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

**PETE MITSUI**

Oral History Interview

San Fernando Valley

April 24, 1993

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Northridge, California 91330-8329

**Mr. PETE MITSUI**

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION

Narrator: Mrs. **PETE MITSUI**

Length of Interview: 152 minutes

Date: April 24, 1993

Place: Mr. MITSUI'S Residence

Subject: Japanese American Farmers in the San Fernando Valley

**Interviewee:** Mr. Pete Mitsui (PM)

**Subject:** Japanese American Farmers in the San Fernando Valley before and after WW2

**Interview:**

[00:32] IN: I was talking to you earlier about some of the experiences your family had coming here since you were born in Japan but your family came here later. Could you tell me a little bit about the beginning part of your life? You came over here as an infant, like we were talking about earlier.

[01:10] PM: I could tell you starting with my folks. My father came to United States, actually Hawaii at the turn of the century, around 1906. He worked for a few years and his pay was so meager around \$8-\$10 per month. He couldn't save anything. After a couple of years he decided to come to the United States. He knew a friend that had some money so he borrowed some. He came to LA originally. Then he worked for railroads. As I understand it he worked in Arizona and New Mexico area. After a few years, he came back to LA. He started working as a laborer in the agricultural field. In 1912 or 1913, he decided to go back to Japan and get married. He married my mother. He was supposed to come back in one year but my mother got sick so they had to stay another year. In the meantime I was born. They brought me with them when I was just 2 months old. As soon they came back, he started working as a farm laborer. He worked mostly in the San Fernando Valley taking care of citrus trees.

[03:23] IN: You mentioned that your mother had gotten sick and you were born. You had mentioned earlier that your family had mentioned leaving you there.

[03:46] PM: At that time, I was just two months old; they were undecided whether to bring such a young child to the United States. The trip on the boat took three to four weeks. Relatives said that they would take care of me because they were coming back in five years anyway. Little did they know that wasn't going to be? I guess I was the firstborn and they decided to take me.

[04:28] IN: You also mentioned earlier the type of boat they came on.

[04:34] PM: They came on a freighter to augment their income. They took about 10-12 passengers on a freighter. They said the living quarters were bad but the food was

terrific. It took a bit longer than a regular boat would take because they were loaded down with different materials or whatever they were bringing over.

[05:18] IN: It wasn't a passenger boat?

[05:20] PM: NO.

[05:26] IN: Your family back in Japan, what did they do for a living and their social class.

[05:34] PM: They came from the farmer's class which at that time was middle class. They weren't quite up to the right class but they weren't way down either. They were on a farm. My dad being the oldest was in charge of the family home stead which included a house. He owned part of the mountain and had the trees that belonged to there. As I understand it, they burned the trees and made charcoal. They had a little rice field too. It was way out in the boonies actually. I visited the place in 1977 when I made my first visit to Japan. It was really out in the country but since then the central highway has come through the town and now it's a resort town.

[06:27] IN: Your father owned property there?

[06:31] PM: It was a hand me down all the way down. It wasn't a big area but as I understand it were about four or five acres including the mountains.

[06:51] IN: For what reason did your father come here?

[06:55] PM: I don't know why he came. He never did tell me. I don't know if he came with a contract with the pineapple company or not.

[07:13] IN: When he first came over and went to Hawaii and was working there on a plantation?

[07:23] PM: That's right. That's the way I understand it.

[07:27] IN: After you were born and your parents came to the US, where did they stay first?

[07:37] PM: They always stayed in the valley. The only recollection I have is grammar school. It was always in the San Fernando Valley.

[07:51] IN: You don't remember any particular house?

[07:58] PM: Not until I started going to school. That I have a pretty good recollection.

[08:06] IN: You showed me a picture earlier; maybe you can show it again of you living in Northridge.

[08:15] PM: That was quite a few years later. That was when I started grammar school.

[08:22] IN: Maybe we should skip to that one since that's the one you remember.

[08:29] PM: At that time, it wasn't called Northridge, It was Zelzah. After that it turned into North LA and then Northridge. When I was going it was Zelzah. There was quite a grammar school there.

[08:47] IN: You were five or six then?

[08:49] PM: I was pretty young here. I was 8 or 9 I guess. I started grammar late. They didn't have kindergarten.

[08:56] IN: Would you show everyone the picture of your parents when they got married.

[09:04] PM: A marriage picture in Japan with their typical clothes they had at that time. It was traditional more or less.

[09:13] IN: Skipping back to your elementary, your recollection of things in the Valley begins with elementary school?

[09:22] PM: That's right. I can recollect a few things before then but very vague.

[09:33] IN: What elementary school did you go to?

[09:37] PM: I started with Zelzah Grammar School. That was right off Reseda Boulevard next to the railroad track which was one block in off Reseda.

[09:51] IN: In that school was there a mix of races?

[10:00] PM: I don't remember the type of students but there was a few of us Japanese Americans at that time. I would say there was only 15-20. I don't recollect too many Spanish people then at that time. It was mostly Caucasians.

[10:23] IN: When you were in elementary school, what type of friends did you have? Japanese or Caucasians? As I recollect, I didn't have too many Caucasian friends. Of

Course the Japanese Americans stuck together. I remember our principal, Mr. Cartwright, I really thought a lot about him. I thought he helped us a lot.

[10:54] IN: You mentioned you stayed the Japanese Americans; the community stayed together? Was the area you lived in predominantly Japanese American?

[11:11] PM: At that time we lived on Reseda north of Devonshire. At that time it wasn't paved. It was a two lane paved road to Devonshire and then a dirt road. At that place there were ten Japanese families.

[11:35] IN: The community was close knit?

[11:37] PM: It wasn't close knit as it was later on. We used to do a lot of things together. At that time, we had no community center or anything.

[11:54] IN: Why did you say that the community got a lot more close knit later on?

[12:00] PM: I wouldn't say it was close knit more. AS time went on, people got more money and they were able to do things they couldn't do before.

[12:10] IN: Going back to your time at elementary school, what was it that your principal did to make you feel fond of him?

[12:21] PM: He did a lot of things actually. I really recollect the time he used to have these Christmas programs. For some reason, we learned all the carols; they taught us all different carols when we were young. I still remember all of that. I remember the Christmas program that they put on. The school couldn't afford the stockings so they furnished the stocking itself and we filled it up at home and then we took them back. They would distribute during the program and made it look pretty good with Santa Claus.

[13:05] IN: your school life was important to you at that time? Was the principal also very helpful to you as far as getting to know what life was like later on?

[13:25] PM: All I know was that he made us feel very welcome and there was nothing to worry about. At that time that was a problem, for Japanese Americans, especially us kids.

[13:45] IN: Can you remember back then what the Community in general was like? Was in predominantly agriculture work out there?

[14:03] PM: All I remember is what transpired among us. Everybody farmed. Everybody had a small farm. It wasn't big; I would say 20-30 acres at the most. They grew cantaloupes and things of that type, tomatoes. I remember one year we grew watermelons. This friend of mine on Devonshire, we backed up the truck and loaded it with the watermelons and cantaloupes. We sold them on weekends. I don't know how many people bought them from us, I guess we did alright.

[14:49] IN: This was your father?

[14:52] PM: NO, myself. We two kids were selling out on the street.

[14:56] IN: Your entire family worked on the farm?

[14:59] PM: Oh yes. Everybody worked. As soon as we came home from school we had to pitch in and do what was necessary until it got dark.

[15:12] IN: Did you live on a farm?

[15:14] PM: We all lived on a farm. The houses weren't very good. It was one of those houses that you move from one farm to another. They were small houses where you could tear them apart, put them on a truck and move them to the next farm. We couldn't buy the land, so we had to rent or lease.

[15:34] IN: could you talk more about portable houses?

[15:38] PM: Oh yes. Very old. They were real light. We had a floor and the sides were 1 by ten put upright. We didn't have electricity, gas or telephone. Most of it was outhouses. We had no running water. We did have water but that was about the only thing.

