

GEN GOTO

MRS. HASEGAWA: Today is October 27, 1980. I, Yoshino Hasegawa, am privileged to interview Mr. Goto in his home on 28207 Avenue 6, Madera, California 93637.

Before we get into the interview proper, please give us your full name, your date and place of birth, and your place of longest residence.

MR. GOTO: My name is Gen Goto. I was born in Fukushima-ken, Koriyama-shi, Fukuyama-machi, Minami Koizumi on March 19, 1899. I have lived here in Madera the longest.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When did you come to America?

MR. GOTO: I came in July 1918 when my father called me to this country. I landed in San Francisco.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Why did you come to Madera?

MR. GOTO: Because my father purchased this land.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was your father here in America before you arrived?

MR. GOTO: Oh, yes. I am a yobiyose (born and educated in Japan).

MRS. HASEGAWA: When did your father come to the United States?

MR. GOTO: He came in July of Meiji 32 (1899) to Hawaii, and then later came here. My mother waited 13 years for him in Japan before she joined him. When I arrived, they had rented a farm in Parlier, and we worked there for three years. That was during World War I, so we were able to earn enough to buy this 100 acres in partnership with Mr. Ishisaki in 1920. We have lived here ever since that time.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you come with your mother?

MR. GOTO: No, I was left in Japan when I was 13 years old. I came in July of 1918. I was 18 years old. That was after five years at the Iwakura Tetsudo Gakko, a railroad school in Tokyo. It is now called Iwakura Koto Gakko. It is near the Uyeno Railroad Station in Tokyo.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What kind of crops did you raise on the Parlier farm?

MR. GOTO: There were many kinds of fruits there; grapes, peaches, plums, and ume (Japanese plums).

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was planted here when you came?

MR. GOTO: There was nothing but weeds east of the San Joaquin River; there was nothing but bare rolling hills. There was no hot water, no electricity-- we used kerosene lamps for one year. The water was pumped up by a windmill. We scraped and leveled this farm with horse teams.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You bought this 100 acres in partnership with Mr. Ishisaki?

MR. GOTO: Yes. During the Hoover administration when the country went

into a depression, Mr. Ishisaki wanted to abandon the farm because he could not pay the loan. So we had a family conference to decide whether the family would all work to keep the farm or to abandon it. My father's wish was to keep the farm, since he felt that he had given his life to acquiring this farm with his labors in Hawaii and the United States. He said he would turn back his life 10 years to work again as a young man if I would help him. So one of my brothers and sisters decided to work together to save the farm. After three or four years, we came out of the depression and we began to get back on our feet.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

MR. GOTO: I was the only one born in Japan, the others were all born here. I have two sisters and two brothers.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do they all live in this area?

MR. GOTO: One of my brothers lives right next door. I gave him half of the farm. My two sisters are married and live in Los Angeles.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you have the 100 acres between you?

MR. GOTO: Yes. We added on 30 acres each that we acquired when our neighbor sold his acreage; so we both have 80 acres apiece. Yes, we really had a lot of hardship, but not so much as the Issei! There is no comparison.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Can you recall some of the hardships your father encountered?

MR. GOTO: When my father came to Hawaii on a three-year contract to work in the sugar cane fields, he really suffered. He wore the same old cotton-filled kimono because he could not afford to buy western clothes. The foreman was a Portuguese who rode a horse and lashed at the workers with a whip to make the Japanese laborers work harder. He told me that at the back of the camp where they lived, there was a hole digger who dug graves for unfortunate laborers who died from overwork. Whenever my father would recall those days, he would weep as he told us about those days. So, after he fulfilled the three-year contract, he came to the mainland United States of America.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What happened to him when he came here?

MR. GOTO: He worked just like all the other Issei.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did he encounter prejudice?

MR. GOTO: Oh, yes, of course he did. Even in my days when I came there were many incidents of discrimination. I remember going to the five-and-ten and not being waited on. Not all the stores treated you that way, but there were salespeople that treated you in a derogatory way. So now when I see how well we are treated, it makes me cry for happiness!

MRS. HASEGAWA: I am sure that is true. After you bought this farm, what did you plant on this bare land?

MR. GOTO: We bought this bare land for \$160 an acre, and every day we scraped the land until it was leveled. In 1921, we began to plant the

vines.

MRS. HASEGAWA: To scrape and level the land, did you use horses?

MR. GOTO: Of course, horses. We couldn't buy good strong horses because we didn't have money, so we bought poor, skinny horses. And as I think back, I feel sorry for those horses that we drove so hard!

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many horses did you have?

MR. GOTO: For cultivating the 100 acres, we had six horses.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many of you were there?

