

PART 3

ORAL HISTORY

This interview with Sadako Hirose took place in the Kawasaki home in Fircrest, on February 27, 1993. Also present were Tadaye (Teddy) Kawasaki and her sister, Yoshiko Sugiyama, also students of School. They add occasional comments. In order to simplify the transcription, some insignificant exclamations - such as "uh huh" or "yes" spoken in agreement with the speaker - have been edited out without notation.



left to right
Yoshiko, Sadako and Teddy
at the Kawasaki home on the day
of the interview.

**ORAL HISTORY: SADAKO HIROSE, with TADAYE (TEDDY) KAWASAKI AND
YOSHIKO SUGIYAMA**

Brenda Thank you all for reconvening, and thank you [Sadako] for being here and taking part in this important project of history at the University of Washington, Tacoma campus. What I'd like to do today is to ask you questions, and you just answer based on your own memories - and you can go from there. First of all - my interest is around the Japanese Language School and about how it was formed and the people that went there...Can you tell me where you were born? Were you born in Tacoma?

Sadako Yes - I was born at 7th and Pacific, and lived in Tacoma all my years.

Brenda You mind telling me when you were born?

Sadako 1915, July the 6th. I've been living in Tacoma seventy-seven years, except when I went to camp⁵³, and one year when I got married. Well, it was in Washington, near the Columbia River, and one year when my sister got sick and I helped her out in Los Angeles. But that's five years out of seventy-seven.

Brenda You see a lot of changes in Tacoma, then?

Sadako It was kind of sad, though, when we came back from camp.

Brenda Where were you taken to camp?

Sadako Ah, first Pinedale⁵⁴, Tule Lake⁵⁵, then Heart Mountain⁵⁶.

Teddy You were in Heart Mountain too?

Sadako (unintelligible)...everything was bad, huh, where Japanese used to live, it wasn't the same thing.

Teddy It was a lot of Japanese business, too -- all the Black people lived there.

Sadako That had come to the shipyards, you know.

Brenda That had come to the shipyards during the war?

Sadako Um hmm.

Yoshiko There were very few Blacks here before the war.

Sadako We were living in a _____ it was called, but then they were really very nice Blacks, you know. We used to call them colored people, but my daughter says "Don't say colored people," you know! (laughter)

Yoshiko My daughter says, "What color?" (laughter)

Brenda What is your earliest childhood memory?

⁵³The time of her wartime internment.

⁵⁴Refers to Pinedale, California Assembly Center where most west coast Japanese internees were initially sent.

⁵⁵Tule Lake Relocation Center in northern California housed some 16,000 Japanese internees.

⁵⁶Heart Mountain Relocation Center in northwestern Wyoming housed some 12,000 Japanese internees.

Sadako My earliest childhood memory? Well, I used to play in - there was a fire station on 8th Street and there was a little park there and we used to play there. That was our only playground that we had. You know, my father used to take us fishing, dock fishing, and we used to go after ferns and wild things, you know.

Brenda And what did you do with them when you carried them home?

Sadako We cleaned it and then we ate it.

Brenda You're talking about gathering ferns to eat, then! Oh, I thought you were talking about gathering flowers for the table or --

Sadako We had to go after our food.

Brenda ... Can you tell me something about your family?

Sadako My family? Well, my father and mother...had seven children...the last three were born on Tacoma Avenue. [The first four] were all born in 7th and Pacific and we had a midwife in those days, you know, but we were all born right in that place and my father had a barber shop and my mother had the laundry. We lived there until the kids started to go to school, and that Japanese School was there at Tacoma Avenue so, my father thought we better move 'cause it's too far to go to school. So we moved to 15th and Tacoma Avenue.

Brenda Just be close to Japanese School?

Sadako Uh huh. And to be close to Central School, that was on 7th and Tacoma Avenue. So we could get from Tacoma Avenue to both schools. So I -- come to think of it, he thought of education, you know?

Brenda It seems that the Issei people were very interested in their children being educated.

Sadako Uh huh -- I think so. We didn't have any money, but he bought lots of books and things, and he read Japanese books to us. And in the Japanese paper they had stories in there every night, you know, and so he'd read that story to us. We'd get together and he'd read that story to us. He said he didn't go to school very much. I guess he was kind of sickly and so he thought he'd better educate his kids. My mother had more education than he did.

