

NARRATOR: Gene Hamaguchi

INTERVIEWER: Grace Kimoto

DATE: July 21, 1999

GK: Where were you born?

GH: Who do I talk to?

GK: Just talk out loud.

GH: Livingston, California.

GK: And what is the date of your birth?

GH: August 24, 1920.

GK: And what was your family's line of work? Uh, this is an interview with Gene Hamaguchi, an esteemed man of seventy years old, in his home in Atwater, California. Today is July 21, 1999. I am Grace Kimoto and this is a project called Oral History for the Yamato Colony that was organized by the Livingston-Merced JACL and the Central California District of JACL. Okay, Gene. Where were you born?

GH: Livingston, California.

GK: And what was your date of birth?

GH: August 24, 1920.

GK: And what did your family do for work?

GH: They farmed a vineyard and orchard of plums, peaches, almonds, nectarines, uh, guess they did dry yard work, too.

GK: Okay, and that was about what years? What year did they begin?

GH: Oh, they started farming I would say around 1915.

GK: And how many siblings did you have?

GH: Oh, we had nine.

GK: Nine. How many boys and how many girls?

GH: Two girl and seven brothers.

GK: And what place were you—what were you, the second sibling, third sibling?

GH: Yeah, I was the fourth.

GK: Fourth?

GH: Fourth, yeah.

GK: Okay, and what do you remember of your family life growing up with your family?

GH: Oh, we were a—

GK: Everybody worked on the farm.

GH: Well, yeah, after we were older, around fifteen, sixteen years old we used to work in the vineyard, orchard and helping to irrigate for rain. Anyway, any little work, we used to help my parents.

GK: Do you remember farming with a horse, or did you have tractors?

GH: Oh, we had—in the beginning we had four horses, but they were operated by our Mexican workers that lived on the farm.

GK: So you had workers living on the farm with you.

GH: Oh, yes, yes.

GK: Family? Or—

GH: Yeah, family, and we had two cabins on the farm, and they were living on their houses on the farm, and they took care of the horses and drove the horses.

GK: And did all of the sifting and cultivating, and—

GH: They did all of the horse activating, and later on we—

GK: When did you get a tractor and all?

GH: Oh, later on, we had, oh gee, the first tractor we got was a 9N4 tractor, back in, I'd say, about 1927.

GK: What kind of tractor was it?

GH: A pull tractor, (inaudible) great tractor.

GK: Did you have to drive that?

GH: Oh, my oldest brother drove it, and I drove it.

GK: (inaudible Japanese phrase)

GH: Yeah. He drove it—we used to sow (inaudible) with it. Anyway, it was—

GK: Do you remember, how did it feel, was it not too scary?

GH: It was easier then, because we didn't know how to drive horses, and driving a tractor was a lot more fun, I guess.

GK: Mm-hm. I see, and what did the other brothers do? Did they work after school?

GH: Yeah, during the school year we would work after school, and in the summertime we would work irrigating and doing a lot of farm work, because Hiroshi was the oldest, and my sister was the next, and the next brother—he passed away when he was eleven years old, and then I was the next one. So, I worked right after Hiroshi and he really did—of course, his being the oldest—

GK: So was your farm part of the Yamato Colony?

GH: Yeah, it was next to the church property there.

GK: And how many acres were you doing (inaudible.)

GH: There at the beginning there were forty acres. Forty and it was right next to the church, just north of the church, the Methodist Church.

GK: Methodist Church.

GH: Methodist Church.

GK: So the family was really close. What was the largest that you farmed at the—

GH: Well, after a few years we bought the ranch where my brother used to live, over at Ken's place, my younger brother. That's the second parcel—

GK: I see.

GH: Where Ken and Tony used to live. That was a neighbor, too.

GK: You have a third parcel with Joe?

GH: Yeah, Joe, next to Masuda's place.

GK: About how many acres do you think you've farmed at the largest?

GH: Oh, the largest? It was in the neighborhood of 700.

GK: 700 acres.

GH: Yeah, about 700.

GK: Of all those different varieties of the fruits.

GH: Yeah, we had, oh, we even had alfalfa. (laughs)

GK: Oh, did you? So, what did the brothers and the kids do when they were having fun, for entertainment?

GH: Oh, we used to go to the canal, in back of our vineyard, across the whole ranch where the big canal is—we used to go swimming there next to the Takahashis' place, on this—the big canal?

GK: Um-hm.

GH: On Yamato Road. We used to go swimming there, and then once a year we would go—the community would have an annual picnic at the Merced River, near Cressey Road, or

was it near where Bob Muller(??) used to live on top of the hill—on the bottom, there used to be a park right there. And we used to have our annual picnic. The community would have the picnic, have races, and baseball—we'd play baseball.

GK: So, your family—the boys were involved with the Nisei baseball. Okay.

GH: Yeah, once a year we used to—of course, they played grass baseball at the church grounds, too.

GK: But did they go up and down the valley, playing Nisei baseball?

GH: Oh yeah, the Nisei League, that was—

GK: Hiroshi. Who are your brothers, which brothers?