[15:59] IN: What kind of floors did they have?

[16:04] PM: Most of them had wooden floors. Depending on the situation sometimes we had dirt floors say part of the kitchen or something.

[16:24] IN: AS a child, you remember selling stuff and working on the farm. As you got older did your chores increase?

[16:35] PM: Our chores never did increase; we always had to work hard. As soon as we came home, mother would have a few sandwiches or something, after we ate them; we went on the farm and did what we had to do until it got dark.

[16:58] IN: What did you do?

[17:01] PM: We had to do weeding. Hoeing was very important because weeds would come all over. We had to keep the weeds down. Later on I grew and cultivated and did whatever I had to.

[17:17] IN: This was probably too young for you, was there anything specific that your father might have helped or come up with that might have helped the farming process?

[17:30] PM: What do you mean?

[17:32] IN: A technique. Using certain fertilizers or anything.

[17:35] PM: At that time the fertilizer industry wasn't too well developed. Basically all you had to do was natural manures. Money was the essence so you had to do what you could without money.

[17:52] IN: Do your father run this farm?

[17:55] PM: Yeah. He planted whatever he wanted. Then they would have people, haul men that would bring trucks, load the produce and take it to LA market. It was basically on consignment. We were at the mercy of whoever sold the produce. If he said it was 50 cents, it was 50 cents. We don't know if he was right or wrong but at that time they were happy to get what they could.

[18:32] IN: The produce was trucked down?

[18:35] PM: Yes, to the La central market. The biggest one was on 9<sup>th</sup> street.

[18:42] IN: After grammar school and into high school can you recall major changes in the Valley? More industrialization, more shops or anything?

[18:54] PM: Not that I could recollect. I don't think industry had come to the valley at that time. It was basically farming. There were a lot of citrus trees, lemons and oranges. At that time there was even walnuts that had to be taken care of. As far as the Japanese Americans, most of us were farmers as such. In San Fernando town there was one general grocery store which they called Sunlight Market. That was more or less our Saturday night gathering place. We would all go to downtown, have ice cream and then we would walk around the town of San Fernando which was like home to us at that time.



[20:08] IN: How old were you at this time?

[20:10] PM: By then, I was around 10-14. From Northridge, we moved to Pacoima and farmed there.

[20:24] IN: I heard the soil in Pacoima was not really an easy thing to farm because some parts were rocky. Do you remember anything about that?

[20:39] PM: Certain sections were bad, but where we were it wasn't that bad. It was heavy soil and hard to till. It wasn't that bad

[20:51] IN: Can you tell me a little bit about when you went downtown to the general store. Do you remember what the street was like?

[21:03] PM: I know in those days, San Fernando road was the only street that had markets and stores. Before the earthquake it was two stories on both sides of the street. It wasn't all two stories. Porter Hotel was two stories. I heard it did get wrecked a little bit. It was basically one block between Brand and McLee, that was the center of the town. Then a half block towards Mission and little south towards Chatsworth. It was basically that one section, that's all it was, San Fernando Road.

[21:40] IN: I know the JC Penny store was there.

[21:43] PM: I remember.

[21:46] IN: Do you remember when it first came in or was it always there?

[21:58] PM: It was always there as far as I know. It was in the center of the block. We did most of our buying there. I remember shoes were \$1.99. Up to \$3 was too much.

[22:18] IN: There was the general store; you said something about an ice cream parlor.

[22:27] PM: That whole one block was solid. You are talking about small stores. In those days all the produce stores were wide open. There were a couple of banks; I know Bank of America was on the corner of San Fernando and McClay. Then you had typical drug stores. The Sunlight Market was run by Japanese and that's where they congregated because there was an ice cream parlor near the front and had odds and ends of Japanese food.

[23:05] IN: Was there intermingling between the Japanese community and the Caucasian community?

[23:15] PM: I don't remember. Most of my friends when I was going to grammar school in Pacoima were Latino friends. I would say I had about six good friends. I knew I had two Caucasian friends who I palled around with.

[23:38] IN: You went to Pacoima elementary?

[23:42] PM: I graduated grammar school there. I Started in Northridge and finished in Pacoima. At that time we went through each grade. As soon as we went to San Fernando High School, I went to junior high but it was only two years. I graduated in '32.

[24:08] IN: Do you remember where Pacoima Elementary school was?

[24:20] PM: Van Nuys Boulevard and from San Fernando road it was five or six blocks up.

[24:29] IN: East?

[24:31] PM: That's right. Towards foothill. Originally when we first moved Van Nuys Boulevard was a dirt road.

[24:42] IN: You went to a junior high school, do you remember the name?

[24:47] PM: That was San Fernando. It was just the beginning of the junior high school. Up to then you had grammar school and went straight to high school. Then they started the junior high school and that was with the high school.

[25:10] IN: The high school was on the streets?

[25:14] PM: I don't know. I think right now it's called the junior high school of San Fernando Valley.

[25:25] IN: It's on Brand?

[25:28] PM: Yes, Brand. North of the railroad tracks.

[25:33] IN: Going back to your elementary school in Pacoima, was there any fond memories of that one as compared to the other one?

[25:52] PM: The thing I remember most about the school was the Latino friends there and I got along really good. I remember had a school project which made us stay after school. I don't think the picture is in there. There were half a dozen of us and he taught

photography, wood work, how to make things with different things. I really enjoyed that relationship.

[26:27] IN: WAS there any specific things that you can remember happen to you that were negative, that you felt it happened to you because you were a minority?

[26:42] PM: I really don't have any recollection. I thought I got along pretty well with the Caucasian. At that time we had no African Americans. I think in the whole San Fernando school there was only one family with two girls, Grace and Mildred. I don't have any recollection of any contact with them. With the Spanish people I had really good contact. I don't recollect any problems as such at that particular time although later on I can have a few specifics.

[27:29] IN: You showed me a couple pictures here and maybe you could go through them. It looks like these are citrus groves. Maybe you could explain them.

[27:47] PM: My dad was cultivating. They didn't have tractors, they had horses. This was in Pacoima. These were prior to his farming days. These were his co-workers. These are the young citrus trees in the back they planted and were taking care of. As I recollect he was telling me that when he first came to the Valley on a clear day you could see all the way down to Ventura Boulevard. When he originally came here, he stayed at the San Fernando mission itself. You couldn't do that after you got married but that was a long time ago. This is a friend of his on a team of horses. They are harrowing a field. As you can see there were no tall buildings or trees. It was barren ground.

[28:56] IN: Where was that?

[28:59] PM: Pacoima. That's the way it was. No tall trees, no buildings, no anything. Just one open field.

[29:06] IN: you mentioned dicing.

[29:09] PM: Before you plant what you do is the old vegetation or weeds, you disc. It's round blades where you chop up the things. After you get it cleared up, then you plow. You get behind a horse and till the land over. Then after that is harrowing. There is a level with teeth in it. You would break up the ground. Then you started to plant whatever you wanted.

[29:44] IN: At this time all the Japanese Americans worked on farms?

[29:52] PM: Basically all the friends that I had worked on farms.

[29:59] IN: Do you remember anything about what your father had told you about contract laboring?

[30:09] PM: He didn't say too much. All I know that he was head of this crew. At that time, the Porter land company was one of the biggest. They owned most of the citrus trees. He did the cultivating. I think they went through twice a year and had to trim trees and a lot of dead wood would come off.

[30:37] IN: He was head of a...?

[30:39] PM: A crew, I recollect. He organized a few people. I don't know whether he contracted them by month or whether on a regular salary.

[30:54] IN: He worked for Mr. Porter?

[30:57] PM: As I understand, he owned most of the citrus trees at that time.

[31:02] IN: From what I have studied, that's most of the north part of the San Fernando Valley.

[31:07] PM: that's right. That's the only part I remember. I don't know much about the North Hollywood area. I know they grew different crops there. They did more the hand labor type like carrots and green onions. North Hollywood was very well known for the color of the carrots. We were more into tomatoes, cantaloupes, peppers and things of that nature.

