MATSUSHIGE MATS ANDO

MRS. EZAKI: Today is July 5, 1980. I, Bessie Ezaki, am privileged to interview Mr. Matsushige Mats Ando of 2501 Tenth Avenue, Kingsburg, California. 93631.

Before we go into the discussion, we'd like to have your name, your birthplace, and the name of your longest residency.

MR. ANDO: My name is Matsushige Ando. I'm 66 years of age. And I was horn May 18, 1914 in Kingsburg, California. Son of Nihei Ando and Chika Watanabe. My parents came from Kagawa prefecture on Shikcku Island. I have lived in Kingsburg all of my life. Except for the two years that I spent in relocation center in Gila River, and the two years that I served in the Army.

MRS. EZAKI: Would you please relate to us the reason why your father chose Kingsburg, and starting from the very beginning, his decision of coming to America? Where he embarked and all the other places that you have heard him speak of? Will you give us a history of your father's route to Kingsburg? What he did along the way, if you recall?

MR. ANDO: I suppose like most of the people who left Japan, he came to America to make lots of money; of course he didn't. It seems that my father left Japan and first
arrived in Hawaii. And after working there for a year or two, found things and conditions not to his liking, so he decided to come to America. From what I can make out, he didn't land in the United States. He landed on Vancouver Island in Canada. After they found out that they didn't land in America, most of the people began to drift into Washington across the straits and found work around the Seattle area. I heard him talking about little towns
such as Auburn, Tacoma, Renton, and Pasco in Washington where he worked at various jobs. Apparently, he must have stayed there a couple of years until he saved enough money to head out for California. Why he headed out for California I don't know. But it seemed as if he had some friends in the Fresno area. Friends or relatives in the Fresno area with whom he thought that might be of help to him, so he started out this way. I used to hear him talking about hitchhiking along the railroad tracks and sleeping in haystacks, begging for food at small stores along the road until he finally reached Fresno, sometime around 1910.

MRS. EZAKI: Will you tell us about what year you think your father landed in Vancouver, Canada?

MR. ANDO: He said it was 1905.

MRS. EZAKI: When he came down to Fresno, you say it was 1910?

MR. ANDO: It must have been something around 1910. Four years or five years after landing in Vancouver.

MRS. EZAKI: When he arrived in Kingsburg, what do you imagine he saw here at that time--you say it could have been some friends in Fresno. Was there some relative or friend in Kingsburg? Is that why he chose, or he just drifted to Kingsburg and decided this was the place.

MR. ANDO: I think he just drifted over here. Just happened to land in town and started to get jobs, work around the farms.

MRS. EZAKI: Do you recall if there was any other Japanese when he arrived in Kingsburg?

MR. ANDO: Oh, surely, there must have been. There must have been other Japanese here, because he must have come here because he could get some help.

MRS. EZAKI: I hear that your mother and your sisters were left in Japan. When did they arrive here in Kingsburg to join him? Did he call for them, is that the reason they came?

MR. ANDO: I suppose that after he worked and saved some money, he as able to call for them. As I understand, after they arrived here, oh 1910 or 1911 or 1912. Soon after they
arrived they established a small store and a boardinghouse in the city of Kingsburg.

MRS. EZAKI: At that time, you were not born yet?

MR. ANDO: No.

MRS. EZAKI: So, you wouldn't know. But as you grew up, were you born in the town of Kingsburg or were you born on the Island?

MR. ANDO: No, no. Somebody bought the place where my father and mother were running the boardinghouse, so they had to move out, and they moved out into a rural area about four miles south of Kingsburg. They bought themselves a little farm.

MRS. EZAKI: Before they moved out, who were the other families that were in business or in town when your father and mother were in business?

MR. ANDO. I don't know. They never talked about it. There must have been other people in business there. However, they never talked about it.

MRS. ELAKI: Your parents bought the ranch on the island. How many acres was that? What year was it when they bought the ranch?

MR. ANDO: I think they bought that ranch in 1912.

MRS. EZAKI: Do you remember growing up on that farm?

MR. ANDO: Yes.

MRS. EZAKI: Do you remember the neighborhood that you were in and any Japanese families around that area where you bought your farm?

MR. ANDO: My first recollection of life was of many people coming and going; people who were repairing bicycles and people who were rolling blankets and bedrolls. People who were packing suitcases and cardboard boxes with personal belongings. I can even remember a man who, after winding his dollar watch, gave a grunt of disgust and handed me this watch because evidently it would not keep time anymore. All this

seems to come about because my mother ran a boardinghouse on the ranch for transient farm laborers of Japanese ancestry.

MRS. EZAKI: How was life around that time? It must have been good.

MR. ANDO: Yes.

MRS. EZAKI: I heard you went to Japan for a while?

MR. ANDO: Yes, life was good because people were all young and they were all of working age, and they were able to work and make money. Whatever money, even though it was low was good compared to what they were making in Japan. I can remember the people gathering at our place and having big dinners. Fish dinners. They would drink and sing and have a grand time. But that soon ended because in 1918 my mother died, because of the influenza epidemic, and the people drifted away and never came back again.

