

MR. AND MRS. KIYOTO SAIKI

MRS. HASEGAWA: Today is August 27, 1980. I, Yoshino Hasegawa, am privileged to be in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Keek Saiki at 1558 North 9th Street, Fresno, California, 93703.

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.

MR. SAIKI: I was born November 12, 1913 in Fresno. My name is Kyoto Saiki, and I have lived here on 9th Street the longest.

MRS. HASEGAWA: So, do you remember anything about your parents, where they came from, and why they decided to settle in the Fresno area?

MR. SAIKI: Well, they came from Hagi-Yamaguchi, Japan. And like many other Issei, they came here to prosper and to make a better life for themselves. My dad was in the bicycle business. He did very well. In fact, he was the first one in Fresno in the bicycle business. My mother was a highly educated woman. She had graduated from the Koto Shihan Gakkoo in Ochanomizu, Tokyo during the Meiji era. This school educated their students to become high school instructors. Being accepted to this school was quite an honor. She was teaching a home economics class in Japan when they decided to emigrate to America. After arriving here, she began teaching Japanese language classes to the Nisei children in the Fresno and Sanger area.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you know if they had friends here, or what influenced them to come to this area?

MR. SAIKI: Immigrating here in 1893, they were one of the first to settle in this area. I don't know what influenced them to settle here.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then they came here and bought this place right away?

MR. SAIKI: No, not this place. They first settled in the Japanese part of town.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you grow up in Fresno town?

MR. SAIKI: No, I was born on "B" and Kern Streets, and we moved right after that.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is that where your father's shop was?

MR. SAIKI: No, my father's original bicycle shop was on Broadway.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Broadway and where?

MR. SAIKI: I think it was between Inyo and Kern. That was many years ago. In fact, at that time, he was one of the first to have an automobile. It was a big touring car.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What do you remember about your childhood?

MR. SAIKI: What I remember of my childhood is that I spent helping out my folks in the shop. Later we moved to 9th Street and farmed.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did he raise here?

MR. SAIKI: We farmed about three acres of muscats. We had another 20 acres of grape vineyards out at Kings Canyon and DeWolf.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where did you go to elementary school?

MR. SAIKI: At Chester Rowell School, it's all dismantled now.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were there other Japanese children there?

MR. SAIKI: This area was sort of a Japanese community then. Many of the Japanese families like Inouye, Kazato, Ohara, Goto, Aoki, were truck farmers. In fact, we truck farmed, too. This whole area between 9th and Harvey Streets was all truck farms.

MRS. HASEGAWA: This area was all farms?

MR. SAIKI: Yes. This area has grown just recently, with the last 20 or 30 years. After the evacuation it was all farmland. This, the Mayfair area, began to develop and grow around 1948.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did your father buy this land before the Alien Land Law--did he buy it in his own name?

MR. SAIKI: I'm not sure how that was. If they bought it, it was probably under my sister's name Setsu, since she was the oldest.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I understand the people who first came did not have that problem. They could buy it. Then, after the Alien Land Law, they could not buy land, they had to buy it under the children's names or form a corporation, so I wondered about that.

When you were going to grammar school, did you find any kind of racial discrimination?

MR. SAIKI: Well, the school was so small that I guess we just didn't notice it. It wasn't too bad in grammar school. It was more apparent in junior high and high school.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were there any incidents?

MR. SAIKI: Once, when I was in high school, I went with a group of classmates to a swimming pool, and they wouldn't let me in.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where was that?

MR. SAIKI: It was on "H" Street where the Army and Navy Recruiting has an office.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was it a public swimming pool?

MR. SAIKI: Yes. That's the only incident I remember.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where did you go to high school?

MR. SAIKI: I attended Roosevelt High School here in Fresno.

MRS. HASEGAWA: That's quite a ways from here. How did you get there?

MR. SAIKI: We had bicycles; later, we had automobiles. That's what we all worked for you know. We'd work picking grapes, saving our money to buy an old car.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is that what you did in the summertime, pick grapes?

MR. SAIKI: Oh, yes, we'd go out on the farms.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you go to Japanese school?

MR. SAIKI: No, I didn't go to Japanese school.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Since your mother was a Japanese schoolteacher, she probably taught you at home.

MR. SAIKI: Well, she tried.

MRS. HASEGAWA: In high school, did you experience discrimination?

MR. SAIKI: Yes, that's where I felt it the strongest.

MRS. HASEGAWA: In what ways?

MR. SAIKI: Well, they would give us dirty looks or ignore us as if we weren't there. It wasn't too bad, but, still, you felt the resentment.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were you involved in extracurricular activities when you were in high school, sports or -

MR. SAIKI: No. My spare time was spent helping my folks. I didn't have time for going out for sports. It was during the Depression, times were hard. We, the Niseis, were raised during the toughest times, facing the depression, evacuation, war, and discrimination. It was a pretty rough time.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was I told that your mother passed away when you were young?

