

Japanese-American Association of Lane County, Oregon - Oral History Collection
Yoko Matsuoka McClain – Part 2

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Interviewee: Yoko Matsuoka McClain

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Note: (sp?) means that words prior, mostly names, may be spelled incorrectly

[00:00]

[EU] This is part two of the interview with Yoko McClain. We were talking about your grandfather, Natsume Sōseki. Um, when he went to England, um, he, of course, was already married at that time.

[YM] That's right, that's right. Yeah.

[EU] And had family and they stayed in Kumamoto, or in Tokyo?

[YM] Yeah, uh, he was sent from Kumamoto direct, I mean, of course come back to Tokyo and then go, you know, but he already had my mother, a child. The other child is, uh, on the way. So, ah, he he said, um, he, he, he was also Hai poet (sp?). He was pretty good Hai poet, so he, ah, he composed a Haiku in a [?], you know, Autumn Wind, ah [?] um. [?] It was kind of sad [laugh]

[EU] So he didn't see his, the second child until after?

[YM] She was born apart, he was in London, uh huh.

[EU] London, yeah. So, ok. Um. So when he, when he came back to Japan, did he go back to Kumamoto?

[YM] No, no. Kumamoto, ah, you know, ah, his father-in-law, that like my grandmother's father, was a pretty influential person, and he wanted that to bring him back to Tokyo, you know, so he was looking for a job in Tokyo, so when he came back, and then, he was hired by a Tokyo University, and he was still the lecturer, and then at also, ah, he was teaching at the other school, the number one high, higher school that the in those days the educational system was different in Japan too, and so six years of a elementary, course, and five years middle school, and then three years of a higher school, that's that the one that almost prepared you for a university, and that's a higher school. And then, ah, the university three years actually. And so he was teaching, and, ah, at, uh, Tokyo University. Also, he was teaching at the number one higher school. Then, then, then he, he started writing, and then so besides his teaching, and teaching, I mean writing, he was more interested, that's why when *Asahi* approached, you know, he uh, announced that he's

quitting, so, everybody was so surprised because by now he was quite well-known as a writer but a Tokyo University professor is such a prestigious position; journalist was not that respected, but I read someplace that because of him, journalists, ah, came to be respected more [laughs]

[EU] [laughs] [pause] Could you talk a little bit about your grandmother? Um, and then their relationship?

[YM] Yeah, um. My grandmother, um, was the oldest daughter of this, uh, ah, the man who, who was professor also, old old Tokyo University, Tokyo University, even before it was called Tokyo University, and then after he finished he was quite bright, and then he, ah, he was interested economics, and he wanted to study German, but he, only the medical school taught German so he want to medical school and then after, ah, he finished, he ah, he was ah hired at the Niigata City, which is Northeast of Tokyo, facing Japan Sea, so Niigata Medical school, he was assistant professor, and then, there he translated at German medical like a cholera something, or some kind of Ophthalmology, something about this in German into Japanese, which was used by so many medical schools in Japan or something. And then, there he stayed four years and came back to Tokyo, he became, um, he became ah, the Secretary General of the, ah, [pause] Congress thing, you know [laughs]. So he became really politician, almost. And so very influential [cough] when my grandmother married him, so he's the one who really liked the Sōseki even though he was in such far away, he heard such good reputation about him, he himself was interested in foreign language, that's why maybe he was interested in Sōseki that way too, you know, English major.

[05:52]

[EU] Yeah.

[YM] And, ah, my grandmother was, had three younger sister, she seems she was the, ah, oldest and after elementary school, everything was tutor, or every subject was a different tutor, she had; that kind of education she had. And then, um, then arranged marriage thing came up, both kind of liked the picture and background, and so they, so when they married was a father even took her to Kumamoto, and then that's where they married.

[EU] Yeah.

[YM] Then when, while he's in London, of course in those days, you know, you certainly can't take your wife or anything, and so she went alone, she went back to his father, parent's place, with my mother, and then, ah, her youngest youngest sister was, was born there too. Ah, then, then, by then, ah, cabinet has changed, so father lost it, lost his job I guess, you know; he did, uh, have a different kind of job. Nothing went so well, and then he, he ah, started buying stocks, and that's when, and then after he lost so much money, and so by the time Sōseki came back, they were in a very hard time, they were having a real hard time. That's all he said in his novel *Michi Kusa* ah, he tells everything about that too. So but my grandmother, as I said, Sōseki, after he came back, from this nervous breakdown he had, now current doctors think he really had a

serious depression, you now, and from time to time that's explored and so I think that the family had a difficult time with that.

