

**EMI KAMI**  
**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW**

**Pre and Post Internment Camp Experiences of  
Japanese Americans from the San Fernando Valley**

**April 9, 2004**

Interview conducted by

Henderson Lee

Videotaped by

Faith Ramirez

Transcript Prepared by

Faith Ramirez

CSUN, Asian American Studies Department

Cal State University, Northridge

18111 Nordhoff Street

Northridge, California 91330-8329

EMI KAMI

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION

Narrator: Emi Kami

Occupation: Housewife

Address: 12953 Branford Street, Pacoima 91331

Date of Interview: April 9, 2004

Length: 35 minutes

Session: One

Place: San Fernando Valley Japanese American Community Center

Subject: Japanese American Farmers in the San Fernando Valley Before and After World  
War II

Interviewer: Faith Ramirez and Henderson Lee

LIFE HISTORY  
BIOGRAPHICAL DATA SHEET

SFV JACC Representative \_\_\_\_\_ Date 4-7-04

CSUN Representative \_\_\_\_\_

CSUN Representative \_\_\_\_\_

Location of Interview SFJACC

1. Name: Emiko Kami M ☒ F

2. Address: 13650 Herrick Ave

3. Phone(s): (818) 367-9330

Email \_\_\_\_\_

4. Birth Date: 4-18-26 5. Birth Place: Glendale CA 6. Citizenship US

6a. Date of immigration: \_\_\_\_\_ 6b. Departure point: \_\_\_\_\_

7. List Sisters / Brothers (Eldest to youngest – Include yourself): \_\_\_\_\_

Robert Takayuki Oda Edward Nobuyoshi Oda R. Emiko Oda Kami

8. Marital Status (and dates): married 8-14-54

9. Spouse's Name: Seiji Kami

10. Children (and birth dates): Kay Shizue Kami 5-18-55

11. Ethnicity: Japanese Am. 12. Languages Spoken: Japanese English

13. Religion: Buddhist

14. Places lived and dates: Glendale, Burbank, No Hollywood, Moorpark

Crystal City Texas, Glendale, Berkeley, Sun Valley Lake View Terrace

15. Mother's Maiden Name: Aratani Ethnicity: Japanese

Date of immigration: 1919 Country: Japan

16. Father's Maiden Name: Oda Ethnicity: Japanese

Date of immigration: 1918 Country: Japan

17. Maternal Grandparents: Aratani Oda

18. Maternal Grandparents: Aritani Oda
19. Education:  
 Elementary: Wm McKinley Elem. Burbank Secondary: Burbank <sup>John Burroughs</sup> Sr High (Now Hi Sch.)  
 High School: Burbank High School Other: Glendale College Glendale  
Mancaster High School U.C. - Berkeley LA State College  
LA - Northridge
20. Work Experiences (and dates):  
Teacher - Elem. Mancaster Teacher - Elem. C City Texas  
Teacher - Elem. Morningside Elem. San Fernando, CA.  
Teacher Librarian " " " " "
21. Organizations, member of (past and present): UC Alum - SEVJACC - LA Buddhist Assn.  
Crystal City Assn. -
22. Location of farm(s) and the types of crops/flowers grown  
Burbank 1000 Flower St. Flower + Alameda Flower + Allen
23. Size of Farm(s) Not too large
24. Circle the category(ies) that best describes you (Issei, Nisei, Sansei, Kibei)
25. Do you have any photos of yourself prior to World War II, or immediately after World War II that you can loan us? If not, can you show the camera person the photo?