Like all children of that time, I started school at age six. The school was a one-room country school. One teacher and two grades, I and another Japanese girl being the only Oriental children there. Soon the other girl was skipped to third grade in another school, and I was the only Oriental there. However, with other Armenians, Mexicans, and Italian minorities we rambled along and got second grade education until we went to the third grade in town.

MRS. EZAKI: Let's talk about the early Japanese community in Kingsburg. Do you remember what prefectures in Japan the early immigrants came from?

MK. ANDO: There were many Hiroshima people here. Kingsburg was full of Edajima people, Edajima being a small part of Hiroshima, some from Kumamoto-ken. And of course, there was a lot of Aichiken people, too. Like Furuhashi, Mizutani, Yagi. There was a lot of Aichiken people. They had a strong community.

MRS. EZAKI: Were all these people strong Shinshu Buddhists?

MR. ANDO: Aichiken people were Higashi. At that time there used to be a Higashi bonsan (minister) in Parlier. There were two branches, Nishi and Higashi, they were both Shinsu sects.

MRS. EZAKI: What do you remember of the Selma Japanese School?

MR. ANDO: I went a couple of years to the Selma Japanese School, with some other Kingsburg children. There was no gakuen (Japanese school) here yet. It was not started until 1927. So us people on the island went to Selma. There was a lot of people on the island, about 10 families, in those days.

MKS. EZAKI: Really! So there was a lot of children, too.

MR. ANDO: Yes, a lot of Nihonjin children.

MRS. EZAKI: Was there some plan of starting a Japanese school on the island area?

MR. ANDO: Well, I don't know. They were talking about it and pretty soon they says, oh, phooey, we'll go to Selma, So they all went to Selma. Later some went to Fresno
Betsuin to Japanese school.

MRS. EZAKI: When they started a gakuen in Kingsburg, didn't they start it in a small house?

MR. ANDO: No, they built that big hall the first thing. On the grounds there was a small house, and at first I think they rented it out as a residence, and Mike Iwatsubo's folks were living there.

MRS. EZAKI: I think they only lived there briefly.

MR. ANDO: Yes, a year or so. They lived there for a while, and then another family lived there for a little while. And after they moved out, and pretty soon the gakuen began to use it for classrooms. I am not sure since I didn't go long, but Dad had to have me help on the farm so I never went to Japanese school after that. The trouble with that big hall was, there was no classrooms in it, just a stage and a big hall with a room on the back. If you have a bunch of kids together you have to have compartments, otherwise they'll be bothering each other. So they used that other small house. They knocked out some walls and used it as classrooms. I don't know how long they used it. Let's see, who was teaching
over there when the war started?

MRS. EZAKI: I think it was Araki sensei before the war. Where was Mrs. Taira teaching before the war?

MR. ANDO: Oh, yes, she was here, too. But I didn't go to school when she was around.

MRS. EZAKI: While you were going to public school, what means of transportation did you have, and what sort of games did you play at school in your primary years? There was no bus, I believe.

MR. ANDO: Oh, yes. When we went to country school there was no bus.
But after we got into third grade a bus picked us up at our house, and took us into town. We had bus transportation which was in 1923. The kind of games we played were the usual games; baseball, spinning tops, and flying kites, hide and go seek, and marbles. Games like hopscotch, running races. We'd go fishing, sometimes we'd go hiking up and down the rivers. See what the country looked like.

MRS. EZAKI: May we have you recall some of your activities in your youth, like in high school years? Would you tell us about them?

MR. ANDO: My high school years were very uneventful. I didn't take part in any sports or speech contests or debating teams. But I took the usual courses of mathematics, science, and English, which I thought were necessary for my life. I studied hard in them, and I think I benefited by them.

MRS. EZAKI: Were there any special teachers that you recall, some humorous experiences or pranks you or the kids played on each other?

MR. ANDO: Most all of the teachers I had were wonderful. They helped

us to be good students. I studied hard and tended to my business. I didn't play any pranks nor did I cut classes.

MRS. EZAKI: Did they used to ditch classes?

MR. ANDO: Yes, they did. A lot of people used to cut class and didn't come to school. But I stayed in school and studied hard. As a result I got good grades, and when we graduated I was number three in the class, high school that is.

MRS. EZAKI: What do you remember that the Kingsburg High School had achieved while you were at that school?

MR. ANDO: Yes, at that time in 1930, the Kingsburg football team almost won the valley championship. Also the baseball team almost won, wait--I think they did win the valley championship.

MRS. EZAKI: The baseball or the football? The football did?

MR. ANDO: I think the baseball won the valley championship. The football almost won, but they didn't.

MRS. EZAKI: What kind of nationalities were on this team?

MR. ANDO: There were very few Nisei athletes at that time. Most were pretty small in stature and couldn't qualify in varsity football. Mostly Caucasians and Armenians.

MRS. EZAKI: Were they very big?

MR. ANDO: Yes, they were all hig. They were all much larger, weighed in the neighborhood of 200 pounds compared to the average 125 for us Orientals. So we couldn't compete in any sports at all.

MRS. EZAKJ: Who was the coach at that time, do you remember?

MR. ANDO: Yes, I remember him. He still comes around to the reunions. His name was Bunger.

MRS. EZAKI: What do you remember of him?

MR. ANDO: He was a nice man. A nice man devoted to his profession. I think he treated all of us very nicely.

