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Stockton Immigrant Women Oral History Collection

by Sally Miller

MOTOIKE, AYA (Japanese)

August 1980

Interviewed by Motoike's daughter

Transcribed by Unknown (no audio available)

Question: Can you tell me about your early life, that is before you came to this country?

Answer: I attended a girl's school and had just graduated high school. I had plans to go to work as a teacher's aid, when my parents and my husband's parents agreed to introduce my husband and myself for the purpose of marriage. They arranged a dinner meeting and we met. I was told my husband was an older gentleman, but he appeared much younger and his personality was appealing, so I decided to marry him.

Question: Place of birth? How long did you live there? Was this in the country or the city?

Answer: City of Sakai Minato, Totore Prefecture. I lived 18 years.

Question: Birthdate (approximate if necessary)

Answer: I was born January 23, 1907.

Question: When did you come to U.S. (directly? via what other countries?) How old were you?

Answer: I arrived in Seattle, Washington at the age of 18.

Question: How many brothers and sisters did you have before you arrived? After?

Answer: I had four sisters and three brothers. I now have two sisters and one brother.

Question: Did your immediate family arrive together? How many persons arrived with you? Did you all live together when you got here?

Answer: No, I arrived with my husband. Just the two of us arrived in Stockton.

Question: Did you ever go to school? How much did you go to school in the old country? How about in the U.S.?

Answer: Yes, I went to school for eleven years in the Old Country. I attended grammar school for about two or three months and learned to read and write a little.

Question: Parents' educational background: Father_____

Mother_____

Answer: My father attended school for 8 years. My mother had an equivalent of a high school education.

Question: Your parent's religion? How about your own? Have your religious views changed since then? Why is that, do you think?

Answer: My parents were Buddhists. I did not have any religious preference while in Japan, but at the present I am a member of a Japanese Presbyterian Church. I would say my religious views have changed significantly. My friends were all Christians and I have since joined them and my life has changed for the better.

Question: Did your mother work outside the home (ever? part-time? full time?) while you were growing up the Old Country? How about when you were in the United States. How did you feel about your mother working? What kinds of things helped you to adjust to this?

Answer: No, my mother never worked outside of the home other than out on the family farm.

Question: How did you feel when you were leaving the Old Country? Did your feeling change once you got here?

Answer: Yes, I was a little sad leaving my family, but being so young I did not have any regrets. About a year later I was depressed as I had lost a child and my living conditions were very poor.

Question: What did you like most about your life in the Old Country? Was there anything about the Old Country you didn't like? Can. You tell me about it? Were you ever able to do anything about it? How?

Answer: I enjoyed school life the most. I lived in a girl's dorm and enjoyed it very much. I also enjoyed the holiday celebration with my family. I had no particular dislike about my Old Country.

Question: What do you remember about what life was like when you first came to the United States?

Answer: My first year in the U.S. was very good. I lived in my brother-in-law's hotel and helped with the work. Then when my husband and I moved out to the country to farm things became bad. We lived in a house w/o floors, and it was during the summer when it was very hot. This is when we lost our first child. Things became better after three years as we prospered in our farming endeavor.

Question: What kinds of things did you expect to find in the United States? What did you think when you got here? Was there anything in the United States that surprised you?

Answer: I had no particular expectations about U. S. before I arrived here. I found that it was a very large and nice country. The only surprise was the automobile as Japan did not have automobiles at that time.

Question: Did your family settle in Stockton when they first arrived?

Answer: Yes, our first home was in Stockton.

Question: Did your family settle with family or relatives from the Old Country?

Answer: Yes, I've lived with my husband's brother and wife. Yes, we lived in a section of town where most of the Orientals lived, (Filipinos, Chinese, Italians)

Question: Did you live in a neighborhood mostly with persons from your Old Country? What other groups were present?

Answer:

Question: Did your family encounter any problems when you got here? What did you or your family members do about them? Could you turn to others for help?

Answer: No – no problems.

Question: What language(s) were spoken at home? Did English ever become the main language at home? When did this happen? What languages were spoken in your neighborhood?

Answer: Japanese. English was spoken among the children when they began to attend school. The neighbors spoke Italian, Japanese, English and broken English.

Question: Who lived in the household during your growing up years? Were grandparents, uncles or aunts in residents? How many? Were there ever boarders? (If so, relations?) How many? Did you ever live in the home of relatives or board with another family? Did this ever create problems? Can you tell me about them?

Answer: My parents and my sisters and brothers and until I was 10 years old my grandmother lived with us. After I left for high school and eldest brother lived in the home with his wife. There were no problems. When I was under 10 years of age, I did stay with my sister and her adoptive parents for a month at a time and I had no problems. They were very good to me.

