

JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAII

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

With

Stanley M. Miyahara (SM)

September 9, 2004

BY: Florence Sugimoto (FS)

FS: Please state your name in full, your birthdate and place of birth.

SM: Stanley Masazumi Miyahara; birthdate is November 25, 1932; place of birth is Honolulu, Hawaii.

FS: May I have your parents' names and the year and their place of birth?

SM: My father's name was Hiroshi. He was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, and my mother's name was Chiyoko. She was born in Lahaina, Maui.

FS: Tell us the circumstances which brought them to Hawaii.

SM: Well, I really don't know because they were born here. My father's father lived in Kapahulu, and I don't know what...I forgot what...he was doing, but my mother's parents...her father died when I was born.

FS: What was the language spoken at home and cultural influence you got from your parents?

SM: We spoke Japanese and English. My father was a strong Japanese language...you know...so I had to go to Japanese school until the war started. My mother spoke Japanese too and some broken English. The culture was strictly Japanese.

FS: How many children in the family?

SM: I have three sisters. Two were born here, and another sister was born in Arkansas during the internment. I'm the oldest and I have three sisters.

FS: Were you dual citizens?

SM: Yes...I was...so I had to go to ...my name was registered at the Japanese Consulate.

FS: Just you.

SM: Yes.

FS: What was family life like?

SM: Good. (chuckle) You mean before the war?

FS: Yes.

SM: Very normal. Everybody do his thing. My father worked as a salesman for Hawaii Candy Company. My mother was at home. It was a really good life.

FS: How about your neighborhood?

SM: My neighborhood was all Japanese people, and I had a...we were very close...my neighbors were close.

FS: What district was this?

SM: This is in McCully.

FS: What English and Japanese schools did you attend before December 7?

SM: English school Lunalilo School and Japanese school right across the street was Koike Sensei.

FS: Oh, I see.

SM: Koike Sensei's father started it. He was a...

FS: McCully Japanese School?

SM: Yeah. He was the "*koochoo sensei* " (principal) and my teacher was Hirata-Sensei.

FS: Do you have any special memories of Japanese school or English school?

SM: Oh, yeah...very much.

FS: Tell us about some of your experiences.

SM: Japanese school?

FS: Either.

SM: My father was very strict in Japanese, so every night...we had a two-story house...he sat across me at the table and I had Japanese lessons. "*Kakikata*"...he was very, very strict on "*Kakikata*."

FS: Writing.

SM: Writing. I really had to study Japanese. A couple of times I had to...you know...what do you call that...?

FS: "*Hanashikata*?"

SM: Yeah.

FS: It was like a speaking contest.

SM: And then every week they had Japanese movies at Japanese school, so I used to save seats for my parents. It was good.

FS: And you enjoyed it.

SM: Yeah, and I used to talk in class, and the teacher would turn around and throw the eraser right on my head. He knew who was talking, I guess. Sometimes he throw the chalk.

FS: But you must've been a good student.

SM: I tried.

FS: Let's go to December 7. You have here in your written material some of the details. Is there anything you'd like to add as far as the circumstances or your reaction are concerned?

SM: I really don't know why my father was arrested or taken to Sand Island. All I know is that he didn't come home from work one night. My mother told me that he was taken to Sand Island, so I didn't know what that was about. I didn't know he was interned because I was only about 10 years...9 years old, actually, because my birthday is in November.

FS: That means your father never explained to you the details of his arrest.

SM: No, he never did. He mentioned one time that he liked to listen to short-wave radio, so it might be that the neighbor...it was a duplex house...the neighbor can hear because they mentioned it to the Federal agents, I don't know.

FS: That's just your guess.

SM: That's what I was told by my mother.

FS: How did your relations with your neighbor change after your father was arrested?

SM: Well, I mean my immediate neighbor was quiet. They never bothered us, but the rest of the neighbors...we were close. My mother used to take us over to the...

FS: Even after the arrest?

SM: Yeah, even after the arrest. He would take us to our neighbor...Nakagawa house...and have dinner once in a while.

FS: For the whole family?

SM: They would come by and invite us.