Brenda Do you know when they came here? Did they come first to Tacoma from Japan?

Sadako I think when my father - he came he was about sixteen. And my grandfather that is buried in Seattle, he used to bring the people [from Japan] to Hawaii. He brought people over and after that he came to Seattle with Japanese people. So that's how my father came.⁵⁷

⁵⁷Japanese workers were begrudgingly hired as laborers on the plantations of Hawaii in the late 19th century since "white men cannot take the place of the coolies in plantation work." Japanese immigrated to the Puget Sound region in relatively large numbers beginning in 1905. See Daily Ledger article, Addendum IV, page 1.

Brenda What brought him down to Tacoma?

Sadako He was in Seattle for a while...Well, when he first came, he said he planted apple trees, so he must have been in the Wenatchee area ...Then he said he went on a tug boat and learned how to cook. Then he had an Alaska restaurant. He had a restaurant and so he worked at that for about a couple of years. But the rent went up to \$200 and he said he couldn't pay it, so he came back to Tacoma where all his relatives were and --

Brenda Did he meet your mother here?

Sadako Well,yes...my family is kind of complicated (laughter) but anyway, my mother came when she was about nineteen with her sister and her cousins, I guess...my mother's sister, older sister...they didn't have any children so they adopted my mother. Well, they wanted a husband for her, but they wanted a man that could change his name to Yamani, see? My father [and mother] were married...because he was a second son, so he could change his name...

Teddy I think...Sensei⁵⁸ [was also a second son].

Brenda Why did they want him to be able to change his name?

Sadako Because they wanted the Yamani family to -- what do you call it?

Teddy They carry the name --

Sadako Carry the name.

Teddy ...Fujimoto's⁵⁹ gone. [The name is carried on] only when you have boys...

Sadako But anyway - now we have lots of boys (laughter)...it's kind of funny, huh? They were married in a Baptist Church. They had a Japanese Baptist Church here.

Brenda So this would have been back just shortly after the turn of the century then, maybe 1910 or --

Sadako Oh, yeah. My sister was born 1909, so they must have been married before. I guess my father came in later part of 1800's and my mother came maybe about the early part of 1900's so I have to do real research on my family. (laughs) That's what they say, "you've got lots of time, so" -- but I don't! I don't know how to begin!

Brenda ... As you think back, what were the evenings like in your family home? What would you do?...

Sadako Well, we have seven children, so we'd be in the kitchen. We had a big table and we all ate together. At night everybody gets together and we talk about everything. My mother had to work 'til late because it's a laundry and she has to do it herself. My father had lots of time because he's a barber. So he cooked and he did the dishes and everything. He's a

⁵⁸*Sensei* is a term of respect for teacher, which also implies counselor or authority. Teddy is referring to the principal of the Japanese Language School, Masato Yamasaki.

⁵⁹*Fujimoto* is Teddy's family name which, since she is one of three sisters, has not been "carried on."

good cook! We had good food although we were poor. So when we come home from Central School and before we go to Japanese School, my father would have buns or doughnuts or something like that for a snack...we kinda looked forward to that, you know.

Brenda And your whole family went to Japanese School?

Sadako Oh yeah, right.

Brenda And what is your family name?

Sadako Yomani. My two brothers live in Seattle.

Brenda What do you remember about going to Japanese School? Was it something you looked forward to?

Sadako Yes! Uh huh. We had good times, although, we had to sweep and --

Yoshiko We had chores assigned to us.

Teddy We were the janitors!

Brenda And did the chores rotate among classes or -- what kinds of things would the different groups do?

Sadako Well, we'd wash the blackboards and sweep.

Yoshiko Clean the erasers.

Teddy One a year or twice a year we'd have to do windows...

Sadako Summertime the principal took us to picnics.

Teddy And in the summer we had a victory garden on the side of the building...Every classroom had a garden...

Brenda What do you remember about your principal?

Sadako Oh, he was a smart person, and he -- I like him because he knew all the history of Japan, and he used to tell us stories and things, you know about Japan.

Yoshiko He used to go from classroom to classroom and give us stories.