[31:40] IN: Not as much into the orange—

[31:43] PM: Not so much into the small farms where you had more hand labor.

[31:49] IN: You mentioned walnuts and a lot of citrus trees. Did your father do any work as picking and harvesting?

[31:58] PM: I don't remember. I think picking was done on a contract basis. I don't recollect him doing any of that. He did the ground. I had to keep the weeds down, irrigating. Irrigating was a big business in those days.

[32:14] IN: During your childhood and through your adolescence, you had the chance to go to school and learn. What kind of work did you do later on in life in high school? Did you still work on the farm?

[32:34] PM: That's all we did. We just had to help. I used to play baseball quite a bit.

[32:43] IN: You have picture of that?

[32:47] PM: That was a little later on. At least I didn't have to work much on Sundays. Sunday was our baseball day. We had to work Saturdays and rest of the week, but at least Sundays we wake up early, picked a crop and had to get ready for Monday market. By the afternoon we were playing baseball. I made my letter in high school my senior year.

[33:38] IN: Before high school you played baseball, was this organized?

[33:45] PM: Oh yeah. The Japanese Athletic Union in LA had quite a program and it encompassed San Fernando and San Pedro. We used to have games between communities. We didn't recruit from anybody else so whoever we had in the community, that's who played.

[34:11] IN: How old were you when you started playing?

[34:14] PM: I guess I was about 15.

[34:20] IN: You kept going all through high school?

[34:24] PM: That's right. Even during camp I n1942-1943, I played, but when I came back, I didn't play anymore.

[34:43] IN: Can you run through an average day for yourself when you were 15-16 years old?

[34:49] PM: We would wake up. I didn't have to work before I went to school. When I first started grammar school in Zelzah, the bus came and picked us up. I didn't have to walk. When we moved to Pacoima, we walked to school which was three miles.

[35:07] IN: you would wake up in the morning and walk to school?

[35:13] PM: we didn't have to work before school. In those days, the San Fernando Valley used to get awfully hot. We would walk home. Like I said, mom would have

something to eat which was usually jam sandwich. As soon as we ate we went out to the field. When I was 13-14, I drove horses. I harnessed up our horse and put him on and cultivate between rows.

[35:43] IN: Your family also had horses?

[35:45] PM: Later on came the model T Ford but until then we had horses. Everybody had horses.

[35:54] IN: That was the main mode of transportation?

[35:59] PM: No, by ten we had FORD. Everybody had Ford Model T's. They could afford a model T which was not too expensive. It must have been around \$500. I don't know the cost at that time. It wasn't good but it was transportation.

## **Second Session of the Interview.**

Date: MAY 21, 1993

Location: Mr. Mitsui's residence.

[36:48] IN: How many people were in your family?

[36:51] PM: There were six of us in the family. My mother and father Idjigi and Hatumi Mitsui. Then my name is Pete Mitsui, then my next sister Chemi Mitsui then Satoro Mitsui and Mitsuko Mitsui.

[37:17] IN: What order were you in?

[37:20] PM: That's the order. I was the oldest then my sister then brother and youngest sister.

[37:29] IN: You have a picture here, these are your parents? We have seen this before but we want to show it again.

[37:36] PM: This was their picture when they got married in Japan. That was in 1912.

[37:47] IN: You had another picture here, the one I like of you and your expression there. How old were you?

[38:01] PM: I don't know. I imagine about a year and half or something.

[38:06] IN: where was this?

[38:09] PM: In San Fernando in 1915.

[38:11] IN: Here is another one of you and your sister.

[38:18] PM: When we were real young. I really don't know how old I was. There was a two year distance so probably three and one or something like that. This was they first came to San Fernando.

[38:37] IN: Here is another picture - we are going through pictures here.

[38:43] PM: I had three uncles; I think these are my uncles here.

[38:51] IN: You don't remember their names?

[38:54] PM: NO.

[38:55] IN: That's not a problem. That was your immediate family. We are going to talk a little bit about your high school we had before in the last interview that you had really good teachers in high school. You were good friends with the Mexicans at school. Is there anything that you remember that stands out in your mind about that time of your life?

[39:28] PM: One of the things was in grammar school, I was in Pacoima grammar school that was my second and first was Northridge. Then we moved to Pacoima. In those days, the grammar school, we went through eighth grade. We had one teacher that was very helpful. I remember we stayed after school, I forgot how many times a week but he taught us photography, wood work and a number of things. He taught us how to work with plaster of paris. At that time there was only 6-8 of us. I think there was only one Caucasian, I was the only Japanese and the rest were Mexicans.

[40:18] IN: You were also involved in baseball quite a bit.

[40:24] PM: Yeah. I started playing when I was 16 years old. In my senior year in high school I finally made the varsity baseball team in the San Fernando High School. I made

my letter as a pitcher. At that time I was only 17 years old. I was only 5'1 and weighed 120 pounds. I was a runt. I played baseball for nearly 20 years afterwards. We didn't quite have a semi pro team but we played the merchants team in the Valley. Different towns had different teams and we used to go around and play them. We had a pretty good team.

[41:23] IN: That was until the time of the evacuation?

[41:25] PM: Yeah. That was in 1942. I pitched a few years for LA Nips, they were the semi pro team. I used to go to LA and pitch for them.

[41:43] IN: This is the Valley tire?

[41:45] PM: That's right. We took the championship in 1939 with 10 consecutive victories. We used to play in the city softball league. We were the only Japanese team. We had one tall kid that later on went to the Detroit tigers. He only lasted about five years but he did play for the Detroit tigers in the major leagues.

[42:11] IN: You mentioned something in your notes about how you were elected to the judicial board?

[42:22] PM: That was really something. The Italian fellow said that I am going to put you up for one of the judges on the judicial board.

[42:42] IN: This is in the high school?

[42:44] PM: That's right. We had to go to the assembly in the auditorium. He got up and made this speech and bungled it up. I don't remember how I went through but six of us were elected on this judicial board. We were supposed to make rulings on some of these unruly students. In those days, the student weren't that bad as today. Usually they went to the Vice Principal and he took care of most of them. I guess we took care of some of the others. I don't recall exact types. We were supposed to be doing something like a Supreme Court or something.

[43:32] IN: You also mentioned a forestry class that you were in.

[43:38] PM: Yeah. It is an extracurricular activity. This fellow was very interested in outdoor natural types of trees and things. It was in this class and we used to go on weekend trips to the mountains. We would hike a lot and study up on the natural trees and shrubs. Then we would stay overnight in the camps. We would cook ourselves. Our



main project was to plant seedling trees to replenish the trees in the mountains. This man was very good.

[44:17] IN: You don't remember any names?

[44:21] PM: I was trying to think of his name. It son the tip of my tongue but I can't bring it out.

[44:28] IN: He was the project director?

[44:33] PM: That's right.

[44:35] IN: We are going to skip back a little bit. You had mentioned something about the San Fernando Valley at the turn of the century; the first Japanese Americans had mostly worked in the citrus and walnut groves, they were mostly single men. Is there anything you could tell us about them?

[44:57] PM: I don't remember too much other than the fact that he was the head of crew workers. He was a manager of a group that used to work for these different— basically I think it was in the citrus orchards. Of course there was a lot of work involved. By then they had irrigation, they had to make the trenches. They had to do a lot of trimming. They used to trim twice a year; there were all kinds of work involved.

[45:51] IN: This was the time of the influx of Japanese immigration in the early 1900s. Do you remember that your father might have said to you that might lead you to believe that there was a lot of discrimination?

[46:10] PM: He really never mentioned anything that he encountered. Of course they weren't involved in too many mixed activities. And at that time they had just come here to band together among themselves. As far as I know, he never told me that they had any ugly incidents. As for myself, I have been fortunate. I don't think I have ever really had bad situations come up, although we knew there were subtle ways of saying you cannot do this or that. No one really told us. We used to go on theatres and on Sunday they had vaudeville acts. The man was very polite and we knew him. He said the best seats are upstairs. We took the hint.