Photo description and approximate date \_\_\_\_\_

Photo description and approximate date \_\_\_\_\_

Photo description and approximate date \_\_\_\_\_

Photo description and approximate date \_\_\_\_\_

Photo description and approximate date \_\_\_\_\_

Photo description and approximate date \_\_\_\_\_

**Deed of Gift  
Oral History Agreement  
Japanese American Experiences in the San Fernando Valley**

I, R. Emiko Kami,  
residing at: 13656 Herrick Ave,  
City of Sylmar, State of CA, Zip Code 91342 here by  
give and grant to San Fernando Valley Japanese American Community Center (SFV JACC),  
Asian American Studies Department at California State University at Northridge (CSUN) and  
the California State Library Civil Liberties Public Education Program (CCLPEP) as a donation  
for such scholarly and educational purposes as the SFV JACC, CSUN and CCLPEP shall  
determine, the video tape/interview tape recordings on 4-7-04 (date of  
interview), including the contents of those recordings and any transcriptions that may result from  
them and copyrights thereto.

Emiko Kami

Print Name of Interviewee

Emiko Kami

Signature of Interviewee

4-7-04

Date



## EMI KAMI ORAL HISTORY

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We interviewed Emi Kami and her husband in the San Fernando Valley Japanese American Community Center on April 9, 2004. Emi was grew up in Burbank, there were not many Japanese American families. Besides Japanese, there were some Mexican families, mostly Caucasians. She doesn't know how her parents became farmers, and she doesn't remember how many acres was the farm. Her parents grew onions, spinach, carrots, tomatoes...etc. Her father's daily routine was plowing, getting the land ready, and weighing the crops for market. Her mother's daily routine was to help out on the farm and doing the housework. Her parents hired a Mexican helper on the farm. One memory of her parents was they want the children to do their best and be proud of their family.

Emi began to work on the farm when she was pretty young. Her daily routine was going to school, and helped out on the farm after school. She also went to Japanese school everyday right after American school. She doesn't really have any specific chores or responsibilities at home except listened to her mother. She was the youngest and the only daughter in the family, she has two elder brothers. Her parents didn't say they have to take over the farm, they just wanted them to success in the occupation. Her parents spend time with her in the school programs and activities while growing up. Sometimes they had family friends from Japan staying in their house. When her parent didn't work, the family would go picnic and movies. Her family celebrated mostly calendar holidays, such as fourth of July, thanksgiving, Christmas.

In her school, there were a few Japanese, mostly Caucasians, she also had some Mexican friends. Her family went to the church in Los Angeles. Emi has a Chinese nephew and a Caucasian niece. She met her husband from his sister in Glendale College. Her first job was teaching elementary school. Before they were sent to the camp, the Burbank high school coach offered to keep their car, and other things for them. She went to Manzanar and her father was in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Her family moved to North Hollywood after the camp and her father

was doing landscape gardening.



Interviewee: Emi Kami [EK]  
Interviewer: Henderson Lee [HL]  
Date: Friday, April 9, 2004  
Subject: The Pre and Post Internment Experiences of Japanese Americans  
from the San Fernando Valley

[Begin Tape 1]

**HL:** My name is Henderson Lee and I'm going to interview Emi Kami with Faith Ramirez  
Mr. and mrs. Kami thank you for taking the time to help us with this project  
First of all i would like to get a sense of what the San Fernando valley was like while you were growing up there. Can you tell me what it was like and how it has changed

**EK:** It is very vague for me. Actually we were in burbank which is sort of the valley

**HL:** What about the demographics. What were the demographics were there other Japanese Americans?

**EK:** Uh huh few not too many not like this community

**HL:** Besides japanese what other ethnic groups at that time

**EK:** I don't recall many filipinos chinese or koreans we had the some mexican families. caucasians.

**HL:** Do you know what occupations did they hold?

**EK:** No I don't

**HL:** And actually um since you grew up in burbank did you ever live in the San Fernando Valley right

002

**EK:** Yes, we lived in north hollywood before the world

**HL:** Actually I would like to know a little bit about how you ended up living the North Hollywood

**EK:** You mean the farms? It was a very large farm that's about it

**HL:** So how did your parents become farmers

**EK:** That I don't know I think they probably just moved along with friends. Try their hand at farming. I'm not sure

**HL:** Do you know if they had previous farming experiences in the past?

003

**EK:** Not that I know of I don't think so. Couple of friends helped them a long

**HL:** What kind of crops did they grow?

**EK:** I recall onions, spinach, carrots, vegetables, tomatoes, that kind of thing

**HL:** Do you remember how many acres was the farm?

**EK:** I really don't . I don't remember. I wasn't too large though. we were on flower street  
and burbank and hollywood street and victory. The corner. That's north hollywood

