

BUNTARO AOKI

MR. INAMI: Today is March 7, 1980. I, Joe Inami, have the privilege to be in the home of Mr. Buntaro Aoki at 7242 Road 23, Madera, California, 93637.

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. AOKI: My name is Buntaro Aoki. I was born November 9, 1901 in Shizuoka-ken in Japan. I have lived most of my life in Madera.

MR. INAMI: Your father was one of the old-time pioneers in Madera. Will you please give us his name and some of his background?

MR. AOKI: My father's name was Eijiro Aoki. He was born in November in 1868 in Shizuoka-ken. My mother's name was Kiku, and she was born in 1873. My father came to the United States in 1906.

MR. INAMI: Where did he work when he first came?

MR. AOKI: He first went to Denver and worked for the railroad. After five or six years, he came to the Sacramento area and worked at a truck farm. After that, he came to Fresno and started his own truck farm. And in 1916, he sent for my mother, my older brother, and me to come from Japan.

MR. INAMI: When did you come to America?

MR. AOKI: We came to Madera in 1921. Two years later I bought some land and began to raise vegetables.

MR. INAMI: When did you plant your vineyard?

MR. AOKI: After the war. Before the war, my brother and I bought 80 acres of grapes, so we had two places.

MR. INAMI: Is this the old farm?

MR. AOKI: Yes.

MR. INAMI: How did you meet your wife?

MR. AOKI: I met my wife through a baishakunin who introduced her to me, and we were married in 1937.

MR. INAMI: Have you returned to Japan?

MR. AOKI: Yes. We went back to Japan in 1970. After 50 years!

MR. INAMI: How many children do you have?

MR. AOKI: We have six children, and they are all married to Japanese spouses.

MR. INAMI: What do you think of interracial marriages?

MR. AOKI: I think, as a parent, I would like all my children to marry a Japanese person.

MR. INAMI: Would you oppose an interracial marriage?

MR. AOKI: There would be no advantage to do so. It could not be altered.

MR. INAMI: What are your children's occupations?

MR. AOKI: Our oldest son works at a seed company in Salinas. The second one works at a store in Fresno. The third at Fresno Ag as an inspector. And the last son is a nurseryman in San Diego. Our oldest daughter is married. She works as a bookkeeper at the State Hospital in Porterville. The next daughter has just married and is a housewife. They are all college graduates. They have their degrees from Fresno State, Cal Poly at San Luis Obispo, Armstrong College, and from Fredrico Beauty College in Fresno.

MR. INAMI: Were any of your sons in the military service?

MR. AOKI: Yes, two of our sons were. The oldest and second sons; one was in Germany and the other in Viet Nam.

MR. INAMI: Did you encounter racial discrimination during your life?

MR. AOKI: The harshest discrimination that we received was the Alien Land Law which was passed, and we were not allowed to purchase land.

MR. INAMI: Where were you interned during the war?

MR. AOKI: We were in Jerome, Arkansas. We were transferred to Rowher later on. When the camps were being closed, we returned to Madera.

MR. INAMI: What kind of reception did you receive when you returned to Madera?

MR. AOKI: When we reached the Madera railroad about 12:00 p.m., our neighbors had come to greet us and to take us to our home.

MR. INAMI: Who took care of your ranch while you were gone?

MR. AOKI: Our neighbors the Adams, looked after the farm. There were some people from Oklahoma who lived here as laborers and they really messed up the place. There were about five families who were living here, and they had made holes in the windows and doors and damaged the floor so badly that we had to redo all the floors.

MR. INAMI: Do you belong to any organizations?

MR. AOKI: I belong to the Fresno Buddhist Church and to the Madera Nikkeijinkai.

MR. INAMI: Do you still observe any traditional Japanese customs?

MR. AOKI: When our grandchildren were born, we observed Girls' Day and Boys' Day. We always make omochi for the New Year's celebration. Last year, four or five families came to our home and we made omochi

together. We made about 200 pounds of omochi! It was a lot of fun. We used the four bamboo-lined sero (wooden frame in which sweet rice is steamed) and a mochi-pounding machine. After the omochi was made and cooled, we froze the excess for later use.

MR. INAMI: What do you enjoy doing?

MR. AOKI: I look forward every day to reading the Hokubei Mainichi newspaper. I also enjoy going on picnics.

MR. INAMI: What do you read first when you get the paper?

MR. INAMI: I read the news of the world, and then the news of the Fresno area Japanese community.

MR. INAMI: Are you a United States citizen?

MR. AOKI: Yes.

MR. INAMI: Then you must know the history of our country quite well?

MR. AOKI: Well, when we studied for our examination, we went to night school twice a week so we learned quite a bit. That was back in 1965.

MR. INAMI: That's wonderful!

MR. AOKI: Last year I received an extension on my driver's license, because of my good driving record.

MR. INAMI: When did you return from the Relocation Center?

MR. AOKI: The first part of May in 1945. The war ended in August. There was discrimination at that time, and as I remember, we went to buy furniture at McMahan store in Madera and they refused to sell to us, so we went to a Fresno store and had no trouble there.

MR. INAMI: Is there anything else you would like to add?

MR. AOKI: No, I don't think so.

MR. INAMI: Thank you, Mr. Aoki.