[46:58] IN: What theater was this?

[47:03] PM: There were two. One which was north of railroad track and another one on the south that had more of the cowboys. This was more refined. It had newer pictures. On Sunday it had the Vaudeville tracks. It was more on the Caucasian side

[47:27] IN: I wanted to ask you about that, you mentioned something off camera last time about the unwritten rule about where minorities were to stay.

[47:40] PM: The railroad track was the dividing line. North of that was the whites. Whites could live south too. That's where the minorities which at that time was only a few Japanese. There were no Chinese, no Filipino or no colored.

[47:59] IN: And the Mexicans?

[48:02] PM: Mexicans and Japanese were the two. There were more Mexicans living in town than the Japanese.

[48:11] IN: We are talking about the San Fernando Valley, just above San Fernando road. We are talking south or east of the railroad tracks.

[48:26] PM: I would say north and south. All the way up to the Sierra Nevada Range and down south towards the mission. I don't know about other towns. This was basically I stayed most of the time at that time.

[48:51] IN: Going back to your father again, you mentioned in your notes, your father told you a story about what the Valley was like when he first came here.

[49:03] PM: He said on a clear day you could see the whole Valley up towards Ventura Boulevard. He said there weren't too many things that impeded his sight. It was mostly dry farming which included wheat. They grew a lot of hay in those days. When I was in grammar school, I remember there were many places which had nothing.

[49:44] IN: You mentioned a lot of work was done by horse.

[49:51] PM: That's right. The tractor was just starting to come in. Ford Tractor was the first to come in. It was pulling up a slight incline and it jerked, fell over and killed him. Before they used to put it on the back and it would jerk up. Now they put it in the front so you are pulling them from the front so it doesn't jerk up anymore. It was our neighbor. I remember we went out and there he was. He was dead. It fell right on top of him. He was riding the back and the thing fell over.

[50:36] IN: What date was this around?

[50:39] PM: That was in the 20s. I can't really remember. At that time, the tractor was just coming into vogue. Most of the farmers could not afford them. They still had to have a pair of horses and did most of the harrowing and cultivating on the ground.

[51:08] IN: Because there were so many horses in the Valley, they grew the hay?

[51:12] PM: That's right.

[51:19] IN: How many Japanese American families do you think were in the Valley around this time?

[51:32] PM: It's hard to pinpoint. I was trying to visualize it. I would imagine 100-150 families.

[51:44] IN: You said that's from San Fernando?

[51:49] PM: From North San Fernando East would be past Sun Valley, or Roscoe, North Hollywood. Way down south it would be Canoga Park but at that time it was called Owensmouth. Chatsworth to the south I guess.

[52:05] IN: We are going to talk about high school. I have a couple of notes here that I want to talk about because they are quite funny. You had mentioned in your notes that you had two great teachers and they treated you really well. You were a teacher's pet.

[52:26] PM: Japanese being a minority, most of us were shy. That's one of the reasons we never got in to too much trouble. Because of the fact that teachers took a liking for us. I remember this Miss Wolfer. She was unmarried at that time. She was my Spanish teacher. I took Spanish three years. She was my teacher all that time. She took a liking to me. I felt that I was her teacher's pet.

[53:09] IN: You also mentioned something about dating.

[53:15] PM: Dating was a taboo in those days as far as our parents were concerned. I remember I had opportunity let's say. There were a couple of Caucasian girls—it was puppy love. One of them was after high school. We never dated. We did manage to see each other once in a while. This went on for two years. When I was in grammar school, I was a little runt and this girl kept chasing me and I didn't know what it was all about.

[53:46] IN: You didn't have any trouble with anybody?

[53:50] PM: The parents kind of liked me. I used to go to their house once in a while..

[53:58] IN: They treated you well?

[54:01] PM: We had no problem. This was the beginning and they didn't know me.

[54:07] IN: People were very set in their ways. I see that you were given a breakdown of what the Valley consisted so far as Japanese Americans and what they grew.

[54:18] PM: They had the bunching vegetables where you had to bunch everything up like radishes, green onions and carrots. They were grown in the North Hollywood area. It was more sandy. Those were the types of things that grew well. Where we were the land was heavier. We grew mostly cantaloupes, watermelons, cucumbers and cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes, bell peppers and eggplant.

[54:52] IN: In this end of the valley, in the northern end of the Valley?

[54:56] PM: It was heavier soil so the carrots would never come out smooth because of the texture of the soil. The North Hollywood area was more sandy and their carrots came out nice and long and smooth. In the wholesale market, they were well known. In North Hollywood, the colors were really red as compared to the other places.

[55:27] IN: In comparison to the north and south—

[55:31] PM: I really don't remember. There wasn't quite as many. A lot of them I remember prospered. From there they started to develop more. They had to move out to Riverside, Corona and out there. They got bigger acreages. I know a lot of them really made it. They really got large.

[55:53] IN: Another thing you had mentioned was that the Japanese were involved in growing flowers.

[56:00] PM: That's right. A large segment of the Japanese grew cut flowers for the wholesale market and the florists. San Fernando Valley flower growers specialized more towards the winter crops like chrysanthemums, carnations and sweet peas. Naturally at that time the Pasadena floats were still going gung ho. They supplied a major part of their flowers at that time. Even the kids used to go there and help put the floats up. Talking about flowers one thing I would like to mention, there was one family, the Imis. There were five children. They specialized in sweet peas. They were known for their sweet peas. Another family specialized in the renuncula flower. The Imutos specialized

more in chrysanthemums. There was one brother who is still alive, he lives in Encinitas now, and he is retired. He was one of those that liked to experiment with a lot of things. He brought out quite a number of chrysanthemums, new color combinations. One of Mutu's crimson which was famous for – there was no patent but he brought it out. I imagine in 20-30 years it was very popular, the two tone chrysanthemum that he produced. He was the one that brought out the black top method of forcing chrysanthemums. Basically chrysanthemums set flowers when night are longer and the days are shorter. In the fall you got longer nights so they started setting buds. Originally chrysanthemums came out in the fall but the rest of the time they didn't have it. Now they use a black top method that he introduced. You plant your plants; get them to a certain height. To force flowers say at 4:00 in the afternoon, they will make it pitch dark inside. They don't let it up until 9 in the morning. It makes longer nights. Once they set buds they will start flowering. Now chrysanthemums come out year round. I know some flower growers up towards Santa Barbara that get here crops a year by that method. Before you only had them in the fall. Mutu was the innovator of the whole thing. We didn't know what he was doing. We thought he was nuts. They use that in the industry now.

[59:12] IN: Going back to one of the things you jotted down, because the distance and the transport methods were bad at that time, the stores that needed flowers relied on local sources, San Fernando valley, Dominguez Hills, Compton , Whittier and San Gabriel Valley.

[59:33] PM: Those were the local areas that grew most of the flowers. Now they are shipped in from Chile and all over. They come from great distances too. They will come from central CA because trucking is advanced now.

[59:52] IN: The next thing I would like to cover is medical care for Japanese Americans prior to the war. You had to go to Little Tokyo.

[60:00] PM: That's right. Just prior to the war, by then some of the elders took up medicine and got to be doctors. When we were young kids there were no Japanese doctors. It didn't pay to be a doctor in the San Fernando Valley, there wasn't enough population to make it while when we had a major situation we had to go to LA. The trips usually took us two hours to get there. Once I remember I had appendicitis. I didn't feel good, I went to LA. The doctor looked at me and said I needed an operation. I didn't go

with my folks so I had to go all the way back to tell them what the situation was. By the time I went back it had ruptured on me.

[61:00:08] IN: You are lucky to be alive.

[61] PM: Yeah. Just prior to the WW1, I had a gallbladder operation. I went to Little Tokyo to the Japanese doctor.

