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**“TELLING OUR STORIES:
Japanese Americans in the San Fernando Valley Oral History Project”**

Transcript of

**FRANK EMI
Oral History Interview**

8 November 2004

Interview conducted by

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Murase Ikeda
Peter Ngotngamwong

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PROVENANCE

This oral history was conducted by Amy Emiko Murase Ikeda and Peter Ngotngamwong on November 8, 2004 at Frank Emi's residence at 1104 Prospect Avenue, San Gabriel, CA, 91776. Frank Emi was interviewed about the Japanese Americans in the San Fernando Valley before and after World War II. The original transcript was prepared by Amy Emiko Murase Ikeda. It was a part of an Asian American Studies 390 Field Practicum class with Professor Edith Wen-Chu Chen. Editing of the transcript for transfer to the Urban Archives Center was completed in January 2006, while revisions were made by Dan Calderon in December 2007 for the History 505 Practicum.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

This interview documents Mr. Emi's unique life stories of struggle and determination, as well as attest to the similar experiences of many other Japanese American *Issei* and *Nisei*, who lived in the San Fernando Valley prior to WWII. The interview focuses on three focal points, growing up in the Valley prior to the war, resisting the draft while interned, and life after camp. Frank Emi was born in 1916 in Los Angeles, in what use to be the Business Valley near 6th and Grand. His family started out in the retail grocery business, and while Mr. Emi was very young, they moved to Burbank, and then later to San Fernando. He recalled that one of his earliest recollections was riding a horse and wagon from Burbank to San Fernando when he was about three or four-years-old. Mr. Emi attended school in the Valley from grammar school up to his junior year in high school. Growing up he was faced with a lot of racism. Mr. Emi recalled getting in a lot of fights at a predominately White middle school because the children would tease him for being Japanese. He also relayed the story of when he was around 12-years-old and his scout troop went swimming at the San

Fernando Plunge, but he was not allowed to swim because he was the only non-White in the troop. In addition to public school Mr. Emi attended Japanese language school and spoke Japanese at home. A rambunctious boy, Mr. Emi claimed that he didn't do so well in school and was stubborn. His parents were strict and worked very hard on the farm. Often his older sister had to assist in taking care of him and his younger siblings. Mr. Emi shared that leisure time was sparse and it was rare to see his parents relaxing and socializing with the children.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked Mr. Emi remembers thinking initially that it was just another radio play. Mr. Emi and his family were interned at Heart Mountain in Wyoming. Although he was not subject to the draft because he was married and had two children, Mr. Emi still stood up as a leader in resistance to the draft. He believed that it was wrong for young men to have to fight and put their lives at stake for a country who had taken away all their constitutional rights. Mr. Emi spent 15 months in prison as a leader of the draft resistance known as the Fair Play Committee. After the war Mr. Emi and his family were somewhat fortunate to return to homes that they had rented out before the war, as their management company had taken care of the homes while the family was in camp. After camp, Mr. Emi visited the market that his family had owned before the war and found that it had changed hands. The new owners had bought the business for a 100 thousand dollars and Mr. Emi's family had sold it for 15 thousand when they were forced to go to camp.

Frank Emi's story tells of a rambunctious boy growing up on his family's farm in San Fernando Valley, who grew up to be an activist who stands up against injustices. Although his life story was often shaped by racial prejudice and injustice, Mr. Emi said, "But we also came across people who were not so nice. But in general I remember the nice people."

RELATED COLLECTIONS & SOURCES

RELATED UAC COLLECTIONS

Related collections in the Urban Archives Center include:

- Young Women's Christian Association of Los Angeles
- Dr. Mary Oda Oral History
- Reverend Wendell L. Miller Collection and Oral History

RELATED RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS & COLLECTIONS

- Clara Breed Collection, 1942 1945. Museum Collections Online, Hirasaki National Resource Center, Japanese American National Museum, 369 East First St. Los Angeles CA 90012. <http://www.janm.org/>
- Online Archive of the Japanese American Relocation During World War II. Mary Norton Clapp Library, Special Collections Department, Occidental College, 1600 Campus Rd. Los Angeles CA 90041-3314. <http://departments.oxy.edu/library/>

SECONDARY SOURCES:

Articles, books and related secondary sources available in CSUN's Oviatt Library include:

- *Regenerations Oral History Project: Rebuilding Japanese American Families, Communities, and Civil Rights in the Resettlement Era, Volume 2*. Los Angeles: Japanese American National Museum, 2000. [E184.J3 R44 2000 v.2]
 - Sakata, Yasuo. *Fading Footsteps of the Issei: An Annotated Checklist of the Manuscript Holdings of the Japanese American Research Project Collection*. Los Angeles: Japanese American National Museum, 1992. [Z1361.J2 S35 1992]
 - Hayashi, Brian Masaru. *For The Sake of our Japanese Brethren: Assimilation, Nationalism, and Protestantism Among the Japanese of Los Angeles, 1895-1942*. Stanford, CA: University of Stanford Press, 1995. [F869.L89 J32 1995]
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INTERVIEW NOTE