MR. SAIKI: Yes, in 1940. My mother and father were involved in a terrible car accident just before the war. They were preparing to go to Japan, we were sending them over there. They were making the rounds, they had gone to Los Angeles, and they were on their way home. They weren't far from home, just outside Reedley, on the corner of Mendicino and Manning, a guy ran through a stop sign killing both my mother and father.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Now you were telling me earlier that you started chick sexing before you graduated, before you finished high school. Could you tell us a little bit about how chick sexing got started in America?

MR. SAIKI: Credit should be given to Mr. J.M. Hattori for bringing chick sexing to America from Japan. He brought three instructors into the United States and two into Canada. He was required by the government to teach chick sexing to the Caucasians, so we traveled to various poultry centers demonstrating and teaching the process. Later, Mr.

Hattori taught the Kibeis in Japan and brought them back to America to do the work. He taught some of the Nisei here, too. I was working as a chauffeur for Mr. Hattori, at that time, and developed an interest in the work.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How old were you then?

MR. SAIKI: I was 19 when I started to chauffeur them around, taking them to various hatcheries. I learned my sexing, and in a year or two, I was skilled enough to teach the Nisei here in this country.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was there that much demand for chick sexers?

MR. SAIKI: Oh, yes. That was the beginning of it. There was good demand from then on. The beginning was slow, but after two or three years, they, the poultry industry, realized the advantage in sexing birds.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What is chick sexing?

MR. SAIKI: Well, it's to determine the sex of birds.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When do you do this?

MR. SAIKI: Right after it's been hatched, one day old.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You separate the male and the female birds, then what happens to the birds?

MR. SAIKI: Well, at that time, it was a depression year, they wanted to save as much as possible on the feed bill, so they destroyed the male, the cockerel, that way they get double space; they can raise twice as many as before, because they have the room where they destroyed the male. I'm sure that's what saved the poultry business at that time. In fact, they prospered. They were in better shape than they are presently.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Why would they save the female bird and not the male bird?

MR. SAIKI: Well, the female is the one that lays the egg! In sexing, the main purpose is to destroy the cockerel for the female laying birds.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do they do that still?

MR. SAIKI: Oh, yes, it's still a very popular -

MRS. HASEGAWA: I mean, do they still destroy the male?

MR. SAIKI: Oh, yes. Because it's in the breed of birds. Like the Foster Farms, they purposely raise a certain kind that grow better and faster for meat only, they're no good for laying eggs, but for the meat purpose they raised both male and female. They aren't sexed for gender.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was it just chicken, or did you do other poultry?

MR. SAIKI: Well, now our work is 100 percent turkey, especially my crew here in the valley. Both the male and female turkeys are raised just like the meat birds. Almost 100 percent of the turkeys are sexed. The male and female turkeys are separated, raised separately. They do better

that way, grow faster without fighting at the feed trough, or chasing the females around.

MRS. HASEGAWA: About how many chicks to you sex in an hour?

MR. SAIKI: I average about 800 an hour, but most of the others sexers average about 1,000 to 1,400 an hour accurately.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then you could say you were the first chick sexer in America?

MR. SAIKI: I received notification that my name was placed in the Congressional Records as one of the prime contributors in bringing the chick sexing industry to this country.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was there a chick sexing school?

MR. SAIKI: Yes. There were schools in Fresno, in Los Angeles, and other back east.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many people did you teach?

MR. SAIKI: Well, it varied. Some years I'd have as many as 30 or 40. Sometimes less, sometimes more.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many people would you say you have taught over the years?

MR. SAIKI: I don't know. I could say in the hundreds, I wouldn't say thousands. Many of those I'd teach would teach others.

MRS. HASEGAWA: There must be lots of chick sexers in America then.

MR. SAIKI: Well, enough to take care of the poultry industry. Originally, many of the sexers came from Japan; now many Koreans are entering the profession. I have Koreans on my crew right now, they're accurate and fast.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many in your crew?

MR. SAIKI: I have 15.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Just in Fresno? Are you the only group in Fresno?

MR. SAIKI: Well, we do have a competitor that comes from Turlock. I believe he has a crew of about five or six at the present time.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Are these all Orientals?

MR. SAIKI: Many hakujins enter this profession, but not many of them stick to it. They usually find something else that won't require such long hours or erratic work schedules. Nihonjins will stick to their work no matter how rough it gets.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What do you mean by long hours?

MR. SAIKI: Well, sometimes we couldn't sleep for two or three days. We had rough days like that. It's not like that now, but it was rough back

then.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Why did you have to do it like that?