Question: How did your parents feel about having other family members living in the home? How did you feel about it?

Answer: My parents readily accepted others in the home very well. They encouraged their daughter-in-law to only take care of her husband and did not expect her to do anything for their family. I really enjoyed my grandmother's presence in the home.

Question: Did the children have regular chores? Can you tell me about what was expected of children in your family? Boys in the family? Girls?

Answer: Yes, the girls were expected to clean the house and clean the yard. The boys were expected to help on the farm.

Question: Did you ever work in a job outside the home when you were growing up? Can you tell me about it? Did you work for a person from your own country? What was it like to be supervised by an adult? Did you ever have to do something you didn't like? How did you respond to this?

Answer: No, I only attended school.

Question: What kind of home did you live in when you arrived in the United States? How many rooms did you have? Did you ever move? What was your new home like?

Answer: I lived in a hotel. I moved a year later to the country. The home was inadequate.

Question: Who made most of the family decisions? Did your parents together make decisions? Father? Mother? Both? Other?

Answer: My father made the business decisions and my mother made the decisions regarding the home.

Question: What influence did your mother have in deciding things about the family? Did your parents ever disagree on things? How were their disagreements handled?

Answer: She made the most of the decisions and they both agreed. There were no major disagreements.

Question: Did you ever disagree with your parents about things? Can you tell me about some of these disagreements? What did you usually do about them?

Answer: No, I never disagreed. I was an obedient child.

Question: What, if any, customs and practices from the Old Country did you observe at home? Religious rituals? Recipes and foods? Holidays? Ceremonies? Children's games? Folklore? Superstitions?

Answer: New year's celebration which includes recipes and foods. For funerals, we still give money to the bereaved family.

Question: What groups did you belong to while growing up? Were your friends mostly of the same religions and ethnic background? Did you and your friends often relate to, play with, children of other backgrounds? If so, did your parents object?

Answer: None. My friends in Japan were all Japanese. I had no association with other ethnic background people.

Question: Did you every bring your friends into your home as visitors? How did your parents feel about visitors or friends from another culture?

Answer: Yes, but they were all Japanese friends.

Question: Did your parents set any rules about dating?

Answer: No. I never dated.

Question: Did your parents have anything to do with who you married? Can you explain?

Answer: Yes. They encouraged me to marry my husband, but they did not force me. It was my choice.

Question: Was it ever difficult for kids from your country to grow up in Stockton? Were there especially good things about growing up in Stockton?

Answer: No. My children grew up in the country near Linden, California. This was very good for them.

Question: Was it helpful to have brothers and sisters when you were growing up?

Answer: Yes. I learned to get along with others, learned to share, give and take etc.

Question: Did you go to school in the United States? What was it like?

Answer: Yes, for two or three months. I enjoyed studying English as an adult

Question: Did you and your classmates have the same ethnic background?

Answer: No

Question: Did most of your classmates speak English? Did you? How about other children from your country?

Answer: Yes. No – I was an adult and the only Japanese student.

Question: Did the teachers appear to come from different backgrounds than yours?

Answer: Yes.

Question: How did you learn to speak English? When?

Answer: What little I know, I learn from others.

Question: As you recall now, did the teachers seem able to handle languages differences among the children? Or other differences stemming from background?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Did you recall any funny incidents while in school?

Answer: No.

Question: Was there anything that bothered you about going to school in the United States? What could you do about these things?

Answer: N/A

Question: What was your family's attitude toward school? What was your own? (If different) how did you handle the difference between your attitude toward school and your parent's attitude?

Answer:

Question: Did your parents try to help you with problems at school? Could you rely on anyone else to help you? Who?

Answer:

Question: If you had brothers and sisters, did girls or boys stay in school longer? If so why?

Answer:

Question: What did your parents expect you to learn in school? How about your other sisters? And your brothers?

Answer:

Question: Did you participate in school activities? Did you ever take classes at the YMCA, or classes? Where these activities helpful to you while you were growing up?

Answer:

Question: Did you tend to participate in neighborhood or church activities? Were there special activities for your age group? Were these activities helpful to you? How?

Answer:

Question: How far did you go in school? Is this the amount of education you hoped you would have?

Answer:

Question: During your years in high school, did your father give you some independence in certain ways? How did you feel about your family in those years? Did your parents speak English? Was it ever difficult for you when your friends were present in your home?

Answer:

Question: Did you have any special hopes or ambitions while you were in school?

Answer:

Question: Did the school help you achieve them?