Interviewee: Frank Emi (FE)
Interviewers: Amy Ikeda (AI) and Peter Ngotngamwong (PN)
Date: November 8, 2004
Time: 1:03:27

Subject: Japanese Americans in the San Fernando Valley from the 1910s to 1950s.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

0:16

PN: This is an interview with Mr. Frank Emi. On November 8, 2004 1:50pm. We are at Mr. Emi's residence. This interview is being conducted by Amy Ikeda and Peter Ngotngamwong. We are interviewing Japanese Americans who grew up in the San Fernando Valley from between the 1910 to 1950s. Okay Mr. Emi we would like to get started. Could you give some background information on yourself, where you were born, and how you ended up in the San Fernando Valley.

0:43

FE: Yeah, I was born in Los Angeles. What used to be the business valley near 6th and Grand. And from there at that time my parents were in a little retail grocery business there. From there we moved out toward Figueroa and Manchester which was all farmland at that time and they were farming there for a few years. And then we moved to Burbank, California and then we farmed there for a few years. I don't know exactly how many. From there we moved to San Fernando and I still remember riding on a horse and wagon to go from Burbank to San Fernando. I think that is my earliest relocation. I don't know how old I was there of course our family got into farming and we farmed there and I was going to San Fernando grammar school. And from about the 4th grade we moved from one section of San Valley to another, and I ended up going to Ol' Melvany grammar school. San Fernando Valley grammar school was predominately Latino and Ol' Melvany was predominately Whites. I remember getting into a lot of fights at that Ol' Melvany school.

2:35

PN: Really fist fights? Like a lot of fist fights?

2:39

FE: Yeah.

2:40

PN: The Ol' Melvany school that was the Caucasian?

2:43

FE: Caucasian school.

2:45

PN: Why were there a lot of fights?

2:49

FE: Well, they liked to pick on the minority. I guess because there was so few of us there. I think I and my brother were the only ones there.

3:04

PN: Did you experience a lot of the fights at the other school, at the Latino dominated school?

3:11

FE: No hardly any at the Latino school.

3:14

PN: Do you think that is because, why do you think that was?

3:18

FE: Probably because they were less prejudiced against the Asians, being themselves being minorities. Whereas Ol'Melvany was almost strictly almost 100 percent Whites. There was a lot of discrimination during that period. In fact, giving an example, when I was in the Boy Scouts, when I was about 11 or 12 years old, I guess. Our whole troop went swimming to the San Fernando Plunge and they wouldn't let me in because I was the only non-White in that troop. So I sat on the bench, watching my fellow scouts swim. And that sort of ingrained a lot of hatred in

me, I guess for discriminatory things. Then once we, my parents farmed their till about 1938 or 9. Then my family started a fruit stand business in the market at the center of town right at the corner of San Fernando Road and McClay.

4:56

PN: Oh I think that is Sylmar now?

4:58

FE: No, that is right in the heart of San Fernando itself. City of San Fernando. There was large persimmons grocery store there. And we operated the vegetable portion of it, the fruit and vegetable portion of it. In fact that was the first open air fruit stand in San Fernando Valley and the family did very well there, much better than farming. We were there until about, that's when I was going to high school, it was called San Fernando High School at the time. And I remember I was on the football team there. I had a lot of fun playing football. Made my letter two years there. And we were there until about 1932. Then business got slow so we sold the store. My parents sold the store and we moved to Long Beach and by that time we entered Long Beach I was in 11th grade. Went to Long Beach Polytech High School. There was one instance that really remains fresh in my mind, was when I Was out with the football team. And we were having practice outside called scrimmage. You know what scrimmage is? When you actually play hard. One of the Japanese boys that was scrimmaging had lost his, had his helmet knocked off, so as they were playing, the assistant coach sitting next to the coach, Coach Detrick, said "Coach, maybe better stop scrimmage and let Joe get his helmet back on, he might get hurt." I still remember the coach say "oh it's ok if he gets killed, it'll just be another dead Jap."

6:55

AI: [Gasp]

6:56

FE: Oh yeah, I still remember this clear as day. I was so angry but at the time you don't talk back to teachers or coaches or anything like that. It just burned me up. But that was the type of thing that went on, anytime you got into an argument, anyone would say "You damn Jap." That was the typical response. That is what made you get into a lot of fights.

7:25

PN: Did you have a lot of Japanese friends in Long Beach?

