

KAZUYOSHI KY MATSUOKA

MRS. EZAKI: Today is July 6, 1980. I, Bessie Ezaki, have the privilege to be in the home of Mr. Kazuyoshi Matusoka at 40928 Road 32, Kingsburg, California, 93631.

Please give me your full name, date and place of birth, and place of longest residence.

MR. MATSUOKA: Well, I was named Kazuyoshi Matsuoka, and I was born in Kingsburg and have spent my whole lifetime here except for the evacuation years which were spent in Poston, Arizona.

MRS. EZAKI: Will you please give me the date of your birth?

MR. MATSUOKA: The date of my birth was March 4, 1916.

MRS. EZAKI: To begin our discussion of your life and career, will you tell us how it was that your parents came to settle here in Kingsburg, and some of your memories of your childhood and growing up years in this area?

MR. MATSUOKA: My father and mother used to live in Isleton, California, and they worked in the asparagus fields out there, and then Mr. Ezaki, who came here first, he called them over here and my dad and mother moved this way. They lived in Kingsburg area and rented a farm, and eventually I was born here.

MRS. EZAKI: Could you relate what you know about your parents prior to your father's coming to America and right after?

MR. MATSUOKA: My dad came here as a student. He was going to school in Japan at the time. I think he was going to high school, and I don't remember him telling me that he finished high school. But he came as a student.

MRS. EZAKI: So he was going to school here.

MR. MATSUOKA: Yes, but evidently, he didn't.

MRS. EZAKI: So the marriage was already made up in Japan?

MR. MATSUOKA: Later on, when time and money permitted, he called her, and they got married.

MRS. EZAKI: Do you recall some of the memories of your childhood days, growing up years in this area, your friends, and the Depression years?

MR. MATSUOKA: It wasn't Depression years because times were getting better at that time, because it was the end of the First World War, World War I.

MRS. EZAKI: In 1923, you went to Japan. What did you think about your trip?

MR. MATSUOKA: In 1923 my parents went to Japan and took the whole family, and eventually my two sisters and a brother stayed in Japan. They left them there. They were taken care of by their families in

Japan, but they brought me, my sister, and youngest brother back.

It was quite different. They didn't wear Western clothes in Japan at that time. The boys were wearing hakama and Japanese clothes and girls were wearing kimonos. We took our Western clothes with us, and I never did wear Japanese clothes. That's why we stood out differently. We looked different wearing overalls and shirts and things like that. I was the only one with my hair combed, and they thought that was odd because every little boy was bald or just about bald. They also used to, whenever I walked the street, everyone in the stores would yell to the next place and tell them, "Here is a kid with different clothes on walking down the street," and they'd all come out and look at me. That was kinda odd to me to have everyone stand out in the doorway and look at me and talk and yell to each other. But being little kids, we'd run up and down the street like we didn't care. They got used to me after a while.

MRS. EZAKI: Oh, did you stay very long?

MR. MATSUOKA: We stayed several months there. I stayed in Hitoyoshi town.

MRS. EZAKI: I guess your grandparents were glad to see all of you.

MR. MATSUOKA: Yes. All I did was just run around the city and go fishing in the Kumagawa there.

MRS. EZAKI: Did you have any friends?

MR. MATSUOKA: Yes. We made friends with some neighbor kids right in town.

MRS. EZAKI: No discrimination?

MR. MATSUOKA: No -- well -

MRS. EZAKI: Well, you were foreign, so they stared.

MR. MATSUOKA: They stared at me at first, and the Japan kids all got together and yelled at me, made fun of me because of the way I dressed. I stood out, looking different, but it didn't bother me.

MRS. EZAKI: Coming back to the Kingsburg area, who were the people you grew up with?

MR. MATSUOKA: Well, mostly I grew up with my neighbor's boy. He was Sheldon Anderson, and I was over to their place most of the time. We were running back and forth. He used to come over, I went over there.

MRS. EZAKI: No discrimination, nothing? They treated you nice?

MR. MATSUOKA: Ran in and out of their house just like it was our house.

