

MOMOYO MIZUKI

MRS. GOTO: Today is September 18, 1980. I, Terry Goto, am privileged to interview Mrs. Momoyo Mizuki. Mrs. Mizuki's address is 278 North Indianola, Sanger, California, 93657.

Before we get into the interview proper, would you please tell us where you were born, when you were born, and what prefecture you are from?

MRS. MIZUKI: I was born in Hiroshim-ken, Aki-gun, Kaitai-ichi, Inari-machi. I was born in 1899 or Meiji Era 31.

MRS. GOTO: What is your place of longest residence?

MRS. MIZUKI: I lived in Sanger the longest period. When I first arrived in the United States from Japan, I went to Parlier where my husband had contracted to take care of the ranch of Elmer Nygren who was away in the army during World War I.

MRS. GOTO: When did you arrive in the United States?

MRS. MIZUKI: I arrived in November 1917 by ship. I could be called a "picture bride," but not exactly my marriage had been arranged by our parents when I was 15 or 16. At that time, there was a period of waiting from the time one applied for the passport and visa. And so, after three years, I was permitted to come to the United States. Many other families had several members of the family to emigrate to Hawaii or the United States, but I was the only one from my family to do so. I never questioned the decision to come to the United States. I did what my parents told me to do; I felt they knew what was best for me.

MRS. GOTO: How did you feel about coming to the United States?

MRS. MIZUKI: I was not worried, though my parents might have been. I came with a group arranged by an Immigration Agency. The trip lasted 14 days, and there were many young people, so I was not lonely. When I arrived in the United States, my husband-to-be was waiting for me. It was a holiday--perhaps Armistice Day. I stayed with the Immigration Department for three or four days. We were very well taken care of there, and the people were kind to us. There was nothing to worry about.

MRS. GOTO: Were you in Western clothes?

MRS. MIZUKI: We then stayed at the Yemoto Hotel in San Francisco, and we were taken to a large department store where we were outfitted completely. Everything was of the latest fashion. I bought a suit and an overcoat, and the shoes were high heeled. I still have them in a trunk--my daughter would not let me throw them away.

MRS. GOTO: What about everyday clothes?

MRS. MIZUKI : When we came home to Parlier, the neighborhood women sewed me a wardrobe of cotton dresses. It was Thanksgiving soon after I arrived, so the Thanksgiving dinner became a welcome dinner with everyone present.

As I said earlier, my husband had contracted the farms of two families called Stoker and Nygren. Mrs. Stoker was older, and she was very

helpful to me. She showed me how to bake and cook, and helped me with Western manners and customs. Both families were very nice people. We still visit with Mrs. Nygren in Parlier.

MRS. GOTO: What about your children? Where were they born?

MRS. MIZUKI: When I had my children, I went to Fresno to a Japanese hospital. We had bought an automobile soon after I arrived. It must have been a maternity hospital operated by Eda-san and another person. Both must have been midwives. I stayed there for several weeks each time. Only my youngest was born at home.

MRS. GOTO: When did you come to Sanger?

MRS. MIZUKI: We came from Parlier to Sanger in 1923. My husband worked for the La Paloma Ranch. We also had a short stay in Dinuba. He always raised grapes. He generally farmed 50 acres or more. Eventually we came to Sanger to the present ranch which we purchased.

MRS. GOTO: Did you help with the farming at all?

MRS. MIZUKI: I never worked regularly on the farm as some of the other women did, but I helped when we were shorthanded, particularly after the war. And I generally helped during the busy harvest seasons. Most of my time was spent at home, particularly as I never learned to drive.

MRS. GOTO: What happened to your ranch during the war?

MRS. MIZUKI: During the war, the ranch was taken care of by our neighbor Mr. Henry Schafer. We were fortunate that most things came through the war fairly well, though they had used the tools and machinery, and the house had been lived in. But things were cleaned up by the time we came back from camp.

MRS. GOTO: How many children did you have?

MRS. MIZUKI: We have four children. Our oldest son Henry is in St. Louis, and is a commercial photographer. He has two sons both attending college now. He married his wife after the war in St. Louis. She is a Nisei and was raised in Escalon, near Stockton.

My older daughter Tsukino lives with me and is with the Nisei Farmers League. My younger son Gakuji also lives with me and farms the ranch. My youngest daughter Sachiye is married to Sateshi Kuwamoto. They have three children, a boy and two girls.

MRS. GOTO: When did your husband pass away?

MRS. MIZUKI: My husband passed away in 1976, two days before reaching his 88th birthday. He had a heart attack. He went suddenly without suffering. He had just had his glasses fixed and his dentures refitted, and he had enjoyed his dinner for the first time in quite a while. It had rained that day, so he had been studying to renew his driver's license on his birthday.

