

SHIGEO HIRAHARA

MR. INAMI: Today is May 10, 1980. I, Joe Inami, have the privilege to be in the home of Shigeo Hirahara at 9808 Road 281, Madera, California, 93637.

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. HIRAHARA: My name is Shigeo Hirahara. I was born on February 4, 1917 in Bowles. I have lived longest in Madera.

MR. INAMI: Please tell me about your family. What were your parents' names?

MR. HIRAHARA: My father was Tsunetaro Hirahara, and he was born in 1881. My mother Shizuno was born in 1889. They were both from Hiroshima-ken.

MR. INAMI: Where were they married?

MR. HIRAHARA: Probably in Hiroshima.

MR. INAMI: When did they leave Japan to come to the United States?

MR. HIRAHARA: They came in 1916 to make a living.

MR. INAMI: Where did they live when they first arrived?

MR. HIRAHARA: In Monterey. Then in 1917, the following year, they moved to Bowles.

MR. INAMI: What kind of work did they do in Monterey?

MR. HIRAHARA: They were in commercial fishing.

MR. INAMI: And in Bowles, what did they do?

MR. HIRAHARA: They were farm laborers.

MR. INAMI: What year did they come to Madera?

MR. HIRAHARA: They came in 1922.

MR. INAMI: Did your parents ever go back to Japan?

MR. HIRAHARA: My mother did. They went back in 1927 and the second time in 1954.

MR. INAMI: Did she become a naturalized citizen?

MR. HIRAHARA: No.

MR. INAMI: How many children did your parents have?

MR. HIRAHARA: Two boys and three girls.

MR. INAMI: Did they marry outside the Japanese race?

MR. HIRAHARA: No.

MR. INAMI: What did their children do for a living?

MR. HIRAHARA: I am the oldest, and I am in the farming business. I was in the military service during World War II.

My brother Akira is in the TV repair business in Los Angeles. He is also a World War II veteran. He graduated from Fresno State University and a trade school in Los Angeles. He owns his own shop.

Then my oldest sister Fusaye is married to an X-ray technician in Los Angeles. The next sister Fumiko is a farmer's wife in Lodi. The youngest Yoshiko is married to an aircraft electrical engineer. She, too, lives in Los Angeles.

MR. INAMI: Did you encounter any racial prejudice before or after the war?

MR. HIRAHARA: No.

MR. INAMI: Have you noticed any difference in the treatment of Japanese before and after the war?

MR. HIRAHARA: It has improved a whole lot.

MR. INAMI: What differences in social and economic changes have you seen in your local community?

MR. HIRAHARA: Lots of changes for the better.

MR. INAMI: Have your parents been involved in any religious, social, or business organizations?

MR. HIRAHARA: They belonged to the Bukkyokai (Buddhist Church) and the language school.

MR. INAMI: Did they observe some Japanese customs?

MR. HIRAHARA: Oh, yes. Oh, boy, all of them; Boys' Day, Girls' Day, New Years mochitsuki (rice pounding), and all the traditional Japanese celebrations.

MR. INAMI: Is there anything else you might like to add?

MR. HIRAHARA: We didn't have electricity, no pressure system. Toilets were outhouses. No running water, we had to pump water; but we sure had ofuro (Japanese bath), and we had to cook in a wood stove; not hot water.

MR. INAMI: How did you make hot water?

MR. HIRAHARA: We put a pot of water on the wood stove to use for dishwashing. My mother was widowed in 1934, and she worked hard to keep the family together because all the children were small. I was only 14, and I was the oldest.

MR. INAMI: Most people today would go on welfare.

MR. HIRAHARA: There was no welfare then. She was just too proud. Japanese had pride, and she would not have received charity. We worked it out by being thrifty. The Nisei and the third generation don't really know nor appreciate the Japanese pride. When my dad passed away the Japanese community offered to raise money to send the family back, but she said no and refused their offer. She said the children did not know Japan, and she would not subject them to that. We lost Mother in 1962 at the age of 73.

