



Cincinnati Chapter

George Buyo

I was born in 1900 in Kagato, Japan, near Okayama City, and was the oldest of three brothers and four sisters. My father was a sergeant in the Japanese Cavalry in Manchuria and was wounded and sent home in 1904. I remember after he was mustered out as a disabled soldier, he brought home a horse. In those days, only a very few had riding horses.

The villagers had work horses. I thought it was a big thing to see this riding horse. Because my father was in the army so long, my brother was born nearly seven years later. The last sister was born after I was in this country.

My family was one of the wealthiest in the village. My grandfather started the shoyu business. As he prospered, he started Okayama Kojin (orphanage). The purpose or why I wanted to come to the U.S. is this. My family was one of the earliest Christians. I really didn't like the idea of being educated and raised as a Christian because the townspeople looked down upon us. "Yaso, yaso" they called Christians and looked down on them. Anyway, I kind of felt I was ostracized from Japanese society. In high school I started thinking about this and maybe if I got a chance, I can go to another place like the United States.

Among the orphans at the Orphanage were one brother and two sisters by the name of Kanzaki. My grandfather recognized the ability of this oldest boy and sent him to the United States to be educated. He graduated in 1909 from the University of California in Berkeley, and after graduation he became associated with and was elected president of the California Japanese Association. Politically, as far as the Japanese government was concerned, he was the second most important man in the U.S. Number one was the ambassador to the U.S. and then there was Mr. Kiichiro Kanzaki.

I did get the chance because Mr. Kanzaki came to Japan on business. I appealed to Mr. Kanzaki. At that time Japanese youths under 21 were not allowed to leave the country without serving in the military first. Also in 1908 under the Gentlemen's Agreement, the Japanese

government was committed to restrict the immigration of Japanese laborers and farmers to the United States.

Mr. Kanzaki went to see Baron Shidehara who was just appointed as ambassador to Washington, D.C. In 1917, I entered U.S. on a student's visa. Baron Shidehara, Mr. and Mrs. Kanzaki and their children, and I left on the Siberia Maru in October. I felt lucky being able to come to the United States.

Being a third-year student at Kansengakuin University, I had enough scholastic credits to be transferred to the University of California as a freshman. I did not have to take an entrance examination. I lived in the student club house with other Japanese students.

From the beginning, I didn't know what the heck I'm doing. I wasn't understanding anything. I could only express, "I want this" or "I want that" but taking notes in a lecture class... I soon realized I should take myself out of those classes and enrolled at Oakland High School and took English, American history and music.

Then the second year, I could understand what other people were thinking and doing about us Japanese in California. I realized that Japanese are not welcome in California. From the treatment accorded me, I was more ostracized, more out of place than I was in Japan. I told Mr. Kanzaki about it. Since it was summer, he sent me to a fruit ranch where I was given special treatment. I rode horses to see that the fruits were picked properly. For this preferred job, I think I got \$2.00/day while the others got \$1.00/day. I told Mr. Kanzaki I felt the whites looked down on the Japanese. He said, "If you are not satisfied here, I'll send you someplace else."

In 1920, Mr. Kanzaki enrolled me in Eastern Business College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. Since my family was fairly well to do, they sent me \$250 a month allowance. Four of us Japanese students owned one Cadillac. I remember my share was \$600. Winters we went skating, we golfed all summer. We were members of the Dutchess County Country Club. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was a member of the same country club.

In 1923 my father lost his shirt in silkworms. He was dabbling in the silk market. You might say he lost a big fortune. My family couldn't afford to send me that kind of money anymore. Mr. Kanzaki came to Poughkeepsie. He gave me a ticket to Wilmore, Kentucky, where I was enrolled in the sophomore class at Asbury College. So I was changed from playboy to country school student. My allowance was cut from \$250 to \$75 a month. The next summer I knew I had to look for a job some place which meant I had to come out to Cincinnati or Lexington.

