

GO FOR BROKE
and
JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAI'I

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

MERRY KIMIKO OKANO

JUNE 28, 2008

BY: Tatsumi Hayashi (TH)

TH: Good Morning!

MO: Good Morning!

TH: Today is June 28, 2008, Saturday. The guest today is Mrs. Kimiko Okano. She is 91 years old. I was informed that her husband was Mr. Ryoshin Okano, who was a resident minister at Jodoshinshu Pearl City Hongwanji (Mission). I would like to ask you many things today, especially about the difficult time you went through during World War II.

MO: Yes.

TH: First of all, your name is Kimiko Okano and you were born in Seattle, Washington, U.S.A and your maiden name was Kouge. The Kouge family was from Okayama prefecture, wasn't it?

MO: Yes, that's right.

TH: You were born in 1917, the 6th year of Taisho era in Japan. Will you tell me your birth date?

MO: Yes. I am 91 years old this year.

TH: Yes, and what is your birth date?

MO: It is April 28, 1917.

TH: The 6th year of Taisho (era)?

MO: Yes. The 6th year of Taisho (era).

TH: How about your husband, Ryoshin Okano? I know he has already passed away, but what was his birth date?

MO: Yes, It is April 27, the 41st year of Meiji (era).

TH: It is 1908, isn't it?

MO: Yes, it is.

TH: He was born in Japan, wasn't he?

MO: Yes. It was in Kurayoshi, Tottori prefecture.

TH: I see. Do you remember when your husband, Mr. Ryoshin Okano, came to Honolulu, Hawaii?

MO: Yes. I think it was in 1935.

TH: I see. Did he go to another island first?

MO: No. He was assigned to Hongwanji Betsuin (Mission) first and was trained there. Then, Rev. Tamekuni, who was a resident minister at Pearl City Hongwanji, became ill and my husband went there to assist him. However, my husband ended up staying there, because Rev. Tamekuni did not get well.

TH: So he stayed there in Pearl City until the war began.

MO: Yes, he did. When he returned to Hawaii in 1951, he went to Pearl City again and was transferred to Moiliili Hongwanji and then retired.

TH: I see. So, he stayed at just two places, Pearl City and Moiliili?

MO: Yes. Two places only.

TH: I understand. Now I would like to go ahead. How many children do you have?

MO: We have three.

TH: I see. Two sons?

MO: Yes. And one daughter.

TH: I see. Now, I would like to move on to the war era. Let's see. Pearl Harbor was bombed in the morning of Dec. 7, 1941. What do you remember about that morning?

MO: A Jodoen Service at Honolulu temple was planned on Dec. 7. So the Sunday school was in recess and my husband left home at 5:30am to go to the temple. I woke my children up and had them eat breakfast at about 10 minutes to 8:00am. At that time, I heard a

terribly loud sound like “bang, bang.” The sound was so loud that window glasses shook and vibrated. Since Pearl Harbor was not too far from our temple, I ran to the temple building and saw from its veranda that dark smoke was going up and airplanes were nose diving through the clouds one after another. I was watching them, thinking what an awful thing had happened. Then, one plane happened to fly very close to the roof of the temple, and I could see a big Hinomaru (red circle) on it. I realized that the plane could be a Japanese plane. I went back to the house and put on a radio in the kitchen. The radio announced that an enemy attacked, but no details were included. It did not mention which country, just said an enemy attacked, so be careful. I made my children finish the breakfast and waited. Then, teachers of the Japanese school came and told us to evacuate to the mountain area. So we evacuated to the mountain, but nothing happened afterward. I left a memo on the entrance door for my husband who was not back yet from Honolulu to tell him that we evacuated with the teachers to the mountain at so and so time. I waited a very long time and wondered why my husband did not come home. He finally came back around 3:00 p.m. after the road blocks to the military base from Honolulu were lifted. He came to look for me after he saw my note. Around that time, the National Guard was going up and down the mountain to help the people. My husband asked one of them where his family could possibly be. There were sugar cane fields on the mountain (at that time) instead of the present freeway, and many people were hiding in the cane fields. We climbed up all the way close to the hospital and hid on a side street. He found us there at about 3:00 p.m. It was already after 3:00 p.m. “This is terrible,” he said, “Since we don’t know how long we have to stay here, we need some food.” So, he went back with some other people to the temple. It was a good thing that we kept some extra food, following the newspaper’s advice saying the future situation could be uncertain. He had been purchasing one case by one case of corned beef or canned goods. He brought some of those food items up to the mountain, since we thought we might have to stay overnight there. Around 7:00 p.m. we heard a noise of someone coming. They were two military police men. They asked for Reverend Okano. My husband answered, “Yes, sir!” and he went out to see them. They asked him to go with them for a moment. I asked them where, but they said only for a short time. So, my husband went with them, holding the car key, house key and all. I realized later that I didn’t have those keys and was unable to enter my house. Anyway, we spent one night on the mountain. It was a good thing that we put up a tent and had some food, since rain started during the night. Some people from the Japanese language school and from Second Street gathered around.

