

Oregon Cultural Heritage Commission Oral History Interview

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Interviewer: Morgen Young

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Transcribed by: Kimberly Haysom

YOUNG: This is our interview on August 9, 2013 with Taka Mizote and Aya Fujii. Maybe we can start with you telling me a little bit about your early family life in Hillsboro. Memories of your parents and life before the evacuation.

FUJII: Taka, you can start.

MIZOTE: Well, we lived out in Hillsboro, Oregon. Our parents had a farm, first they had a dairy farm and then went to a truck gardening farm. There were eight of us children and we really worked for hard in helping the family survive actually, I guess. I was the middle child and um, but nevertheless I had to work really hard in helping the family.

FUJII: There were eight of us, three boys that were older than us, and five girls. Our parents, our mother was a strong willed person and so she made sure that we did our work before we went to school and after we came home from school. We worked every single day. Doing the harvesting and getting the field ready for harvest and things like that.

YOUNG: Were there other Japanese families that you knew in Hillsboro, when you were growing up?

MIZOTE: Yes.

FUJII: Yes. There was one family the Tsugawa family, who owned a stand, kind of a fruit stand, we called it. They had other confections and stuff and it was right across from Shute Park. They were the only closest Japanese family.

YOUNG: Did you grow up working in the fields and helping?

MIZOTE: We did, we really worked hard but still it was, we were all, our parents were really loving to us and encouraged us that we needed to do this. We thought at that time that we had to work, none of the people our age worked as hard as we did, we felt but then... you know it was something that those things were instilled in us that we must work hard to make us stronger, you know in all.

FUJII: Well I think that we were kind of jealous of the city kids. They were able to do whatever they wanted. We thought. But we had to come home straight from school whereas the others got to play ball and things like that.

YOUNG: What do you remember about the evacuation order? Which totally changed your lives.

MIZOTE: Well you know the evacuation... you know as we were growing up our Caucasian friends always said, "We're going to grandma's house on the weekend or go to the beach for summer vacation." We never had that experience because we always had to stay home and help on the farm. So when the evacuation order came I thought, "Oh! We get to move!" I was quite happy that, finally we get to move! Not realizing you know. So I remember that we were only able to carry one suitcase a piece. Our parents were saying what we needed to pack and everything. It was something; it was something kind of exciting.

FUJII: Well we were young.

MIZOTE: Yeah.

FUJII: We were in our teens yet.

MIZOTE: Yeah.

FUJII: So when the, and our parents were middle aged but to be responsible for moving five of us girls and our brother...

MIZOTE: Our oldest brother.

FUJII: Our oldest brother. Because our two other brothers were already in the service.

MIZOTE: They were drafted.

FUJII: And so, it's kind of mind boggling to think back of all that they had to do to get us together and move and get our farm settled and everything stored away. I mean, it was really mind boggling to us when we think about it right now, yeah.

MIZOTE: Well, our mother, she cried you know and was, I remember her crying about the fact that we had to move and lose everything. But luckily our oldest brother, he did not have to serve in the, enlist. He was deferred because having to take care of our folks and the rest of us. So, he was able to get the people to take care of the farm and everything. Fortunately our parents were one of the very few that owned their own farm. Most of the Japanese families were renting and the small community of Japanese people in Washington County wanted to store their belongings into our farm buildings. We had green houses and barns and sheds that they were able to store their things at our place.

YOUNG: Did someone watch the farm?

MIZOTE: Pardon?

YOUNG: Did someone watch the farm?

MIZOTE: Yes. It was leased to a county doctor, and so he was the one, we rented it to them.

FUJII: It was just the house so... the farm was rented out to our neighbors. They were German. When we returned, they returned the farm to us. But it was harvest time, so they harvested all the berries and everything.

YOUNG: Do you remember what you packed?

FUJII: Strawberries, it was...

MIZOTE: No, no, packed in our suitcases.

YOUNG: In your suitcases.

FUJII: Oh, in our suitcases. I remember our mother took us to J.C. Penney's and we picked out suitcases. They were cardboard suitcases; you know they weren't the hard tops. We had to write our initials on our suitcases in big white letters and I remember packing party clothes. Because they were our nicest clothes you know, and our mother sewed a big duffle bag and she stuffed everything in there that she thought we needed. And we were taken by our neighbor to Forest Grove to the bus station, Canyon Road bus station. and we were bussed to the Portland Assembly Center from there.

