

MR. KAZUO HIYAMA

MRS. KOZUKI: Today is September 1, 1980. I, Irene Eiko Kozuki, am privileged to be in the home of Mr. Kazuo Hiyama at 8184 East Adams Avenue, Fowler, California, 93625.

Before we get into the interview proper, I would like to have you give us your full name, place and date of birth, and your place of longest residence.

MR. HIYAMA: My name is Kazuo Hiyama, and I was born August 8, 1915 in Fowler. And my longest residence is in Fowler on the corner of DeWolf and Adams.

MRS. KOZUKI: Have you lived there continuously?

MR. HIYAMA: More or less around the area. I was born across the street. I have moved just twice in my life.

MRS. KOZUKI: Tell me first about your parents. What part of Japan did they come from?

MR. HIYAMA: They came from Ushita, Asa-gun, Hiroshima.

MRS. KOZUKI: Do you know when your father came to the United States?

MR. HIYAMA: 1906 he came to Hawaii. Then he came to San Francisco in 1907.

MRS. KOZUKI: Do you know what he did when he first came here; what kind of work?

MR. HIYAMA: I think he must have worked on the farm in Walnut Creek. Then he moved to Fowler, because my uncle was living in Fowler, and, naturally, they asked their friends or relatives to come to Fowler. That's why they came to Fowler.

MRS. KOZUKI: When did your mother join him here?

MR. HIYAMA: 1914. Then I was born in 1915.

MRS. KOZUKI: What have you been doing for most of your life?

MR. HIYAMA: Well, I was born on a farm, and I helped my father work on the farm. At that time, I went to school, and there was a lot of discrimination, and we figured there was no possibility of getting a nice job, so I might as well be a farmer.

MRS. KOZUKI: Can you tell us what you can remember about working on the farm?

MR. HIYAMA: I did mostly what my father taught me; cultivating, plowing, irrigating, and pruning. Most of it was hard work. There were no tractors, so we had to drive the horses and plow. All the irrigation was open ditches. We had to wake up in the middle of the night and watch the water at nighttime, and usually get up early in the morning. When I was going to school, we used to help before school and after school when I got back. We would help our parents.

MRS. KOZUKI: You say you had horses. Was that the only help you had on the farm?

MR. HIYAMA: Well, that was the only thing we had to cultivate; we didn't have a tractor.

MRS. KOZUKI: Was this land yours?

MR. HIYAMA: The folks had a verbal agreement with the land-owner that we leased their place, and we did all the work. We probably paid part of the sulfur and hay and all incidental expenses like sharpening the plowshare. At the end of the year, after we delivered the crop, we used to get about 40 percent, and the owner got 60 percent. At that time I thought it was a bad deal because the owner was getting so much of the profit without any of the hard work. So, at that time, I always thought I'd like to own a piece of land and be a landowner.

MRS. KOZUKI: How long was it before your family was able to buy some land?

MR. HIYAMA: Well, I think it was about 1933. Our family wanted to acquire some land because they had saved some money. We were able to buy 40 acres for approximately \$3,000. For the whole 40 acres. But I was only 18, and my parents couldn't buy the land, so we had Mr. Akira Chiamori buy the land for us, and we worked for him. Later, when I reached my age (21 years), the land was transferred to me. That was called a quitclaim deed.

MRS. KOZUKI: About your farming, did you have to hire other people to help you?

MR. HIYAMA: We had to hire grape pickers at harvest time, but most of the time we did all our work. During the daytime, we usually used to work out, eight or nine hours a day, and did our own work when we got back. We went out to work for wages to have money to operate the farm. At that time, there was a depression and things were kind of rough. It was a struggling business.

MRS. KOZUKI: After you decided to buy the land and stopped leasing, you moved to the land where you live now?

MR. HIYAMA: That's right. We lived on the same property for about 45 years.

MRS. KOZUKI: Would you say you had experienced any prejudice in buying any land or in trying to acquire more land?

MR. HIYAMA: That law that said you couldn't buy any land until you were a citizen and aliens couldn't own land. I guess that was what you call prejudice. Other than that, you had to work hard and banks wouldn't loan you much money. It was all on a cash basis.

MRS. KOZUKI: You told me earlier that the few instances you had experienced prejudice usually had to do with land transactions, and you mentioned an escheat case. Can you tell me about that?

MR. HIYAMA: When we got back from the war, the State of California

wanted to escheat our land, because they claimed we had violated the law. So, they were going to take our land away. So we had an attorney Einer Nielsen to represent us. At that time, he recommended that we compromise with the state by paying approximately \$1,500 cash, and that all would be forgotten. Then they gave us right to the land.

MRS. KOZUKI: Were those kinds of cases common then?

MR. HIYAMA: I don't know, but I think there were quite a few.