TH: So a couple of hundred people stay there together?

MO: Our group from Second Street where the temple was, about 14-15 people, stayed overnight in a tent. When we were discussing whether the rain would be trouble, we heard another loud clapping sound in the sky. We thought that it was another air raid, but it turned out to be American airplanes from the Mainland coming to help. I heard later some thought they were enemy airplanes and even shot at them. They were all panicked at that time. Anyway, we spent one night there and went back to gather at the Hongwanji temple in Waipahu the next morning. I finally went home in the afternoon, but, as I mentioned earlier, I didn’t have the car key nor the house key. After I was

dropped off at the house, I had to go around the house, just like a thief, to look for any loose window screen and climbed over to enter the house.

TH: It was the day after, wasn't it?

MO: Yes, it was the following day.

TH: Your husband was already taken away?

MO: Yes. He was taken away for "just a short time".

TH: You didn't know where he was when you returned to the house.

MO: Not at all. Some people said this was not an ordinary situation. He might have been shot to death or something like that. There was no word where he was. I asked around but no one knew. I found out in the newspaper, after I had been worried for two weeks, that he was detained at the immigration office and would be transferred to Sand Island next. At the end of December, I was told to take a change of clothes, a shaver, and some necessities, since he would need them to live in a tent there.

TH: You were told by the military agents, not by your husband directly?

MO: No. I couldn't do that.

TH: That meant you couldn't write to him, nor talk to him, nor see him.

MO: That's right. Finally, a letter, written by someone for my husband, arrived the following year. I don't remember which month, but the letter was crossed with black lines here and there, because of censorship. I could just understand that he would be transferred to the Mainland from Sand Island. I couldn't tell where or how long or any details at all.

TH: In the following year, on February 20, 1942, he was actually heading to San Francisco on a ship, but you had no information at all until his departure.

MO: Yes, that's right. Until his departure. I delivered his clothing in a suitcase earlier, but I couldn't see him.

TH: I know. Meanwhile, you and your family worried about him very much, didn't you?

MO: Yes, we did. What's going on? Was he alive? Was he already killed? We sure worried.

TH: This may be a little rude to ask, but wasn't your daily life difficult without your husband?

MO: Yes. Without income. Luckily, members of the mission took care and supported us.

TH: And then, when did your husband's letter arrive from the mainland?

MO: After he was moved to the mainland, oh, and it had to be in English....

TH: Yes. In the beginning.

MO: (The letter) had to be written in English, but my husband couldn't write in English. So, he had to ask someone to write for him. It took a while after he arrived there in February, because many people lined up to ask that person to write.

TH: I understand. I heard that some people who had money to buy stamps were able to send a letter while they were being transported from Angel Island in San Francisco further inland by a train. Couldn't he do it?

MO: No, he couldn't.

TH: I see. According to the information, he departed from Honolulu on February 21, 1942, and arrived in San Francisco about one week or 10 days later, and then was sent to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin.

MO: Yes, Wisconsin.

TH: He was in fact moved to the extreme eastside of the American continent.