7:29

FE: Yeah, they had a Japanese club in school. In fact one of the stars of the football team was Joe Takahashi, he was a really good player. Fast, very fast. Any way, I graduated from there in 1934 and went to Long Beach City College. At the time it was called Long Beach Junior College. I was there for a while and then we moved back to Los Angeles. My father started a produce market in Los Angeles retail market and I went to Los Angeles Junior College. During that period he got into a very serious auto accident, someone just broadsided him, he got hurt pretty bad. So I dropped out of school and took over running the market. Then once this was over by Melrose, right near LA City College now. Then he sold the place and we opened up a store over Limerton and Alvarado in Los Angeles. We started with a, just a produce department then we gradually expanded it to a gourmet, regular full grocery market. Meat department, we hired a butcher to run meat department. That's where we were when World War II started. I still remember turning on the radio Sunday morning. We opened 7 days a week, worked like horses. Opened up the radio, heard the announcer say, "we have been attacked by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor, we are at war." I thought, hold on, this must be another radio play. Have you ever heard of that Orson Wells "The War of the Worlds?" It was so realistic, people running all over, getting their guns ready to fight the Martians. Well I thought it was one of those radio plays, so I didn't pay much attention to it. Then as the day went on, all the stations are saying the same thing, so I thought I guess we are at war. Which didn't surprise me too much because at that period during that period there was a lot of news about Japan and all that. In fact, two three weeks before that Secretary of Navy Knox, I still remember the headline said, "If we got to war with Japan we will knock out their fleet in two weeks." So that's the mentality they had, so it didn't surprise me. But any ways, going ahead with story, February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which said we all had to be evacuated from Los Angeles. We had to sell our store and prospective buyers had the silver barrel, they knew we either had to sell it for what we could get, or just abandon it. So we had about 25,00 invested by that time. Which then was a big sum because milk was selling for 10 cents a quart, bread was 10 cents a loaf, potatoes a penny a pound so 25,000 bucks was a lot of money for us. We eventually sold it for 1500 dollars. The irony part is that after war, and we came back from camp, I visited that store and found that it had changed hands and the people who had bought it paid nearly a hundred thousand dollars for that business. That's why you can see how much the community, Japanese American community lost in that period. Because for us it was very small potatoes compared to what the big farmers lost, they lost millions, they had harvest ready to harvest and leave it or sell it for pennies on the dollars. And people in big business lost the lost, millions, lost. So this is an economic angle, were we not only lost all our right as citizens but lost economically cleaned us out. Of course well, we are getting away from the San Fernando Valley story.

12:52

PN: Its okay we will come back to that.

12:55

AI: That's very interesting.

12:56

PN: Going back to the San Fernando story, when you, when your family made the transition from farming into the fruit stand, San Fernando and McClay, where did you get the produce from?

13:08

FE: My father used to drive all the way to Los Angeles, 7th and Central where they had the wholesale market. Used to go there every morning, used to leave about 2 o'clock in the morning, drive over there and come back. I remember as a kid I don't remember how old I was, maybe 12, 11, 12 years old I used to ride with him sometimes, that early in the morning. Cause I was driving a truck, driving cars, since I was about 7 or 8 on the farm.

13:40

AI/ PN: Oh wow! [laughter]

13:41

FE: Yeah.

13:48

PN: What was your typical day on the farm like growing up? When did you start working on the farm or did you always help out?

13:49

FE: I think we always, as far back as I can remember I would help maybe wash the rice and get it ready for cooking you know and things like that. And go out to the farm and maybe help take the worms of the tomato plant, you know those big green worms. Get a penny a piece. Didn't really work to hard. Did what we could. But I remember our parents worked like a horse. My mother and older sister, she was born in Japan. She was twelve when she came here.

14:35

PN: Your mother was?

14:39

FE: No my older sister. And they were always out on the farm working you know. Everyday. And some my things I remember like, when we were harvesting corn or tomatoes, things like that they would have kerosene lanterns under the shed you know open air shed you know. We would be packing these things in boxes till 8 or 9 o'clock at night.

15:06

PN: What was typical day for your mother as far as. Did she have to raise the children and work the farm as well? What was her life like?

15:18

FE: It was a pretty strenuous life for all the farmers. I think and the most of the people were farmers, Japanese were farmers in San Fernando. There was only one small Japanese grocery store, they specialize in Japanese food mostly, catered to Japanese people that lived around there. Otherwise they weren't in any other business. Most of the farmers and our family was the first one that started this big market in the center of San Fernando.

15:57

PN: Where would your family get the other goods, like clothes?

16:02

FE: By the regular retail clothing stores in San Fernando.

16:12

PN: What were the neighbors like?

16:17

FE: Well, you know when you're farming, your neighbors are not too close by. The first one we had I still remember, we had a had a neighbor that in the city of LA was about 10 blocks always. He was a big Caucasian man. Looked like a cowboy type. Very gruff but very kind. Nice gentleman, he was very nice to us. And then there was a real estate broker that got us this farm, that we could rent. I still remember his

name, Mr. Pumplin. He was a very nice gentleman. But we also came across people that were not so nice. But in general I remember the nice people.

17:25

PN: The neighbors, your neighbors 10 blocks away, did he have any children that you played with?

17:32

FE: He didn't he was a bachelor.

17:36

PN: Did you have any friends outside of school?

