

Japanese-American Association of Lane County, Oregon - Oral History Collection
Perry and Chiyo Mori – Part 2

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Interviewee: Perry and Chiyo Mori

Interviewer: Elizabeth Uhlig

Transcriber: Ingrid Ockert

[00:00]

[EU] Okay, this is part two. Chiyo, let's start with you and your family's history. What is your full name and when were you born?

[CM] Chiyo Sato Mori. I was born August 22, 1921, in Stockton, California.

[EU] Where was your family from in Japan?

[CM] From Aichi I don't know where, but from a prefecture of Aichi. And my father came first and I don't know when he came. Then he went back to Japan and got married and came back. And then I think he came back by himself and then my mother followed a year or two after.

[EU] What was his name?

[CM] Ichitaro Sato. And my mother's name was Toki Sato. But they were not related. Same last name, though.

[EU] Was she also from Aichi?

[CM] I don't know.

[EU] Do you know how they met or was it an arranged marriage?

[CM] I imagine it was arranged.

[EU] What was your father doing in California?

[CM] At the time I think he was in grapes, I think. Back before that he was in Vacaville in the orchards.

[EU] So he worked in the orchard?

[CM] I think it was their whole fortune; he and one other man. Then after, they were in Lodi, into grapes. And my sister was born in Stockton, I was born in Stockton, my brother was born in

Campbell. After that, in 1923 or must be about '24 or so we moved to Sacramento, California. Then my father went into hotel business.

[EU] Do you know why they decided to move into the city?

[CM] I have no idea.

[EU] What part of Sacramento was the hotel?

[CM] In the old Sacramento, what they call the "Old Sacramento." That's where the Japanese town was. There was a huge Japanese town in Sacramento.

[EU] I think you said before that there were Buddhist temples?

[CM] There was a Buddhist temple, there were offshoots of Buddhism, there must have been about three or four of them. There was a Baptist church, a Methodist church, Presbyterian church. So there were quite a few Japanese churches in Sacramento.

[PM] These were all Japanese Churches and Congregations. All Japanese.

[EU] So did you then speak Japanese at home? Or English?

[CM] Mixed. I imagine that I spoke Japanese until I started school or after my sister started school. And we went through all the schooling in Sacramento. We went to Japanese School after the American School. We went for an hour a day.

[04:40]

[EU] What did they teach you at the Japanese School?

[CM] Language.

[EU] Just language?

[CM] Yes. How to read and write.

[EU] Did you learn other Japanese culture...like tea ceremony or flower arrangement?

[CM] That kind of thing was not taught in school. I remember my sister had tea ceremony, but that was a separate thing. When a teacher from Japan came and you signed up and my folks signed my sister up and she took lessons. But I never did. I was the younger one.

[EU] So, you went through high school there?

[CM] Kindergarten, grade school, junior high, high school. Then I went two years Junior College and I finished in '41. And then in August of '41 I went to the Haymore School of Design in San Francisco. And that's where I was when the war started.

[EU] During high school, for example, were you involved with clubs? Or what your main interests?

[CM] Well, Japanese Citizens Clubs and different clubs.

[PM] There wasn't much mingling with the Caucasians. Was that true in Sacramento too?

[CM] Well, they had CSF, you know, they were all the clubs, whichever.

[PM] There wasn't too much intermingling...in Watsonville. We didn't have that many different organizations either, you know. It wasn't that big a school.

[CM] Well, at that time, there were only two high schools in Sacramento. Then one opened when we were Juniors in high school, so. But until then, there were over three thousand.

[EU] Did you work with your parents in the hotel? Did you help?

[CM] Uh-huh. On weekends.

[EU] And what did you do?

[CM] Making beds.

[EU] Did you get paid for that or were you just expected?

[CM] Oh just expected to...that's a family thing [laughs]

[EU] So did your life center around Japan Town?

[CM] Yes.

[EU] Perry said at his school that you either took a college prep course or? What about you? Did you have that same choice?

[CM] Uh-Huh.

[EU] And which did you chose?

[CM] For the college, so I had all the math and science.

[EU] What about your brother and sister? Did they go onto college?

[CM] Yes, my sister got her degree from Cal Berkeley in 1930...1940, I guess maybe. And my brother was in Berkeley when the war started. And I was in San Francisco. My sister was home.

[EU] So you said that you went to a two year college. What were you studying?

[CM] Oh, I took Home Economics.

[EU] What were your plans? Or what were you hoping to do?

[CM] Not much. Just killing time I guess [laughs]. Then I went on to dress designing school and that's what else interested me.

[EU] And so you did that in San Francisco?

[CM] Until the war started. And with the traveling restriction came on, I went home.

[EU] What was the name of the school?

[CM] Hasmore School of Fashion.

[EU] So you learned dress design?

[CM] Design, how to make patterns, how to sew, different sewings, how to make hats, how to work with the furs, and everything. But I didn't finish because we had to leave.

[EU] Do you remember Pearl Harbor? And where were you on that day?

[CM] Oh that was on a Sunday and a group of us were at the San Francisco Zoo. And once we heard that, we all went back to our apartments.

