

MASATARO AND KIRI KUBO

MRS. GOTO: Today is July 21, 1980. I, Terry Goto, have the privilege of being in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Masataro Kubo at 2482 North Dower, Fresno, California, 93711.

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. KUBO: I was born on July 7, 1915 in Wakayama Shi, Japan. I have lived in Fresno the longest. I came to Lone Star in Fresno, then to Sanger and worked at three or four places.

MRS. GOTO: Wasn't your father here in America before you arrived?

MR. KUBO: Yes, I am a yobiyose. I lived and worked with my father for five years, marrying my wife after the first two years. We saved our money and separated from my folks after that. In our long life together, we have had successes as well as failures.

MRS. GOTO: How old were you when you came to this country?

MR. KUBO: I was 19 years old and 11 months, and engaged to my wife who later came to America.

MRS. GOTO: When did you come, Mrs. Kubo?

MR. KUBO: I came by myself posing as a picture bride. In actuality, we were engaged in Japan by parental arrangement when I was 15 and he was 17.

MR. KUBO: Our homes in Japan were very close.

MRS. GOTO: How many children do you have?

MRS. KUBO: We now have four children. Our oldest daughter is Sumi who now operates the family farm with her husband. We make our home with them. Emiko Takeuchi married to Shigeru Takeuchi is our second daughter. They owned a grocery store until last year, now they are retired. Our third child Mary Sugii is the manager of a warehouse in Los Angeles. Our fourth daughter Kikuko Tamiyasu's husband George is a CPA and has his own office.

MRS. GOTO: Are your children married to Japanese People?

MR. KUBO: Yes, to Nisei. But two of our granddaughters and a grandson are married to Caucasians.

MRS. GOTO: Have you returned to Japan?

MR. KUBO: In October of 1952 we took a trip to Japan by ship. It took two weeks by ship, and we returned in February of 1953. It was right after World War II, so food was scarce in Japan. But our families were farmers so we had plenty of rice. The natives were on rice allotments. When I visited my childhood friend, he informed me that to obtain two eggs he had to barter with clothes or objects. The farmers did not want cash, they wanted objects which they could not buy.

MRS. GOTO: Did you encounter discrimination in the United States?

MR. KUBO: Perhaps it was the time or the area. I think that those that came earlier, than we, did encounter lots of prejudice, but we did not. In fact, when we were ordered to go to a relocation center, our neighbors pledged to build a fence around our property to protect us. We were grateful for their friendship but felt it would be safer to go with the other Japanese in the area. I think all our neighbors and the Caucasians in this area knew our family, because I was a foreman for farm laborers who knew and trusted me.

MRS., GOTO: What kind of treatment did you get after the war?

MR. KUBO: We had no trouble; our daughters came back first since they were citizens, bought a car, had our house vacated, then let us know so we were able to move right into our home. Before we left for camp, we had just purchased a brand new car. While we were interned, our neighbors wrote saying our tenants were driving around in our automobile, so we sold it to him at a minimal cost. We decided the auto would be worthless by the time we returned! So when we were ready to return, we were without transportation. The year we were in camp, farm produce sold for a good price, but we did not know what happened to it.

When we returned home, the weeds had grown, and the place was so overrun that we were overwhelmed.

MRS. KUBO: Papa was getting too old and tired to tackle all that had to be done, so we asked our oldest daughter and her husband to take over the farm management. We built a new home for them.

MRS. GOTO: Is this the home?

MR. KUBO: No. There was a large two-story house here, but we tore that down and rebuilt this on the same location to avoid paying more tax. We were told that if the house was built on the same site the taxes would be less. We built this house in 1962.

MRS. GOTO: Did your children attend Japanese school?

MR. KUBO: Yes, for eight years. And they also went to the Methodist Church school. We also belonged to the Nippon-jinkai, the Japanese organization.

MRS. GOTO: Was there a Kenjinkai? (Club for people from the same prefecture.)

MR. KUBO: No. Before the war there was a Kenjinkai, but after the war there were very few people from Wakayama. They went to other parts of the United States. We joined the Methodist Church in 1938. We were all baptized by Reverend Hayashi.

MRS. GOTO: Did you belong to the Buddhist Church before that?

MR. KUBO: No. We did not belong to any church. We did not have a religion. We were asked to go to church by the Moritas on Easter Sunday, and we joined without knowing too much about it. But once we joined, we have attended faithfully every Sunday.

MRS. GOTO: Were you a Buddhist in Japan?

MR. KUBO: Yes. In Japan you can almost say that 100 percent of the people are Buddhists.

MRS. GOTO: Please tell me about your father, Mr. Kubo.

MR. KUBO: My grandmother told me that my father left to work in Australia when I was 3 years old. I don't know when he went to Hawaii after that. I don't remember my father. My grandparents raised me. When my parents called me to come to the United States, I had no filial love for them. When my father would order me around after I arrived, I did not take it kindly. They didn't send one cent when my grandparents were caring for me.

MRS. GOTO: Do you remember your mother?