Sadako Yeah, he was really a smart person.

Brenda And his wife was a teacher there.

Sadako I don't remember her a lot.

Yoshiko I had her in first grade and second grade. Kimi had her a long time. She [Kuni Yamasaki] was supposed to have been more educated.⁶⁰

Sadako One thing that he did was [to plan] programs that all the children were involved in.

Yoshiko We told you about that [in our last interview], and there was a picture of a couple of classes all in costume.⁶¹ You're in there [Sadako] !

⁶⁰Kuni Yamasaki was hired as the School's first teacher in 1912. Her husband joined her as principal the next year.

⁶¹See the class photo on page 48 of Part 4.

Sadako But he did everything! Made most of the costumes. He made --

Teddy I remember, he used to make paste [for us] from the rice, huh? And we used to use it.

Sadako He used to make sandwiches for us.

Teddy And Mrs. Yamasaki worked there every day. Every day she was there.

Brenda They must have really believed in what they were doing. Because it sounds as though it was a hardship for them. They weren't wealthy people.

Sadako And they didn't get much pay! But they enjoyed it, I think!

Teddy They were dedicated people!

Brenda What kinds of other things do you remember studying? What did you like the best - your favorite thing about the School?

Teddy We didn't have grades so we didn't have to study! (laughter)

Sadako I kind of appreciate what I learned at school because now that I'm retired, you know, I can read Japanese books. So I've gotten quite a few books to read about Japan, and learn more things about it. I appreciate going to school.

Brenda Did you get tired of having to go to school after you'd already spent a long day at Central?

Sadako No, it just got naturally to go to school. And I went after graduating high school...Well, in those days, girls weren't supposed to be going out to dances or going out to bowling or things like that. The only thing was to go to school! (laughs) So I went to school every night for a couple of hours and I learned Chinese writing.

Yoshiko Because we were in the lower class from you folks. You folks were in the higher level. See, one teacher taught more than one class in the room.

Sadako Yeah, two classes usually.

Brenda Different grades?

Yoshiko I remember her class because we were in the lower and they were in the higher [grade].

Teddy Were the boys as strong as the girls with the Japanese?

Yoshiko The boys were pretty good too!...

Sadako See I was supposed to be in another group, one grade higher, but I started late.

Yoshiko [Me too] I was living on 9th and Fawcett and it was too far for me to go to school. And I didn't go to kindergarten and I started late. So I figure I should have been in the class with you girls.

Brenda So you went to Japanese Language School all the time from when you were eight years old until you finished high school? Is that right?

Yoshiko Um hmm. I went to the School for twelve years. And that was at night, you know. That was a long time! (laughs)

Brenda What did you do during the day after you finished high school.

Sadako Or I started a grocery store. My father had a barber shop and a laundry, and there was a grocery store. And two old Japanese couple had the store and they wanted to go back to Japan. And so they asked my father to buy it, see? And my father said, "I don't have the money." And they said, "Well, you can just get me \$40 a month. Send it to me." And I paid \$800 for they store. And so -- they trusted us. And so we sent them \$40 a month every month. (laughs) And I ran the store.

Brenda And your store would have been on Tacoma Avenue then?

Sadako Um hmm. Right next door [to where we lived].

Yoshiko Who was that [you purchased the store from]?

Sadako Hmm, old lady and old man. [Don't remember their names.] We used to go into that store every day, you know, because we'd run out of milk or run out of bread. So we used to go there all the time.

Brenda So you knew the store very well!

Sadako (laughs) And then we didn't have any jobs, you know, after we'd graduate from high school! So my father said that's the way [if] we own it more that we could do it, you know. So we got a start -- \$800 dollars, \$40 a month! (laughs) And we owned the store!

Brenda And you worked in the store until the time of the war?

Sadako No, I got married and so after I got married my brother ran the store. Let's see, I was gone about a year and the war broke out. So we went to the same camp with my father and mother.

Brenda Where were you at the time?

Sadako We were at Pillar Rock, Washington. See, he was working for a cannery. He was a fish butcher -- salmon head butcher. And so there was no road or anything. You had to go by boat. And so when you want to go to Portland you went on a mail boat, you know... And when we wanted to go home after the war [began], we had to catch the mail boat and my brother came after us to Willamette, Washington 'cause there was no roads, see. Every day the mail boat came. And if we want certain groceries, well, we could get Captain, or whatever he is, and he buys it and then brings it over.

