

GEORGE MASASHI AND MITSUNO HASHIMOTO

MRS. HASEGAWA: Today is September 5, 1980. I, Helen Hasegawa, am privileged to be in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Masashi Hashimoto at 2224 West Floradora, Fresno, California, 93728.

Before we get into the interview proper, I would like you to give us your full name, place and date of birth, and the place of your longest residency.

We'll start with you, Mr. Hashimoto.

MR. HASHIMOTO: I was born in 1902. The place is Okayama- Ken, Kibigun, Oishimura. The place of longest residency would be Fresno, California.

MRS. HASEGAWA: And your name? Do you have an English name?

MR. HASHIMOTO: It is George Masashi Hashimoto.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How did you get your American name, George?

MR. HASHIMOTO: Masashi was too long for some Americans to pronounce, and I never did care to be called "Mas," so at the time of my naturalization, Mr. Archie George, for whom I worked a long time and who helped me in many ways, said, "You are like a member of the family. How about George for your new name?"

MRS. HASEGAWA: And, Mrs. Hashimoto, your name and place of birth?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: I am Mitsuno Hashimoto. I was born in Okayama-Ken, Sodashi on June 17, 1903, and lived in the United States of America, Fresno, California, the longest.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When and why did you come to America?

MR. HASHIMOTO: In 1919 I arrived at Seattle and then went to the State of Utah, to Salt Lake City.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Why did you go to Salt Lake City?

MR. HASHIMOTO: It was arranged that I go there, but my father was in Wyoming. But, during the train ride, there was an American lady who helped me very much, but because I did not know the English language, I did not get her name or address. Even to this day I regret that I did not get her name. She got food for me, and I wished I knew why she was so kind to me. I had just arrived from Japan, and her kindness to me at that time still lingers in my memory.

I was living in Japan, but my father told me to come, and that is the reason for my coming.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was your father doing in Wyoming?

MR. HASHIMOTO: He was working in the coal mines.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What were you planning to do in Salt Lake City?

MR. HASHIMOTO: I was too young to get a job. I was only 15 years old, so I worked as a schoolboy for a little while.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Mrs. Hashimoto, when did you leave Japan?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: I came in 1922 and landed in San Francisco.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was your reason for coming to America?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: My husband had returned to Japan to get a bride. We were married and together arrived in San Francisco.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you know Mr. Hashimoto in Japan before your marriage?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: No, it was a baishakunin wedding.

MRS. HASEGAWA: There were picture brides in those days.

MRS. HASHIMOTO: At the time we were married, they had stopped that because of troubles.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What kind of troubles?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: The men would send back pictures of themselves when they were young and when the young brides saw their prospective husband, they noticed that they were much older than the photos. Some of the brides wanted to go back, and so there were troubles. So, at the time we got married, they no longer had picture brides.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Mr. Hashimoto, after your schoolboy days, what type of work did you do?

MR. HASHIMOTO: I worked on a farm and also worked in the coal mines. I worked on the railroads and also did laundry business. Then I came back to California and became a gardener.

MRS. HASEGAWA: After your marriage, where did you go?

MR. HASHIMOTO: We got married in 1922 in Japan, and then came to Fresno.

MRS. HASEGAWA: And what did you do in Fresno?

MR. HASHIMOTO: I worked mostly as a farmer. I did everything all kinds of work.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you work in the vineyards, peach orchards, or on vegetable farms?

MR. HASHIMOTO: I did all of them. I worked in Fresno from 1922 to 1939. Then I went to the State of Washington. I started a steam laundry business in Spokane during the war.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You had children during those years?

MR. HASHIMOTO: While living in California, we had four children;

three sons and one daughter. The oldest had been sent to Japan where he died, so now I have three children. The children are married to Japanese. There is one in California, one in Washington, and the youngest one, the daughter, is in Texas.