MO: That's right. He was transferred from Wisconsin to Tennessee, and then to Louisiana, and finally to a family camp in Texas. He had to build his own barrack, so he could call his family to join him. However, we had already been asked through the Red Cross around August 20 of the following year to board an exchange ship arranged by a neutral country to go to the mainland leaving in September. My husband wanted to go back to Japan, because our children were still small. Some people, however, wanted to stay, because their children were in high schools or in colleges. So their petitions were split. Our first assembled group was made of about four or five families. I don't remember exactly how many...

TH: I understand that Dr. and Mrs. Murai who were the leaders of the group which consisted of 137 members, including the Okano family, went to the mainland.

MO: Yes, yes.

TH: Your departure date was recorded as August 18, 1942.

MO: It took about one week to reach San Francisco by ship. After arriving in San Francisco, we headed towards the east by train, but, when we arrived in Chicago, we were told that the (exchange) ship was not leaving in September, so we must wait for a while. Therefore, my family went down to North Carolina, and had to spend about half a year

there before we could go to Texas.

TH: Wasn't it an awfully long trip?

MO: Yes, it was. We left Pearl City, Hawaii and went to the mainland, and stayed in Texas and yet we were told it would take about 2 months to go around the back of the globe to reach Japan. It sounded awful. However, we didn't even know when the ship would depart. Not in 1942. Then, the following year, or following-following year? Then we heard a ship arranged by a neutral country would leave in 1943. It was a Swedish ship named S.S. Gripsholm. It was an exchange ship, which took 1500 people from America and 1500 from Japan. We went to India on that ship.

TH: I would like to ask more about the exchange ship later. Going back a little, may I ask why you went to the mainland and then decided to go on the exchange ship to return to Japan? Was there a family matter or some special reason?

MO: I just followed my husband's decision to take our family back to Japan. He was the eldest son and worried about his parents and the country in the war time. Our children were still small, the son was five and the daughter was four, and we had not decided whether to educate them in Japan or America. Anyway, he just wanted to go back to Japan once and have them meet their grandparents. I suppose it was good and bad. It was good that my children could meet their family members and learn about Japan. I think that experience benefited my children. However, (it was bad) because my husband was worried about his temple in Pearl City, since he just left it as it was, and he wanted to go back to Hawaii very much. He received permission to return to Hawaii even before an official passport could be issued, because we were considered to have a right to return to Hawaii, since we were just dropped off in Japan for a while on our around-the-world trip. We were very lucky to receive permission to travel without a passport, since all others had to get official passports later.

TH: I heard that some interned families had trouble because they had split opinions whether they should stay in US or go back to Japan.

MO: Yes. Because of children. Our children were small, so they could go either way, but high school or college students would have a difficult time adjusting if they went back to Japan. So, those parents were very worried about their children and would wait in the camp until the war ended. Like myself, I just had to follow my husband, since the children were small.

TH: So, in your case, there were no split opinions....

MO: That's right. It was either yes or no through the Red Cross. So, I replied "Yes. Yes, I would go to America." There were many people who did not go to America. Only some went. People were divided at that time. Older ministers at Aiea Hongwanji or Waipahu Hongwanji all stayed back. Their wives, too. They said they would not go back to Japan. Only I went back to Japan. So I didn't know what happened afterwards.

My husband, too. He was just taken away and didn't even say good-bye to the members, so he was worried about the situation so much that he wanted to come back here as soon as the war ended.

TH: Let's go back a little. While you were still in Honolulu, did you receive any letters from your husband on the mainland?

MO: Time to time, we exchanged letters, which were all inspected.

TH: Your husband must have worried about his family in Hawaii. Do you recall anything around that time?

MO: Thanks to the temple members who took care of us, we could live without hardship. They said the minister had to be in difficult situation and brought some donated money. They were very good to me.

TH: Was Pearl City safe and peaceful to walk around by that time?

MO: Yes. One year had passed by that time.

TH: So you could go to shopping, too?

MO: Yes, I could.

TH: It was almost back to normal?

MO: Yes, it was. However, only thing at night, my children and I stayed in a large house, which included a temple and a school, and the members were worried about us. So the students, 7th or 8th grade students, decided to stay with us at night, but they didn't last. Mrs. Fujitani, who was the wife of Mr. Fujitani who owned a barber shop, and also the chairwoman of a women's club, worried about us very much and offered for us to stay at their house at night. The barber shop was located just across from the temple, and we walked over to their place while the sun was still up and came home after dawn. It was too much for the students take turns staying with us, so we decided to stay with the Fujitanis for a long time. At that time, more than ten Japanese people couldn't get together, even at a funeral or a wedding. Large gatherings were prohibited.