MIZOTE: Well we, I'm sure you heard that, where we were, at the assembly center being the former stockyards. I don't know how large the um, each, the quarters were, there was no, just kind of a tarp paper kind of a door or you know, entry way into each, what do you call it? Quarters.

FUJII: Mm hm.

MIZOTE: And um, you know, we're from Hillsboro with very few Japanese families. And here, they are all Japanese people, nothing but Japanese and so, we met a lot of other Japanese families and there were kids our age. It was fun! We had fun! I remember one fellow saying, "You know, camp life was a lot of fun!" Yeah.

FUJII: That's when our father and mother thought that this is no place to raise a family. Because we didn't eat with the family, we ate with our friends. So, after three weeks there was a call from eastern Oregon asking for farm labor because all the men over there were in the service. So, our oldest brother George went with out a

group of young bachelors and went to find out how the situation was. He came back and said that there would be a place for us. So we gathered up our things again and rode the midnight train to eastern Oregon and arrived there, um there were sentries on the train and shades were pulled down. And I think we landed in Ontario.

MIZOTE: Mm hm and the farmers I think were transferred to this camp.

YOUNG: What are your first memories of seeing eastern Oregon? It was quite different from where you were coming from.

MIZOTE: Oh yeah. Mm hm.

FUJII: But we thought, here we go again. Its hard work again, you know.

MIZOTE: I was just thinking, oh my gosh we're going to live in tent camps you know!

FUJII: I think there was... you said there were 2,500 or?

YOUNG: About 250 I think that could fit in the camp.

FUJII: We were able to have four tents for our family, one was for our parents and younger sisters, one was for the older sisters, and one was for George and his wife. You know, they got married two months before evacuation so you could imagine. And one tent to cook and eat. So we were all together, anyhow.

YOUNG: Do you remember who was in your tent? Were you in the same tent?

FUJII: Yeah.

MIZOTE: No.

FUJII: Yeah, I think our oldest sister and we were, shared a tent.

YOUNG: And so your mother would cook?

FUJII: No, our sister-in-law.

YOUNG: Tomiko?

FUJII: Tomiko, right! She was brought up in a refined family you know, so she didn't do any of this labor work. So she took care of our youngest sisters...

MIZOTE: Dorothy and Rose.

FUJII: Yeah, while the rest of us all went out to work.

YOUNG: What can you tell me about going out to work? Who would come and get you and what was the work like?

MIZOTE: Well there were crews, crew bosses and they would say, one farmer would come and say that they needed so many people. And so, we would be in crews and sometimes we would go in an open truck and go way out towards Jameson. Do you know where Jameson is? I can't believe we did that! We worked in the fields, as crops were... first we, I think we thinned beets and then onions and then harvest time we picked – top onions and potatoes and top sugar beets but this is all with crews, different crews. And the farmers would come out to the camps and say they needed so many people for.

FUJII: Mm hm.

YOUNG: Had you ever seen sugar beets before?

MIZOTE: No.

YOUNG: That's hard work, isn't it?

FUJII: It is yeah. But that was the sugar beet factory was there the Amalgamated Sugar Company, yeah. And then in October, I think they let out all the school kids for two weeks to harvest the potatoes and onions. Can you imagine they shut down the schools to harvest the crops? So we did all of that. When you harvested the onions, you smelled like onions all day long. Then when you went to social events you really scrubbed down.

YOUNG: What was the weather like when you first came to the tent camp?

MIZOTE: It was hot, very hot. It was, the temperature was hot but it wasn't like it was in Portland, it was dry heat. So it was more tolerable I think than the heat you know, we experienced here.

YOUNG: How did you stay cool in the camp?

MIZOTE: Well, what did we do?

FUJII: We opened up the flaps of the tent. If you could imagine yeah, and we never had any ice, but I think they delivered block ice and put it into the refrigerator its just an open refrigerator. Our dad dug a hole in in the back of one of our tents to store some perishables but it wasn't enough.

YOUNG: What else do you remember about the camp? Where would you take a shower or basic necessities?

MIZOTE: Well it was going to a special facility. Not, we had to go out... public, it was all public.

FUJII: The men had special hours and the women you know...

YOUNG: Was there electricity?

MIZOTE: Uh huh, 'cause I remember in our tents you could see the lights in our tent.

FUJII: Well it was one light bulb you know; at night you could certainly see the shadows.

MIZOTE: I don't know how we...

YOUNG: Who would do laundry in your family?

MIZOTE: We would all take turns. It was a public washboard and laundry tub.