[EU] Did they live alone or did they live with her parents in Tokyo?

[YM] After he came back, several months later, I can't remember how many months, then they had their own house, they rented their house. Interesting enough, I was just writing, he was already a very well known novelist, he could never afford a house in those days, he always rented, and after he died, you know, such big royalty, my grandmother had, so she built, so two years after his death, I think, she build a huge a home, but the rental house, she bought that house. Then toward, had a huge home and that's where I was born.

[09:38]

[EU] And where was that? It was in Tokyo?

YM That's right, Tokyo, of course, everything's in Tokyo.

[EU] What part of Tokyo?

[YM] Ah, it's all old, old time Tokyo, it's Waseda, right now Shinjuku actually, Waseda so. Just very recent, last year, they had a campaign, to ah, the house where he studied was burned during the war, air raid, and so they had a big campaign to rebuild it. At least they clean out the place, so last year, I guess November / December, no, this year, earlier this year, they had the opening of that and so when I go back, (?) ward chief wants me to come and look at it.

[EU] So, do you think they had, well, it was difficult for you grandmother at times?

[YM] Pardon?

[EU] It was difficult for your grandmother at times?

[YM] That's right, that's right, that's right

[EU] But they had what, seven children altogether?

[YM] Yeah, uh-huh, of course the youngest died early, but even after, six children, you know, every two years or something, you know. So, but at the time I think it was very difficult even though he was making good enough money to support the children, support the family. When depressions comes from time to time, I think, must have been very difficult, because my mother's memory of him is only, she was scared; it's a kind of sad thought, you know.

[EU] Yeah, so she was still very young when he died?

[YM] Only seventeen

[EU] Only seventeen

[YM] So he didn't have any grandchildren of course, you know. Two years after, so, my mother had been nineteen, she married. And then my sister, my oldest sister was born, so

[EU] Um, maybe now, could you talk a little bit about your father? You said your mother was nineteen when she got married. How did she meet him?

[YM] Oh, ah, he was my grandfather's student, one of the young students. Apparently several people wanted to marry her I guess, you know, [laughs]. But, so other person wanted to marry her and when my father married her, he wrote a novel and apparently it was read so much that he said something almost like my father, you know my father took her from him, all those guys [laughs]; in those days everybody read that.

[EU] Did your mother, you said she was basically, she had tutors at home, did she go to?

[YM] That's grandmother.

[EU] Your grandmother.

[YM] That's not my mother. Grandmother was the one who was tutored.

[EU] Oh, right, right. So what? How? Then, could you talk about your mother's schooling, where did she go?

[YM] Yeah, mother was just a, to high school than she really wanted to go to music school, she just loved piano and but my grandmother, you know, after her husband died and everything, didn't want her to go to college and didn't want her to marry [laughs]. And so that's why my mother always felt that her daughters should have higher education because she couldn't do it; it's too bad.

[EU] So your mother and father, they lived in Tokyo too in the family's home?

[YM] Yeah, we all lived in Tokyo but my father was born in Niigata Prefecture, so then came to Tokyo, number one higher school and Tokyo University and at that time about, do you know Actama Unoske (sp?), very famous writer and a few people young people start going to Sōseki's house, you know. So my father was born the oldest son of the temple so he was suppose to succeed, become a priest, but after he came to Tokyo and he was interested in the writing so he just never went back, and his younger brother took over the priest. And so mother said later that she was the one who, who fell in love with him [laughs]. Since Sōseki had so many students and some wanted to marry my mother and that's what she said she was the one who was interested in him, in my father.

[15:56]

[EU] You said that there was a group of writers around your grandfather?

[YM] Yeah

[EU] Was there, what were they called?

[YM] Yeah, actually, some are writers but many of them more like scholars. Did I show you my book I publish last year? One picture... 17th death anniversary... I have that... here... this is my grandmother, Sōseki's friend, and my father and me.

[EU] Oh, okay.

[YM] And my mother, and my sister, and this is a neighbor, but my brother, and mainly all this, these are all my mother's brothers and all the sisters; lots of those are very well known

[EU] When was this picture taken?