GH: Ken and Joe, yeah, Ken and Joe.

GK: I see.

GH: The younger brothers, yeah, they enjoyed baseball.

GK: Okay.

GH: They had—they'd even go up to French Camp, Stockton, and—

GK: Fresno, too?

GH: Fresno, too. They used to have—

GK: Mm-hm.

GH: Yeah.

GK: What did the girls do for fun?

GH: Gee, the girls—they didn't do too much in those days.

GK: But the church was the center—

GH: Well, yeah, church had—once a week they would have kendo, you know, kendo—I don't know what that was—that was just before the war.

GK: Was that just with girls?

GH: No, it was for girls and boys. And there were quite a few little kids, yeah.

GK: I see, so what do you think that your parents had in mind for their goals? What did they want to do. Do you recall anything? What did they want for you?

GH: Gee, uh—

GK: They wanted all of you to stay as farmers?

GH: Yeah, especially the Niseis, they were more or less committed to take care of the parents, and of course my oldest brother went to business school in San Francisco, and then he went to sewing school in San Francisco, too.

And I went to Davis, it was more or less assumed that farming them days were practically the only job there is for Niseis. You know, of course nowadays it's different, it's more open to other—

GK: You're saying in the olden times—even if you had college degrees, discrimination kept you from getting jobs.

GH: Yeah, especially before the war, you know. It's quite different now even, and nowadays it's really more open so, much more.

GK: Tell us about some of the hardships that your family knew, especially your dad and mom.

GH: Oh, yeah, hardship came with the world in the—during Depression years, in 1933, it was in the early part of the thirties, in '33 is when the Depression was going on, and the parents were getting older also, and it was —then they were rough. Of course, that's why the parents, and the mother, and the children are all small, and even the mother and the families would have to do manual work, hoeing and they're pulling, and things like that it's—they were all taught how to do that—especially the Issei parents were—because the

children were still small, it was really a—of course, then the thirties were rough, but after in the forties, it was getting a little easier because the children were getting older, and they could assist in taking—but the parents were feeling older, too. And a lot of parents passed away, just before the war, too. And they didn't even have to go to camp, because they were already passed away.

GK: The parents both passed away early?

GH: Well, just my father passed in '38.

GK: And then your mom, was she—

GH: And then my mom, she lived until 1947, I think.

GK: But your dad passed away early. How old were you when he passed away?

GH: Oh, I was—right after about '39, or '38, I believe.

GK: So, about the colony, the Yamato Colony. Do you remember much of the Isseis getting together, and putting the community together?

GH: Well, they—a lot of the Isseis were pretty active at church, you know, the Isseis in the early days, they had two co-ops. The Isseis had two co-ops: one I guess they call it the Livingston co-op and they had also the Livingston Fruit Growers.

GK: This is in the Yamato Colony?

GH: Mostly.

GK: Some belonged to one and what—why were there two?

GH: Oh, I guess they had different—I don't know if it is difficulties or the thinking was different from the other growers, I guess, there. It was—while I wasn't too active in those days, but the parents seldom had different ideas about how they operated, and the other one, it was more aggressive, you know.

GK: It wasn't the territory from Japan that they came from—did that have anything—

GH: They might have, but the one shed—it was more like the smaller growers that came a little later, they had one group there and the other, Mr. Pornos(?) was usually more of the medium-larger farmers.

GK: So you think that's probably why, and not the Watayama-ken?

GH: It could have, but I doubt it. It just—

GK: And what would the co-ops do?

GH: One was the Livingston co-op. They packed the same fruit, but they were different—

GK: They marketed at different places?

GH: Yeah. They marketed at different places, and one was run by Kazu Masuda shed and Mr. Pornos used to run the other.

GK: And did that go on through the war, or after the war did they merge?

GH: After the war they merged, yeah, they found out that it was better to have one, instead of having two, yeah.

GK: So the farmers were able to get together.

GH: Yeah.

GK: Probably the Niseis were more in charge now.

GH: Yeah, because a lot of the Issei passed away by then. Yeah, that's my buddy, Wata (inaudible.)

GK: So did your sisters work on the farm, too?

GH: My sisters? Oh, she used to cut fruit at that cutting shed, cut the peaches and apricots.

GK: So your sisters did a different kinds of work.

GH: Yeah, all the women folks used to go to the cut shed and cut peaches and put it on the tray with like Manetti's(??) daughters, you know, across the street, they had, and also Mr. Tsuchiya used to operate it, for the shed. And mostly the women folks would cut, you know, cut fruit.

GK: Okay, let's find out, when the boys were bad or the girls were bad, how did your parents discipline you?

GH: Oh, (laughs) gee, I don't really recall whether they—I guess when we were really small, I guess the parents would come and grab us by our arm and spank us, you know, spank us when we were about five years old, but after that I don't—(laughs) the parents I guess in a way, they were all so busy, too, so and we used to play see-saw, and the swing, and we'd play in a pond of water, things like that I think.

GK: So your parents didn't really discipline you.

GH: No, not when we were five years old, I mean. (laughs) It's just when we were small, I'd get the paddle in the back, you know.

