

HARLEY MITSUGI NAKAMURA

MR. UCHIYAMA: Today is August 29, 1980. I, Mikio Uchiyama, am privileged to interview Mr. Harley Mitsugi Nakamura at 7071 E. Dinuba, Fowler, California, 93625.

Before we get into the interview proper, may I have your full name, your place and date of birth, and your place of longest residence?

MR. NAKAMURA: My name is Harley Mitsugi Nakamura. I was born on January 12, 1914 in Fresno, and my place of longest residence is Fowler, California.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What was your father's name?

MR. NAKAMURA: My father's name was Kumaichi Nakamura.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Where was he from, and how old was he when he came?

MR. NAKMURA: He was from Hiroshima, Japan. He came when he was about 18 or 19 years old.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Was he the first member of your family to come here?

MR. NAKAMURA: My uncle was here first; his name was S. Nakamura.

MR. UCHIYAMA: How many years earlier did he come?

MR. NAKAMURA: Oh, about five years.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Was he in the Fowler area at that time?

MR. NAKAMURA: He lived in Oleander.

MR. UCHIYAMA: How far is Oleander from here?

MR. NAKAMURA: About five miles from here.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What was your mother's name?

MR. NAKAMIJRA: Her name was Tomeyo.

MR. UCHIYAMA: When did she come?

MR. NAKAMURA: She came in 1912 from Hiroshima, Japan.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What kind of work did your father do when he first arrived in Fowler?

MR. NAKAMURA: He came as a student. He landed in Seattle but some friends got him into the railroad.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Do you know how long he was with the railroad?

MR. NAKAMURA: I think he was with them two years. My uncle knew my father was in Seattle, so he called him to come to the Fresno area.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What kind of work was your uncle doing at that time?

MR. NAKAMURA: He was a laborer--a farm laborer.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What was your father doing at the time of your birth?

MR. NAKAMURA: He was a farm laborer.

MR. UCHIYAMA: How many brothers and sisters' do you have?

MR. NAKAMURA: Three brothers and three sisters, and they are all younger than I.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Where did you go to school?

MR. NAKAMIJRA: I went to school here at Iowa Grammar School, 'and then to Fowler High School.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Was grammar school eight years?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes.

MR. UCHIYAMA: How far was it to school?

MR. NAKAMURA: About one half mile.

MR. UCHIYAMA: When did your father start farming, actually, on his own?

MR. NAKAMURA: In 1919, when we bought this 40-acre ranch.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Do you know approximately how much he had to pay for this 40 acres at that time?

MR. NAKAMURA: I think about \$28,000 for 40 acres.

MR. UCHIYAMA: All your brothers and sister were born in this farm and all went to Fowler schools?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Were there many Japanese when you began to go to Iowa Grammar School?

MR. NAKAMURA: No, we were the first ones.

MR. UCHIYAMA: In eight years approximately how many Japanese students were there?

MR. NAKAMURA: There were quite a few--about 30.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What was the total enrollment at Iowa School?

MR. NAKAMURA: Only about 150, all told, I guess. One fifth were Japanese. There were many Japanese who bought land in this area since 1919.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Approximately how many families lived in this Iowa School District?

MR. NAKAMURA: They used to call this "Little Tokyo Village," so you can figure it out!

MR. UCHIYAMA: Quite a few Japanese families lived here. Do you remember what year you started Fowler High School?

MR. NAKAMURA: 1928. I graduated in 1932.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Were there many Japanese American students graduating in 1932?

MR. NAKAMURA: There were only about six, I think.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What was the student body?

MR. NAKAMURA: I think it was 68.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Do you remember anything of special interest during your high school days?

MR. NAKAMURA: Nothing special.

MR. UCHIYAMA: How about discrimination?

MR. NAKAMURA: No, hardly any discrimination in Fowler High School.

MR. UCHIYAMA: After finishing high school, what did you do?

MR. NAKAMURA: 1933 was a Depression year, so, I wanted to go to college, but I couldn't make it, so I started farming.

MR. UCHIYAMA: You were the oldest?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes, I am the oldest.

MR. UCHIYAMA: How old was the next one in your family?

MR. NAKAMURA: He was one and a half years younger than I.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What type of farming were you doing at the time?

MR. NAKAMURA: I was diversified--peaches, grapes, strawberries, and vegetables.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What did you do as far as social activities?

MR. NAKAMURA: Church, the YBA, the Fowler Buddhist Church.

MR. UCHIYAMA: When was the Fowler Buddhist Church first started?

MR. NAKAMURA: Around 1930.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Do you know approximately how many members belonged to the church at that time?