MR. KUBO: She brought my younger sister to America and left me alone when I was 4 years old. When I awoke in the morning the day after she left, our neighbor, who was one of the tenants that lived in one of the three houses my grandparents owned, found me crying. He came to see what was the matter; he carried me to my grandparents' home on his back. I remember that my parents abandoned me, so I have no love for them.

MRS. GOTO: Your father sent for you, didn't he?

MR. KUBO: Yes, but my grandparents had to pay for everything; my fare included. That's the kind of parents they were. My wife came after two years, and she suffered because of my father.

MRS. GOTO: When he called you, was he here in the United States?

MR. KUBO: Yes.

MRS. GOTO: Did you live together?

MR. KUBO: Yes, for two years. They were very hard years. He was so stubborn. We fought fervently. And my wife was caught in the middle. I felt sorry for her. I thought that even if he died I would not pay for his funeral.

MRS. GOTO: Did he return to Japan?

MR. KUBO: Yes, to remarry. We had contracted a 160-acre farm in Sanger and lost it. We had lots of debts, and knowing that the grandparents in Japan had lots of money, we returned to Japan to get the money to pay off our debts. But when we got there, we found that my father had spent all the money on his new wife! So for 20 years we worked to pay off that debt!

MRS. KUBO: We had three little girls, and since his father was ill with ulcers, we had to care for him, too. To earn money, I took my three little children and cooked for over 70 men at a labor camp! We paid off his father's debt. We were told that in America children were not obligated to pay their parents' debts, but we did. I, who had never worked in Japan because my parents were wealthy, worked hard! Those three huge Chinese woks at the Christ Methodist Church; we donated

those. Those were the huge pots in which I cooked two meals a day. The men went to work about 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, so I had to get up early, too. I am sure other Issei worked as hard as I did.

MR. KURO: Those were hard times. We cannot describe the hardship we suffered.

MRS. KUBO: We owe no debts to anyone. We worked hard and paid off all our debts. That was in 1936.

MR. KUBO: We bought our ranch in 1936 in my daughter Hisako's name, and we made a down payment of \$3,000. The place cost a total of \$10,000. We paid one-third down. The property is now priced at over \$30,000.

MRS. GOTO: Mrs. Kubo has a very interesting background. Would you care to tell us about it?

MRS. KUBO: My uncle was a Shosha, one-star general, in the Japanese Army, and my older sister's son was also an officer in the Japanese Army Headquarters. His wife was from a military family. I came from a good family in Japan, but because Mr. Kubo's family had difficulties in America, I suffered, too. There was good and bad during our life, but now my retired life is good. I enjoy going to the Nikkei Center to meet with friends and have lunch together. I have had many surgeries performed on my head and on my back. I have had open heart surgery, too.

MRS. GOTO: You have had lots of adversities.

MRS. KUBO: Yes. But with God's blessings I have lived a full life. We celebrated our Golden Anniversary and our 60th wedding anniversary three years ago.

MRS. GOTO: Congratulations!

MR. KUBO: Many picture brides have celebrated their 20th anniversaries, but there are not as many that can celebrate their Golden Anniversaries, because most picture bride's husbands are 10, sometimes 20 years older than their wives, and the men are gone. Our birthdays are very close, and we knew each other as youngsters in Japan. As a young man, I asked my grandmother to arrange my marriage to the Nishimura girl (my wife) so within a week she arranged the marriage for me, although we were married much later.

MRS. GOTO: Did you know each other before that?

MR. KUBO: Oh, yes. She was the postmistress in our village.

MRS. KUBO: I wore a hakama and commuted to the post office every day for four years. He must have seen me then.

MR. KUBO: I fell in love with her. It was love at first sight!

MRS. KUBO: My face is all distorted now because of the brain surgery, so I don't look the same anymore.

MR. KUBO: We have lived for 63 years together, and have never had any serious disagreements.

MRS. GOTO: Perhaps you have been too busy.

MR. KUBO: I have been grateful to God for his blessings.

MRS. KUBO: I've been at death's door many times.

MR. KUBO: When she had the tumor removed from her brain, the doctor told me that she had a 50-50 chance. So I called my daughters. It took four and one-half hours to operate. When the doctor told me the operation was a success, I was so grateful and happy.

MRS. KUBO: I am very healthy and can still garden and eat whatever I want. However, I cannot taste nor feel heat in my mouth, so I cannot drink anything hot.

MRS. GOTO: Do you have any superstitious beliefs? Such as good or bad luck?

MR. KUBO: No.

MRS. GOTO: Do you go on vacations?

MR. KUBO: One daughter in Los Angeles invites us to come there where it is cool, so we go for a week at a time whenever she comes after us.

MRS. GOTO: Do you go to Japan?

MR. KUBO: No, we don't have anyone there that we want to see any longer. And all our loved ones are here in the United States, so we have no thoughts of returning to Japan. If I had money to travel to Japan, I would give it to my children.

MRS. GOTO: Have you received your United States citizenship?

MR. KUBO: Yes, on June 20, 1979, we both received our citizenship. Now we can vote. We received a congratulatory letter from the President of the United States. We even have our plots at the cemetery so we will eventually become American soil.

MRS. GOTO: Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview?

MR. KUBO: No. Thank you for coming in this heat.

MRS. GOTO: Thank you.