MR. GOTO: Because it was on a partnership basis, there were about six of us. We planted grapes and during the Hoover era, the prices plunged to the bottom. The raisins sold for \$32.50 a ton! There was no way one could survive!

MRS. HASEGAWA: What is the price for a ton of raisins now?

MR. GOTO: \$1,200 a ton! Of course, everything else has gone up, too! There's no value in the dollar, but still!

MRS. HASEGAWA: There must have been many Issei who lost their shirts!

MR. GOTO: Oh, yes! There were many Japanese in Madera at that time, but because of the Depression, about one-quarter of the farmers lost their lands. Then, on top of that, the Alien Land Law hit us, and we were involved with it.

MRS. HASEGAWA: In what way?

MR. GOTO: They took away our land. But because of the Oyama Case our land was returned to us. That is where America is great; by due process of law we were saved!

MRS. HASEGAWA: Whose name was your land registered under?

MR. GOTO: That was the problem, most of the Issei had borrowed other citizens' names or formed corporations in order to buy land. When my brother reached 21 years of age, we transferred the title to his name.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When the Alien Land Law took effect, was your land in your brother's name?

MR. GOTO: No, it was in Mr. Nakagawa's name. We had borrowed his name, and that's where the trouble was.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Many people were caught in that dilemma when they came back from camp; were they not?

MR. GOTO: Yes, that's right. But only in America was it possible to farm under someone else's name or by forming a corporation. It would never have been possible in Japan!

MRS. HASEGAWA: When you decided to all pitch in and work to save the

farm, were your siblings married?

MR. GOTO: No, they were all in high school. But each one pledged to help all they could.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you go to school in America?

MR. GOTO: No. I had prepared to become a surveyor in Japan, so my math was superior, but I could not speak English. I had studied English in Japan, but it was not good. When I first arrived, I attended school Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday; five days! And all the little children made fun of me, an 18-year old, because I couldn't speak English. That made me so angry that I refused to go back to school! At that time, no matter if you had a college diploma, you could not get a good job. You ended up by being a secretary for the Japanese Association, if you were lucky! Since the economy of the country was good during World War I, I decided it would be smarter to make money by farming. In retrospect I think I did the right thing. Because of that decision, we were able to acquire this land.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Your brothers and sisters were born here, so they must have been educated here?

MR. GOTO: Yes, they all graduated from high school. The second brother was very smart and graduated at the top of his high school class. He had his heart set on going to UC Berkeley, but we couldn't afford to send him. So, we asked him to wait one year and help us. We promised to send him after that, but he complained so much that we sent him off that September. He became an architectural engineer, and now he is the engineer for St. Mary College. He is doing very well. He and his family went to Egypt, Europe, and Italy for a three-month vacation paid by the college.

MRS. HASEGAWA: He made a good decision!

MR. GOTO: Yes, but he gave up his rights to the land when he chose to go to school. I did not want any trouble afterwards. When there are so many siblings in the family, there is bound to be trouble. But I have been fair in my dealings with the family. My father was an educated man, but after I arrived on the scene, he didn't write one letter. All the business dealings were left up to me. I was responsible for the farm. So when I reached my 77th birthday, my sister and brothers had a surprise party for me at the Kawafuku Restaurant in Los Angeles. It was about New Year's Day. When they told me they were having a dinner at the Kawafuku, a fancy restaurant, I said, "Who wants to go to Kawafuku, such a place." When I got there and found out they were honoring me, I cried! I was so shocked and so happy. They all tell me that although we had a father, they felt I had been the father to them. Before World War II, I paid for three weddings for my sister and brothers within three months time.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You felt responsible for your family.

MR. GOTO: Yes, that's why my family regards me as "Father."

MRS. HASEGAWA: When did your father pass away?

MR. GOTO: When he was 88 years old. After the war.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You have had many hardships in your life, but now you are able to rest on your achievements.

MR. GOTO: When we first came here and had no income, we raised vegetables, and I took them into the Fresno Market about 12:00 p.m. And when I couldn't sell the vegetables, I'd make the rounds of the small retail stores and sold them before returning home. If I got back home by 12:00 the next day, I was lucky! I would sleep a few hours then get the day's pickings ready and go out again that night. I did that every day for four years! I marvel at how hard I worked!

MRS. HASEGAWA: How old were you?

MR. GOTO: I was in my prime; about 37 or 38.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You may have been in your prime, but you also had to have the courage to face the prejudice and discrimination to go out into the alien community. I certainly admire you for your fortitude!

MR. GOTO: At least I was able to communicate with the Caucasians by speaking a little English. I am not the only one who suffered. All Issei faced the same kind of hardships.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Even as you endured these hardships, you took time to work for the Japanese community and to be a leader, did you not?