MRS. EZAKI: There was no prejudice?

MR. ANDO: No, there wasn't.

MR. EZAKI: All during this time, growing up and in high school?

MR. ANDO: There was some, but then you've got to expect that. Early in life I realized that just being as good as the Caucasians wasn't enough. If we were to get anyplace in life, I realized that we had to excel. Instead of taking a negative attitude, I exerted the best efforts that I had, and I knew that we had to work harder, complain less, try hard, and work if we wanted to get anyplace. I think that that's the way we've got to do it.

MRS. EZAKI: Was there any social life at that time, that the Niseis were allowed to participate in, folks were pretty strict.

MR. ANDO: Yes, I think there was. Within the restrictions of our finances, I think we did pretty well. Of course, there was no social life intermingled with the Caucasians, none at all you might say. But among the Nisei themselves, I think they got along pretty well together. And we had our parties, and picnics, and get-togethers which made life fairly interesting.

MRS. EZAKI: What role and how influential was our Buddhist Church here in Kingsburg, and will you relate how we were affiliated with the Fresno Betsuin or the Fresno Buddhist Church in this area in Kingsburg?

MR. ANDO: Buddhist church activities began early. There were Issei pioneers who were very interested in that. They tried to get us organized into young Buddhist groups, which would participate in church activities. In that line in Selma, when we were attending Japanese school there, they organized what was known as the Visaka Club. The club of young girls, young Buddhist girls, which organized themselves in traditional Buddhist activities. Seems like the boys were left out, I don't know why. When Japanese school was established in Kingsburg, we came back separated from Selma. Shortly afterwards the Young Buddhist Association was established in Kingsburg. And we participated in the religious activities in the valley with other churches' athletic events, activities such as plays and programs. Entertainment programs were put on by these organizations.

MRS. EZAKI: Do you recall what the names of the organizations were?

MR. ANDO: It was called Kingsburg Young Buddhist Association. It included both girls and boys.

MRS. EZAKI: But wasn't there a young woman's organization?

MR. ANDO: Yes, they were first Young Woman's Buddhist Association and Young Men's Buddhist Association. But after a couple of years they combined them and formed the Young Buddhist Association. Activities or whatever it was, was carried out together.

MRS. EZAKI: Do you know if these organizations were really known for basketball or baseball as being very strong in Central California.

MR. ANDO: Yes, athletic events were very interesting. More groups were drawn together because of the athletic events that took place, whether it was basketball or baseball, there was no football. These activites were a focal point and as long as we had time, we would go to them.

MRS. EZAKI: It kind of kept the group close, the church really influenced our lives, and that was where we spent most of our days.

MR. ANDO: Yes.

MRS. EZAKI: What other organization was there under this Kingsburg Buddhist Church, and what role and capacity did you serve?

MR. ANDO: They had these Young Buddhist Associations. I was sometimes

president and treasurer and served in various different capacities. Although I wasn't very much of a religious person, I felt that I had a social duty to perform, and I assisted in it. I think now that I was there too long. I should have pulled away and made it necessary for other people to perform those activities, too. So that others could have to train themselves.

MRS. EZAKI : This is during the youth years?

MR. ANDO: Yeah. I think that I was there a little too long. I should have stayed away and let the younger group take over and run it. Because that would help in their development.

MRS. EZAKI: And their leadership.

MR. ANDO: And leadership development.

MRS. EZAKI: What about sports? Some communities had Japanese leagues.

MR. ANDO: We did have basketball with Chick Yamaguchi as the coach. Also we had a baseball league. He was the leader, and he kind of roused things up.

MRS. EZAKI: I remember when I went to a picnic as a girl, you people had sumo. I guess that was because of Mr. Inouye. He was such a sumo enthusiast.

MR. ANDO: There were also other men who encouraged sumo. Mr. Hanaoka was one. Also there was a man in Kingsburg by the name of Okuda; he used to be a sumotori (sumo. wrestler). We used to have sumo at picnics.

MRS. EZAKI: Did the boys' and girls' Young Buddhist Associations have oratorical contests?

MR. ANDO: Of course, they had them all over. But I suppose most of the orators didn't know what they were talking about since the speeches were all written for them by scholars. I remember attending one oratorical contest in Visalia during 1940 or 1941, where a young speaker was expounding on the Jewish problem in Nazi Germany. Well, by golly, within a year and a half, all of us Japanese in California were in our form of concentration camp. How ironic!

They also had picnics. Every year they had a picnic up until the war started. They used to go up to the mountains, and then they would find a place along the river, until Burris Park got established, and then everybody went to Burris Park. Before the war they used to find some pastures around Traver or someplace and have a picnic out there. Along the river someplace. I remember one time we went way up to Yettem, way up in the mountains.

MRS. EZAKI: That was something. The day before the picnic the young boys had to go up there with shovels and things and remove the cow manure.

MR. ANDO: And fix the toilets and things like that. And then where they have the gun club now, we had a picnic. That gun club area used to belong to Cederquist, Delmore, Cederquist, and Mr. Yamaguchi was a good

friend of Cederquist's father.

MRS. EZAKI: We will now go back to the origin of Kingsburg. How it got its name, and who settled here, and how it had grown through the years up to your youth days. Would you recall how the town looked like, and give us information on the things I have mentioned? Beginning with the town.