GK: Really nice, okay, so the responsibility on the boys was farm work, and the girls probably did the cooking and the cleaning and laundry.

GH: Right, as soon as we were of age, we could take over.

GK: I see. What do you think are the values that your parents wanted you to learn about life? What are the important values?

GH: Well, they—I know they wanted you to go to Sunday school, of course we used to walk up to the church on Sunday, every Sunday, you know, and we also used to go to the Japanese school and Mr. Tsuchiya, there was a Japanese teacher was Mrs. Tanji I guess it

was Gilbert Tanji's wife's mother and Will Matsu's(??) mother and they used to be Japanese school teachers before the war.

GK: This was on Saturday, or Friday, or—

GH: Usually on Saturdays.

GK: Saturdays.

GH: Usually.

GK: The whole community's children would come for Japanese school.

GH: Just about all, not everyone, but just about.

GK: Just about.

GH: And we used to walk all the way to Tsuchiya's place near the other end of town, we walked up to there, all the way, you know, every Saturday. And I don't know what that was for, but—

GK: So it seemed like church was one of the main value systems that your parents—

GH: Yeah, they'd try and instill some discipline, you know, in the children, because that was all the way up to 1941, until then the younger Niseis, they were too small, they were already, you know, in relocation camp, it was only in our age, the middle age that had to go to school. You see the difference is that.

GK: So on Sundays the whole community of kids would go to Sunday school?

GH: Yeah, we'd all go to Sunday school.

GK: And Mother and Father, and—

GH: Mother and Father would go to the Japanese church, and it was in Japanese in their language.

GK: I see, otherwise you had English language services?

GH: Yeah, we had—

GK: Okay, so let's move on to some of your other activities. Did you have Boy Scouts, or—

GH: Yeah, they had Candywood(??) in Boy Scouts in town, there was—

GK: And you said picnics—how about band, musical instruments?

GH: Oh, we—I don't remember going out for band. Here we used to play piano, but that was at home.

GK: So your family, the boys didn't mind going to church, or going to Japanese language school, or—

GH: Well, the Japanese language was only one we lived with. I know I went, and Kenny went, I don't know if Joe went, or not.

GK: Oh, so some of you did, and some of you did not go.

GH: Yeah, because the age was—

GK: I see. Okay, tell us about your schooling, from first grade, kindergarten—you had kindergarten, didn't you?

GH: Yeah, we had kindergarten from Mrs. Iker(??). Yeah, we had Mrs. Pickton later on.

GK: This was the first kindergarten in Merced County, did you know that?

GH: Yeah.

GK: Uh-huh. Kindergarten started in your community.

GH: Oh yeah, that was at that old, where that grocery store is now, that old market.

GK: So how do you feel about school?

GH: Well, my dad used to take a Model A or Model T truck and dump us off at the town, you go to kindergarten, it was half a day, and I remember one day Mrs. Pickton put me under the teacher's desk because I was misbehaving or something, so I remember sitting in

that—underneath her desk, school desk, in the, you know, oak table, sitting under there and that was in kindergarten.

GK: Just one time.

GH: Yeah, just—I guess I must have fought or gotten in a fight or something. Anyway, next we went into the other church building, and Mrs. Sheasley(?) taught there.

GK: So, how was your English by then? I guess the kindergarten your parents started was to really get to learn English. Did you speak English before school?

GH: Yeah.

GK: You did.

GH: Well, I mean because—

GK: Were the words you got at home English?

GH: Yeah, (inaudible).

GK: (inaudible)

GH: Of course we could still converse in Japanese because our mother didn't know any English, so we'd talk in Japanese.

GK: So Japanese was your primary language, your first language.

GH: Yeah, first language. And besides we were going to the Japanese school, I learned, you know, the alphabet, you know. (laughs)

GK: And you were learning Japanese at the same time you were learning English.

GH: Yeah, later on, but right after the war started back in '41, that ended, you know.

GK: So, they weren't worried about you learning Japanese.

GH: Yeah, that ended that.

GK: Okay, then how did the teachers treat you, besides Mrs. Pickton disciplining you, how about the other teachers?

GH: Oh, at fourth grade, we moved to the B Street School, over there at B Street in Livingston. The school is over there at market, near the Foster Farms' building there. What is that market there? Anyway, that grocery store that up until third grade—kindergarten up to third grade was there at the—near the Mexican store, just before they closed it in '99, that block was church, I mean school grounds, grammar school—of course they eliminated that.

But, after the fourth grade, we went over there on the other side of Livingston, where the (inaudible) drug store was over there at Second Street, somewhere over there, you turn right on Winton, at the insurance building you turn right and you go down the road and the school is the third block on your left-hand side.

GK: Did you have busses in those days? How did you get to school, on a bus?

GH: Bus.

GK: Oh.

GH: Yeah, (inaudible) was a bus driver.

GK: When you were starting school like that, did you consider yourself as Japanese or Japanese-American, or just an American kid?

GH: Gee, I always considered—

GK: Was there a separation, do you think, or?

GH: No, there was no separation, yet, but we knew that we were Japanese though, because of church taught us, you know.

