

California State University  
Northridge - Ovaatt Library

"Japanese American Farmers' in the San Fernando Valley before and  
After WWII Oral History Project"

**YONEKO TAKIMOTO**

Oral History Interview

San Fernando Valley

CSUN, Department of Asian American Studies  
California State University, Northridge  
18111 Nordhoff Street  
Northridge, California 91330-8329

YONEKO TAKIMOTO

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION

Narrator: Mrs. YONEKO TAKIMOTO

Length of Interview: 40 minutes

Place: Mrs. Takimoto's Residence

Subject: Japanese American Farmers in the San Fernando Valley

## **INTERVIEW:**

[00] IN: Thank you for taking this time to help us with our project. We will be focusing on events prior to World War 2 and immediately after WW2. I would like to get a sense of what the San Fernando Valley was like while you were growing up there.

[00] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Well.. When I was growing up? It was really valley here. There were hardly any houses around; it was a surprise to me. I was living in west LA where there were houses all around and that part was not, it was very quiet.

[01] IN: Can you tell me, what it was like and how it has changed, the San Fernando valley?

[01] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: It has changed because when I came to see where I was living, it was all houses built in. I was really surprised how much development there was.

[01] IN: What were the demographics around here? Were there other Japanese American families living in your area who were your neighbors?

[01] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: We did not have a place to go when we came out. We had to stay at the Japanese school they had before they were in the camp. That school was rented out to the church and the church gave us a place to stay. We stayed in that Japanese school in San Fernando.

[02] IN: Were there other ethnic groups that lived there at that time besides Japanese American families?

[02] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: No, it was just the people that came out of the camp who were living there.

[02] IN: Do you know what occupations did they hold?

[02] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Where?

[02] IN: your neighbors in general

[02] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: After the war? They were all looking for jobs. My husband found a job in Venice doing tractor work over there.

[02] IN: I would like to know a little bit about how your parents ended up in the San Fernando Valley.

[02] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Well, before the war my parents moved here in the valley from west LA. We were all living together.

[03] IN: How did they decide to move to the San Fernando Valley?

[03] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I was married here. They wanted us to stay in the same camp with each other so we were living in the valley here.

[03] IN: When did they arrive in the San Fernando Valley?

[03] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: 1941. No not 1941. It must have been somewhere around January or February, they moved in with us because we went to camp in April.

[03] IN: What area did your family live in the San Fernando Valley? The cross streets?

[04] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: We lived together in a house in North Hollywood.

[04] IN: Do you remember the streets?

[04] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Coldwater and Victory. I remember the house number. The house is not there but I still can remember the number of that place.

[04] IN: Can you describe to me your farm?

[04] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: We had about 35 acres together between my brother in law and us. I don't know how many acres were used but we had quite a bit of farming area. We were growing onions and carrots and things like that mostly.

[04] IN; Can you describe what your house looked like?

[04] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: It was a regular house. I guess you might call it, it had a bedroom, bathroom , kitchen, living room and things like that. But the bath was way out in the shed because we had to make our own bath out there with firewood. We made hot water so we could take a bath in it, old fashioned.

[05] IN: What does the area consist of today?

[05] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Much different from the time we were farming there. Nothing but track homes around that area now.

[05] IN: How did your parents become farmers?

[05] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: My dad was working doing farming, he did gardening. My mother worked for people around the neighborhood, farming work, bunching onions and carrots.

[05] IN: What was their previous farming experiences, if any?

[05] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: They had no experience at all. We were all city people.

[06] IN: What kinds of crops did they grow on your farm?

[06] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Carrots, onions, turnips, cabbages and things like that. Mostly bunching things anyway. Yeah, all those vegetables.

[06] IN: Is there any particular memory about the crops that you have?

[06] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I was from the city so I didn't know how the vegetables would grow. I was out there every day growing; it's very interesting for me to watch them grow. Most people think I am crazy but to me it was something new that I enjoyed watching.

[07] IN: Can you tell me your father's daily routine on the farm?