MR. NAKAMURA: Almost all of the Japanese in Fowler except a few Christians who separated. They began their own Japanese school.

MR. UCHIYAMA: So, approximately, how many families?

MR. NAKAMURA: About 70 families.

MR. UCHIYAMA: As far as the church, did you have Sunday School at the Buddhist Church?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes. We attended every Sunday.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What days did you have Japanese language school?

MR. NAKAMURA: All day Saturday and half days on Sunday.

MR. UCHIYAMA: When did you get married and to whom?

MR. NAKAMURA: 1939, before the war, and my wife's name is Shizue.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Where was she from?

MR. NAKAMURA: At that time she was in Los Angeles, and she had come from Japan.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Hoy, did you meet her?

MR. NAKAMURA: Through baishakunin--who was my brother-in-law.

MR UCHIYAMA: In other words, Japanese style of marriage.

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What was his name?

MR. NAKAMURA: His name was Masao Nakamura, but no relation.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Nakamura is a common name.

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes. He was from Kumamoto, and we are from Hiroshima.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What happened when war broke out? What were you doing then?

MR. NAKAMURA: I was operating an 80-acre ranch, my dad's 40, and another 40 that I'd leased. Just before Pearl Harbor, I'd made a deal to buy that 40 acres from a widow.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Did you make the deal all right?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes. I made the deal all right. But since we found out that all Japanese had to go to camp, I tried to return that 40 acres, but at the time, the lady whom I leased it from didn't have the money to return to me. So, I just kept it, and my neighbor took care of it for me during the war time.

MR. UCHIYAMA: About how much did this 40 acres cost at that time?

MR. NAKAMURA: It was \$300 an acre, so that's \$12,000. I had \$2,000 as a down payment on that property and the balance was by yearly

payments.

MR. UCHIYAMA: When were you evacuated?

MR. NAKAMURA: It was May 15, 1942 to Fresno Assembly Center. From there we transferred to Jerome, Arkansas in October.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What was your experience in the Fresno Assembly Center? What kind of housing or facilities did they have?

MR. NAKAMURA: It was just barracks, and we had a job. I was security officer.

MR. UCHIYAMA: How long did you stay at the Assembly Center?

MR. NAKAMURA: Until October of that year.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Actually the Assembly Center was the Fresno Fairgrounds?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Is that where the present fairgrounds is?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes. Where they have horse races.

MR. UCHIYAMA: That was the Fresno Assembly Center. Did they have one near Highway City?

MR. NAKAMURA: They called it Pinedale Assembly Center. People from Washington and Oregon came there; none of the local people went there.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Do you remember your experience going from Fresno Assembly Center to Jerome, Arkansas?

MR. NAKAMURA: The only thing that happened was that I had a second child born in Assembly Center, so my wife took the baby on the Pullman train, special you see, and I had to take care of my son.

MR. UCHIYAMA: The second child was your daughter Marlene, and she was born when?

MR. NAKAMURA: Ten days after we got into the Assembly Center, sometime in May, 1942.

MR. UCHIYAMA: When was your son born?

MR. NAKAMURA: November 5, 1940, while we were still on the ranch. There is only one and a half years between the children.

MR. UCHIYAMA: So you had a year and a half son and a baby daughter in the Fresno Assembly Center. Had you been to Jerome, Arkansas before? Did you know what kind of place it was going to be or anything?

MR. NAKAMURA: No, I only heard it was a swampland.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What did you find it to be when you got there? Can you tell us about your experience?

MR. NAKAMURA: We were on this special train and all the curtains were closed while we were going through California, so we didn't know what was going on. After we got into Arizona, we were able to see outside the train windows.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Til then you were blindfolded! Was that Tucson, Arizona?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes, somewhere around there.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Did they tell you where you were going when you left the Assembly Center? Did they tell you anything about Jerome, Arkansas?

MR. NAKAMURA: Just that it was a Relocation Center.

MR. UCHIYAMA: How long did it take you to go from Fresno to Jerome?

MR. NAKAMURA: I think it was about two days and two nights.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Then after two days and two nights, what did you find when you reached Jerome?

MR. NAKAMURA: We found that our barracks were not completed and still being built.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Were you housed right away?

MR. NAKAMURA: They housed us right away but everything wasn't complete yet. We happened to be on Block 46; that was the last block.

MR. UCHIYAMA: How many barracks were there in a block?

MR. NAKAMURA: I think there were 20. Approximately 20 barracks to a block.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Was your mother and dad living at that time?

MR. NAKAMURA: Just my father, my mother passed away in 1939 in an auto accident.

MR. UCHIYAMA: How old were you at that time?

MR. NAKAMURA: I was 25 and not married.