GK: There were two churches, weren't there? The town church, Town Methodist Church, and the Japanese Methodist Church.

GH: Yeah, because the Town Methodist Church, that's where the Japanese that were living in town went to that church.

GK: I see, so it wasn't all Japanese growing up here, they were mixed.

GH: Yeah, mixed.

GK: So, how did your parents work with the school? They didn't speak English. How did they take you to school and talk with the teachers?

GH: Well, it was very minimal, meeting with the—

GK: How did your parents feel about your school work? Did they make sure you did your school work?

GH: Yeah, the made sure, you know, you did your study, and not, you know, fool around all evening, because you had an older sister and older brothers, and you'd get assistance through the older sisters, too.

GK: Okay, as you were growing up, and all the kids are home, what did you talk about at the dinner table? Would the whole family sit around the table?

GH: Yeah.

GK: You had a big table.

GH: Well, in summertime we would eat outdoors in the patio. We had a long table and bench. We would—and in the kitchen we had a long table and a bench. We—

GK: You were able to still talk Japanese with your parents.

GH: Yeah, we were conversing in Japanese. We had to, because Mother wouldn't understand otherwise.

GK: Okay. So, let's move on to your teenage years, your high school years. You went to Livingston High.

GH: We had high school, oh, and I graduated high school in 1939. There was—

GK: What kind of problems did you have at school, high school? Did you have any social problems?

GH: No, not exactly. No, we had 105 students in my grade, yeah, we had the most, you know, like Irene, Fred Kishi, Esther Okuda, Ruth Okuye, Kate Tanji, (inaudible), Francis Tashima, yeah, we had a lot of those—

GK: A lot of the Niseis were in that class.

GH: Arnie Ohki, yeah, a lot of us were in that class—Eric Andow—

GK: What are some fun things in high school you remember?

GH: Fun things?

GK: Yeah, what were some things you have good memories of, that were fun at the high school?

GH: Oh, we played basketball, we would have track meet, run, broad jump, we played basketball, uh, of course that was the athletic part, but we used to go to track and broad jump and run. I wanted to—I was pretty active in FFA, Future Farmers Association. I raised chickens.

GK: Did you date in high school? Did you go on dates with girls?

GH: Yeah, I think we had class—forget what they called that, class—

GK: Parties?

GH: Yeah, let's see—

GK: Did kids mix with the haku-jin kids, interracial?

GH: Not like, not like now. Let me see, who did I take in once—I don't remember if it was junior or senior year, I think Peggy Taniguchi? She's from Cortez.

GK: Yeah.

GH: I think Kenny was going around with her, so—

GK: Not you?

GH: No, Kenny. She was a nice girl.

GK: How about you? Did you date?

GH: I didn't have any with the—

GK: At that time then, do you think there was any racism or prejudices or injustices? Did you feel any of that?

GH: Yeah, a little bit, I mean a little bit. Not that much, surprisingly, there was a little bit. You could tell there was a little bit, but now it's a little different, you know. Of course, some—like some Portuguese fellows, they were nailed pretty good, and uh, the Portuguese were pretty—

GK: So, how did you meet Yuri?

GH: Oh, that was back in '47, when I come back from Detroit, see after I got discharged, I went to Detroit for trade school in Detroit for about six months, and I came back to Livingston with a car in, let's see, that was '46 or '47—'46 I guess. I got discharged, because I got discharged in Salt Lake City, and I was in Colorado Springs Hospital there.

GK: For what?

GH: For my shrapnel I got in my leg.

GK: Oh.

GH: And I got hit twice, once in Italy, once in France. So, I was in the hospital there, and I got discharged in Colorado Springs, I guess. And I went to Salt Lake to get discharged and then I went back to Detroit to go to mechanic school.

GK: So how did you meet Yuri?

GH: Oh, when I came back, Yuri's older sister was taking care of the ranch with her husband, you know, Kurokawa(?), have you ever heard of that? That's older sisters—

GK: They were taking care of your ranch?

GH: Yeah, they were taking care of the ranch.

GK: How did that happen?

GH: I guess they were in Gila Camp.

GK: Gila River.

GH: Yeah, Gila River, and I guess there was nobody at the ranch. (laughs)

GK: Because your dad was gone, and you guys were in the military.

GH: Yeah. Yoshi was still in the army, Kenny was in the army, Joe was in the army.

GK: Right. All of you.

GH: Yeah, all, and I was in the hospital, and so I guess my mother let them take care of the ranch, and she was there at the ranch. So when I came from Detroit, I guess that I met them at the ranch.

GK: And so that's how you met Yuri.

GH: Yes, that's when we first met. I guess they rearranged it, to tell the truth, but—

GK: (laughs) An arranged marriage.

GH: They used to, you know. (laughs)

GK: Sure! That was the proper way.

GH: Yeah, in them days, huh.

GK: Uh-huh. The popular way (inaudible).

GH: Yeah—(talking at the same time)

GK: It was a pretty good system, I think.

GH: Well, yeah, I think they still practice that in Japan, huh?