004

**HL:** Can you tell me what your father's daily routine?

**EK:** It was plowing, getting the land ready, and irrigating, weighing the crops for market

**HL:** What about your mother daily routine?

**EK:** Helping out. helping farm

**HL:** Including house work right?

**EK:** Yeah

**HL:** If they worked long hours was their relationship strained?

**EK:** Not that i'm aware of. we were all pretty tired i suppose at the end of the day.

005

**HL:** Did your mother work outside of the home. what kind of jobs did she have?

**EK:** No she was always at home

**HL:** Do you know if the pay that your parents received was sufficient to make a living at  
that time?

**EK:** I really don't. I don't know. Strange enough we never knew that we were poor in any  
sense. seemed ot have plenty of food

**HL:** And so um wo was your responsible for the household duties and taking care of  
your Brothers and sisters?

**EK:** Parents.

**HL:** Basically, especially mostly your mother right

**EK:** uh hm.

**HL:** What about your parents did they have anyone to hire on the farm?

**EK:** Well we did have a helper a mexican helper, he used to come and help out.

006

**HL:** Was there anyone who lived on the farm including the Mexican helper does he also live there?

**EK:** He didn't live with us. He got his own place

**HL:** Who made the key decision in your family regarding property, how money was spent?

**EK:** Uh. My dad did.

**HL:** Because he was the important person in the family? did you or your parents ever participate in any strikes?

**EK:** No I can't recall any strikes

**HL:** Were there any hardships you parents faced from society?

007

**EK:** I don't think so. Probably was some discrimination at that time. Not that seemed to affect us

**HL:** From growing up, describe one memory of your parents

**EK:** They always wanted us to be proud of our country and uh be good citizens and always to do our best. always be able to be proud of our family

**HL:** So now I'd like you to tell me about growing up on the farm. what was it like growing up on the farm. what age did you begin to work

**EK:** Pretty young. what was it like? I really didn't help out that much.

008

**HL:** So can you describe your daily routine?

**EK:** My routine. I think mine was go to school, get home, maybe help out on the farm

**HL:** Did you go to Japanese school during that time

**EK:** Yes, uh huh

**HL:** Only on the weekends right?

**EK:** No I went everyday. right after school

**HL:** Japanese school?

**EK:** The bus would pick me and I went to Japanese language school

**HL:** Was it close to where you live?



**EK:** Border of glendale and LA.

009

**HL:** Okay, also do you have any specific chores and responsibilities and home?

**EK:** Not really. just did what we needed to do and listened to what our mother said

**HL:** Did you have to take care of your brothers and sisters?

**EK:** No, they sorta looked after me

**HL:** Are you the oldest child in the family?

**EK:** Youngest

**HL:** How many brothers and sisters do you have?

**EK:** 2 older brothers

**HL:** Any sisters?

**EK:** No sisters

**HL:** So you're the only daughter

**EK:** Yes

**HL:** Do you feel your brothers were treated equally by your parents?

**EK:** Yes, I think so

**HL:** So your brother was the oldest. what role did he play in your house? Did your family want you to grow up and take over the farm

**EK:** No, they didn't say anything, I don't think so. Nothing like that was discussed anyway

010

**HL:** What were their aspirations for you and your brothers?

**EK:** I guess they wanted us to be successful in whatever occupation we chose

**HL:** During when you were growing up did your parents have time to spend time with you? In what ways?

**EK:** Well we used to go.. They always uh took part whenever we had school programs. and activities they would always watch. They were always there