17:43

FE: Did, I? Yes. There was one little boy that used to play with me, his name was Paul Bently. He lived maybe several blocks away, of course, when you say blocks in those days, it was like a long distance. He used to call me boy, boy. Never by name. And I would call him boy this. Thought maybe I couldn't pronounce Paul.

18:20

PN: Your siblings, did they have a big part in farm work?

18:25

FE: Not very much, because I was the oldest and even then I was 8, as far back as I can remember I was 6,7, or 8.

18:40

PN: What were your responsibilities as the oldest sibling, as the oldest son?

18:46

FE: I can't remember any particular responsibility. My older sister would more or less take care of us.

18:58

PN: Was she the mother figure because your mother was really busy?

19:05

FE: Yes. She was 12 years older than me.

19:13

PN: What kind of crops did you family grow?

19:16

FE: We grew quite a number of crops, tomatoes, cantaloupes, corn, rhubarb, not cauliflower, we didn't go much into truck farming, but watermelon, cucumbers, mostly that type of vegetables.

19:46

PN: And it was mostly you family working the farm?

19:48

FE: Our family hired Mexican and also Filipino workers. We had a little trailer house that some of the workers would live in.

20:07

PN: How did you find Filipino and Mexican workers?

20:10

FE: There was a huge Mexican town in San Fernando. In fact the Japanese school use to be right in the middle of Mexican town. By the time we started the store. When we lived in town, our neighbors were all Latinos, we didn't call them Latinos, we called them Mexicans they were all Mexicans. All of our friends and playmates were Mexicans.

20:53

PN: How were your relations together? Did they, going back to junior high and grammar school days? Was there tension between Mexicans and Japanese groups? Everyone get along?

21:07

FE: No, everyone got along.

21:15

PN: Were your parents allowed to own the land they farmed?

21:18

FE: No they had to rent it, they couldn't lease it. They had to rent it. See there was discriminatory laws against buying and leasing, so all they did was rent.

21:46

PN: Did the Mexicans own land? The that they farmed?

21:51

FE: Not that I know of. We didn't know of any Mexican farmers, the only contact was through laborers.

22:03

PN: As far as traditional Japanese customs and values did your parents instill any of those in you or your siblings?

22:10

FE: To a certain extent. We certainly we're Americanized in that respect. They taught us ethics, always be quiet, never steal, never do anything to shame the family. I think they instilled that into the children, I think that was a common thing. Don't bring shame to the family, *haji*. You know, I guess that is what kept even guys like me from getting too rambunctious

23:02

PN: As far as on the farm, you were very isolated, were you isolated?

23:07

FE: Yeah, kind of isolated because I guess nearest right in San Fernando we had to Probably drive a good 5, 6 miles to nearest Japanese neighbor.

23:20

PN: How would it work out if a family member was sick and needed care?

23:38

FE: I don't think there was too much interaction between families in that respect. I

remember that my mother got sick, dad used to take her to Burbank, we had a nice Caucasian doctor, very kind, very able. Use would take her over there.

24:03

PN: As far as medicine, you got medicine from doctor?

24:10

FE: Yeah, I don't remember too clearly but I would imagine they would go to drugstore or get it directly from the doctor in those days.

24:26

PN: When your younger siblings were born, how soon, did your mom go back to work?

24:37

FE: I really don't remember, here is an instance I do remember. My mother had a stillborn. Before my youngest daughter was born and what cause that the doctor said was that she was out one day trying to scare the birds away from the crops, you know? Lettuce crops or something. She took a shotgun and fired to scare them, boom. That shock, that recoil, knocked her down, sat her on her back, you know, real bad. And that shock hurt the baby inside. It was stillborn.

25:31

AI: Did your family ever plan to move back to Japan initially? Or when they moved here did they plan to move here forever?

25:38

FE: I remember they were thinking about going back to Japan for a visit as soon as I graduated high school. They said lets wait until my youngest brother finishes high school and then lets go and I remember them buying suitcases and things getting ready and that after he graduates they said, maybe we'll wait until my sister graduates. As it turns out they never went back to Japan, even for a visit.

26:06

AI: But they came here to live here, it wasn't just for...

26:08

FE: Well, I think in the back of their mind maybe at one time or another they felt like

they might go back to Japan, because here they could not become citizens and they were decimated against and once they figured they had enough money to live in Japan I think that was on the mind of most *Issei*. I think they were so unwanted here, they wanted to go back, but hardly any of them went back.

26:46

AI: Did you ever feel pressure as a *Nisei* to fulfill certain things that you family couldn't because you were a citizen and your parents weren't?

26:56

FE: No I never felt that pressured, only thing is that they stressed education.

27:06

AI: What was the...

27:10

FE: Oh, and I was not a particularly good student.

27:17

AI: Was there anything you remember fighting with your parents about?

27:26

FE: Not really, because growing up I was pretty recalcitrant. I did not like to mind my parents very much. I think I got scolded quite a bit more than my brother or sisters. I was always more on the rebel side.