[10:32]

[CM] We saw, that night, that all the big tanks came through the Japanese town. It was kind of frightening. We all ready had blackouts.

[EU] Even before?

[CM] Yes.

[PM] They brought in the tanks that early?

[CM] That very night they were roaring down the street.

[PM] Is that right? December 7th?

[CM] Yes. It was scary.

[PM] We didn't have tanks in our town.

[CM] Well in San Francisco...

[PM] [chuckle]

[EU] I mean, were you worried, what did you think, were you afraid?

[CM] Well, it was scary.

[EU] I mean, were there stories about people being taken away or arrested?

[CM] Not that. That didn't happen until after. And then, in January, early January, the restriction came, the travelling restriction. So we left and everybody went home.

[EU] So you went back to Sacramento?

[CM] I went back to Sacramento. That's when people started...men were being picked up.

[EU] What about your sister and brother then?

[CM] They all came. My sister was home. My brother naturally came home too.

[EU] Came home. Then how long ... when did you go into the camp? The assembly center?

[CM] Oh...early. I don't remember when. We went to Walerga and we weren't there very long.

[EU] That was the assembly center.

[CM] Uh-huh. Outside of Sacramento. And from there we were transferred to Tule Lake.

[EU] And how long was your family in Tule Lake?

[CM] My brother left; he didn't stay very long. Denver University took students.

[PM] [Sneeze]

[CM] So he was able to register for them fall semester...in '42. So he left right away. And in '43, after the "no-no" thing came up, I stayed with my folks and went to Amache, Colorado and my sister went to Denver because my brother was there, from Tule Lake she went to Denver.

[EU] And what did she do in Denver?

[CM] She worked. I don't know where she worked...but let's see in January, February of '44, I left for New York City. Because that was the furthest that I could go on the government's expense [laughs].

[EU] When you were camp, were you able to teach? Or what would you do in the camps?

[CM] At Tule Lake I taught adult education in sewing and pattern drafting. Then, in Amache, I worked...we were making posters for the Navy, in the, what do you call that?

[PM] Silk screen.

[CM] Silk screen. They had a silk screen art place and we were making posters for the Navy. It was just something to do.

[EU] But what did the posters say?

[CM] Well...”it’s not a boat unless you can hoist it aboard a ship” or something like that. Just something. Nothing fancy. That’s where I worked until I left.

[15:01]

[EU] And so you wanted to get as far away as you could? At government expense?

[PM] [laughs] They would pay up to where you wanted to go.

[CM] Plus twenty dollars, or something like that.

[PM] I don’t remember them giving us any money.

[CM] My girlfriend in Arkansas had an older sister already in New York City. So we decided that’s where we’ll go. I met her in Chicago and then the two of us went onto New York City. I think it was Valentine’s Day in 1944. Then her sister took me so I could get my social security. I had never worked before for anything, so I had to give social security. Then found a job in a couture dress shop.

[EU] What kind of work did you do there then?

[CM] Oh gowns and clothes for, at that time, it was a special order for some of the well known, Firestone lady, and all that kind of stuff.

[EU] So even during the war they could afford?

[CM] Oh yeah, for them a thousand or even two thousand wasn’t anything I guess. Now you don’t get anything for a thousand and two, but in those days that was beautiful gowns.

[EU] So you were designing them and making patterns?

[CM] No, just sewing.

[EU] Where did you live in New York City?

[CM] With my girlfriend's sister. They had an apartment. So there was one bedroom, the sister, and the roommate was a visiting nurse. And so my girlfriend and I had to roll out the couch every night. That's where we slept.

[EU] What was it like living in New York? I mean, it was during the war, but still, coming to the big city?

[CM] Oh it's okay. I mean. We went to church. And in those days, it was safe to be any place. We use to go to the Central Park and they use to have concerts in the summer. We went to places like the Statue of Liberty and all that kind of stuff.

[EU] Did you like the city?

[CM] Yeah, it was fun. Then after my girlfriend got married, she got married in November on Thanksgiving Day, and then my folks left for Denver from Amache. Even before I left Amache, they left. They'd never work for anybody, so they started a little restaurant. It was just supposed to be a noodle shop, but then it turned out to be a restaurant. So my folks asked me to come to Denver and help. So I left New York City in December of '44.

[EU] What part of Denver was their restaurant?

[CM] Larimer Street.

[EU] On Larimer Street. Was that also a Japanese area?

[CM] Right, Japanese.

[PM] Yeah, it was I guess. A lot of Japanese stores there.

[CM] So I helped there until California opened up again. Then my folks went back because they still had their business.

[EU] So they still had their hotel in Sacramento?

[CM] Oh yeah, they had two hotels. They owned two hotels at that time and they sold one before, oh must be in '44, or about '45 I think. They sold one, the one we use to live in, they sold that. Then they went back, must've been '46, they went to Sacramento. And they bought a nursery. 'Cause a friend was in the nursery business before the war, so they bought the nursery and my sister went with them. I stayed in Denver and worked at a dress shop. I got tired of that, and I went back to Sacramento, stayed for half a year.

[EU] Okay. So how did you meet Perry? Where did you meet Perry?

