

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH SACHIKO YOUNG**

An Oral History Conducted by Mikaela Nettlow

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Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islander  
Oral History Project

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Oral History Project

University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2020

Produced by: The Oral History Research Center at UNLV – University Libraries  
Director: Claytee D. White  
Project Manager: Stefani Evans  
Transcriber: Kristin Hicks  
Editors and Project Assistants: Vanessa Concepcion, Kristel Peralta, Cecilia Winchell, Ayrton Yamaguchi

The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of a grant from the City of Las Vegas Commission for the Las Vegas Centennial and funding from private individuals and foundations. The Oral History Research Center enables students and staff to work together with community members to generate this selection of first-person narratives. The participants in this project thank University of Nevada Las Vegas for the support given that allowed an idea the opportunity to flourish.

The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islanders Oral History Project.

Claytee D. White  
Director, Oral History Research Center  
University Libraries  
University of Nevada Las Vegas

## PREFACE

“I stayed in the States a long time. I have stayed so long, it’s my home. This is my family.”

Sachiko Ikeda was born in 1936 in Fukuoka, Japan, to a school teacher father from Hiroshima and a Kyushu-born mother. The family moved every two or three years before her father fell ill and could not work. When Sachiko was 20, she visited her aunt in Tokyo, where she met her future husband, Thomas Young, an American military man. Despite the language barrier, the couple navigated the process to marry in 1958. Three years later, they arrived in San Jose, California, with their first son. They moved several times after that, often returning to Japan, before arriving in Las Vegas in 1979. In this interview, Sachiko Young recalls winning at the slots in the California Hotel, working in the coffee shop at the Marina Hotel until it closed, and going to the casinos with her friends. She talks of the difficulty of learning English, of marrying a Black man, and of facing racial prejudice both from her family and from her husband's family.

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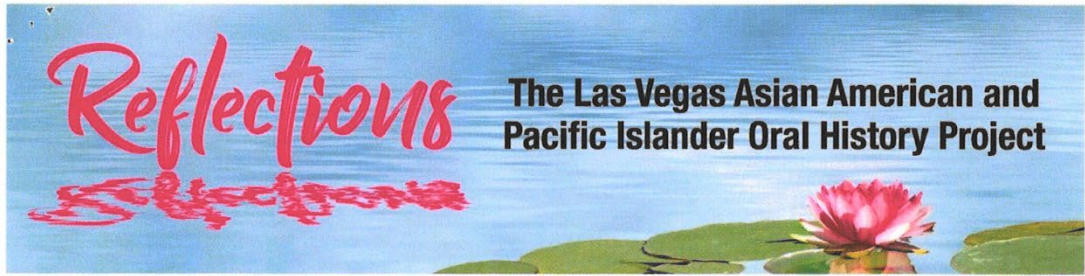
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in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Mikaela Nettlow

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Young begins with her life in Japan, discussing her parents and how she met her husband. After a difficult process getting married, Young traces her life in the U.S., all the places she moved to, and what having a husband in the military was like. She also describes the distant relationship she kept with her family after moving away from Japan.....1-4

Young describes her first memories after moving to Las Vegas, Nevada, gambling at the California Hotel. She mentions staying at a base house for awhile and compares all the American cities she has lived in to each other. She briefly talks about the job she had working as a casino coffee shop, and the other Japanese people she has met in the U.S. Young goes into detail on what she enjoys about living in Las Vegas as well as comparing it to Japan.....4-8

Young touches on a variety of topics from what it was like learning English, food, and especially racism. She elaborates on her experiences marrying a Black man and all the difficulties among family that came with. Lastly, Young talks about the influx of Japanese people, including those from Hawaii.....8-11



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**[Interview with Sachiko Young on December 5, 2021, conducted by Mikaela Nettlow]**

**Can you say your name?**

My name is Sachiko Young. Age?

**Yes, age.**

I'm born 1936, March 11<sup>th</sup>, now eighty-five years old.

