

Oregon Cultural Heritage Commission Oral History Interview

Narrators: Teddy Wada Tanaka and Sumi Wada Saito

Interviewer: by Morgen Young

Videographers: Dorin Daniels and Gary McClellan

Location: Ontario, Oregon

Date: April 16, 2013

Transcriber: Kimberly Haysom

YOUNG: This is our interview with Sumi Saito and Teddy Tanaka on April 16, 2013 at Four Rivers Cultural Center in Ontario, Oregon. So, first I just wanted to get an understanding of your early lives, if you remember life before you moved to Vale, was it the Vale area? And life in Vale and...

SAITO: Oh my goodness, well Teddy would know about moving but...

TANAKA: Yeah, we were born, well I was born in Yakima Valley on the Indian reservation and I was about eight when we... my dad decided to move to Vale during the reclamation project. It's about ten miles on the other side of Vale, so we were out in a sagebrush country. He cleared the land there with two friends that came together. So, our houses were like a cross, we had one here, one here, and one here.

SAITO: And their fields met, yeah in the corner.

TANAKA: So we had somebody to play with other than our siblings.

YOUNG: Who were those families?

TANAKA: He were, uh, call him... Hirai, and I can't even think of what his first name was.

SAITO: Kay Hirai.

YOUNG: Kay Hirai.

TANAKA: We always call him Mr. Hirai, Mr. Nida in those days, the other one was Nidas and...

SAITO: Nobuichi Nida.

TANAKA: She remembers everything.

SAITO: Well my dad, my mother and Mr. Nida had similar names so they were real buddies. My mom's name was Nobue Hiwasaki Wada, his name was

Nobuichi Nida, so and they were born the same year and so they were really good friends.

TANAKA: But anyway, it was the reclamation project in the late '20s and he moved here a year before he moved the family here and I don't know how he lived, in a tent probably. Anyway, um, we moved in 1930...

SAITO: Was just a baby.

TANAKA: Mm hm. And uh, he was here in '28, '29, before we moved up here but um, I remember coming, my dad had this little old Chevrolet and he drove all, what, seven of us kids in his car.

SAITO: It was six then.

TANAKA: Six! Coming in late to Vale, I can still picture that. And there's this old man, who was a realtor at that time, his name was Mr. Zuits.

SAITO: Yeah!

TANAKA: ... and he was so good to my dad and family and sort of took care of us and showed us where we could go to stay and...

SAITO: We rented that house across the street from the Methodist church in Vale and I thought the name was Rinehart that owned it but uh, I don't know. We lived there until dad got the house ready or living quarters ready for us on the farm. And uh, so, we were good Methodists so we ran across the street to church.

TANAKA: In those days, everybody was very good to us, I think. We were probably the first Japanese they ever saw but um, friendly and even out in the country, I remember the neighbors coming to visit and helping us and we were all running over and playing with them.

SAITO: Yeah, remember the Langes?

TANAKA: Uh huh.

SAITO: You know Teddy became best friends with Martha Lange and they both became nurses when they grew up.

TANAKA: Mm hm.

YOUNG: How big do you think the acreage was at your parents' farm?

TANAKA: I think they started out with forty acre sections and then he cut another one up above and down below so he was farming about like one hundred and twenty.

SAITO: Well he, uh, in those days you know the Japanese people couldn't own land and so, um, they got it in my oldest sister's name because she was over eighteen I guess, you had to be over eighteen.

YOUNG: Do you mean because your parents weren't citizens yet or do you mean because they were born in Japan?

SAITO: Yeah. Well, they...

TANAKA: Oriental Exclusion Act.

YOUNG: Okay.

TANAKA: I guess that's what they called it.

SAITO: I don't think they were able to buy land until 1956 or something like that.

TANAKA: Mm hm.

SAITO: When Dad became a citizen.

TANAKA: The lands he bought in Ontario, I think was in my older brother's name, so.

YOUNG: What kind of, what do you remember about your parents in details of where they were born and...

TANAKA: Well my dad was born in Japan, as was my mother was and they were distant cousins I think, they knew each other.

SAITO: They were distantly related, but they married.

TANAKA: He came over after he finished school in Japan.

SAITO: He was only seventeen.

TANAKA: Yeah but he was nineteen when he came over, wasn't he?

SAITO: Seventeen.

TANAKA: Was he?

SAITO: He was on that ship.

TANAKA: Oh, 'cause I thought he, he worked for a year.

SAITO: Well he was young.

TANAKA: Anyway, he couldn't speak English but he landed in Seattle and I could remember telling that he got a job as a houseboy and he loved ice cream. He always had a sweet tooth, he just thought ice cream was wonderful and he spent all his money on ice cream. And then, after he was a houseboy and I think learned a little bit of English, he worked on the railroads out of there and after that, I don't know how many years later, he decided to go into farming. And uh, so they would lease land from whoever, a lot of it was Indian land that they, in the Yakima Valley that they leased and um, did, start a grow crop forming. My, let's see it would be my, six of us, my oldest sister and then the next, I was the third one, and then I had a brother who was two years younger, and then Sumi was two years younger, and uh, my sister Muts was,...

SAITO: Born in 1930.

TANAKA: That's the year they moved and then my two youngest in the family were born in Vale.

YOUNG: Is that Jim and...

TANAKA: Jim and Dorothy.

SAITO: Dad fixed up this garage for us to move into before our house got built, and so Jim was born in the garage in Vale.