MRS. EZAKI: Were there any other Japanese families here before your father came, and right after? Your uncle, Fukushima?

MR. MATSUOKA: He was here earlier. We moved out here, and they called Mr. Hamada so he came over from Lindsay to live there. And Mr. Murayama

was also here.

MRS. EZAKI: Where did the Yamadas go?

MR. MATSUOKA: They came to Kingsburg, and they moved around a lot. They had a place in Parlier, bought a ranch down there. I don't know what happened to that one, but they moved again and again to the Island and bought a ranch down there. And they also moved right across the road from where the Kakiuchis live right now. They used to own a ranch there which they gave up because they had a hard time on that one.

MRS. EZAKI: There were a lot of Japanese children in Clay School. Who were all those children, those families that were going there, besides your brother, your sister, and yourself?

MR. MATSUOKA: Well, when we were going there were families like Inamasu, Hatsuki Yamada was an Inamasu. She used to walk with me, and her brother and sister, too. Wakitas were a little ways away and they joined us on our way to school. And Moriyamas, Hashimuras, my uncle, also there was Aoyagis and Yamas. And, let's see, quite a few.

MRS. EZAKI: What did you do for a living around here? What did you do in the summer to help out?

MR. MATSUOKA: Well, the main thing most kids did in our younger days were looking for jobs that were available, and that was cutting apricots and peaches to dry during the summer. That's about the main job for young people. And as we grew older, we picked fruit just like the laborers that come around nowadays. Well, we did the best we could working like that. During pruning season, we pruned after school, and we used to help our parents because they could use the money at the time, so all the family went to work to help them.

MRS. EZAKI: Do you remember any happy occasions while you were growing up?

MR. MATSUOKA: In our younger days, people had more time to visit each other and many times friends gathered at a certain person's place and all the kids had a lot of fun playing with each other. We had all kinds of games. Kids don't play those kinds of games any more, just running all around the yard.

MRS. EZAKI: Would you say there was no racial prejudice during the years you grew up that you can remember in this neighborhood?

MR. MATSUOKA: Not when we were kids.

MRS. EZAKI: Did the experiences you had influence your way of thinking as you grew to maturity, and later on in life?

MR. MATSUOKA: When we grew up with the people in the neighborhood, they seemed to be good friends. But once in a while you find out some of them kind of changed their minds because of the war. Those things we just ignore.

MRS. EZAKI: After graduating from high school, did you go into farming right away? Can you relate some hardships you had encountered and some family struggles? Were we already out of the Depression?

MR. MATSUOKA: No, it was right in the middle of the Depression when we graduated from high school in 1934. And immediately afterwards, we looked for work out in the fields just to help the family, and for very little pay. Things were very cheap at the time, and we didn't earn very much.

MRS. EZAKI: Do you remember not having enough food in the house or not having enough clothes on your back?

MR. MATSUOKA: No, there was no occasion to be in that much hardship, because if you tried to work, you could find work. And if you worked enough, you made enough money to eat and everything else. We didn't have any luxury, but as far as food and clothing, we didn't struggle for that.

MRS. EZAKI: During all these years were the activities of the Gakuen, Japanese Language School, and the Sunday School already in progress?

MR. MATSUOKA: Yes. We went to Japanese School on weekends, so we went to school practically every day.

MRS. EZAKI: You didn't think anything of it, because everyone was going, so it was fun to go.

MR. MATSUOKA: Yes. And we met other people from other areas.

MRS. EZAKI: Do you remember some of the things that were held at the Gakuen or at your social hall there? I heard there was a big baseball team there.

MR. MATSUOKA: Well, we had our clubs--YBA--they used to have it separated from the girls, so they called it YMBA, and YWBA for women. We had activities there all the time and meetings. Also there were sports programs and we had basketball teams and baseball teams. We all participated.

MRS. EZAKI: Did you have oratorical contests?

MR. MATSUOKA: They used to have oratorical contests, and some of the people who were very good participated. Others just listened.