GK: Oh, yeah, but that's not the only country. Many countries do that.

GH: Yeah?

GK: Uh-huh. Arranged marriages, and I think that's a pretty good system for—okay, so you were married, uh—

GH: November 22nd, or 27th, 1947.

GK: '47. Okay, '47.

GH: '47, yeah, that's over fifty years ago.

GK: (laughs) And how many children did you have?

GH: Four.

GK: Four children, and what are their names?

GH: Oh, Don, John, and Robert and Julie.

GK: How many grandchildren do you have now?

GH: Seven.

GK: They're all married, all of them—seven grandchildren.

GH: All married, yeah.

GK: If your marriage was arranged, how did you feel, and was that okay?

GH: Uh, it was okay.

GK: Were there any issues? (inaudible phrases between speakers) So, let's move into that army time. The World War—how did you enter the military and where did you train and where did you go?

GH: Oh, I went in the army from Gila Camp. I more or less volunteered with another fellow from Vacaville, another person wanted to get out of camp, so said, "Let's go." Of course I lost track of where he's at now, but we got inducted in Salt Lake and we got shipped to Mississippi.

GK: From Gila River in Arizona?

GH: Arizona is where we went in from.

GK: And then you had to go all the way to Salt Lake City.

GH: Go all the way to Salt Lake City.

GK: Oh, my.

GH: Yeah, that's where I got inducted.

GK: 1942 or '43?

GH: No, that was, uh—yeah, about '43, because we stayed in the camp for almost two years.

GK: And then you went—where did you train?

GH: Camp Shelby, Mississippi, and uh—

GK: And then how did you get overseas? Where did you go?

GH: Oh, I went to uh, Italy. Nap—

GK: Naples?

GH: Naples, anyway, it was right over on the boot, and then we had to walk all the way up toward uh, the Leaning Tower of Pisa—

GK: Oh, my that's northern Italy.

GH: Yeah, but to walk up to there—

GK: Wow.

GH: Yeah.

GK: Tell us about some of the battles. Can you name the battles?

GH: Uh, the battles?

GK: Were you part of—were you 442nd?

GH: Yeah, 442.

GK: You were 442.

GH: Attached to Fifth Army.

GK: Attached to Fifth Army, and were you part of the 442 that freed the Texas—

GH: Oh, that was in France.

GK: Oh, that was France, forgive me. Okay.

GH: Well, I got hit. We were going to free the 36th Battalion that got surrounded in France, at uh, toward the Switzerland border, and there's a town named Bruyeres and in this Bruyeres, that's where I got hit in my right leg. So, I went back and never went any further than that, and that was in France.

GK: But the 442nd freed Bruyeres, the town, and I understand there's a monument there for the 442nd.

GH: It was a little town.

GK: Yes, but the citizens there won't forget the 442nd.

GH: Yeah, I guess not, because it was sort of a halfway forest kind of town.

GK: Was that your first battle?

GH: Yeah.

GK: It was, and you were injured on your first battle.

GH: Yeah, the German Army was being pushed back, you know, and we went—we landed in Marseille, on the boat, and then we went on a freight train going up north and got off near Bruyeres, and then we started going east toward Switzerland, not going straight up north of France, but went down on to southern France, the south part, because they were surrounded over there. That was the Texas—they got surrounded over there.

GK: The Lost Battalion.

GH: Yeah.

GK: And so you didn't have anything to do with that battle.

GH: No, I didn't make it.

GK: So, you were in the service not very long then. You were injured so early, and you spent most of your time in the hospital.

GH: Um, almost a year, mostly it was recuperating, that's what it was.

GK: So, when did you finally get home? I thought you said '46.

GH: Oh, '46 or '47, something like that.

GK: Well, that's a long time. You went there in '43—'44, '45, '46, that's four years.

GH: Yeah, well I was in the army for what—you guys train, and it takes—training is almost a year.

GK: Oh, is that right? I thought it was shorter than that. Okay, and then they went overseas, and so then, how soon after were you injured? You must have been in the service a whole year before you were injured.

GH: Just about, yeah.

GK: I see, okay, so then you got home. So by the time you got out of the hospital, you said that you had to reach Salt Lake City. Where did you go to the hospital in our country?

GH: Oh, Tennessee. That's after I got off the boat, I had to go to Tennessee Hospital and that's where you got operated on.

GK: Oh.

GH: Then to—

GK: So you had the shrapnel in there all that time?

GH: Yeah.

GK: Oh, my.

GH: Then after the operation, they ship you to Colorado Springs Hospital—convalescent—it's really a convalescent hospital where you can do recuperating, I guess, and that's where I got out. But then you've got to go travel to Salt Lake City to be discharged. (laughs)

GK: That's because you went in in Salt Lake City, right?

GH: Could be, but—

GK: You have to be where you went in—

GH: Yeah, I guess.

GK: So your war experiences were mostly in the hospital.

GH: Yeah.

GK: But you had four brothers in the service? Hiroshi, the oldest one, went in first?

GH: Yeah, he uh—

GK: So he must've saw a lot of the battles.