YOUNG: So you didn't have a basement home. I just learned that basement homes were quite common in the area.

SAITO: No we had a basement in our house but we, we didn't, we had a two-story home. It was real nice.

TANAKA: It was a nice home that they built, his friend was a carpenter that he knew from Washington and he came out and built it for him. There's no running water or indoor plumbing, so we had an outhouse and um... we had a great big barrel down in the basement that they pumped water into the barrel and then pump it up.

SAITO: We had a well that the three families used and we had a water pump to each with, and I was just telling Donna this morning, she said, "How did we keep the food cold?" And I said, "Well we had a barrel in the basement

of house that they pumped the water into and then on top of the barrel there was a little red, kind of a pan like thing and mom kept meat on there because it's cool." And, we did have an icebox but we'd have to go to Vale to get ice and it didn't last a week, I don't think.

TANAKA: We only got it on special occasions.

SAITO: I guess. Yeah.

TANAKA: The other thing they built before, even before the house got built was the Japanese bathhouse and uh, so it was our job to get the sagebrush and burn, burn box that heated the water. So, every night, we'd all got to get bathed in, the girls got last but...

SAITO: Mom was the very last. But I think she liked to soak so probably a privilege for her.

TANAKA: Yeah.

SAITO: But we all had to wash really good with soap, they had a drain there and we'd wash ourselves with soap and rinse yourself off before you get in the tub and kind of soak awhile and the kids got to do that too and then... you know we'd have hard water so we'd skim the soap off the top.

TANAKA: Scum! Ha ha!

SAITO: The scum, yeah! And Sharon our sister in law just can't imagine the whole family bathing in the same water you know.

TANAKA: I said it's no worse than these Jacuzzis they have in the, the um, now what do they call them? The decks that people have? Hot tubs. They all bathe in the same one. Strangers even, I said, I don't like that.

YOUNG: Did you grow up speaking Japanese in the home?

TANAKA: Very little unfortunately, um.

SAITO: We talked baby talk.

TANAKA: So we never got beyond that. Young Japanese talking never discussed deep things with my mother especially.

SAITO: Well I don't know, you were gone but we were still, Teddy left home when she was seventeen just like my dad. And, but we were all weeding onions out there and my mom would tell us all kinds of things, all up and down the rows you know, all about their history, their family, so well, we

didn't listen, so you know, I wish we had. She told us all about her relatives and everything. We didn't really listen.

TANAKA: She was really amazing because when she got married, she came from a family that was very well to do and, so she had maids and so she never did anything but play and didn't know how to cook or do anything. When she came to, to Washington, they all thought the United States was paved with gold and everything, everybody was rich and he brought her to, well they, his cousin met him at the train station with a horse and wagon and brought her to this...

SAITO: One room.

TANAKA: One room shack.

SAITO: His dad and his cousin batched you know, for I don't know how long.

TANAKA: Anyway, it's amazing; she said all she did was cry for the first year. Couldn't even boil water but she'd learned how to cook and...

SAITO: My oldest sister was very small and mom always said, "Tsuruyo is so small because I cried everyday I was pregnant." And then she said, "We didn't know anything!" and she heard that you know, her milk wouldn't come so heard they gave them can milk. So they bought can milk and she said they gave it to her straight. They never knew how to make formula or anything. But they heard they use those can milks and I thought oh dear.

YOUNG: So she would cook, all your meals?

TANAKA: Finally she learned how to cook; later in life she was a very good cook.

SAITO: Well Dad, no Mom told me when she first came, she was ready to go back. 'Cause in the kitchen, dad and Mr. Matsui had a whole ham hanging and the bone was showing and they never saw bones of meat in Japan at that time.

TANAKA: They still don't, I think, everything is all fillet and they just don't like to see bones.

YOUNG: Was she a picture bride or how did they meet?

TANAKA: No.

YOUNG: Because they were distant relatives.

SAITO: She was promised, she was promised to marry him I guess. The families and Dad was almost thirty before he had enough money to get back to Japan and bring her back and you know, have passage to come back and dad says, god they just barely had enough money to get there and come back with mom. All the relatives were just standing around with their hands opened, “Where’s my gold watch? I thought you were gonna bring us presents?” You know, because they thought you know, the U.S. is just lined with gold streets. That was their impression of this country and Mom said, when people got to be fifty, they were old people and they just got to sit around and do nothing and over here, she was weeding onions until she was eighty probably.

TANAKA: She was amazing; she lived to be ninety, almost a hundred. She wanted to be a hundred.

SAITO: Ninety-nine.

TANAKA: She lived to be ninety nine and in her nineties she was still gardening and canning and...

SAITO: She was a real good cook.

YOUNG: What types of food did she make?

SAITO: Everything, she made wonderful rolls.

TANAKA: She was known for her homemade rolls and she would make them and...

SAITO: Sushi.

TANAKA: And she canned everything that she grew and so she taught my younger sister how to can, she carried on the tradition. She was not married, and so when she retired, she would go out to my mother’s and help her with the canning and cooking and she learned how to do that. By the time my mother passed away, my sister was canning about two thousand jars of pickles and whatever, whatever, and she gave it all away. It’s amazing.

SAITO: My mom was good at giving her stuff away.

TANAKA: Mm hm.

SAITO: She was always feeding people and she was always, they were very religious and um, they were always keeping somebody in their home and the minister’s that were coming through, whatever. We always had to wax the floors, get ready. Johnson’s Wax remember?