[62] IN: The next subject I want to go to over quickly was the Japanese owned food supply markets. There were other small businesses owned by Japanese.

[62] PM: There weren't too many businesses as such. I don't know too much about the rest of the Valley. San Fernando was the major focus point of the whole valley at that time. I know San Fernando pretty well. There was the Sunlight Market run by the Matoko family. They had groceries. They had Japanese items that people wanted. They had the rice, shoyu and that type of thing. There were two barbershops and one pool hall that was run by the Takahashi family. That was more or less in the Mexican settlement area. That's where it was easiest to get the building.

[62] IN: That was in the south?

[62] PM: Yes. Hinos had the barbershop which was only one block off San Fernando road so it was close to town. It was right on McClay.

[63] IN: Were there any Japanese language schools?

[63] PM: Yeah, they Japanese finally go together and built a building on Wadsworth. Below it's off Mission Boulevard. There is a grammar school there. It was about blocks west of that. They taught Japanese on Saturdays. A lot of places in LA went after school but we went on Saturdays. We went there to learn Japanese but we went there to eat lunch and play baseball. There were two of them, there was another smaller school about the block away. It was different factions. We learned judo, some people learned kendo. That's when they had Buddhist church gatherings too. It was kind of a community center.

[63] IN: Your parents would send you to this school on Saturdays?

[63] PM: That's right.

[63] IN: Instead of going to class, would you go there to play baseball?

[63] PM: we went to class but we didn't know any better. We did what they told us but it was a forced thing. We didn't go on our own.

[64] IN: Was the school very good? Did you learn a lot?

[64] PM: I think we learned quite a bit of history. I think we learned a lot of discipline. The teachers were pretty strict. I think it did us a lot of good. Other than the fact we didn't learn much. We managed to talk easier to the parents I guess. Now it's hard to talk to Japanese people because we don't remember too much. I can converse as far as everyday conversation but that's about it.

[65] IN: what kind of curriculum did they have?

[65] PM: The general thing. They taught the ABCs of everything.

[65] IN: History and literature?

[65] PM: Mostly history. Japan goes back a long way. They have these heroes and they made sure we learned about them. They taught us how to talk and write. It's hard for us to learn how to write. It's not easy.

[65] IN: You also talked about Buddhist church activities. Was there anything you can remember about that?

[65] PM: We used to go where the parents had their services but we couldn't understand what they were saying, we went anyway. We did have young men and women's Buddhist association. We were pretty active. We had one in San Fernando and other in Canoga Park. It was where young people got together. We had met similar type of people from other communities. We used to go to East LA, Compton, Long Beach and we would have an all-day gathering and talk about different things. We weren't too much into religion.

[66] IN: You weren't really into practicing?

[66] PM: NO.

[66] IN: Were your parents?

[66] PM: No, they believed in religion but they wouldn't go too far into it. There was a Holiness Church that was a Christian organization that was pretty active.

[67] IN: Let's go back to the LA Markets where the flower growers took their flowers. Could you talk about that?

[67] PM: At that time, the farmers, the acreage wasn't too big. You are talking about small acreage because everything was hand labor. They couldn't go in too much or else they couldn't take care of it. I would say most of the farms were between 20-80 acres. It's really small by today's standard. You have to remember everything was hand labor. What they grew they were shipped. The farmers took it or they had a trucking outfit that would come pick up the material and take it to the LA Market. It was the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> street market. They were on consignment, which meant the farmer took whatever the fella said he sold it for, we didn't check upon it. I imagine we didn't get our fair share many times. But that was beside the point. The produce was shipped on consignment. The flower industry was different. The growers themselves would take it to the market on Wall Street and each grower had their own stall and they sold their own flowers that they grew.

[68] IN: Which street?

[68] PM: Wall Street in LA.

[68] IN: Each grower would take their flowers downtown and set up a booth and sell their flowers?

[68] PM: That's right.

[68] IN: who did they sell to?

[68] PM: You are talking about florists. They are sold to the florists. They were the growers and they sold to retail outlets.

[68] IN: Did they also sell on the roadside?

[69] PM: If they lived on a major street they would put up a little stand and augment their sales in that way.

[69] IN: DO you remember any roadside stands in San Fernando?

[69] PM: None that stands out as far as major ones. There were small stands.

[69] IN: You don't remember too much about that?



[69] PM: My wife's folks had one where the kids ran it. It was on Foothill Boulevard on the other side of Lakeview Terrace. It was not quite up to Sunland.

[69] IN: You said you didn't feel too much discrimination when you were in the Valley.

[69] PM: That's right.

[69] IN: What about as it got closer to the war?

[69] PM: Up to the war, we were quite minorities and didn't do anything. I think we felt it a little more after we came back. We had no ugly incidents where we got beat up or anything. We felt a little more after the war was over.

[70] IN: I forgot to ask you one question, you mentioned hand labor was the reason a lot of the farms stayed small. When harvesting season came, do you remember being in high school and did the Japanese use other minorities?

[70] PM: Yeah. They had the Mexican colony. They were there for the extra help that farmers needed. We could always go down there and get our favorite helper to come work for us.

[70] IN: Where was the Mexican colony?

[70] PM: Most of it was settled in San Fernando and Pacoima. Pacoima had a pretty good settlement. That was on Van Nuys Boulevard north of the railroad tracks.

[70] IN: Do you remember any labor movements within the Japanese American community?

[71] PM: No, they had never anything like that, that I can remember.

[71] IN: any job action strikes?

[71] PM: Originally the Japanese were laborers but a lot worked in the railroad construction. After they worked for a few years, as soon as they got a few dollars, they went on their own. They never worked too much for other people.

[71] IN: In the last interview, off-tape you mentioned, when you first met your wife, you had an accident. Can you describe that? How did you meet your wife and how did this incident come about?

[71] PM: We knew the whole family way before. We literally grew up together although they were in the flower business and we were in vegetables. It wasn't that we socialized that much other than the club outings.

[72] IN: What club is that?

[72] PM: San Fernando Aces. They had the Ace-etts, which was the girls club. We used to have dances. When you had dances, you didn't pick up the girl. The girls came, the boys came, we danced and went home. When we were 18-20, she is five-six years younger than I am. Here we were 18 and they were 12. That's quite a big difference. You don't pay much attention. As they grow up you start noticing them. I knew her from before the war. We were dating a little bit and then the war broke out. We went into camp. In camp we had more time, so at that time we would go on outings. They had picture shows and dances and we would go together. Finally in 1943, we got married.

[73] IN: You mentioned last time that you used to go on double dates with her brother and his wife.

[73] PM: We never actually double dated. We probably went out but nothing that I can remember was different.

[73] IN: You were telling us about the accident that you had. Can you tell us about that?

[73] PM: That was quite a bit before the war, it must have been in the late 20s. I was coming home from a party. I knew that I took four other people. I had just dropped them off home. I was block away from home. This was a paved street where I was driving. I was going pretty fast. I had the Ford V8. It was a 1936 model. It must have been in 1937 that this happened. Anyway, I was coming home and I hit this horse. It was pitch dark and all of a sudden I saw something. This place was cut out and the horse came out. I hit the horse and then it hit the bank and the car flipped upside down. When I finished the car was pointing the other way with the head down like this. I don't know how I managed to get out. My brother went later on and said he couldn't open the door but I got out. He said there was blood all the way around. I walked home which was about a half a block. The horse was just in pieces. The Caucasian neighbor took me to the San Fernando Hospital. That was probably about 3-4 in the morning.

[75] IN: Later on, there was a hospital around?

[75] PM: Yes, it was a small hospital.

[75] IN: The reason I wanted to bring that up that was a date.

[75] PM: It wasn't a date at that time.

[75] IN: you had seen her that night though.

[75] PM: NO, not her. There was a bunch of people. It was a church outing.

[75] IN: You mentioned something earlier I wanted to hit on quick. There were gambling halls in the Valley.