MR. SAIKI: During the war, sexers were scarce. Like farming, when the crop is ready, it has to be harvested; the crop will not wait. Chicks must be sexed immediately after they are born, within a day and a half. After that, it becomes difficult to determine the sex.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is there a certain time of the year when this happens?

MR. SAIKI: The poultry season is busiest between February and June, tapering off after that. Presently, our work with turkeys has been going pretty steadily all year round. This year has been especially heavy.

MRS. HASEGAWA: It doesn't have to be a certain time, does it? Can't they regulate it so they can hatch all year round?

MR. SAIKI: The most effective breeding is done during the cool part of the year. Heat or cold affecting their breeding.

MRS. HASEGAWA: So you went to Japan in 1935. Tell us about that.

MR. SAIKI: I and three other Nisei traveled to Japan to learn chick sexing at the International Chick Sexing School in Japan.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many other places in Japan teach that?

MR. SAIKI: At that time, Nagoya was the only place.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How do you think it started?

MR. SAIKI: Many claim that China originated it, and that the Japanese perfected it. A Japanese professor started out with a full-grown bird and worked it down to a baby chick.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then after you came back in '35, you continued to do chick sexing until the war started?

MR. SAIKI: Yes. I'm still with it, we just continued right along.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where were you on December 7, 1941?

MR. SAIKI: We were in Fresno.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How did you hear about Pearl Harbor?

MR. SAIKI: It was in the newspapers. I just continued working, even though we weren't supposed to go on the other side of 99. The boundary line was 99. But I kept working at the hatcheries until the season was over.

During the war, the Hakuajins we had taught took over all the chick sexing business. They became experienced and taught other Hakuajins, taking away all of our accounts during the war. But the hatcheries must not have been very satisfied with their work, because after I came back

to this area, the hatcheries asked me to do their work again.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then after the war started, you and your family went to Minnesota to help your brother? And then you were caught there.

MR. SAIKI: That's right.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What happened to your house?

MR. SAIKI: We had asked some German friends take over until we returned.

MRS. HASEGAWA: If you just went to Minnesota, you didn't think you were not coming back did you. Your house must have been just the way you left it then?

MRS. SAIKI: Yes, my blanket was still on the bed. I was planning to come back after two weeks.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you have friends send things to you?

MRS. SAIKI: Sets and her family were still in Fresno, so they brought things that they thought we'd need. The wedding presents we had left in Fresno were gone when we returned to Fresno.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you do in Minnesota?

MR. SAIKI: Well, I took up refrigeration, chick sexed, taught chick sexing, and farmed. Prosperous farming. We raised soybeans full of grass! We tried growing tomatoes, but a hailstorm destroyed it. Truck farming was terrible there.

MRS. SAIKI: But you raised pickling cucumbers, and got \$15 a bushel.

MR. SAIKI: Oh, yes. The first year we planted pickles was very good, but after that they wouldn't grow. It's funny, truck farming over there is different than in California, the growing season there is too short.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How was the chick sexing business in Minnesota?

MR. SAIKI: Minnesota and Iowa are poultry centers in the Mid-West, that's why we decided to start a chick sexing business there. From that point we had sexers working all over the United States, they covered most of the poultry centers.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was Minnesota the headquarters then?

MR. SAIKI: Yes, during the war.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you have children then?

MRS. SAIKI: No.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then in Minnesota you took up refrigeration. What did you do? How did you get started?

MR. SAIKI: I had to do something during the winter months, the work seemed interesting, challenging, and profitable.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What school did you go to?

MR. SAIKI: I learned refrigeration at Dunwoody.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you have a shop or something?

MR. SAIKI: No, my instructor and I worked out of my home.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How long were you in Minnesota?

MRS. SAIKI: Four years, but it seemed longer.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When you came back to your own home, were you able to move in right away?

MR. SAIKI: Yes. These people were holding it for us. They had their own place on the west side of town, but they took care of everything for us, so we could move in by the time we got home.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you do then?

MR. SAIKI: There was a lot of discrimination at that time, we saw signs saying "Jap Keep out," but I worked the area anyway. By that time, many of the Japanese were returning to this area, so I started my refrigeration business and gradually built it up.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then the months you are not busy with chick sexing, you do your refrigeration.

MR. SAIKI: Yes. They complement each other, because they are seasonal. One will start with the warmer weather, and the other one lets up with warm weather.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You're pretty busy then, all the time.

MR. SAIKI: Yes. My refrigeration business became very successful. So much so that I couldn't keep up with both the sexing and the refrigeration, so I gave the refrigeration business to my brother-in-law Ben.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Ben Nishioki?

MR. SAIKI: Yes. I couldn't do both of them. It was a little too much.