Answer:

Question: Did school help you to understand life in the United States? Was there ever anything you felt confusing about what you heard or learned about the United States in school?

Answer:

Question: Can you think of any differences between your life when you came to the United States and that of your grown children now? (If so, how do you feel about them?)

Answer: I came to the U.S. 56 years ago. There is a drastic difference since that time and now. My children are much more independent and have a great deal more material possessions. We worked very hard to achieve very little. My children have it much easier. They have more emotional freedom where we were oppressed because of our ethnic background and lack of citizenship.

Question: Are the customs celebrated at your home when you were a child celebrated in your children's homes?

Answer: No – only New Years.

Question: Are the foods the same? Are the same holidays celebrated?

Answer: Only at New Years – the rest of the celebrations are U.S. celebrations and the food is American.

Question: Do our children help each other with home responsibilities – share babysitting, shopping – etc., and does this resemble your mother and aunts sharing of various responsibilities? Is it different in some ways? Can you give some examples?

Answer: Yes, they did share responsibilities. I brought up as I was brought up.

Question: Do your children have anyone living in the household besides their spouses and their children, e.g., aunts, cousins, boarders? Is this helpful?

Answer: No.

Question: Do your children assign their children chores or tasks similar to what you and your brothers and sisters had to do as children?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Do your children have husbands or wives of the same background?

Answer: Yes.

Question: How do the younger people born in the United States of your ethnic (nationality) background generally feel about having their parents or other family members living in the home? How do you feel about this?

Answer: They do not particularly care to have relatives live in their home permanently. I rather live in a separate home as it gives me and them more freedom.

Question: Would you (do you) prefer to live with your children if you can?

Answer: While I'm able to take care of myself I rather stay alone, but when I'm unable to do so, I prefer to live with my children.

Question: Do your children have children? How do you feel about them having friends not of your own nationality? How do they feel about this?

Answer: Yes, my son has two children. I feel if they have other ethnic friends it's all right. They think nothing of friends of other nationality.

Question: Think of the kind of lives your children are now living? What are some of the best things about their lives now? What are some of the less desirable things? If you were to do something to help them, what would it be?

Answer: That they are free to do as they desire. They go to church, they have jobs, friends, they live in the U.S. They do not have less desirable things in their lives.

Question: What is life here like for people from your country?

Answer: The Japanese people have worked hard to achieve success, and I feel most of them have achieved it. Their lives are above average here in the U.S. They believe in education and have much pride in their nationality.

Question: Have you felt close to the Old Country?

Answer: Not really, I feel American although I am not a citizen of this country.

Question: Are you in contact with relatives or friends there?

Answer: Yes, I write to my siblings.

Question: Do you feel that you are affected by what happens there?

Answer: Yes, if tragedy strikes, I fear for my relatives.

Question: When you first got to the United States did you think of yourself still as Italian, Chinese, etc.? Do you think of yourself now as an Italian American? Chinese-American? Etc.? How about your children? Why?

Answer: Yes, Now, I feel I am an American. My children feel they are American.

Question: Have your attitude toward the Old Country changed over time? When did this change? What makes a person Italian, Chinese American?

Answer: Yes, when my first child was born. I am Japanese-American because my origins is Japanese but I now live as an American.

Question: Did you ever return to the Old County for a visit? What was it like there?

Answer: Yes, Japan has greatly changed for the better – very Americanized.

Question: Did people from your country tend to live in the same neighborhoods, that is neighborhoods where all or most of the people came from your country? What was life in these neighborhoods like? What did you like best about these neighborhoods?

Answer: No.

Question: What kinds of things did the parents of your neighborhood friends do for a living?

Answer: Farming.

Question: Were there ever any things about these neighborhoods that were not so good for the people living there? Did your neighbors ever try to do something about these things. How about yourself?

Answer: No.

Question: What aspects of the Old Country and its culture do your children retain? What aspects have disappeared from your family life?

Answer: Social obligations are still relatively observed. Most of the other things have disappeared.

Question: Have you often as an adult related to neighbors or others whose background was different?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Have you ever felt discriminated against on account of your background? In your opinion why did this happen? What could/did you do about this?

Answer: Yes – U.S. had a Alien Land Law and Japanese were not allowed to become citizens and all Japanese were placed in relocation camps during World War II. This all happened because the U.S. Government feared national security. My husband helped by serving on the committee to allow Japanese to own land and be naturalized U.S. citizens.

Question: Have you participated in organizations or groups? Which?

Answer: No. Only as a church member.

Question: What kind of recreational activities do you enjoy?

