

MOMOYO JANE KUBOTA

MRS. HASEGAWA: Today is November 26, 1979. I, Yoshino Hasegawa, have the honor and privilege of interviewing Momoyo Jane Kubota in her home located at 3459 Illinois Avenue in the city of Fresno.

Mrs. Kubota, your family are pioneers in Lindsay. What was your maiden name? Please tell us about your family, and the role you played as Mr. Kubota's wife.

MRS. KUBOTA: My maiden name was Kaku. My father first came to this country at the turn of the century, and he first came to Parlier, California. And he stayed here for several years before he went and settled in Lindsay. We had a little family grocery store in town. Japanese town across the tracks. And my father and mother were in business.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is that store still there?

MRS. KUBOTA: The small store is now replaced by a big store, a supermarket.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is that your brother that is running it?

MRS. KUBOTA: My brothers are running it at the present time at the same location.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was the address?

MRS. KUBOTA: It's on Mount Vernon Street, 157 North Mount Vernon Street in Lindsay where they settled years back. It's the same location but a lot bigger store.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When they started the store were the customers mostly Japanese?

MRS. KUBOTA: Actually, there aren't too many Japanese families in Lindsay. During fruit season time, like orange picking time, olive season most of our customers were Mexican. Most of the Japanese people that lived around in the country came to the store. Mostly Mexican and small percentage of Armenian people.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You said something about a boardinghouse.

MRS. KUBOTA: Yes. Years ago, my mother and father catered to the bachelor, the Japanese men who came around to pick oranges during season. During picking time there would be more outsiders come in to help with the harvest, and my father started--well, years ago it was a boardinghouse--because they were fed. My mother would feed them, too. But later on became just a rooming house where they could pay for a room, if they wanted to stay in town. And, of course, there were also labor camps out in the country.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Would you mind telling us when you were born?

MRS. KUBOTA: I was born January 13, 1919 in Lindsay. I went to grammar school in Lindsay and Lindsay High School. Several years after high school, we were married.

MRS. HASEGAWA: And your children?

MRS. KUBOTA: We have two girls. The oldest one, Masako lives in Mission Viejo, California at the present time. And then our second daughter Marlene is still at home at the present time.

MRS. HASEGAWA: They don't have Japanese names?

MRS. KUBOTA: Marlene Meiko. Then our oldest daughter, we just called her Masako for a long time. Then after she started going to college she had her middle name legalized, Janice. Janice Masako Kubota.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You have one daughter that's married?

MRS. KUBOTA: Yes. One daughter that's married.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Grandchildren?

MRS. KUBOTA: We have three grandchildren. Our oldest one is a granddaughter Elaine. She became 13 this last July. Then we have two boys, grandsons. John is 10 and Jim is 8.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is your daughter married to a Japanese?

MRS. KUBOTA: Yes. Masako is married to a Japanese boy.

MRS. HASEGAWA: She didn't go through miai, did she?

MRS. KUBOTA: No. She met Al when she was going to college.

MRS. HASEGAWA: She didn't have a Nakaudo (go-between)?

MRS. KUBOTA: She didn't have a Nakaudo.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What is their last name?

MRS. KUBOTA: Their last name is Edo, not too common. You know Edo is the ancient name for the now Tokyo. Tokyo was called Edo years and years ago.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where do they live?

MRS. KUBOTA: I guess the nearest place of renown would be San Clemente. About 15 miles from there.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did she go to school?

MRS. KUBOTA: She went to the University of Southern California. Al is also from Southern California, and she met him down there.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What does he do?

MRS. KUBOTA: He does IBM work engineering. Right now he supervises.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Does your daughter work, too?

MRS. KUBOTA: No. Well, recently she took up kind of a part-time job,

and she is a pharmacist working in a hospital. Our younger daughter went to the California University in Fresno and majored in journalism. Right now she works for Sumitomo Bank, waiting for a job more in her line.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Does she work in Fresno?

MRS. KUBOTA: Right now she works in Fresno for Sumitomo Bank.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Does she live at home?

MRS. KUBOTA: She lives at home right now.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you remember anything about your childhood that might be of interest. How was school? What did you enjoy doing in school? Did you have any kind of feelings of prejudice or discrimination towards you?

MRS. KUBOTA: Well, it was really quite uneventful. But I know in high school we were treated quite well--the Japanese students were. There was no prejudice that I knew about. Even in those days it was well known that Japanese students were conscientious, so we were more popular and were elected to the student body.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you serve in some offices?

MRS. KUBOTA: Well, I was just secretary of the student body for several years. The activities were like Girls' Reserves and the Girls' Athletic Association. Typical high school organizations that we belonged to. As I recall, there was just myself and two other Japanese Nisei girls and two boys. It was a small high school that I attended.

MRS. HASEGAWA: There were just five Japanese?

MRS. KUBOTA: That was about average. In the graduating class, there was just myself and one other girl.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What year was it?

MRS. KUBOTA: That was in 1937. In Lindsay and the surrounding country there weren't that many Japanese farmers.

MRS. HASEGAWA: That sounds like a pretty peaceful kind of living.

MRS. KUBOTA: Yes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You were married when Pearl Harbor happened. So your experience was probably similar to your husband's. How did you feel about it?

MRS. KUBOTA: I knew it wasn't a good thing to be at war with Japan. Somehow the American friends I had were pretty good to me, and they didn't change that much. And their attitudes didn't change that much toward me. And Lindsay, being more or less a Christian town and there being a Christian church at the corner of each block. People didn't, I don't think, change that much toward us. Then, of course, the evacuation came along and that was a big change for us. But, like I say, my high school friends and the people that I knew, their attitudes didn't change.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were you a Christian? Did you go to a church?

