

MRS. AKIKO SUDA

MRS. HASEGAWA: Today is June 9, 1980. I, Helen Hasegawa, am privileged to interview Mrs. Akiko Suda in her home on 4683 East Olive Avenue, Fresno, California, 93702.

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

MRS. SUDA: My name is Akiko Suda. I was born in Hiroshima-shi, Misasacho, Japan. My birthday is November 15, 1896. I have lived in Fresno for 63 years. I come from a very large family of 10 children. There were six girls and four boys. My family had a needle factory, and I recall watching the workers polish each needle by hand, one at a time! Later my brothers expanded the family enterprise by opening factories in various places and by manufacturing other small hardware articles. They were known also for their fine fish hooks!

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

MRS. SUDA: I came in February 1916 as my husband's yobiyose wife, as a himin and not as an imin.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What is an imin?

MRS. SUDA: Imin were people who came as laborers. I came as a housewife. There was a difference in our passports. I had a pink permit as a yobiyose and did not need a photograph, while the laborers had green ones.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you come directly to Fresno?

MRS. SUDA: Yes, via San Francisco.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was your husband's occupation?

MRS. SUDA: My husband's occupation has been a farmer, liquor store proprietor with his brother, and a gardener. His name was Zenjiro Suda, born on March 21, 1888 in Hiroshima, Japan. He worked on his family farm before emigrating to the United States. His brother Toichi, who came two years before he did, who was a drug salesman, called him over because of a better future here. He arrived in Hawaii and then went on to San Francisco in 1907, the year after the earthquake. He worked on the railroad in Utah for less than a year, then joined his brother Toichi in a joint cantaloupe venture in Imperial Valley. The first year was a bad experience for them, and they lost a lot of money. The second year they changed their planting method, cantaloupes were scarce so the brothers were successful in raising lots of melons and made a fortune! They stayed in Imperial Valley for three years. It is said that the bank was greatly impressed with the amount of money the Suda brothers made. They sold the melons for 75 cents each! The bank remembered them with greetings at Christmastime for several years after.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did they do then?

MRS. SUDA: They planned to return to Japan with all this money, but when they got to Fresno their friends told them that if they went back

to their homeland they would be drafted into the military service since my husband was 21 years old. They decided to stay in Fresno and bought a liquor store in Fresno and leased 11 sections of land in Kerman where my husband raised beef cattle, pigs, chickens, alfalfa, and grain. In the winter he cut willow wood along the riverbank and sold it for firewood. Drought took its toll and his home burned down. After three years of bad luck, he gave up the farm and returned to Fresno. Zenjiro went to work with his brother in the liquor store until 1919 when Prohibition closed the store. It was planned that I come to Kerman from Japan, but those plans had to be changed, and so I came to Fresno in 1916.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did Mr. Suda come to Japan to marry you?

MRS. SUDA: Toichi, his brother, went to Japan to marry my sister Ryuko (Nakata Suda) Asada in January 1915. They had a very elaborate wedding lasting three days, and at the same time I was married by proxy to Zenjiro. Toichi and Ryuko came to America in March of 1915. I remained in Japan to wait for Zenjiro to come for me, but he became involved in a suit against the liquor store for sale of liquor by a clerk to an Indian which was illegal, so Zenjiro could not come for me. About this time Zenjiro's friend went to Japan to bring his wife back, so at the same time, they accompanied me to San Francisco where my husband came for me.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was your marriage arranged?

MRS. SUDA: Yes, more or less. We were related and knew each other. Since my sister was shy and did not relish the idea of living more than two miles from home, my mother wanted us to marry the two brothers so we could go to America together. She felt better knowing we would be close to each other in a foreign land.