**Where were you born?**

Fukuoka, [capital of Fukuoka Prefecture, on Kyushu Island] Japan.

**How old was your mom and dad when they had you? Actually, let me rephrase that. Where are your mom and dad from? Are they from Fukuoka?**

My father is from Hiroshima. My mother is from Kyushu, Wakamatsu.

**What was your childhood like in Japan?**

House?

**Childhood. How was your life in Japan?**

My father, schoolteacher. My mother, housewife.

**What did you do in Japan?**

Family?

**Like hobbies in Japan, what did you do in Japan?**

My father was a schoolteacher, so then he locates to one school, but every three years we moved, so I go. After war, then my father quit schoolteacher, and then he is in a business, but no good in it. Then after he's sick, then he not work. He's sick. That's all I know about my father.

**What was your mom like?**

My mom, she never work, just a housewife. I have one older sister and three younger brothers, but everybody is gone now.

**Just jumping forward a little bit, can you explain how you met grandpa, your husband?**

I met my husband when I was twenty years old. My aunt stayed in Tokyo, so then I come and visit her in Tokyo. She had four rental houses. In one house, his friend lived in. He came and visited, and then I meet my husband. I cannot talk English. My husband no can talk Japanese. Then his friend have another named Nina, and she can talk Japanese, so then she translated for me. She come and tell my husband wanted to go on a date and if I want to go. But I don't know English. Then I say, "I'm going to the movies." He said, "Okay, I'll go with you," and he goes. Every time I go to see a Japanese movie, he's coming, too, to the theater.

One day he brings a paper, but I don't know what's in the paper because it's in English. Then one day I walk in the base, and then I saw her. Then I showed her what kind of paper it is, and she said, "This is an application for a job on the base." But I feel I can't work on the base because I can't speak English. Then she said, "It's not for a job. It's a marriage application." Then I said, "No, no, no."

Then she asked my husband if he's asking me to marry. I said, "Yes," but I didn't know, I remember. Then I don't know what to do. Then my father was real mad. He said, "You come home right away." Then I go home.

Then my husband write letters to my father. Almost every week, he wrote my father a letter. But my family, everybody said, "No," but my father first said, "Okay." Ever since he tell me okay, then he fixed for paper.

Then I sent the paper to Tokyo, but I have to go to a police station to fix paper. Then I go back to Tokyo. After I finish, I have to go back to Kyushu. This marriage is going to take one year. Just one year. I go to Tokyo, Kyushu, keep going and coming back. The last time I go see



chaplain. That's my last time, and that's when my father said, "Okay, you don't have to come back. You can stay in Tokyo." Then I marry.

I married at twenty-two. At twenty-five years, then I have a first son. After he was born, in three months, then I come to the States, to San Jose. Then after eighteen months, I'm homesick. My husband has to go to school for one year. While he goes to school, I'm going to go back to Japan. Then he finished school, and he comes to Japan, and then I come back to the States again, this time California, Victorville. In California, three cities we change and move. After my first daughter is born, my husband needs to go to Thailand for one year. Before, I not drive a car, but then I'm going to drive to school and then take driving lessons. Then I take care of my kids for one year.

Then he comes back. Then another change of station, not changing, but go at that time to Massachusetts. Then my youngest daughter was born, Mikaela's mother. Then after she is born, about one month, then we moved to Kansas City. After Kansas City, then we go back to Japan and stay there five years, and then we come back, Las Vegas. That was about forty-five years ago.

Now I'm still staying in Las Vegas. I have now six grandchildren and pretty soon come another two great-grandkids. Everybody is nice, and I'm happy now. Now I stay with Mikaela's mother and her family, and I take care of my girl and stay there together. Now I don't have anybody.