MR. GOTO: I don't know how it came about, but when I was 28 years old, I was selected as one of the three men to become officers of the Japanese Association in Fresno. The other two were Mr. Shohara and Mr. Okamoto. Since that time I have been a leader of the Japanese Association, the Madera Japanese School, and the Madera Shunwakai (Friendship Association). After the war I have relinquished the role since I feel that it is now the era of the Nisei. I was advisor for three years and after that I have withdrawn from the various organizations. I donate money as the need arises, but that is as far as I go. I feel it is time for the younger people to take over.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What is the Shunwakai?

MR. GOTO: The Madera Shunwakai was started by Mr. Nagasugi, Mr. Mochizuki, and Mr. Takeno. When the Japanese school was needed, Mr. Takeno organized the school. When Mr. Takeno moved to Los Angeles, Mr. Mochizuki became the superintendent. And after Mr. Mochizuki, I took over the job until recent times. In those days to combat anti-Japanese feelings we went around to collect donations from each Japanese family night after night! We used to pay politicians to help the Japanese in the community. Of course, this had to be done in secrecy. To obtain donations to support the Japanese Association, Japanese schools, and the Shunwakai, I can't tell you how much time and money I spent going around to collect donations. There was only one telephone in our neighborhood which was located at the Mochizuki store, so, by necessity, we had to go by car. During the day we worked on the farm, and at night we worked for the Japanese community. It wasn't easy, because I would have to set the amount of donations by the individuals by making my contribution a little more than others to encourage like amounts in order to meet our goals. At least gasoline was cheap then! The

cheapest amount I paid for gasoline was 3 cents a gallon during a gasoline war. I filled my tank! Can you believe that?

MRS. HASEGAWA: Now you have to pay \$1.15 a gallon.

MR. GOTO: You know how much I like to visit and talk, so it took me many nights to complete the rounds.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Well, you worked hard!

MR. GOTO: Yes, I feel that I did my share. I am sorry that the young people today do not take serious their obligations to the community. I don't want to sound pompous, but I feel that one cannot exist alone, that to survive one needs to cooperate and work with each other. I have always thought along this line.

MRS. HASEGAWA: The community benefited because of unselfish people such as yourself!

MR. GOTO: Some young people tell me that they would not be caught doing all that work for others: wasting money and time! They think it is crazy to go around asking for donations! But I tell them that in those days we crazy people were necessary. If it were not for our endeavors the Alien Land Law would not have been settled nor would we have been accepted as we are. We have paved the way by our public relations with the community at large.

MRS. HASEGAWA: There were many leaders in each community who had foresight!

MR. GOTO: Yes, the Issei planned and worked to send their children to be educated at great sacrifice to themselves. If they had not, the Nisei would not be where they are now. Look at the Mexicans, the smart ones who were educated have succeeded. But the majority still live as their parents did, from hand to mouth; even though they have been here as long as we have! It is education that makes the difference!

MRS. HASEGAWA: Yes, you are right!

MR. GOTO: When we first came, we had no water to use for irrigation, so we couldn't raise vegetables. So we picked edible weeds and ate those! That's how hard up we were!

MRS. HASEGAWA: What kind of weeds were there that was edible?

MR. GOTO: There was the nazuna (shepherd's grass) which grows in the fields, and also a wild spinach-like plant that we boiled!

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you use windmills to pump water?

MR. GOTO: Yes. every house had a windmill. It used to be terribly windy here. Madera was famous for wind and for dust storms! We couldn't work for days at a time; we were blinded by the sand and dust.

MRS. HASEGAWA: It seems that there was not much fun in those days?

MR. GOTO: There really wasn't much fun. We worked day in and day out.

It is no wonder we were discriminated against. We had no Sundays. We worked seven days a week! We would work in the back where people couldn't see us on Sundays. So there as no time for fun. There were no Japanese movies; no television; and so we worked from dawn to dusk. During harvest, we would get out in the field while it was still dark and pick the grapes. As it grew dark in the evening, we would go back and spread the grapes on the trays, when we could no longer see to pick the grapes!

We pioneers all worked like that, I was not the only one! But the women are the ones who deserve the credit! They are the ones who worked the hardest. They gave birth to many children, they had to get out in the field at the same time as the man, and they had to wash and cook, too! The women really had it hard. I tell the Issei men not to brag, that only because of their wives were they able to be successful! That's the truth!

MRS. HASEGAWA: I think that you are unusual in that you give credit to the women. Not many Japanese men will do that!

MR. GOTO: I always say that. The men came in at lunchtime and took time to read the newspaper while Mama cooked and then left with Papa when he went out into the field again. There was no time for her to rest! In the evening she had to prepare food for the next day while the man laid around and read the paper after his bath. Men who married were the only ones who were able to retain their properties. Most single men did not do so well. There are many single men now who are dependent on the government for their livelihood. Not all; but the majority! Many of them have passed away.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Mr. Goto, you are great! You have compassion and understanding of the woman's role!

