

MR. AND MRS. TORAZO OUCHI

MRS. GOTO: Today is August 11, 1980. I, Terry Goto, have the privilege of interviewing Mr. and Mrs. Torazo Ouchi in their home at 3318 South Sunnyside Avenue, Fresno, California, 93725.

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. OUCHI: My name is Torazo Ouchi. I was born in Fukushima-Ken, Tate-gun, Datesaki-mura. My birthdate is April 30, 1902. My longest place of residence is Fresno.

MRS. GOTO: When did you come to America?

MR. OUCHI: I attended Koto Shogakko and came to the United States as a yobiyose when my father sent for me. I came with my mother to San Francisco on December 17, 1918 on the Tenyo Maru. I was 16 years at the time.

I lived in the Los Angeles area for six years in Charter Oaks. In 1924 I moved to Ducor near Delano where we bought 10 acres of land. My father and I left Mother in the care of a friend at Azusa. We left for Ducor in an automobile. When we got there, we found that there was no house on the land. It was a 10-acre wheat field and the nearest neighbor was a mile and a half away. It was a lonely place. We borrowed a barn and lived in it and hired a well digger so that we would have water. My father and I worked every day to build a house, and as soon as the house was built, we went to Azusa to get my mother.

MRS. GOTO: Where was Azusa?

MR. OUCHI: It was a small town at that time, but now it has grown considerably. We returned to Ducor and went to Porterville to buy a tractor and other agricultural equipment and tools. We worked to level the land every day for a long time. My father's objective was to plant the land with persimmons. He sent for seeds from Japan and spent several years raising seedlings. About the time the seedlings were ready to plant, big agricultural farms came into the area and planted cotton and grapes, and they sunk deep wells so that our well went dry. We dug down to 150 feet but to no avail, and we had to abandon the farm. We left with two little children to find work as a truck farmer. We worked very hard.

MRS. GOTO: When did you marry your first wife?

MR. OUCHI: I married Kikue Otomo, who was born in Selma and was raised in Japan. She was a Kibei. We were married in 1932 in Ducor, California. The wedding ceremony was held in the Fresno Methodist Church, and the reception was held at the Delano Gakkuen (Japanese School).

MRS. GOTO: When was your first child born?

MR. OUCHI: In 1933 our daughter was born and a son in 1934.

MRS. GOTO: Do you have any other recollections before the war?

MR. OUCHI: I worked as a truck farmer raising tomatoes, stick peas, corn, and other vegetables. Mostly tomatoes and stick peas.

MRS. GOTO: Where was your farm?

MR. OUCHI: It was in Terra Bella. We worked there for about three years, then moved to the Fresno area.

MRS. GOTO: Was that before the war?

MR. OUCHI: Yes. We left for camp from Lindsay.

MRS. GOTO: Were your parents with you?

MR. OUCHI: Yes. We went together with our two children, my parents, my uncle, and my wife, and I. The seven of us. My uncle worked with us a long time. My uncle was the first to come to the United States. He came six or seven years before my father went to Hawaii. He came to work in the oranges. My father was a good worker, so the Caucasian boss liked him, and his work was mostly irrigation and pruning.

MRS. GOTO: Did your father call you from Japan so that you could assist him with the farm work?

MR. OUCHI: No, to start that persimmon farm. That was a long time ago.

MRS. GOTO: Who is your daughter married to?

MR. OUCHI: She is married to John Miyauchi, who is an architect. She is 46 years old and has a 14-year old daughter. She attended Reedley College two years then went onto business college in Los Angeles.

Our son went into the Navy Air Force after graduating from Reedley College. He became a jet pilot. He was born August 25, 1934 and died August 13, 1957. He was killed in a jet plane crash at a Pensacola Naval Air Station on a Tuesday. His name was Frank Akio Ouchi.

MRS. GOTO: Was your son a volunteer?

MR. OUCHI: Yes. Four years after our son was killed my first wife passed away.

MRS. GOTO: What did she die of?

MR. OUCHI: She had a weak heart.

MRS. GOTO: Was she sick for a long time?

MR. OUCHI: She was sickly from the time our son was born and had a miscarriage later. Since then she went to the doctor very frequently.

MRS. GOTO: You remarried a year later?

MR. OUCHI: My second wife is very healthy. Her name is Hanako Ouchi. I married her November 18, 1961.

MRS. GOTO: Will you please tell us about your life.

MRS. OUCHI: One year after the war with Japan was over, my husband passed away in Japan. My grown daughter is in Los Angeles. She called me to come and live with her in America, but after living with her for a year and a half I left because it did not work out. It was not a good situation. This happened about seven years after my husband had passed away.

Through the introduction of our good friends the Nakamuras, I found a position as a maid in the home of a Caucasian lawyer in Fresno. This couple was very kind to me, and I stayed with them for four years.

After four years with the lawyer's family, I married Mr. Ouchi who was a widower taking care of his aged parents and uncle. Grandma Ouchi died at the age of 87 after I married. Grandpa Ouchi died at the age of 96, five years ago. Uncle died at the age of 94, four years ago.

I had never worked in the field in the hot Fresno heat before, and there were many a day that I wanted to give up and go back to the lawyer's home where I was welcomed, but I stuck it out. Many times I cried out in the field, but I persevered. Father always told me that one must persevere for three years in whatever one does. So at the Caucasians' home I persevered for four years in spite of the language barrier. And, so, I did likewise with the farm and in caring for three old men and a sick woman.