MR. ANDO: I can remember when the town had hitching posts along the curb so when the farmers drove into town with their teams and wagons, they could tie their horses up to the post so they wouldn't run away. In a few years that disappeared. I remember my father telling me that he drove a team of horses into town, and another wagon that was alongside of him dropped a big tin pipe, and scared his horses so that they ran away and he was hurt in the runaway, but not very seriously. I remember that incident. When I was a young boy, I remember people drifting their teams of wagon loaded with raisins and fruit or peaches or whatever it was and hauling them into town to deliver them.

MRS. EZAKI: How many horses did it take, do you remember--teams and teams -

MR. ANDO: No, generally they pulled them with two horses. Some people would bring them in with four horses. But one of the things that the farmers were scared of was, the trains would come by and their loud whistles would scare the horses and cause a runaway. So the farmers began to hire people (with motor trucks) to haul their products into town instead of bringing them into town with their own wagons and horses.

MRS. EZAKI: Did they always park right next to the freight cars to load them up?

MR. ANDO: Yes, they had to do that. They had to park right next to the freight cars or packinghouse, wherever it was. But when the trucks came in, farmers stopped doing that because it was too dangerous.

MRS. EZAKI: Now can we ask you how Kingsburg was?

MR. ANDO: Ever since I was a little boy everybody that came into town marveled on how wide the streets were. Even the Japanese people who came into town said, "What a wide street Kingsburg has!"

MRS. EZAKI: Is there a reason for that?

MR. ANDO: Yes, there's a reason. The old city fathers thought they were going to put in streetcar line right in the middle of Draper Street. And maybe on some of the side streets, too. So that was the reason why they laid it out so wide. I bought a piece of property alongside the Southern Pacific tracks, just north of town, and as I was looking through the old papers, there was a right of way granted to a certain streetcar line through our place. And after inquiring around town, I found out the people thought eventually they were going to build a streetcar line along the railroad tracks all the way from Fresno to Kingsburg.

MRS. EZAKI: Oh.

MR. ANDO: And that was the reason why this right of way for this streetcar line was reserved through our property. But, anyhow, it wasn't very long before city streets were being paved and old wooden buildings were changed.

MRS. EZAKI: Who were the people that were mostly in this town?

MR. ANDO: Most of the storekeepers were Swedes, although when I was a little boy there were three Japanese grocery stores. One was Mizutani, one was Furohashi, and the other was Kato. And they all competed against each other for the business that the Japanese people could give them. If the Japanese community could support three Japanese stores, there must have been quite a few people around here at that time.

MRS. EZAKI: These Japanese grocery stores, was it all Japanese food that they were selling?

MR. ANDO: Mostly. They would handle products that would sell to the Caucasians, too. But they sold not only groceries, but general merchandise. Merchandise, clothing, and hardware products. And not only just Japanese groceries, but other products that were necessary for people to use and for the people's convenience. Also, I'd like to mention that on the southern end of town there was a Japanese boardinghouse when I was a little boy, as I remember.

MRS. EZAKI: Were there a lot of boarders?

MR. ANDO: There were a lot of boarders.

MRS. EZAKI: What sort of boarders? Were these Japanese boarders?

MR. ANDO: Yes. Japanese boarders. They were single men who were transient laborers that wandered up and down the West Coast of the United States from Imperial Valley in the south to Washington in the north. Picking and hoeing and pruning and harvesting, things like lemons, grapes—seasonal work. They wouldn't stay at one place more than three or four weeks. Then after the job was done, why they'd pack up their blankets, as I remember, pack their bicycles or blankets or suitcases and disappear over the horizon. The present-day farmers around here said, "Gee, that's the way it should be. Those Japanese labor never stayed around, and we didn't have to support them out of welfare. They just disappeared over the horizon and went to next job." The farmers always used to say, we had them when we needed them, but when we didn't need them, well, they were gone.

MRS. EZAKI: Was Kingsburg a one main street town?

MR. ANDO: No, in the early days, we had one main street in Kingsburg. The city itself, had one main street which was called Draper Street. But the Golden State Highway ran through town, and there was lots of business on it, too. So you might say that the town was composed of two streets: one, Golden State Highway 99, which is known as 99 today, and Draper Street. And I suppose there was equal number of businesses on both streets. As time went on, the businesses on Highway 99 began to slow down (I mean old Golden State Highway began to slow down) and most of the businesses began to be concentrated on Draper Street. There were some few side streets that had

some stores, but not very many. Those three Japanese stores were on California Street, one block away from the main street.

MRS. EZAKI: While you were growing up during the Depression time, do you remember any hardships as a child? Were you able to get enough clothes on your back?

MR. ANDO: It was tough for everybody.

MRS. EZAKI: Put shoes on your feet?

MR. ANDO: I know it was fairly easy for us because we owned our place. I would turn around, think to myself, what about people who had to pay rent? If they couldn't pay rent, they'd get thrown out. To turn around and think about--of course, I didn't think about it then, but right now, you know, we hear about high rents and things like that. People having to move out. Said to myself, well, we own our own place so we never had to worry about things like that. But people who were renting their houses, you know, they would have to put away their rent money regardless, because if they didn't they would have to move out. And I suppose it was pretty tough for them. But down on the island, most Nihonjin owned their place.