**There's a couple other questions. When you left for America for the first time, what was the hardest thing that you had to leave behind? Who or what were the hardest people to leave behind in Japan? Was the move from Japan to America hard?**

My husband was in the military. Every four years or five years, he got an order that he needs to move around. Your father go move around, too, right? Japan, Okinawa, and all the places to go, right? That's the way. I'm the same way. Any place I go, I'm lucky, nice people. I never know any people behind talk or nothing. I meet everybody, nice people. That's why I think I'm lucky. I'm lucky just all my life. I think I'm lucky and happy life.

**Did you miss your family?**

My family, for us to marry, said no. But my father, who said no, but after my husband keep sending letters, then my father said okay. But still, my mother warned me. I don't know.

**Did you still call them? Did you ever call them while you were in America?**

A phone call? Oh yes. I come to the States and order a present, a telephone. Then I go back to Japan sometimes, or then my mother and my younger brother go to Tokyo and come and visit, go. My sister and my brother are coming. When I come to the States, too, I called them, but now everybody is gone.

Then I don't have a home because my home is a freeway. I don't want to go back to Japan. Nobody knows...I don't know. My cousin's kids I don't know. I stayed in the States a long time. I have stayed so long, it's my home. This is my family.

**What were your first memories of Las Vegas? What was your first day like in Vegas?**

Coming to Las Vegas?

**Yes.**

Okay. Oh, this one I know. People coming here for a meeting from Japan. People are coming and taking me and my family to go to dinner. I never know this one. California Hotel. The California Hotel, she had taken me to dinner. Eat there. This is the first time I've come to a casino. I pay and then I have change, one quarter. Then I'm walking with my kids, and everybody goes put it

in this. A slot machine, I never touched a slot machine, but I have one quarter. I put it in, and money coming. Right then I say, "I don't know what happened." Then everybody come. He said, "Why did you not put in five?" I said, "What do you mean five?" If you put in five, your three sevens come in. I put in just one quarter, but I didn't know it. I put in one quarter and won fifty dollars. Then Daddy [Thomas Young, Sr., Sachiko's husband], Tom, and everybody come. "Oh my gosh, your first time to come in, that's good luck. Then you get three sevens." [Laughing] "What are you going to do with this money?" I cannot put it in my pocketbook; they're all quarters. But bring a cup, and they say, "You want to put your money in a cup?" I didn't know anything. "You take it to the cage, and you can exchange it for paper money." I said, "Okay."

The next day, my friend took us to Circus Circus. Then I need a quarter. I said, "Okay, I'm going to take just one." That's why I say, boy, the first time I come to Las Vegas, the first night, I hit three sevens. I'm lucky. But after I put it in that machine, no luck.

**Was it hard living in Vegas at first? On your first days here, was it hard for you?**

First, we stayed in a base house, so base house is a long way, but no kitchen, no nothing. Then we would walk to the mess hall to go eat. We are looking to get a better house right away. Then me, Daddy and Thomas [son, firstborn], my son, stay. Then Nina [daughter, second born] and Patricia [daughter, third born] go to a friend's house and stayed. The first time I came to Las Vegas was in June. It was so hot to me that I think I will die.

**What was Las Vegas like compared to any other of the America cities you lived in? How was it like compared to Kansas City, Missouri? California? Was Las Vegas the same or different?**

Different. I stayed in California first, San Jose. San Jose is so quiet, a quiet place. Anyway, San Jose, eighteen months I stayed. Then I have a baby, so I stay at home all the time. That place I

stayed was a base house. I'm not going no place, so I stay at the house and cleaned up the house and taking kid to kindergarten. In San Jose, PopPop [also Thomas Sr.] and me go to San Francisco to go eat some crab legs and then come back. Yes, I'm enjoying it.

Las Vegas is different. Las Vegas, anyplace you go, just only casino. The food in Las Vegas casinos is cheap. I left California a long time ago. California people coming. Las Vegas, everybody work and everybody busy.

**Did you have any jobs in Las Vegas?**

I was just at Marina working and that's all.

**Can you tell me about your job at the casino?**

I worked in the casino coffee shop in food service. But after Marina went bankrupt, then it closed up. Now Marina is MGM. Everybody moved for a job. I can go, but I don't want to go. PopPop said, "Quit," but then I quit. Since I'm not working, then I stay home.