27:54

AI: Can you give me an example of thing you got in trouble for?

27:57

FE: I think as a kid I would pick on my brothers, I would get scolded for that, my father would be pretty rough on me sometimes.

28:19

AI: Would he scold your sisters the same that he scold you? Or do you think the boys...

28:30

FE: Well, my older sister was kind of stubborn and I remember, he would get very angry at her sometimes. My younger sister probably did not feel any of Dad's wrath, but my brother, he would probably get some of it, but we were all strictly treated.

29:03

AI: **Was your younger sister pretty well behaved, or were your parents getting older...**

29:07

FE: Well I guess she was pretty well behaved and not stubborn, or wouldn't talk back like I did or my older sister did.

29:20

AI: **How did your parents feel about you speaking Japanese?**

29:27

FE: Well they sent me to Japanese school in fact, my brother too. We were sent to Japanese school and they wanted us to learn about culture too, and especially language. Which I didn't do too well in. I went to Japanese school to play marbles and play mostly. I should have studied a little more Japanese I think.

29:57

AI: **At home did you speak Japanese?**

29:58

FE: At home, yes. That's why our parents, especially my mother, never did learn too much English, even if she was here almost 50 years. My dad spoke pretty good, it was broken English, but you know, it's amazing, these *Issei* parents that spoke broken English sometimes their point was put across much more strongly than the *Niseis* with their nice smooth English.

30:36

AI: **Was there anything that embarrassed you about your parents when you were younger, but then as you got older, you felt differently about?**

30:44

FE: No, I never felt that. Another thing that I never felt that some *Nisei* said, gee they wish they were White. They were angry because they were Japanese. That to me was very strange. I never felt that way and didn't see how they could feel shame that they were Japanese. They would say they wish they were White, you hear it on that film too, *Constitution*. A couple guys mentioning that. That's something I never felt. I never felt I was particularly proud of being Japanese, it was a natural thing. So I didn't too much about that in any ways. If someone discriminated and like calling me Jap, it just got me very angry that's all. I never felt ashamed of being Japanese, I never did have that feeling.

31:53

AI: **When you were younger was there any expectation you felt your parents had for people that you were gonna date, or your brothers or sisters?**

32:04

FE: No, something like that never did come up, but when I did eventually get married, I got married to a *hapa*. Her mother was part Japanese and part *Hakujin* and her father was Japanese. He was a minister, a Christian minister. And her grandmother was a Japanese and her grandfather was an American businessman. And her great grandmother was Japanese and her great grandfather was an English something to do with religious thing. So my first wife more or less came from a religious family, Christian family. And her brother, he graduated UCLA, he was a chemist, he was working as a chemist that's when he got evacuated to Poston, Arizona. He said you know this world has too much of the material not enough of the religious or the other type of thinking. So he went to seminary, a theological seminar and became a minister. He became one of theses ministers that go different places and preach and open up churches, like a missionary. In fact I think he was one of the originators of JEMS, Japanese Evangelist Coalition.

33:50

AI: **I have been in that.**

33:51

FE: Oh, you have. And after the war he went to Japan and taught at the International Christian University for five years. So my first wife came from somewhat of a Christian family. And my second wife is comes from a Buddhist family, her family goes back few hundred years as Buddhist priest. So I can't get away from religion.

34:23

AI/PN: (Laugh)

34:24

AI: Did your parents get a chance to meet your wives?

34:32

FE: I think I bought them together before I got married, they weren't too happy about me being marrying a *hapa* but they weren't that opposed. Well it's your business, it's your life.

34:52

AI: How did your siblings feel about you marrying a hapa?

34:53

FE: Well, my siblings were much younger than me. So they didn't think about it or talk about it that much. Old sister was a bit on the minus side. She didn't particularly care because our family goes back several hundred years you know a long line? I got that chart, tree chart. It stems back from the emperor of Japan and sort of branches from that. She was sort of an elitist about coming from a nice Japanese lineage so for me to get someone mixed she wasn't too happy with that. My mother either but she didn't express too much antagonism or wasn't too much against it.

36:06

AI: When you were growing up in the SFV did you ever see interracial couples.

36:11

FE: No

36:12

AI: Not at all? Was it ever talked about? Like friends that liked other races.

36:23

FE: You know those things never came up at least not by me.

36:29

AI: In the valley was it mostly like Japanese lived in one area? Whites lived in another area? How was it? What was it like?

36:37

FE: Well, the Japanese was scattered because they were farming. They weren't close like around here. (Mr. Emi talks about modern San Gabriel and neighbor)

37:38

AI: **But when you lived in the San Fernando Valley was it, how was it?**

37:42

FE: I think the Japanese were scattered being farmers. And the only time we got together was when they had picnics or Japanese school activities.

37:58

AI: **Since they were scattered, were they scattered around other minorities as well?**

38:05

FE: No, I think they were scattered. Well being farmers it's nothing like it's now being congested. They could have been by a *hakujin* farmer or an Italian farmer or Mexican families you know. But it was very scattered so, during that time.

