

KOU UYEMARUKO

Today, April 15, 1980, I, Keiko Uyemmaruko, have the privilege to be in the home of Mrs. Kou Uyemmaruko, my mother-in-law, at 1102 Mayor Avenue, Fresno, California. 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.

KOU: My name is Kou Uyemmaruko. I was born on August 5, 1898, (Meiji 31) in Aki-gun, Hiroshima. This house at 1102 Mayor Avenue, Fresno, has been my home of longest residence.

KEIKO: We would like to know about your family and your early years.

KOU: I am from a family of eight girls and two boys. I am the second oldest girl. My father was a master of a bank and also a post office in Hiroshima.

KEIKO: What school did you attend?

KOU: I graduated from Kasei Jogakko, which specialized in home economics. It is now a two-year college.

KEIKO: Wasn't it uncommon for girls to go to Jogakko in those days?

KOU: Yes, very much so. It was not common for girls to get a higher education in those days. My father who had a good job and owned land and property was financially able to send all of his eight daughters to Jogakko. He also firmly believed that women should receive an education, which was counter to the prevailing thought about education for women at that time.

KEIKO: What subjects did you like?

KOU: I enjoyed art and gymnastics and hated sewing.

KEIKO: Do you have any special memories of your childhood?

KOU: I was scolded often, for I was always swimming at Ujina Bay. Even though my parents had me take tea ceremony and flower arrangement lessons, I preferred active endeavors. I was a "tomboy".

KEIKO: Why and when did you come to the United States?

KOU: I came to the United States on December 10, 1917, to get married to Sanichi Uyemmaruko.

KEIKO: Is that the date you got married?

KOU: No, legally, we got married on February 12, 1917. I had a grand wedding ceremony at the Uyemmaruko's without my husband who was in the United States. I lived with the Uyemmaruko family until my departure to the United States. It was a period of ten months that I lived with my husband's parents and learned the customs and traditions of the Uyemmaruko family.

KEIKO: How did you meet your husband?

KOU: My family, the Nishimoto's, and the Uyemaruko family arranged our marriage. Since my future husband was living in the United States and was not able to come back to Japan to meet me, we exchanged photographs. There was a person in Hiroshima who had lived in Fresno, so my father talked to him about the condition of my future husband's business.

KEIKO: Where did you first live in the United States?

KOU: I first lived at 947 "F" Street, where my husband had started his business. We had a bicycle store on the first floor, and our residence on the second floor. Seven months later we moved our residence to 715 "E" Street, when I became pregnant with my first child. It had become difficult to climb the stairs to our residence above the store. After living there for three years, my husband and I decided to move to 515 "C" Street and not live in the Japanese section, for we thought that since we were living in the United States, it was important for our children to mix with other people, as well as to continue their ties with the Japanese and Japanese community. I have lived my entire American life in Fresno other than that period of the evacuation.

KEIKO: Have you ever been back to Japan?

KOU: I first went back to Japan in 1954, and I've gone back five times since then. I am planning to go this fall (1980), too.

KEIKO: Do you have any children?

KOU: Yes, I have five children. Mikiye was born on January 15, 1919, Kenji - December 13, 1920, Sachiye - August 27, 1922, Shuji - March 6, 1925, Eiji - August 11, 1931. All were born in Fresno.

KEIKO: Did you have any guidelines when you were raising your children?

KOU: I tried to follow my father's advice. He often wrote and taught me the priorities of life. They were, first, a happy, peaceful family life; second, education for the children; and last to become financially rich. He also suggested that we should give our children an opportunity to absorb American culture. So we had my first daughter Mikiye take piano lessons, and Kenji and Sachiye violin lessons. We had intended to go back to Japan eventually, so we wanted our children to take American culture back to Japan. However, World War II changed our plans. These guidelines of my father coincided with my husband's, and his support assisted me in raising our children.

KEIKO: Did your children marry Japanese?

KOU: Yes, they married either nisei or Japanese nationals. Mikiye is married to Mitsuteru Nakashima, Kenji to Fumiko Hirasaki, Shuji to Akiko Wakamatsu, and Eiji to Keiko Suzuki.