MRS. EZAKI: Well, when was the first land law forbidding immigrants to buy land? What was it, because the Orientals were getting strong –

MR. ANDO: The first land law was around 1915. Then they began to make it stronger and stronger and stronger.
MRS. EZAKI: You people bought yours earlier. 19...12, like your sister said?

MR. ANDO: Yes, 1912. If a man had a child he could buy land in the child's name. They were doing that until about 1919. Then they made a law so you couldn't do that either. Well, --

MRS. EZAKI: You had to be of age –

MR. ANDO: You had to be of age. That's what they said. But if they challenged that law, they could have won.

MRS. EZAKI: They should have got a lawyer and –

MR. ANDO: Yeah, they should have got a lawyer and challenged it, but nobody did.

MRS. EZAKI: I think they were too hard up to do anything.

MR. ANDO: That was it. And the people who wanted to do it, (meaning to challenge the law) they would have to have money, if they went around to collect, nobody would help. You're just trying to keep it yourself, they thought. And they wouldn't help out. And I suppose in 1910 and those years when the law was being proposed there was a lot of money collected to fight it, but then maybe a lot of people put it in their pockets, too. So we don't know. So a lot of people got tired, and they said, "No, we don't want to do anything. Let it be, whatever it is." A lot of people buying property in their children's name and they could do it until 1919 and 1920, and then they stopped that.

MRS. EZAKI: And then what, around 1922 they came up with this other land thing that they couldn't buy it at all, for a while.

MR. ANDO: Yeah, well, that stopped it. But they never stopped anybody because everybody would borrow names and buy land with somebody else's name.

MRS. EZAKI: Oh. An older person or a naturalized citizen?

MR ANDO: Nisei. At that time, right next to George Fukagawa's place, there was a man named Ito. Did you ever hear about him? He was a citizen. And being a citizen, he was able to buy land. And many aliens who could buy asked permission to use his o name in the purchase. However, there was an inherent danger in using this procedure. Let us say that the citizen was involved in a lawsuit and lost. All his assets, including the land purchased could be seized to satisfy the debt. Or let us say that the citizen was dishonest. He then could mortgage the property unknown to the alien owner and use the money on a Las Vegas binge or a drunken party or on fast women or on slow horses as the case may be. It was awful risky.

MRS. EZAKI: Just like Mrs. Inouye said, they sponsored, they signed papers for other people so they could buy land, or loaned them money, but they never got it back because they went bankrupt.

MR. ANDO: Never got it back.

MRS. EZAKI: They really had to suffer. She said she didn't go to a movie at all. Everybody, you know, like Mrs. Kimura was saying that your sister put them on the car, they went to Armona to see a Japanese movie. And then sometimes Selma. Mrs. Inouye said they couldn't afford anything like that, because I guess he was a nice man, Mr. Inouye, and was caught in a thing like that. And had to suffer hardship. After high school, did you go into farming right away? Can you relate some of your thoughts along that time?

MR. ANDO: Yes. I did go into farming. Well, in 1932, when I graduated from high school, the Depression was really getting stronger. With the election of Roosevelt as the President of the United States, hope and expectations rose, but things were to get a whole lot worse before things got better. I remember the speaker at our high school commencement in 1932 saying that he could see no hope, no bright spot in the future. He told us, and maybe it was just a joke, but he told us to go and find a job and work for a man who had a big company, and then try to marry his son or his daughter, because thereby you will assure yourself a good position in the company. And at least have a job. I remember the audience laughed at the joke, but it wasn't very loud. As economic conditions grew worse, many businesses in town closed down. I, being on the farm with my parents, saw many of our neighboring farms lost to the banks and to the moneylenders because they could not keep up with their payments. The ironic thing was that the bankers and moneylenders themselves considered these farms as big liabilities and were willing to shove them onto any- body at any price. But there were few takers. About this time, the dust bowl in the Midwest was beginning. Blown out farmers from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, and Missouri began to arrive in California in the quest of a better life. And bad as our life was, things were equally hard for them. You might want to read "The Grapes of Wrath" by John Steinbeck who graphically recounted their

suffering as they wandered
in search of work in the San Joaquin Valley. If you could find work the pay was 15 to 20 cents per hour.

The farmer could hardly pay that, but his conscience wouldn't let him pay less. However, by scraping and saving and hoping for better times, I was able to get enough money to put down on 40 acres of poor land in 1938. But what was there to plant? Overproduction was everywhere. Or was it underconsumption? People had no money to buy California specialty crops; melons, berries, grapes, or peaches. The government was buying all these crops on the farm and letting them rot on the vines as means of helping the farmers out from their problems. Well, take a stab in the dark and plant any crop. And so that was the way I got into melon farming. And if it brought a fair price, it got me my cost of production or a little profit, I considered myself lucky.

Far away in Europe, a man named Hitler started to cause trouble. Roosevelt, who was the President of the United States at that time, started the country on the road to armament and defense. Industries opened which produced ships, ammunition, guns, and all kinds of military goods. The workers who worked there got paid. With it the demand for goods and foods and housing and service slowly grew, and farm products began to be in demand, and slowly the cycle of inflation began, as it continues to this day.