MRS. EZAKI: During World War II, you were interned in Poston Relocation Center in Arizona. Can you tell us some recollections of those dreadful times and how you felt about evacuation of the Japanese from this area?

MR. MATSUOKA: Well, I felt like most of them, I guess. It wasn't a very good deal for us, but since everybody went, we went reluctantly. Fortunately, I had a very good friend who took care of the ranch, so I wasn't worried about the ranch. He was very honest.

MRS. EZAKI: Do you remember when we had to leave in this area?

MR. MATSUOKA: Oh, we left on August 3rd, something like that. We had a difference in zoning in Kingsburg. People west of 99 were moved to Fresno Relocation Center, then there was a County line that separated us from Fresno County people. Since the property of the Kingsburg people

extended into three different counties, we moved to different areas. We happened to be in Tulare County, so we moved from Kingsburg to Visalia then to Poston. The other segment of Kingsburg went to Sanger then to Gila, Arizona. We felt kind of bad being separated from our friends at the time.

MRS. EZAKI: Can you relate some of your good, or bad, experiences that you encountered during the camp days? Did anyone leave for the draft or volunteer in your family?

MR. MATSUOKA: No. I don't remember too many difficulties we had except for weather.

MRS. EZAKI: Before being released, did you come back to check on how things were at home?

MR. MATSUOKA: Yes, I did. I came back about January, the year California was opened up for us to return. I felt there was quite a bit of discrimination at that time in our area, so we didn't return right away. We went to Pennsylvania and stayed from May to November, then I returned in November of that year.

MRS. EZAKI: How was the situation when you returned in January?

MR. MATSUOKA: People seemed to resent the government for letting the Japanese return to California, and so that was the reason I went east for a while, to let things cool off a little bit.

MRS. EZAKI: When you came back, in what condition was your farm?

MR. MATSUOKA: I was fortunate in having Mr. Levin take care of my place. He took very good care of it, so it was in very good shape.

MRS. EZAKI: As a farmer engaged in farming in the fruit and grape industry, do you belong to any of the organizations? Tell us about them, and what changes you have seen over the years.

MR. MATSUOKA: Well, as for grapes which were made into raisins, we belong to Sun-Maid which is a large cooperative organization.

MRS. EZAKI: What do they do there?

MR. MATSUOKA: Well, they received all the raisins that we dried, processed them, and sold them, and paid us on the returns that they brought. They distributed whatever they made on it, so we felt they were doing a pretty good job. But we felt waiting for the money was a little bit long, because we had to wait a year, or year and a half, until they finished selling it, to distribute the money. But, in the long run, it seemed to work out okay.

MRS. EZAKI: Can you relate some changes, developments over the years at Sun-Maid?

MR. MATSUOKA: Well, Sun-Maid has come a long way in marketing and also in processing. They are doing a better job all the time and things are working out very good for the farmer. Today they are one of the first class raising Processing plants in the world, and seem to be doing a very good job and expanding into other areas of grape processing like

distilling brandy. They make use of the byproducts or waste. They make brandy out of poor raisins that they used to dump or sell cheaply to people who would buy them. Now they use that to make more profit for the farmers. Also, in case of bad weather, they have dehydrating facilities so you can dry raisins that are too heavy at the time. They've improved a lot. The returns are getting better for the farmer all the time.

MRS. EZAKI: What about fruits? What sort of fruits do you raise?

MR. MATSUOKA: Well, I raise nectarines. I used to raise both nectarines and peaches, but as time went, some of my peaches were not too good to market, so they were pulled out and changed. Then I've changed a lot of fruits and went back into a vineyard, growing wine grapes in place of the fruits I used to have.

MRS. EZAKI: Can you tell us about your fruit processing and marketing? How it was picked and shipped out from the orchards.

MR. MATSUOKA: From the beginning we used to field pack, have ladies work out in the field, pick the fruit. But as the volume increased, we couldn't handle it out in the field, so I built a little shed to pack our fruit, and I shipped our fruit to the Los Angeles market and also to San Francisco and Oakland. That way we had different field men from different companies to take care of us. That's the way we marketed our fruit.