MRS. HASEGAWA: But you're still into refrigeration?

MR. SAIKI: Well, poultry work is unpredictable, it varies. One year, two of our best accounts went broke, so I had to return to refrigeration. Fortunately, I had developed another skill other than sexing to carry me through.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How is it now?

MR. SAIKI: Since I'm getting old, I can't take the fast pace any more, so I take whatever jobs I feel like taking. The chick sexing business is still pretty good, enough to keep 15 men in a pretty good mood, satisfied, and making a living out of it. It's not what you would call a

prosperous business, but they make ends meet with it.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How do you get paid for chick sexing?

MR. SAIKI: At the present time, we are getting 24 cents a bird, \$2.25 per hundred birds sexed.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You get \$2.25 per hundred?

MR. SAIKI: Yes. And most of the boys average a thousand.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Now how many hours is that?

MR. SAIKI: Well, as I said, the hours vary. We might work continuously two or three days without sleep. But, at the present time, it is not that bad. The hours vary, that's what makes it rough.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When the chick sexing season is here, do you work with the boys?

MR. SAIKI: Yes, up to now I have. I'd like to start taking it a little easier, I can't take that pace any more. It's getting to be a little too much.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you get the jobs for them, then?

MR. SAIKI: Yes. That's my main job, to line up work for them. All the businesses are large now, Yoshino, but before the war, in the valley here, there were almost a hundred hatcheries. Now, there are only about 25. Foster Farms, Armour, Swift, they put out over a million birds a year. They have their own birds, breeding flock, their own mill, and processing plant. All aspects of the process are included in their corporation. Even the fertilizer is used in making byproducts. I see in the paper where they make protein products and feed it to cows. So there's no waste. It's amazing what they do now.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Sounds like pretty interesting work. What do you see as the future of chick sexing?

MR. SAIKI: Well, I wouldn't advise anyone to take it up. Otherwise I'd tell my boys to do it. My children are doing a lot better than I am.

MRS. HASEGAWA: But this is an important industry.

MR. SAIKI: Yes, up to now. But from here on, I think there's something better.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do they think it will be done mechanically?

MR. SAIKI: Well, they said that even when I was learning. That's the thing I was afraid of, if I took up sexing, that I would be replaced by a machine. But, it hasn't happened yet.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then the young people in American don't learn the job?

MR. SAIKI: No. At the present time, I don't think any Japanese want to take it up.

MRS. SAIKI: The hours are too long with a great deal of time spent away from their families. How many marriages would last?

MR. SAIKI: The younger generation won't take those rough hours we went through.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many children to you have?

MR. SAIKI: We have four.

MRS. HASEGAWA: And they are all married to Japanese?

MR. SAIKI: Two are married, both to Japanese. Our older son is teaching.

MRS. SAIKI: He was teaching the mentally retarded and then Proposition 13 came in and counseling was split, because he was one of the last ones. So, then, like a lot of teachers today, he didn't see any future in teaching, so he went into landscaping, in partnership with another kid. Landscaping and selling insurance.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is that here in Fresno?

MRS. SAIKI: San Luis Obispo.

MR. SAIKI: They're building condominiums, too, so I guess you could say he's in construction, too. Our oldest daughter Jere Ann is married to Wally Tanaka, a government employee. Our other daughter Janis is a medical technologist and works at Community Hospital. Our son Greg is married to Kathy Yukiyasu; he's a veterinarian.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many grandchildren?

MR. SAIKI: We have four, two boys and two girls.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What is your wife's maiden name?

MR. SAIKI: Fumiko Nishioki.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What social and economic changes have you seen in your local community over the years?

MR. SAIKI: Economically, most of the Japanese in this area seem to be doing quite well, living comfortably.

MRS. HASEGAWA: And have you been involved in any religious, business, political, or social organizations?

MR. SAIKI: No.

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

MR. SAIKI: We talk about it quite a bit. I guess our food is one of the most obvious ties with our heritage.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you have any advice you'd like to give to the younger generation?

MR. SAIKI: I think the young people should maintain the demonstration of respect towards their elders and parents just as generations have done in the past.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I guess that's a Japanese family custom, honoring the older people. What are some of the old Japanese traditions that you think were important?

MR. SAIKI: Well, I'd say determination! I think a lot of the younger ones don't have that.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You mean gaman?

MR. SAIKI: Yes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I think that's true. The perseverance, stick with it. Like you were saying earlier, people don't stick with a job if it gets to be tough.

MRS. SAIKI: They don't have endurance.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Would you like to add anything else?

MR. SAIKI: No, I think you covered it pretty well, Yoshino.

MRS. HASEGAWA: All right. Thank you very much.

MR. SAIKI: Thank you.