MRS. KOZUKI: Has there ever been any legal effort to get that money back?

MR. HIYAMA: I don't think so. We settled out of court, so they didn't pay too much attention.

MRS. KOZUKI: When did you start expanding your farm from the original 40 acres?

MR. HIYAMA: We later acquired another 20 acres for \$1,700 with only \$500 down and five years without payment. That was in 1940.

MRS. KOZUKI: So you left 60 acres when you went to camp.

MR. HIYAMA: When we went to camp, we left 60 acres with a good friend of ours who took good care of it. When we came back, the property was in good condition. We were lucky, some people lost their property, it was mismanaged and not taken care of.

MRS. KOZUKI: Before we got on to your family, let me ask you about your marriage.

MR. HIYAMA: I met Misao Edith Yuki of Elkhorn, Yolo County, through a brother-in-law who was married to her older sister. I was engaged at the age of 19 and three years later we were married, December 11, 1937.

MRS. KOZUKI: And you had children.

MR. HIYAMA: We had one, Howard. Then Bernice just before the war. Both were born in Fresno.

MRS. KOZUKI: I'd like to know more about your experiences in camp.

MR. HIYAMA: Bernice was only 3 or 4 months old, and we had to go to Gila, Arizona. When we went to Gila, it was around 12 o'clock noon, and it was very hot. The bus was supposed to pick us up around 12 o'clock, but there was some misarrangement and the bus came around 4 o'clock. We had to stay out in the sun for four hours right in front of the station. It was a bad experience, because she was such a baby, and she was crying and my mother was crying.

MRS. KOZUKI: How many people were in your family at that time?

MR. HIYAMA: My mother, father, wife, and two children.

MRS. KOZUKI: I know you had a brother; where was he at this time?

MR. HIYAMA: He was inducted and serving in the Army. Later he was

transferred to Italy. He was in the 442nd and was killed in April, a couple of months before the war ended.

MRS. KOZUKI: Was he already in the Army when the war broke out?

MR. HIYAMA: Yes. He was already in.

MRS. KOZUKI: They didn't discharge him because he was Japanese?

MR. HIYAMA: No. Actually they inducted me from camp, and I went to Fort Douglas, but I got a medical discharge and came back. That was toward the end of the war and camp time.

MRS. KOZUKI: What did you do next?

MR. HIYAMA: Well, at that time, there was talk that we could go back to California. So I applied to come back to California in November, and in the middle of December they gave us permission to come back.

We left Arizona December 24, 1944, and stopped at Barstow for transfer to a train from Chicago to Los Angeles. From there we transferred to the train that goes to Fresno. We arrived in Barstow at noon, and we decided we wanted something to eat at the restaurant there. There was a sheriff who told us, "You'd better not go inside, because we don't want to cause any incident." So the best thing for us to do was to buy a box lunch and eat outside.

We waited there until 4 o'clock. Then we got on the train to Fresno and arrived at midnight on the 24th. Later I found out there was a Committee for Fair Play at the station waiting for us that evening. But we had arrived late (snow storm above Barstow had delayed the transfer train), at midnight, so no one was there; just our landlord who picked us up and we came back.

The next day the press was over, and they wanted to take our picture and some stories. The day after Christmas it was in the news. I guess all over the United States. This was in the Fresno Bee.

MRS. KOZUKI: I would like to ask you about camp. When you first got there, how did you feel about Gila?

MR. HIYAMA: I know when they moved us I guess they wanted to rush us out. When we got there the camp, our place where we were going to live wasn't ready yet, because all the trenches weren't covered and the floors had no linoleum, the windows had no screens.

As you know, in Arizona they have that dust storm in August and September. Every night the storm would blow up beneath the floor where there was a one-quarter inch crack. When we got up the next morning, everything would be just covered with dust. At nighttime there were no window screens, and they have what they call blister bugs. If you put on the lights, the blister bugs would come in. If that thing stings you, you get a big blister. So we had to turn the lights off early. This is just a one-room barrack. The whole family had to stay in there. There were no partitions and no privacy at all.

MRS. KOZUKI: What kind of work did you do while you were at camp?

MR. HIYAMA: At first I worked on the farm. Later I was a foreman on the farm.

MRS. KOZUKI: Do you remember what they paid you?

MR. HIYAMA: I think they paid us—average worker was strictly \$16 per month. And anybody with a little skill like a doctor or nurse or something, they got \$19 a month.

MRS. KOZUKI: Did your children go to school there?

MR. HIYAMA: Yes. My son did go to school.

MRS. KOZUKI: Does he remember any of this? Was there any resentment?

MR. HIYAMA: He was pretty young, about 4 years old. So I don't think he remembers much. After he got back, I guess he remembers a little.

