

MRS. KIYO IMAI

MRS. GOTO: Today is August 8, 1980. I, Terry Goto, have the privilege to be in the home of Mrs. Kiyo Imai at 561 Princeton Avenue, Dinuba, California, 93618.

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. IMAI: I was born in Ibaraki-Ken, July 14, 1891 and received my high school education at the Toyo-Eiwa and Yamanashi-Eiwa High School. And continued at the Bible School in Yokohama and graduated after two years. After graduation I served eight years as a "Bible Woman" at these three churches; Nagoya Church, Toyohashi Church, and Mita Church in Tokyo. And then came to Los Angeles in 1920.

MRS. GOTO: When did you leave Japan and why?

MRS. IMAI: In 1920 I received a letter asking me to come to the church in Los Angeles. My salary was not paid by the Los Angeles church, but by the Women's Society of the Methodist Church.

MRS. GOTO: Did the letter of invitation come from the Women's Society?

MRS. IMAI: No. From both the women's group and the church.

MRS. GOTO: Which church did you come to?

MRS. IMAI: Japanese Methodist Church in Los Angeles on George Street in 1920.

MRS. GOTO: How long were you there?

MRS. IMAI: One year, three months. I left for San Francisco Methodist Church after that.

MRS. GOTO: How old were you at that time?

MRS. IMAI: Twenty-nine years old.

MRS. GOTO: Why did you go there?

MRS. IMAI: Because they wanted someone to work, with the women. There was another person in the Los Angeles church so that I could leave.

MRS. GOTO: Who sponsored you?

MRS. IMAI: The San Francisco Methodist Women's Society paid my salary. I worked at the Japanese Methodist Church for two years. Then I met and married Reverend Imai. He was at the Walnut Grove Methodist Church South.

MRS. GOTO: Was it a baishaku kekkon?

MRS. IMAI: No. I met him frequently at church and became good friends. He was a 38-year old bachelor.

MRS. GOTO: That was a very good match. Where did you go after that?

MRS. IMAI: He was pastor at Walnut Grove Church, so we stayed there.

MRS. GOTO: Who officiated at your wedding? And where was the ceremony held?

MRS. IMAI: At the San Francisco Methodist Church. And there were three ministers; Dr. Johnson, Reverend Tsuda, and Reverend O. So.

MRS. GOTO: Was it a large wedding?

MRS. IMAI: Yes. I had been there for two years, so we had a large wedding with many people.

MRS. GOTO: Was your wedding in the American style with a wedding gown and veil?

MRS. IMAI: Yes, very formal.

MRS. GOTO: Was your vow in English or Japanese?

MRS. IMAI: It was conducted by Superintendent Johnson in English. My piano teacher played the organ.

MRS. GOTO: Did you have attendants in your wedding party?

MRS. IMAI: Mr. and Mrs. Sano stood with me. They were old friends of my father. There was a reception following the ceremony. They were witnesses at our engagement party and again at the wedding.

MRS. GOTO: Did you go on a honeymoon?

MRS. IMAI: Yes, to Palo Alto. We were young. We returned to Walnut Grove for seven years. Imai worked there eight years before we were married, so he was there at that church for 15 years. We moved to the Dinuba church after that on September 30, 1930.

MRS. GOTO: Did you have children?

MRS. IMAI: My three children were born in San Francisco Children's Hospital since there was no hospital in Walnut Grove.

MRS. GOTO: What years were your children born?

MRS. IMAI: Oswald, the oldest, was born in 1924. Kei was born in 1925. There was only one year and four months between them. Two and one-half or three years later Nobu was born.

MRS. GOTO: When did you come to Dinuba Church?

MRS. IMAI: In 1930, September, and we were there until the war with Japan in 1942. After the war we went back to Dinuba Church, and in 1952 we moved to the Bakersfield Church. During the war we went to Poston III Camp in 1942 in August and stayed three years. Our oldest son went to Asbury College in Kentucky while we were in camp. Kei went to college in North Carolina and studied for four years. She met her husband Jimmy

Nelson during her senior year there and was married.

MRS. GOTO: Did you go to the ceremony?