Now we are retired, and I go fishing and have a good, peaceful life. When I worked for the lawyer, he took out social security for me and took care of medicare so now I have an income and can be assured of health care.

MRS. GOTO: You were fortunate to have worked for a lawyer. Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview?

MRS. OUCHI: I only wish for my grandchild to grow and to be happy.

MRS. GOTO: How long have you two been married?

MRS. OUCHI: Almost 20 years.

MRS. GOTO: Are you still friends with the lawyer's family?

MRS. OUCHI: They still remember my birthday with a gift every year. I take a simple gift to them at Christmas.

MR. OUCHI: They have been good to my wife, but my wife has also been good to them.

MRS. GOTO: They probably think of you as family.

MR. OUCHI: Even after we were married she went every Saturday to help them. So they will not forget -

MRS. OUCHI: I did not accept pay for the work I did. I did not clean house for them. I did the baking for them. I learned to bake lots of things. They tease me for being fat now. They are both careful of their diet and stay slim.

MRS. GOTO: Mr. Ouchi, do you recall about evacuation and your camp

experience at Poston II, Block 207, Room 6-D?

MR. OUCHI: My family of seven; my parents, my uncle, my wife, and two children went to camp. We were in camp for three years. I helped cook for over 200 people in one block. On my days off I went fishing to the Colorado River. That was my pleasure.

MRS. GOTO: What kind of fish did you catch?

MR. OUCHI: Mostly koi and black bass and turtles. We drained the blood from the turtles and mixed it with wine as medicine for people with high blood pressure. I also took some of this to someone I knew in Camp I with lung ailment, and he was cured in a month's time. It is good medicine.

MRS. GOTO: Doesn't the blood coagulate?

MR. OUCHI: Not if you mix it with the alcohol in the wine. We had requests for this remedy from Manzanar and Gila, too. I built a pond and raised many turtles. I had to walk three miles to the Colorado River to get the turtles. I stayed overnight on the riverbank and fished for the turtles and carried them back to camp in a sack. They were very heavy!

MRS. GOTO: Were they large-sized turtles?

MR. OUCHI: About eight was all I could carry; they were about 12 inches long.

MRS. GOTO: What did you feed them?

MR. OUCHI: Meat. That's what we caught them with. They each laid about a dozen eggs. It took about 2 1/2 to 3 months before they hatched. They were cute. I was the turtle specialist! No one else could catch them. I also worked with vegetables. I took turtles to the hospital to Dr. Okonigi of Fresno for those who wanted turtle blood for medicine. I rode the bicycle to Camp III to advertise my turtles.

MRS. GOTO: What did your wife do?

MR. OUCHI: She helped the cooks. I stayed in the kitchen and made cookies for the children and manju for the adults. I would ring the dinner bell and everyone would come running. The other cooks would disappear as soon as their chores were done. It was very hot! But to help keep the spirits of the people up, I did my best to make treats.

MRS. GOTO: When did you come back from camp?

MR. OUCHI: I came back to Centerville in 1945. I knew a foreman who came from Delano. There were about five families who came back from camp that did not have living quarters. The property belonged to a lawyer in Fresno who vacated buildings there for us. Later he was killed in an auto and train accident. He was a good man.

MRS. GOTO: Was your first wife ill in camp?

MR. OUCHI: Yes. She had heart trouble. We went to Glendale, Arizona to help a farmer before returning to Fresno. It was a terrible place. The water was foul. We used water from the pasture, draining it and

straining it for bath water. We stayed there for two months. It was too hot and uncomfortable for my wife.

MRS. GOTO: When you came back, how did you buy the ranch?

MR. OUCHI: We bought it in Mrs. Ouchi's (first wife) name, since she was a citizen. We stayed in Centerville two years then bought this place on December 21, 1953.

MRS. GOTO: How many acres was this property?

MR. OUCHI: Thirty acres.

MRS. GOTO: What was on the farm?

MR. OUCHI: About three acres of first-year plum trees. But it was overgrown with weeds, so we couldn't even see them. There were some Thompson grapevines, but it, too, was covered with weeds. But the soil seemed to be fertile, so I decided to buy the land. So we dug the weeds out every day and hauled them to the Del Rey Dump. After that, we planted fruit trees and between the trees we planted vegetables. Year by year the trees have developed and now they bear a good crop so now we have enough income to live comfortably.

MRS. GOTO: Do you still have fruit trees?

MR. OUCHI: Oh, yes, we have plums. This year the plums brought in a good price, so this was a good year. For 22 years I labored to make this into a successful and profitable farm. Three years ago we sold this farm to a Nisei, since I have reached the age of 70 years.

Some time ago, I passed the naturalization test and am now an American citizen. With God's grace I am now living my last years in comfort.

MRS. GOTO: It is fortunate that both of you are in good health.

MR. OUCHI: Yes. We go fishing and plant vegetables and take care of our garden around the house. I went back to Japan after 53 years and have gone four times now. And if there is life, I would like to go back once more to meet my relatives and classmates. That is my wish.

MRS. GOTO: You went back to Japan last year, did you not?

MR. OUCHI: Yes. That was our fourth time. The sixth time for my wife Hanako.

MRS. GOTO: Mr. Ouchi, is there anything else you would like to add?

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

MRS. GOTO: Thank you very much for this interview.