FS: Oh, I see...this was during Christmas.

SM: Yeah.

FS: What happened after that, since you didn't hear from your father? How long did you have to wait to actually see him?

SM: After he was arrested?

FS: Yes. Did you ever see him?

SM: No, I never saw him.

FS: Until...?

SM: Until I got on the boat going to the mainland.

FS: When was that?

SM: Let's see...must've been October. He probably went in March 1942. He didn't return from work one night. I later found out that he was sent to Sand Island, and that was in March, 1942, so only four of us...my mother, two sisters and myself. My mother was really busy. I don't know how she got her income. We never did talk about that, so I don't supported us. Could've been her mother...my grandmother. My grandmother had a farm in Kaimuki right behind the Diamond Head cemetery. My mother was the oldest child in the family, so my mother had to work, but we had regular food and I went Japanese school and all that stuff. In October 1942, I was in school. It was just after lunch. The principal called me in the office. I remember her name was Mrs. Weatherbee, a real mean-looking principal. She gave me a dime and told me go to Ala Moana Boulevard and catch the bus to go to this Immigration Station...they called it Fort Armstrong at that time...tell the bus driver you want to get off there. I got on the

bus. I didn't think anything about what was going on. Then I went over there to the Immigration Station, and the man says, "Put your gas mask on that stairwell and go upstairs and get yourself a bunk," so I went upstairs. This was evening time, and I don't remember having dinner, but next morning they got us up. We caught the bus, went down to the pier.

FS: Was that you alone?

SM: Yeah, just me myself.

FS: And that means you were sharing bunks with...

SM: There were other people around...all men. It was a single bunk.

FS: And the next morning...

SM: The next morning we got on the bus and went to the pier to board the ship. I was still by myself, and I got on the ship, and the guy says, "Go to the lowest level, so I went down to the lowest level, and that's when I saw my father for the first time. He was waiting by the bunk bed.

FS: And this was at Sand Island.

SM: No, this was on the pier. I don't know which pier that was. I remember the harbor. I know there was a boat, and I know they had to pull up the gangplank. We were downstairs in the lowest part of the ship.

FS: On the ship.

SM: Um hum, and that's the first time I saw him in six months. We were on the ship for five days. I didn't see my mother then. Then we got to California, a place called Wilmington. We got off the gangplank. They had guards around. They had GIs all over the place with rifles. Then when we got on the train I saw my mother for the first time.

FS: And this was immediately after you got off the boat or ship.

SM: Yeah, then we got on the train. That's when we saw them, but they sleep in a different car. Men sleep in a different car. The dining room was the same.

FS: Did your mother explain where they were?

SM: She didn't tell me anything. Young as I was, I didn't even think about stuff like that. I wasn't even concerned. It took us about three days to get to Arkansas.

FS: Did your father explain about where you were going and why?

SM: No, he didn't explain anything to me. These are things you find out after you get there and talk to other people...how come you're here, how come I'm here, how come your parents are here, etc. There was a Doctor Miyamoto. He was in our block, and I don't know how a doctor got interned.

FS: And this was where...your first camp?

SM: Jerome, Arkansas. We got there in the evening; in fact, it was night time. It was raining. They put us on a truck and took us to this barracks, and that's where we stayed. Next day, I see my friends, Donald Matsumura and Kimura. Those two guys were the first people I met over there. They were a couple years older than me.

FS: But they were from your district?

SM: No.

FS: Just friends?

SM: I just met them. The three of us became kind-of close.

FS: Were you in the same barrack?

SM: No, same block, different barracks. The barracks were like 6 in a row, mess hall is here in the middle (pointing to picture) and over here is the laundry room, over here is the men's toilet/shower. Over here we had a big area; that's where they had a woodpile. We had a pot-bellied stove and coal. Our unit was the last one in the barrack, so it was the biggest. The middle ones are small, the ends are bigger.

FS: Do you remember what number it was?

SM: A...Unit A.

FS: And this was which camp?

SM: Jerome.

FS: I see. It was a family camp.

SM: Yeah, and most of the Hawaii people lived in Block 38...39...40.

FS: And you were in Block...?

