

YOSHIE DOMOTO

MRS. HASEGAWA: Today is March 23, 1980. I, Yoshino Hasegawa, am privileged to interview Mrs. Yoshie Domoto at her home on the 65-acre farm which has been in the Domoto family for 56 years. The farm is located just northeast of Sanger in the Centerville Riverbottom area. The address is 528 North Rio Vista, Sanger.

If you will give us your full name, date and place of birth, and your place of longest residence.

MRS. DOMOTO: Yoshie Arita, 1914, in the town of Reedley. I've lived out here the longest since I got married.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I didn't know that you were born in Reedley.

MRS. DOMOTO: My folks had a store there.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What kind of a store?

MRS. DOMOTO: Oh, it was just a general merchandise store.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What do you remember about your folks? Where they came from and why they came to Reedley?

MRS. DOMOTO: They came from Hakata in Fukuoka Ken. My father Shosuke Arita was born in 1875 and was a watchmaker in Japan. He was married to Yoshi Yoshinaga who was born in 1882. They had three children in Japan. He left his family and came by himself to the United States of America. I think he came to Reedley. At first he worked for some watchmaker or had a watch repair shop. After he started the store, my mother came to Reedley, leaving the two girls and one boy in Japan with relatives. They had five children in America; Masami, myself, and Masae survive, and one sister in Japan.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When did they move to Sanger?

MRS. DOMOTO: From Reedley he went into farming after a fire destroyed their store. We lived on a farm in Reedley, then Parlier, and Sanger. Then we moved into town in Fresno for a while, and then we came to Sanger.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did he do in Fresno?

MRS. DOMOTO: He started a business making "konyaku" and selling and delivering it to the Japanese stores in the valley.

MRS. HASEGAWA: In Fresno?

MRS. DOMOTO: Yes. And then he came to Sanger, and they started the Star Restaurant in Sanger, serving Chinese and American food.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How old were you?

MRS. DOMOTO: I was in the third grade, I remember that. That would make me 9 years old.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where did you go to school in Sanger?

MRS. DOMOTO: Well, I first started in the old Taft School building and then r went to the Wilson School. The old school was torn down, and now it's a new school. And then I went to Harding. It was where the library is now.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was the Wilson School just up to the sixth grade then?

MRS. DOMOTO: Fifth grade.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then Harding was junior high?

MRS. DOMOTO: I guess. We were the only Japanese children in both schools.

MRS. HASEGAWA: There weren't any other Japanese families in town?

MRS. DOMOTO: Yes, there were, but there weren't any children going to school. The Yoshikis, the Tanakas, and the Jindei families had the Home Grocery; three partners. know people talk about discrimination, but we never felt it. Because we were the only Japanese, we got along fine with all the children.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Your family restaurant and then the Home Grocery, were they on the same block?

MRS. DOMOTO: Yes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: That would be the Japanese town?

MRS. DOMOTO: Well, that was it. Later a Mr. Ota had a barber shop for a while.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was there anything else besides those?

MRS. DOMOTO: There was an Italian grocery. The Linenbach Garage next door, and Lesters had their trucking business. Picchis and Lombardis had their bar, too.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is the Picchi Bar still in the same place?

MRS. DOMOTO: No. It's all changed. Picchis moved.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What about that hotel on the corner, the Sanger Hotel?

MRS. DOMOTO: Oh, yes. Barsutti Brothers had that. One of the brothers had a barbershop and pool hall in the building.

MRS. HASEGAWA: That was just across from the depot.

MRS. DOMOTO: Yes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What do you remember about living there and going to school?

MRS. DOMOTO: Well, we lived in back of the restaurant. And all these people lived around there, you know, close by the business.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you do for entertainment?

MRS. DOMOTO: Well, we didn't have any radio or TV. We had a radio later on. We just played with the kids. Played games in the evenings, and I remember we used to have a movie theatre and we'd all go to the movies.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where was it? Was it that one that's now next to the location of your family restaurant?

MRS. DOMOTO: No. It was on Seventh Street. I think around where Kingens is now. And we used to go for a nickel. A bunch of us would all get a nickel and go to the show and stay in there all afternoon on weekends. The Royal Theatre, next to the restaurant, came in much later. They had a band concert at the park once a week and everybody in town would be there. Saturday nights all the farmers would come to do their shopping and visit each other on the street. We would be busy in the restaurant.

MRS. HASEGAWA: After you graduated from grammar school, you went on to Sanger High?

MRS. DOMOTO: Yes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you recall anything about Sanger High; how it was and how many Japanese youngsters might have been there?

