

Ethnic Oral History Project, 1977-1978

Fresno Historical Society

Anita Ynson

Anita Ynson was interviewed on August 30, 1977 in Pinedale, California. Ynson was born in 1910 in Azusa, California. Ynson discusses, having lived in Fresno County for forty years, how the young children of the 1970's are getting involved with drugs and crime. Ynson recalls only going to school until the fourth grade because she moved to Mexico for nine months with her family. After coming back to America to live in Los Angeles, Ynson got married at the age of fifteen before moving to Reedley to pick fruit. Ynson recalls only making three to five cents per tray of fruit that was picked. There were no attempts to organize labor unions in the 1930's. Ynson says that during the Great Depression, her family would use food stamps in order to eat. Her father also worked in a warehouse where food was given out.

Ynson discusses discrimination towards black people and how things in California were much better than they were anywhere else. However, she says that there is still racism in Fresno County. Ynson talks about how she was stuck in the Philippines for eleven years because World War II started. Ynson had to hide from the Japanese people out of fear that they would hurt her. Ynson's husband was Filipino, though he unfortunately died due to illness before they could return to the United States. Ynson talks about being active in the PTA when her kids were small, but none of the other ladies in Pinedale wanted to get together to meet. When she first came to Pinedale she remarried, but when her second husband died she never remarried again to take care of her children.

After her children got older, Ynson took up several different jobs so she could support her family. Ynson talks about Fresno taking over Pinedale and how she believes it is a good thing. Ynson discusses her sons and how one is a lawyer while the other has given in to alcoholism. She also talks about how the system keeps Mexican-American law students from passing the bar exam.

Interviewer: Ben Garza

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FRESNO CITY AND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ANITA YNSON

AUGUST 30, 1977

Today is August 30, 1977. I, Ben Garza, am interviewing Mrs. Anita Ynson, a Mexican-American from Pinedale, California.

GARZA: Mrs. Ynson, when and where were you born?

YNSON: I was born in Azusa, California, in 1910.

GARZA: Where is your longest place of residence?

YNSON: Fresno.

GARZA: How many years have you lived here?

YNSON: I lived about ten years in Fresno, and about thirty in Pinedale.

GARZA: You've lived here for a period of forty years in this county. What is your impression of this county? How have you seen some of the changes in this county?

YNSON: It's kind of . . . every place, the way we're having trouble with the younger generation. With the dope and all of the crimes going on around. Before it was a pretty place to live in. That's why I stayed here, instead of where I was born.

GARZA: You're saying that in the late '70's, we're beginning to see a lot of trouble with the youth, drugs, and all those things. What kind of things did you do when you were a youth?

YNSON: Well, I got married very young. I was fifteen

years old when I married. So I had no chance. I had a family right away.

GARZA: What was your generation like? What kind of things were they going through?

YNSON: Well, the kids had the parties at school. It was different, way different. You don't see the like today, they're all going so fast. Everything is going too fast in these times.

GARZA: Did you go to school?

YNSON: Just to the fourth grade.

GARZA: Were you forced to leave school, did you have to go to work, or what?

YNSON: Well, my father moved us around. We went to Mexico and that put me back. Then when I was fifteen years old I got married.

GARZA: When was it that you went to Mexico?

YNSON: That was about 1922.

GARZA: Why did you go back?

YNSON: My father thought he was going to take us and stay forever, but we didn't like it. My brother and I started crying every day to come back. We only stayed nine months.

GARZA: Where was that?

YNSON: Leon, Guanajuato.

GARZA: That was after the Revolution. Was it pretty peaceful?

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YNSON: Yeah, it was. They were having trouble with
the religion.

GARZA: What was the trouble?

YNSON: A lot of priests were exiled.

GARZA: Did you then come back to Fresno?

YNSON: No, we went back to Los Angeles, and then my
father bought a little house there and stayed for
awhile.

GARZA: What was the name of your father?

YNSON: My father was Maladeno Contreas.

GARZA: Do you know when he was born?

YNSON: He was born in Mexico, but I don't know what year.

GARZA: What did he do?

YNSON: He was just a worker. In Los Angeles he worked
all kinds of jobs. The last job was the CBS Studios
in Hollywood. That was his last job.

GARZA: He passed away thereafter?

YNSON: Yeah. About ten years ago.

GARZA: You said you got married at fifteen. Did you
come to Fresno to live, or did you live some place else?