YOUNG: What about recreational activities? Did you have time to listen to records or go into town?

MIZOTE: When we were in tent camp there wasn't much recreation except when the Hashitanis invited all us and they you know, provided entertainment for us in some way involving the camp people.

YOUNG: And did you go to the Hashitanis?

MIZOTE: Oh yeah, 'cause they were very close to the tent camp. And then when we went to Adrian, there was a rec hall that's where we had the church services and the socials.

YOUNG: We talked a little bit about Azalia Peet, the missionary who lived in the camp. What are your memories of her?

MIZOTE: We have found memories of Ms. Peet. She was just involved, everybody, I mean, she was a missionary in Japan prior to the war so she could speak some Japanese and so our parents, they all you know just loved her. Because you know, she would gather them all up and say, let's do this. She taught our mothers how to do craft things like making plum pudding and things like that. Which is, my mother would never think of making plum pudding. She helped us make mattresses. I can't remember what she used, straw? Do you remember that?

FUJII: But she was in Gresham that's why she knew a lot of the Gresham people.

MIZOTE: Right, she returned from, she returned as a missionary from...

FUJII: She had a bicycle for transportation. I am sure she was in her 30s, late 30s or 40s. And we thought she was an older person but she endeared herself to all of us.

MIZOTE: I remember, you know we think about telling us to come to the church, she taught us hymns with this organ what do you call it when you pump?

FUJII: It's a player organ. She did the Christmas pageant.

MIZOTE: With all the costumes and everything.

FUJII: It was amazing, the Three Wise Men and the whole bit.

MIZOTE: She was very, very dear. Very dear lady.

YOUNG: So there were families from Gresham, from Yakima, from Hillsboro, did you know any of the families before?

MIZOTE: No, not, we didn't know the Wapato people nor... let's see well we didn't know the Gresham people except Ed was there too but um, and then there were people that came from Minidoka that would come. But they didn't stay very long.

FUJII: Yeah well there was, you know the Inazukas, there were two girls.

MIZOTE: They came to the tent camp.

FUJII: Yeah they came to the tent camp. Just to get out Minidoka.

MIZOTE: Minidoka.

FUJII: They came, just two sisters you know, they were just like the rest of us. They were city girls. But we were only there until when? September?

MIZOTE: Yeah.

FUJII: October. When it got cold, that's when we went to Adrian.

YOUNG: To the CCC Camp?

FUJII: To the CC Camp. Yeah.

YOUNG: What was that like in comparison to the tent camp?

FUJII: It was much nicer.

MIZOTE: Well we still lived in cramped quarters at least it was better suited for the fall and the winter.

FUJII: I remember going to school we had to walk quite a ways to catch the bus and it was so cold that we built kinda a bonfire just to get warm you know. And the fire would just be raging away and the bus would come and we would all smell like smoke when we got on the bus.

YOUNG: And you went to Nyssa High School.

FUJII: Ah-ha.

YOUNG: And what was that like?

FUJII: You know there were maybe a half a dozen of us from the camp but we all kind of stuck together it was just more comfortable that way I think.

YOUNG: Did you ever face any direct discrimination?

FUJII: Well one, I remember this one gal, her brother was killed, and from then on she was very hostile, yeah.

YOUNG: Were there particular families that your family was close to in either the tent camp or the Adrian camp?

MIZOTE: Not really, we were all pretty much...

YOUNG: Tight knit?

MIZOTE: Right, yeah.

AKA: Well the Kido family, Nori, Hisako's sister that lives in California, she and I were roommates at Oregon State. Sumi, we were all the same age. That's when I met Sumi.

YOUNG: Sumi Wada?

AKA: Uh huh.

YOUNG: So you were teenagers when you were in the camp? You mentioned you going to the Hashitanis, would you go to dances?

MIZOTE: Mm hm.

YOUNG: And how did you meet Ed?

FUJII: Well let's see, probably at a social somewhere.

YOUNG: Did you start dating while living in the tent camp or later?

FUJII: Later. And then he was in the Army, taken in the Army he was only in the service, I think just a year and so many months so he never did go overseas.

YOUNG: Did your brothers, did they ever get to come to the camp while on leave?

MIZOTE: Yes. They were able to come back to see the farm in Hillsboro and check on the farm whenever they got a furlough before they went overseas.

YOUNG: Did they come and see you?

MIZOTE: Oh yeah.

YOUNG: Was that difficult, having brothers that were in the service while you're...

