

KAZUYE MATSUNAGA

MRS. HASEGAWA: Today is September 6, 1980. I, Yoshino Hasegawa, am privileged to be in the home of Mrs. Kazuye Matsunaga at 3419 South Bethel Avenue in Sanger, California, 93657.

Before we get into the interview proper, I would like to have you give us your full name, place and date of birth, and your place of longest residence.

MRS. MATSUNAGA: My name is Kazuye Matsunaga. I was born on January 18, 1900 in Okayama-ken, Sojashi. My place of longest residence is right here in Sanger. I have lived here for 61 years. I came here on November 10, 1919. I came to Mrs. Dean's place first and have lived here in this neighborhood since then.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How long were you at Mrs. Dean's place?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: About four or five years.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When and where was your port of entry?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: September 1919 in San Francisco.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you come with Mr. Matsunaga?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: No. I was a picture bride.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did Mr. Matsunaga work for Mrs. Dean before you arrived?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: No, he lived in Ventura prior to Sanger. He was growing lima beans there, and the lease for the farm ended about the time I arrived; so we came to the Katayamas, our relatives' place, in Orosi. They found the job at the Dean's place for us. We rented the place for a year and raised grapes for raisins. In those days the price for raisins was good.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How old were you when you came to America?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: I was 19 years old. I was born in 1900, and came at the age 19.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did Mr. Matsunaga propose to you by mail?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: I knew him since I was a child, and his family and mine arranged the marriage. I was a sickly child, and the doctor recommended a change in climate. He told me that the climate was good in California, so they decided to send me here.

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

MRS. MATSUNAGA: I thought if it was good for my health, I would go. My grandmother and mother encouraged me to go since they were worried about my health. My mother said that we would meet again as long as I had good health. I was an only child, so they hated to let me go.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Your mother must have felt bad sending you to a

foreign land!

MRS. MATSUNAGA: She was about 40 at that time.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did your husband come to meet you in San Francisco?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes. I remembered him since I had seen him when I was about 8 or 9 years old and had a recent photograph.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was it like on board ship coming over?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: I left from Kobe. There were many young brides on board the ship, so I did not feel lonely or sad.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What kind of examination did they give you when you went through immigration at Angel Island in San Francisco upon arriving?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: They made sure there was someone to meet me. Then I was given a health examination before they released me.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you have a wedding ceremony?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: No. Since a marriage ceremony had been held in Japan before I came, it was not necessary.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What kind of work did your husband do at Dean's?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: We leased the land for a year, then worked for a few years for the Deans before moving to this property.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Who are your children?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Rosie, Benny, Lena, and Tom. In 1926, when my mother became ill, I took my three children--Rosie five, Ben three, and Lena six months old--and went back to Japan for a seven-month visit. I left Rosie in Japan since she wanted to stay with my mother. She stayed there from kindergarten until she graduated from high school. She graduated in April and came back here in May. That was 1939. In 1940 my husband died with a heart attack. Benny was 16, Rosie was 18, Lena 14, and Tom 12. After that, the war broke out and we went to camp.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Who took care of your farm during the war?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Hall Packing Company took care of everything.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you return directly to Sanger?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was your house vacated when you returned?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: There were people who worked on the farm living in our home, but they vacated the house about three weeks before we returned.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You were fortunate.

MRS. MATSUNAGA: After I returned, the neighbors followed. The Okajimas and Nakashimas came here until they could find a place to live or until

they could move into their homes. A few months earlier, Mr. Mano and Mr. Katayama from Selma came back to see how things were. When they tried to find a place to sleep, they were refused rooms. They were told they didn't want Japanese in their place. They went to the hotel across the depot and to the restaurant on the corner of Seventh Street and Academy and were refused service. So, they came back to the farm to Krum's place, and the Krums were indignant about the treatment given to Mr. Mano and Mr. Katayama. They housed and fed them. These were young people who were very kind and understanding.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When the two men left camp, there were rumors flying about the rough treatment the Japanese received on the West Coast. They were told that those who returned to their homes in California had to pad their windows with quilts since shots were being fired into the homes and rocks hurled through the windows. Did you have that kind of trouble?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: No, nothing happened to us. We needed food stamps in those days to purchase certain foods. The Hall Packing Company took care of us and helped us to get whatever we needed. We had left our automobile with the packinghouse and they used it while we were gone. But they returned it to us when we came back.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Since your husband was gone, you had to take all the responsibilities. How did you manage?

MRS. HASEGAWA: There was Mr. Mano, who was our partner, who helped us. But he was well along in age, so he could not do too much manual labor.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Your son Benny was 18 when he went into camp, and you stayed in camp three years, so he was quite young.