38:29

AI: **When they had contract laborers did they have farms or were they just male's single male men or were they families.**

38:43

FE: Families, they were families.

38:46

AI: **The contract people?**

38:49

FE: Japanese families I don't know what status they had. But I imagine they were just like our family, come over here to work. Like my dad came here first before my mother came. He had worked all the way down South first. He was around Alabama, Texas. In fact, recently he would tell us he was a foreman at one of the farms houses in a farm in Alabama. The owner was so pleased with him he wanted him to marry his daughter. And my father said no I am already married. He was already married and

my mother was in Japan and my older sisters were in Japan. There weren't that much purchases at that time, Japanese.

39:53

AI: When was that?

39:54

FE: I guess that was around, he came over here in; he was in the Japanese army during the Russian Japanese war, so that was 1904. So I guess the turn of the 1900s. Around 1909, 1910 something around there. He was here a few years before. He called my wife, I mean my mother to the United States.

40:25

AI: I see what about the contract laborers who were on the farm that were Chicanos, or Mexican America?

40:34

FE: I don't know if they were contract labors or if they were just plain labors. But they went to Mexican town and got them and brought them.

40:43

AI: Were they families?

40:44

FE: Single men

40:47

AI: Single men, I see.

40:49

FE: And I remember, I think about 4 or 5 of them use to live in the little trailer house they had on our farm. I remember sometimes I use to be talking to them or something in the evening after work and I use to smell. They were smoking something. I remember something a sweet smelling smoke and it just that lately maybe that was marijuana they were smoking. Does marijuana smell like that? Kind of sweet smoke?

41:24

AI: (Laughing)

41:25

FE: You never smelled it either? I bet that's what they were smoking. It didn't smell like tobacco. It was kind of sweet smelling. So I guess even back then they were enjoying themselves.

41:43

AI: So do you remember any conversations that you had with them or any specific actions that you had working with them? Did you guys eat dinner together?

41:55

FE: No, they use to eat by themselves. I remember we had a Japanese man who uses to live with us in our house and we use to work on family farm. I still remember this one time he told my father he says; I guess I was very obnoxious to him or something. Seiji, that was my Japanese name he is going be, one day his gonna end up in jail. Prophetic.

42:38

AI: Oh that's funny.

42:44

PN: This is Peter again. And just something about farming, were there any specific techniques. I just want to back up a bit. Were your parents farmers in Japan?

42:55

FE: No, my father was managing a one of these retail stores that sold food, general merchandise store in the village he lived in.

43:10

PN: And your mother did she work in Japan?

43:16

FE: I think she was working as a steam stress. She uses to do a lot of sewing. And an amazing story about this is, my father was considered a pretty good businessman so the owner of that business wanted him to marry his daughter. Take over the; he was the biggest business man in the village. But my father said no, he would rather marry my mother, who was sort of impoverished by that time. Poor family because her

family owned a huge land there and they were particular more or less the head people of that village but there was some kind of legal fight between that village and the providence or something. And being the largest landowner there they more or less took on legal battle. And I think they lost the battle and lost a lot of the fortune there. So her mother's family was sort of poor by that time. So my dad said no this family is a very illustrates family going back hundreds of years so he wants to marry her and build her up again and turn down the rich man's offer. So that's an interesting story.

44:51

AI: A love story.

44:54

PN: And when they came to America, how did they get into farming?

45:00

FE: Well, as I mentioned before they first had a little grocery store near sixth and Grand. And then, after that, I don't know why but they moved out towards Figueroa and Manchester. And started to farm there. And from there they got into farming in Burbank and became farmers there and then San Fernando.

45:25

PN: How did they learn how to farm? Did someone teach them?

45:30

FE: Well, I guess he had gone down South and worked farms over there and worked on the farms over there and he worked in these orchids too. So he had some knowledge. He probably had some knowledge about framing before he came, started up. I think most families sort of learned by trial and error.

46:00

PN: Did he have a specific Japanese tool that he brought for tools?

46:04

FE: No.

46:05

PN: Did you have nay certain names for farming on specific, Japanese specific techniques for farming?

46:23

FE: That I wouldn't know.

46:26

PN: So they learned from the Mexican American and all the other farmers.

46:29

FE: Probably, yeah.

46:33

AI: This is Amy again. I just had a question. The technology has changed a lot with farming.

46:40

FE: Oh yeah.

46:41

AI: So I imagine it must have been a lot harder then because then machines you had then were not. You didn't have irrigation systems like you have now and all this rights?

46:50

FE: Actually when we were at San Fernando it's self toward Devonshire we had horses, it was the mules that did the plowing and all the hard work. It wasn't until we moved to San Fernando were Devonshire and Sepulveda is in that area, the 2nd farm. That's when we got a tractor and used the tractor.

47:29

AI: Your dad? You said you were driving since 7 years old.

47:33

FE: I wasn't driving the tractor. I was just driving the track going to the wells and things.

