TORAO TY ARIFUKU

MR. ABE: Today is August 28, 1980. I, Norman Preston Abe, have the privilege of interviewing Torao Ty Arifuku, a retired farmer at his home in Parlier, California, 93648.

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. ARIFUKU: You pronounce my name wrong. My name is Torao. But everyone calls me Ty.

MR. ABE: Excuse me. And your place and date of birth.

MR. ARIFUKU: I was born in Bowles, California, February 20, 1914.

MR. ABE: Where have you lived the longest?

MR. ARIFUKU: Parlier since 1929, except for the time we went to relocation camp.

MR. ABE: How did it come about getting the name Ty?

MR. ARIFUKU: Well, in school the teachers had a hard time pronouncing my Japanese name. Every different class I'd go to, they'd pronounce it differently. So I decided to have
a simpler name and named myself Ty.

MR. ABE: What was it like in school?

MR. ARIFUKU: I stayed two years in the first grade, because I didn't understand English; because we just spoke Japanese at home. My parents didn't speak English. So when I started school, I didn't catch onto English fast enough.

MR. ABE: Did you have any English-speaking friends or neighbors when you were small?

MR. ARIFUKU: Not that I remember. There were Japanese neighbors. I didn't have Caucasian neighbors to speak English with.

MR. ABE: Did you get along with the kids even though you spoke Japanese?

MR. ARIFUKU: Oh, yeah. I just couldn't communicate with the Caucasians for a while.

MR. ABE: Did you speak Japanese to other Japanese kids?

MR. ARIFUKU: Yes.

MR. ABE: Did you know any English words before you started first grade?

MR. ARIFUKU: Not that I remember.

MR. ABE: How do you think the teachers received you, because you spoke only Japanese?

MR. ARIFUKU: I was just set back one year. Then, after a while, it was okay.

MR. ABE: So you might say you caught on after a couple of years. After two years, you were on your way.

MR. ARIFUKU: Yes.

MR. ABE: What do you remember about growing up in your area as a child? What kind of things do you remember about the "good old days"?

MR. ARIFUKU: Well, we didn't have all the luxuries we have now. We would go into town like Fresno, the parents took us. We were very happy when our parents bought us ice cream cones for a nickel. It wasn't very often we went to town.

MR. ABE: Did they buy you other things?

MR. ARIFUKU: Well, they bought a bicycle because at that time we lived in Fowler. In those days we went to grammar school, and then we went to Japanese school afterwards. So, me and my sister had to bicycle to the Japanese school and back.

MR. ABE: Since you already knew Japanese, what was the reason for going to Japanese school?

MR. ARIFUKU: Well, we were told to go, so we went. We were just little kids, and we accepted what the parents said.

MR. ABE: Was there any religious significance for going to Japanese school?

MR. ARIFUKU: Well, I was more on the shy side. I kind of hated to get up in front of class to speak, because I wasn't very good communicating in front of other people. To get
up in front of other people was pretty rough for me.

MR. ABE: Was it because of your English difficulty?

MR. ARIFUKU: No. It was just I was rather shy. When I had to give a current event report, I'd get the newspaper and find the shortest one.

MR. ABE: What kind of farm chores did you have?

MR. ARIFUKU: We had to pick grapes and prune. In those days we had no tractor. We had mules to do the cultivating.

MR. ABE: Were horses or mules used?

MR. ARIFUKU: My father may have had horses, but when I started I had mules. I can remember going back and forth with the team plowing. Just to cultivate four acres took four days. The tractor can do it in a couple of hours. They just make one pass down the rows.

MR. ABE: What kind of plows or implements did you use with the mules?

MR. ARIFUKU: We had just a single plow to turn over the ground in

spring. Then we made furrows to irrigate with a cultivator. It was sort of V-shaped. You couldn't make just one pass, you had to make one side and make another pass to make the row. In those days, we didn't irrigate as much as we do now.

MR. ABE: I guess I'm still not sure of the term cultivation.

MR. ARIFUKU: You turn the soil. You cultivate, because after you water the ground gets hard. So you break up the soil so it can hold moisture. If you just irrigate and left it
there, it would get hard. The next time you try to do something, you can't do it. You then have to water again, but the weeds would grow. But now with the tractor, you can disc
it right down.

MR. ABE: Did you have other livestock besides horses?

MR. ARIFUKU: Chickens. It was my father's mother's job. They were layers, and we sold the eggs to a truck that came by. They would not only take our eggs but also deliver our feed. We'd get about 15 cents a dozen for them.

MR. ABE: Did you always have electricity?

MR. ARIFUKU: For a few years we had gas and kerosene lamps. Like the Coleman pumps, but we didn't use it all the time. If there was a gathering, then we'd use the gas lamp with a white ash type mantle wick, and you had to pump it first and it was brighter. Then there was also the kerosene which just had a cloth wick.

MR. ABE: Did you have indoor plumbing?