YNSON: Well, we stayed in Los Angeles for awhile; then
we came here to pick fruits in Reedley and all those
places around there.

GARZA: When you came to pick fruit in Reedley, were
there a lot of Mexicanos then?

YNSON: Oh yeah. All the workers were mostly Mexicans.

who were picking grapes. Our relatives were all around with us there, living under the trees.

GARZA: When was that?

YNSON: It was about 1935, '36, like that.

GARZA: That was during the depression, right? Were a lot of people living in tents?

YNSON: That road coming here from Los Angeles through the mountains was just a narrow thing. There were a lot of accidents. In fact, I had brother that got killed in the mountains going to Los Angeles.

GARZA: How old are you?

YNSON: I'm 67.

GARZA: How many children do you have?

YNSON: I had five, and two died. I just have three living.

GARZA: You said that you came out here to Fresno to pick fruit. Do you remember how much they were paying?

YNSON: I forget the price, I think trays were three or five cents. I think they're ten or more now.

GARZA: In those days, do you recall any efforts of trying to organize a union in the fields?

YNSON: No, no nothing like now, like Cesar Chavez, we didn't have those things.

GARZA: Do you remember any incidents with Ku Klux Klan in the '30's, out in the countryside?

YNSON: I don't think so, because I didn't read the

papers at that time. I always loved to read the newspapers, but in those times you moved around, you didn't go to town or anything. I don't know. I used to read in the paper once in awhile about the KKK in Georgia.

GARZA: Did it ever bother you?

YNSON: No, nobody used to bother us. We used to sleep under the trees, and nobody bothered us. Now I'm afraid to step outside, when it gets dark.

GARZA: Is that because of the drugs now in the streets?

YNSON: Yeah, because of the drugs. A lot of kids are on drugs.

GARZA: When you say kids, do you mean Mexican-American, white kids, or just kids?

YNSON: Both, both races! I see twelve year olds, with a rag on their nose, sniffing paint.

GARZA: What things do you remember about the depression?

YNSON: I remember we would get our food . . . I forgot the name that . . . it wasn't welfare . . .

GARZA: Relief?

YNSON: Relief. They used to give us some stamps to get our food. They'd give a certain one in the family a job at the warehouse where they'd give out the food. I know my father worked there, after that one of my sisters worked there. They'd give you a chance to work. Well, we didn't have it so hard because my

mother, she used to make tortillas out of corn.
She'd grind it with a stone, a metate. We didn't
have it hard.

GARZA: En que sea frijoles y tortillas?

YNSON: Yeah. Frijoles y chilitos [laughing]. My father
always had cows, chickens, and turkeys. So, as long
we had corn and beans . . . it's O.K..

GARZA: How do you feel about discrimination? Do you
think it exist?

YNSON: Oh yeah, there is. Not as bad as it was, but
there is.

GARZA: When you say that, what do you mean? Can you
give me examples?

YNSON: I remember how they used to treat the colored
people. I forget the states. I used to read it in
the papers that they would give them free transportation
to come here to California, where there was no seg-
regation, like Texas used to have. They couldn't
even go into eating places. They had different street
cars. California didn't have that. We all mingled.
But you knew a few people who got into the races.
There still is.

GARZA: What comes to your mind when you say there still
is?

YNSON: Like my son moved out there by Ashlan and Fresno
Streets, and the people in front, call him, "Dirty

Japanese" . . . and they're not Japanese laughing.
There still is!

GARZA: Do you remember the war? What kind of things
do you remember about World War II?

YNSON: I wasn't even here in America when the war broke
out. I was in the Philippines.

GARZA: What were you doing in the Philippines?

YNSON: We went on vacation. We couldn't come back
because the war had broken out. I was there when the
the Japanese took over Manila. I was there when the
Americans got it back.

GARZA: How many years were you in the Philippines?

YNSON: Eleven.

GARZA: Eleven years! Can you tell me about them?

YNSON: I was lucky that they Japanese didn't get me
as an American, because they were rounding up all of
the Americans when they got to Manila. Well, I always
like to be friendly with everybody, with kids. When
the kids saw a Japanese coming to our place, the
little kids would run over to our place and say,
"There's Japanese coming!" So I used to hide over
that. I used to see when they would fight in the
sky, when they used to have those fights, Americans
and Japanese.

GARZA: Dogfights?

YNSON: Yeah, dogfights.

GARZA: Did the Japanese ever think that you were an American, or did they mistake you for a Filipino?

