

MR. LOU HARUO MIYAMOTO

This is a statement by Mr. Lou Haruo Miyamoto whose father, the late Mr. Gunzo Miyamoto was one of the influential pioneers in the Fresno and Caruthers area. Mr. Lou Miyamoto's current address is 12165 South Fig Avenue, Caruthers, California, 93609.

I am Lou Haruo Miyamoto, age 61, born on 10 February 1919 in Monmouth, California (just a few miles away from my present homesite) to Mr. and Mrs. Gunzo Miyamoto, both migrants from Hiroshima, Japan.

My father was born on February 14, 1890 in Kabe-cho, Nakashima, Hiroshima, Japan and his place of longest residence was the Bowles area. He left Japan in the year 1905 to fulfill his constant desire to absorb whatever he could find (knowledge). His hopes to satisfy his desires in Japan were so slim his teacher, knowing of his wishes, suggested he go to America to gain knowledge. In October of the year 1905, he arrived in Honolulu, Hawaii aboard the freighter Kobchick. Then aboard the freighter Kinao he traveled to the island of Maui and worked in the Kanapali area for about eight months at which time he set sail for California, arriving on June 26, 1906.

He worked in the Northern California area, working in homes, in charge of hotel, et cetera. But he felt there was more future in the fields, but he didn't care for the uneven terrain and difficult soils in the northern part of the valley. Just prior to his marriage to Chiyono Oshita in 1914, he worked in the Central California, mainly in the Clovis-Reedley area. He heard about the sandy loam in the Bowles-Monmouth area. In 1919, he purchased his first 40 acres of land which had 10 acres of two-year old vines and 30 acres of beautiful barley which my father though was as level as a table top, but when the barley was mowed for harvest, it was a different picture.

After making considerable improvements, he sold this 40 acres with the intent of going to Japan to visit. However, due to a mix-up in obtaining passports and visas, the trip was canceled, so they bought another 40 acres in the Bowles area. During the era of the "Great Depression," he couldn't keep up the payments, losing the land. He wasn't sure whether it was good or bad, but the first 40 acres that he had sold at a profit was returned to him, so he moved back to Monmouth, which remains our home 'til today. My parents talked about how hard it was to have to make land payments during those difficult years. It all sounded good to own your land, but the constant pressure was always present. They had to work doubly hard. They lived in this area (aside from evacuation period) until retirement in 1963.

My father was active in many community activities. He was a member of the Kenjinkai, the Japanese language school, Judo Club, and the local Lions Club, and was a member of the local school board.

Some of the awards and commendations he received were as follows: Green and White Medal from the Japan Agriculture Society, Red and White Medal (one degree higher than the Green and White medal) from the Japan Agriculture Society, 5th Degree Treasure from the Japanese Government (Kungoto Zuihosho), Recipient of the Foreign Born Citizen of the Year from the International Institute of Fresno, Inc., as well as Recognition from the Farmers Cooperative of which he was a charter member, the local Strawberry Exchange, and the Fresno Betsuin.

There were four children in our family. The oldest was Shigeko who was born in 1915 and is now married to S. Nakata, who is a retired gardener in Southern California. The next is Elsie, born in 1917, married to a farmer John Morita in Reedley. I am next, and James, born in 1921, is the youngest also a gardener in Southern California.

As youngsters, we had very little of anything, toys, clothes, et cetera. But unlike the youths of today, we were very happy creating our own toys, tree houses, games, pets. Somehow our parents, through their sacrifices, always provided all of the four children with adequate and sufficient food and clothing.

Life during the late 20's and all of the 30's was hard for all of us. Money was very scarce, but no matter how hard any of us worked, we never expected to be compensated for our efforts. Knowing that we would be taken care of when the time came, or perhaps we were a more close-knit family than we had imagined or realized. Even as a youngster I can still remember how wonderful it felt when the tasks and chores were completed through the cooperation of the entire family; also knowing that it made it a little easier for our parents.

Looking back, although much time was spent diligently working the soil, I remember the days of the Model-T and Model-A's as the growing-up years. Our lives seemed to be revolving around the Sunday School, Japanese School, the oratorical contests, undo-Kai, basketball, baseball, annual community picnics and dating, fishing down at the neighboring slough, plus being involved in all of the high school activities. So, we were never really bored. During these carefree days, we tried hard to keep our heads and feet on the ground, and I believe reasonably successful in building trust and confidence amongst our schoolmates and neighbors; thereby overcoming any prejudice that could have easily emerged at the drop of a hat. Our permanent neighbors, as a rule, were very good to us. It was a mutual situation as they were happy to have dependable neighbors, too.

All of the various activities provided us by our parents during these very hard years were good for us, a chance to face various situations and problems, good and bad, enabled us to cope with and to make sensible decisions when it was required.

The Nisei depended on actually doing their utmost where the results and achievements were visible and noticed by the rest (Caucasian) of the community; very seldom making any vocal demands. So, in the 30's, you saw or read about the Nisei leadership and excellence in the academic world as well as sports, especially in the high school level.