MIZOTE: Well we didn't that much that is just the way it was you know.

FUJII: I'm sure the parents were you know, uh, but we just liked to see them.

YOUNG: Would your parents ever talk about the evacuation or living in the camp later on in life?

FUJII: I don't think so. George was probably more vocal about that more than my parents, I think they, you know that saying, "Shikata ga nai," you know, they can't be helped that type of attitude. I'm sure that's what they had.

YOUNG: Did George express any anger about the situation or did any of the siblings?

MIZOTE: No, not really.

FUJII: I don't think, you know the kids nowadays are astounded that we didn't stand up for our rights. But, I don't think in our generation nobody really said this is wrong.

YOUNG: Yeah, and if you did, you would go to a different, you went to detention.

FUJII: Mm hm.

MIZOTE: Right, right.

YOUNG: You two did the Densho interview you mentioned that Ed participated in a strike.

FUJII: Right, that stands out in his mind evidently. He was just young, you know, eighteen, nineteen year old and they were topping sugar beets. And he said each row was a mile long or whatever and they were not getting paid very much so

evidently they said they were gonna strike and so they sat by the ditch bank. The farmer told them to get back to work and they didn't but the farmer needed the things topped. So, evidently the manager of the farm came out and raised the prices so they were able to finish the job. He was on a crew with all young fellows so you know.

YOUNG: Was his entire family in the camp too?

FUJII: Yeah, mm hm, he was in a family of all boys you know.

MIZOTE: Well, Kimi.

FUJII: Well yeah.

YOUNG: Do you remember if you were paid the same amount as men?

MIZOTE: Mm hm we were I think.

YOUNG: Do you remember what that amount was?

MIZOTE: I have no idea.

FUJII: Amazing.

YOUNG: So who didn't work in the fields? Dorothy and Rose?

MIZOTE: And Rose, uh huh.

YOUNG: Okay and they stayed at home?

MIZOTE: Mm hm.

YOUNG: So both parents were out there in the fields?

MIZOTE: Right.

YOUNG: Maybe could you walk me through what it's like to top and block sugar beets or what you remember about it? You mentioned that Ed said it seemed like it was a mile long.

FUJII: Mm hm.

YOUNG: What did you do when you were in the fields?

FUJII: Well I think everyone kept their own short handled hoes and 'cause I know we still have ours and they called it blocking sugar beets. All the plants are in a row and you...

MIZOTE: Thin them.

FUJII: Thin them so you leave one standing and chop down the next three and leave maybe a foot in between the plants so all those in between ones you chop down and leave the one standing. So you're bending over all the way down the row. That's how you top sugar beets.

MIZOTE: It was all stoop labor. Really stoop labor.

FUJII: Mm hm.

YOUNG: When do you use a long hoe? Or you don't really?

FUJII: I think its...

MIZOTE: We did use it for onions, I thought, you know, I thought we used long hoes.

FUJII: But I remember there were, I heard of the short handle hoe.

YOUNG: You kept your hoe all these years?

FUJII: Yeah. We have one; it's got a handle about that long.

MIZOTE: Really?

FUJII: Mm hm.

YOUNG: Would you bring your lunch into the field?

MIZOTE: Oh yeah.

YOUNG: What would you have for lunch?

MIZOTE: Probably rice balls.

FUJII: No, I thought it was sandwiches.

MIZOTE: Sandwiches.

FUJII: We would put our sodas in the irrigation ditch to keep them cold.

MIZOTE: I thought we made rice balls.

YOUNG: And you would go out in the morning and somebody would pick you up?

MIZOTE: The farmer's would take us and bring us back.

FUJII: I had to go with my mother a lot because you know I was on the younger side. So I worked with my mother and her crew, which were all older women. And I remember falling asleep halfway down the road and here comes Mrs. Saito I remember her, she was a little lady and she'd come back and meet me halfway on my row. This is Kayno's mother.

YOUNG: Would you ever go to the Snake River and go swimming?

MIZOTE: Well none of us swim but they did.

YOUNG: And then, what about going into town?

MIZOTE: Well there were, I don't know.

FUJII: There were people that had some cars.

MIZOTE: Cars, yeah.

FUJII: I remember going to the movies, we had to go like midnight movies, remember?

MIZOTE: Gosh, I don't, I remember going...

FUJII: Yeah that was the only time they'd let us in. I remember coming home at 3 o'clock in the morning.

YOUNG: Because you were Japanese? They wouldn't let you go in earlier?