MRS. KUBOTA: We didn't have a Buddhist Church in Lindsay. The closest one was in Visalia. So on Sunday, the bus would come around in the city of Lindsay from the Nazarene Church and I was going to the Nazarene Church for a while. We did not travel clear to Visalia.

MRS. HASEGAWA: My parents were so strict when I was growing up that we weren't allowed to go to dances. I just wondered how your family was, and whether you were allowed to go to the movies and to dances and things that occurred at the high school.

MRS. KUBOTA: Well, in those days the young people didn't do too much dancing. I remember we held a meeting one time and discussed social dancing, and there were some Issei members that were very much against that, but we had a girls' club Shojokai we called it, and at our meetings we had discussed some social dancing, if we wanted to learn, but it never materialized. Now, I went to the Prom and didn't do a lot of dancing, but the students were all friendly and I enjoyed it. I went to the Junior-Senior Banquet and to the Prom, and my folks weren't against that, high school activities.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was your daughter born in camp, or was it before you went to camp?

MRS. KUBOTA: Our daughter, our oldest daughter, was born in Lindsay, and she was three years old when we had to evacuate. She was just tiny, a small girl.

MRS. HASEGAWA: So she was born at the Lindsay Hospital?

MRS. KUBOTA: Yes. At the Lindsay Hospital. And my second daughter was born in Fresno.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were you active in the PTA after you came back from camp when your children--they grew up in the Fresno area, right?

MRS. KUBOTA: Our oldest daughter Masako started school, grammar school, in Lindsay. They had to hold her back a year because we didn't return to Lindsay from the relocation center until December, and she was just a little too late in enrolling. So they set her back a grade, but before the school year ended, they skipped her because she was progressing so rapidly. So she went through grammar school in Lindsay, and then we moved--my husband was in Fresno earlier so we lived separated for a little while. Then when my husband found a house in Fresno, then I came with my daughters to Fresno to be with my husband. But my older daughter went to school in Lindsay for a while, in grammar school.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were you involved with the children's activities?

MRS. KUBOTA: Well, I did join the PTA, and I went while we were in Lindsay, and then we moved to Fresno and my daughter was going to Emerson Grammar School, and I joined the PTA there and after a while I started to work at night.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where did you work?

MRS. KUBOTA: When I first came to Fresno, I worked for Berven Rug Mill in the office. The reason why I applied there was that I saw in the Fresno Bee in the "Help Wanted" column that Berven Rug Mills was specifying that they wanted Japanese office worker, so I felt I could go apply. So I started working there and after a year I asked my boss why he specified in particular that he wanted a Japanese office girl. Well, he had learned that most of the Japanese young people did very well in school, and he had been told by some that the students did very well, so he decided that he wanted to hire a Japanese girl, which made me feel very good.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Your second daughter was born in Fresno?

MRS. KUBOTA: Yes. Marlene Meiko. She was born here in Fresno in 1954. So there are almost 15 years between the two girls.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where are you working now?

MRS. KUBOTA: Right now I'm working for Valley Medical Center, and I have been there a long time.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How long have you worked there?

MRS. KUBOTA: We were transferred about three and a half years ago from Computer Services on Ventura. We were transferred to Valley Medical Center. This was all Fresno County.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How did you get this job?

MRS. KUBOTA: I quit working for Berven after 13 years. I quit that job because I wanted to try a civil service job. I passed the Civil Service test and tried the Hall of Records. The Fresno County Auditor-Controller wanted a keypuncher and when I went there they trained me on the keypunch machine where I applied, and they hired me. And that was the beginning of working for the county. From the County Auditor-Controller, they transferred a group of us out to Computer Services. Then from Computer Services they transferred a group of us to the Medical Center.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you like your job there?

MRS. KUBOTA: I'm enjoying it more now because right now I'm working on the night shift and there's a small crew working and there isn't the pressure that there is in the daytime. I enjoy that a lot.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I hear there is a lot of problem out at the Valley Medical Center now. Do you get any of it?

MRS. KUBOTA: Yes, we do. We don't get it in our department, but I read about it in the paper. Where the morale isn't too good, like in the Obstetrics Department. And in the cafeteria where the food is taken out by the employees. It doesn't involve our department.

MRS. HASEGAWA: In your present family life, have you retained any traditional Japanese customs?

MRS. KUBOTA: Years ago when I was growing up, we had New Year's celebration in our home. But right now, gradually, we found out that people aren't making the rounds for New Year's greetings and the New

Year's "gochiso" (feast), and so it's gradually died down. But I think that the traditions we keep is that when our daughter comes down we go to visit the graves of our family "ohakamairi." I know that in the Japanese tradition we honor the ones who have passed away. That's about it. As far as Oshogatsu (New Year's), we still make omochi (rice cakes).

MRS. HASEGAWA: Having gone through the war, the evacuation, and wartime experience, how do you feel about living in America?

MRS. KUBOTA: At this stage, I am settled to this way of life. When I first came back from relocation center, I didn't feel any prejudice, but I know of a friend whose daughter graduated from the College of the Sequoias. She went to apply for a job and they didn't hire her because she was Japanese. I know it was a shock to her, because she didn't know or think that prejudice existed. But when she was told they wouldn't hire her because she was Japanese, she was shocked.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was this right after she returned from camp?

MRS. KUBOTA: Well, it had to be several years later, because she went to college and after she had graduated from college, she went almost two years to college.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What year was that?

MRS. KUBOTA: She probably applied for the job about 1948. There still was that feeling several years after the war. War does bring all kinds of grievances.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How do you feel as a Japanese-American now, after almost 40 years since the war with Japan?

MRS. KUBOTA: More of a relaxed feeling now. I feel that it is because Japanese people have proven that we keep out of trouble and work hard, so it has been recognized.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Thank you very much for your interview.