[07] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I was out there working on the farm like everybody else learning to bunch things.

[07] IN: With your father?

[07] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: My father didn't do much of anything out there because he was a gardener, he doesn't do much farming work. He does gardening. I never saw him do work out in the field. My mother did but not my dad.

[07] IN: Can you tell me more about your mother's daily routine?

[07] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: She gets up in the morning and goes to work. Somebody must take her to work because she goes out somewhere else to do the work. She doesn't work for us, she works for some other people.

[07] IN: If your parents worked long hours, how was their relationship? How were your mother and father's relationship?

[08] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: They never had any problems. We always enjoyed life together. I don't think I ever saw my parents not enjoying themselves. We always used to talk to each other. Just regular family life.

[08] IN: Did your mother work outside of home?

[08] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Yes. She worked all over. All type of farming work. Before the war, my parents were in west LA, my mother had a little nursery where landscape people would come and pickup plants to use it as a landscape thing. That's what she was growing before the war.

[09] IN: Was the pay of your parents sufficient enough to make a living?

[09] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I don't know much about their finances. I don't think it's my place to put my--- I never thought about it when I was young.

[09] IN: Who was responsible for the household duties and taking care of your brothers and sisters?

[09]YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Most of the time, I was responsible because my parents were working.

[09] IN: Did your parents ever hire anyone to work on the farm?

[09] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: My parents never had a farm. It was my husband's. When I got married, I married a farmer. It's not my parents at all. My parents were from West LA, so they only did gardening work and my mother had a nursery before the war.

[10] IN: did you ever hire anyone to work on the farm?

[10] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: We had Mexican people working for us. Family people.

[10] IN: Did they live on the farm?

[10] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: No, they lived in their own home.

[10] IN: Regarding decisions in your family, who made the decisions regarding property, moving?

[10] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: My husband did. Most of the time I had no idea. I did whatever he said, I went along with it.

[10] IN: Did you and your parents ever participate in any kind of strikes?

[10]YONEKO TAKIMOTO: No. Never heard about that.

[11] IN: Going back to your parents and your family, what kind of hardships did they face?

[11] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: raising six kids is rough for parents. They both had work, that's the reason why I became a schoolgirl and worked in the house. Living with another family to support myself to graduate high school because I knew my parents could not afford it. I had to work myself to graduate high school.

[11] IN: IS there one memory of your parents you would like to share with us? Anything that stands out?

[11] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: one thing that stands out is that my dad used to be a baseball player. We used to travel from San Diego to Fresno. That was the most interesting thing for us. Our whole family would go from one place to other while my dad was playing baseball when he was young.

[12] IN: What team did he play for?

[12] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I don't know. I was too young to know and I wasn't that interested in baseball at that time.

[12] IN: Was it semi-professional, professional?

[12] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: it must have been some kind of league thing that travels around as a group. That's why we were travelling.

[12] Was it within Southern California?

[12] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: yeah.

[12] IN: You never travelled to other states?

[12] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: No, no.

[12] IN: Now, I would like to know more about you. What was it like growing up around a farm?

[12] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Well, farming life is very short life because I got married in 1941 and then we were in camp in 1942, we were put in camp. It was a very short time farming time I had in the valley. I had one child before we were in camp. My life was very short; with me being pregnant you cannot do too much work.

[13] IN: At what age did you begin to work? Do you remember?

[13] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Before the war? I didn't work at all before the war because right after I got out of high school, I got married.

[13] IN: Do you have any specific chores around the house or specific responsibilities?

[13] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I used to do the cooking for everybody. That's the only real thing that I would do, cooking for my whole family.

[14] IN: Do you feel that your brothers and sisters were treated equally by your parents?

[14] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I think so, we all working together. We were very much close by each other.

[14] IN: you told me earlier that you are the oldest. Did you see yourself play a specific role?

[14] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Not exactly. Just that...The routine thing that I was taught to do around the house so my parents could be relieved so they don't have to work their time into it because I had it all done.