KEIKO: What do your children do for a living and where do they live?

KOU: Mikiye lives in Watsonville, California, and is married to Mitsuteru Nakashima who owns flower nurseries. Kenji took over my husband's business, Maruko Cyclery, and he lives in Auberry, California. Sachiye is living with me and works part time at Maruko Cyclery. Shuji is an engineer at Northrup Aircraft Company and lives in Orange, California. Eiji is a music teacher at Fresno City College and lives in

Fresno.

KEIKO: What have you done for a living during your life?

KOU: My husband owned Maruko Cyclery. I helped him and worked at the store until he retired in 1968. My husband did not want me to work at the store while the children needed my care.

KEIKO: Were there many Japanese-owned businesses in those days?

KOU: Yes, quite a few. But only five, Toshiyuki Drug Store, Kogetsu-Do, Aki-Shokai, Fresno Fish, and our Maruko Cyclery survived the depression and the evacuation of World War II.

KEIKO: Will you tell us about the business you and your husband owned?

KOU: My husband, when he was twenty-three years old, bought the business from Nakamura Cyclery with \$3,580 on July 15, 1915. At that time it was a large amount of money, since the average wage was a dollar a day, and price of grocery items were: bread - eight cents a loaf, tofu - five cents, eggs - eight cents a dozen, sashimi - thirty-five cents a pound - delivered. We were selling mainly bicycles, hardware, electric goods, and sporting goods. Our customers were mostly Caucasians, especially Germans and Italians from nearby German and Italian towns. Our older children helped my husband with the business, while I was busy taking care of the younger children at home. But one time while my husband was in Japan visiting his father, who was near death, I ran the business for three months with the older children. The store was very busy and we did good business. I believe that the schooling that my husband received in Japan and his knowledge of the English language helped to run our business smoothly and successfully.

KEIKO: Do you remember some of the prices of the goods you were selling then?

KOU: Bicycles were \$39.50 to \$49.50. Guns were \$14.50 to \$39.50. BBs for BB guns (air rifle) were five cents a pack.

KEIKO: How was the business affected during the depression?

KOU: Although I didn't know how the business was affected, my husband gave me enough money to support our family, so I think we were somehow managing to live during those difficult times. But long after the depression, my husband told me that he was very sorry that he didn't have enough money to give to a beggar who wanted to buy something to eat.

KEIKO: What did you do with your business when World War II started and after the war?

KOU: The United States government decreed that the Japanese on the West Coast were to be relocated to camps in the interior of the U.S. After that a notice was issued which declared that Japanese aliens were not to possess guns, radios, flashlights, and knives. Although my husband was an American citizen, I was a Japanese alien, so to comply with the order we decided to have a sale to sell these goods that were ordinary stock items in the store. Then just before being evacuated we held a sale to reduce the inventory of the store. The goods that we didn't sell were

stored at a sushi store on the 900 block of "E" street. During the war, the government moved all the goods to a warehouse in order to rent the sushi store. During this process of moving, many valuable goods disappeared - probably stolen. After the war we stayed at our married daughter's home in San Leandro, California, until we could reestablish the business. After the war, there weren't enough goods to supply the demands; however, we were fortunate that we could reestablish our good relations with the wholesalers from pre-World War II, so that we could stock our store. The goods that were stored were pre-World War II items, which were no longer available, so electric goods and metal grape picking pans were good sellers right after the war. We had pre-war items that people couldn't find at any other store in town.

KEIKO: Will you tell us about your experiences during World War II?

KOU: In May of 1942 we were evacuated to the Fresno Assembly Center, which was located in the Fresno Fairgrounds. In October of 1942 they relocated us to Jerome, Arkansas. Jerome was very hot and humid in the summer, and it would snow in the winter. I never saw so many snakes in my life. While at Jerome the government issued an order in which people who wanted to go to Japan could do so. We decided to do so, because the war seemed as if it would continue for a long time, and for the reason that the children would not receive a good and proper education in Jerome. But the government instead of sending us to Japan, sent us to a camp in Tule Lake, California. Although we were getting enough to eat, adequate education for the children, and an allowance of \$16.00 a month to buy personal items, I was living with constant fear and anxiety that I would be separated from my family, for I was the only Japanese national (alien) in my family. I was prepared for the worst.