47:39

AI: Taking vegetables back and forth the stuff?

47:44

FE: Just, I was driving it regularly like a hired driver. I just drove now and then. Fooling around mostly cause I wasn't really big enough to do much work around the truck.

48:04

AI: So it seems like it was a lot of work. What did you guys do in your spare time?

48:11

FE: What spare time?

48:12

AI: There was no spare time?

48:12

FE: There really was no spare as far as my parents concerned.

48:18

AI: So was there any special holidays like *Oshogatsu*?

48:24

FE: *Oshogatsu* yeah. We always pounded *mochi*. Dad made a big round tree about that much. Maybe 18-inch diameter tree trunk somewhere and carved out the inside to make like a bowl and pound the rice into *mochi*.

48:50

AI: Wow, Japanese New Years.

48:52

FE: Yeah, Japanese New Years.

48:55

AI: And how about was there any special holidays you did anything?

49:00

FE: I remember one 4th of July dad and our family and one hired Japanese man, we went to Tahunga Canyon. There was a stream there and we went wading into the stream I still remember that because that was one of the few rare times that our parents mingled with us. As a rule we didn't spend too much time with our parents. They were always working. So that was sort of a rare thing that sticks in my mind. Like my dad and the other gentlemen was trying to catch a fish with their hands. I still remember that. Another thing that was sort of memorable was that they have these *kenjinkai* picnics. *Kenjinkai* means prefecture. Just mean like counties over here. *Okayama*. We were *Okayama* prefecture. And they had *Okayama* prefecture picnics usually in San Pedro, in white part. White's part. I remember they had running races, little kid running races, sack races, things like that. In fact I remember one time they had a I think a San Fernando Japanese school picnic or something up in Chatsworth, one of those mountains there. And they had a race running down hill, and I stumbled coming down, and I rolled down half the way down. And I think I ended up with a headache for a couple days after that.

50:52

PN/AI: (Laugh.)

50:57

AI: Okay Peter, do you want to talk about a little about internment and post internment?

51:04

PN: Post internment. After you when you came back. When you left the camp, did you come back to the Valley?

51:16

FE: No, we went some of us were sent to live in the Levin worth penitentiary and then we won our case so we were released and came back to Los Angeles. And at that time my parents had a couple houses were they lived before the war and had rented out and the management company had taken care of it for us so we had a place to come back to.

51:43

PN: So they took care of your families' property?

51:47

FE: Yeah, so then after our family stayed at the hostel ran by the American Friends Service Committee up in Boyle Heights up until they vacated by the tenants. Then we moved back to the house over in what they call the Virgin Area now.

52:13

PN: **Okay, what were the feelings like, the community toward your family?**

52:18

FE: It didn't feel anything different. Some people say especially those that resisted draft said that especially this is the San Jose area. Because the San Jose area had a lot of JACL people and they felt ostracized by the Japanese community there. In LA it didn't feel any of that didn't have any.

52:48

PN: **Was it business as usual when you came back? Everything was.**

52:52

FE: Yeah, I workers at a couple different jobs. Finally ended up working for the U.S. Postal Service and worked there till I retired. And worked there till I retired. And after I retired I went to work for the state of California Part time and worked till I retired again. So as they say I am a double dipper. Socialistic parasite.

53:22

AI: **I know we talked about this with you earlier but do you think you can say a little about what it was like resisting the draft during internment?**

53:36

FE: Like as I said before I was married and had two kids so I wasn't even subject to the draft. Neither was seven of the most active members of Fair Play committee, were indicted under the conspiracy charge. The charge conspiracy to violate the lack of service, aiding and abetting and counseling of others to resist the draft. That was the charge. And of the seven only three were actively subject to the draft. And 2 of those 3 had already been convicted at the trial for resisting the draft because their notices came for the green in action physical and they didn't go. So they were already at Leavenworth. And then the third worth, his draft notice never did come so he ended up with the rest of us. And of the 4 that remained, two of the gentlemen were over draft age. And one was an Issei who was not a citizen so wasn't even subject to the draft. But he was indicted with us because he offered translation our English books into Japanese for the benefits of the parents of the young resisters. And that's why he was tried with us. In the trial itself, well, I am getting ahead of myself. But the Fair

Play Committee was started in 1943 about the time when the No-No and Yes-Yes answer. Well, I explained that in the book. That's when the Fair Play Committee started. It was really actually stated with an older gentleman by the name of Kiyoshi Okamoto who was a Hawaiian Nisei and was going around camp whenever he could gather a group of people he would start talking to them about the constitution, bill of rights, and how everything was denied to us. So several of us younger guys that felt very strong about this got together with him and we eventually started to Fair Play Committee as an organization. And because of the things we were talking about at these meetings, we would go to different blocks of the camp and hold these big public mass meetings and tell them why we thought this was wrong that the draft should be applied to the people in all these camps. After all, especially after we were subjected, kicked out of our home, put in camps, all our rights taken away, and not they want us to serve in the army just as if we were free on outside. It didn't make sense. So we held these meetings until finally the FBI took us in and we were, well first they took the actually draft resisters that received their notices and didn't report. In fact, some of those resisters had physical ailments that they never would have pass the physical but they still resisted anyway in principle. So they got tried and there was 63 in the first trial, 63 people. It was the headline in the newspaper. Cheyenne, Wyoming's biggest mass trial in Wyoming's history.