**HL:** So what about which parents tend to be strict?

**EK:** Probably dad said and mom wait for what he said i guess

**HL:** Is there any example of how they handled that

**EK:** Discipline. Can't think of any exactly. They probably talked to us a lot in a lot of voices

012

**HL:** And did you ever remember you or your siblings get in trouble?

**EK:** No, we probably didn't. can't recall any serious.

**HL:** Were there other people living in the house besides your parents, brothers, and sisters?

**EK:** Wt times we had people from japan staying with us. briefly. Till they got settled in

**HL:** Are they all relatives or just friends

**EK:** Family friends

**HL:** Did your parents try to instill their traditional Japanese customs and values inside the home?

**EK:** No, I don't think they instilled but by example.

**HL:** Do your parents speak the Japanese language to you at home?

**EK:** Both.

**HL:** English and japanese, right?

**EK:** Yes

**HL:** Do you follow and listen to what they say or do you have your own ideas?

**EK:** No it was fine with us. we went to japanese language school. so we were able to... both ways.

**HL:** Do you remember getting sick or any of your family members getting sick?

**EK:** I imagine we go sick once in awhile

**HL:** Who would take care of the sick person?

**EK:** The doctor or family friends.

014

**HL:** And what was the medical care like?

**EK:** Fine. just tender loving care. Just looking after each other

**HL:** When your parents didn't work what kind of activities did you do as a family?



**EK:** We had picnics. We went into little Tokyo what's now little Tokyo. That was a treat. We'd see some movies. buy some japanese foods and picnics. go the beach.

**HL:** What kind of occasion/holidays did your family celebrate during that time?

**EK:** There were birthdays. weddings. usually calendar holidays we took part in. fourth of july we had our firecrackers and things thanksgiving and Christmas. celebrated everything

**HL:** Did you celebrate tradition Japanese festivals?

**EK:** The church had certain festivals. The.. which is a memorial festival. i'm not sure

**HL:** What is your favorite holiday growing up?

016

**EK:** Well, still toward the end of the year Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year

**HL:** Do you have any family vacations?

**EK:** No. just outings we had. we never had what they call vacation to some place.  
just local

**HL:** Lets talk about social relationships. can you tell me a little about your school exp.  
what was your ethnic makeup of your school

017

**EK:** We had a few japanese students, but a many caucasians. I had some mexican friends but i can't remember any.

**HL:** Did people treat you differently because you japanese in school

**EK:** No

**HL:** But what about were there an activities. that you did after school. after school activities

**EK:** After school, the bus picked me up... japanese language school

018

**HL:** Do you know any activities your family was involved in like churches or temples.  
which one did they go to

**EK:** The church

**HL:** close to the san fernando valley

**EK:** The Los Angeles

**HL:** Were you involved in comm. activities. like sports or clubs. since japanese school

**EK:** We had undo. oral contests

019

**HL:** So can you tell me a little about dating, Did anyone in your family date outside of your ethnicity?

**EK:** We do have a chinese son niece and we have a caucasian niece.

**HL:** Because your brother married a different race?

**EK:** No their children married int. third generation

**HL:** Can you tell me how you met your spouse?

**EK:** His sister. i was going to glendale college at the time and his sister also went there and it was time for my graduation and he's the one i went to the prom with.

**HL:** Can you also describe our wedding?

**EK:** Don't let him describe it but it was fun

**HL:** What was the first job you required?

**EK:** My first job would be teaching i guess baby-sitting, yes, i did baby-sitting with the family and then i. when i was going to school i was a what they called school girl helping in the home and going to school and then i started teaching elementary in the SFV

021

**HL:** What type of jobs did you take before the war?

**EK:** I didn't work. i was still in HS. Tenth grade

**HL:** Did you experience discrimination or obstacles?

**EK:** There was one thing i noted. coming home from school as i stepped on the school bus i stepped on someone's foot and the lady said this Jap girl stepped on me and she didn't even apologize. That really really freaked \_\_\_\_ me out i held on to the door. I thought i had whispered i'm sorry. But i don't know but i was sure to get home get off the bus that was a about it. that was a very bad feeling for me.