MRS. EZAKI: At this time, may I ask you in regards to all those tough economic times that have gone on since your graduation, how did the Japanese immigrant family in this area sustain themselves through these difficult times? Can you give some points on how they managed?

MR. ANDO: Okay. Well, we've got to remember one thing, one of the reasons why we were able to sustain ourselves through those difficult times was because we didn't know any better. Most of us thought that that's the way life was. We figured that if that's the way life was, we had to muddle through our life that way. Now, if you would take people in our present day and age, and if we tried to put those people, these same people in our present day and age, back 30 or 40 years ago and put them in that economic strait, there would be a rebellion. Everybody would be at everybody else's throat and there would just be a riot and--revolution. But at that time, since we didn't know any better, we just accepted what we got and were satisfied with it. They kept telling us that things were going to get better, so we just worked, hoped, and waited. Although I realize that conditions were not very easy, but then racial solidarity and racial pride and hard work, I suppose, and strong backs, since most of us were young, our spirits were resilient, and we could make it through. And we did. It was hard to do, but we did.

MRS. EZAKI: Now then the war with Japan started on December 7, 1941, how did you take the news of Pearl Harbor and all the following events concerning our people? Would you relate some of the events and how you took the news?

MR. ANDO: Well, to me, World War II began with a terrible suddenness. With hindsight, anybody could say that it should not have been a surprise. You could have seen it coming. But to us it was a surprise. Perhaps because our hopes and wishes blinded us to reality so we could not see the facts that existed at that time. Most of us were numb. The events were so big that it was all beyond our comprehension. All we

could do was to let the events roll on with time. Then slowly it dawned that the eventual consequences of the war was going to catch up with the people of Japanese ancestry.

First, were we going to continue living as usual, going about our business of living, job, working, farming; going to school, church, social life? And, two, how about the Alien Land Law? Is the state going to enforce the law, which was more or less ignored until this time?

And number three, are they going to round us up and throw us in a concentration camp?

Number one: were we going to continue living as usual? Well, no. There was a nighttime curfew. All people of Japanese ancestry were to be at home from sunset to sunrise. No one to be more than five miles from home at any time. No flashlights, no shortwave radios, no cameras, and no guns. Avoid crowds of Japanese people. In the event of funeral or other unavoidable gathering, get permission from the local law officers.

Those were the conditions under which we had to live.

Number two: Alien Land Law. Stringent land law enforcement against Japanese people was discussed by the District Attorney Conference in Sacramento. But soon was declared moot as evacuation and detention programs began to take effect. "Why worry about the Alien Land Law, all the Japs are going to have to get out anyway," was the thinking.

Evacuation; soon evacuation became a reality. All persons of Japanese ancestry were moved from California into inland detention centers located in Arizona, Idaho, Arkansas, and other places. I was sent to the Gila River Relocation Center in Arizona where there were some 35,000 persons of Japanese ancestry incarcerated. The climate was hot and dry in summer, mild and dry in the winter. Life there was uneventful. Some problems, but not major. After a few rough events, during the first week or two, life settled down and the people tried to make the best of it. Arts, crafts, and self-improvement courses, shows and other community events took place. Deaths, births, marriages, and even divorces took place. Eventually, the people made out from July 1942 to July 1945.

MRS.EZAKI: I understand you spent some time in the Army. In what capacity did you serve and where were you located? Please relate some of your experiences during your Army life.

MR. ANDO: I was inducted into the United States Army in June of 1944 from the Gila River Relocation Center. The unit to which I was assigned was all the Japanese-American 442nd Infantry Regiment. After three months of basic training at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, I was sent to Fort Snelling to enlist in the Japanese language school, as the United States Military Service had very few Japanese speaking servicemen. After three months of training in Japanese military language, I was assigned to teach the new recruits; both Caucasian and Japanese ancestry. This was an extremely difficult job, as many younger Niseis were not versed in Japanese nor did they care to be versed. Although the Caucasian counterparts were very sharp in their studies. One had to marvel at their ability to pick up a language not similar to their own so quickly. After two years at Fort Snelling, I applied for and received, a dependency discharge, as my father was ailing, and I had to help him out on the farm. That was in April of 1946.

MRS. EZAKI: Now about this time, the Japanese in relocation centers were allowed to go back to California. Back home once again. Please tell us about those events.

MR. ANDO: On January 1, 1945, General Dellos Emmons of the Western Defense Command revoked the evacuation orders against Japanese. So, my father, mother, brother, and sister, who were still in Gila River Relocation Camp at that time, applied for and got a release from the center. They returned home to California about the middle of January 1945. Previous to that, in October of 1944, I received a furlough from the Army, and I returned to California to take a look at our farms and general conditions in our locality. I saw the conditions were good, our farms were being taken care of properly. And at that time talking with the people in the streets of Kingsburg, they said that there was some rumor that by January 1st the evacuation orders were going to be rescinded. Well, I didn't pay too much attention to that. But it became a reality. And so, my parents
returned to Kingsburg, to our home, in January of 1945.

MRS. EZAKI: When you came back from the war in January of 1945,was there some discrimination here?

MR. ANDO: Oh, sure there was, but you just had to ignore it.

MRS. EZAKI: That didn't bother you people at all?