After the wedding, Toichi, Ryuko, and I stayed at the Suda home during the Buddhist holiday of Honko. Then they went to America and I returned to my maternal home and resumed my pre-married life's routine attending flower arrangement and tea ceremony classes. Before I left, my high school friend found out that I was going to America and invited me to come to her home in Hamon, Higashi Shiwa, to meet her brother who had come back from Seattle, Washington. When I got to the railroad station, I was met by a jinrikisha. There was a dog harnessed to help the man who pulled the jinrikisha. When we came to a steep hill, the dog had a hard time, panting away. When we reached a level spot, the dog was allowed to stop for a drink of water. My friend's home was spacious and beautiful and I could see that she was accustomed to and had been brought up to be a lady. My friend's brother advised me not to go to America. He told me that the life for women in the new land was too hard, that pictures of large western homes which were sent back by the immigrant men were homes of rich white people and that Japanese immigrants lived in shacks or barns.

On arriving in Fresno in February of 1916, I found that my friend's brother had not exaggerated; that most of the immigrants lived in shacks and many babies were born in barns without doctors. Many lived in rooming houses or hotels when they first came before they could construct their own modest dwellings. My home had a parlor, two bedrooms, a kitchen, so I was fortunate. Very few immigrants had their own homes around 1916.

I went to the Buddhist Church every afternoon with my friends and their

children as the basement there was really cool. I learned to play the piano and another friend played the violin. It was very enjoyable. Soon after that a friend told me about a position that was open in a Caucasian home. I was told that I would learn some English, so I went hoping to learn some bookkeeping too, but when I arrived I found that I was to baby-sit a young child and keep the house in order. There was a black woman who did the washing and ironing. There was not enough work to keep me busy, so I was dozing one day when the boss told me to go to the movies near there and gave me the money. So I took that, but went to my sisters and spent the time with her. The thing that bothered me most was to have this young child calling me "Akiko, Akiko." It was degrading, and I did not like that. I told them I did not want a salary, but instead would like to learn English. I wanted to be able to go to a store and ask for whatever I wanted to buy and so they taught me to say in English, "I want a striped overshirt, blue and white overshirt." I still remember saying that. My boss owned a shoestore called Karl's, and he gave me all the shoes I wanted. As they were not around during the daytime, I was not able to learn much English. After three months, I found I was pregnant, so I quit that job.

I remember that while I worked there, they went on a week's vacation. They sprinkled something on their carpet and rolled it up before they left, which was something I had not seen before. Then, because they had milk delivered daily, they wanted me to take the milk home every day, but I gave it to the neighbor instead of carrying it home. They trusted me. I felt a little apprehensive when they left their jewels out in the open. I did some mending for them, and they appreciated that. They prepared good meals for the black lady and myself.

About this time Mrs. Okonogi, a doctor's wife, and a Mrs. Miyano taught me how to make mayonnaise, cake, salad, and other Western dishes. Making mayonnaise was the most difficult. She used to get prizes at the Fresno County Fair for her cooking. She was born in Hawaii and so spoke some English. I also went to English classes at the Japanese Congregational Church at one time where Reverend Fukushima was our teacher.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How long were you in the sake business with your brother-in-law?

MRS. SUDA: From about 1912 to 1919. Toichi contracted the flu and died in that epidemic on February 15, 1920. The liquor store was closed in 1919 so Zenjiro, in partnership with Mr. Setsugo Sakamoto, leased a 200-acre ranch in Visalia where we lived until 1924.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you have children then?

MRS. SUDA: Two were born in Fresno, Fumi and Willie; and two in Visalia, Miles Noboru and Hiromu Otto.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you raise in Visalia?

MRS. SUDA: There were about 60 acres of Thompsons, plums, peaches, figs, and olives, and the rest in pasture and grain.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was this a partnership?