MR. GOTO: I go to Japan every four years now that I am retired. The last time I went, the travel agent told me that I am different from the other Issei tourists from the United States. He told me that most of them degrade Japan just because they have made successes of their lives in a foreign land. But I enjoy and appreciate everything I see. I told him that I speak the truth, that I really enjoy my trip! As a result, I was treated very well!

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you have children?

MR. GOTO: Yes, two girls and one son. My son lives here on the farm, but my two daughters live in Los Angeles. One is married, but the other is a commercial artist and travels all over the world! My granddaughter was the Nisei Week Teenage Queen and now is Senator Hayakawa's secretary!

MRS. HASEGAWA: Well, I don't know. Senator Hayakawa is not too popular now!

MR. GOTO: Yes, I know. She tells me that he was so unpopular for a while that he was getting lots of protest mail and phone calls. But after a few days he began to get mail and phone calls that supported him!

MRS. HASEGAWA: When Pearl Harbor was attacked, what was your

reaction?

MR. GOTO: I was not surprised! The United States had humiliated and treated Japan very badly prior to the attack. We were ordered into the Fresno Assembly Center and then transferred to Jerome, Arkansas. Then Jerome was the first camp to close down, so we went to Gila Relocation Center in Arizona; then returned here.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Didn't most evacuees go from Jerome to Rohwer?

MR. GOTO: Those that went to Rohwer were those whose children went out of camp. I didn't allow my children to leave. Later my son was drafted into the military service. The war ended just as he was ready to board ship at Baltimore, Maryland to go overseas to Europe.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When did you return to Madera?

MR. GOTO: We returned in 1945. I think the United States is great. When we left we couldn't take one knife, unless it was a very short one. We were allowed only one small suitcase. Yet, when we were released from camp, the government sent back all the material goods we'd accumulated during our stay in camp, a big truckload! They shipped it right here to our home! No other country in the world would do such a thing!

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was your mother still living when you returned?

MR. GOTO: Yes, she passed away with cancer. My father and my mother passed away about the same time. My first wife passed away before my parents did. My second wife took care of my parents for several years. She had a very hard time.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did your son come back to the farm?

MR. GOTO: He came back after we returned to Madera. He did not have to bear arms. He was a truck driver, so even now he is a good driver!

MRS. HASEGAWA: What kind of work did you do in camp?

MR. GOTO: For \$16 a month I worked on the farm. We worked about two hours day. It rained a lot there, so we found many tree mushrooms. After going to Gila I didn't work. I took lessons in Shigin (poetry chanting) and became assistant teacher! Mr. Kayamoto, who is presently the Shigin master here in Fresno, was our instructor.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you still go to the classes?

MR. GOTO: No. I stopped because it gets so foggy at nights in the winter and my family worries if I am late. So I decided not to go.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Are you involved with the Buddhist Church?

MR. GOTO: No. When the Buddhist temple was being built, I was very active, but I am no longer involved.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What are some of the awards you have received from the Japanese government?

MR. GOTO: I received a number of recognitions and awards from the

Emperor of Japan. They are: the Kunrokuto Kyoku Jitsu Sho; Dai Nihon Nokai Ryokuhaku Yukosho; and the Kohaku Yukosho, the highest Japanese agricultural recognition.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What changes have you seen in the treatment of Japanese over the years?

MR. GOTO: Very good. As I said earlier we were objects of discrimination, but now even an old man such as I am is treated with respect and courtesy. I am grateful to America.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What economic and social changes have you seen over the years?

MR. GOTO: Most Issei have become affluent, and we are much more relaxed. Personally, I have nothing to worry about now!

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you observe any traditional Japanese custom?

MR. GOTO: I appreciate and give thanks to our ancestors. All nationalities should respect their ancestors, but the Japanese must never forget what the older generation has done for them.

MRS. HASEGAWA: In your opinion, do you think the third and fourth generation Japanese understand this?

MR. GOTO: That is the question! The Nisei do, but the young cannot really understand. Until a man reaches 50, 60, 70, he cannot really understand what life is about. Experience is the best teacher. I don't think you can teach youngsters by speech alone; you need to set examples by your actions.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is there anything else you might like to add to this interview?

MR. GOTO: Yes. I am continually grateful to the Nisei soldiers of the 442nd and 100th Battalion who sacrificed themselves against great odds during World War II. Because of the valor of Nisei soldiers in the European and Pacific theatres, the Issei are now able to obtain citizenship from this great country. We must never forget this.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Thank you, Mr. Goto.