While we lived in California, there was discrimination against Japanese. I was frightened at the prejudice in California against Japanese. In a certain town there were notices posted at the edge of the town. There was one in Porterville. When I lived in Visalia, I saw the sign a few times. So, there was much suffering due to discrimination. And, during the war, we went to live in Littsville, Washington near Spokane and opened a laundry. But even there, we had to struggle against prejudice. Comparing the prejudice before and after the war, the Japanese now have the citizenship, and there is much better feeling all around.

The greatest change during the last several years is inflation. With inflation, everything has become so expensive. I imagine that is causing hardship in some cases.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What is difficult for me to understand is something you said about your oldest son. He passed away? How?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: When he was small, we sent him to study in Japan. And while he was in school the war started, and he died in service there.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was that the war with the United States?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: Yes, the "Nichbei senso."

MRS. HASEGAWA: He was in Japan a long time, then.

MRS. HASHIMOTO: He was studying in Japan for about 15 years. We had been planning for his return, but the war prevented it.

MR. HASHIMOTO: We had a very unusual experience about our son. He appeared to me in a dream begging for help. He was very thin and ill. I woke with a start and looked all around for him; but, of course, he was nowhere to be seen.

MRS. HASHIMOTO: The following night he came to me. He was weak and suffering from starvation and could not speak. Then he disappeared. Not long after that we received a letter from his best friend with whom he had undergone severe deprivation in a Siberian prison camp, and upon becoming ill had been sent to a hospital in Korea. The letter informed us of the death of our son. I truly believe that God answered our prayers concerning the whereabouts of our beloved son from whom we had been separated for so long.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Let's see. You came from San Francisco to Fresno in 1922 until 1939. So you also lived in Visalia during this time?

MR. HASHIMOTO: Yes, I lived in Visalia.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What about your experience while you were in Washington? Did you experience any discrimination during the war?

MR. HASHIMOTO: Yes. During the war, because I was an enemy alien, I

noticed the change in attitude of our customers toward us. My customers no longer came. And while the children walked around the city, there were some Americans would glare at them. Some of them would say nasty thing, but I believe they did this because an enemy alien lived in their midst.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Mrs. Hashimoto, after you got married, you came to Fresno right away. And what did you do after you arrived?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: After I landed in San Francisco with my husband, and since my Uncle Yamoto was in Fresno, we came to his home here. We did not know too much about the conditions in America. My uncle found us a job in the country on a farm. Because I did not know anything, I cooked in the camp where there were nothing but bachelor men. It was a hardship for me.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many were there at this camp?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: Ten people, all Japanese single men.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How long did you work there?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: I went there from November and worked during the season during the harvesting of grapes and all during the other farm work. Both my husband and I had to rely on my uncle because we were new in California. Although my husband had a parent, his father was in Wyoming and in no position to help us. So we both did lots of farm work.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were your children born during this time?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: Yes. We did not have a home, but was more of a migratory worker carrying our blankets here and there, so one was born here, and then there. So all four were born at four different addresses!

MRS. HASEGAWA: How long did you work like that? How old were your children when you got your home?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: We did contracting work, so we moved with the children to various places. The children attended different schools.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you go to a large farmer's place to work?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: No. We did a little work here and a little work there. There were times we lived in the corner of the garage or by the side of a barn. My husband was only 21, and I was 20 when we came, and we didn't have any close relatives besides my uncle. At one place where we worked for about five years, I had to cook over an unvented kerosene stove in the corner of the bunkhouse. The fumes eventually caused me to lose the sight of an eye, most of my teeth, and lung disorder by the time I was 30 years of age. I thought that I had TB but a doctor who later checked my lungs and discovered scar tissue, said that it had been caused by inhaling the fumes. He was amazed that I had recovered.

MRS. HASEGAWA: My! How you struggled. But now you are comfortably situated.

MRS. HASHIMOTO: Yes. Now we are truly happy and comfortable and very

thankful for what we have. For we did struggle in the early years.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Mr. Hashimoto, your father was in America a long time before you?

MR. HASHIMOTO: Yes. When I was 4 years old he left Japan and came to the United States, so I really don't know what he was doing in the United States. I only knew him for about two years when I lived in the Utah and Wyoming area. He was killed in an accident in the coal mine.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I am very sorry to hear about that. And also that you did not get to know him better.