**Can you tell me again how you got the job?**

From my friend. PopPop's friend's wife. I was joking, "Oh, I want to work, too." Then he told his wife, but PopPop said no. But anyway, the boss was so nice. Just I work only at Marina, and then it closed up.

**Where in Las Vegas did you live?**

Owens. When we first come here, we lived in a base house maybe a couple of months, and then we moved on Owens, and in this house over forty years. Now I move in your house.

**Were there any other Japanese people there?**

In Kansas City, I have a best friend. Then I come back to the States in Las Vegas. One day, some guy called PopPop, my husband. Then my friend still in California, I meet in Kansas City. Then I go to Japan, and she goes to California. But all the time, I sent her letters, and she sends me

letters. Then I come back to Las Vegas. She called this one lady here, Yoshie. She called her.

That's when I'm coming to Las Vegas and meeting her. Then one day I just move in and have no telephone. Then she called my PopPop in office, and then he tell me, and then I call her. Then I meet Yoshie in a hotel. Then I go to the Japanese store and meet Emiko, the couple. Then I start with Japanese dance group. Before, I have a dance group and then karaoke group, but everybody died. There are just only a couple of people now living. But I still have a couple of friends.

Yoshie calls me. Before, I had a lot of Japanese friends, and now everybody is gone.

**What do you like about living in Las Vegas the most? What's your favorite thing about Las Vegas?**

[Laughing] Sometimes before, everybody go play at casino, bingo. Before we can play nice.

That's all the time, go to Showboat and go play bingo, but now, not good, end up tired of casino.

But I do dances, karaoke. Then I joined JCC, a Japanese group [Las Vegas Japanese Culture Club]. But now I quit because I'm sick, so I'm not go, but everybody still comes over. I'm going to try next Wednesday, maybe I'm going to try to go see everybody. But Las Vegas is only gamble. I like to eat, too.

**You like to eat and gamble.**

Before, my friend, everybody, when a new casino opened, "Okay, let's go." Then everybody wears tennis shoes and then eat buffet. Each casino, go eat in the buffet, have fun, before.

**Was Las Vegas different to how you lived in Japan?**

I stayed in Japan only twenty years, twenty-two. Only I like Japan hospital, a lot of difference. In Japan hospital go, I don't have to go all over the place; one hospital get everything finished. But here, I go to a home doctor, then go see, then go, "Oh, you need X ray," and I found some girl. Then this was another site. That's what I miss. In Japan, there is just one hospital, one hospital to

finish it. I don't drive a car in Japan, but anyplace can go have a bath, *onsen*, a hot bath they can go, but States, no.

**What was it like learning a whole new language? What was it like learning English?**

Still, I don't know English, still, so that's why I have a hard time. I come to the States, only I met Japanese people because I don't want to talk English, and maybe my English maybe not good.

Just all the time, I stay in the house. That's why I talked only to PopPop. That's why now I cry. I need more study in English, so then I can talk more. When I first American, I go to English school, but don't know nothing of English. I go to school to work on base with people in a school. They're so high class I don't know what they're talking about. That's why I tell PopPop, "I don't know and I can't get it." He said, "Okay, you quit." I should more study English. You know PopPop not talk so much, right?

**Are there any foods you made back in Japan?**

When I first come to the States, I'm in San Jose, but I'm lucky to have a few Japanese food stores there, but everything is different. But now most of them I'm going to find some fresh fruits and frozen, and I miss Japan. Every time I miss it, and everybody say, "Don't go," but I come. Now there are Japanese stores, but I miss the food, yes.

**In Vegas, there wasn't a lot of Japanese stores?**

A couple owned by Japanese people, but most of them not real Japanese food.