[75] PM: No, I didn't know that.

[75] IN: Ok, I thought you had written it down.

[75] PM: There was a pool hall, but it was recreational pool hall.

[75] IN: Ok. I wanted to clarify that.

[75] PM: Although there was one in Little Tokyo which was well known.

[76] IN: And well frequented, I have heard.

[76] PM: They ran Chinese gambling games.

[76] IN: Leading up to the evacuation, we were talking that you continued to date your wife up until the evacuation and when you were interned. Can you give me an idea of what it was like for you?

[76] PM: Before the evacuation? At that time we were living in town. We were commuting to our farm. At that time we had our farm in Newhall/Saugus area. We lived right on McClay Avenue. This was one and a half block south of San Fernando Road. I know the day the war broke out it just so happened that we were in Fresno. We were visiting friends. I drove and had my father, sister mother and brother. My brother was about three years old. We were in Fresno. We heard there was a war so we thought we should come home. By the time we got to Bakersfield, it was dark. We had to get gas. AS I drove into the gas station, in those days they used to come out and service you. They called in and just as we finished and driving come a bunch of FBI agents in a car. They pulled us over and took us to City Hall. They interrogated me for about two hours. They pulled me inside and left the family outside. Somebody was asking them questions while they were asking me. They wanted to know where we said we drove. They

thought we were leaving. They let us go because we had nothing to hide, we just went to visit. Then we got home. That was the day the war broke out. Later on before the evacuation, there was a funny incident that took place. There was a fellow Caucasian man that had acreage in Arkansas. He was real good friends with the Japanese. He said he would give the land for free. He had about 200 acres. He said all you had to do was farm it and whatever you made you could live off it. There were five families that thought this was good idea. Some lived in San Gabriel Valley. We met in San Gabriel. We decided what to do. We decided we were coming home. We were beyond the curfew area. They only gave us five miles I think. There were five of us in the car. The police saw us and stopped us. He asked us what we were doing. We went to talk about the farm. Citizens were alright. If you were a US Citizen, it was alright but I wasn't a citizen at that time. I was born in Japan. I couldn't get naturalized. It was a funny thing. He started in the back and asked for papers. I was the youngest of the bunch. I was driving. He came to me and didn't ask. He figured this guy must be or I would have been thrown in jail at that time. I didn't have any papers.

[80] IN: They didn't harass you or anything?

[80] PM: No. we never had ugly incidents. They were good to us.

[80] IN: No name calling?

[80] PM: No, I don't think they knew at that time what to call us.

[80] IN: I have a question about the FBI Interrogation. What was it like for you to be interrogated?

[80] PM: I wouldn't say that we were scared, we took everything for granted. It was supposed to be this way. After all they were at war with Japan. I figured we were Japanese so they had a right. I never felt anything, I had nothing to hide. In a way I had no problem

[81] IN: You weren't angry?

[81] PM: No, I wasn't really angry. I guess we had no time to get angry at that time. We were so surprised there was a war. Maybe some of the other Japanese had an inkling but I certainly didn't have an inkling there was going to be a war.

[81] IN: There was no info coming out of the media?

[81] PM: Not that I know of.

[81] IN: There was no idea that Japan might attack?

[81] PM: I really didn't. I am certain my folks didn't know. Of course they were forcing Japan's hand at that time. I didn't know anything was going to be this bad.

[81] IN: They were forcing Japan's hand?

[81] PM: They were getting it so they couldn't get outside supplies.

[82] IN: what kind of questions did the FBI ask you?

[82] PM: I really don't remember. They wanted to make sure I was telling the truth about my name and what type of work we were doing and why we were in Freson. It looked like we were fleeing with a family. I don't actually remember the questions.

[82] IN: How many people interviewed you?

[82] PM: One of them, the rest they left by car. Somebody went out there and was asking them questions. There was only my dad and myself as far as men and then my mother, sister and little son. He must have been 3-4 years old.

[82] IN: They interviewed you by yourself?

[82] PM: That's right. They pulled me inside the building. The rest were in the car.

[82] IN: what building was this?

[82] PM: I don't remember. It must have been the City Hall.

[83] IN: One man interviewed you?

[83] PM: That's right. As I recollect.

[83] IN: it's a long time ago, I know.

[83] PM: We were half dazed too.

[83] IN: Do you remember any reactions from your family when you got back in the car?

[83] PM: No, everybody was so surprised with the whole thing. I don't remember any emotion being shown.

[83] IN: I would imagine it would have been traumatic.

[83] PM: that's right. This was something we never imagined. I never thought there was going to be a war.

[83] IN: I mean having to deal with the FBI.

[83] PM: I was never scared of the FBI or the police.

[83] IN: what happened just before you were sent in?

[83] PM: before we could finalize our answer as far as going to Arkansas, they didn't give us enough time. Boom boom and that it was. We couldn't leave anymore. They didn't really give us enough time. They said next week you go, next week this bunch goes and that was it.

[84]

IN: How many days did they give you to get your stuff together?

[84] PM: I would imagine we only had a week to ten days when they gave us official notice.

[84] IN: In the history books, it was three days

[84] PM: we had a little bit more time because we put the furniture out in the street for sale. We probably got \$5 for sofa and \$2 for the smaller ones. We had to get rid of it. It wasn't our house it was rented so we had to get rid of our stuff. We had a Ford truck that we had to get rid of. We just bought a new Ford car and sent it back to the dealer and got whatever we could. I don't remember what amount we got. We got very little. I don't think we got 10 cents on the dollar.

[85] IN: Do you remember people wandering the streets in Japanese neighborhoods?

[85] PM: They had no time.

[85] IN: I mean Caucasians or Mexicans or anybody or another race going down the streets and trying to buy your stuff.

[85] PM: Oh sure that was it. I will give you 50 cents for it. You either say yes or no. Toward the end you would take anything to get rid of it. We had Mr. Pete Andres. He

liked the Japanese people. He owned the Valley tire shop. It was the one in this softball picture. He helped quite a bit. I knew him real well.

[86] IN: Which picture?

[86] PM: Right there. He was our friend and benefactor. We had just bought a new case tractor with rubber tires and a cultivator to cultivate on the farm. We had just bought it. He said don't give that away. On Laurel Canyon and Fox he had a building there with a garage. He had rented the building to this Mexican family but he had a garage and told us to put it there and jack up the rubber tires. He said we would leave it for the duration. We left it with him and he took care of our tractor. Later on when we were in camp during the War, they needed all of those for the farming and so he sold it for us and brought the money to us. We got full value of it.

[87] IN: Where did you first gather? You were going to Manzanar right?

[87] PM: We gathered in Burbank as I remember. The bus came. We didn't ride a train, we got on buses. We got herded into these buses and directly into Manzanar. We didn't go to Santa Anita or any Assembly Center.

[87] IN: What state is Manzanar in?

[87] PM: it is in the Owen's Valley. Actually it's below Bishop. The closest town is Lone Pine, CA. its right under where Mount Whitney is.

[87] IN: You and your mother— who all went from your family?

[88] PM: That's right we all went. All of us went. My brother in law and sister, they were living in Bell, CA.

[88] IN: This is a later picture of her.

[88] PM: After that he went into the army so this is his uniform. They decided to go with us. From Bell, CA which is down, he came and stayed with us and then we all went together. Otherwise they might have gone to other camp

[88] IN: You all went to Manzanar? Your wife's family also went?

[88] PM: That's right.

[88] IN: What was it like? The trip wasn't bad?

[88] PM: IT went so fast. We didn't know whether we felt bad. We had no feelings when you come down to it. I don't think any of us were angry. I think we took it for granted that Japan was the enemy and what can we do about it. There was nothing we could do. We couldn't be blamed for it but on the other hand our heritage was Japanese. I think most of us took it for granted, what we can do about it.

[89] IN: There wasn't any bad sentiments on your side?

[89] PM: I don't think we had the time to think about those things

[89] IN: Once you were in camp, what do you remember?