[YM] So, last 17th anniversary... that should say something... 1932

[EU] 1932, okay, yeah, wow

[YM] Yeah so, people think that, you know, not many writers have that many top, all well-known students, you know [laughs]. People just, he had that problem of like depression and from time to time he really acted like that but he, apparently he was a person who had charisma, what we call now, you know, because some many young people just gathered around him

[EU] gathered around

[YM] Ever since he was, he taught, one of them is a, his doctor when he died, but he was his own student too, when he was in Matsuyama, some Kumamoto student and everybody comes to Tokyo and all of them were just even after 17th year after he died, they were together

[EU] So that's when, the purpose of the picture, it was after...

[YM] That's right, in Japan you die, have funeral, right? And the second year, they don't, they have a third, third, third and the seventh, I don't know what significance is, but the three and seven, so after seventh anniversary, 13th, 17th, 23rd, 27th and all the way to, then 50 and then that's the last year because all the family will be died too [laughs]

[EU] So this picture taken on, of the family and his students on one of the anniversaries

[YM] [coughing] Excuse me

[EU] Did, this book that your showing me then, did?

[YM] That's him, Sōseki, and that picture of arranged marriage picture, the exchange.

[EU] Oh, okay. What's the, can you tell me what's the name of you book?

[YM] Yeah, name is a *Sōseki and his Wife* – sort of a, you know, this is a, publisher put that title but I would maybe says its *Love between Sōseki and his Wife* I suppose, something like that

[20:04]

[EU] And when, when was this book published?

[YM] It was in, last October.

[EU] Last October.

[YM] Yeah, that's why I went back in December to give several lectures and I'm going back again, I'm giving four talks in May.

[EU] So when you do research for books like this about your grandparents, um, because of course you didn't know him, you were born after

[YM] Correct, correct, correct

[EU] So do you have memories from your mother or?

[YM] Just, you know, all the things I heard from my grandmother and then my parents and aunts and uncles then some relative who knew him, that kind of thing and then so, my theory was that, my grandmother had a reputation the she was a bad wife [laughs]

[EU] Oh

[YM] Isn't that crazy? I think that's because of the Japanese men are no good, that's why [laughs]. You know, I mean, if the women just always follow husband, it's that kind if society. So I just said she isn't a bad wife, I thought.

[EU] She wasn't, yeah. [pause] You said your father was also a writer.

[YM] Yeah that's right, that's right.

[EU] Did he write novels?

[YM] He did write novels too; he did lots of those on Sōseki too; one, everybody used it and I still think it's one of really good one; it's *Memory of Sōseki* by my grandmother, she said, she talked to him, he recorded but he had to read, study all Sōseki's writing then everyday and heard her talk and that's a very interesting book, you know, what she thinks about and so

[EU] What was the title of the book?

[YM] That's *The Memory of Sōseki*

[EU] And his name was? Your father's full name was?

[YM] Yuzuru Matsuoka

[EU] Matsuoka

[YM] That's right, correct, correct.

[EU] Okay, um, so, and, so you were born then, in 19-?

[YM] 24

[EU] 24, okay. And tell me again, you had, how many brothers and sisters did you?

[YM] So, two sisters, I'm the middle, older sister, older brother, younger brother, younger sister, and one died of course so we always think about five.

[EU] And you were living in Tokyo.

[YM] That's right, I lived in Tokyo. And the first three years, my parents went to Kyoto for three years but I have no recollection of Kyoto, because I came back to Tokyo when I was three.

[EU] When you were three, okay...and what part of Tokyo did you live in?

[YM] Um, well [laughs] we moved three times. First, of course I was born, that's Waseda, my grandmother's place; then after came back from Kyoto, we came back to, we had house Ogimachi which is from Tokyo and Yokohama and then maybe about here; then, we moved to, the last one we lived in Denechofu, in those days it was suburb, but I think it almost middle of the town, now getting to be isn't it?

[24:48]

[EU] Yeah, okay

[YM] So my parents, my brother and sister were still so young, so during 1944 when the war, air raids was getting so much, they moved to Niigata, where my father was born and lots and lots of people, when they had little ones, they were suggested to move to the county side, so they did. I was already a college student, I was at the college dormitory, and every weekend I went back to, when my parents there, every weekend, I went back to my parents, then after they moved to Niigata, then I always visit my grandmother, on the weekend. Because she never moved, you

know, because she said she was always in Tokyo so if she had dies, she would die in Tokyo; that's what she said.

[EU] Okay, um, were to you go to elementary school and high school?

[YM] It's all Ogimachi

[EU] And where did you go to college?