Answer: I am 73 years old. I do not have a recreational preference. I walk approximately 4 miles a day.

Question: Have you been as active in your church synagogue in the past as you are today, or has this changed? In community organizations?

Answer: Yes, in my church.

Question: When you grew up did you every work in a job outside your home? What can you tell me about what it was like to work in the jobs you just had?

Answer: Yes, my husband was a farmer so I have helped him on the farm. I also worked out in the Islands (Delta) I enjoyed it very much. There were other ladies working with me. I pulled weeds, sorted potatoe, onion and carrots. I also have irrigated, tree and truck crops, pack fruits, grafted walnuts. I enjoy being outdoors.

Question: Have you ever worked part-time? Full time?

Answer: Yes.

Question: When did you have your first paying job?

Answer: In Relocation Center during World War II, I worked as a cleaning lady for \$16.00 p/mo.

Question: Did you work before marriage? Did you give up your job upon marriage or upon the birth of your first child

Answer: No.

Question: Did you enjoy working? Would you have liked to have held a job for a longer time? What did you find most satisfying about working? Least satisfying?

Answer: Yes – No. I'm too old. I enjoyed being out of doors and in farming I enjoyed seeing everything grow.

Question: Would you have worked if you had stayed in the Old Country? If yes, in the same kind of job or a different one?

Answer: No, women in Japan stay at home. They did not take an outside job at that time.

Question: If you worked after marriage, did you have any help at home with chores?

Answer: Yes, my daughter helped cook, clean house, wash dishes and ironed.

Question: When you first held a job, did it seem only certain types of jobs were available to you as a woman? Or because your ethnic group seemed to be in certain types of jobs or industries? Why was this? Was it possible for you to do anything about this?

Answer: No, I helped on the farm.

Question: Did you ever join a union? Why or why not? Were you active in it?

Answer: No, I was never required to nor confronted with the possibility.

Question: Did you take on a job after the children were in school, or grown? Was there anything difficult about going back to work? Did you do anything about these difficulties?

Answer: Yes, no difficulties.

Question: Did you marry in this country? What was it like to get married here? How did you go about setting up a home here?

Answer: No.

Question: How did you meet your husband? Are his parents from the Old Country? Were you still living at home?

Answer: I met my husband through my parents. Yes. Yes, I was living at home.

Question: Describe the courtship. How old were you when you got married?

Answer: The only courtship we had was when we met, as time was of essence as my husband had planned to go back to America within two weeks. The immigration deadline for Japanese immigrants was to close in two weeks. I was 18 years old when I married.

Question: Was your decision to marry him influenced by your family?

Answer: Yes.

Question: What did he do for a living when you married him? Did he ever change jobs after that? What things did he do? How did you feel about his working in these jobs?

Answer: Farm. No, he did not change his job while he was farming my husband opened a Farmers Exchange office for about one year.

Question: How did your husband's job(s) compare with the things that other men from your country did in their work? Other men working in Stockton?

Answer: My husband headed a share system in farming. Most of the other men worked under him farming small acreage for a percentage. Others worked as farm laborers, owned restaurants, hotels, stores, pool halls, fish markets etc.

Question: After you married, how did the two of you make decisions?

Answer: Business decisions were made by my husband, but family decisions were made together.

Question: How did you resolve your differences?

Answer: We agree most of the time. We hardly had unresolved differences.

Question: How did the two of you decide responsibilities?

Answer: My husband did all the business and financial responsibilities and I took care of the family, home and social obligation responsibilities.

Question: How many children did you have?

Answer: I have two children, one of each.

Question: Are your child-rearing practices different from your mother's?

Answer: Yes. Because we are in a different country, but some of the practices are the same such as honesty, integrity, dedication, respect, purity, education, disgracing family name and spiritual importance.

Question: Were your children very demanding on you? If yes, did your husband always seem to realize how demanding the children could be on you?

Answer: No.

Question: Did you sometimes help your children with problems they had at school? Can you tell me about some of these problems and what you did?

Answer: No.

Question: Did your relations with members of your own family change after you got married? Was this good? What were some of the things that did change?

Answer: No.

Question: What was your greatest satisfaction as a mother?

Answer: That the family will continue after I am gone. My life will continue to live in my children.

Question: What were your greatest concerns as a mother? How did you handle these concerns?

Answer: That the children will grow up to be responsible, responsible and God-fearing adults. When they were children I did not over shower them with their desires, so that they would become appreciative, they walked to school every day, rain or shine; they were taught the value of time; I sent my daughter to live in an American home so she could learn how other families live as well as further learn to cook and clean house. She learned to manage money with what she made by working in this home. My son worked on the farm since the age of 13 and drove the truck on the farm. He worked summers to put himself through college.