MRS. DOMOTO: There weren't many Japanese. When I was in the eighth grade, they decided to start mid-term graduation, a mid-term class in high school. Fifteen of us graduated into high school at mid-term, and they just had a few basic classes we could take, and it never worked out. I think they had another class after us, then after three and one-half years they asked if we wanted to stay an extra year or to graduate with the regular class. So part of us graduated with the regular class, and the others stayed another year.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Does that mean you graduated high school in three years?

MRS. DOMOTO: Three and one-half years.

MRS\_ HASEGAWA: What did you do after graduation?

MRS. DOMOTO: Worked in the restaurant. My father died when I was in high school, in 1931, during my senior year. We had the restaurant, and we had to work to keep the family going. That was during the Depression years.

MRS. HASEGAWA: So you had to help at the store. Did your brother work with you?

MRS. DOMOTO: Yes, and my younger sister Yukie. My mother did the cooking. We also hired a cook during the summer fruit season.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was it a busy place? Were there a lot of people coming to eat at your restaurant?

MRS. DOMOTO: Yes, it was pretty busy.

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

MRS. DOMOTO: American food, and chop suey, and chow mein.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was the specialty?

MRS. DOMOTO: Chow mein.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Wasn't there a certain kind of chow mein that you served?

MRS. DOMOTO: Yes. It was real crispy and everybody liked it. In Sanger they still talk about our chow mein. I guess you've heard of it. We just fried it real crisp, and it wasn't greasy so everybody liked it.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How long after you graduated from high school was it before you were married?

MRS. DOMOTO: Oh., seven years. In 1938.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You said something about your sisters and brother being in Japan. Did they stay there?

MRS. DOMOTO: No. The oldest brother Isao came about 1921. He died in 1926. The other two stayed in Japan, the two girls Sumiye and Mitsuye. My parents tried to get them over, but because of the immigration laws at that time, they could not come. When they allowed immigration, they were grown and decided to stay in Japan.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Who took care of them?

MRS. DOMOTO: They stayed with the grandparents, and then with Dad's older brother.

MRS. HASEGAWA: After you were married in 1938, you lived on the southeast corner of Belmont and Academy. Then you went to Gila, Arizona and then to Detroit?

MRS. DOMOTO: First we went to a farm in Minnesota, then we went to Cincinnati, and then we got a job in Dayton, Ohio.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When was your oldest son Paul born?

MRS. DOMOTO: 1945. September 18, 1945. And William was born on October 9, 1947.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Can you tell me something about their childhood?

MRS. DOMOTO: Well, they started at Centerville School here, and they seemed to be getting along fine. There were quite a few children in the neighborhood. I think they enjoyed their childhood.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were you involved in the school PTA?

MRS. DOMOTO: Yes. School, Cub Scouts, 4-H, this and that. I guess I was a room mother all the way through.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How do you see the change in the school in Centerville since the time your children attended and now?

MRS. DOMOTO: Well, it's a lot bigger school. When Paul started school, they had two grades in some classes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Combined classes!

MRS. DOMOTO: It's a lot bigger now. A lot more students, don't you think?

MRS. HASEGAWA: Oh, yes. What about the reputation of the school?

MRS. DOMOTO: Oh, that's improved a lot because they used to say students from Centerville were wild, and that Centerville was in the boondocks.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How do you account for the size of the school enrollment?

MRS. DOMOTO: Well, all these new homes coming up in the developments across the river and along Belmont Avenue.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What do your children do?

MRS. DOMOTO: Well, the oldest son Paul is Associate Professor of Horticulture at Iowa State University. He specializes in pomology. He got his B.S. and M.S. at Fresno State then went to the University of Maryland for his Ph.D.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How about Bill?

MRS. DOMOTO: He graduated from Fresno State with a B.S. in Industrial Arts. He's working for PG&E in Fresno.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you have any grandchildren?

MRS. DOMOTO: Two. Benjamin, 5, and Joseph, 2; Bill's children and two red-headed boys.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Who are your sons married to?

MRS. DOMOTO: Caucasians. Bill's wife is Linda McCullough, she's formerly from Iowa. And Marlene Mead from Washington, D.C. Paul met her while he was going to school at the University of Maryland.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Now that your children are grown, what do you and your husband do?

MRS. DOMOTO: Shig still runs the ranch.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What are some of your memorable travels?

MRS. DOMOTO: Well, we've been East a couple of times to Washington, D.C. We've been to Iowa twice, and I went to Japan in 1976. My sister Misaie Yamamoto and I went.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you think about Japan?

MRS. DOMOTO: Well, I enjoyed it. It was beautiful in April. When I got

back I was happy to be home, because it just seemed like it was so roomy. Japan is so crowded, you know. We toured and then we stayed with my sister Sumiye about seven days in Saga, Fukuoka Ken. And that's the first time we ever met her.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How was your other sister?