Now, could you tell us what organizations you belong to?

MR. HASHIMOTO: I belong to the Fresno Congregational Church and the North Fresno Community organization, the Shiginkai, Bonsai Club. And I joined the JAFL.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When did you become a citizen of the United States?

MR. HASHIMOTO: I became a citizen in 1952 in Fresno court.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Before the war, you went to Spokane, and then did you return to Fresno after the war?

MR. HASHIMOTO: Yes. I lived in Spokane for eight years, and then came back to Fresno, when I started to become a gardener.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What were the feelings as you worked as a gardener at the various places?

MR. HASHIMOTO: It was a business, so I mainly had American customers. The American customers I had were very comfortably off. The place I took care of the longest belonged to an attorney Archie George. They were very good to us and taught us many things for which we are very grateful. The official things they did for me that he helped me with business and legal dealings with other Americans.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you still have any Japanese customs you observe?

MR. HASHIMOTO: I came to America when I was quite young, so as far as Japanese customs, I'm not too familiar with them. The only thing might be that we looked forward to the New Year's meal. I don't have too much interest in Japan.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You have lived in America most of your life.

MR. HASHIMOTO: I lived here over 61 years in the United States, so I feel like an American. I went to Japan about four times but just to visit.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What years did you go to Japan?

MR. HASHIMOTO: Last one was 1974. Before that I went three times. The first time was in 1922 when I got married.

MRS. HASHIMOTO: After we got married, we returned to Japan together in

1971.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you take the children?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: No, we went by ourselves. The children were old enough to be left behind by then.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What else do you recall about your past history?

MR. HASHIMOTO: I would like to mention one special thing. Before the war, the Japanese lived at various places. There was a Nihonjin kai that helped the Japanese to get together to establish schools, to give help with the everyday situations and other problems. This was a very helpful organization. Without a doubt, California was very prejudiced, so it was necessary that Japanese help each other. The organization was needed to give the individuals the strength to succeed.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What do you think of the present work of the JACL and the Nikkei Service Center?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: Nikkei Service Center is supposed to help the Issei with some of the problems. They are doing some of the things Nihonjinkai used to do.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What do you think of the Nisei and Sansei?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: The Nisei, because they are still Japanese, I believe, they have some of the Japanese traits in them. When I read the daily newspaper, I see that the Nisei do not get into trouble. I think the Nisei are good citizens, perhaps due to their education and good training. Compared to other nationalities, the Niseis are very good and a clean living group, I think.

MRS. HASEGAWA: In 1939 you decided to go to Spokane. Why?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: In 1939, my husband's older sister was in Spokane. And we wanted to make more money since our son was in Japan studying.

We wanted to go back to Japan later. So, with his sister and her husband, we opened or started a large steam laundry. Soon after we opened it, the war started. We were Japanese, so during the war it was very difficult. But, as we didn't have to evacuate, we stayed with the laundry business during the war.

There was close by a large airbase, so we had to do the laundry for these airmen. They would bring the clothes every day by the truckload, and we would work from early morning to late at night getting them done. Because we were Japanese, they took advantage of us and paid very little for the work.

We had heard that Japanese people in camp were fine. As for us, we didn't make much money, and the food was rationed so we were unable to buy meat. It was very difficult and trying time.

Because of the war, whenever a Japanese passed by a wounded soldier, the soldier would push the Japanese from the sidewalk or even hurt them. The government told us to display a gold star if any son was serving in the US Army. Our third child was in the US Armed Service, and so my husband and I and the children all received a gold star and displayed

them as we went out.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did the feeling improve after that?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: Yes, they no longer tried to push us.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When you returned to Fresno, Mr. Hashimoto started his gardening work. Were conditions better?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: After the war, one was able to get citizenship and we were able to buy a home for the first time in this nostalgic Fresno. And my husband started to do his gardening work every day, and we were able to make a comfortable living.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Now, your home was on "A" and Ventura? How long did you live there?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: We lived there about 23 years. After that we moved further on "A" Street next door to the Konko Church and lived there about seven years.