**Have you experienced any racism while you were in Vegas or in America? Has anyone treated you differently because you're Asian or Japanese?**

People in front of me not talk too much, but my friend say, "Sachiko, why you marry Black people?" I say, "What do you mean? I don't know either." But my sister asked me the same way.

But I say, “How I know?” I said, “I don’t know.” But she says, “Okay.” Then everybody quit. I never think about this kind of stuff. I don’t know what to say.

But Japanese...One time I walk in these places, one boy tells me, “Sachiko, you are a Jap.” I said, “Okay.” He doesn’t know what this means, so that’s why he didn’t mean to say it and after he apologized. Most people not front; I don’t know behind. But my Japanese friends, a couple, asked me why I marry. But I’m married and I’m happy. I have three nice kids and six grandkids. I want to tell, no matter if I marry Japanese people, maybe I would be happy, and maybe I can fail. Maybe I marry White people, same thing, you never know. No can tell. Right? You understand?

**Yes. You mentioned that your mom and your sister were asking you why you married a Black man. Did they ever accept that or come around to it?**

My father thought it was okay, but my mother, my sister, and one younger brother, I think, are still...My younger brother stayed in Tokyo. His wife is nice. All the time come to my house and then bring the kids, and then I’m going to go this way. One time I want to go back home, and then Nina and Patricia want to go. I call and tell my mother. You know what happened? My mother and my sister, she jumped up, and she’s coming to Tokyo, make stuff. Me, I want to go home where my mother and my sister are coming. But still, she come in, and she talked still, “Why? Why?” Guess what? Your mommy and your daddy are very happy, right? Now everything is changing, but my family look at people in a different way.

**Just for establishing context, what year did you and grandpa marry?**

Fifty-eight. In 1958, I married, so that was a long time ago. I was married at twenty-two years old, a long, long time ago. Daddy’s mother don’t like me.

**PopPop’s mom did not like you?**

PopPop, he cut off family. He not go home or nothing. Now, a lot of people, White people and Black people marry Japanese people, but before, to marry Japanese, not too many. Just people looking different, but now, different. You're looking for a guy, huh? You're twenty-one. Don't do it.

**Okay, okay. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are the fastest-growing population group in Southern Nevada. In Nevada, there is a lot more Asian people coming.**

Before, a long time ago, I asked how many people stayed, but...How many people there now? I think a lot of people stayed. That's why now I put it on NHK station. But most of the people coming are from California, moving in, yes.

**How do you feel that there are more Asian things around you now? There are more Asian stores, more Asian people. How do you feel with that?**

I don't know.

**Okay, we'll just stop there.**

They used to have a group in Las Vegas, a JCC, Japan Club. There was a Buddhist temple. Once a year, they have Aki Matsuri. I see in the newspaper they have a Japanese group that has this festival. Osaka restaurant right now, I see Japanese people. No, I don't know how many people, but I think it has more. The first time I come in, I wanted NHK channel, but not enough Japanese people, so that's why they can't put it, but now...

**I like that. That's good because there are more Japanese things for you. It's a good thing that you're able to still watch Japanese TV and everything.**

Yes, yes. They have Hawaii people, too, that have a Japanese name, but they are from Hawaii. That's why they can't speak Japanese. They say, "I'm from Hawaii." They're Issei and Nisei and now Sansei. I think there is a doctor with a Japanese name. I say, "Oh, I can talk Japanese." A lot



of people moving from California, Japanese people, yes. You want to know how many Japanese people are here?

**Have you seen more Japanese people in Vegas compared to when you first arrived?**

I don't know. Now everybody gone and everybody old. I don't know.

**I'm going to end this interview.**

You're finished?

**Yes, I'm going to finish it.**

Good.

**Before I close this and everything, is there anyone else that my school should interview?**

Maybe Satomi. She is a girl. She talks English. Satomi, now she married a Korean guy, but first she married Black people. She's a karaoke teacher, and she talks English good. Maybe you interview her. [Laughing] Not me.

**I am going to be ending this interview now. Thank you so much for joining me.**

**[End of recorded interview]**