MRS. SUDA: Yes, with Mr. Sakamoto. It was April, so the pruning was

already done, and we paid two or three thousand dollars for that labor and took over the farm. We stayed there for three or four years. At first we made some money. We had to pay about \$10,000 a year on the contract. It was a lot of money! Then we had it reduced to \$6,000, then \$1,000, but we still lost. We sent fruit to Los Angeles expecting a good return, but it did not materialize. When we thought we had a good crop of raisins, it would rain. We had to buy dehydrators and other equipment, there was all sorts of trouble. As many as 40 workers came and helped pick the muscats for table grapes. We lost a great deal of money! The year before we leased the farm, all the farmers had had a good year so the rent was very high, but the following year conditions were bad, and we were caught between high rent and no cash income. My husband and I spent all the money we had saved to pay our full-time workers and two or three Mexicans and their crew. It was a time of great anxiety! (The money I had saved from the liquor store amounted to about \$700 or \$8014 which I was saving, hoping to buy a piano for the children, had to be spent, too!)

Although I had not worked in the fields prior to this time, when it began to rain I went out to turn trays for raisins instead of hiring help. There were peaches and figs drying and when it rained, three trays were joined together and had to be stacked, so it was very hard work. All the raisins and everything else that was drying were soaked and ruined.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You had to go out to help?

MRS. SUDA: Since it was Saturday, all the workers had been paid and they had all gone to town in Visalia, so they were not available. I aged 10 years in three years. The farm that we contracted was on private land far from the road and had pasture land and barley fields and was so vast that we had to open two gates for the children to go to school. There was a big house that the landowner lived in with about 10 acres of all kinds of fruit trees of the best kind. We originally had about 20 chickens and increased them to over 300. There were cows, so we had milk to drink. No, we did not want for food.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you come back to Fresno after your Visalia experience?

MRS. SUDA: Yes, we came back in 1924. After our lease expired in 1924, Zenjiro went to work at the Aki Company, a hardware and grocery store which originated in Sacramento, because the co-proprietors, Naoichi and Yoshino Kuwamoto wanted to visit Japan. Naoichi's brother Seichi had married my younger sister Tomiko, and all together, they owned the Aki Company. In 1925, Naoichi died while in Japan, so Zenjiro stayed on there instead of returning to farming, which was his first love. During this period, I taught Japanese language to Nisei on Saturday mornings for 11 years at Monmouth with Mr. Masuda. When it closed down due to the impending war, we went to Parlier (it was east of Highway 99) until just before evacuation. I had also learned to drive an automobile and wondered why my leg had gotten so tired the first time I drove to Monmouth. I had held the clutch down all the way! In 1940, Zenjiro leased a soda fountain on Tulare Street and refurbished it with a new door and modern electric lighting.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was the name of your store, and what did you sell?

MRS. SUDA: It was the Suda Store, and we sold ice cream cones, hot dogs, milkshakes, and candy, and also there was a pool table in the back. We ran this business until 1942. Just when we were getting back on our feet, we ran into another crisis. War with Japan! And then evacuation! Although there were many prospective buyers, we could not sell the business or sublease it because without our knowledge, the landlord had leased the property to a Chinese neighbor who had a dry goods store next door and wanted to expand. He wanted to move in immediately so we had to pack up and get out! We salvaged what we could and stored the jukebox, equipment, and many electric fixtures in Murashima's vacated sewing school building. Because we were enemy aliens, we had no choice or protection from the law.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were your sons in college at the time of the war?

MRS. SUDA: Yes, Willy and Miles were at University of California at Berkeley. Willy graduated in 1941 as an entomologist and was drafted into the U.S. Army where he served until 1946. Miles, the second son, had to leave UC Berkeley and enter the Fresno Assembly Center and Jerome, Arkansas. He left camp to attend the University of Missouri and graduated as a mechanical engineer in 1946. Our third son Otto was attending Fresno State College and working at Aki Company when the war started. He went to camp and left Jerome in 1943 to attend Wayne University and Michigan State to graduate as a veterinarian. When my son decided on this profession I said, "If you are going to become a doctor, why don't you become an M.D.?" He said he wanted a profession that other Japanese had not tried, so he became a veterinarian. I really wanted him to become an M.D.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was your daughter Fumi married?