[14] IN: Did your family want you to grow up and take over a farm?

[14] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: No. I don't think they ever wanted me to take over a farm. No, I don't think so, we tried after the war but it did not work out.

[15] IN: Was farming life different from the Japanese Americans than it was for others living in the area?

[15] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I don't think so. All Japanese people were farmers at that time. I dint think anything about that at all.

[15] IN: Do you remember any specific techniques on the farm that you used to make farming easier?

[15] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: (Laughter) They all used the same thing. They used tractors to grate up the ground. They used mules to straighten up the lines, they did a beautiful job.

[16] IN: Did you own land or lease the land?

[16] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Leased the land. When we left, we just left it as it was.

[16] IN: When the crops were grown and bunched up together, how was it selling the crops to markets?

[16] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: We had to take it ourselves to the market every night after we finished working on the farm. We washed the vegetables and then we used to get ready and take it down to the market. We took it down to the 9<sup>th</sup> Street market.

[16] IN: How was the relationship with business people down there?

[17] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I didn't go. My husband did all the travelling. I knew where they were going to drop off the vegetables. Sometimes they had somebody else come and pick it up when they had that much vegetable to send out to the market.

[17] IN: Were there other people living in the house besides your parents and brothers and sisters?

[17] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Our land was used by another family. They brought the house and put it in our land. They moved in right next to us. They were able to do that before the war, to bring in houses and put it in someone else's yard.

[18] IN: Within the family, did your parents try to install Japanese traditional customs and values within the household?

[18] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Not much. My dad was very understandable about the United States. When we were small, my parents didn't want us to talk Japanese. They said you were born here, talk English. We were all taught English instead of Japanese. Even now, I don't know much Japanese because we didn't use the language at home.

[18] IN: How did you react to that when you were told to speak English because you were in America?

[18] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: That was natural because when we went to school we were able to understand everybody else that's talking because we didn't talk Japanese. When we were very young my parents taught us to speak English. He was very good in English.

[19] IN: Do you remember your family members getting sick at any time and who took care of your brothers and sisters when they were sick.

[19] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: The only one that really got sick was my sister. She was the only one that really got sick when we were living in some store on the cement floor, we slept there. She got this asthma attack and was very sick. She almost died on us but she lived until she was old. She really scared all of us. My dad took care of us somehow. She was special to all of us because she got so sick that we thought we were going to lose her.

[20] IN: How was the medical care around you like the hospitals?

[20] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: We were a very luck family that nobody went to the hospital. None of us kids were in the hospital except me. I was the only one that caused a lot of money expense for our family.

[20] IN: When your parents didn't work, what kind of activities did you and your family do?

[20] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: On their off days.. I don't exactly remember. I know we were having fun, I really cant remember. The only thing I remember was when my dad was playing baseball, we followed him around. Other than that, I don't remember any activity or other things around.

[21] IN: Did your family ever celebrate holidays or special occasions such as birthdays and anniversaries?

[21] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: The only one we really celebrated was New Year 's Day.

[21] IN: How was that like?

[21] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: it was a very busy time for us because my dad was very Japanese idea in his mind about what we should eat. We had almost a month supply for that New Year's thing. I don't know what it was but it was pretty good things on the table to serve us.

[22] IN: When your parents didn't work, were there any other activities to picnics or anything?

[22] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Oh yeah. We always used to go to picnics. That's one thing my parents liked to do, take us on picnics.

[22] IN: Did you have any family vacations at all?

[22] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: yes, we did have family vacations. We went to Yosemite and camped out there and things like that. My dad really used to take us when we were young.

[23] IN; Now, we are going to talk about social relations within school. Can you tell me a little bit about your school experiences?

[23] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I wasn't very much active except sports were my favorite...I used to like basketball, hockey, mostly those were my favorite sports that I enjoyed playing. I loved to hit the ball on the knee but I was terrible.

[23] IN: Were you part of any sports teams?

[23] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I was in special gym class. I wasn't interested in sports then, but then I had this Buddhist church and they had a basketball team. I enjoyed going around and playing there.