SM: I was in Block 40.

FS: I'd like to ask you now about the daily routine, your length of stay, camp life, etc. First of all, how long were you there?

SM: Let's see...

FS: About a year?

SM: I got there in '42...'43...sometime in '44.

FS: So that would be about a year-and-a-half.

SM: Yeah, they were gonna close Jerome, so I was told that they were gonna close Jerome, so we had to move to another camp.

FS: I see, but you were there about a year-and-a-half.

SM: Yeah.

FS: What was the daily routine like?

SM: Daily routine? Oh, lot of activities. We had baseball team, football team... We used to go out the back gate. This is the back gate. As a matter of fact, this is our forest already. We used to go swimming in the bayou in the forest.

FS: So you actually participated in all those activities.

SM: Yeah.

FS: So were you homesick at all?

SM: Not really.

FS: What kind of housing did you have?

SM: It was just an open bay. The room is like this (pointing). Here's the door, this is the end unit of the barracks. This is our unit. The pot-bellied stove is right here.

FS: In the middle.

SM: Right here, against this wall, and our bed...

FS: How were the families separated...by curtains, by...?

SM: Nothing...just open area, just bunks. That's all we had.

FS: Completely open...with how many families?

- SM: Only our family...one family per unit. This is a unit.
- FS: Oh, I see, then it was just an apartment.
- SM: One unit.
- FS: What about family life? Did you have much of a family life?
- SM: Oh, yeah, we were close.
- FS: Not much different from life in Hawaii?
- SM: No. Besides that, like I said, in the middle of the block they had the mess hall.
- FS: Did you go together as a family?
- SM: My mother used to work in the mess hall and get the food and bring it home.
- FS: Oh, you ate at home.
- SM: Yeah, we ate at home. Sometimes we go to the mess hall. You can go there or you can bring your food back.
- FS: What about the income during that period? Do you know what your parents did?
- SM: My father worked at the hospital.
- FS: He must have earned something like \$17-\$19 a month.
- SM: Sixteen dollars a month.
- FS: Were you able to manage with that?
- SM: Oh, yeah, they got a PX. This is a store (pointing) so there we buy milk, crackers, toothpaste, and other stuff.
- FS: Do you have special memories of school?
- SM: Yes. Our school is (pointing) up here someplace. This is our school. The high school was right across our block. The fire station was here (pointing).
- FS: And what grade were you placed in?
- SM: I was in the fifth grade. Regular grade.



- FS: Was school very different from when you were back in Hawaii?
- SM: About the same thing...history, English, math. Miss Young was our teacher.
- FS: Was there any Japanese school?
- SM: No Japanese school...strictly English school. We used to have to walk to school, walk home to eat lunch, then walk back to school, and that's a long walk because the blocks are big.
- FS: How long did it take you?
- SM: About 15 minutes. We take our time.
- FS: Was there anything interesting happening in school?
- SM: Well, we had a strict teacher, and I talk in class, and they used to have a counselor, and I cannot forget his name, Mr. Chong. He took me and washed my mouth out with soap water. I never forget that. He did that to me twice.
- FS: You must have misbehaved in some way.
- SM: I don't know why he kept picking on me. We sing a lot in class...regular work, regular history, math, English...all that stuff.
- FS: What about outside of school?
- SM: Lot of activities...baseball, football. We used to walk out in the back over here and go all the way down to a place called the bayou. There's pictures inside here of the bayou. We can go fishing and swimming.
- FS: Tell us what you did.
- SM: In this area over here was all mounds of dirt and sand. Get rattlesnakes and the man that used to live over here was an old man.
- FS: At Block 41?
- SM: Yeah. An old man used to skin the rattlesnakes, so we used to catch rattlesnakes.
- FS: Did he pay you?
- SM: No, no. I was only 10 years old. We don't think about money because everything is free. You go to the movies, it's free, and I don't go to the store because I don't need anything. I don't buy anything because my mother did the buying. All I need is toothpaste, and I was bald-headed.

FS: What would he do with the skins?

SM: He made hatbands, belts...really nice.

FS: Did he sell any of them?