MRS. MATSUNAGA: He left camp early and went to Montana. Lena left camp, too.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What kind of work did Benny do in Montana?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: He left camp with several other young men to work in the sugar beet fields. Later he went to Minnesota and then to Chicago.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did he work in the sugar beet field in Minnesota, too?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: I don't know what he did there, but in Chicago he worked in a garage. Then he was drafted and went to Japan as a member of the Counter Intelligence Corps.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where did Lena go?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Lena went to Minnesota and later came back to California since I was back. She now lives in Fresno. The youngest is Tom.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where does Tom work?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: He is a pharmacist and lives in Woodland Hills. After camp he went to Sanger High then to Fresno State College and to Berkeley, and graduated from University of Utah School of Pharmacy.

After graduation, he enlisted in the Navy.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you work?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: We hired workers, so I had to cook for them.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were these Japanese "buranketto" boys? (Migrant workers who carried blankets and went from place to place to work.) How many were there?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes. There were four or five men. On weekends, they would walk to Del Rey. They couldn't wait for the horse and buggy transportation; they cut across fields to get to Del Rey, which was a thriving town in those days with many Japanese stores and Chinese gambling houses.

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

MRS. MATSUNAGA: We had a large Japanese kudo on which we cooked with wood fire. We also cooked on kerosene stoves.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What kind of food did you serve?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Japanese style meals. The peddlers would come around with Japanese food. I made konyaku (jelly made with arum), which I had never done before. I tried all kinds of recipes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How long did you cook for the men?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: I started in 1920 at Dean's and cooked here on this farm, too. They did their own laundry.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you have these men all year around?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: They stayed here during the harvest and pruning seasons. After they finished pruning, they went to Lindsay to work in the strawberries. After that, they came to Fresno for a short rest until the grape harvest began. After harvest they went back to Fresno. The same people returned year after year. There seemed to be three or four all the time.

MRS. HASEGAWA: That was quite a job!

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes. Compared to then, my present lifestyle is so much better.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did these men complain?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: No, they were all right. They liked the wine we made. We used to crush grapes in large 300-gallon barrels and make wine.

MRS. HASEGAWA: It was during the prohibition, wasn't it?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes. Looking back, I marvel at the amount of work I did!

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you have the Japanese bathhouse?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes. My daughter Lena used to joke about being able to stop being "sansuke" (a boy who burns wood under the tub to heat water). I would tell her that she would have to keep it up until she got married and left home.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How old was Lena then?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: From the time she was seven or eight it was her chore to heat the bath water.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Had you done any cooking in Japan?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: No, I never did. So I had trouble in the beginning.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was there a kitchen set up when you arrived on the Dean Ranch?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: No. There was a couple named Nakatas who had a labor camp there, so we went there to eat until we were able to get our place ready to live with their help.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you learn how to cook from them?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes. I even learned to make konyaku for the first time. I made it in a large pan.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How do you make it?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: There is some kind of powder made from an arum, special kind of plant. We blanched it somehow and stirred it with water and let it set.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you ever work out in the field?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: No, I only cooked for the men. Later, I did easy farm work such as tying vines.

MRS. HASEGAWA: It must have been a chore to have to cook for so many and care for your children, too.

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes, it was.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you attend church?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes. When I was at Deans, Reverend Fukushima came to call on us and encouraged us to attend church in Fresno. We were unable to go since there were little children, and I had to cook for the men. However, Reverend Fukushima called on us frequently. When Ben was 10, Lena 8, and Tom 6, a minister from Japan, Reverend Kimura, Seimatsu, came and we were all baptized.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Mr. Matsunaga, too?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: No. He encouraged me and the children, but he was not baptized. At that time, Mr. Hiraoka was active in the church, so he started a Sunday School in Del Rey. Reverend Fukushima, Mrs. Kazato, and others came from Fresno and conducted services on Sunday afternoons.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you look forward to going to church on Sundays?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes. The children looked forward to going, and my husband willingly took them in the car, but I could not leave.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you drive?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: No, not on public road. I did drive around the field.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Which school did your children attend?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: They all went to Bethel School. Tom graduated from elementary school in June of the year we were evacuated to the Gila Relocation Center. Lena was a sophomore in high school.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did Lena graduate from high school in camp?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes. Tom returned at the beginning of his junior year and graduated from Sanger High.

MRS. HASEGAWA: As far as you can recall, did your children encounter racial prejudice?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Not so much--except that when Tom graduated from elementary school, his teacher told him he was academically the top graduate, but he was not allowed to make the valedictory speech. This was just before we evacuated, and we did not go to the graduation.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Pearl Harbor was attacked on Sunday. How did you find out how the war with Japan began?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: We heard it on the radio. That day we had everyone here and some laborers from Del Rey pruning peach trees. They had been brought here by their crew boss early that morning. Everyone was shocked at the news.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How did you feel about it, Mrs. Matsunaga?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: I had a feeling before the attack on Pearl Harbor that war was imminent. I wished that Japan would not fight with America, because America is such a large country with unlimited resources. I felt that Japan would not have a chance. At the beginning of the war Japan made great gains, but I knew Japan could not win.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What gave you this premonition of the war between the two countries?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: According to the news about President Roosevelt and the ambassador from Japan, Mr. Matsudaira, it seemed that they could not come to an agreement on issues concerning the two countries.