MRS. GOTO: Tell me about your husband.

MRS. MIZUKI: My husband was always helpful and concerned about the community. He started a Japanese language school in North Sanger. It had about 30 pupils, children from the comparatively large Japanese populations who farmed in that area. The families included the Nishimuras, Iwasakis, et cetera. Since the Depression and the war, the community has broken up as the young people left to go to other places.

At the time my husband started the school, he was foreman at the La Paloma Ranch, and he got from San Francisco a person who could do the bookkeeping for the ranch and also teach at the Japanese school. His name was Takata. After he quit, the wife of a newspaper man called Kamenno was the teacher.

My husband would not think of himself as a community "leader," but he did what he felt would be best to serve the community. For instance, he also arranged for a kendo "dojo" at the hall of the La Paloma Ranch and arranged for kendo to be taught. The teachers were from Japan. The head teacher was called Nakamura, Tokichi. Girls were included in the kendo lessons, too. They took it not for the exercise, but to learn Japanese etiquette.

It was because of my husband's involvement with the kendo group that we felt he was investigated by the FBI when the war started. They came and searched the house thoroughly, but my husband was not taken to the special internment camp.

My husband was not one for learning songs and socializing, but he was interested in helping others and getting things done.

MRS. GOTO: What kind of a background did your husband come from?

MRS. MIZUKI: He came from a business background. His family had a silk factory in Japan, and he had gone through high school. He came originally to Hawaii to bring his older brother back to Japan, but it happened that his brother returned to Japan, and my husband came to California. He must have been in his late teens then. He didn't work on the railroads as many of the young men did then, but he knew someone in Los Angeles who had a store. And he thought he could work there. But he decided instead to try his hand at farming, although he had never farmed before. When he decided to stay in the United States, he called me to join him here.

MRS. GOTO: Have you ever returned to Japan?

MRS. MIZUKI: We did not return to Japan before the war because my husband didn't want to take the children out of school, but the two of us went back in the 60's. Of course, my parents were no longer living then. I had come to the United States knowing that I probably would not see them again. But I still have an older brother and two younger sisters in Japan. We have gone back twice since that first trip--the last time I went alone. We come from Hiroshima, so it was quite different and things have changed. Even in Kaitai-ichi, which is a small village, there is much traffic.

MRS. GOTO: Did you obtain United States citizenship?

MRS. MIZUKI: Both my husband and I obtained United States citizenship when it first became available to us. We studied hard at night school

and took the full test in English. The young Mr. Nagamatsu from Del Rey JACL was very helpful.

MRS. GOTO: What kind of experience did you have when you returned from camp?

MRS. MIZUKI: When we came back from camp, we had no bad experiences as I recall. Everyone welcomed us, and we were able to return to our old home and ranch. Just my daughter Tsukino came back with us as my sons were both away in the Army, and Sachiye was in college in the East. But the neighbors were very helpful. We still have the same neighbors and still enjoy going back and forth sharing fresh vegetables, fruit, et cetera. When my husband died, they were very helpful, and one of the sons acted as one of the pallbearers. We have always had good people as neighbors.

MRS. GOTO: Did you feel your children suffered any discrimination?

MRS. MIZUKI: I don't think so. Perhaps at the start of the war they might have felt some unfriendliness at school and had some minor incidents. In the period after the war, my two sons were in the Army, one with the 442nd in Italy and the other with the Military Intelligence, and there was no problem.

MRS. GOTO: Do you still observe any Japanese customs?

MRS. MIZUKI: We celebrate birthdays Japanese style. I always make "seki-han." For the New Year, I still try to celebrate Japanese style and make a lot of Japanese food and have the children and their families come and enjoy it. The neighbors come for brief visits in the morning. On Boy's Day and Girl's Day, I try to make sushi. I don't display the dolls as they were all destroyed or stolen from where they were stored during the war.

MRS. GOTO: What about your health?

MRS. MIZUKI: I'm fortunate that I'm still in fairly good health and still able to help about the kitchen and the garden, although my eyes are "old." On the whole, our family has been fortunate in that we have all enjoyed good health although we both had major surgeries in our early years.

MRS. GOTO: What are your thoughts about your life here?

MRS. MIZUKI: On the whole, thinking back, we've had a fairly good life. There have been no major tragedies or disappointments. My children have all turned out well.

MRS. GOTO: Do you have any advice for the young?

MRS. MIZUKI: I would tell them to be steady, to be independent, and to avoid being a burden to others; to be a good citizen. If my husband were alive, he probably would have more concrete advice, but I can only say what I feel as a mother.