MRS. IMAI: No. None of us could go. It was too bad. I felt sorry about that.

MRS. GOTO: Oswald went to Asbury, then was drafted, was he not?

MRS. IMAI: Yes. After his freshman year he was inducted and went to Minnesota to the language school. He did not believe in actual combat. He went to Tokyo as an interpreter. He came home after the war. Before we went to camp, Oswald was ready to graduate from high school and had his cap and gown all ready. But was not able to graduate with his class because of the war. It was a tragedy. His high school principal in Dinuba was a good man, and he gave diplomas to all the Japanese students who were ready to graduate in the principal's office.

MRS. GOTO: Did Nobu go to school after she returned to California?

MRS. IMAI: She completed her senior year of high school after returning from the Relocation Center in Poston, Arizona. She went on to complete two years at Reedley College. Then she worked in San Francisco for a few months. She returned to Dinuba and she has been employed by a physician since that time. But in between when I became ill with cancer and would have died, she quit her job and cared for me for two years. Now I am well, she is back to work.

MRS. GOTO: Who is your daughter Kei's husband?

MRS. IMAI: He is a professor in North Carolina. He is a Caucasian. They have one daughter. Vicki is about 32 now and is married to a Caucasian.

MRS. GOTO: Who is your son married to?

MRS. IMAI: To Mary Omura in Stockton. They had their wedding at the Presbyterian Church there. They have four sons. One died at age 241 in an accident in February 1979. My son graduated from University of the Pacific and worked at the Fricot Ranch School for about 10 years. Then he moved to Lodi. He works in the office of the Stockton State Building as a parole officer. His wife works half-time with the State Department of Employment.

MRS. GOTO: Have you returned to Japan?

MRS. IMAI: The first time in 1927 and again in 1966, I returned to Japan. The first time my husband and I went with our two children. On the way back I had to go to Angel Island with my two children and had a hard time. They treated us like a prisoner. I thought I would not be able to get out of there.

MRS. GOTO: How long were you there in Angel Island?

MRS. IMAI: About one week where we underwent examination. In 1966, I went alone to Japan with a Methodist tour group.

MRS. GOTO: Why did you go alone?

MRS. IMAI: Because my husband was gone then. In 1976, I went alone again with a Methodist tour group. I went back three times. I don't think I will be able to go again.

MRS. GOTO: When did Mr. Imai die?

MRS. IMAI: In April 1957. He had a stroke. He suffered for a week before he died. After he went to Bakersfield his health began to fail, and his ministry was not as good as it should have been. He was pastor at Bakersfield for three years. He retired at age 70. Since then I have lived here with my daughter Nobu.

MRS. GOTO: Did you encounter prejudice after the war?

MRS. IMAI: No. Mr. Nelson and Mr. Wright helped us before evacuation, and after the war they brought us food and gave us lots of help after we returned. Not only the two, but all the people of the Dinuba Methodist Church helped the evacuees to feel welcome on returning.

MRS. GOTO: Where is Mr. Nelson and Mr. Wright now?

MRS. IMAI: They have both gone to heaven. They were good family men. At the time of evacuation, Mr. Nelson got a big truck and made the rounds of Japanese homes, Buddhists and Christians alike, to help transport the belongings of the evacuees to the railroad station. He was truly a kind man from this area.

MRS. GOTO: I also heard Reverend Nicholson helped the Japanese people?

MRS. IMAI: Yes. He brought many young men with him from Pasadena during evacuation to help us. While we were interned in camp he came to help us and to inspire us. He was a member of the Friends and loved the Japanese people. He spoke both Japanese and English.

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

MRS. IMAI: There was Reverend Clark of Clovis who was especially good to us. The people of his church brought lunch to all of us at the time of evacuation. The Visalia people were prejudiced, but some of their church people prepared lunch for us on the day of the exodus.

MRS. GOTO: Are there any other memories you may like to share?

MRS. IMAI: There was this kind of an episode. When our son could not attend his high school graduation, he was awarded his diploma in the principal's office. When his school friends heard about it, they became very indignant and went around to tear down the anti-Japanese posters. They did not believe the U.S. citizens should be prosecuted and put into concentration camps!