MRS. KOZUKI: Did he have any trouble with prejudice when he got home?

MR. HIYAMA: When he was going to school, some of the students would call him names like TOJO or something.

MRS. KOZUKI: Do you remember any prejudice directed at you after you came back from camp?

MR. HIYAMA: We used to get threatening letters, especially when this news got out that we came back to California. Three or four crank letters, but there were a lot of nice letters, too, and they sent us some gifts.

MRS. KOZUKI: Do you feel you were taken advantage of as far as having your farm? Did you have any trouble because you were Japanese?

MR. HIYAMA: There was talk that they wouldn't buy Japanese products, that they would discriminate against the Japanese. But it never did turn out that way. Most of them treated us pretty good.

MRS. KOZUKI: You had no trouble selling your fruit, then?

MR. HIYAMA: No.

MRS. KOZUKI: About farming. Since you have been doing this for so many years, could you tell us something about the changes you've seen in the industry?

MR. HIYAMA: Well, what I've seen is from horse and buggy to this modern mechanization where we get on a tractor and disc on it. In one day, you can get 80 acres done.

But, basically, the raisin industry hasn't changed too much as far as drying the raisin. So, recently, I've been experimenting with a method of trying to mechanize some of this hard work and some of the problems they've been having in the grape industry.

Last couple of years we've developed some equipment, about four, and what is known as the Double T Trellis. There is a caneflipper, a sprayer where there is high volume and low pressure, some vertical

striking rods for a harvester. This is for harvesting grapes for raisins.

MRS. KOZUKI: Could it be used for anything else?

MR. HIYAMA: This trellis can be used for table grapes; also for winery.

MRS. KOZUKI: So the basic change is the trellis?

MR. HIYAMA: Yes. Basically the trellis system. And then the equipment that we made.

MRS. KOZUKI: Are these things patented?

MR. HIYAMA: We're working on it now. We have a few patents already.

MRS. KOZUKI: Can you quickly describe what process this raisin goes through that makes it different from the typical sun-dried raisin?

MR. HIYAMA: First the grapes are not dried on the ground. The biggest problem with raisin is picking it and putting it on the ground. When you get bad weather, it damages it. In our system, we dry on the vine with chemical treatment that hastens the drying. The rain doesn't damage it. The quality is good, and we have more quantity. It's clean, and we are totally mechanized.

MRS. KOZUKI: What is the chemical that you spray?

MR. HIYAMA: We put potassium carbonate and Grape Aid. It hastens drying.

MRS. KOZUKI: So the grape is left on the vine and sprayed, and it dries by itself.

MR. HIYAMA: Yes. You just shake it off.

MRS. KOZUKI: You have developed some equipment to spray the chemical and harvest it afterward. It seems that you've done a lot as far as thinking about farming and that these latest projects have proven to be very satisfying to you.

MR. HIYAMA: Yes. If it works, it will be one of the best things for the industry, because they are having a lot of problems. As you know, grape picking is one of the dirtiest work anyone can experience. It's dirty. Turning trays is hard on your back. Rolling is hard on your knees. I think mechanization will help the condition of the workers.

MRS. KOZUKI: Back to things Japanese. Do you feel that as a family, you do many Japanese things?

MR. HIYAMA: We try to Americanize as much as possible. But I think some of the Japanese customs that we have aren't bad. So some of the good parts, we want to keep doing it.

MRS. KOZUKI: Does your family join you in these things?

MR. HIYAMA: Yes, they all. All the children seem to enjoy it.

MRS. KOZUKI: How many grandchildren do you have now?

MR. HIYAMA: Nine, now.

MRS. KOZUKI: What are the things that you observe?

MR. HIYAMA: New Year's, Christmas, all the holidays.

MRS. KOZUKI: Japanese things?

MR. HIYAMA: Boys' Day and Girls' Day. We have the koinobori and for Girls' Day we have these dolls that we display.

MRS. KOZUKI: Would you say that more than other Japanese-American families, you have kept the traditions?

MR. HIYAMA: I think out in the country they keep their Japanese traditions more than in the city.

MRS. KOZUKI: I suppose it has helped that all your children have married Japanese.

MR. HIYAMA: Yes. I am going to have two daughters-in-law that are Japanese.

MRS. KOZUKI: Is there anything else you can think of that would help us in our history project?

I remember you told me about shaking some kind of poison?

MR. HIYAMA: Cyanide? At that time it was depression days, and we had a lot of vinehoppers. And the only chemical they used was cyanide gas.

We worked for 15 cents an hour in those days, and it was a struggle to keep our farm going. So I used to take on a job of putting this dust on. They used to pay us \$5 a can to spray 100 pounds of cyanide gas. We get up early in the morning, put it in a sulfur machine on our back, maybe 10 pounds. And we'd have a gas mask that was supposed to protect us.