MR. UCHIYAMA: So when you went to Fresno Assembly Center, you went in with your father, wife, and one child.

MR. NAKAMURA: That's right.

MR. UCHIYAMA: When you went to Jerome Relocation Center, how were you housed?

MR. NAKAMURA: By families; my wife, two children, and myself.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Your father was in another barrack?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes, with my brother and sister.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Were any of your brothers and sister married at that time?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes, all were married except for three of them. Ben was in the service.

MR. UCHIYAMA: One of the three boys were in military service. When did Ben go into the service?

MR. NAKAMURA: I think in 1941, before the war. He was stationed in Little Rock, Arkansas. There were lots of Nisei soldiers there.

MR. HUCHIYAMA: Did he remain in the service?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes. Two of my sisters were married; Teruko and Faye are now Teruko Nakamura and Faye Namba. The remaining were Patsy, a sister, and Meso, a brother, neither of whom were married. When we went to camp, Teruko and Faye went with their families, and Patsy and Meso went with our father.

MR. UCHIYAMA: How long were you in the Relocation Center?

MR. NAKAMURA: A year and a half, I guess. I left in 1944 to relocate to Nebraska.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Did you go by yourself or did you take your family?

MR. NAKAMURA: I took my family with me.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Did you go out together, or did you go alone first?

MR. NAKAMURA: I went by myself.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Where in Nebraska did you go?

MR. NAKAMURA: We went to Omaha.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What were you doing there?

MR. NAKAMURA: I worked on a dairy farm.

MR. UCHIYAMA: How did you find this work?

MR. NAKAMURA: I got it through the WRA office.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Had you worked in a dairy before?

MR. NAKAMURA: No.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What did you do on the dairy farm?

MR. NAKAMURA: It was a pretty big farm, and I was supposed to pasteurize the milk. During the shortage of labor, they had to close up the pasteurizing department, and so I just worked in the barn milking 35 cows.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Had you milked cows before?

MR. NAKAMURA: No.

MR. UCHIYAMA: How did you learn?

MR. NAKAMURA: I learned by experience.

MR. UCHIYAMA: How many cows did you have to milk?

MR. NAKAMURA: Thirty-five each, twice a day, with another Caucasian fellow.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What time in the morning did you get up to milk cows?

MR. NAKAMURA: Two o'clock in the morning, and we started at 4 o'clock to milk the cows.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What time was the other milking?

MR. NAKAMURA: At 4:00 p.m.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Saturdays and Sundays included? How long did you stay at the dairy farm?

MR. NAKAMURA: I stayed there until the end in 1945.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Where did you go from there?

MR. NAKAMURA: As soon as the Western area was opened, I came back to my own ranch.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Where was your father in the meantime?

MR. NAKAMURA: He was in Rohwer, Arkansas Relocation Center. They had closed the center at Jerome earlier, and everyone had been moved to Rohwer, Tule Lake, and to Arizona.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Your brother and sister had been moved to Rohwer, too?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Do you remember when you came back to California?

MR. NAKAMURA: In February of 1946 to Fowler. My family and my father came back, too.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What did your brother and sister do?

MR. NAKAMURA: They came back later.

MR. UCHIYAMA: In the meantime, your ranch was being cared for by someone?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes, by our neighbors.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Had they taken good care of it?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes, very good.

MR. UCHIYAMA: You were lucky to have a good neighbor. How old was your father when you came back?

MR. NAKAMURA: He was about 54.

MR. UCHIYAMA: You told me your mother died earlier; how old was she?

MR. NAKAMURA: She was 45.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Where was your brother Ben?

MR. NAKAMURA: He was still in the service. He got back about 1947, if I am not mistaken. By then he was married.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Where was he married?

MR. NAKAMURA: In Arkansas.

MR. NAKAMURA: When you returned, how old were your children?

MR. NAKAMURA: About five and three years old.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Have you been farming ever since? How many acres are you farming now?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes, I've farmed every since. I farm 120 acres, both orchards and vineyards.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Is your daughter a dietician?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes, she is, and she's married. She has two children. My son is a CPA, and he had two children.

MR. UCHIYAMA: You have been with the Fowler Buddhist Church a long time. In fact, you were one of the organizers before the war.

MR. NAKAMURA: I organized the YBA (Young Buddhist Association). Before that we used to have a YMA, Young Men's Association, which included Christians and Buddhists. That split to a YBA and YMCA. It used to be YMBA, and in 1936 they called it YBA, and girls and boys met together after that. We had the first joint convention in Sacramento.

MR. UCHIYAMA: You have attended all the conventions? Were these organizations inactive during the war?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Did you reactivate the YBA after you returned?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes, in 1947, the YBA and the YABA (Young Adult Buddhist Association) in 1949.