My father wrote me saying if I'm ever in trouble, go see Mr. L.A. Ault in Cincinnati who was the founder and president of Ault & Wiborg Ink Co. The factory was located at 8th and Broadway. Bottled ink had to be shipped in boxes and my job was to print addresses on the boxes. The second summer I went back but Mr. Ault said the boxes were now printed by mechanical means and not by hand. Since I knew how to drive a car, Mrs. Ault hired me as a houseman-chauffeur-butler-what have you.

I was dating a girl in school and was told by the president of the college that they didn't want Orientals to date white girls. That was news to me. It came out of the blue. I felt too uncomfortable to stay. I didn't have any place to go so I went to Cincinnati. Mrs. Ault recommended me to a family in Indian Hill. This family went to Michigan in the summer and that's where I met Nora who was working next door for a family from St. Louis. We were engaged in 1923 and finally married in January 1924.

Since I was getting money from home, I wrote them that I might get married here. They immediately sent me six women's pictures and told me to pick any one of them as they were all acceptable to the family. They sent me \$700 to come home any way I wanted...through San Francisco or New York, London, India. I returned the check and the pictures. They sent me two month's allowance of \$150. I still have that check uncashed. I had decided to marry Nora Elsie Poensing.

So that's how we got married. I had never finished schooling. All the schools I went, I was just about to graduate but didn't finish to get a diploma.

While working in Cincinnati, I went to night school at Woodward High School. I thought I might become a newspaperman or draftsman. I took private lessons from a draftsman for six months. He guaranteed me a job but he said no one would hire me because they were unionized. I thought I would go into carpentry but they wouldn't accept me in the union. I took an extension course from LaSalle University to go into newspaper work. They offered me a job as a reporter for \$25 a week but not in Cincinnati. I had to go to Los Angeles, San Francisco or New York.

I remember December 7, 1941, when United States declared war on Japan. All the friends we made were loyal to us. We didn't give them reason to be otherwise. We had to register at the courthouse downtown. I was fingerprinted by the FBI. They put us under surveillance. We could only go fifty mile radius from Cincinnati. They advised us not to go to theater, ballgames or places where people congregated. They

said they were protecting us. We didn't get gas rations, no tires because we were enemy aliens. We had a 1940 Pontiac which we sold to a banker in Sunman, IN.

How we found this remote farm of 40 acres is because this is as far as we could come within 50 miles from Cincinnati. The creek had good fishing and there was good hunting. I had searched all over Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky and I knew this place was good. When we bought this place in 1942, there was nothing on it except a barn that was ready to cave in. We tore the barn down and used the lumber for the shed. We dug out a cistern for water. I started to design and build this house. Carpenters and masons put up the outside. Inside, I did the work all by myself.

We worked for the Graydons in O'Bryonville off Grandin Road. Nora worked there while I tried to make a living by farming but I couldn't build the house and farm by myself without hired help so it was impossible for me to weather through that. I went back to running the big house for the Graydons until they died in the 60's. I planned to retire to the farm then but was asked to be caretaker for the Powell Crosley estate where they were planning to build the new Providence Hospital. The hospital was completed in 1970 and we worked until 1972. During all that time, we spent weekends on the farm.

The first time I visited Japan was in 1958. Since I rejected my father's offer, we didn't get along. He wouldn't write to me. I wouldn't write to him. He died before WW II. I took Nora to Japan in 1965 to meet my mother.

Douglas MacArthur put a severe blow to our family finances because he split up the land in Japan. I remember we had a big house and three big warehouses. Our storehouses were always loaded with rice clear up to the ceiling. After the war, they received token pay for the land the government confiscated. The shoyu business of my forefathers went down because Kikkoman Company took over all Japan. We are in the pottery business now making "bizen yaki" which is bringing in big money.

Since Nora and I have no children, we have sponsored and educated ten or eleven relatives and friends' children. We get the immense satisfaction and joy when they come to visit us. We invested in their future. Now their children are doing well.

George Joji Buyo 9/11/84