TANAKA: Mm hm. And wash the curtains and starch them and iron them. It's amazing.

YOUNG: Did you know a woman named Azalia Peet?

SAITO: Yes I was gonna tell you about that. My dad was very religious and he, well my mother too, they were staunch Methodists and the provisional conference from San Francisco, helped the Japanese, Star church and some things and Dad got together with them and when the Nyssa camp came into being, my dad made sure they had church over there too and uh, Dr. Earl Shaver who was a retired missionary and he, he ran, he did most of the church I think in Nyssa. And, Azalia Peet and Alice Finley were missionaries from Japan, they spoke perfect English, I mean Japanese and uh, they came and helped Reverend Shaver and um, I remember Azalia Peet, she rode a bicycle all over. Remember?

TANAKA: I was gone.

SAITO: She was gone. Yeah and Ms. Finley, they were just the nicest people and uh, I remember Azal, no, yeah, Azalia Peet, she worked real hard to get a lot of these young people into colleges that probably wouldn't have never gotten into college. But, I remember Sachi Fukiage was able to, I think it was Ohio Westland, because Ms. Peet helped her get you know, over there, told her, you know, what she needed to do to get into college. So.

YOUNG: Did she live at the Nyssa camp? Or did she live somewhere else?

SAITO: I think so. No, no, they lived with some family I think, they didn't live in the camp I don't think but nearby. And then another thing I was gonna tell you, they used to have dances and things for the young people and um, I wished Alice was living now, but Alice Hashitani passed away, but their family had a farm just on the corner, I don't know what that street is, going out of Nyssa. And then they had a nice lawn, big lawn and I guess they used to, Donna Mae was telling, her niece was telling me they used to invite the young people to come out there and they had musicians out there and they had dances and they had some young kids came and sold pop. I didn't know all that, but I did go to some dances that uh, that young people had you know.

TANAKA: From the camp?

SAITO: Camp people. And um, oh you know when we lived in Vale, old Nephi Grigg, he was um a young man then, he helped get some dances going for the young Japanese people and I remember, I was probably only sixteen, dad let me go, he didn't really want us to go to dances but, I did get to go to that one. And only if I could get everybody mixed you know and, he

had this broom. I just remember this broomstick, you know and every time he'd bang that broom stick on the floor, we then you're supposed to change your partners.

TANAKA: Do you know who Nephi Grigg is?

YOUNG: Mm hm. Ore Ida.

TANAKA: He, we used to laugh and say, Ore Ida started on my dad's farm because he bought the place and raised corn there and he would go selling it door to door and finally he and his brother found a way to freeze it. And it was called Bridgeport at that time and from there they went on to Ore Ida and so.

SAITO: Yeah.

YOUNG: So what sort of crops did your parents grow on that farm?

TANAKA: Onions and...

SAITO: Sugar beets.

TANAKA: ...sugar beets, I remember he tried growing seed plants like carrot seeds and onion seeds.

SAITO: Potatoes he grew potatoes. Alfalfa.

TANAKA: And finally the land was just depleted and it, you know, row crop wasn't good out there, so that's when he came down to Ontario and Nyssa, these lands.

YOUNG: When do you think that was?

TANAKA: Oh that was in the '40s after I left home.

SAITO: Let's see I was,...

TANAKA: I left home in 1940, so everything is before and after.

SAITO: It was in um, uh... we went over to Ontario when I was in the fourth grade and then went back to Vale when I was in the seventh grade, that's how I remember things. And then, uh, then later on, dad and Shing moved to Ontario, but we were renting that place you know on Kenny's and the Trenckels lived nearby. Lincoln school is gone now but we lived there for three years and then, um...

TANAKA: And then my dad leased land right across from the hospital. Forty, some forty acres. And he was going to buy it and he had an agreement with this lady, to buy the land and they went to closing and she decided she wanted, it was very insignificant amount of money. He said, "No, you told the price was, this much." She wouldn't budge, so he just walked away and bought the other one by the airport corner then. But that's what he wants.

SAITO: It all developed into.

TANAKA: He could have been a multi millionaire selling this land if wasn't so stubborn.

SAITO: It was across from Holy Rosary.

YOUNG: You mentioned the Hashitanis and the neighbors you had in Vale, do you remember other families like the Atagis and there were some Saitos in the area.

TANAKA: Well she is one of the Saitos.

YOUNG: So Paul's family was one of the earlier families?

SAITO: Yeah, Paul and Joe and Abe were, lived out of Cairo, uh huh and they came over in 1934 and uh, so they were here before the war also. So, uh,...

YOUNG: Beyond church, was there a way the Japanese community got together?

TANAKA: Oh yes, they had an association that they...

SAITO: You know where the airport is, there used to be a hall there and they'd call it the Japanese Hall I think, among other names, but uh, we used to have socials there you know and uh, we used to have cultural things there that probably wasn't politically correct now, you know, they honor the emperor and remember we used to have Tenso services?

TANAKA: Mm hm.

SAITO: It was honoring the emperor of Japan and we'd have foot races and a lot of fun. And um, later on they used to have dances there and uh, oh my dad was, you know this old fashioned Methodist, he didn't believe in dancing and smoking and drinking, and card playing...

TANAKA: So when they were gone, we had nothing better to do and we always had a deck of card that they didn't know about. We'd be upstairs playing pinochle and whatever...

TANAKA: Under the sheets.

SAITO: Yeah! Oh dear, anyway.

YOUNG: Do you remember Pearl Harbor and the evacuation order that came out?