[CM] In Amache. He came in January '44 for his sister's wedding. And that's where I met him.

[EU] So that's where you were still in the camp. How did you meet then? Who introduced you?

[PM] I guess that was...

[CM] Kumagai?

[PM] Yeah.

[CM] He was a family friend who invited the young...

[PM] My brother was with one of the Kumagais...

[CM] Butch, he was with Butch. So Mrs. Kumagai invited all of us for dinner or something.

[PM] I don't remember.

[CM] And my folks were gone already and another family friend, a father, said that I wasn't to stay in the apartment, in the camp, by myself. So the oldest daughter, a very close family friend, she stayed with me until I left. But we decided that they were the nosiest brothers that we ever met.

[PM] I've heard this before [they all laugh].

[EU] So you didn't have much privacy there, in the camp?

[PM] No, each family had a room that was a little bigger than this one. And that was it.

[CM] I don't even know if it was this big.

[PM] Maybe a little bit bigger, maybe. No much.

[EU] So you two met in Amache, but then you went back to New York?

[CM] No, I stayed in Denver and went back to Sacramento every so often.

[EU] And you were going to school in Chicago, at Northwestern.

[PM] Uh-huh. And I'd come back to Denver because my family was there.

[EU] So did you meet up now and then?

[PM] Yeah, and we got married in Denver.

[EU] And when did you get married?

[CM] '49. June of '49.

[EU] June of '49. So at this time, where did you work in Denver?

[CM] I worked in the dress shop and then I worked in alterations in Daniels and Fisher.

[EU] That was a big department store in Denver.

[CM] Yeah, at that time.

[PM] It was the biggest store there.

[CM] Just about. In those days, it was just off of Lawrence.

[EU] On 16th street? I think it's still there too.

[CM] The Power is still there.

[PM] You can see it.

[EU] Yeah. I still remember when they were still May, D and F, they called it.

[CM] That was before.

[PM] They bought out.

[CM] Yeah, Daniels and Fisher.

[EU] Yeah, that was before D and F, and I never knew what D and F meant. And it was later that...Daniels and Fisher. Yeah. So...

[24:15]

[CM] And I worked there. After we got married, we went to Chicago, but we couldn't find a place to live because it says for rent, but after you go it, it's been rented. And they wouldn't rent it to us.

[PM] Yeah, this was after, in '49.

[EU] After '49. Yeah.

[CM] Disgusting.

[PM] Yeah. That's just the kind of stuff that really gets you, you know.

[EU] Did that happen more than once?

[PM] Oh yeah.

[CM] We had a hard time finding a place. Someone he knew was moving out, so we got a room and a kitchen. Not much of a place.

[PM] Yeah, pretty much.

[CM] It was in June, July we went. And he was going to school. And I went to work in alterations some place. I was doing any job I could get. And then in February, my father got sick. He was going to have surgery, so I left for Sacramento. I think in February, in '50.

[PM] Yeah, it had to be '50.

[CM] He was in such a bad way, that I just stayed. And he moved back to the dorm.

[EU] At Northwestern?

[PM] Yeah, I finished up there.

[CM] I just stayed in Sacramento 'til after my father died. And then I went to Denver. And he finished so he came to Denver. And then we had a hard time finding an apartment there.

[PM] I had a hard time finding a job.

[CM] They wouldn't hire him.

[EU] I'm sorry?

[CM] They wouldn't hire him. CBE Firms wouldn't. He applied for the FBI and they wouldn't answer. He couldn't find a teaching job.

[PM] See, this was in '50. And you think that after the war and everything, you wouldn't find any discrimination. But it's still there. Even today it's there, you know.

[EU] We always heard too that Denver welcomed Japanese Americans more.

[PM] Yeah, probably more than anyplace probably, you know.

[CM] No, Philadelphia.

[EU] But still you had troubles finding...

[PM] Oh yeah.

[EU] Even in Denver

[CM] Place to live?

[PM] Oh we had trouble even finding a place to live, you know. And job wise, I finally found a job with a firm, you know.

[CM] A small firm.

[PM] It was a small firm. But I had the feeling that I wanted to teach. I had more trouble there...no everything was the same. You applied for a job and everything was rosy until they found out your background. And then the job was gone.

[CM] And when the thing come out the next month, it's still open. The job's open. But they tell you it's been taken. Until the Dean Sorrel in New Mexico and give him the chance to teach. So that's when we moved to.

[PM] Never heard of New Mexico. [laughs]

[CM] Moved to Albuquerque in 1951. September of '51.

[EU] So how did you make that connection? With ... what was his name Dean...Sorrel?

[PM] Yeah, Sorrell. He was the Dean there.

[EU] And you had applied there?

[PM] Oh yeah. I had applied – every time I saw an opening... I applied. You know?

[CM] Everyplace, anyplace.

[PM] Even the Church schools, you think would not discriminate, but they do. You know. We found that out, you know.

[EU] Even by that time, in 1950, you had your Masters in business.

[PM] I had all the credentials, you know. So in '51 I got this job. We went down in '51.

[CM] September for Fall Semester.

[EU] All right, let's take a break. This will be the end of part two.

[end 29:31]