[89] PM: It was something so different. On top of that we didn't have to work. For us kids we thought, gee what kind of life is this? Everybody was going to get a few bucks

[90] IN: Here is your picture.

[90] PM: This was taken after we came back. See my sister isn't there. This is my wife, myself, my brother, my younger sister and my folks.

[90] IN: Hold it for one second

[90] PM: That was after. There is another one of our family.

[90] IN: In Manzanar?

[90] PM: Of our family. Or there was.

[90] IN: This is the group that was there?

[90] PM: That was block 8. I was out on furlough at this time so I wasn't there for the picture. There were approximately 300 people on each block.

[91] IN: Let's show some more pictures. Here is your wife before you were married?

[91] PM: No this was in camp.

[91] IN: How long were you in camp before you got married?

[91] PM: We went in 1942. That fall I made a crew of seven we went to work in Idaho Falls picking potatoes and topping beets. We were there six weeks. The farmer picked us up and we went to work. Then we went to camp and got married next year.



[91] IN: You had mentioned something about the FBI earlier that they would interview Japanese Americans in the internment camp to find out whether you were eligible to be released.

[91] PM: The FBI never interviewed us. But they knew more about us than we did ourselves. It wasn't that they interviewed us. I don't know whether you know that they asked us yes, no questions?

[92] IN: Yes.

[92] PM: I answered no, yes. One was would you forsake your citizenship or something. My was a no, yes. That was okay because being an alien they don't expect me to say yes, yes.

[92] IN: What was the second one, you remember?

[92] PM: Will you pledge loyalty in case of the enemy invasion or something? I figured I was in the US and didn't know Japan. Sure I was not a citizen, I came when I was two months old.

[92] IN: Why did you say no to the first one?

[92] PM: If I had said yes, I would have been a man without a country. I would not be US Citizen and forsake Japanese citizenship. How can they force me to do that? What happened was either you were eligible to go out or you weren't. You were one of the two. We were eligible to go. They didn't make us but gave us every chance to get out. They thought we could go out and help the war effort. In the first year seven of us made a crew and went to Idaho Falls. The following year, we got married in March.

[93] IN: Do you remember the no-no boys?

[93] PM: Yeah. In our block I know of one particular family that had no father and had three boys. The mother was really flabbergasted. She didn't know what to do or say. I know they thought, well I guess we better go back to Japan. She told us she didn't know which way to turn because she had no husband to help her. The boys said no-no and were sent to... I don't know of too many others did.

[94] IN: were they ostracized?

[94] PM: No, they didn't know what that was anyway. At that time everything was going so fast we didn't have time to think it out too much.

[94] IN: I am wondering if there was any prejudice against them.

[94] PM: No.

[94] IN: You got married in 1943. This is a picture from your wedding.

[94] PM: This was the first Buddhist wedding in Manzanar. We were the first ones. They had to make this archway. It was just made out of wood. They had to make it for us. We had no honeymoon. No place to go.

[94] IN: This was the traditional Buddhist wedding?

[95] PM: You can say traditional. It was probably more so than now. They made it as simple as possible. They didn't do the whole rigmarole.

[95] IN: It was the Americanized version?

[95] PM: That's right. This was the Buddhist Church organization. The young people had an organization. There was a president.

[95] IN: get a good shot of this. Did you notice in the background the mountain there? What mountain is it?

[95] PM: Mt. Whitney. It's kind of hidden.

[95] IN: That was Mt. Whitney we showed there. Here are some pictures. This is his wife. Here is another one of her in Manzanar.

[95] PM: We had just gotten married then.

[95] IN: These are the two of you?

[95] PM: yeah. I worked in the Town Hall. I was the executive secretary at that time. We had a mayor and I was the secretary. We had a Japanese mayor. Each block had a block leader. Every Friday we would have a meeting.

[96] IN: What kind of activities did you have in the camps?

[96] PM: Other than sports there was not much else. That was my work. Later after I came back the second time. Originally I was always with the Town Hall. I was either secretary or executive block leader. Then when I first went I was a night checker. Each block had X amount of people. We had a checker. We had this sheet of paper and everybody so we went over there and talked to them. You haven't moved or snuck out? Then we checked them off. We had to go do that every night. There was a movement at that time. Some had to change rooms because they couldn't get along with a neighbor. We made sure everybody was there that was accounted for.

[97] IN: This is a picture that you were telling me of the baseball team. Tell us about this.

[97] PM: It was the same San Fernando Aces with a few additions before the War. When we got into camp, things got organized. We started having leagues. Our team came in first again.

[97] IN: AS usual.

[97] PM: Yeah. Usually it was one of the top teams before the war too.

[97] IN: You left for Idaho and came back. Did you leave again?

[97] PM: The first year in 1942 we went to Idaho Falls. We topped beats and then came home. The second year we got married in March and then she didn't want to go back east like everybody else was doing so she went out to Burley where her sister had gone to. Burley, Idaho. We stayed with a farmer. They made us a little house. We stayed with them for six months. When we first went out she was helping the Mrs. in the house and I was helping with the general chores on the farm. It really was something. That time I learned a lot of things. I skinned a sheep, we thinned beets, we thrashed alfalfa, we bailed alfalfa, and we castrated pigs. Oh boy, we learned everything.

[98] IN: That's tough work.

[99] PM: Oh yeah.

[99] IN: Do you remember the name of the farmer?

[99] PM: Mr. --- ,it's on the tip of my tongue. It was in a little town called Paul. Burley was a bigger town. Paul consisted of couple of stores on the corner.

[99] IN: It sounds like you learned a lot.

[99] PM: We finished a whole season with him. In the fall we came back to camp again. The following year she still didn't want to go permanently outside so we went out towards Ontario, Oregon which is on the Snake River. It was way on the east. The other side was Idaho.

[99] IN: Why Didn't you stay longer on the farm back in Paul?

[99] PM: In those days, after you finished a crop there was nothing to do in the winter, there was no use. You got a period of about 3-4 months where there is nothing to do. They are very seasonal out there.

[100] IN: why did your wife not choose?

[100] PM: She just didn't want to go. Most of our friends were going to Chicago but she said no. She didn't want to go in case it opened up she wanted to go back to CA. Okay we will go to Ontario, Oregon because a lot of our friends were there.

[100] IN: She wasn't against living outside of camp, she didn't want to return?

[100] PM: She didn't want to go permanently back east. We went to Ontario for six months.

[100] IN: There wasn't any feeling that harm would come to you if you were outside camp?

[101] PM: I guess we had thought that was possible, when we went into this two outside of Ontario, there were signs all over that we couldn't go in. It said, Japs keep out. This one drugstore lady accepted us and did landslide business because when everybody had money they would go there and eat ice cream and candy

[101] IN: what city was this in?

[101] PM: I am trying to think.

[101] IN: If you cannot remember, that's okay. It was in Oregon?

[101] PM: It was a few miles outside of Ontario. Ontario everybody knows but this was a dinky town.

[101] IN: What did you do there in Oregon?

[101] PM: We worked on the farm. We did basically from thinning beets to topping. We picked potatoes. On topping onions you work as a team. We did well on topping onions. We made some then because when you get a good crop they pay by how much you top.

[102] IN: You and your wife worked together?

[102] PM: That's right. We worked topping onions which was very lucrative for us. You are not making a fortune but in those days, a buck was a buck and if you made \$ 5-10, then it was a lot of money.

[102] IN: Can you describe what your day was like in Oregon?

[102] PM: at that time, we were staying in a camp, it was a tent. They had made it especially for migrant workers. There were only two ladies and she was one of them. There was another couple. The rest were all menfolk. We would wake up at sun up, get ready, they had a community kitchen. We ate; we were lucky that the farmer that we worked for gave us a pickup truck to commute back and forth. I drove and I would park it outside. I did take a crew out to his farm and we would work ten hours thinning beets. You are going like this, stooped labor all day. I really don't see how we did it, but we were young and used to it. Now it's legal to have that short hole. They can't force you to use that short hole anymore when you are like this all day. Now they do it by machine. The seeds are planted so you don't have to thin them out.