Brenda Now, Pillar Rock is down south in Puget Sound down on the south coast or --

Sadako Columbia River. It's quite a few miles up the Columbia River. There was a big cannery there. And his father used to be the fish butcher there...and his father went to Japan.

Brenda Could you tell me something of what became of your principal and your teachers and so forth during the war?

Sadako During the war the principal went to -- it wasn't Missoula (unsure). I was thinking about calling Yoshi to find out a few things, and then I let you know.

Teddy Yoshi's the daughter. She's in Japan. She's married to a Japanese national.

Yoshiko I was asked to say the eulogy at Tule Lake [for Masato Yamasaki, the School's principal, who died in an internment camp]. I don't why I was asked to do it, because there were certainly much, much better students than I, but I was chosen and I did it.

Brenda What kinds of things did you talk about?

Yoshiko I can't remember! That was back in 1943, I think. So much was happening to us. It's real hard to remember things.

Teddy I don't even remember how we went from camp to camp! I mean, I know we went on trains, but then I don't remember anything...

Brenda Maybe they didn't tell you very much.

Teddy Yeah, but I ought to know how I got to a certain place. I can't even -- Well, Pinedale, we took a train, right. But what I can't remember is -- I don't even remember from Michigan to Heart Mountain to back to Tacoma. Or how we got back in the house! Isn't that terrible! (laughs)

Brenda Mrs. Yamasaki came back here after the war, didn't she?

Sadako Yes, um hmm. She came to stay at the school...

Teddy Because all the people were staying there like a hostel, you know...And [her daughter] Yoshi came back to stay there. We used to take her with us every Sunday...

Brenda Their daughter, Yoshi, was ill?

Sadako Um hmm. That's why her older sister came from Japan to take her back [with her]... Yoshi was in the hospital. Her sister's eighty-three. But she's [Yoshi's elder sister, Tetsuko] teaching -- English! We'll have to talk about it at the next reunion. Are they going to have another reunion?

Teddy (laughs)

Brenda Better get busy! Start planning the next one!

Teddy My class was the ones whose pushing it. (laugh) I guess it has to be Tacoma or else it wouldn't be a real reunion. But I mean if we do have it somewhere else it would be a lot of work -- I mean for them!

Brenda Your last reunion was in August, this past August - the 50th [anniversary of the school's wartime closing]?

Sadako '92, um hmm.

Brenda How many people attended that, do you know? [She didn't know] How did you find Tacoma when you came back from the war? How had the Japanese American community changed in that time?

Sadako Well, my brother came back here and he said, "Tacoma isn't very good," you know, because people has a sign saying, "No Japs, no Japs," all over. (laughs) But because we have to get home. It's the only place we got, you know. My sister's family and my family

and my mother's family, so three families came back to the same place. And we all lived together.

Brenda Your parents were still living at the time.

Sadako Um hmm. Um hmm. And no jobs.

Brenda What had happened to your business?

Sadako He had sold the business. The laundry was closed, I think. I don't know. The barber shop was closed. I'm not sure, because I wasn't here. But everything is closed up here. And an apartment -- had the upstairs and we rented it out. And one person looked after the place. But everything was OK. We had to live together. (laughs)

Brenda So what did people do for a living when they came back ? What did your father do?

Sadako My father didn't start the barber shop right away. And my mother didn't feel like running the laundry. And my husband and my sister's husband went out to the farm and picked potatoes and sacked potatoes.

Brenda Where was the farm?

Sadako Out in Fife someplace.

Brenda So, you still had property somewhere.