[24] IN: As far as your friends go, what were their ethnicities, were they different?

[24] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: My friends that I had died early age so I never get to see them as much I wanted to see them. The only one that is left now is used to know ever since I was born in downtown. The funny thing is from there I met them and they live in the valley here. She is the only one of the old friends that I have.

[24] IN: Did you ever meet their parents?

[25] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: No, I haven't met their parents. When we were young I met them but not after the War.

[25] IN: During high school and grade school were there a lot of fellow Japanese Americans?

[25] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: No, there wasn't during the time I was growing up.

[25] IN: Did people treat you differently because you were Japanese?

[25] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: No, they didn't. Not that I know of. We all get along.

[25] IN: Did you ever attend a Japanese school growing up?

[25] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: When I was growing up, I went for a little while in west LA to a Japanese school there, for a little while, but I didn't learn much of anything.

[26] IN: Did you like it?

[26] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I liked the school, yes, but my parents could not afford to send six of us kids to school so I dropped out.

[26] IN: Were you involved in any community activities?

[26] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: No, that happened after the War. Yes, there is a community center here and I was a woman's club president for five years. Just before they weren't going to have any more women's clubs so I gave my stuff to the athletic clubs so they could take over. That's what I did. We did have a women's club. They don't remember those days, but I do, it was fun in a way.

[27] IN: is there any particular memory about the women's club that you want to share?

[27] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: We enjoyed doing things together. We do the meat and things like that. We do it all together. Everybody did it, we all helped each other. We had fun.

[27] IN: You said you were married in 1942, correct?

[27] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: No. 1941

[27] IN: Can you tell me a little bit about dating before you were married?

[28] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I was over at my friend's house, that's where I met him. I want you to marry this man. Things like that were going on in those days so I didn't know much about what I was supposed to do. All I said was yes and that was it. There were ways to get married, I don't know much about how they do things but my husband must have talked to the family and we got married that way.

[28] IN: Did you ever date anyone outside your ethnicity?

[28] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I never dated nobody because I just got out of high school and we got engaged in March and we were married in April. I didn't have much time since high school, I didn't have time to enjoy myself either.

[29] IN: Can you tell us about your first date with your husband?

[29] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: He was Kibei and I was an American citizen so the relation was a little different. It's not like you were getting along together. You feel odd. I don't know to the other people.

[29] IN: Can you describe to me your wedding?

[29] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: It was a big wedding. We had 250 people. It was all farmers and things. We had a wedding at the church and then we had a reception in Japanese town. It was a pretty big wedding.

[30] IN: Was there any particular memory that stood out about your wedding?

[30] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I was too excited, I don't remember too much about that day. The only thing is I had to work on the farm the next day, that's all I remember. No honeymoon, we didn't do anything like that.

[30] IN: After your wedding, what was your first job?

[30] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Yeah, work outside.

[30] IN: What types of jobs were you able to take before the war besides farming?

[30] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I could not do anything. I got out of high school and married so soon that I didn't even have time to take a day off to go around and look for a job. I did try to go to a trading school but I didn't even have time to do that because... I don't know, I just didn't have much time left.

[31] IN: Shortly after your wedding you said you were sent to camp. Can you tell me what the social climate was like back then during internment?

[31] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Well... I just got married and all my wedding gifts that I had got, I had to break them all up because I didn't want to leave them for somebody else. I told my sister if she wanted anything she could have it, so she took some things before I broke them because those Japanese things were expensive. Right now they would have been a fortune. I used to break all my things and went to camp with nothing; just my kid and my husband and we went to camp.

[32] IN: Do you remember Pearl Harbor Day?

[32] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Yes, I sure do. I had a labor pain that December 7 at 8:00 in the morning. I was on my way to the hospital. I remember that day because I was in labor. But my daughter wasn't born that day, they gave me sleeping pills and put me to sleep because it was too early to be born. It was supposed to be born in the end of January or February, she was born in December, two weeks later.