At that time, last year, about in March, one night a colored robber came in and took our money and jewelry. I felt relieved to think that he was ready to go home, but, instead, he pushed me onto the bed and said, "I kill you." He got his pocketknife out and stabbed my throat, so I thought I was going to die. I was alone; my husband was not home. I realized that I might die, so for the first time in my life I prayed to God to save my life. He gave me strength so I was able to stand up and pushed open the door and ran out to the sidewalk bleeding. I was able to run to Reverend Okazaki's place, banged his door, and he called the emergency. My life was saved. Even now, as I recall the incident, I am very thankful and every day I give thanks to God for letting me live. The police had gone to get my husband who was still at Shigin, and the ambulance had taken me away. The police brought him home, and when he saw the blood all over the kitchen, he had such a shock that he became ill.

MRS. HASEGAWA: At that time, your sons from Los Angeles and Seattle came to Fresno. Didn't your children say that they would take you two with them?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: They said if we stayed here someone would kill us, so they were determined to take us to either place. But, since I've lived here a long time, and have many friends, and live close to our church, I asked them to let us live here in Fresno. The children said that if we would stay here to please move to another location. So, to please them, we sold the house and moved here.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How fortunate that this place was open just at that time. Your place on "A" Street was fairly new.

MRS. HASHIMOTO: Yes. But the surroundings were very bad and very dangerous there. Here it's much better. If anything was left outdoors no one would take it, but at the other place, things and even plants were stolen. Things were being constantly stolen at the old place.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Before the war, the West Side wasn't bad at all. But

after the war, it has continually gotten worse.

MRS. HASHIMOTO: Since the war, there seems to be more bad people, more criminals killing people, and think nothing of it.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Why did you move from the first house on "A" Street and Ventura?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: Ventura was being turned into a highway, so the government told us to move.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Compared to before and after the war, what changes have you noticed?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: The West Side has changed considerably and has become a dangerous place to live.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you belong to any organizations?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: I belong to the church organizations and attend church. I no longer belong to the flower arrangement classes. When Mrs. Ohara was teaching the classes at our church, I started and learned under her for a long time.

MRS. HASEGAWA: That was shortly after the war?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: Yes, it was.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Now, the Japanese custom is mostly retained for New Year's?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: Yes. New Year's, Girls' Day, and Boys' Day. On those days, I would fix a special Japanese meal and observe the Japanese feelings.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You have three living children. What is the son in Washington doing now?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: The one in Spokane works in the postal office of the Great Northern Pacific Railroad. He has been there for over 30 years and has two sons.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What about the son living in Los Angeles?

MR. HASHIMOTO: He's a chemist and the manager of resin research and development for Textilana Company. He's been there almost 30 years now. They have a son and a daughter.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What does Jo Ann's husband do?

MR. HASHIMOTO: Jo Ann has a government job. They have one boy and one girl.

MRS. HASEGAWA: So, all together, how many grandchildren do you have?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: We have six grandchildren. The three children have two children each.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Your children are certainly scattered over a wide area!

MRS. HASHIMOTO: Yes, really. Spokane, Washington; Los Angeles, and in Texas in a place called Steppinville, about a hundred miles from Dallas. All in all, conditions have greatly improved. The older people have been able to get citizenship and anyone, even Japanese, can buy land, so we're very thankful for all these improvements.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is there any advice you'd like to leave to the Nisei, Sansei, or Yonsei?

MRS. HASHIMOTO: There's one thing I'd like to emphasize. I believe that religion is very important. One must have shinko (faith in God). That is what pulled me through all these hardships and crises.

MRS. HASEGAWA: That's very important.

MRS. HASHIMOTO: My son in Spokane attends the church of Reverend Kazato, and is very dedicated. Reverend Kazato was appreciative of his active participation.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Thank you so much, Mr. and Mrs. Hashimoto.