Question: What were you especially proud of in running your home?

Answer: Nothing special.

Question: At what age did your children really begin to be independent? In what ways were they independent? How did this independence compare with you when you were young? How did you feel about this?

Answer: My son became independent financially when he started state college. My daughter became independent emotionally and financially at age 16, when she went to work in a home while attending high school.

Question: What were your concerns as they began to go more on their own?

Answer: I had no particular concerns in regards to my son, but my daughter, being that she was a girl I worried about her male friends, that she would not find a hoodlum for a boyfriend.

Question: Would your interest have been different had you not married? Do you feel you gave up your own interests while you were raising your children?

Answer: I always planned to get married, I had no other interests. The only feeling of deprivation because I became a mother is that I was not able to continue my study of the English language.

Question: Now that your children are on their own, how often do you get together?

Answer: I see my daughter almost every day, but my son I only see once a month. I get together with my son, his wife and children about twice a year. I go shopping and some places with my daughter each week.

Question: If you had sisters, are you still in touch with them? Do you share problems and tasks while raising your families?

Answer: I correspond with my sister about once a year. They do not live in this country.

Question: Did your children's activities sometimes involve you in different activities and lead to meeting new people? Can you tell about some times when this happened? Were these people members of your own ethnic group? Neighborhood?

Answer: No.

Question: Thinking of your family overall, how did it compare with other families of people from your country? Other families in Stockton?

Answer: We think we live about the same way as they do.

Question: Is your husband still living? If not, how did your life change when he died?

Answer: No. I took care of him every day until he died and was very busy. Now I am not as busy and I live alone. I have more time for myself. I attend church activities much more and am involved in more committees.

Question: Taking all things together, would you say you are happy, pretty happy, or not too happy with the way your married life turned out? Can you explain?

Answer: I feel my marriage was very meaningful and it was a happy marriage.

Question: Think of your life after you were first married. What did you expect to get out of life then? Did your expectation change?

Answer: I expected to be able to study a little more in America after I got married, but the children came and I was unable to do so. This is the only thing that changed in my expectations. The rest was what I expected.

Question: Were the goals that you had for your family different from those of your parents? Why? From other persons from your country your age when you married? Why?

Answer: My goals were about the same as my mother's. I feel my goals were different from others who came to this country from Japan. I feel they were interested in making money and having plenty of it for things and for fun but my goals were more inner goals such as peace and spiritual fulfillments.

Question: Generally did your husband share these goals? How about your relatives? Your children? If differences, how did you handle these differences? Why?

Answer: No. His goal was to own land and a farm and be successful, also he enjoyed doing things for others. He had goals for his children's education. We had differences in our goals, but I supported him in his goals because I loved him.

Question: What things that happened in Stockton affected you and your family the most?

Answer: None.

Question: Have you become a U.S. citizen? When?

Answer: No.

Question: How do you feel about the United States?

Answer: Very favorable.

Question: Considering your own life, what is the best age to be? What made (makes) it the best?

Answer: My age of 46-60 was a good time for me. Everything was running smoothly. My children were married and I went back to Japan and re-united with my sisters and brother and their families.

Question: Again, considering your own life, what is the worst age to be? What made (makes) it worst?

Answer: At 19 was my most miserable time of life, as living conditions were bad and I lost a child.

Question: Look back on your life now. Can you think of some times when great changes happened that really changed your life or that gave it new directions? Can you explain them? What did. You do about them?

Answer: The greatest change in my life is when my husband died and I was left alone. I had to adjust my life and this was very difficult for me. I tried to become busy by taking care of a bed patient in a home and this helped me take my mind off myself.

Question: Did the Depression affect you or your family? How? Or WWII? How?

Answer: Yes - (A) Our crops could not be sold we lost money and had to quit farming and had to move. (B) World War II sent us to concentration camps. We had to uproot the family for three years and leave the farm in care of our neighbors, sold our equipment and tools for almost nothing and stored the rest of our belongings in a barn, most of which when we returned, could not be used or were stolen.

Question: Did any purchase made by your family change your life in any major way?

Answer: No.

Question: Are there government programs you particularly enjoy having? Or dislike?

Answer: I benefit from the SSI and Social Security Programs.

Question: Have you ever heard of the Women's Liberation Movement? What do you think of it?

Answer: Yes. No, I don't fully agree with it. I was brought up to believe the women's place is in the home as a help mate to her husband.

Question: Have any other Stockton events really affected you and your family?

Answer: No.