Japan?

MRS. TANAKA: No, here. She writes to me in Japanese.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Who was your children's Japanese school teacher?

MRS. TANAKA: Mrs. Yashimoto of Fowler. Our grandchildren can converse in Japanese, and we can carry on all our conversations in Japanese. There are many nowadays who don't understand Japanese. I am fortunate to have grandchildren who do.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Yes, I agree with you. Thank you for your interview.