MR. ARIFUKU: No, we had outhouses. We also had a windmill which would pump up the water, and we used to have a tank house 12 feet by 12 feet with a room at the bottom. The tank was at the top so the water would flow down to the house, or wherever.

MR. ABE: What about irrigation water?

MR. ARIFUKU: Many farmers had a big gas engine for the irrigation pump. Either that or they just opened the ditch water. In those days, they didn't have all the fruit trees which take a lot of water. These trees came around the war time (World War II). It was mostly grapes for raisins. When my father first developed that land in Bowles, it was raw land. He planted grapes; Muscats and Thompsons and made raisins. So all you needed to do was to irrigate twice. But now, with table grapes you have to irrigate every 10 days until harvest time. For raisins you quit watering early, so it will ripen and sweeten faster.

MR. ABE: You say your father was the first to plant on the land he bought in Bowles?

MR. ARIFUKU: Yes. It was virgin land. Nowdays your soil has a lot of nutrients taken out already. Whereas on that land, things grew fine without fertilizer. Nowdays, everybody levels their land when they plant. But where you take the dirt away, you take away the rich top soil so the soil below is poor. Then you have to enrich it again with manure and fertilizers. Anywhere you move your topsoil your plants are usually

smaller. So when my father planted in the 1900's they didn't have levelers and planted as is. And so they had a hard time irrigating.

MR. ABE: So in the old days, everyone was growing grapes?

MR. ARIFUKU: As far as I know. There were a few peach trees in Fowler, but they didn't ship it or anything. They'd make dried peaches.

MR. ABE: How did the windmills work?

MR. ARIFUKU: The fan has a tail on it, so the fan would face the wind. When the tank gets full, you have to turn the tail sideways. There was a lever to do that. That way the tank didn't overflow.

MR. ABE: Did you ever climb up the windmill?

MR. ARIFUKU: Yeah, we had to climb up there to grease it. And since it was galvanized, we didn't have to paint it.

MR. ABE: Was there a room underneath it?

MR. ARIFUKU: Oh, yeah, it felt like a basement, because the water tank kept it cool. You could take a nap, and you could keep canned goods there.

MR. ABE: So your dad had the farm, and you'd help with the crops and plowing, et cetera.

MR. ARIFUKU: Yeah, I would help him even before I went to school. I would help him after school also; pruning, harvesting grapes, et cetera. In those days you didn't hire to prune. It was the family job.

MR. ABE: How much did he pay you?

MR. ARIFUKU: Nothing.

MR. ABE: Did he give you an allowance?

MR. ARIFUKU: Not that I know of. But if there was something we needed, they bought it for us. When school started, they got us clothes and shoes.

MR. ABE: What was the reason for your dad coming over to the United States?

MR. ARIFUKU: To make money and then to come back to Japan. Some people did and some were unable to.

MR. ABE: Did he go back?

MR. ARIFUKU: Yes.

MR. ABE: Then what was it that brought him back?

MR. ARIFUKU: He had the urge to farm again. Possibly there were no jobs there, too.

MR. ABE: He must have been an ambitious man.

MR. ARIFUKU: He had to be to come to America without much money, not knowing the language, and still acquire land and plant and develop it.

MR. ABE: What did you do during World War II?

MR. ARIFUKU: We went to the Gila Relocation Camp. I stayed in there for a year or so. Then one of the fellows had a friend who had a farm in Glendale, Arizona, so five of us went there to do seasonal work to get out of camp. Later I went out to Cleveland for about a year.

MR. ABE: What did you do back there?

MR. ARIFUKU: I worked at a small welding and machine shop or factory. They made small parts for larger companies to use. One of the things I made was emergency exit doors.

MR. ABE: Did you get pretty good pay then?

MR. ARIFUKU: Not very much. About 75 cents an hour.

MR. ABE: Was it exciting for you back there?

MR. ARIFUKU: I wouldn't call it exciting; it was a new experience. I was able to visit New York before I came back.

MR. ABE: What did you think of New York?

MR. ARIFUKU: I was fascinated by their tall buildings. I went clear up the Empire State Building, and I could see the Statue of Liberty. I'd be walking down the street and be
looking up at the skyscrapers like a country boy.

MR. ABE: What was life in camp like?

MR. ARIFUKU: It was rather dull. But you got to meet different people from different areas. Since the Parlier area was not one of the first areas to report to camp, many people from other areas (Bay Area, Los Angeles, and other side of Highway 99) would stay with relatives or friends here to avoid going first. So I met a few of them over here in Parlier. So when we had to leave, we'd end up in the same camp. So there were people from Los Angeles, San Francisco, Alameda, et cetera, and were in our camp. So we got to meet people from all over.

MR. ABE: How did you get to the concentration camps? Where did you start from?

MR. ARIFUKU: We got on a train in Sanger. No air conditioning and we went through Indio and Yuma.

MR. ABE: What was the ride like?