KEIKO: Have you experienced any prejudice?

KOU: I, personally, have never experienced any prejudice. The business was doing very well and we had many good Caucasian friends. I've believed that prejudice often occurs not because of your race, but because of the way you are as a person. So, I dressed my children in clean clothes and taught them good manners. Even when World War II began, many Caucasian friends offered their help to us. Of course most Japanese on the West Coast experienced prejudice during World War II.

KEIKO: Have you noticed changes in the treatment of the Japanese people?

KOU: Yes, I think there have been changes in the treatment of the Japanese people. When the Japanese people first started to immigrate to the United States, they were mostly from rather low positions in Japanese society, and they were without education, experience, or money, consequently they were despised. The issei realized that a college education was a requisite for their children to have in order to gain equality and respect from society. They worked very hard to give their children a college education. The children did very well in school and achieved very high scholastic standings and distinction. Many went into the professions. And now the Japanese have gained recognition and respect as a people for their qualities of working hard and for their educational achievements, and other traits of character.

KEIKO: What social and economic changes have you seen in your local community over the years?

KOU: When I first came, Fresno consisted of small communities formed by different races. There was Japan town, China town, and German town, Italian town, and et cetera. Now all the races are mixed all throughout the city. There were many changes that have occurred in Fresno through the change in the standard of living and the economic growth of the city and its people. In the old days the mode of transportation was the horse and buggy, streetcar, and the train. People used to ride to Fresno in their horse and buggies and do their shopping. There was a person whose job was to clean-up after the horses. The Santa Fe and Southern Pacific stations were always crowded with people coming and going. Fresno Hotel was the most elegant of the hostelrys. The White Theater of Broadway was the entertainment center of Fresno. Not many people owned a telephone. It was more frequently found in businesses. Most people used wood stoves, and ones who could afford it used oil stoves. Chandler Field was an airstrip in the middle of a field. The big event during the spring was the Raisin Festival. Fresnoans looked forward to the festival. Each ethnic group used to choose a queen who participated in the festival. The hospitals were private hospitals. Fresno Normal School was the college. On Fresno Street adjacent to the Court House every Saturday there was a Farmers' Market. The farmers would set up makeshift booths and sell their vegetables, fruits, citrus, and et cetera directly to the people.

KEIKO: Have you been involved in any religious, social, business, or political organizations?

KOU: I am a member of the Fresno Buddhist Fujinkai. I was the president of the Fresno Buddhist Fujinkai in 1959, 1963, and 1974. I was the representative of the American Buddhist Fujinkai at the World Buddhist Women's Convention, which was held in Kyoto, Japan, in 1970. I served as a chairperson at the All American Fujinkai Conference which was held in San Francisco in 1974. I was recommended by the Fujinkai as a nominee for the Mother of the Year award in 1978. I am also a member of the Haiku Kai and of the Older Americans Organization.

KEIKO: Do you still observe some Japanese customs?

KOU: All the members of our family get together and celebrate New Year's Day. They enjoy Japanese gochiso (feast) that I prepare. We observe most of the Japanese events centering around the Buddhist temple - such as ohigan, hanamatsuri, obon, and et cetera. When our children were young, we celebrated girls' day and boys' day.

KEIKO: Is there any other information about Japanese-American history you would like to discuss, especially covering the period before World War II?

KOU: I would like to talk about women in those days. They were placed in a very different society, and they didn't handle English language at all, and most of them were experiencing financial difficulty. So what they did to ease those difficult conditions and strengthen their determination, was to visit each other very often, and help each other. They were closely banded together centering around the Buddhist temple. I still treasure these beautiful friendships from those days.

KEIKO: Would you like to give some suggestions to the current generation in regards to how a successful life can be achieved?

KOU: I believe that the foundation of a successful life is based on a happy family life, and also to sustain strong family ties, so that family relationships can be maintained. This was the precept of the issei.