MRS. GOTO: These were high school students?

MRS. IMAI: Yes, his friends.

MRS. GOTO: Please relate your childhood experiences. When did your father become a Christian?

MRS. IMAI: I don't remember. When I was three I received my baptism. At that time, both my parents had already been baptized. Reverend Kobayashi led them to Christ. There is a Komagome church near Tokyo University. It was there they became members, and I was baptized there, too. While they were there, my father went to the Tokyo-Eiwa Seminary and became a minister.

MRS. GOTO: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

MRS. IMAI: There were eight of us. But most of them perished with tuberculosis. We were very poor. Ministers received practically no income. We didn't have much to eat, so we did not have any resistance to the disease. There was only myself and two younger brothers. One of the brothers became ill while he was attending the University of Chicago. He went to Japan, and we thought he was getting better, but he died. It was a tragedy.

MRS. GOTO: Your brother that remains is a minister?

MRS. IMAI: Yes. He has been healthy. He attended Kansai Gakuin. He just retired, about the time your husband Reverend Goto retired.

MRS. GOTO: Is he well?

MRS. IMAI: Not so -- he is not as strong as he was. He has three sons and one daughter. A happy family, a successful family.

MRS. GOTO: What is his name?

MRS. IMAI: Reverend Iizumi. He lives in Kanagawa-Ken. Iizumi was my maiden name. He lives near Yokohama. First son is a graduate of Tokyo University. The second son graduated from Aoyama Gakuin and is now an English teacher in high school. He came to the University of Massachusetts to study for a month and crossed the United States. The third son is a photographer.

MRS. GOTO: Mrs. Imai, you are now 89. What are your plans?

MRS. IMAI: My plans are to work for the church as long as I can and play the piano and organ so that I will not forget how to play the instruments.

MRS. GOTO: Your hobby is music?

MRS. IMAI: Yes. I love to read, too.

MRS. GOTO: Do you go to the library here in Dinuba?

MRS. IMAI: I understand that now there are Japanese books in the library. So I plan to go and take advantage of them. When the children were small I used to take them, but I have not gone since then.

MRS. GOTO: What do you do now?

MRS. IMAI: I attend church and meetings regularly, read, play the organ and piano. I am a member of the Board. I represent the Japanese-speaking group to the best of my capabilities.

MRS. GOTO: Do you have any physical problems?

MRS. IMAI: No, I am fine.

MRS. GOTO: When did you receive your citizenship?

MRS. IMAI: I postponed taking the examination a long time, but on June 27, 1980, I finally received my citizenship at the Visalia Courthouse. During that time Mrs. Goto and Reverend Starbuck were very kind in taking me back and forth many times.

MRS. GOTO: Will you vote this election year?

MRS. IMAI: Yes, I plan to.

MRS. GOTO: How long have you been here in America?

MRS. IMAI: I have been here 60 years!

MRS. GOTO: Do you have any advice for the younger generation?

MRS. IMAI: I regret the fact that the youth of today are becoming alienated from the church. I pray that the younger generation will return to the church.

MRS. GOTO: What has been the most trying time for you during the past 60 years?

MRS. IMAI: The saddest moment was when I heard that my parents and brothers and sisters passed away. The hardest time was the depression. When we first came to Dinuba, the people of the church could not support us, so we did not have any income. It was depression time and members of the church only made 10 cents an hour working out in a field. Reverend Imai's savings from his Walnut Grove pastorate were spent. However, we did not starve. With the help of church members, we had food every day.

MRS. GOTO: What were your happiest recollections?

MRS. IMAI: I think I was the happiest at my wedding and when my grandson was born. Two happy experiences! I think my saddest moment was when my grandson died. Seeing my son so very sad made it even harder to bear.

MRS. GOTO: How long have you been in the Central Valley?

MRS. IMAI: I came in 1930. We went to Poston Relocation Center in 1942 until 1945. Then we came to the Bakersfield church for three years and in 1952 we returned. I have been in Dinuba 44 years.