MRS. DOMOTO: She died during the war. Her two grandchildren, it would be my grandniece, were here with my sister Sumiye to visit us from Japan last summer.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I see. What did they think about America?

MRS. DOMOTO: I think what impressed them most was the space and size of farms in the United States. The vastness of the country. Especially the girls from Tokyo were impressed with the spaciousness of everybody's homes. Because in Japan they live in the suburbs in little apartments and everybody is so crowded.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Coming back to you as a farmer's wife, what was your role? Did you have to work in the field? What did you do?

MRS. DOMOTO: Well, I took care of the family, and in an emergency I was a handyman and tied vines if I was needed. I drove the tractor for Shig during harvesting. I was elected to do lots of things.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you raise your own garden?

MRS. DOMOTO: Yes, we still have a garden.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you raise?

MRS. DOMOTO: Well, vegetables for the table. Then we had cows and a couple of steers that we butchered for meat.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where did you keep the meat?

MRS. DOMOTO: In the freezer at home.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Oh. Before we had freezers in the home, what did you do?

MRS. DOMOTO: We rented a locker in Sanger. It wasn't far to town, but it was so inconvenient. Now we have our own freezer.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where were you when you heard about the war with Japan? How did you feel about Pearl Harbor?

MRS. DOMOTO: Well, it was awful because I was pregnant at that time. I was due to have the baby in March and everything was so upset. I had a hard birth and lost my baby. That was in April, and by the time we had to leave for camp in August, I still had troubles. And so when we left, I was one of the privileged few that got a Pullman berth on the train to Gila, Arizona.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How did you get along in camp with the change in climate and all. That certainly didn't help your health.

MRS. DOMOTO: No. I kept going to the clinic. They had a hospital just started with all the Japanese doctors working.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you get adequate treatment?

MRS. DOMOTO: Yes. I just needed check-ups.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What are your recollections of camp life?

MRS. DOMOTO: For a while we just sat around very angry and resentful. But later I worked.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you do?

MRS. DOMOTO: I worked at the school, in the high school library.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When you left camp and went east to Dayton, did you work?

MRS. DOMOTO: Yes. The people we worked for gardened, and I helped prepare the vegetables for market.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What kind of vegetables did they have?

MRS. DOMOTO: All kinds.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were the vegetables similar to the kinds grown in California?

MRS. DOMOTO: Yes. Beans and onions and celery and all kinds of things like that.

MRS. HASEGAWA: At the present time do you belong to any social or church organizations?

MRS. DOMOTO: Not any more. Just the Sanger United First Methodist Church.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you see any changes in the Japanese-American society?

MRS. DOMOTO: Our parents brought their morals and customs from Japan, and they raised us as they were: to obey our parents, be polite, and never do anything to shame the family.

As we grew older and wanted to go to movies and dances with a boyfriend (as our American friends were doing), the Japanese community thought that was terrible.

My mother trusted us and let us go, but she got a lot of criticism, and we were gossiped about. In a few years, the younger Nisei had no trouble dating. Many of my girlfriends, the first Niseis of marriageable age, were forced into marriage arranged by their parents and baishakunin. When Shig and I decided to get married, we had to ask two Issei couples to be our baishakunin so it would look right. Soon all the Niseis were picking their own mates and baishakunins were name only or done away with.

The Nisei were gradually Americanizing the Isseis.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Are there any Japanese traditions that you remember your folks talking about or that you have passed on to your children?

MRS. DOMOTO: No. Only the New Year's tradition. We still make the New Year's feast and aside from that not too much. We still go to the annual Japanese community picnic which has become a traditional Japanese community affair over the years. We had Japanese school when we were little. We attended Saturdays at the Sanger Japanese Hall. They had Japanese school when our children were little, but our children never did go.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How about church? Did you go to church in Sanger when you were growing up?

MRS. DOMOTO: Oh, when we were growing up my folks belonged to the Congregational Church in Fresno. So we used to get there once in a while.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you go anywhere for vacations? Did your folks take you somewhere special?

MRS. DOMOTO: No. We used to take trips. A few here and there, but never special.

MRS. HASEGAWA: With the restaurant you couldn't just get up and go, I suppose.

MRS. DOMOTO: No. Kind of hard to take turns, you know.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Well, I am sure that it was pretty hard for your mother to make a living when your dad passed away.

MRS. DOMOTO: We all had to pitch in and help. It didn't seem so hard during those Depression years, because everybody else was in the same shoes. We were all poor.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is there anything else you would like to add?

MRS. DOMOTO: No, I don't think so.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Thank you for this interview.