FUJII: Yeah mm hm that was kind of a designated time for us to see the movie.

YOUNG: Would you ever go to the soda fountain that was in town?

MIZOTE: I don't remember going to the... I don't remember going to.

FUJII: Well they had restaurants I remember going to restaurants.

YOUNG: Did your parents speak English or did you speak Japanese at home?

MIZOTE: We spoke Japanese mostly.

YOUNG: I heard from June and Anne Morishita that when they went to town they would tell their mother to not speak because she didn't speak English that well. And they didn't want her speaking Japanese because then they would be harassed.

MIZOTE: Well our mother used us as interpreters all the time. Dad spoke more English than mom.

YOUNG: So you grew up speaking Japanese not baby Japanese?

MIZOTE: No.

FUJII: No.

MIZOTE: We spoke Japanese most of the time at home.

YOUNG: So after you said you went to Adrian, is that where you lived until you went back home to Hillsboro to the camp? At the CCC Camp or did you live somewhere else?

MIZOTE: We went, our father did some sharecropping. We moved out of Adrian.

FUJII: It was Ontario.

MIZOTE: Was it Ontario?

FUJII: We sharecropped with the Fisher family and raised sugar beets and onions. And that was, that's when the war ended anyhow. But, I remember a truckload of German P.O.W.s came and helped. There was a truck full of them and they were blonde and young and the sentry was on the truck. You know, they were prisoners of war; it's a real irony you know. And you had said that they ate watermelon.

MIZOTE: They would eat watermelon. I guess the farmer brought watermelon. They would eat it right to the rind, I recall.

YOUNG: So when you were living in Ontario did someone have to sponsor you to be able to get out of the camp?

FUJII: No, we just um, well it was sponsored by the Fisher family I think. They found us a house. I remember the bed, it had no mattress it just had slats that you just put a thin mattress on top of it, no springs.

MIZOTE: We encountered bed bugs. It was bad.

FUJII: I think it was all side plumbing too.

YOUNG: When did you return to Hillsboro?

MIZOTE: Well see I, the family moved back in '45?

FUJII: Yeah by Thanksgiving.

YOUNG: But you went to college?

MIZOTE: Yeah I was in, I went to college; I came back in December of '45. You know it seemed like '46 because I finished at Pacific in '47, 1947.

YOUNG: So the family farm was still there?

MIZOTE: Mm hm.

YOUNG: What about, I heard a little about the rules that the Nyssa Camp had, there was a curfew. Do you remember anything about that, things that you weren't allowed to do?

MIZOTE: Gosh, I don't remember.

FUJII: I imagine there was curfew. But we were probably too young.

MIZOTE: Too young, yeah.

FUJII: It didn't really apply to us because we had to be home anyhow.

YOUNG: And you don't remember anything like armed guards at either camp?

MIZOTE: Mm hmm.

FUJII: Mm hmm.

YOUNG: But there was one on the train.

MIZOTE: Oh yeah there were sentries walking along the train, you know. There were sentries all over the family centers, you know, outside.

YOUNG: Are there any memories of the Nyssa Camp that stick out in your minds? Funny instances or difficult times?

MIZOTE: It's, it's... when I think about it, I think, "Oh that's almost unbelievable how we survived under those conditions." In either one of the camps. How did, you know, our parents really had to endure a lot of hardships. You know, we didn't feel the hardships as much as they did.

FUJII: Mm hm. But we made some very good friends, you know.

MIZOTE: Right.

FUJII: Eastern Oregon, well that's where you know, my happiest times were in Eastern Oregon.

YOUNG: Was it the first time that, you mentioned when you were at the assembly center you had suddenly this large Japanese community. Was it like that too in the tent camp too was it a community?

MIZOTE: Uh-huh, kind of, but not as, different circumstances.

YOUNG: Which families did you keep in contact with after the war ended?

FUJII: Well I keep in contact with Sumi's family. And Joe Saito, do you know Joe Saito, Sumi? That's Paul's brother.

YOUNG: Joe married to Nellie?

FUJII: And Nellie.

MIZOTE: Nellie.

YOUNG: Yeah, I interviewed Nellie.

FUJII: Did you?

YOUNG: Yeah, Joe's memory is like...

FUJII: He's ninety something isn't he?

YOUNG: Yeah, he's well into his nineties I think, yeah. Well, if there's nothing else I think this is great. You shared a lot of memories of the camp, which is really wonderful.

END OF INTERVIEW

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