MR. ARIFUKU: It seemed so slow and very tiresome. The curtains were drawn, too, so we didn't see too much of the outside.

MR. ABE: Did you have beds?

MR. ARIFUKU: No, we just sat. No beds or anything like that.

MR. ABE: What was your first impression of the camp when you first arrived?

MR. ARIFUKU: It wasn't even ready yet. There were trenches dug all over for the water line. We lived in barracks, and there was cracks in the floor because it was just boards and your barrack would get full of dirt. People who had some money could order linoleum through Sears to keep the dust out. But it was dusty and dirty and hot and those who could afford it bought water evaporative coolers.

MR. ABE: What jobs did you get at the camp?

MR. ARIFUKU: I worked at the mess hall. My brother-in-law's nephew who went to the Tulare Assembly Center at the fairground (and used to live in Guadalupe near the coast) wrote and told us the best place to work is in the mess hall 'cause of the food. So that's why I chose to work there. My wife worked there as a librarian.

MR. ABE: How did you meet your wife?

MR. ARIFUKU: In camp, we were introduced through friends of my family.

MR. ABE: Were you discriminated against?

MR. ARIFUKU: During the war we were in a restaurant in Alamosa, Colorado. My wife remembers a sign on the window, "We reserve the right to refuse to serve you," but I don't recall it. But anyway, we went in and sat at the counter. But the waitresses kept looking at us; they wouldn't even come near us to take our order. If they'd said they weren't going
to serve us, we would have walked out right away, but they didn't, so we just sat there. They just stood there looking at us. And after five minutes, we just left.

MR. ABE: Where were you when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

MR. ARIFUKU: I had gone to Michigan by train and was just returning home. In those days, when we bought a car, I used to go to the factory to pick it up because we could save the freight cost. I was in Oklahoma and heard that Pearl Harbor was bombed by Japanese. I didn't think anything of it. It was in December, and I pulled into a gas station, and the group there was cussing up and down about the "Japs" that they're gonna get 'em and I walked right in there and they didn't seem to notice I was Japanese. I guess they didn't figure I was Japanese and maybe they thought I was Indian since there's a lot of Indians around there. In those days there probably wasn't much Japanese there, so they probably didn't know what Japanese people looked like. So I filled up with gasoline with no problem. When I got to Los Angeles, a cop stopped me and I just told him that I went to Michigan to pick up this car. I showed him the papers. He let me go on.

MR. ABE: When you got back to the farm after the war, you probably couldn't afford to hire workers if you needed help. What did you do?

MR. ARIFUKU: We exchanged labor with our neighbors. Like I'd help him turn his trays, and he would help me load my grapes into trucks for the winery.

MR. ABE: Who were those other farmers?

MR. ARIFUKU: They were Japanese neighbors. George Wada who lives in Reedley now, and Nobuhiros who were leasing their land nearby.

MR. ABE: What do you think about farming? Is it a good life, easy money?

MR. ARIFUKU: Yeah, it's a good life, you're working outdoors. You have your own place. Your time is your own. You don't have to punch a time clock. But when you work, you might have to work 12 hours a day during the harvest time. But in between there's more free time. There's good points and then some rough times. Like a few years back, lots of people lost their raisins due to the rain. You work all year to grow it, then "poof" it's gone because of mold and rot. Or say frost comes in springtime just when the grapes are coming out. Like my father's grapes in Fowler, the frost came in May, which is awfully late, so it just wiped it all out.

MR. ABE: What about insect problems?

MR. ARIFUKU: There's mites which make the leaves dry up and fall off, so the grapes (or fruit) may never ripen.

MR. ABE: What do the mites do?

MR. ARIFUKU: They'll suck the juice out of the leaves so the leaves will turn yellow; they'll just dry up and fall off. And then there's leaf rollers, a worm that rolls up the leaf to make a cocoon and exposes the grapes to the sun and it burns up. They can also drop into the bunch and chew on the grapes, then it'll start rotting. And if it gets real hot, we get mildew. But when it stays around 80 degrees, they're more susceptible to mildew. The humidity has a lot to do with it.

MR. ABE: What did you use to do for relaxation when you were farming?

MR. ARIFUKU: We used to go to Los Angeles to visit her parents. Now that they've passed on, we still go down there and visit her brothers and sisters. When I was farming I didn't go fishing because I was too tired. If I had two days off, I'd just rest. But now I'm a fishing nut. Now that I'm retired I have lots of time to go fishing.

MR. ABE: I see you've got two fishing trophies up there. What is that big one?

MR. ARIFUKU: That's a 50-pound salmon.

MR. ABE: Holy Mackerel! Where did it come from?

MR. ARIFUKU: San Francisco, outside the Golden Gate.

MR. ABE: What test line?

MR. ARIFUKU: Thirty-pound test.

MR. ABE: Well, that just about winds it up. I thank you for your time and thanks for sharing your experiences as a Nisei with us.