[33] IN: After hearing the horrible news, how did you and your family react?

[33] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: First the doctor said, don't worry. We went home and we didn't worry about it for a while. My husband was taking a while because he was a candle instructor. They thought he had something to do with this war, so they took him in. he came home that night. It was a funny feeling to go to somebody in the family taken away for a while.

[33] IN: What kind of impact did it have on your family?

[33] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I don't know what to call it. It was scary. You didn't want to go out any places anymore. I was still young yet.

[33] IN: Did any of your parents or family members get taken away prior to internment?

[33] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: NO.

[34] IN: Before you were sent to internment, what did your family do with all the property and belongings?

[34] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: The house wasn't ours at all; we leased the land So it was nothing to do with that but the rest things like.....my husband bought a new car that year before the war started. It was just before the war so he had to send it back to the company because there was no use keeping it because we had to go into camp.

[34] IN: What about the farm equipment?

[34] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: We just left it as it is. We could do nothing. They didn't give us much time to sell the engine so we just left it there. I don't know if he sold it or not, I don't know. He does most of the talking. I was getting things done around the house. I have no idea if he sold it or not.

[35] IN: With family photography, what did your family do with photos?

[35] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: I don't think we have any pictures taken of any sort. I don't see any pictures around the house that I know of because I haven't seen any yet. I don't have a camera. I don't think we have any camera in the house. All we had was a radio.

[35] IN: what things did your family decide to take to the relocation center? Or did they?

[35] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: No, we were only allowed to take our clothes, that are it.

[35] IN: Was there anything you wanted to take but couldn't?

[36] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Well, there was no place to put it anyway to take it, so I didn't even think about it. We were still had our family together. We were all together. My parents were with us. In the barracks, we were al together.

[36] IN: Which internment location did your family go to?

[36] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: We went to Manzanar. My folks went to Tule Lake later on. They said if you want to go to Japan, you can go to Tule Lake and from there you can go to Japan, so they went there.

[36] IN: Do you remember any Japanese Americans that didn't have to go to camp?

[36] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Most of us stayed in the barracks. My parents wanted to go so they went.

[37] IN: I would like to know more about life after internment. Was any of your family members released before internment?

[37] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: No, we were all there until they told us we could get out.

[37] IN: Where did you and your family go after internment?

[37] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: We came here to the San Fernando Valley.

[37] IN: Did you return back to your old farm?

[37] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: No, we lived in four family building that we were able to find right there in San Fernando. We lived in one whole area in the bottom floor. It was a Chinese restaurant before the war.

[38] IN: What did your parents do for work after internment?

[38] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: My dad went back to gardening work, my husband still stayed with farming type of work. We went to Venice to do tractor work and things like that. He was working towards the Venice way. In the valley, there wasn't much work for him to do. Later on he became a construction worker, and that construction like cement, went on a strike So he had to take another job. He worked in the cabinet side and I worked on organ and TV side. We both worked together.

[39] IN: After interment was there any obstacles you had to face?

[39] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: We had to get used to starting all over again, but other than that, no. Everything worked out alright.

[39] IN: We are going to wrap up, is there any one memory of growing up in the Valley that is the most important to you?

[39] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: Most important to me?

[39] IN: Or any memory of the valley that you want to share before we go?

[40] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: The only memory is my granddaughter that I have was disabled all her life until she passed away. We all share together in the family. She was in the hospital and she would have dies in that year. She brought us lot of good memories by takin care of her. For 17 years we had her. She had to be fed through tube and then change her diapers and clean her mouth out and things like that. We enjoyed taking care of her. That was the

most important thing to us. She died on April fool's day that was yesterday. It was her anniversary yesterday. You can't forget that.

[40] IN: Thank You. Is there anything that you want to talk about that we haven't covered today?

[40] YONEKO TAKIMOTO: No, I think I covered everything. I appreciate it. Thank you.

[40] IN: Thank You for your time. We appreciate everything.

**END OF INTERVIEW**