SAITO: Teddy was gone.

TANAKA: I was in Los Angeles when that happened. I was going to college there.

YOUNG: Did it affect you being in Los Angeles?

TANAKA: Hm?

YOUNG: Did the evacuation order affect you being in Los Angeles?

TANAKA: Yes, uh huh. Um, that happened in, by March. We either had a choice of going to wherever their camp was or going home, since home was outside the area. So my sister, she was down there also going to school, she and I decided to come home. Got on the train and came home. At least we had a place to come to. But uh, and she shortly after, I don't how long she stayed home but she went on to New York to fashion school and um, I stayed on until June and went onto nursing school in Minnesota. Didn't have enough money to get to Minnesota so I, uh, my dad said, "I earned enough money for the first year of tuition," and he said, "Well what are you going to do the second or third year?" I said, "I don't know something come, they're not going to kick me out after the first year, so." Anyway, I didn't have enough, any money to get to Minnesota, Rochester so, I earned enough money to get from here to Denver, um, and I worked for um, gosh, I ended up doing housework, I don't remember how long I was there but, anyway, just enough to get to, because I had to get to school by June. And it was amazing the people I worked for owned the Samsonite Company. Didn't mean a thing to me at the time, anyway. So, well while I was in school, I began at the nursing program that came into being so, that was the first time I had to sign up for my, so they'd pay my tuition, books, gave me a stipend. I was in heaven.

SAITO: Well when she went to, she won't tell you, but when she went to Minnesota she went into the nursing program at, it was part of the Mayo Clinic, St. Mary's in Rochester, Minnesota and she graduated top in her class, so and the nuns there made sure she got a good place to go, didn't they?

TANAKA: Yeah not the nuns, one of the doctors.

SAITO: Oh.

TANAKA: He said, "If you ever decide to leave Rochester, you can come to New York and we'll find you a job there." So my roommate and I decided after staying one year in Minnesota, we decided to go to New York, in the big city. So we did and...

SAITO: My second oldest sister lived in New York.

TANAKA: Yeah she was the one that had gone to fashion, design school there. So, she was working in a fashion house.

SAITO: Her, she lived with our cousin, Sue, who is next to her in age.

TANAKA: So anyway, I decided I better use the scholarship from the Mayo Clinic had given me so I went to Columbia and got my B.S. in nursing at Columbia University and guess what? Dwight Eisenhower was the president of Columbia the time so he signed my certificate!

SAITO: Teddy did real well in nursing before she met Gus; she had to speak to whole national convention in Chicago of nurses. I told her kids that and they said, "All they talk about is what Gus did." I says, "Well, she never talks about herself so I have to tell."

TANAKA: Yes I was, I was, nursing at uh, Memorial Hospital which is part of Sloan Kettering and um, so, they wanted to start a program to teach nurses about handling, radioactive isotopes and all this. So, they asked me if I learned enough to teach a class and I said, "Okay, I guess I can do." And that's what I did. And so at that time, we designed things to carry to carry the isotopes patients and how to protect yourself, it was interesting. And at that time all the chemotherapy drugs were being tested out there on patients and so it's amazing to see how far we've come along since then, you know six years is a long time to develop things but, it was an interesting time.

SAITO: When her mother-in-law had cancer of the bladder, she had to have a, what do you call that?

TANAKA: A bag.

SAITO: Bag, well she helped develop that or used the first ones.

TANAKA: Yeah.

SAITO: That they were developing.

TANAKA: Yeah back in New York. Once a week I'd go over and change her bag for her. Anyway.

YOUNG: How old were you in 1941-42?

SAITO: Um, I was in high school; I graduated from high school in '45. When the war started, I was a freshman in high school and I remember it happened on a Sunday, December 7th a Sunday and the next day I went to school and Inez Wells, a girl that I went to school from first grade with choked my neck and said, "Sumiko, shame on you Sumiko!" I says, "What did I do?" And she was blaming me for the war! Anyway, I talked to some of my other friends they says, "Oh well, she's no count." And it was kids that we didn't really know that made any kind of fuss about that, most of our friends were already established and never even thought of us being different, I don't think.

YOUNG: Were you at Ontario High School then?

SAITO: No, Vale.

YOUNG: Vale.

SAITO: Uh huh.

YOUNG: Seemed that, I read some newspaper articles that Vale was particularly had a lot of Japanese discrimination.

SAITO: Well my dad got his haircut everyday I mean, most of the time from Mr. Pruitt in Ontario.

TANAKA: In Vale.

SAITO: I mean, Vale. And he went to get his haircut and he just sat and sat and sat, and finally Mr. Pruitt came over and said, "Well, we're not allowed to cut your hair anymore." You know, I think he must have rented the place from somebody that didn't want to allow that so, you know.

YOUNG: Do you remember when they established the camp in Nyssa or hearing anything about that in the news?

SAITO: My dad was...

YOUNG: Since he was involved with getting the church there.

SAITO: My dad was involved in, and my sister had just had a baby April 26 and they had to move in May, the first part of May to um, the livestock what did they call that? Pavilion in Portland.

YOUNG: The Exposition Building in Portland.

SAITO: Uh huh and that was their first place, they went to and my sister just had the baby a couple weeks before and my dad was just crazy to get her out of there because she said it's so hot in May and June there and the cracks in the floor were an inch wide. And she said, the manure smell just came up, which is just terrible. And um, so, uh, my dad was able to get her moved to Nyssa camp so she and my brother and law and the baby lived there at the Nyssa camp.