SM: I don't know. I remember he just used to make them. Then we used to go swimming in the back here (pointing) and the water moccasins would come across and we start yelling, "Get out of there!" Lot of snakes. On each block there's a big ditch, so in order to go on the road you *gotta* cross this...you *gotta* walk across.

FS: Across the plank?

SM: Yeah. Every block has that. There's a big ditch around ours.

FS: What was the purpose of the ditch?

SM: I guess rain. It used to get flooded. The water gets soft and muddy and pretty soon get crawfish...you know...crayfish.

FS: In the ditch?

SM: Yeah...big kind. Big kind crawfish we used to catch. Night time, we go out in the open field and catch fireflies.

FS: What did you do with the crawfish? Did you prepare it and eat it?

SM: I never think about eating crawfish...just pick them and throw 'em away. We used to catch fireflies sometimes at night. We used to go steal sugar beets and eat the sugar beets from the vacant lot next to our block.

FS: Tell us about that.

SM: That sugar beets is so good...big...about softball size...and then we just bite into it.

FS: And the farmers...

SM: I don't know who was farming that...maybe it's the residents.

FS: The mainland internees, possibly, who were farmers?

SM: Yeah, they were farmers. But nobody chased us out. We just went in...

FS: And helped yourselves?

SM: And this block over here had nothing but old people...I mean senior citizens...so lot of deaths.

FS: Oh...in Block 1.

SM: So we think...we were young...we used to call that a haunted area because a lot of times I seen "*hi-no-tama*" from the camp.

FS: Fireballs?

SM: Plenty times. I seen one fall into a chimney of Block 29. I seen that thing.

FS: At night?

SM: Nighttime...man inside the chimney.

FS: In the chimney.

SM: Look like one chimney sticking out in the light. I don't know whose house that was. Maybe it was the laundry room.

FS: Did you go to any funerals?

SM: No...no such thing. No such thing as funerals, no such thing as weddings, birthday parties.

FS: Then you never celebrated your birthday.

SM: No...never. We don't even think about it.

FS: Did it ever bother you that you were living in this separated area of barbed wire?

SM: No, I think it was kind of... This camp, Jerome, I think, wasn't like that because I saw barbed wire, but it was like real dilapidated already. There's no place you can run to. This is all forest in the back here (pointing) and only trees must be around here. Beyond here is probably Denson, Arkansas, and this side is all forest.

FS: You never went as far as the perimeters of the area.

SM: In front. The back side...inside right here...it's fenced but it's forest. The fence is all broken down so it's really not a camp.

FS: It didn't seem like a camp to you.

SM: Yeah.

FS: Even though there were armed guards.

SM: I didn't see any armed guards.

FS: Oh, you never saw armed guards here.

SM: No. I never seen any armed guards in this area. The only thing is in this area by a hospital we had double...double fencing...so in order to get to the hospital, you got to go through two fences. That's the only place where I saw double fencing.

FS: But no guards?

SM: No guards. I didn't see any guards.

FS: When you transferred to the next camp after Jerome, were there any reasons given as to why you were going?

SM: Yeah...because Jerome closed. I later found out that people who go to Tule Lake would normally go back to Japan after the war, and I guess my father's intention was to go back to Japan, but my mother talked him out of it because after we got to Tule Lake, she said that we were going back to Hawaii, so I guess when you get to the camp, you can change your mind. Then again, the day we left for Tule Lake we all had to meet at the school...the elementary school. There were a lot of people and a lot of people must have changed their minds.

FS: When you transferred from Jerome to Tule Lake, did you go by train?

SM: Yeah...by train.

FS: All the way?

SM: All the way.

FS: I understand you never spent a night someplace.

SM: No, we just stayed on the train all the way.

FS: That was pretty far.

SM: Oh, yeah, Arkansas to California...about 2 days.

FS: Any memories?

SM: Tule Lake?

FS: No...on the train.

SM: No, no memories of that. It was just another train ride.

FS: What time of the year was it when you went to Tule Lake?

SM: Let's see...

FS: That's all right if you can't recall.

SM: I think it was about September of 1944.

FS: So it wasn't really that cold.