GH: Well, let's see, what did he do in the war—

GK: He wasn't in the 442nd.

GH: No, he wasn't. He got in there—he was drafted you know, because of his age, he got in, so he got drafted.

GK: So, he got drafted, I know—yeah, my brother, Keichi, he got drafted, but when did the men, the Nisei men—I know my husband, Willy said, he had a classification “enemy alien” when at the time of the camp, internment camp.

GH: In internment camp, yeah, in those days.

GK: All of the Nisei men were determined enemy aliens, and when did it turn around that they could volunteer for the service? It must be '43 or '44?

GH: Well, he got drafted when he was in Colorado, on the farm—

GK: Really, after camp, the internment camp. You were, too. You said you were in the internment camp—and then you volunteered, after they opened it up and said you could.

GH: Yeah, see, once you get released—

GK: How did you feel about that? It was a good way to get out of the barb-wired camp.

GH: Yeah, I—what are you going to do otherwise? Of course, I worked on camouflage nets for a year and making those nets.

GK: For the army.

GH: Yeah, they made us make that, because we were getting what, \$7 a month?

GK: Um-hm, it was actually like \$18, doctors and—

GH: Yeah, and I went to work on that and they pay you piecework, and you—ten days or was it two weeks, I made \$367 for making—

GK: Oh, that was extra.

GH: Yeah, that was piecework.

GK: Oh, that's good.

GH: That's what I made, and then I gave all the money to my mother and then I volunteered for the army to get by.

GK: How did you feel about that? Your mother was in the detention camp.

GH: You said it, because she was working in the kitchen in camp, you know, because she was taking care of the younger brothers, so I knew she had to buy clothing for them, so I gave it to her and I took off. I didn't need it.

GK: Okay, and you—I guess, did your mother resent being there, or how did she feel?

GH: No, she didn't resent that too much.

GK: No, did she say that?

GH: No, you know Issei women are pretty tough, you know.

GK: Yes, Isseis were very quiet.

GH: Yeah, they don't resent—I guess they had a hard time, the way it was going anyway.

GK: That's true, your parents—your mom was in camp, and did the kids eat together, or did they all eat on their own—the kids that stayed together, did she make them all eat together in camp?

GH: No, they'd go to the kitchen, you know. She was working in the kitchen anyway.

GK: So, she couldn't do much about that.

GH: Yeah, she didn't do that.

GK: So the kids would just—ate on their own.

GH: Yeah, they'd eat on their own, and not at the housing, but they'd go to the kitchen, the one building is—

GK: The mess hall.

GH: The mess hall, yeah, the mess hall.

GK: So your older sister didn't make the kids stay together or anything.

GH: Oh, she was already married.

GK: Oh, I see (inaudible). So was that a pretty good period of your time, or do you have bad memories?

GH: No, you meet a lot of new people, and my first job there was at \$10 a month, and I had to—drive the girl secretary that was working on the administration building, an office worker I guess, from camp one to camp two, which was about a couple of miles, I had to take them in the morning, pick them up in the afternoon. After about two or three weeks, (inaudible) (laughs) So, I worked the camouflage.

GK: So the camp people worked on camp—during camp. So, looking back now, what do you think of that, the internment camp and how you were put in the camp?

GH: Oh, I think that the United States were—they weren't, they just weren't tolerant for Japanese kids, you know. Of course, I blame it on DeWitt—Daniel DeWitt who was the commander, he had no (inaudible) history of how America was being born, because when you think about it, the only true Americans are American Indians, and the rest of us that came from other countries—so why didn't they take Germans and Italians, also, when you think about it. Why do they just take (inaudible). Crazy.

GK: Because we were at war with Italy and Germany.

GH: Yeah, and see, that's how crazy the—I don't see how Franklin Roosevelt even justified those kind of things. You would think that they were intelligent. You know, I mean, I have a schoolteacher who says, "Yeah, that's funny." A lot of people think that's funny.

GK: You should bring them a Constitution.

GH: Yeah, after all we went with, “Well, it’s funny.” You know, you being a teacher, you should understand.

GK: I do.

GH: Huh?

GK: I do. So, at least, but we have our great country, and they apologized and had to pay restitution back.

GH: Yeah, but that doesn’t justify all those things—

GK: You’re right.

GH: I don’t care what they do later on, they don’t justify them.

GK: That’s true. Okay, so let’s get you home then.

GH: (laughs)

GK: So, after the war and all of this, did your whole family gets back to Livingston? All the children, your mother was alive yet—

GH: Yeah.

GK: You moved back to the farm, and the Krukows(??) were taking care of the farm.

GH: Yeah, they took care of it one year.

GK: One year, okay.

GH: And they moved to Madera. That’s where their hometown is.

GK: Oh I see, and you were home within that year?

GH: Yeah.

GK: I see, and Hiroshi, he was still—

GH: Yeah, he was still in the service.

GK: Yeah, so you were the big brother.

GH: Yeah, well, I was next on—

GK: You were boss.

GH: Yeah.

GK: Okay, so how is it coming back, how did you get back to your farming?