[YM] College is in Tokyo; it's the college that is oldest women's private school, do you know the founder, Tsuda Umeko? She is an amazing woman: she left Japan when she was six years old, and then she arrived in San Francisco, when she was seven, together with lots of people, who came to the States for exchange, and then so she stayed in the States until she graduated from Bryn Mawr. And then, then went back to Japan, and then she was so shocked that women's position was so low, and so, she never knew almost, right? And then she privately taught English to the nobility people first, and then when she came back here, she got also donations from the Bryn Mawr people and she decided to start her own college and that's she thought lots of Japanese women need: higher education; that's the only way to improve their position, so that school started in 1900.

[EU] Did you always know you would go to college? Your parents, your family?

[YM] I wasn't thinking anything but I always enjoyed English at high school so my mother said, "Why don't you go to the college, you know" I said, "Okay" [laughs] That's what I did, very simple.

[EU] How did you get interested in studying English?

[YM] Oh, I went to the Catholic high school, you know, and all those nuns, was Irish nuns, they're the ones who were the English teachers, so somehow I was kind of always interested; that's what suggest English lit maybe, that started, it that, it was considered the best in those days, so that's what I did.

[EU] And how, where were you when, during World War II then, during the Pacific War?

[YM] I was at college, working in the college factory, you know, the factory brought all those huge machines to the gym, to the college, so for three shifts you know: 8-4, 4-12, 12-8, and it's a horrible, horrible time in Japanese history of course, you know. We made what they called "pistons" for the airplane and then between times, every time siren rung, we just rushed into the air shelter, uh-huh, uh-huh, that's how we did. So our education in only two years, college two years, then war ended, even though we were not qualified, school just gave us diploma, because they didn't want all those girls, because once occupation starts, they didn't know what would happen; Japanese men were so bad they thought American would too [laughs]

[30:20]

[EU] So you were working in the factory making pistons, were you going to school at the same time?

[YM] No, oh no, no classes

[EU] No classes

[YM] That's why we actually, two years, first two years was okay, you know, we got to study two years. And then afterward was just out year and a half, but we were forced to get diploma [laughs]. So in those days once we finished, there were not enough people who knew English, so we could get any kind of job, you know, they all needed. Japanese government so stupid so in this country because of the war with the Japan, they actually need to study, that's what they did, but if you studied English, you studied enemy's language, that kind of thing.

[EU] What was the like it like in Tokyo during the war?

[YM] Oh, awful; day after day was air raids, you know, uh-huh

[EU] And you said your grandfather's study had been bombed and burned?

[YM] Yeah, that's correct, unfortunately

[EU] But you weren't living at that house?

[YM] No. So that day was one of the worst in Tokyo, so many houses were burned.

[EU] When did your parents come back from Niigata?

[YM] Pardon?

[EU] When did you parent come back from Niigata?

[YM] They never did, until my father passed away.

[EU] Oh, okay, did he die during the war then?

[YM] No, no, after the war.

[EU] Okay, so after the war ended and you had your diploma, then what did you do?

[YM] So I worked for lots, US Forces, you know, they needed anybody who knew little English; so, translator, mainly translator, typist, translator, all those kind of things I did.

[EU] What was it like working during the occupation of the Americans?

[YM] That was fine because even my English speaking was not that good, but still, I could spell much better than certain [laughs]. When they write something I always corrected their spelling at least, right, so there was not problem in those days. I can hardly understand about Iraq, you know, has going on, right? No, no, many US people were good enough.

[EU] Did you continue to live with your grandmother?

[YM] Right, I did. First, I went back to Niigata and I lived with my parents and my sister, brother and then I, of course in the country side not much to do, so my mother suggested that maybe you know, nearby I can take a lesson on making kimono, and I did, several month I did. Then, my typing was not that good, I did have a little bit and I did take typing lesson. Got on the train, everyday, about an hour or so, go to the north end of the city that were teaching. They had US soldier there teaching typing so that where I find my typing wasn't that fast but good enough to be able to work, that kind of thing I did and then came back to Tokyo and live with my grandmother. And then I also went to. I also went to dress making school for two years; I get all the dress making, you know, so that was good and then I started working for the US Forces mainly.

[EU] And how long did you work for them?

[YM] You know I can't remember, you know, about how long; I, at least maybe three years.

[EU] Okay, alright, let's take a break.

[YM] Okay.

[end 35:28]