51:41

AI: In the Wyoming paper?

51:43

FE: Yeah, there was a whole slew of newspapermen there because it was a big event. At the trials the newsmen were surprisingly sympathetic to the resisters. In fact one newsman was heard to say "If I were treated like evacuees, I would be damned if I was thrown in the army!" And this was reported, reported in the Wyoming paper. So as it turned out the judge was a very racist judge. At one point during the trial he addressed them as "You Jap boys."

58:21

PN/ AI: Gasp!

58:22

FE: Yeah, he did

58:23

AI: And were you there?

58:24

FE: I wasn't there. This is the first trial the resisters, the young men, then when they heard that, they were like our goose is cooked, you know. We aren't gonna get a fair trial from him. And sure enough they were found guilty by him and sent to prison for three years. In fact, anyone who doesn't have such a serious charge is eligible for parole after one third of their sentence. Well, in this case the WRA, that's the War Relocation Authority had requested to the prison board please don't send these boys out of parole because it will be bad for the morale of the camp. So they wouldn't give them parole. They had to spend their three years, well, less time for goof behavior, which everybody gets. So they spent about 27, 28 months before they were released. In that case, in 1947, President Truman gave them a blanket pardon, restoring all their civil and political rights. And in doing that the head of the Amnesty Board said they understood why these men did what they did. So they showed some understanding. But the JACL at that point didn't, show that understanding. They still insisted the leaders of the Fair Play Committee and another gentleman named James Omura should be charged with sedition. Which I will talk about later, Its in there too. Should be charged with sedition. Even the government didn't go that far. That sedition is more serious than draft violation. Anyway, after they were convicted and sent to jail, the government came after the leaders, the seven of us, as I mentioned. Okumura and Kobota the two older gentleman got two years. No Kobota got two years and Okomoto and I and a fellow named Horino and Paul Nakagata got sentenced four years. We immediately filed an appeal to the court. While they didn't render its decision until the War in the Pacific ended. Finally, the end of December 1946, they reversed our convictions. In the case of the 63, original younger draft resisters we also found an appeal for them but the 2nd court would not reverse their convictions. But one of the judges did said "two wrongs does not make a right", implying the government was wrong.

1:01:31

AI: So how long were you there?

1:01:34

FE: I was there 15 months.

1:01:39

AI: 15 months? This was at Heart Mountain. But at the other camps were there resisters with similar stories?

1:01:43

FE: Oh yeah, there were resisters in almost all the camps.

1:01:47

AI: Did you ever meet them after you got out of camp?

1:01:51

FE: Oh some of them. Few of them.

1:01:53

AI: Did they go through similar trials?

1:01:55

FE: I guess there were tried too but see we were the only organized resisters. All the other camps they more or less resisted individually. Some people resist by saying I want to be sent to Japan. I don't want to live in this country. Not a very good reason to resist. We resisted on constitutional grounds that's why we won our case. But some of them said well no sense the government reclassified me as Anna May Lin. Okay, I am Anna May Lin, send me to Japan. I'm not going to the army. Which it made sense in a way but legally it's not very good. Not a very good reason.

1:02:42

AI: Alright I think we got a lot of good stuff.

1:02:50

FE: More the about the resistance is in the two things I gave you.

1:02:55

AI: Thank you, we will read these.

1:02:58

PN: Thank you very much Mr. Emi.

1:03:03

FE: Oh, you're welcome.

1:03:04

AI: Thank you for taking your time, so long, sorry.

1:03:10

FE: Oh, when people are interested in this I'm glad to explain our story to them.

1:03:12

AI: **I am really interested to hear because you hear about 442 a lot, but I have never heard about the resisters story.**

1:03:14

FE: That is because JACL wrote us out of history. Just recently did it start coming out.

1:03:21

AI: **It's really interesting for me to hear about it. Because I have family members who were in 442 and stuff, but I never heard the resister side. Both sides makes sense, people who want to show alliance and its understanding to be angry and feel you shouldn't have to serve if your family is locked up. It makes sense I never hear that side so it's interesting.**

1:03:27

FE: When I spoke at Long Beach at the group called, the ever heard of the Conference of Christian and Jews that organization it's now changed it's name, to Conference of Community and Justice. I spoke to them in February and there was almost 700 people there and they made me feel good, they gave me a standing ovation, see the mayor gave me a key to the city. Want to take a video shot of that? I am kind of proud of that one.

[Talks about key of the city received from Mayor Beverly O'Neil of Long Beach]

[END OF INTERVIEW]