GH: Well, Kenny moved to the ranch where he went. He wanted that ranch. They gave it to him, and when Joe—they gave him the other ranch for (inaudible), you know. Joe was over there with Lilly and—

GK: And you weren't married yet, right, when you got back home?

GH: Yeah.

GK: So how soon after you got back to the farm did you marry?

GH: Oh, about a year and a half.

GK: A year after that. And so you broke up the farm between your brothers.

GH: Well, yeah, we divided the ranch.

GK: And you were still farming—

GH: Well, I bought other ranches on the west side, and oh, I had the ranch next to your place.

GK: That's right, and how many acres is that, your farm?

GH: Well, that's fifteen acres, your place.

GK: Yeah, but altogether.

GH: Oh, that was about 135.

GK: One hundred and thirty-five acres of peaches and—

GH: Grapes.

GK: Grapes.

GH: Thompsons and others.

GK: So how did people accept you back? How was the situation?

GH: Oh, just like, that was a challenge.

GK: How did the other Livingston people in the community welcome you back?

GH: Well, everybody was busy with their own problems, you know.

GK: So, how about the haku-jins?

GH: Oh, haku-jins? Well, some of them were—the Portuguese people's ancestor were pretty understanding. There were a few like the barber in town, I think he's—what the heck was his name? We used to go over there and—forgot his name already.

GK: He was good to you?

GH: No, we went to his barber hop. Right after we came back, we went to his barbershop and he says, "We won't cut your hair because you're Japanese." You know, so we would go to the other, Garcia Barber Shop, and he—and then I understand there was a lot of Nisei that went to that barbershop to (inaudible) building there, and he would say the same thing. But he's out of business anyway now. The other one, Garcia, is of Mexican descent, I guess, he would cut my hair.

GK: So, the Mexican people welcomed you back.

GH: Yeah.

GK: And helped you.

GH: Yeah.

GK: But some of the others kind of would not.

GH: Yeah, like (inaudible) was no good.

GK: Yeah.

GH: Arnold—

GK: Arnold.

GH: Arnold (inaudible), he—I understand he didn't like Japanese either, but his son Bobby Arnold, he was a good friend with Franklin Okuda, and he would give his father a good argument, you know, that he's all wrong, and I guess they separated. Bobby Arnold was the same class, they went to UC Berkeley together, and they were good friends. I heard that story, and who else was it?

There was a Portuguese, and he used to sell alfalfa and bale of hay to the Japanese farmers—the old time horse people—people who had horses—he would sell loose hay and baled hay. So, very nice, yeah, I forget what his name was (inaudible.) Anyway, he lives right around Main Street in Merced, in Livingston. He's probably passed away. He would pick up, like Katsu Miyeki when he came back from camp, he would pick them up and take them home. So he was really sympathetic.

GK: So there were lots of good friends that helped you.

GH: Yeah.

GK: And there were a few that would not help.

GH: Yeah, (inaudible).

GK: And you feel like the Portuguese and the Mexicans were very helpful, good friends.

GH: Really helpful.

GK: I see, so when did you go to college? You said you went to college before that?

GH: Yeah went to—

GK: When was this—

GH: Yeah, in 1940.

GK: So this was before the war.

GH: Yeah, just before the war.

GK: Were you in Davis when the war started?

GH: Yeah, we left—let's see, I graduated in '39 and went to school and that's when—what is that Miho(?) Kishi?

GK: Miho(?), not Mina, Miho(?).

GH: Yeah, Miho. I think it's Miho. And they—Jane Makano(?)—I used to give her a ride to Davis, too. You know, the Makanos(?), they didn't like Japanese, either. But, Jane Makano(?) was real nice. But I used to take her to Davis, and when the war started, Miho(?) wanted a ride home, too, and she cried half the time coming back.

GK: Why?

GH: Because she got kicked out of school.

GK: Oh, and this was because of the war.

GH: Yeah, all the Japanese had to go home.

GK: I see.

GH: And she'd be crying, you know.

GK: Sure.

GH: And I guess it means to me quite a bit to me, I—

GK: So what was your major?

GH: Oh, my major was agriculture.

GK: Agriculture, I see. So you had to leave school, so you never did complete your major?

GH: No. (inaudible)

GK: So—

GH: Because there was a lot of nihon-jin there, you know, that apartment store is still standing there.

GK: Oh, yeah?

GH: 217 Second Street. It's only a block away from the campus.

GK: Oh.

GH: It's still standing there.

GK: Is that right?

GH: I went to it the other day, and it's still there. I showed the kids—that's where I stayed. Two-story apartment store.

GK: So how do you discuss the wartime with the children? (inaudible)

GH: No, really, I guess I never talk about it too much.

GK: So they didn't get filled in on how—

GH: No, they don't say too much.

GK: Any other memories of some things that happened when you were young, or in the army, or—tell me, really describe how you got hurt in the army. There was a battle?

GH: Yeah, there were—the shells were coming, and it hit those big pine trees, the shells, and then they rained—the shrapnel would rain on you, so if you're squatting down in the wrong place, you would get hit.

GK: I see.