YOUNG: What, which sister was this?

SAITO: Tsuruyo.

TANAKA: Oldest sister, Tsuruyo.

SAITO: Tsuruyo Nishi, Tsuruyo and Jesse Nishi and their first-born was Karen Nishi Mortensen but they lived in the camp but they came out and lived with us later, I don't remember the sequence of the time. But they lived there for a while. And then Jesse's family came out to Nyssa and lived in the camp for a while too, before they moved back to Yakima.

YOUNG: It seemed like there were a number of people that lived in the camp that were from the Yakima valley.

SAITO: Mm hm.

YOUNG: Did it have a strong Japanese presence? Farming in that area?

SAITO: Mm hm, my dad used to farm there.

YOUNG: Right.

SAITO: But when that Nyssa camp was there, we had several boys from, teenage boys I guess, they're just, maybe just out of high school uh, came and worked on our farm and they lived in the Hira's house. And one of the boys was Midori Kimodo's brother, who lived there and a, they were a bunch of young kids and they worked in the beets and you know, thin beets and hoed beets and we used to thin them by hand and uh...

YOUNG: Did you ever have anyone come and live at your house?

SAITO: Yeah we had, well I don't know during the war or not but my dad always had someone, some young guys come from Wapato to help in the harvest because they got done early in Wapato and then, so Harry Matsui, our second cousin would come Nes Wada and these Nishita boys would come and stay with us. And helped dad in the harvest and mom used to cook up great big meals and they still talked about how many rolls they used to eat, mom's rolls. But they're all gone now, they all died.

YOUNG: Did you ever visit the Nyssa camp or the Cow Hollow camp?

SAITO: Yeah.

YOUNG: When people were living there?

SAITO: Mm hm.

YOUNG: What are your memories of the tent camp near Garrison corner?

SAITO: I know what the tent camp uh, our cousins lived there and the Nishis lived there in the, yeah. We used to roll the sides up, I remember that and then they, there was dirt floors but they use to sweep them! I used to think that was kind of funny because the floors were dirt and they'd sweep them. I was just a kid, I was young, young, you know a teenager.

YOUNG: Were there anyone that was ... any people living in the camp that went to your school?

SAITO: Went to where?

YOUNG: Went to your school where you were attending?

SAITO: Mm hm.

YOUNG: No? Many went to Nyssa High School and Nyssa Grade School.

SAITO: Mm hm. I went to college with, rode the bus to Corvallis with Iwa Saki and Nori Kido who had lived in the camp and they were going to college and we rode the same bus to Corvallis, I remember that. But, uh, yeah the Kido family lived there uh...

YOUNG: The Kido family like Bob and Hiro Kido, that family?

SAITO: Mm hm. They lived in the camp, uh huh and uh, Joe Kimodo's family, his dad I think had quite a bit to do, setting up the camp um, I can't, I can't remember why but some how Joe Kimodo's family had something to do with setting up the camp.

YOUNG: Is that Janet Kimodo's father-in-law? Joe Kimodo.

SAITO: Mm hm. His, it'd be her grandpa, Bob's grandpa.

YOUNG: Right, okay. Anything else you remember or heard about how that camp was established or details about...

SAITO: Mm, I don't, I know I...

YOUNG: I wrote down all the people you identified because you knew so many people in the photographs. So, what ...

SAITO: I remember the Sugais lived there, Mas Sugai and George and Gail was just a little five year old then, I remember that.

YOUNG: Did you know the Kato family, Henry?

SAITO: Reid's.

TANAKA: That would be Reid's.

SAITO: Henry Kato.

YOUNG: Right, yeah, that's Reid's cousin.

SAITO: I don't think their whole family lived there, I remember Henry was there.

YOUNG: And you mentioned Alice Hashitani.

SAITO: Mm hm.

YOUNG: She was involved in the camp from what I understand.

SAITO: Yeah.

YOUNG: Teaching Sunday school, something along those lines. Um...

SAITO: She was very musical, she probably played piano for the church services, yeah.

YOUNG: Um, Sigmore Kami?

SAITO: I didn't know him.

YOUNG: Didn't know him? Um, Hideo Hamamura?

SAITO: The Kamiharas?

YOUNG: The Hamamuras.

SAITO: Oh I didn't know them but the Kamiharas lived there, and the Fukiages for a while.

YOUNG: I think you identified the Fukiage family, is it Ken, Mita, and Fumi are those members of that family?

TANAKA: Mm hm.

SAITO: She was in that picture uh huh.

YOUNG: Do you know anything about them? Where they came from?

SAITO: Oh yeah they were really good friends of our folks.

TANAKA: Out of Yakima Valley.

SAITO: Uh huh and uh, he was a really good farmer and had an interest in a produce company there with Kay Morinaga and uh, Mr. Kamihara, I think the three of them were partners and in Yakima. They were well known but um, they had to move just like everybody else. And uh, Mr. Kamihara's family, his wife died early so when he came over here, he didn't have a wife, he had two girls were already married and gone, um, Kio and Mio Kamihara were married and gone but there were, three boys I think George and Tom and, what's the artist one?

TANAKA: Yeah, what's the artist name? I don't know, I didn't know them.

SAITO: Ben was the artist, he was a pretty well known artist, he was even written up in the Times Magazine once, you know he got a Guggenheim scholarship and all kinds of things. But the Kamiharas were in camp at the time too, and they were really good friends of the Fukiages. Yeah.