The emphasis, no matter how lightly and innocently it was applied, was always on honesty, truthfulness, loyalty, and to do our utmost. Dishonesty, failure or any unpleasant happenings were frowned upon; always a lesson to be learned, don't let it happen in our family. Since this attitude existed in practically all of the Japanese families, our Japanese community was a unique ethnic group; no crime, industrious, clean, loyal, churchgoing, community minded. It is no wonder discrimination was kept at a minimum.

I'm sure that this reputation that followed the Japanese was the reason why three other Nisei and I went through elementary and high school

mixing well, receiving our share of academic and athletic awards, and assuming various offices in our classes and student body.

Upon graduation from high school, I immediately went into farming. In those days, farming was hard physically. And, being the older son, I assumed the responsibility without a complaint. To go on to higher education with my Caucasian friends was my strong desire. But to help my family, plus noticing that many Japanese-American out of college were having a difficult time obtaining employment in many fields, helped me to decide to stay on the farm.

When "Pearl Harbor" came around in December 1941, we had just finished our church league basketball game. We came home, everyone of us were quiet knowing the seriousness of the situation. At this time, all of us had already registered for the draft, and some Nisei had already volunteered or had been drafted. I couldn't help but feel resentment toward the country of my parents. I just couldn't understand what Japan hoped to gain by this action that caught our country flat-footed. The loyalty of the Nisei was never in doubt; but, it was so frustrating to be in this situation, war between our parents' homeland and my country. History tells us that many countries were aware of the foothold that Japan was gaining on the mainland of Asia, in the Chinese and Manchurian area, so in order to curb this aggressiveness we were forcing an economic boycott on Japan who, as in the present, imported all her raw materials in order to survive. The diplomatic corps was helpless as the military had the power in Japan, so they launched an attack that "awakened" the sleeping giant." Today, the OPEC Nations are doing the same to the United States by curtailing the shipment of valuable fuel and increasing the price on what does enter here.

As mentioned so many times in previous paragraphs, because of our status in schools, reputation that the Japanese community had earned through hard work and honesty, our good neighbors were reserved and not openly hostile. However, with the casualty list from the Pearl Harbor attack and other fronts coming in, more and more vandalism and discriminatory acts began to emerge. Our neighbors of many years were usually sympathetic and good to us, but some of the migrants took advantage of the situation and let us know they were around.

A short time after Pearl Harbor, I was inducted into the armed forces. Thinking back to those days, none of the Nisei that I knew panicked under the very awkward situation. We didn't have any discussions about our predicament. We knew that we would serve in the United States Armed Forces when the time came. It was a very sad state of affairs, but our parents knew that we were reacting as we had been taught from our younger days. To be honest, dedicated, loyal to the family, friends, and above all, to the only country we knew.

I went to basic training in Arkansas with the rest of the Nisei GI's. In all cases except in a few isolated instances, the Nisei GI performed true to form and set a good example. I felt discrimination in the Army when I was refused acceptance in the OCS (Officers Candidate School), the reason given was "for the convenience of the United States Army." I had applied for OCS before completing basic training because many of the NCO (Noncommissioned Officers) in the regular Army, in my opinion, didn't have the capability of leading troops into combat. As I had passed all my required tests and clearance from FBI, my being of Japanese ancestry was the only reason for the declination.

About that time, they took our weapons away and loaded us into trucks and trains (GI's of Japanese Ancestry only) and shipped us to noncombat duty, such as dining room orderlies, cooks, latrine duty, et cetera. I remember when we left our basic training camp, all of the Caucasian buddies with whom we had been training woke up at 2:00 a.m. (our departure time) to bid us good luck. We had become close friends. Most of those boys came from the Mid-Western part of the United States.

Around this time, the JACL and other authorities, were doing the groundwork for the formation of the now famous 442nd Infantry Combat Team. We were once again given a chance to volunteer for active duty, not really knowing about the Combat Team. Those of us accepted initially were for cadre duty (NCO) for the 442nd CT, which became a reality when we arrived in Camp Shelby, Mississippi. Our first impression upon arrival in the 442 CT was "Hey, those guys are carrying rifles." We quickly became acquainted with the already organized 100th Infantry boys from Hawaii. We learned to soldier and drink beer.

There was a serious decision to be made for GI's (Nisei) that couldn't accept the fact that their families were living under meager circumstances under guard in the Relocation Camps. This; many of us saw firsthand upon our rare visits as GI's. Even under those conditions, we felt as though we were on opposite sides of the fence, feeling guilty and above all, very frustrated in being so helpless, not able to do anything to help the situation, even though we had our uniforms. This was the time that we had to do some serious thinking, without the necessary details to form sensible conclusions. There was no guarantee of any kind for anyone. Some of my good friends stood their ground demanding some clarification as to what could be forthcoming. Things were very dark, because as GI's in uniform, orders were out to shoot any Japanese in the West Coast. Of course, we ignored this and came out to California. Eventually, decisions were made. Some of us went to Shelby to train to be troop leaders; some refused. To this day, my feelings are for these friends. They had the courage to stand up against the Army, because no satisfactory answers were available. Today I'm happy that everything turned out as it did, and we're doubly happy to be living in the United States of America where situations such as these, can arise; but, if one is patient, things work out.