022

**HL:** How old were you at that time

**EK:** 15

**HL:** Lets start taking about the internment. actually i'd like to talk to you about the time directly before executive order 9066. what was the social climate late 1930?

**EK:** I don't think we met the discrimination. i guess there was. his family. his father couldn't own land.

**SK:** He was trustee for my sister....

**HL:** Do you remember pearl Harbor day. how did you and your family react to the news

024

**SK:** Shock. we were shocked. We weren't really paying attention to what was happening prior to that point but we are in shock and my dad called all of us into the kitchen and said that we were american citizens and that this was our country and no matter what we had to obey our country. that was on pearl harbor. so that's the law as far as we were concerned

**EK:** We didn't get that speech from my folks. i can't recall what was said at that time.

025

**HL:** Did any of your parents or family members get taken away prior to interment?

**EK:** My father was. he was active in the community. the japanese language school

**HL:** Before you were sent to the interment camps what did your family do with all your property and belongings

**EK:** I don't think we had that much. our family, i think ours was least, we didn't have that problems. The burbank high school coach offered to keep our car, piano and things like that for us.

**HL:** What did your family do with the family photographs? did they burn everything

**EK:** Many of them were packed. i am finding them now

**HL:** What things did your family decided to take to the assembly center/relocation center

**EK:** Mainly clothing and books and photos

**SK:** Bedding

027

**EK:** But they provided that though

**SK:** Not all. took your bed sheets, and blankets. they gave you a mattress cover.

**EK:** Army blankets

**SK:** You filled it with straw. and for several days you slept on your stomach to hang on till it were flatted out

**EK:** All this is so vague to me

**HL:** Was there anything you wanted to take but couldn't

**EK:** For me it was the phonograph. i had a lot of records loved put the records on and I



listened to music. Couldn't take that i don't know where that ended up.

**HL:** Did your parents sell them of?

**EK:** No they (the coach) offered to keep it for us

**HL:** Which internment location did your family go to?

**EK:** We went to Manzanar and my dad was in Santa fe, new mexico  
we joined dad after 2 years in Manzanar they let us go join my father in crystal city,  
texas

**HL:** Did you remember any Japanese Americans that didn't have to go the camp

**EK:** Oh yes the went moved voluntarily to utah or denver colorado.

030

**HL:** Lets start with the post interment exp. actually id like to know about life after  
interment. was any of your family released before the internment?

**EK:** No

**HL:** Where did your family go after the interment

**EK:** We moved to north hollywood

**HL:** So what did your parents do for work after interment

**EK:** My dad was doing landscape gardening and mom did housework cleaning houses

**HL:** You continued to go to school what were some of the obstacles?

**EK:** All of our friends it just seemed to work out. we didn't have many problems we had  
housing. friends offered to have us on their land. we lived with the \_\_\_ then the  
Sakaguchi family. later we had to move on our own place

032

**HL:** Is there one memory about the SFV that is the most important to you?

**EK:** No.

**HL:** Is there anything that you want to talk about that we have discussed?

**EK:** You've covered almost everything

**HL:** What about your Mr. Kami do you have anything to share with us

033

**SK:** The farms weren't very big because there was mule, horse not tractors. The best t  
that they could do was 2 or 3 acres. if you look at the we were barely into our teens  
before the war started. too many things different. we weren't hat aware of prejudice .

we were pretty free of having any of the effects prejudice against the Japanese until the war. until after pearl harbor thing started to build up. because there were a lot of feelings. loss of sons, friends, and but i don't think it reflected the kids that we went to school of us. all of us were kind of stocked wondering what was going to happen next. we found out. it wasn't that bad of an experience. you were asking about family vacation. Before the war the family didn't take vacations usually there wasn't that much money available. so if the parents worked all year round and when you want to camp that was the first time they had time off. it wasn't a horrible experience for us. we have friends who lost some good friends. but i think in general it wasn't that hard of an experience for us. it wasn't great, the sand storms and the cold, and poor housing, and everything else but it was bearable and a great experience.

**[End of Interview ]**