YOUNG: Did those families return to Yakima Valley after the war or did they stay here?

SAITO: They didn't return, They stayed wherever they, like Fumi Mita lived in Fruitland and she married and lived in Fruitland and the girls, Sachi that studied back east, still lives in Cleveland I think. And uh two of the girls ended up in New York.

TANAKA: But the three brothers stayed here and farmed.

SAITO: Uh huh, Mitsue Fukiage, the oldest daughter was married to a very famous photographer, what was his name? Mits... Fujiura, I forgot what his first name was but he worked for the National Geographic and she, they lived in New York so, one of the younger sister's moved to New York to be near them I think. And Harry started farming over here, in Vale and Ken, the younger brother farmed in Vale with him. And Shoji, Shoji was my age, um, he never married but he farmed with his brothers in Vale. Yeah.

YOUNG: Do you remember the Takami family? Did you know Sonny Takami?

SAITO: I didn't know them real well in those days. Our boys roomed with Wayne in college and uh, Sonny just had this one boy which is a really talented artist, and he worked for TV, for his professor but his, he was really good in ceramics, you know. Making pots and things, but anyway he died tragically, early, but, yeah Mary lived in uh,...

YOUNG: In the camp with her family, yeah...

SAITO: In the camp, and Sonny...

YOUNG: The Ouchida family, right?

SAITO: Ouchida.

YOUNG: Ouchida.

SAITO: Mm hm, yeah. Yeah Mr. Ouchida was quite an artist and their family is really artists but, Paul's family received a gift from Mr. Ouchida when he came out of camp, he made this. We call it a butsudon, it's kind of an altar that you keep in your home, if you're a Buddhist and at the time I think Paul's folks were Buddhist then and um, he had made it with, you know, have you ever been to the Buddhist temple here?

YOUNG: I have.

SAITO: Very ornate, gold stuff all over, well he, out of eggshell, I mean, not out of eggshell, egg cartons made all that, filigree gold stuff and it had a little, I don't remember, anyway, when my mother in law died, Joe and Nell didn't want that and I wanted it, because I thought it was an art piece. Well my mother had a fit because she's, you know how, they're Christians and they didn't want a Buddhist temple in our home and she said, I shouldn't have it. Anyway, so when Wayne died, I gave it to Mary's family, Sonny's family.

YOUNG: I have just a few more names for both of you. Did you ever know a Dr. Maulding? Lou Maulding.

SAITO: From Nyssa.

TANAKA: I didn't know much about his background or anything.

YOUNG: And did your father work as a contract grower for Amalgamated Sugar? That you know of?

SAITO: Who?

YOUNG: Your father, did he work, when he was growing sugar beets was it for Amalgamated Sugar?

TANAKA: That's the only place.

YOUNG: So I wondered if he ever mentioned or you ever interacted with anyone that worked with, for Amalgamated Sugar, Ray Larson or folks like that.

SAITO: I'm sure they always talked to the filed men, but I don't know them by name.

YOUNG: So you stayed in the area, during and after the war? You were still in school and then you graduated?

SAITO: Mm hm.

YOUNG: All of a sudden all these families were staying in the area, so the Japanese community was much larger.

SAITO: When I was in high school, a lot of these kids came from the camps to live in Vale and uh, some kids were mean to them you know, but on a whole people were pretty good.

YOUNG: Was there any distinctions within the Japanese community of the folks who had lived on camp and those who didn't, or was it, it didn't matter? Like calling them camp kids or something like that.

SAITO: I don't know if they thought anything about us but, I don't know. I don't really know but Mr. Conroy, our high school principal used to call Shing and I into the office, he thought because we were Japanese, we knew how to handle things. So every time he had a problem, he'd call us in and we didn't know what to do. This one, one Japanese kid had a crush on one of the cheerleaders and he was writing notes to her and stuff. And this girl was just freaked out, so Mr. Conroy called us into the office and says,

“What should I do?” Well Shing and I didn’t know what he should do! We were just one of the kids. You know, what would you do? We didn’t have much wisdom at that time. Yeah. And uh, I know one other time, he called us in because the baseball boys went on strike because there were a couple of boy son the baseball team who were, what they call, Kibei. And they didn’t speak the language well, you know, they, some of the Japanese people had to leave their kids in Japan while they were trying to make a living here so that, before they could go back to Japan so their kids were raised by grandparents or something and they came back to this country when they are older and they, a lot of them had accents, you know a Japanese accent, there was a couple of boys that, I don’t want to mention their names, they were really good ball players, but they were Kibei and they spoke and speak good English. Well, Mr. Conroy called us into the office because the whole baseball team didn’t want to play with these two guys on the team, there was something like 42, what we saw last night anyway, Mr. Conroy said, “Well what about Shingo?” They said, “Well, he’s one of us!” So, we didn’t know. I don’t know what we said to Mr. Conroy, but I don’t know, we didn’t know what we should say anyway. We didn’t have the wisdom then. Or the experience.

YOUNG: What were some activities? You had that community center before the war, I’m assuming that closed at some point. The Japanese Community Center.

SAITO: Mm hm.

YOUNG: So, how did the Japanese community, what sort of activities did they do together? After the war?

SAITO: After the war? Um, they had dances and things around, the JACL was pretty active and they would have dances and pie socials and whatever, you know, the kind of things that brought people together and um, Teddy was gone. She didn’t know about those things.

YOUNG: Did you come back when Gus started working?