MRS. HASEGAWA: From where did you leave your home when you were evacuated?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: From the Sanger Railroad station, to Gila, with the other Sanger people.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you engage in some kind of occupation during your stay in the Gila Relocation Center?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: No, I did not work. But I substituted as a timekeeper at the mess hall when the timekeeper left camp for work outside.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you think of camp life?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: In the beginning, I hated being in the desert. But, I gradually became accustomed to it and in having to pursue hobbies. I learned how to make artificial flowers and how to knit. It was good to have time.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Most Issei did not have time to relax before going to camp, but at camp they had time to pursue hobbies, I am told.

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes, that is so.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Have you been back to Japan?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes, three times; 1926, 1950 right after the war, and in 1962 when I stayed for three or four months. That was the last time.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was your mother still living then?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you recollect any racial discrimination directed to you prior to the war?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: No.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where did you give birth to your children?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: I went to the Eda Maternity Home in Fresno for the first child Rosie; but for the others Mrs. Eda, the midwife, came to the house to help with the births.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When did you decide to go into the Fresno Maternity Home the first time?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: I went 10 days before the baby was born, since the date for delivery was unknown. After the baby was born, I stayed for another 10 days. It seems I was gone about three weeks. When Benny, Lena, and Tom were born, she came here.

MRS. HASEGAWA: The first time is the most anxious.

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes, because it is a new experience. And everyone teased me about going so soon. But because it was an unknown experience, I went in plenty of time.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was the maternity home like?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Let's see. There were about five rooms, and they were all occupied. I was advised to have a name ready for the baby, since we had to fill out the forms to turn into the Courthouse when the child was born.

MRS. HASEGAWA: At that time you had dual citizenship, did you not?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes, for the United States and for Japan. The Nihonjinkai made the reports to Japan for us.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What were some of the activities of the Nihonjinkai?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: They kept in touch with Japan. If there were any official business matters we needed to know, we went there.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you belong to any organizations?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: I belonged to the Del Rey Japanese organization before the war; but after we returned from Gila, we changed our membership to the Sanger Doshikai. I am a member of the Fresno Japanese Congregational Church

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is the Del Rey organization still active?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes. They have quite a number of members there, and it is called the Del Rey Kiowakai.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was the number of the Japanese population in Sanger at that time?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Well, I don't know. There weren't that many of us. Your husband's folks the Hasegawas are gone now; the Domotos are gone; the Tanakas came later and opened the Home Market in Sanger with Mr. Yoshiki. The Home Market was located next to the present J.C. Penney. The Tanakas and Yoshikis bought that building and started their Home Market. There must be about four of us old-time Issei left; the Tanakas, the Ogawas, the Moris, and the Okajimas. The Mizukis came from Dinuba later. The Kanagawas are gone, too.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What changes have you seen over the years?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Not too much change; there was no racial discrimination.

MRS. HASEGAWA: It seems to me that you lived in an especially friendly area. Your neighbors have been very kind, and as a result you did not experience prejudice. What social and economic changes have you seen in your local community over the years?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: The people now have it easy compared to us. We all worried about saving money to pay taxes each year. The younger generation have a much better standard of living than we ever did. I used to use the scrub board to do my heavy laundry for my family; but now each time I take clean clothes from the dryer after having washed in the automatic washer I say, "Thank you, thank you!" I feel grateful when I compare laundering to the olden days. All I have to do now is put it in and push the button!

MRS. HASEGAWA: Laundry was quite a chore, wasn't it?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Washing those stiff dungarees for the children was hard work.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you still observe Japanese customs?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: No, we have become Americanized. Perhaps eating rice and using chopsticks may be about it. I am told that in Japan it is said that if anyone wants to know about old or traditional Japanese customs, one would have to go to America!

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is there anything else you would like to add? Do you have recollections of sad or humorous incidents?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: The most frustrating time was when we had to leave our farm to be sent to the Relocation Center, just at harvest time.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Are there any thoughts or counsel you may have for the future Nikkei?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: I think the most important counsel is to love and care for your parents. The Nisei are good to their parents, but I feel the third and fourth generation young people do not respect their elders. In America, everyone becomes more independent and has less thoughts for parents or others. The Buddhists, more than the Christians, worship the ancestors.

MRS. HASEGAWA: It shows in the observance of the memorial dates such as the 7th day, the 49th day, and so on of the deceased by the Buddhist people.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I understand you have a heart pacemaker. When did you get it?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: About a year ago.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did it improve your health?

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Yes. Now my breathing is much easier. I have to check my pulse every morning. This pacemaker helps my heart to beat regularly. The doctor tells me that I should be all right for four or five years.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Certainly your health is most important, and I am happy that you are feeling so well. Thank you for this interview.

MRS. MATSUNAGA: Thank you.