MR. INAMI: There was a strong family tie. That's a heritage that Nisei and Sansei don't carry over.

MR. HIRAHARA: I imagine some do, but we are not exposed to it as the Issei were. They had a strong conviction in their custom.

MR. INAMI: When did you come to Madera?

MR. HIRAHARA: In 1922, and I have been here ever since.

MR. INAMI: What do you do for a living?

MR. HIRAHARA: I farm.

MR. INAMI: When did you marry?

MR. HIRAHARA: In 1944.

MR. INAMI: How did you meet your wife?

MR. HIRAHARA: We met in the Assembly Center in Fresno—which was at the Fresno Fairgrounds, now track and field--and we were married in the Arkansas Relocation Center. I have an Arkansas marriage license.

MR. INAMI: Have you been back to Japan to visit your parents and relatives?

MR. HIRAHARA: No.

MR. INAMI: How many children do you have?

MR. HIRAHARA: Four children, all sons.

MR. INAMI: Have your children married outside the Japanese race?

MR. HIRAHARA: No, not yet.

MR. INAMI: What would you think about interracial marriages for your children?

MR. HIRAHARA: I would rather see them marry a Japanese spouse, but those are some of the factors that are changing. And the third generation seems to intermarry.

MR. INAMI: What do your children do for a living?

MR. HIRAHARA: Stanley, the oldest son, is a graduate of Cal Poly at

San Luis Obispo, and is an ag engineer.

MR. INAMI: Has he seen military service?

MR. HIRAHARA: Yes. He was stationed in Italy during the Viet Nam War. He is married and lives in Reedley. He works at Sperry New Holland in Fowler as a designing engineer. No children.

The next son is James, and he graduated from UC Berkeley and also received his masters at Hayward State University. He was in the National Guard. He is married and now lives in Gaithersburg, Maryland. He works for the Federal Government Department of Energy. Originally, he was with the Nuclear Energy Commission in Oakland and was transferred.

Larry, our third, graduated from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo with a degree in Ag Crop Science and was in the National Guard. He is now working in Salinas and is self-employed as a seed salesman. He has a wholesale seed company and sells to big farmers by the bulk.

Steven is the last son, and he graduated from Claremont Men's College near Pomona. He majored in political science. He is not married and is taking over our farm and works with me.

MR. INAMI: What achievement awards did your sons receive?

MR. HIRAHARA: All four received Boy of the Month awards. Jim (1966) and Steve (1969) received the Boy of the Year awards at Madera High School. Jim participated in Varsity football and baseball. Larry and Steve played with the Frosh-Sophomore football teams.

MR. INAMI: What did the other boys do?

MRS. HIRAHARA: They were too busy with the FFA--Future Farmers of America--activities such as pruning contests, where they received prizes. Larry is still active with the Young Farmers' nationwide organization, which is associated with the Farm Bureau.

MR. INAMI: Do they belong to any organizations?

MRS. HIRAHARA: They are active with the Young Buddhist Association. Stan is active in the JACL.

MR. INAMI: Do you still observe any Japanese customs?

MR. HIRAHARA: When the children were young, the grandparents used to fly the carps on Boys' Day and display the significant dolls.

MR. INAMI: Do you still make omochi at New Years, or do you buy them now?

MR. HIRAHARA: No, we started making mochi again the last two or three years at the request of the children. They remembered the grandparents doing the mochitsuki. They want to revive the custom. When they were younger, they didn't care for the traditional Japanese food; but now they want it. They have a craving for it. The older ones like Japanese food, ochazuke and tsukemono (rice with tea and pickled vegetables). Tsukemoni is hard to beat! I cannot eat it now because of high blood pressure.

MR. INAMI: What organizations do you belong to?

MR. HIRAHARA: I belong to the Fresno Buddhist Church, the Madera JACL, and the Nisei Farmers. That's a pretty good-sized organization.

MR. INAMI: Are there any humorous stories you remember?

MR. HIRAHARA: If my mother was alive, she certainly would tell a lot of stories.

MR. INAMI: Thank you for this interview.