

TAMIJIRO MORI

MRS. DOMOTO: Today is May 4, 1980. I, Yoshie Domoto, have the privilege of interviewing Mr. Tamijiro Mori in Sanger, California.

Mr. Tamijiro Mori was born February 25, 1880 in Shizuoka ken Kambara cho, Hakone Japan. Third oldest in a family of two brothers and two sisters. His father operated a rice mill and older brother farmed rice land. He came to San Francisco on January 10, 1903 at the age of 23. He worked at Hotel Bismark on Market Street and also at a hospital in company with a niece of Mr. Wylie M. Giffen of Fresno. Mr. Giffen originated the Sun-Maid Raisin Co-op.

The San Francisco earthquake of 1906 left him jobless and homeless. He turned to a friend who lived in Fresno and through this friend he found work at a labor camp with the late Mr. Y. Migaki, who was one of the very early Issei land owners.

On November 15, 1917, his bride Masu arrived from Japan, and together they became a family and landowner. She passed away on July 7, 1966. Mr. Mori has two sons and a daughter, five grandchildren, and 11 great-grandchildren. Kango and daughter Toshi are with him in Sanger. His oldest son Fred Mori, his wife, five children, and grandchildren live in the Los Angeles area.

MR. MORI: I left Japan to come to the United States when my aunt, who had acquaintances, introduced me to a successful businessman Mr. Ide, in San Francisco. Although I did not work for him, he made it possible for me to come here. At that time, I had reached the Japanese military draft age. I reported to the draft board and requested permission to go abroad. It was not easily granted. I was asked how long I would be gone. Although I did not know for sure, I told them that I planned to be back in two or three years. With the promise of reporting to the San Francisco Japanese Consul, I was granted permission. Then I went to the Shizuoka ken courthouse.

There I was asked what my occupation would be in the United States. When I replied that I did not know, they denied permission. I called Mr. Ide who had an office in Yokohama. He came by train and reassured the authorities that he would be responsible for me, and that I would be his employee. So my passport became official.

After I arrived in San Francisco, I worked for a Caucasian family as a houseboy. In the evenings I went to night school to learn English. This school was supervised by Mr. Yamazaki, and there were about 40 Japanese young people enrolled. Mr. Yamazaki was from my prefecture. I was working at the Hotel Bismark when the San Francisco earthquake occurred. The hotel was four or five stories high.

MRS. DOMOTO: What did you do?

MR. MORI: We evacuated to the park, pitched a tent with sheets, and slept there for about two weeks until a relief shelter was established. It was rainy and miserable.

MRS. DOMOTO: Did you encounter discrimination during that time?

MR. MORI: Yes, we were called names. They yelled Jap sukebe-- Jap

sukebe. When I was asked by a Caucasian doctor's wife what that meant, I could only explain to her in broken English that it was impossible for me to explain the word to a lady. She said, "Alright, George (her name for me), I understand."

Those were the conditions I lived under. The Caucasian children were particularly mean. They threw stones at the Japanese; with the earthquake there was lots of ammunition. They picked up rubble from the ground and threw it at us. One of them hit me on the head, and I had to have a Japanese doctor stitch me up. I have a scar to this day.

MRS. DOMOTO: What else did you do in San Francisco?

MR. MORI: I heard that one of the Russian battleships had been brought into San Francisco Bay. It was soon after the Russo-Japanese War. The ship was stripped of all arms and there were four or five watchmen aboard. The crew had been taken to the United States military base. I remember that there were many spectators and someone called me Admiral Togo!

MRS. DOMOTO: When did you come to Fresno?

MR. MORI: I began to hate living in San Francisco. About that time I heard that a man from Shizuoka ken had a restaurant in Fresno, so I wrote to him. He replied, saying that Fresno was a big place and there was lots of room for me. So I came to Fresno.

MRS. DOMOTO: When did you come to Sanger?