The 442 CT set all kinds of records during their training in Camp Shelby. Although, on the average, they were smaller in stature than other units, no unit in Shelby--large or small--dare say anything detrimental or words against us. The results would be devastating.

The highly decorated Japanese American CT is the result of the efforts of the early Japanese immigrants. For the offspring of migrants who were once denied citizenship and the privilege of owning land to collectively achieve this outstanding recognition in a country that at times seemed to turn her back to her children, is an accomplishment unheard of anywhere in history.

I can't say that our childhood days spent in the Japanese community with church activities as the focal point, was the reason for this achievement. I have many friends who live isolated from other Orientals in states such as Wyoming, Montana, Alaska, and Massachusetts, to name a few. These Niseis were just as successful in the service and later in civilian life where they had no one else to help them.

Our parents came from a country rich in culture, interesting heritage, and also dense population. A country rich in history, where many generations before them accumulated history that the Western Worlds can't imagine is possible. The many sacrifices, disappointments, tragedy from war, and nature have gradually molded a very special group of people that we should be proud of to call our ancestors. We are fortunate to have inherited the values and ability to face up to any situation and bounce back as even better and stronger people with exceptional influences to pass on to the future generations.

During an emergency furlough (evacuation) after completion of basic training, I came back to California and actually drove my family to Selma from where they were bused to the Fresno Assembly Center. However, I stayed with my GI buddy the late Fred Watanabe in the Free Zone of Dinuba where I felt I could do more for my family. At that time I met my wife who I felt was an old acquaintance, because she was a niece of a good friend Bob Koga, who eventually turned out to be our uncle. War time, so the courtship was very short, and by the time I entered OCS, and on my graduation, my wife Marion presented me with a daughter named Joyce, who today is married to Shunji Aoki who does managerial work for a large chain supermarket in the new area in Fresno. Joyce has a daughter Traci, 8 years of age, and a son Steven who is now 5 and entering kindergarten soon. To retain some of the Japanese culture, Traci is participating in some Odori lessons.

After VJ Day, the Army gave me a choice as to whether I wanted to be separated from the service (since I had 41 years of active duty) or go to Japan for occupational duty. Every one of my buddies accepted the opportunity to go over and it was interesting to me also; but since many Japanese families were returning to the West Coast and running into difficulty purchasing even food stuff and vandalism of all kinds, being an ex-GI, I thought I could be of some help, so I decided to return home to the farm.

This was the period that all of us dedicated our lives to rebuild our lives from the basic needs, as all of us had to start from nothing. We were forced to liquidate 40 acres during evacuation, leaving us the old homesteads. And since this wasn't for all the family, eventually in 1948-49 I went to Torrance, California where I learned and went into the commercial cut flower business and strawberry farming. Many hard long hours were spent in the field by the entire family.

Around 1961 the Mexican Bracero Program was due to expire and not to be renewed by the Federal Government. Without a dependable labor force, we decided that farming would be impossible, so we quit and in 1963 returned to the old homestead, because my parents were quickly reaching, or had passed, retirement age. From that time we realized that a larger acreage was necessary in the so-called "modern age" of farming. Today my son Grant and I farm our own 360 acres of vineyard and lease additional acreage for cotton. I feel very fortunate that my son has learned quite a bit of the farming game, and I am now in the process of turning over the entire operation to him.

Farmers of my father's era put in long and hard hours, and they had little choice of fertilizer, insecticides, or cultivation practices. Today's young farmers have a whole line of farm machinery to help him succeed, but he must be good in analyzing the soil, an entomologist, a

bookkeeper, a chemist, and a fertilizer expert. He must be an expert in predicting weather market futures, and also a good mechanic, a good manager, and personnel expert. There are so many other things that become a challenge to the farmer of tomorrow. They must be involved in local agricultural organizations as well as marketing coops, such as Sun-Maid Growers who markets our raisins. Also the Nisei Farmers League, an organization that is responsible for the splendid way in which all the farmers in this Central California are growing and harvesting their crops every year. Most farmers take this for granted, but with the Nisei Farmers League standing by, helping both the farm worker and the farmer, we can enjoy a wonderful life on our farms. Without the NFL stabilizing the industry, many of us would be selling out by now.

As underdeveloped countries become more aware and awakened and able to afford the many benefits and foods available in certain areas of the world, progressive farmers in countries like ours have a whole new era of challenge and reward facing them.

The young farmers are going to become a part of a very financially rewarding and satisfying life knowing that their efforts are going toward improving life for millions of people in other parts of the world.