YNSON: I'd never let them see me. One day at the end, they were losing already, but we didn't know. We didn't have any communication, we couldn't have a radio or anything. We had to dig our radio under the ground, because if we had a radio they would do something to us, kill us or something. So, I think that they were on their way. They started coming out from, I don't even know what side of the Philippines. This Japanese--we didn't even know he was around, until he got up close to the steps [of the house]. He said, "Gra . . . Gra . . ." We had a little hill with sweet potatoes. So I got something and dug up some sweet potatoes. We never knew that we had sweet potatoes or we could have gotten them before, because we had no food. We just had boiled potatoes and rice to eat. I was lucky to find the sweet potatoes, he put them in a handkerchief and said, "All right, all right." He went away. My sister-in-law was out there, they had a little altar and she was kneeling down praying that he wouldn't do anything to me. They were Catholics. The next day the Americans arrived. At night they'd come, and we could hear them over there in this college called Santo de Tomas, when they had cells of American Prisoners . . .

Oh they would sing. I couldn't know what happened.
We could only hear them singing. The Americans had
come in already.

GARZA: How did you get stuck in the Philippines?

You said you had gone on vacation.

YNSON: Yeah, but the war broke out and there was no
transportation. Only like for the President, President
Cason, and they just gave him a plane.

GARZA: Was your husband Filipino?

YNSON: Yes.

GARZA: Did your husband come back with you to the states?

YNSON: No.

GARZA: He stayed?

YNSON: He died.

GARZA: He died in the Philippines. How did he die?

YNSON: He was sick.

GARZA: That's too bad, but you came back.

YNSON: Yes, they were bringing all of the Americans
back.

GARZA: You came in in L.A. or San Francisco?

YNSON: No. I was supposed to land in San Francisco,
but it was Navy Day. It was full of boats, so they
took us to Seattle.

GARZA: How did you get back?

YNSON: I was sent by the Red Cross over to here to
Los Angeles by train. I had to wait because I had to
have a reservation in that time.

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GARZA: How old were you when you went to the Philippines?

YNSON: I was about 22.

GARZA: You came back when you were around 31? You must have learned a lot about the Filipino way of life.

YNSON: Oh yeah, I knew how to speak it, but not anymore, I don't speak it with anyone. I learned how to speak Tagalo.

GARZA: How do you feel about the union? It has a lot of Filipino workers. Cesar Chavez went to the Philippines, what do you think about that?

YNSON: I think it's O.K. for the workers, something to protect them.

GARZA: Are workers mistreated in the Philippines?

YNSON: Well, they don't have it like here, not like we have orchards here where we go picking. They don't have big plantations. If they have a little plantation of rice, all the neighbors get together.

GARZA: Today in the Philippines, communism is a big thing.

YNSON: Yeah.

GARZA: The Marcos Regime is not a favorable regime.

How do you feel about that? A lot of Filipinos don't like Marcos?

YNSON: No, they don't like him. I don't know. I was trying to go back for a visit, but now I don't care anymore the way it is now.

GARZA: Getting back to Pinedale, how do you see Pinedale?

What kind of changes has Pinedale gone through?

YNSON: There's no changes in Pinedale. It is just the same. The only change is in the new buildings they have here. That's the only change here.

GARZA: That means that life has not improved in Pinedale.

YNSON: It's going too slow. People do not like to communicate with each other. We call them to a meeting, but they never come.

GARZA: What do you think it is?

YNSON: I don't know. I used to be active in the PTA when my kids were small. We would go to the houses and invite them, the ladies. They would say right away, that they didn't know how to cook! Just come to the PTA meetings. They didn't have to cook. We'd make tamales. I was the one that used to make the tamales, but I had help, they could have come and just helped. I don't know why they didn't come. It's nice to come. Even if you don't accomplish anything, you talk with your neighbors. That doesn't take very long. We have sewing classes, they don't come. I don't know if this year if they're going to have them or close them, because they don't want to associate.

GARZA: Pinedale used to be a lumber town?

YNSON: Yes, it used to be a lumber mill out there where all those old, old buildings are now.

GARZA: Did you ever work there?

YNSON: When I came they didn't have it anymore. After that it was a army camp. I know that they moved out to Merced Falls. That's where all the workers went.

GARZA: What made you come to Pinedale?

YNSON: My sister moved here and I came to visit her. We stayed. I had remarried. My husband was working on a ranch in Woodland. He came and he said he was going to look for a job here in Fresno.