MR. UCHIYAMA: You also helped start the Fowler Judo Club?

MR. NAKAMURA: We started that in 1951.

MR. UCHIYAMA: You have been the first president of the Fowler Buddhist Church, President of the YMBA and the YABA, President of the Fowler Judo

Club.

MR. NAKAMURA: I have also been active in the Lions Club since 1951, and the Fowler Chapter of JACL. In fact, I was one of the charter members of the Fowler Chapter of the JACL in 1950 or 1951.

MR. UCHIYAMA: You were the first Japanese member of the Fowler Lions Club?

MR. NAKAMURA: Harry Hiraoka was first, then Yosh Honda, then me. Tom Kamikawa joined later.

MR. UCHIYAMA: That was 29 years ago?

MR. NAKAMURA: Next year will be 30 years of perfect attendance.

MR. UCHIYAMA: You served as the president, secretary, on the Board of Directors--practically every office!

MR. NAKAMURA: Except treasurer.

MR. UCHIYAMA: You have been a Fowler Chamber of Commerce member, and in connection with your farm work, you have been with the Raisin Bargaining Association. What is the Raisin Bargaining Association?

MR. NAKAMURA: They more or less stabilize the price of the farm products. A group of farmers get together to bargain for better prices, and I have been treasurer since its inception.

MR. UCHIYAMA: You were one of the charter members, weren't you? Weren't you the secretary-treasurer when it was formed?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes, in 1967. I am presently treasurer of the Raisin Bargaining Organization.

MR. UCHIYAMA: You are also a member of the Nisei Farmers League since its inception?

MR. NAKAMURA: I was the chairman of that when it was begun and president of the Fowler chapter. The Fowler Buddhist Church formerly belonged to the Fresno Betsuin, and I was chairman of the Central California Division of the Buddhist Churches of America, both in 1966 and 1967 (two terms). I was also on the Board on the BCA of Central California for two years. I am on the Board of Directors for the Federal Committee Raisin Administration Committee.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What is that?

MR. NAKAMURA: It controls the raisin variety and regulates grading, quality controls, and inspection of dried fruits.

MR. UCHIYAMA: In Fowler, there is the Central California Farmers Coop. How long has that been in existence?

MR. NAKAMURA: It was when Mr. Shirakawa was alive. It must have been around 1952.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What was the Central California Coop?

MR. NAKAMURA: The main object was to buy products at wholesale and get the benefit of the prices to the members.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Who were the members of the coop?

MR. NAKAMURA: They were the growers, farmers in Central California.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Was this limited to the Japanese people?

MR. NAKAMURA: No, to anyone who wanted to join.

MR. UCHIYAMA: You were an officer of the organization for a long time?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes, I am the treasurer now.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What are your hobbies?

MR. NAKAMURA: Fishing.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What kind of fishing, mountain streams, ocean?

MR. NAKAMURA: Any kind, you name it. But as I get older, I don't have time to go fishing any longer.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What do you do?

MR. NAKAMURA: I don't know what I am doing--taking care of the grandchildren and farming.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Do you recall any kind of discrimination aimed at you because you were Japanese-American?

MR. NAKAMURA: No, the only experience we had was when we got back from camp in 1946. We didn't know it but some of the people living over here attempted to burn down the houses of the Japanese around here, and accidentally they burned the house across the street instead of ours. They thought that house belonged to a Japanese.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Who did it actually belong to?

MR. NAKAMURA: An Armenian family.

MR. UCHIYAMA: That was the racial experience you had. Any other experiences like that?

MR. NAKAMURA: No, not that I know of.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What major ethnic groups comprise your neighborhood? What nationality?

MR. NAKAMURA: Caucasians like Mr. Blayney, who really helped us out when we just came back; and Mr. Harding, another old-timer who took care of our ranch.

MR. UCHIYAMA: You had a good neighborhood with the least amount of bad feelings?

MR. NAKAMURA: Correct.

MR. UCHIYAMA: What suggestions do you have for young people?

MR. NAKAMURA: Well, I hope some of the young people will take over the farming.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Is your son going to take over the farm?

MR. NAKAMURA: Sure doesn't look like it now.

MR. UCHIYAMA: He helps on the farm?

MR. NAKAMURA: I think he does because he doesn't want me to sell it.

MR. UCHIYAMA: So, he has an interest in it?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes, he has an interest in it.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Finally, Mr. Nakamura, it shows that you were not in the military service, was that because you worked on the farm?

MR. NAKAMURA: Yes, also, I had dependents.

MR. UCHIYAMA: Farm work was essential, raising food, so you were exempted from military service.