MRS. SUDA: She was married after we returned from relocation center in 1947. She attended Fresno State College, but later transferred to and graduated from 4 C's College. She was employed as a secretary at the time of war and in the center she became secretary to the block manager.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Have you ever returned to Japan?

MRS. SUDA: Yes. After the war in 1956, and again in 1970, at the time of the World Exposition in Japan. Many years had lapsed since I had left Japan. However, in 1930, my mother came from Japan to visit us! When I heard she was coming, I did not want her to come to this poor place, but she insisted on coming since she would be able to see all three of her daughters and their husbands and all her grandchildren. She soon arrived with two big trunks!

MRS. HASEGAWA: That was quite a feat for a woman from Japan to come to America to visit at that time.

MRS. SUDA: We wanted Mother to stay a long time, but she received word that Mr. Suda's mother in Japan was critically ill, so my husband took Mother back to Japan. I wanted to go so much, too, but with four young children in school, I was unable to go. But I did go after I had received my U.S. Citizenship.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When did you get your U.S. Citizenship?

MRS. SUDA: I received my citizenship in 1955 along with my two sisters,

our husbands, and about 100 others. I was singled out by the judge to answer all of the 30 to 40 questions for the entire group! I was surprised as I couldn't understand English very well, and there were others who could speak it much better than I, but the judge chose me as an example of one who had not known even the ABC's, over the age of 60, and who had learned English after coming to America.

During our class in Citizenship at night school, I had studied hard and was able to provide the answers to questions about Republicans and "habeas" and something or other. I don't know how I managed! My relatives and the many friends who were there to take the test were overjoyed at their own good fortune and thanked me over and over!

MRS. HASEGAWA: Congratulations! Now, please tell us how the Buddhist Fujinkai or Women's Group, began their visits to the Fresno County Hospital, now known as Valley Medical.

MRS. SUDA: It must have been around 1917 there was an 84 year old Caucasian man by the name of Ananda-san who used to make calls on Japanese patients at the hospital. He thought these Japanese men would enjoy Japanese food, so he asked us to make onigiri (rice balls) for the patients, which he took to them. Later, when Reverend Kyogoku became our priest, his wife organized the Buddhist Fujinkai, and we took turns preparing food and collecting magazines for the hospital. And we have continued this practice for over 60 years. Mr. Ananda was a very small man with a big, kind heart. He must have been a missionary to Europe. All the children were always happy to see him, because he gave them candies and pennies on the street. He made many people happy.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What do you remember about December 7, 1941?

MRS. SUDA: I could not believe the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese Army! When I visited Hawaii in 1964, I saw Pearl Harbor and was saddened.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you go to the Fresno Assembly Center?

MRS. SUDA: Yes. It was summer and so hot. We took a large and small electric fan but were not allowed to use the larger fan. In fact, it was confiscated along with any Japanese books on poetry, songs, and flower arrangement that we had. Even our long cooking knives were broken off. I remember at the relocation center our children could not get fresh milk or sugar or ice that they were used to getting at home. They did not like the canned milk which was served with the hot cereals, so they did without.

MRS. HASEGAWA: To which relocation center did you go?

MRS. SUDA: My sisters and their families left for Gila, Arizona, with the other Fresno people, but my family relocated to Jerome, Arkansas because that was the center where Willy could visit when on leave from the U.S. Army. Later we moved to Gila when Jerome was closed.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How long were you in Jerome?

MRS. SUDA: Over two years, and in Gila for one year. We returned to California in 1945 to find that the things we had stored in our basement had all been stolen. Our neighbors

collected our rent and took over the upkeep of our home while we were gone.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was it like at the Gila Relocation Center?

MRS. SUDA: Many of us learned different kinds of crafts, and, in general, had a new experience.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Many people say that going to camp was the first time they had time to pursue their hobbies, to relax and rest their bodies since coming to the United States.