TH: Martial law was in effect?

MO: Yes. And there was no ministers, anyway. Only an assistant minister. He took over the Betsuin (mission) and did some work.

TH: Then, you finally left for Crystal City? Was there any problem or you were just selected by the government smoothly to board the ship?

MO: Yes. It was smooth. Through the Red Cross, I explained that my husband wanted to

return (to Japan) with his family.

TH: I think there were many other families, but do you think they could board the ship as they wished?

MO: I think so. I didn't hear of any troubles. None. The families who had big children attending high schools or colleges did not want to return. Husbands did not have to worry about their wives, even they were left here, because their children were already big. In my case, because the children were small, my husband worried and called us over. We were on the first family transfer ship, but some families stayed in Hawaii, and others went to America, but stayed in the camp, and so on. And yet, they did not know how long they had to stay in the camp. Even my husband wrote in his last letter that he was transferred, but he didn't know where and which camp.

TH: You had to be worried very much when your husband was transferred, since anything could happen.

MO: I think I was. But, thanks to the Fujitanis, we went to their house around 5:00 p.m. and had breakfast before returning home (every day).

TH: I understand that you could not send money nor anything to your husband in the beginning, but later wasn't it permitted? Do you recall anything?

MO: I don't remember sending anything, because he said he did not want anything, although I asked him in my letters, if he wanted anything. The only time was when I packed his underwear and a change of clothing when he was leaving Sand Island.

TH: Didn't you write his name on everything?

MO: Yes, yes. Because there were so many people in the camp. I heard many stories of what happened in the camps. Some people had false teeth, and they left them by the bed while they slept. I was one of the youngest in the younger groups on the first transfer ship. I was about 25 years old, and I knew my husband was worried....

TH: I heard that your husband was put in a ship's hold when he was transferred and could not go to the bathroom except once an hour or two. I suppose that America did not know how to handle (those arrested) people on the first ship.

MO: They could have been very strict.

TH: Although he had a hard time, by the time his family was transferred, they were treated nicely in the cabin?

MO: Yes, we were treated well. We waited in Chicago, and went to North Carolina, where we stayed in a first class hotel, which had a golf course and a tennis court. We stayed on the ninth floor and went up and down in an elevator!

TH: You mean only your family stayed in a room?

MO: Yes, that's right.

TH: So, the first hotel was a resort hotel and it was like you were on vacation. (laugh)

MO: Yes, it was too good to believe. The government realized it was costing too much and put us in a little less expensive hotel in the downtown area after about one month.

TH: It was much better treatment compared to your husband, wasn't it?

MO: Yes. (laugh) My husband was busy using a hammer and nails to build his own house in the camp at that time. We, a family on the first ship, were lucky.

TH: Did you have any letters exchanged with your husband when you stayed at the hotel in North Carolina?

MO: Well, there were inspections, and we didn't have much to talk about anyway.

TH: That means you did not know the condition of his daily life except it had to be difficult.

MO: No, I didn't.

TH: You must have worried a lot.

MO: Well, he wasn't alone. He was with other people.

TH: So you stayed at Crystal City for about 3 months?

MO: Yes, about 3 or 4 months.

TH: And you finally boarded the second exchange ship?

MO: Yes, in 1942.

TH: Was there anyone who was with you but couldn't board the ship?

MO: Yes, there was. On the exchange ship, Mrs. Asami, Mrs. Masaki, and I were onboard. And a couple of people, possibly young teachers whose names I didn't know, boarded from Peru. Anyway, only three people from Hawaii I know of. Others couldn't get on and were left behind. I didn't know why and how we were selected, because those people also requested to return.

TH: The government just unilaterally told you to board?

MO: I still don't know the reason.

TH: I understand that your husband also turned in a strong request and there was an uproar when a name list for the second exchange ship was posted.

MO: Yes, because there were many people who wanted to return.