Sadako My brother had property, and so that's where we came back. He had the laundry and the barber shop, and upstairs the apartments. And so my sister had one room in that apartment, and I had the back of the barber shop, and they had the rest of the place. But I had to cook for a while for everybody because they had to go look for work. And my brother says, "Well, we can't be doing things like this, so let's start the laundry business." And Mother says, "Well, I don't want to," so he says, "Well, we'll start it anyway." And so we started it and my husband started learning to wash clothes...and my sister ran the shirt machine, and others were sent to [the Kawasaki's] cleaners. And my mother...she go downstairs and started to wash again though. But when I was out shopping for groceries on Market Street, a friend of ours that's a soldier, he came after me and said, "You better go home right away - your mother is sick." So we came home and Mother came up the back stairs but then she fell into the back room. I think she had a stroke then. And so we called the doctor, and she was an invalid for quite a while. And so I had to do the cooking and the others had to work really hard 'cause Mother was sick. And my father started the barber shop.

Brenda So did gradually things get back in the business as before?

Sadako Um hmm.

Brenda Do you remember the registration process at the Japanese Language School? Do you remember taking part in that?

Sadako Registration?

Teddy Before evacuation...

Sadako We came to register here [from Columbia River]. My whole family registered here [to stay together]...I was reading something yesterday about how if you wanted to send for all the information [the government had on Japanese internees] --

Teddy [It is from the Japanese Citizen's League's weekly bulletin.] It said if you want your history the way it was written about us we could - write and get all of ours! (laughs)

Yoshiko I wonder why they started to do that?

Brenda Freedom of Information Act?

Yoshiko Oh-h-h...I guess it was the FBI. I had to have a hearing -- special hearing!

Brenda Why?

Yoshiko I don't know! (laughs) I don't know! Something probably I said at our block meeting in Tule Lake...or maybe it was because of my dad being so active [in the Tacoma Japanese American community]. I don't know. But it was really nothing. I just worried myself for nothing! Because, you know, you were in a strange town, and just didn't know what to expect though. But they were very kind.

Brenda And they just wanted to question you?

Yoshiko Uh huh. Whether I was disloyal or loyal, and - that's about all.

Teddy And, you know, when they started to draft the boys [and they] asked for volunteers from the camp, I was upset. (To Yoshiko) Weren't you? I mean we were behind barbed wire, they wouldn't let us out! And why asked them to serve, you know? I was really upset!...Not that we were disloyal but --

Brenda You know Aki Kurose [who] I mentioned to Kimi - my teacher friend in Seattle? She and her husband were both interned. Her husband was in the American army. His brother was in the Japanese army. (exclamations) His mother and family were still in Japan during the war, so she had children on each side. How did the war particularly affect the women in the Japanese American community?

Sadako I don't know. I was away for a year, you know. I was kinda scared when I was up there by myself, you know! My husband, too, but, you know, how every morning [after the war] we go down into the post office and pick our mail or send our mail. And I went up there and there was a lot of people there. And, you know, usually they'll come close to you. But after the war, they're way out. They think I'm gonna do something to them, you know! But there was one man who was an Englishman and his wife. He was a nice man. But the rest of the people, I don't know, they just stay far away from us - won't look at us.

Brenda The people that frequented your business, were they all Japanese, from within the Japanese community or --

- Sadako No, they were mostly American people.⁶²
- Brenda Did you have trouble reestablishing your business? Teddy was saying how slowly the business had to be built back up.
- Sadako I guess it was slow. I'm not sure, because I wasn't out there in the front. If my brother were here, why he'd know. When my mother [ran] the laundry, well then, I remember when the war started, everybody that didn't want my mother to clean their clothes came and then, "Can I have my laundry back?" (exclamations) And they were good customers but they came and said, "Can I have my laundry back? Even if it isn't washed it's alright." ...I guess they changed, you know.
- Teddy I often wonder how I would have felt if it was reversed [if an ethnic group other than the Japanese had been suspected of disloyalty].
- Brenda Do you? And what do you think?
- Teddy I just don't know! Because we were on the receiving end and because you know the hardship...[There was a young Japanese American man we knew] going in the service. There is no family [in Tacoma] and [Mom] wanted to give him a going away dinner. So she went to get meat and [the government] was rationing it...So the only meat she saw that Tony might like was spare ribs. So she went up to the butcher and he wouldn't sell it to her [because she was Japanese]. So she went to the fish market [to the shopkeeper, a friend of hers] and asked him to get it for her, but he was busy selling and said, "OK, just a minute, just a minute." And she was getting impatient. So she got hold of a Chinese man and made him go buy it [for her]. (laughs) And that's how she made dinner for Tony.
- Brenda It's like you said the other night - she should have walked [back in] and said, "No, no. I'm Chinese! Let me buy these spare ribs!"
- Teddy We were established down there, see, so they know. (laughs)
- Brenda Oh, they knew who she was! (laughter)
- Teddy Gee, it was smart to get a Chinese to get it for her! (laughter) And we told (our friend) Kaz about it and he couldn't believe it, because he knows them from before. You know how Kaz is - he knows everybody!
- Brenda And he was surprised that the butcher would have reacted in that way?
- Teddy Wartime. Only because they could tell we were Japanese. If we were Germans - we had one customer - he was German. He would cry, "You don't have to go! I have to go! You don't have to go!" he'd tell us (laughs) because he's a German national, you know.
- Brenda So he felt badly that you were being in that way.