MRS. EZAKI: Have you had any labor disputes or trouble with laborers?

MR. MATSUOKA: No, no trouble with labor because I had all my labor furnished at the time by Mr. Nori Ogata. He did a very good job of keeping me supplied with labor. But there were also times when he sent me some laborers and the Immigration would come around and pick them up, and I'd lose them for the day. But, I'd be replaced with another crew the next day, so as far as labor was concerned, he took good care of me and things worked out pretty good.

MRS. EZAKI: Can you relate a little of the Nisei Farmers League which was formed later?

MR. MATSUOKA: What year was that? Let's see. I joined the Nisei Farmers League the first year they organized, and I was one of the directors of our district and served on the Board of Directors for six years. Then I resigned at the time and gave the directorship to Ed Naaata. During those six years we had quite a confrontation with Cesar Chavez and his United Farm Workers. For three consecutive years he harassed us out in the field, and we had to organize our group and had confrontations with him every day all summer during the fruit season for those three years. Even during the table grape season, they were there so we still had confrontation. Towards the end of the third year, Chavez found out that he couldn't break through in our area so he gave up and moved to other areas of the state and country, clear to Florida. But he admitted that Nisei Farmers League was a tough outfit to be confronted against, so he gave up.

MRS. EZAKI: How is it today?

MR. MATSUOKA: Today, I think he's thinking about coming back to this area and trying again, but he still remembers the Nisei Farmers League

and how well organized they are. He feels kind of reluctant because they are so strong in working that they help each other out. So we built a pretty good reputation. We worked in many areas. We harvested White River Ranch in Delano the year they had difficulty harvesting their fruit. The Nisei Farmers League took busloads of workers and many of us farmers to help out to keep order in the fields. They sent all the equipment, trucks, everything to harvest this big ranch.

MRS. EZAKI: What years were you elected to serve as Trustee to this school district which is Clay School District. Will you tell us of your experiences?

MR. MATSUOKA: In 1962-1966, I served as a trustee. In those four years, I felt I learned a lot about how the school district runs and what kind of salaries we paid. They're much cheaper than they are now, but it was the basic salary at that time. And for the first time we learned how to hire and fire teachers--how the whole organization is run. So, I enjoyed the years, the experience, but I only served one term.

MRS. EZAKI: What do you foresee for this district for the future?

MR. MATSUOKA: During the time I served on the school board, we were going through the time when most of the school was _trying to become unified. This area was much against it and voted against it, so they did not unify as a school district. They kept their own district, and so it's been running that way. As far as the district, even if it was a very small school with three teachers running eight classes, they still wanted to stay that way, and they are still running in that way. As the building got old, they rebuilt another new school and expanded their playground to double the size so they would have more room for the children to play. They seem to be doing very well.

MRS. EZAKI: The former building, what happened to it?

MR. MATSUOKA: It was cut all apart, in three different parts, and moved to a historical site in Kingsburg. And they put the building together and put it on a new foundation, and they were trying to make it a historical building. They've kept it because it's one of the older schools in the area. (Clay School District celebrates 100 years this year.)

MRS. EZAKI: You have been active in your church. Will you tell us in what capacity and what organizations within the church?

MR. MATSUOKA: I've been active with the Kingsburg Buddhist Church, and I served on the Board in almost every capacity they have as far as offices are concerned, from the bottom all the way to the top. I served as President in 1959 and then served on various committees. Even now I feel that I'm part of the church, so I am willing to serve in any capacity in anything that goes on.

MRS. EZAKI: Can you tell us some of the background of this church, the old and the new?

MR. MATSUOKA: Well, the old church, as far as I can remember, it was in my father's day, and they built the church with volunteer labor. They had a building built on Marion Street. During the war years, some people in Kingsburg that were prejudiced against the Japanese burned that

church down, so they felt that they wouldn't have anything to come back to. But we still had the lot and during the time of the rebuilding process after the war, we organized again. Around 1949, we acquired another property and exchanged it for the property we used to have, and we have built another church on 8th and Orange in Kingsburg, which stands today. And also we built a building at the time in 1950 and 16 years later we added a new chapel which still stands here, and it's in very good shape and looks very nice. As far as the people, we are very proud of the church that we have.