MR. ANDO. Well, Dad stayed on the ranch, so we don't really know. Kingo (brother) and I were in the Army. My brother Wasco came home, but then he got drafted after a month or so. Dad, Na, and Michiko stayed on in the barn there. I suppose there was a lot of trouble, but then, of course, Dad stayed at the ranch. And then we had a Filipino woman who used to bring groceries to our place. She told us, "Don't go to town," and she never took money. She'd bring the groceries, she'd always buy a lot of groceries. Twice
a week, she'd come over and say, "Don't go to town, don't go to town. If you go to town you might get in trouble."

MRS. EZAKI: After your discharge from your service in the Army in April 1946, did you come home to Kingsburg right away? What conditions did you find your farm in? Can you relate some experiences of discrimination upon your arrival to your home? And maybe some discrimination which your family had suffered prior to your coming home?

MR. ANDO: I came home to Kingsburg in April 1946, hoping to pick up the threads of life that I left in 1942. During the last year of my time in the service, we were hearing of Japanese homes being shot at, Japanese people being harassed in town, rank discrimination at the stores and service stations, and so forth. Hoping that my military service would mitigate the feeling that caused these bad activities; after I got home I tried to circulate around town and in the community. I'm glad to say that by this time that I got home, which was one and a half years after my parents returned from Gila River, that there was hardly any unpleasant incidents in the community.

I don't know just exactly how our farm looked when my father came home, but I returned in April of 1945 with a furlough from the Army, and at that time it seemed that the farm was fairly well kept up. The vines

were not dead and buildings were up and equipment was in fair shape. So, I can say that our farm, although many other farms--maybe many other people wouldn't be able to say that, but our farm was kept up in very first-class shape.

And after they came home, the renter voluntarily gave up the property and returned the possession of the property to my father. So I'm very satisfied with that. I'd like to say
that when I returned in April of 1945 on a furlough to check on the farm, help my father with the chores, I was taking a bath in a Japanese bath. You know those kinds where you
build a big fire underneath a big tub. It was in the afternoon of, about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. I remember my sister was outside attending the fire. And I was sitting in the bathtub, and my sister said, "The radio said that President Roosevelt had just died!" That was April of 1945. I was sitting in the bathtub.

MRS. EZAKI: You grew watermelons. Can you relate some significant events in regards to this?

MR. ANDO: Yes, I grew watermelons, but it wasn't only I who grew them. There were many farmers who grew watermelons in Kingsburg. In fact, Kingsburg, at that time, was the watermelon center of the United States. We would ship watermelons- from Kingsburg to all over. Kingsburg watermelons were very famous. But the interesting thing about it was that most of the watermelon growers in and around Kingsburg were people of Japanese ancestry. Oh, yes, there were other people who grew them, some Caucasians and Portuguese and Italians, but I would say that 85 percent of the watermelons shipped out of Kingsburg were grown by Japanese people.

MRS. EZAKI: Now, this was before the war?

MR. ANDO: Yes. This was between 1935 and 1942. During those six or seven years. In the beginning, most of us were very unsophisticated, and the buyers would practically steal the watermelons away from us. But, eventually, we got experienced and got a little smarter. And, finally organized a watermelon growers association of Kingsburg. We began to stabilize prices, and merchants who dealt in watermelons were not able to steal them from us. But, unfortunately, because of the war, this organization was short-lived. And were it not for that fact, I suppose this Japanese organization, this Japanese Watermelon Growers Association would have grown into something very significant in marketing produce that Japanese farmers produced in the Kingsburg area. Kingsburg has an annual watermelon festival. However, by the time the watermelon festival was organized, and in the running, most of the Japanese farmers had quit. The Japanese watermelon growers had quit and had gone into some other business. So the watermelon festival put some other groups on the map. Unfortunately, I think that was something the Japanese people should have gotten credit for, but did not.

MRS. EZAKI: That was because of the war. If it hadn't been for the war, probably you people would have had this watermelon festival going much earlier.

MR. ANDO: Yes.

MRS. EZAKI: What other crops did the Japanese grow in this Kingsburg

area?

MR. ANDO: If it was farming, it seems that the Japanese people engaged in most everything except livestock and chicken raising.

MRS. EZAKI: Did some people get into chicken raising?

MR. ANDO: No--anything that involved livestock we didn't get into except goldfish. As I understand, before our time, a Mr. Yamagata attempted to grow goldfish along the slough, along Kings River. Apparently he didn't make much success out of it because it didn't last. But most of the truck crops that Japanese were growing, strawberries, vegetables of all kinds, tomatoes, peppers, asparagus, you name it, they grew it.

MRS. EZAKI: Berries.

MR. ANDO: Berries. And then another important industry which the Japanese people of Kingsburg should get credit for was the growing of nursery trees. Vines and trees which
the local farmers set out and eventually grew into acres and acres of orchards and vineyard which we have around Kingsburg. I would suppose that of the vines and trees that were planted locally, perhaps 75 percent of them were grown by the Japanese people until the war stopped their activity.

MRS.LEZAKI: Most of the Niseis are involved in farm related activities. Now, do you suppose the third generation will come back to the farm from the cities or continue their
lives elsewhere in other fields of their choice? What direction or what do you foresee in the future of this condition? In the distant future?