TANAKA: Mm hm, we back in 1958, so. I’d been gone, well eighteen years. Although I did come back when I was working in New York, in between classes at Columbia.

SAITO: 1948?

TANAKA: I think it was around 48’ I just said, “Oh I haven’t been home in ages, I’ll just go work the summer at Holy Rosary before school starts.” So, I wrote to Sister, it was Sister A Kempis at the time and said, “Do you have an opening for a surgical nurse for the summer?” And she wrote back and

says, “You’re just a God sent, would you like to be a head nurse in the Obstetrics Department?” I said, “Heavens no! Obstetrics, I am done with six weeks of training at the Mayo Clinic you’re tethering the line with student nursing, I just sort of got to observe it, didn’t do the actual testing.” But anyway, so she said, “Well just come on over, we’ll find you a place in the hospital.” So, I came home and she, “You know if you don’t take this job Sister Rayville can’t go to Ireland, she’s already got her tickets and everything.” “Okay, but she’s gonna have to teach me everything, I need to know in two days.” So, it was a riotous time, fortunately for all of the doctors here that helped me, I say, “Could you check this patient, because I don’t know what.” Because the doctors came from up in Council Cambridge to Nyssa, Vale and they didn’t want to be called any sooner than they had to be. They didn’t want to be called too late. And so, anyway, I got through the summer, barely. And happy to leave back, anyway, when I went down to tell Sister goodbye, she said, “You know Dr. Tanaka has a son going to med school in New York City.” She says, “You got to meet up with me, you’ll like him and then come back and work in our community.” And I said, “No thank you Sister.” Five years later, we were married. Ha ha! When we came back to Ontario, it was Sister (inaudible) Golden Jubilee and so she was back here and they were having a celebration, she kept telling everybody, “See, I fixed that one up!” So that’s how I got to Ontario.

YOUNG: Did you look him up in New York? How did you two run into each other?

TANAKA: How did,... well, he had come back to Ontario um, and the family friends, I’m sure his dad said, “Go find a girlfriend for Gus while he’s here.” So they hooked him up with my younger sister and so they went out on a date I guess and she was, just finished college, she was going down to San Francisco to a job that she had and Gus was going back to New York, so she says, “I have a sister in New York, why don’t you look her up?” And that’s how it started. And I said, “I’m amazed that you even bothered to look me up because, knowing you would things like that, oh one of these days I’ll do it.” He did.

YOUNG: How many years have you been married?

TANAKA: Sixty.

YOUNG: Sixty this year?

TANAKA: Uh huh. Yeah we had our sixtieth wedding anniversary on February 14th! And everybody said, “Oh isn’t that romantic?” And I said, “No, that’s the only weekend he could get off.” So, it worked.

YOUNG: And did you know Paul, because his family also lived in the area?

SAITO: But he's older than I so I never paid any attention to him. He was around here you know how kids, you know, they like to be with kids their own age, but anyway, I went off to college and then he, he was a returned veteran and was on a G.I. Bill at Oregon State and that's... that's how I got hooked up with him.

YOUNG: And how long have you two been married?

SAITO: Sixty... what's that? Four?

TANAKA: Don't ask me.

SAITO: We got married in 1948. No... yeah.

YOUNG: Yeah, coming up on sixty-five this year.

SAITO: Mm hm.

TANAKA: You will be.

YOUNG: I've got five years, so...

SAITO: Oh goodness, we have kids on social security. Practically.

TANAKA: Not quite yet.

SAITO: They're sixty-three or sixty-two.

YOUNG: So, how many of your siblings stayed in the area?

TANAKA: Just two brothers, Sumi are the only ones.

SAITO: Muts was here for a while but she died, um, three years ago.

TANAKA: It seems... longer than that.

SAITO: No, longer than that. Five, six years ago, she died in 2007.

TANAKA: But she had left San Francisco and then when she, she married down there and when her husband retired, she and he came up here because they liked the area. And she would go back and just work the tax season for a month or so in San Francisco, just temping. Stayed up here and every younger sister is a schoolteacher in Stockton.

SAITO: You know I was gonna tell you something about my dad, um, my parents believe in education and we had four, two boys and six girls in our family and um, our two older sisters didn't get to finish college but the rest of us did. But our brothers didn't get to go to college, it's a sad thing because dad had made them work on the farm, but uh, I don't know, that was kind of different. Usually the boys got to go and the girls had to stay home.

YOUNG: So the older sister, she was the one that was in Portland and then came to the Nyssa camp?

SAITO: Mm hm.

YOUNG: And did she return to Portland after the war?

SAITO: Well she is from...

TANAKA: From Yakima Valley.

SAITO: ... Yakima Valley uh, town called Zillah when she was married and had her baby there and then that Yakima was in this evacuation place.

YOUNG: Right.

SAITO: So she had to leave.

TANAKA: But she did, they did go back to Zillah.

SAITO: They came here and stayed with us for a while and then went back to...

TANAKA: My older sister got married in New York. Stayed there in that area.

SAITO: Her kids live in Atlanta, Georgia, my second sister, her name was Akiko Sako she and her husband in 2005. But their kids have settled in Atlanta, Georgia, the two boys.

TANAKA: I understand Doug isn't there anymore.

SAITO: Oh, Doug moved to Tennessee, Nashville, Tennessee.

YOUNG: Big family, all over the country. Well, what am I, what am I missing about trying to understand both the Nyssa camp and also the Japanese community that was here before and after the war?