MRS. EZAKI: How about your membership, both before and after the war?

MR. MATSUOKA: Before the war, there were almost double the amount of people in Kingsburg. And during the war lots of them changed their minds and never returned to Kingsburg. So, we only have half the membership that we had. There were about 80 members and only about 40 returned.

MRS. EZAKI: Is this church affiliated with the other church in Fresno?

MR. MATSUOKA: The Buddhist Church is affiliated with the Fresno Buddhist Church, and they send us the ministers. We are not big enough to have our membership maintain a minister and all the expenses, so we share a minister with Fresno. That way we are affiliated with Fresno.

MRS. EZAKI: Have your church activities greatly influenced your life? And what do you see in the future for this church?

MR. MATSUOKA: I think the church has been our central place where we had our meetings and our friends got together and had many activities because of the church. Through the church, I have gotten acquainted with many people in the Fresno and valley area when I served on the Board of the Fresno church. So, it has been a part of my life. As for the future, I think Buddhism will continue. But the fact that younger people are not staying in this small town any more, and as they go to college and universities, they seek employment in different areas and don't return. So, we don't have too many younger members, and we keep it going and have a place for us old people to meet every now and then and talk about old times, even.

MRS. EZAKI: You are also in the Japanese American Citizens League. Will you tell us of the goals and purposes of this organization and how it has influenced your life in some way?

MR. MATSUOKA: My JACL days have been a long one. I've served even before World War II. In the late 30's, I joined the Parlier JACL at the time, and I served on the Board over there. I was an officer there for about four years, and I served actively until the evacuation and since that time I quit there. Upon returning from the camp days, I didn't go back and join Parlier JACL, so I joined Tulare County JACL. I've just served as a member, not being too active and through them I've been in touch with all the things that they do, but I feel that it was an important part of my life in the early days. I used to work for the group.

MRS. EZAKI: Do you think we have benefited from all the programs that JACL have sponsored and will continue to sponsor on our behalf?

MR. MATSUOKA: I think that is a very good question. They are doing

all they can on different legislation. They are right up on everything that goes on in Washington, and in the respective states, so they are doing a very good job, I think.

MRS. EZAKI: You have been in Kingsburg all your life except for the evacuation. From your personal observation and involvement, how would you say that Kingsburg and its people have changed through the years? What do you see as most likely developments for Kingsburg in the immediate future?

MR. MATSUOKA: I see that the Japanese people in Kingsburg are not too involved in the city programs as much as they should be. They need to be involved in the activities, but they are reluctant to join in on the activities, so we just stay on the sidelines watching things go on. I feel that lots of times there should be more involvement. We've been invited to join lots of different things, but actually, we have ignored a lot of that.

MRS. EZAKI: You belong to the Kings River Golf Club. How is your association doing in that area?

MR. MATSUOKA: We go there for our own enjoyment, but the public there are very grateful. They like us there, and we feel really good about it. We're very happy that we can participate in their program. The golf club has been an important part of my life. We enjoy it, and it's practically our home on the weekends.

MRS. EZAKI: We will go back to the organization of the Nisei Farmers League. Will you recall some of the incidents which occurred in this neighborhood?

MR. MATSUOKA: Nisei Farmers League was started by Mr. Harry Kubo, and he is still our president of the organization today. He called the meeting at a labor camp in Parlier, and it was mainly organized to help farmers harvest their fruit for the season in spite of the picketing of the United Farm Workers that had come to this area to picket and try to cause a disturbance among the workers so that they would strike and quit working.