He got a job as a janitor at a store named Cooper's.

GARZA: How long did he work there?

YNSON: Not long. He started working in October and in January 18th, he died of a heart attack at the store.

GARZA: Did you ever marry again?

YNSON: No, when he died I was in the family way and I had three more months to go. I didn't get married again.

GARZA: Did you go to work after that?

YNSON: Not right away, because my son was small. But in a few years I did. I worked all of those jobs. I worked figs, I picked cotton, I picked tomatoes and stringbeans. I ironed, I washed for people. I cleaned yards for people, so I could have a little money for the kids. So they wouldn't go raggedy. Maybe that is why I have arthritis right now.

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GARZA: When did you stop working?

YNSON: While I stopped working, I had arthritis. Then
I used to sort figs.

GARZA: How much did they pay in those days for figs?

YNSON: I guess a dollar or something an hour.
They didn't pay much.

GARZA: How do you feel about the 3rd United Farm Workers
convention taking place in Fresno? Do you think that
was a positive thing?

YNSON: Yeah, I just read in the paper. I didn't have
any idea they were going to have it.

GARZA: Would you have gone?

YNSON: Yeah. I wish I was well when they had those
rallies walking from here to Sacramento, but I was
very bad with arthritis.

GARZA: What do you remember of the 1950's?

YNSON: It was not as bad as now, now it's getting awful.
Shootings here, and shootings there. You're not
safe anymore. Not even in your house. Like my
neighbor got shot in the leg. I didn't even know
until today that she'd got shot Sunday.

GARZA: Who shot her?

YNSON: I don't know. Just today they told me. You
see I have a tree in front of my house. I only stay
till one o'clock, but not now. I see a bunch of little
guys, six or seven around. I say, "The Devil is loose"

better go inside my house. Even if I'm sweating,
I'm afraid to be outside.

GARZA: Pinedale is known for it's alcoholism. Do you
see a lot of alcoholism here?

YNSON: I know where they, [laughing] they all hang out
there at a store on Pinedale Street, under a tree.
You'll find a whole bunch of them out there. Day
after day!

GARZA: Seems to me like Fresno is going to be taking
over pinedale. Do you think that that is a good thing?

YNSON: I think it's a good thing. Before, they tried to
do it, but they were against it. I think it's best.
Maybe it will be better then what it is now.

GARZA: What do your sons and daughter do?

YNSON: My daughter is married. She lives in Fresno,
she's working as a short order cook by city hall.
My other son went to law school and he's trying to
pass the bar. I had another son, I'm sorry to say
it but . . .

GARZA: No salio bien.

YNSON: He was a very good boy. He used to work. But
I don't know what happened to him. Just lately about
four years he went alcoholic. I don't know where I
went wrong.

GARZA: Do you think that it was you or the system?

YNSON: I don't know . My family says it's the system.

GARZA: You don't have complete control over him. So . . .

YNSON: I had, but when he was of age, I couldn't do anything. Now he's 26. Now it's very hard. He'll listen to me when he feels like it, once in awhile.

GARZA: Your son, the lawyer, you must be very proud of him.

YNSON: My son, oh yes! I hope he makes it.

GARZA: I don't know if you know this, but a lot of Mexicans are having a lot of trouble passing the bar. If he doesn't pass, it's not that your son is not qualified or stupid. It's a result of the system.

YNSON: I know that. I understand that, I've known that ever since Peter was in high school. I know the system.

GARZA: How do you feel about the Spanish-Speaking in school? Do you think that they have an opportunity like everyone else?

YNSON: In a way, they don't try. They give up right away. For instance, if they're in high school and they're doing good, they offer them a job and they take the job and forget about school. After they are in their job, they're laid off. Nothing, no school and no job. So they should have stuck to school instead of getting that job with money. I know they offer them good money so they can take them out of school.

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GARZA: O.K. Señora, I'm glad that I had the opportunity to talk to you on your personal experience regarding Fresno County. What do you feel about this project?

YNSON: Yes, it's a good idea. That other people will read it if you put it in books or whatever, so they can read how it was. I like to read history on everything.

GARZA: Thank you very much Mrs. Ynson.

"BY MY SIGNATURE, I MAKE THIS TRANSCRIPT AVAILABLE TO RESEARCHERS IN THE FRESNO CITY AND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES."

Anita ynson
MRS. ANITA YNSON, NARRATOR

Dec 6, 1977
(DATE)

BEN GARZA, INTERVIEWER

(DATE)