MRS. SUDA: That depends on the individual. The living conditions were bad. We had straw mattresses which were very uncomfortable and even the pillows were filled with straw! About that time, I began to read and chant the Junirai, a Buddhist scripture, for comfort; morning, night, whenever I had the time. From this, many of us memorized the Junirai and could recite all 12 verses without the book.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Very good! There were many positive things about camp. I understand some people designed and constructed beautiful Japanese gardens.

MRS. SUDA: Yes. Others made art objects out of wood, such as vases and bases to place under flower arrangements. My husband made walking canes and brooches in the shape of birds. I painted over 150 birds. Also I learned how to make flowers out of tissue paper and Japanese dolls dressed in crepe paper clothes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did your daughter Fumi do?

MRS. SUDA: Fumi taught sewing at Jerome Relocation High School until we moved to Gila Camp. She left Gila to work in Phoenix as a domestic for two years until the camp disbanded and the three remaining family members returned to Fresno.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You spent two New Year's in camp. What kind of celebration did you have?

MRS. SUDA: I thought there would be no omochi, but we did have some made from rice flour. We had lots of friends and our relatives were nearby, so it wasn't too bad.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What social and economic changes have you seen over the years?

MRS. SUDA: I think that there is much unnecessary expenses today, especially with weddings. First there are the shower gifts, then the more expensive wedding gifts. That may be the American custom, but it seems to get bigger and more expensive. Even with funerals there are lots of expenses that I feel are not necessary.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What organizations are you presently involved with?

MRS. SUDA: At the present time I am involved with the Buddhist Church activities and the Senior Citizens group at the Nikkei Center. In pre-war days, Mr. Suda was treasurer for the Kenjinkai group. When we lived in Visalia, I took care of my sister Ryuko's children when my brother-

in-law died. With the care and feeding of six children, cooking for all the laborers besides my own family, I could not be too involved with organizations. In Jerome and Gila, we had organized the HoShokai, a group interested in performing utai (a story sung by chanting) with its parent organization in Japan. We met weekly in Mrs. Momoko Taira's or our home to practice together. We ordered books from Japan and Mr. Kametaro Naoe came from Los Angeles to teach us in the nursery room of the Fresno Buddhist Church.

In January of 1947, Mr. Koichi Hara, Mr. Juro Hashimoto, and a Mr. Inada came from Los Angeles with 15 of their chanters, and we had a gala chartering of our organization with an elaborate dinner, flowers, and picture-taking. Mr. Hara then came once a month to teach us until 1967. Over the years we met over 160 times and spent a great deal of money for dinners, books, orei, traveling, and hotel expenses for our teachers.

All of the members received certificates of varying degrees from the Kuro Hosho headquarters in Japan. There was the Shoden, the Chuden, and Okuden classes of certificates. Mr. Iwao Sano, a higher teacher known as a Shokubun from Japan was ensconced in a Los Angeles hotel for 11 years at our expense to teach us. In November of 1956, Mrs. Kiyoko Isogawa and I were the only ones in Fresno to receive our Shokutaku certificates from Sokei Kuro Hosho in Japan. Gradually, though, old age began to take its toll, we could no longer drive; sickness and death cut our ranks, and in 1967 we disbanded.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Your children attended Japanese Language School and Judo classes?

MRS. SUDA: Yes. They were held at the Buddhist Church. All my sons took Judo. My grandfather was a teacher of the martial arts in Japan, so we encouraged the boys to take up Judo.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When did your husband die?

MRS. SUDA: In December 1968, at the age of 81 years of age. This year we will have a 13-year memorial service for him. Time goes quickly. After his unsuccessful cataract eye surgery, his health and his morale declined quickly.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you observe the traditional Japanese customs?

MRS. SUDA: Oh, yes, we still observe the rituals and celebrations of the first and last day of each year, the Ohigan (Equinox), Girls' Day, Boys' Day, Obon, Tanabata, weddings, funerals, yakudoshi (special birthdays at ages 60, 77, 88), and others. I make special dishes on their memorial dates and place it in front of my Obutsudan (family shrine). Since I have been brought up to observe these customs, I cannot feel at peace until I do. My children understand my feelings.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you have any other recollections that you might like to share?