SM: Not yet, but I felt the winter over there, so it must have been in the fall. It's cold...really it's cold. To me it was cold. The camp is so much bigger.

FS: Than Jerome?

SM: Than Jerome....about 84 blocks. Each block has more units and more barracks than Jerome. In the block we were, we were integrated with the mainland internees. It wasn't like Jerome where everybody in Block 40 was from Hawaii. Everybody in Block 39 was from Hawaii. Everybody in Block 38 was from Hawaii. But at Tule Lake we were all integrated. We had Hawaii people way down in Block 10.

FS: Oh, you were scattered.

SM: Yeah, it was scattered.

FS: That's one difference. Did anything change as far as family life, routines...?

SM: No, it was the same thing. My mother would go down to the mess hall every night...wintertime, especially...so cold to go out, so she would go and get the food. We ate in our room.

FS: How long were you there?

SM: Until the end of the war.

FS: About one year?

SM: Yeah. When we came back I was in eighth grade, so it was after September.

FS: What about school...Japanese school?

SM: No Japanese school.

- FS: It was set up, but I guess your father decided not to send you. I understand there were Japanese schools.
- SM: At Tule Lake? I had judo class.
- FS: Anything else?
- SM: No.
- FS: The usual activities?
- SM: Usual activities...usual kids' activities.
- FS: No snakes here?
- SM: Lot of scorpions.
- FS: Tell us about that.
- SM: We used to catch scorpions. We just lift the rock up and we see scorpions...guaranteed. The place we lived...Block 84...beyond our block was open field, and you can see Mount Shasta from our block. This camp...can see the fence.
- FS: And the guards?
- SM: You really feel like you were in the camp.
- FS: Guards?
- SM: Guards. They had two guards, and there was one camp right outside the corner of the fence for German prisoners, so it was kind of different over there.
- FS: Any other kind of fun...?
- SM: The fun we had was catching seagulls.
- FS: Tell us about the seagulls.
- SM: We would get a needle, fold in half to make a hook, and put a twig on the end and stretch it right across. We got an open field just like this (pointing). It was all black sand...all sand...the kind of rock and sand...gravel. And this...much, much bigger place than Jerome, so what we used to do was get a long string and we stretched them across here and covered with sand and put bread on the hook, and they used to bite the bread, get hooked, fly up, and they landed under the house, and we catch them.
- FS: Under the house?

- SM: Oh, you know why? Tule Lake is really high, and the units, the barracks are on stilts, so you walk under house.
- FS: Oh, I see.
- SM: So we can stay underneath that, I think because the land kind of slopes like that, so that's why this part is high. That's the kind of stuff we used to do. Then we had to go judo practice.
- FS: What did you do with the seagulls?
- SM: Nothing. You cannot grab them. They bite you. Just to catch them was...
- FS: Was a task in itself, I guess.
- SM: After we catch them, we used to get the paint and paint *Hinomaru* (Japanese flag) on the wings, so when they glide you can see the *Hinomaru* under the wings.
- FS: And then let them go?
- SM: Oh, yeah. When they fly, you can see the *Hinomaru* ...nice.
- FS: Whatever made you think of using the Japanese flag to mark the wings?
- SM: Japanese, that's why.
- FS: Even though you didn't go to Japanese school, you still had that cultural influence.
- SM: Yeah, it was strictly Japanese. It was a lot of fun.
- FS: So for you it was a kind of adventure.
- SM: Yeah, to me it was a lot of fun. Never thought about...never got homesick.
- FS: Never felt miserable in that kind of situation.
- SM: We always had something to do...always find something to do...crazy things.
- FS: Any other things that you did as a boy?
- SM: When I was in Tule Lake, I got up one morning and my stomach was so sore, and I cannot go to school, so they took me to the dispensary. The dispensary is in the camp. I went down there and it was so painful they took me to the hospital. The hospital is outside the camp, and I remember they took out my appendix. Then the doctor had told me I just made it because the appendix was ready to burst. I was so scared. My stomach was so sore.

FS: What was hospital care like?