MR. MORI: I came to work for Mr. Migaki who sharecropped 160 acres in Sanger and had many Japanese people working for him. I earned one dollar for a 12-hour day. I lived in a labor camp. Soon after I came, Mr. Migaki left that job and bought his own farm in Parlier. My neighbor Mr. Okajima and I bought this ranch together. I bought 20 acres and he 40 acres. This was a hay ranch then. We paid \$35 an acre. I bought the land from Mr. A.B. Butler, a large land developer for whom the Butler Avenue is named.

MRS. DOMOTO: Did you plant grapes here?

MR. MORI: For three years I did nothing with the land except to rent it to a Caucasian man who wanted it for a pasture for his horses.

MRS. DOMOTO: What year did you purchase this land?

MR. MORI: 1908. I paid it off as I was able to by working out and earning money. Since I had no horses or equipment, I had to borrow them to cultivate and plant the grapes.

MRS. DOMOTO: You had a chicken farm, too, did you not?

MR. MORI: Yes. We raised chickens for eggs.

MRS. DOMOTO: When was that?

MR. MORI: Just before World War II, before we were evacuated.

MRS. DOMOTO: You are a member of the Congregational Church. When did you become a Christian?

MR. MORI: In San Francisco, as a Presbyterian. There was a missionary who had been to India. Although he did not know too much about Japan, he taught English to about 50 Japanese people. Many of the students were graduates of college in Japan.

MRS. DOMOTO: When you arrived in Fresno, was the Congregational Church already established?

MR. MORI: Yes, on Kern and "F" Streets. There was Toshiyuki's drug store, across the street a Japanese garage, and my friend's restaurant on the other corner. I do not recall who the minister was. I was the editor for the Congregational Church newsletter for three years and also helped Mr. Araki write news for the Nichi Bei Times.

MRS. DOMOTO: How did you get to Fresno?

MR. MORI: By bicycle. Later, I went by horse and buggy, and later by auto.

MRS. DOMOTO: Who lived in Sanger when you came here?

MR. MORI: There was Nishimura, the Hasegawas, Ogawa, Kanagawa, and a few others.

MRS. DOMOTO: When was Mr. Yoshiki's store started?

MR. MORI: Mr. Yoshiki was not alone, there were others in with him. They also had the Round Mountain for Citrus Farm. The other partners were Tanaka, Jinde, and Nakashima.

MRS. DOMOTO: When was the Doshikai organized?

MR. MORI: Mr. Ogawa and I began the organization. I was the treasurer. It began as the Sanger Seinin kai (young men's association). Mr. Masao Araki and the Nichi Bei Times gave me credit as having organized the club. We met in Mr. Ogawa's home.

MRS. DOMOTO: Did you build the first home that was here before your present home?

MR. MORI: When we purchased the land, a Mr. Naito who had been a carpenter in Japan, came to work with us during the grape harvest. Since he was also a countryman from the same ken as I, he helped to build this house. The Naitos are now settled in Madera. I only paid for the lumber! The lumber came from the Hume-Bennett Lumber Mill in Sanger. The logs for the lumber camp came from the mountains on the flume.

MRS. DOMOTO: Did you encounter prejudice in Sanger?

MR. MORI: Not particularly. There was a rancher who was the brother of the Wylie M. Giffen. He was good to Japanese. I don't remember his name.

MRS. DOMOTO: When did Mrs. Mori come to live here?

MR. MORI: She came later. Toshi's mother did work in the field very much.

MRS. DOMOTO: What was Sanger like in those days?

MR. MORI: I remember the streets were not paved, but kept clean. A sweeper would clean the horse manure off the streets every evening. Sanger was a big town. There was a big lumber company, Hume-Bennett. The sidewalks were made of wood planks.

(This interview was conducted three months after the celebration of Mr. Mori's 100th birthday at the Sanger Community Hall, and sponsored by the Sanger Chapter of the Japanese-American Citizens' League.)