⁶²Here, Sadako is referring to *Caucasian* Americans.

Teddy Well, he was a German national, you know. We don't treat them in that way.

Brenda So you maintain a close friendship then with Yoshi, the daughter (of former principal and teacher, Mr. and Mrs. Yamasaki)? And she comes to this country often, doesn't she?

Sadako Every year. She's going to come in August again.

Brenda And she comes back to Tacoma to visit?

Sadako Uh huh. Her daughter, Tina, says she likes Tacoma, so. Anyway they're coming. They say the people in Tacoma are real nice...

Yoshiko There are just a few of us here, you know, original --

Brenda So [Yoshi] grew up here until then? And was she interned with her family? I assume she was?

Sadako Yoshi was, but Tina was born in Japan after [Yoshi] got married over there. And [Tina's] a Japanese national.

Brenda The Japanese Language School, where all of the Japanese Americans were registered at that time just before evacuation, all those records and boxes of all those details were just left up there, weren't they? All the way through the war? ...

Teddy It could be some of the things that - in the basement there was supposed to be some things the Japanese community stored there. I mean, you know, individual families, because it was used as a storage just like the Buddhist Church was unless they picked that up. There was a whole mess of junk in there. We didn't touch it because it belonged to different people. Well, when [Loren Ezell] cleared it out, or whatever, you know, when he bought the place -- it might be that. You know, people used it as a storage. But they used it as a hostel too...

Brenda Did your family go to church?

Sadako We went to another church, not the Buddhist Church or the Methodist Church. We went to Kunkokyo. It's another --

Yoshiko It's another sect. Is that connected with Shinto or Gyokyo?

Sadako Shinto.

Yoshiko Do they have any in Seattle right now? Oh, they do?

Brenda But there was at one time a church here in Tacoma? And say it for me again? *Koon-Koe-Kyo* - that's hard for me to say.

Sadako There's one in Seattle, but nobody came back to Tacoma. They all went east or south.
(laughs)

Brenda In what ways do you see things as different now than they were after the war? How are things changing? Are they changing for the better in some ways?

Teddy The doors are open for a lot of people - young people.

Yoshiko I think the recent immigrants --

Sadako Have it a lot better.

Yoshiko Have it a lot better than what our parents did. Because of government giving them special [assistance] like applying property...or getting loans at really very low --

Sadako Interest on property.

Yoshiko Interest -- something really, really nominal. And our parents couldn't even buy property!⁶³ (laughs) So I think in that respect the recent immigrants are really fortunate. And at school they seem to be well integrated. I don't know if they have a special school or not, the Korean people. They're the most numerous in our area, I think, as far as minority goes. But we see their churches all over.

Sadako And they have all kinds of businesses.

Teddy Yeah, they do. But Japanese community took care of their own people, though. People that were well off, or better off would gather goods to use and set it on the porch or on the back door. Because they would not accept it otherwise, you know, because they were proud people. And there wasn't one single family on welfare...And they asked how the Japanese people were able to do it, you know. So Mom said they prepared a dinner with typical [Japanese foods]- what everybody was eating. And invited all the dignitaries and city fathers, you know, to show them how they survived ...

Sadako No one in the community was disloyal.

Teddy No! There wasn't one single act!...

⁶³Washington State's *Alien Land Law*, passed in 1921, prohibited immigrants from owning property. It was not rescinded until 1966. *Asian Americans* by Roger Daniels, page 147.