SM: Good. Our room had another guy here, younger than me, and another person...three of us...one old man, myself and this young kid. This young kid was so funny...I don't know what he was in there for, but...and I cannot laugh because my stomach's so sore. As far as laughing, the doctor had scolded me because the stitches got separated. The scar is wide, so you cannot laugh. You got to stay still so they close up right. Anyway, I went back to regular school...the only thing I dreaded over there actually. From Block 84 to the elementary school was so far, it takes about 20 minutes to go to school, and it's so cold, but we still run, hide and do all that kind of stuff around the school, so it wasn't that bad...play as you go to school.

FS: You actually found things to do to keep yourselves occupied.

SM: When I was young like that, I didn't think about loneliness or anything.

FS: Nothing really serious.

SM: Nothing really serious, but some did.

FS: Did the internment affect your parents in any way?

SM: I don't know...maybe it did.

FS: This was after they came back, though. I mean in camp itself, did they show any kind of change in their attitude?

SM: I didn't pay attention. When we came back we had no place to go.

FS: When you were ready to be released to come back to Hawaii, were there any special preparations or special things you had to do?

SM: Nope, not for me. All we got to do was pack whatever we had in our room and go.

FS: Did your parents have jobs at that camp?

SM: No, my father didn't work at Tule Lake. My mother didn't work at Tule Lake.

FS: Then how do you suppose they were able to support the family?

SM: They furnished that.

FS: So everything was furnished by the government. You were treated more like guests.

SM: I guess so.



- FS: I see. Do you remember your trip home?
- SM: No. I don't remember anything about that. I really don't remember. I'm sure we came home by boat, but I just don't remember that part.
- FS: When you returned to Hawaii, did you return to your old house?
- SM: No, we went to our grandma's house.
- FS: Why?
- SM: My grandma lived in Kaimuki. She had a farm. We had no place to go. My father didn't have a job waiting for him. My mother didn't work.
- FS: And the house you left behind...?
- SM: ...was rental. We were renting...McCully. We didn't own any house. Then we found a room at Jodo Mission in Makiki, so we stayed there.
- FS: After or before you went to your grandmother's?
- SM: After our grandma's house.
- FS: So you stayed at your grandmother's house for...?
- SM: About 7 months.
- FS: And then you transferred to Makiki?
- SM: Several people lived there who were interned. They came home, had no place to go, so they stayed. One...two...three...four...(pointing to picture) five families there, and they shared the same kitchen. My mother would bring the food home to the unit. After that we moved to Kapahulu.
- FS: And after that you...
- SM: He was still renting. He never bought any house. My mother died in Kapahulu. You know...across the street from the Kapahulu Fire Station?
- FS: Yes.
- SM: We lived right over there. So we were able to get a house there...still renting. Then they were going to build an apartment, so we went back to McCully.
- FS: So the readjustment wasn't very traumatic for you.

SM: For me, well, when I went to Jodo Mission, after my Grandma's house, I was in eighth grade at Washington Intermediate School. When we moved to Makiki I was in ninth grade, so I went to Washington Intermediate and I became a sophomore, and they sent me to Mid-Pacific. Then we went to Kapahulu in the meantime, so then I went to Iolani.

FS: Oh, that was quite a transfer...very unusual.

FS: In thinking about the past, do you have any particularly strong memories that are either very pleasant or unpleasant?

SM: No, I think Jerome was a lot of fun because we catch all these animals and all that kind of stuff. (It was the) first time I saw lightning strike a tree. It rained so hard over there, it was pathetic. The ditches was so full of water and flowed all the way up.

FS: And you'd get flooded?

SM: The houses are all above ground, so not too bad.

FS: So it wasn't much fun but tolerable.

SM: Yeah, it was too cold having to go to school...just like living in Alaska, I think.

FS: You were never warm even with that pot-bellied stove?

SM: No.

FS: I see.

SM: Only thing I remember is when everybody gathered at the school and said we were going home. I don't remember anything after that.

FS: It must have been such a welcome surprise for you.

SM: I'm glad my mother talked to my father and he changed his mind about moving to Japan.

FS: I think so too. Thank you very much for all your interesting experiences.