[103] IN: From Oregon, where to next?

[103] PM: The war wasn't over yet. The war with Japan finished first, didn't it? Then Germany. When I came that was in 1945. Then they said they were going to close the camps. We were still in camp; a lot of our friends were permanently outside. My brother was in Salt Lake City. My sister was in New York. My parents were in Seabrook Farm, New Jersey. My other one was in Minneapolis. I was the only one left in camp with my wife. As soon as they said they were going to close up the camp, we were the first ones to come back to the West Coast. There were about five of us that came out to look it over. We came to Little Tokyo. All colored people were in the hotels and businesses. We looked around and came back. We came back when the war with Germany was still on. The reason I came back earlier was Pete Andres, the same one at the Valley Tire shop offered me a job. He said we could stay in his house and he would give me a pickup truck to commute back and forth to work. At that time gasoline and tires were still rationed. I came back and worked as a tire man, repairing tires. He had a gasoline

station, radio shop a tire repair, car repair and a leather shop but he had to close that up. I worked to help this Italian fellow. We recapped tires. I helped him. We fixed a lot of flat tires. I was out in the public. I really didn't have any problem.

[105] IN: IS this the heart of San Fernando?

[105] PM: yes, where San Fernando and Mission used to be. It was a big organization. He owned it completely by himself.

[105] IN: How long did you work there?

[106] PM: Until he died. For about two years. All of a sudden he had a heart attack. He wasn't even 50 when he passed away. By then I didn't know what to do. They were going to close up the shop. He and his wife had separated. He had a cousin that helped him and she said she was going to leave too. We quit and then my brother in law came back from the War. Since he had a retail nursery before the War, he decided to go back in it. He found this place in Southgate and he said he needed some help. That's why I went into it.

[106] IN: After you left the job at the tire company, you still lived in San Fernando Valley?

[106] PM: That's right. By that time, I had bought a house on Rincon Street in San Fernando. It was right off Chatsworth one block over from Laurel Canyon.

[107] IN: your brother in law bought this place?

[107] PM: he found this place in Southgate. He used to have nursery in Bell, so he used to know that area well. He said he found a place in Southgate. I had just quit and deciding what to do, whether to go back into farming. He said he needed help and that's when I started. In Southgate we ran into more problems. At first I was commuting from san Fernando to Southgate until we found a place to stay. Later we found out that Southgate, the City Council found out that Japanese were going to come in, they were against it. They took a vote, evidently it passed and we were allowed to stay there. Then my borther in law bought a house. This fellow that had the nursery had a house on Alexander, right in the heart of Southgate. He said you can buy my house, I will buy another one. He moved in and then the neighbors never did talk to him while they were there. They put up a petition to kick him out. That didn't go through either. Nothing happened. One day four relators came in a big Cadillac and my brother in law was

landscaping. My sister was there and took her to the back and found out later that if you know what's good for you, you will move out of the house. She said no sir; I am going to stay here. That eventually died out too.

[109] IN: Were the realtors there to buy the house off them?

[109] PM: The realtor controlled who moved into the area. We found out later that the area was the home of the KKK. We didn't know that. We ran into it but we had enough friends that stuck up for us that all petitions died out. They could really force the issue.

[109] IN: You didn't have any experience with hate crimes?

[109] PM: it was amazing. Nobody threw rocks at us or anything.

[109] IN: That's great.

[109] PM: Of course we kept a low profile.

[109] IN: Did you sell your house in San Fernando?

[109] PM: Yeah. After we move the little house opened up and that's where we moved. Later on we got a buyer and sold the house.

[109] IN: Did you buy or rent?

[109] PM: We rented the house in Southgate. Then after a while we decided to come over here. We looked all around over. My folks were staying with us at that time. They had more friends around her so they forced the issue.

[110] IN: They steered you this way.

[110] PM: that's it.

[110] IN: You were telling us a story in the last interview about a fact that a couple men came up to you and your brother in law and said it wasn't a good place to do business because it was going to do business with you.

[110] PM: We had a lot of incidents. It was basically real estate agents. They tried to control who would come in. it kind of died out gradually. We never really had too many problems. Although we knew the problem was there. A lot of people didn't know who the Japanese were. They thought they were devil and had fangs and they were out to

kill us before we killed them but we kept a low profile. They are not so bad. We never had problems, we did pretty well.

[111] IN: You mentioned you had a few incidents of that type of people coming up to you and telling you, you are not going to be able to do business. Does anything stick in your mind?

[111] PM: As far as the nursery, probably behind the scenes there might have been but we never had anything direct that stands out. We got to know the people well by then. We were on first name basis after a while. We were a small nursery and it's a little different in those days. People confided in us. We used to hear all kinds of stories. Pretty soon they were telling us our female stories. We would listen. Because we would help them with plants, they thought we would listen to everything.

[112] IN: When did you start having kids?

[112] PM: I don't remember what year. My wife would know the birthday. I don't know the birthdays.

[112] IN: Were you here or in Oregon?

[112] PM: We didn't have any children until we got established. We had our first one while we were in San Fernando. The children came about four years apart.

[112] IN: how many children do you have?

[112] PM: We had three. But one died when she was 26. She had lupus. She contracted it when she was 12 years old. We had a lupus doctor from Beverly Hills. Of course when she first got it, lupus was a new medical problem. She was like an experiment. He was hooked up with the LA County general Hospital. There was one ward up there, 11<sup>th</sup> floor, where every time she had problems, they would send her there. They had all kinds of doctors that would come.

[113] IN: You have two remaining children?

[113] PM: That's right.

[113] IN: Can you state their names?

[113] PM: Patty and Brian. I sent him to UCLA and then he finished his schooling in San Luis Obispo Cal Poly. That's where he graduated. After he graduated he worked for me



for a while and then I turned the operation over to him. He has two boys. Boys are starting to grow up so the retail nursery takes too much time. He didn't have enough time for children. He wanted to give it up so now we have sold the property. At first we leased the property. He didn't want to sell it to us. Finally as he got older I bought out my brother in law. Then I sent Brian to UCLA and Cal Poly. Then he graduated. Pretty soon he wanted to sell it so I finally bought the land and all. Like I Said he didn't want to run it anymore. We just sold the land and the whole kit and the caboodle.

[114] IN: After you moved to the LA area, what kind of ties did you have with the Valley?

[114] PM: After the War, I was at the Valley Tire Shop. When people were coming back, we met a lot of people, because I was in tire shop and they needed help. Their tires would blow out and tires were rationed. Pete had some extra tires and he helped the people out. I got to know quite a few of the Japanese. They were just coming back. Nobody had permanent land. My wife's folks had their land. Somebody watched out for them too. At least they had the land when they came back. Most of us didn't have anything so we had to scramble around.

[115] IN: You didn't have any?

[115] PM: NO, most of the people I know, a lot of them had never lived in the Valley and now they are all strangers.

[115] IN: Pretty much, once you moved out of here, you lost the majority.

[116] PM: Oh yes, I don't have too many ties. I did join the San Fernando Valley Golf Club and was a member for two years. Then it got to be too far. Now I joined another group out here.

[116] IN: That pretty much wraps up everything.

[116] PM: I enjoyed the Valley. It's changed quite a bit. In those days, since there weren't too many I guess because of the heat generated by homes, but you don't have the winds like we used to have. The wind used to blow for days. It was well known for the wind. Now you don't have that. You might have a little wind in the Canyon but you don't have that anymore. Other than that all the areas we thought, well they weren't very good for farming, now they are developed. Now all the malls are up and big homes. The Porter Estate. We thought who is going to live out here.

[117] IN: Things change. Thank you very much. It's exactly what we needed. Thank you.

[117] PM: Whatever we can help you with, I would be glad to.

**END OF INTERVIEW.**