GH: You go in and bullets flying all over, and you know. (laughs)

GK: Um, okay, well, let's get you to today's time, then. What are some of the important things that have happened to you in recent years?

GH: Important? Like this?

GK: Well, what happened to your farm? You should really explain about that.

GH: Oh, the farm? The kids, none of my kids wanted it. I tell them, “Don’t you want it?” And “No,” and I said, “I don’t want it either.” (laughs) You know, they don’t want to farm. They said, “It’s too much work. It’s easier that we just go work.” And so that’s the consequence. That’s why I—at the end, I sold it. I sold the last 120 acres. That’s the last one, I said, “Don’t you guys want it? You can have it.” And “No,” they said.

GK: So that must’ve disappointed you.

GH: Yeah, I was disappointed, because I was going to give it to them. But still, they didn’t want it.

GK: Farming was hard anyway, at that time.

GH: It was hard, you know.

GK: These kids want to be professionals.

GH: Yeah, there’s no—

GK: So, your children went to college, and what did they all graduate as, the boys—

GH: The boys graduated as a civil engineer, and—

GK: That’s John, no, that’s Don.

GH: Yeah, John is an electrical engineer, and the other one is a structural engineer. Donny works in Turlock, Stanislaus County, structural—you know, making bridges, and—

GK: Julie graduated, didn’t she?

GH: Yeah, she graduated from San Luis Obispo, as a landscaper.

GK: Oh, that’s right. And Bobby has a degree, doesn’t he?

GH: No, he’s supposed to get his degree, but I don’t think he—

GK: Completed it.

GH: Completed his—what do you call that, when you're supposed to write a thesis? Huh?

GK: Thesis. Yeah.

GH: I don't think he wrote his thesis. He said, "Dad, I don't need no piece of paper saying I finished." (laughs) You see that attitude?

GK: That's too bad.

GH: And I said, "Hey, that's a ticket." You see?

GK: He said, "Oh, I know all about it."

GH: And I said, "That isn't the way to look at it." But, it's sure funny, huh.

GK: So, how do you feel about those war years now? After redress and we had reparation and an apology—

GH: Well.

GK: Are you thankful they did do that, though?

GH: That's better than nothing, but it's a cruel way of taxing the people.

GK: So, how are you spending your time now? Are you active in the Japanese-American community or political or social issues?

GH: Well, today I spent \$10 on Gary Condit?

GK: Gary Condit? Did you buy a ticket for that?

GH: Ten dollars.

GK: You bought one ticket.

GH: Well, I didn't know if Yuri could go or not, because it's on Friday.

GK: Yeah. Well, we're going to go.

GH: Huh? Well, I know Willy, he said he has to talk with you—if you could make it. I said that's (inaudible) if Yuri could make it, I have to get another ticket.

GK: I think we should support Gary Condit.

GH: Yeah, he's a Democrat, anyway.

GK: So what do you do for recreation right now? I know you don't golf. (laughs)

GH: (laughs) I should go, I should go to Reno or someplace and exercise.

GK: That's right, you said that. It's too bad they called off the—

GH: Yeah.

GK: I know.

GH: I thought I'd just go for a—

GK: Yeah, okay.

GH: You know, I've got the knee injury and I can't—well, I could do a little bit—water
(inaudible) but other than that—

GK: So you putter around with, you've got all these pieces of metals and stuff. Are you
sorting them, or?

GH: Oh.

GK: All these things you have.

GH: Yeah, I just repair little things, fix chairs.

GK: So you keep busy.

GH: Well, I don't want to overdo it, but—

GK: Can you imagine if there was no World War II, what would your life be like right now?

GH: What I would be doing?

GK: Uh-huh, what would it be like?

GH: If there was no World War II—

GK: I think we're almost at the end of the tape.

GH: Well, I don't know if it would be any better, or worse.

GK: What's the most important thing that you have contributed?

GH: Contributed to what?

GK: Society.

GH: I think we contributed quite a bit to the community, showing that we could live together with different ideas and going to different churches, different organizations gives us the opportunity to—Isseis were more or less restricted, but Niseis are not that restricted but, the Sanseis will be more active, I think.

GK: So that's what your advice would be for young people?

GH: Yeah, they should go out and see, they intermarried, so they go out and do things more on the outside of your own ethnic race, you know.

GK: We're nearing the end of this interview. Is there anything else you'd like to say or add?

GH: No, there's not much more. I would say I'm getting older and older and I don't know how long we're going to last. (laughs)

GK: You've lasted that long, you're still lasting. (laughs)

GH: Of course, you're improving quite a bit, because you're so outgoing.

GK: It's not my story, it's your story.

GH: No, it's part of your story, too.

GK: Thank you for sharing your story with us and you are going to leave a big legacy of the Hamaguchi brothers, and I think it's very important that we'll have your story on our tapes. So—

GH: Well, I don't know how I got picked for this kind of thing, but—

GK: Well, don't underestimate yourself. You're very important.

GH: No, everybody chipped in, so it's just that the next generation will be much more broadened.

GK: Do you remember the beginning of JACL, in Livingston?

END OF INTERVIEW