SAITO: Well when my dad moved our family over here, there were some families here already, Watanabe family, and Sato family...

TANAKA: All, not in Vale but in the Ontario area.

SAITO: In this valley, and some are in Napa and Boise.

TANAKA: One of the things they wanted us to learn Japanese. So, as poor as my dad was, they organized a Japanese school in the summertime and it was here in Ontario and they'd hire a teacher. And um, we would drive down from the hills of Vale and go to Japanese school. We just thought it was fun, didn't learn much, at least I didn't.

SAITO: Yeah we didn't learn to read or write Japanese, it's sad. My dad was an artist in calligraphy, he did that all winter. And he's got all kind of calligraphy, we can't read.

TANAKA: Anyway, they tried to teach us Japanese but it just did not stick. We were just too Americanized and too, all our friends were American, spoke English and so, we didn't want to speak Japanese so we just sort of ignored it. Had a great time at school in the summer. Didn't have to work out in the field. So, anyway.

YOUNG: So, you never worked on the family farm?

TANAKA: Oh yes we did!

SAITO: We did.

TANAKA: We did, we hated it. But we weeded onions and hoed beets and...

YOUNG: Did you ever have to do it before going to school, that same day?

TANAKA: No we'd come home from school and have to go out in the field and work.

SAITO: Shing wanted to play football so badly; that he would walk home from football practice, it's eleven miles out to our house.

DANIELS: One thing that this family can contribute to, that I don't think you've touched on yet. And that is that some of the community was Buddhist and some were Christian. And the Wada, their father was very prominent in the Methodist church was it?

SAITO: Mm hm.

DANIELS: So there's a little story there that most people aren't aware of.

SAITO: Do you still have that history of our church book?

DANIELS: Yes.

SAITO: That has quite a bit of what my dad did.

DANIELS: I'll try to bring that for people to look at.

SAITO: His calligraphy is in that too, he donated that one, "God is Love."

TANAKA: But he, that was his whole life, getting that church started and I remember him going around the valley getting people interested.

YOUNG: What's the name of the church? Is it still there in Vale?

TANAKA: No, in Ontario.

SAITO: Last, two years ago there's a big mix up and they um, withdrew from the Methodist denomination and so I don't know what's happened to the ...

TANAKA: It's called the Community Church now. They bought the building back from the Methodist church and still holding services there, it's just a, would you call it, non-denominational church?

SAITO: They don't even call it that.

YOUNG: So was, um, there Methodists and Buddhists, were there other religions or the Catholic population strong among the Japanese?

TANAKA: No. Very few.

SAITO: There are few people around here who are Catholic, like Nancy Sugihero is a Catholic and um, this Hirai family that my folks were such good friends with, his wife had a history of, uh, and she was widowed and he married this widow with a child. But when she was widowed and left on her own with a child in Seattle, the um, Catholic, St. Mary's or something, she used to talk about how they took her in and helped her so much that they became Catholics. So I think some of the Japanese people who became Catholics probably had that kind of start, you know where the Catholic church came and helped them.

TANAKA: Basically it was just the Methodist and the Buddhist. The Buddhist church was quite large.

YOUNG: Was that always in Ontario? There was one Buddhist church in the area.

TANAKA: Mm hm.

SAITO: They started out at the hall, just like our church did. I think they have about the same history, their start and their minister used to live out in a little house where the hall was. But they used to hold their church services there too. Until they built their church over here. But um, but they're more Buddhist than Christian Japanese in this valley, I think.

YOUNG: Well this has been wonderful.

TANAKA: Kind of disjointed, isn't it?

YOUNG: Not at all.

SAITO: We could go on.

YOUNG: Well please do if you want to keep going.

SAITO: No, I'm just kidding!

YOUNG: We can do another hour!

SAITO: They accuse, our family accuses me of remembering such trivia!

TANAKA: She remembers names and dates.

SAITO: Not anymore, I don't. Old age is getting to me.

TANAKA: Well, I think it's getting to all of us.

SAITO: It's too bad, even ten years ago there would've been a lot of people who had lived out in Nyssa.

TANAKA: It just amazes me all this interest all of a sudden within the last few years, trying to put together the histories of the camps and organizations that were around at the time.

YOUNG: I think part of it is that people have somewhat ignored internment and that whole time period and so there's now a great need to capture people, who still experienced that.

SAITO: Well years ago I remember seeing, oh what's that white haired talk show guy?

YOUNG: Phil Donahue?

SAITO: I can't think of his name.

YOUNG: Phil Donahue?

SAITO: Phil Donahue had these Holocaust victims on and it had been forty years since they went through it, and they said they never talked about it before, you know it was just so hard to talk about and then, they just went about their lives and you know. And it was the next generation that got interested in what their folks went through; so they started you know working on history.

YOUNG: Well in a lot of ways it's a collective experience for the Japanese that were living on the West Coast and if we don't discuss it then it doesn't become part of the collective memory. It's really important.

SAITO: And then Japanese people sometimes, we lived out in Vale, we weren't really in a Japanese community, we didn't understand some of the culture, but a lot of Japanese people had this feeling of, come on, you know and you have to take what's given to you, you know and you just don't complain and you don't ever make waves and um, so that's part of it too I think they don't want to you know, make waves. They just want to be good people. I don't know. That's what I think.

YOUNG: Well that seems like a good place to stop then.

END OF INTERVIEW

This project was funded, in part, by a grant from the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Japanese American Confinement Sites Grant Program. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of the Interior.