The Farmers League was organized--it didn't just occur because of the Nisei farmer only. It happened to every farmer in the area, so in a way, the membership was open to Caucasians and all nationalities as long as they wanted to join. Today this organization is a very large organization consisting of all nationalities and many types of farms. We got word by telephone where they were and we had committees organized so that by calling just one person, we could pick up many farmers who were able to help the particular farmer who was in trouble, so that this farmer's fruit would be harvested that day. If the farmers did not go out to help him, the pickets would enter the fields and chase the workers off the field, so they couldn't do that if the farmers formed a line to keep the UFW pickets out of the field. They would not cross the line as long as the farmers were there in front of the place. They would also block driveways so the workers would not be able to enter the place to harvest the fruit, and we were there to keep the driveways open so the workers could enter the particular field to harvest the fruit. We would confront all the pickets to keep them away from the driveway. This had to be done almost every day during the fruit season until the farmer was through harvesting his fruit.

In this area, they started with the early fruit which was at Kay Kitahara's ranch and Mr. Lingren. Those two places were pickets first in this area. Then it spread to Mr. Hamada's ranch, and we were there for a couple of months because he has a long harvest season. And the Nisei Farmers League had their farmer friends on the line almost every day for several months. It took a lot of sacrifice for the farmer to ignore his own place and go help his neighbor farmer to harvest. They felt that in time when we were able to harvest ours, someone else would help us out during that time. We took turns helping each other, and we managed to get everyone's fruit harvested during the season without too much damage. We did suffer some damage, though. Like the Hamada Ranch, at night when the farmers had gone home, many tractor tires and also the trailer tires were slashed and flattened. The irrigation pumps were turned on so that the fields were flooded and would be impossible to harvest. But, in spite of all those incidents, the farmers managed to repair the damage and pick all the fruit during the season. And, as time went, Chavez' United Farm Workers felt that they could not penetrate and get the farmers to sign a contract with them. So we felt we had won a moral victory by helping each other out. That was the beginning of the Nisei Farmers League. This continued for about three years, and, finally, the United Farm Workers gave up and left the area saying some day they would be back again. But it has been several years, and they have been harassing farmers in many parts of the state. Salinas Valley and the Imperial Valley with its many farms have been taking the brunt of the picketing. We feel that someday they will confront us again, but we feel that we are prepared to harvest our crops without his union.

MRS. EZAKI: Most of the Niseis are involved in farming, but are slowly approaching retirement stage. Do you suppose the third generation will come back to the farm from the cities, or will they continue to live their lives elsewhere in their own choice of professions?

MR. MATSUOKA: Well, the main thing, is how the situation is with the farm. If the farm is big enough to support another person, they might come back. It's a question of how much money they can make. If it's too little, they would not care to even consider coming back. But if it is a big farm and a good-paying business, I'm sure they would give up what they are doing and come back to take over the farm. That is a matter of economics. As farmers, we wouldn't wish anything on the sons to take over and have to struggle the rest of his life with it if they could do better elsewhere. If they have chosen their lifetime job, it must be better than farming, so I believe it is up to the individual farms. I don't think they would ignore anything if it was of any size. They would consider looking at it anyway. Someday, when they are ready to retire, they would be willing to come back, but that's the only way I look at it.

MRS. EZAKI: At the beginning, I forgot to ask you where your parents were from. Would you tell us where they came from?

MR. MATSUOKA: Kumamoto-Ken, Yatsushiro-gun, Miyahara machi.

MRS. EZAKI: This interview with Mr. Kazuyoshi Ky Matsuoka was taped on July 6, 1980. In the neighborhood of Mr. Matsuoka, before his father arrived, there was a Japanese labor camp run by Mr. Nakamura, and he had a son named Masuru. Masaru was the first Nisei to graduate from Kingsburg High School in 1922. He was the valedictorian of his class. He

played baseball for the famous Central California Nisei Baseball League team in its early years.

Also, there was a Koga family who came a little later to this area. They had a labor camp. In this family there was a son named Dick and two daughters. They were the earliest Japanese children in school. Dr. Wallace Smith, who later became historian of this valley, and a neighbor and a friend of Toshikatsu Ezaki, had commented on how intelligent the Japanese people were.