MR. ANDO: I don't think the same number, same percentage of Sanseis will take up farming or agriculture related activities as the Niseis did. We've got to remember that the opportunities for the Niseis was somewhat restricted in the sense that he could not get into the other different professions when he started out. So he had to stay on the farm. Whereas with the Sanseis, his opportunities for education and opening of various different professions and jobs, he has a better chance of making a go of it in the outside world.

Now with the different kind of lifestyle, intermarriage, the mobility of the people as they are today there will be some Sanseis sticking to the farm, but it will be the same average that other ethnic groups have.

For instance, Kingsburg early was a rural community and was 90 percent Swedes. But the Swedish people say that their children are all growing up and going out into the cities, urban areas, getting jobs in town and going away from small community farm-related work from Kingsburg. And I think that the same thing is going to hold true with the Sanseis among the Japanese people. Some who are inclined will stay and continue with the farm. But most of them will drift out into the urban centers and get jobs and government work, or factories, or professions and stay away from farming. Because farming now is getting to be a specialized kind of work, any Tom, Dick, and Harry just can't get in there with a hoe and start hoeing and make a living at it. I think that we're not going to see too many Nikkei farmers. Maybe they'll be like the Chinese. They used to do a lot of farming, but I don't see very many of them farming now. They are doing better elsewhere.

MRS. EZAKI: What was the focal center of our religious and social activities?

MR. ANDO: Until 1927, the Japanese people of Kingsburg did not have a social hall or a church or any kind of building where they could get together for social life. In 1927 Japanese community leaders got together and acquired a lot and built a large hall on the corner of Sierra and Marion Streets. And we use that for Japanese language school,
social gatherings, funerals, weddings, and religious activities. Since it was built in 1927, we used it continually until war started. And after the war started since we were not allowed to gather in large numbers, the building was locked up and was vacant, was not used. After evacuation, or during evacuation, when we were in camp in the winter of 1943, around February of 1943, we read in the local paper, which many people subscribed to in the relocation centers, that the Japanese hall had a fire. Somebody had set it afire, and the fire department rushed out there and put it out. Half had been destroyed. About a month later it was set on fire again, but this time when the fire department rushed out there, they found out that the hoses and the nozzles of the fire engine were missing. So the building was completely burned down. There was an editorial in the local paper saying that those people who were responsible for misplacing or hiding the hoses and the nozzles should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, but nothing came of it. We collected a little insurance on it, but the building was a complete loss.

And the lot remained vacant until 1949 or 1950, when it was exchanged for another acreage on the west side of the tracks. We made a deal with the Cotton Oil Company which wanted our property for exchange for a piece of ground about five acres on the west side of 99, at that time. And on that property we built a new church, a new social hall I would rather say, in 1950 which we continued to use for 15 years. Then in 1965, we built on a new sanctuary which cost us in the neighborhood of $50,000, forty-five to fifty thousand dollars, of which we are very proud today. We're glad we built it at that time because if we were to duplicate that building now, it would cost us $200,000 because of inflation. That is the place that the Japanese community now uses for religious and social activities.

MRS. EZAKI: In conclusion, what are some of your thoughts along the lines of our heritage or legacy that you would like to leave for the generations to come in the future?

MR. ANDO: Well, wanting to preserve the ethnic and culture roots of an individual group of people is an understandable desire of that group. But as times go on we can see that intermarriage of all these people is progressing at a very rapid rate. Hence, in a few generations we can see that the cultural identification of these groups will be melted into to great American society. And only such people as historians, sociologists, and demographers would be interested in studying them.

The great masses of mixed blood Americans would hardly care to be concerned. Lets say that in the year of 2025 a person of Japanese, Italian, Swedish, Arabian, Indian ancestry were talking to you. Would he be personally interested in the history of any of these particular ancestors from a cultural standpoint? No. I would say that only historians, sociologists, and other students of people would be

interested.

Also I would like to make a statement about discrimination that the people of Japanese ancestry are supposed to have suffered. We must remember that all new and incoming groups suffered some sort of discrimination. Not only the Japanese, look at other Orientals; Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans. Also even the Europeans; Irish, Poles, Slavs, Greeks. Each in their own turn suffered in some way. You have to remember that the greed for money was much of the cause. Rules were made and laws were passed so that the other guy wouldn't make so much money. And the other guy happened to be the underdog; the Japs, the Chinks, the Pollocks, the Wops, and the Greasers. But there is one thing that we didn't have to do in the United States, and that is kowtow to the upper class. For, in the United States there was no upper class so to speak. Only money and the possession of it was class, and we had the potential to acquire it. I think that a certain amount of discrimination kept us on our toes. Early in life I realized that just being equal to the whites was not enough. I saw that a person of a minority race had to excel. Either you could sulk and give up, take dope and get drunk and goof off or you could get up and go, work harder, complain less, persevere more, and stuggle. If you are the best heart surgeon, be you black, white, or brown, or grey, they are going to look you up. If you fix a television and it stays fixed, they are going to look you up.

If you bake the best bread in town, they're going to look you up. And you can do it. So get off your fanny and do it, like the Reverend Jessie Jackson says.

MRS. EZAKI: Thank you, Mr. Mats Ando.