MRS. SUDA: In 1956, my two sisters, my husband, and myself, my niece Teruko Uchiyama (Kuwamoto) went to Japan with Reverend Jyoshin Motoyoshi as our tour leader. I was the president of the Fresno Buddhist Fujinkai at the time. In Kyoto, we were met by the Tsukiji Hongangi Church's

minister and taken on a tour of the Asoka Hospital where we were told of their need for repairs, a new nursery, and other things. After our return to Fresno, I initiated a monetary donation which was sent to the hospital and has become an annual project of the Fresno Fujinkai. We have received documents and tokens of appreciation from the government of Japan for this.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When you went back to Japan, what changes did you notice?

MRS. SUDA: Because of the atomic bomb, the whole city of Hiroshima had been burned and devastated, so the construction was new and there were no familiar landmarks at all.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was your family far from the center of the bombing?

MRS. SUDA: My brother Tokuzo had a retirement home in Itsukaichi Machi. He had been commuting to work, but on that fatal day he had gone to Kamiya-Cho and so was saved. His home was burned and his brother Denjiro, who had been sitting on the veranda, was blasted into the house and was saved. Tokuzo, however, died from exposure to radiation one month later.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Please tell us about your immediate family.

MRS. SUDA: I have one daughter Fumiko and three sons. Fumi, the eldest, was born in 1917 and is married to Satoru Yokoyama, lives in Sacramento and has three daughters. The middle one married in August to a Caucasian, and the other two are career minded and living away from home.

Willy, born in 1919, is married to Lily, a nurse. They have three daughters and a son who is a medical student at St. Louis University in Missouri. His eldest daughter is a public health nurse graduated from UCSF and is married to a Caucasian, and they have two little boys. Willy's second daughter is a lawyer from Loyola University in Chicago, Illinois and has a practice in Aptos, California. Her husband is of Japanese ancestry and is a dentist. Willy's third daughter is also an R.N. who graduated from UCLA and is married and lives in Richmond, California. Her husband is an engineer.

Miles is married to Kay, and they have a son who graduated from S.F. State and works in a hospital. Their daughter Vicky attends San Jose State University and is studying to be a nurse.

Otto is married to Nancy, also a nurse, and they have three girls and one boy. Their eldest daughter is a nurse graduated from and working at UCLA Medical Center. Their second daughter is attending University of California at Davis Medical School. Youngest daughter Carolyn just graduated from McLane High School as valedictorian and is going to attend UCLA in September. Their son Michael is a junior at California State University at Fresno.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Have you experienced discrimination in your lifetime?

MRS. SUDA: Yes. When we left Visalia, we sold our farm equipment and trucks to a Caucasian farmer and received an IOU. One year later we went to collect, and the farmer said he had no recollection of promising

anything and tore up the contract so we could not get our equipment, money, or anything from him. He shouted, "Get out of here! Get out of here!" My husband was so disheartened he did not try to collect after that. He remarked that he would chalk it up to giving Kodon (funeral offering) to the living! It was very discouraging, but I suppose it was better to be owed than being in debt and owing others.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Well, Mrs. Suda, you've had many ups and downs and now you're able to look back and see your accomplishments through your fine family.

MRS. SUDA: Throughout my childhood, my own family stressed education very much, and we were brought up to become the best housewives we could be, to marry college graduates, and be cultured young ladies. My husband and I had conflicts here because he wanted and believed that he, with his three sons, could be large landowning farmers while I believed with all my heart in education for our children. We will never know who was right, but I hope, for his sake, too, that our choices were the right ones. Perhaps he thought they were, but he never said so to me.

MRS. HASEGAWA: He couldn't help but be very proud of his family. Thank you very much, Mrs. Suda.