But it was hard work trying to spray one can of gas in about two hours, because it doesn't float too good in the morning when the sun comes up, and that thing would drift in the vineyard and kill all the vinehoppers. It used to also kill chickens and dogs.

MRS. KOZUKI: Did you ever get sick?

MR. HIYAMA: No, but I heard we killed chickens. It was just that we loved the money, getting \$5. So we took the chance of working on that kind of dangerous job. At that time we would work all day and only get \$1.50. I must have been about 14 or 15 years old.

MRS. KOZUKI: Do you ever remember taking the money and spending it on yourself?

MR. HIYAMA: No. I think we turned all our money over to our parents. Actually, when I went to high school, the only money I got was maybe a nickel once in two or three months. We never carried a purse; we just

put it in our little pocket.

MRS. KOZUKI: What did you do with a nickel?

MR. HIYAMA: We'd buy a chocolate bar, something like that. I distinctly remember going to the bank to cash checks. My father would sign a check for \$5. I think that was the biggest check I ever saw him write. That was our money to buy our meat, groceries, and things like that. Those depression days were really tough days.

MRS. KOZUKI: I know we've looked at your ledger from 1937 to 1941, and the expenses have been so surprising! How little you paid and made! What would you consider a good amount to clear at the end of the year?

MR. HIYAMA: Well, if you just broke even, you were lucky actually. Most of the time you had to supplement by going out to work, make \$1.50 a day, make payments, pay for the power bill, and run the ranch. Of course, there wasn't much expense. You just bought 10 tons of hay and sharpened some plow shares and do a lot of hard work.

MRS. KOZUKI: Your biggest expense was hay? How many horses did you have?

MR. HIYAMA: We only had two at first. Later on, we had three. We used to raise five acres of hay for our own use. Farming was very cheap. But, still, when you're selling raisins at \$15 to \$20 a ton, well, you can't make too much.

MRS. KOZUKI: How many tons would you make in one year?

MR. HIYAMA: Fifty to 60 tons. That isn't too much, maybe \$1,000 per year and make a living. Most of our living expenses were paid by working outside. My mother and father used to work on the ranch, too, go out and pick grapes.

MRS. KOZUKI: Were your parents healthy enough to do that?

MR. HIYAMA: When I was 16, my father was pretty weak, so I had to do most of the managing. When I was going to high school, I used to come home at noontime and work on the ranch.

MRS. KOZUKI: If your father hadn't been ill, do you think you might have been something other than a farmer?

MR. HIYAMA: I don't think so, at that time. We wanted to buy a ranch, and there was so much talk of no chances of getting a professional job in town. So, I thought the best thing for me to do was buy a farm and try to make some money. And what we did was make more, save more, start expanding, and now we operate close to 280 acres. We have a pretty good operation where my son and I can live quite comfortably.

MRS. KOZUKI: Can you think back when you were growing up, were there any fun things?

MR. HIYAMA: Well, I sure wanted to go out like most of them were playing baseball on Sunday. I don't think we ever had a Sunday off; mostly we worked.

MRS. KOZUKI: I remember hearing about your father making his own beer. What was that like?

MR. HIYAMA: Yes. We used to buy some malt and brown sugar. We put it in a jug. When it ferments, or just before, we put it in a bottle and cap it. Sometimes the mixture of sugar was too much, and the bottle would pop open and the top will pop. Some nights those bottles would pop four or five times in one night. I guess the folks, when they drink beer, they want a little more alcohol, so they put in extra sugar. That's what made it pop.

MRS. KOZUKI: How many bottles did you make at one time?

MR. HIYAMA: They used to make a 10-gallon jug, about 40 to 50 bottles.

MRS. KOZUKI: When you were growing up, did you still celebrate New Year's?

MR. HIYAMA: The old folks always celebrated New Year's. They used to make it not only one day, but they used to celebrate the day before and three days following. They used to get drunk. It was the biggest time in the year.

MRS. KOZUKI: Are there any other things?

MR. HIYAMA: There are lots of small incidents, but I think in this country if you work hard and try, the opportunity is there. And, I think it is one of the best democratic systems. It's a wonderful thing. Whatever you try, it's there. Before there was some discrimination, but now, whatever you try, you can attain. I don't think there's any place in the world where you have opportunity like in the United States.

MRS. KOZUKI: I think as you look back on your life you can say you've seen a lot of change and a lot of good has come of it. You should be proud.

MR. HIYAMA: Yes. We went through some hard times, but I think it's those rough times that make you work harder. When you're hungry, you try harder. I think it's a good philosophy. You have to suffer to know what real hardship is. When you attain it, you really appreciate it.

MRS. KOZUKI: Thank you very much.