TH: There were many who wanted to return but were not listed, and some names were not even recognized in the camp.

MO: I suppose so.

TH: So you were able to go ahead mostly as you wished, but many people couldn't and stayed here (in America) until the war ended.

MO: Yes. There were many things happening at that time. I didn't hear too much about the outside world, because I was too busy to take care of my young children.

TH: How was life in Crystal City camp?

MO: A ration system was used. We received coupons for milk, eggs, butter, bread, and all from the military office, according to the number of the family members. We lived in a barrack together with another family of three. There were many barracks like that.

We were lucky to return. There were many who wanted to return, because their children were small. When we left Texas, they looked very sad saying good-bye, good-bye, repeatedly at the wire fence.

TH: Your life at the camp was not so restrictive, like watched by an overseer?

MO: Not much. We were free in the camp. Meals (were not restrictive), either.

TH: But you couldn't go out?

MO: If I wanted to go to a hospital or a beauty shop, I could with a guard and if I had requested earlier.

TH: Did you go out any place?

MO: No. So, I didn't know anything about outside. I knew only inside of the camp.

TH: Were there also other nationals, such as Italians in the camp?

MO: Germans, Italians, and others from Panama and Brazil, who boarded on the way.

TH: Did you associate with those people?

MO: We didn't associate much because the camp was very large and we were separated.

TH: That means you were close only with your Hawaii neighbors.

MO: Yes, that's right. Since we didn't know how long we had to stay here, my husband and others started to think about education. There were many children who needed to learn Japanese in case they went back to Japan. So they discussed the purpose and method of teaching. My husband was in charge of history, since he was studying Japanese history from Amaterasu-oomikami to Jinmu Tenno. There were teachers who majored in geography or mathematics and so on. However, we left the camp the next year, so I don't know what happened to the plan. They probably went ahead to establish a school.

TH: There was no school yet when you were there?

MO: No, a school was not established yet. They planned to do so and started some preparation. We left there at the end of August. We left there in 1943, but others stayed there for 2 more years until 1945. Our camp life was short.

TH: Well then your children didn't go to school and played all the time?

MO: Yes, yes. That was their life.

TH: I heard from someone who spent his childhood in another camp that he had such an enjoyable time in the camp.

MO: Enjoyed! (laugh) I'm sure!

TH: Of course, children didn't know any better. They were just happy because they could play.

MO: I know, though, that those children who enjoyed playing had a very difficult time when they went back to Japan after the war, because they didn't study not only Japanese but also English.

TH: You boarded an exchange ship after you left the camp in Crystal City and finally went to Singapore where you stayed about two years, and then, you went back to Japan, where you experienced the end of the war. I understand that you came back to Honolulu after the war, and I would like to hear more stories from you, but let's have a short break here. (Break)

TH: Now, let's talk about your trip from Crystal City to New York. Do you remember if you took a train?

MO: Yes, I think we took a train.

TH: Don't you remember anything special?

MO: I don't remember anything special, but I am sure we went by train directly to New York.

TH: How long did you stay in New York?

MO: I remember that we boarded the ship on September 1, but I don't remember how long we stayed in New York.

TH: Didn't you recall many things about your life in America before you boarded the ship, since you had stayed there for a long time after all?

MO: No, not much. All I thought about was that I would be free after I boarded the ship and returned to Japan. And it would be a new world for my children. They would see Japan for the first time and meet their grand-father and grand-mother. I thought I couldn't do anything anyway until time had passed.

TH: Do you think your husband and children were thinking about almost same thing?

MO: I suppose so. My husband, however, might have been worried about being drafted by the Japanese army. He was probably thinking of all kind of things.

TH: Your ship stopped at Montevideo after leaving New York, didn't it?

MO: Yes, it did. And it stopped in Brazil and Panama. A doctor and his wife came aboard. A diplomat from Panama also came on board. He was carrying the Emperor's photo. Some people came aboard at Rio de Janeiro, too. I think more people from Panama. After Brazil, the ship sailed around the south tip of Brazil and then went around the Cape of Good Hope. I was told that the Cape of Good Hope was one of the places in the world where the strongest winds blew. I was wondering what it would be like. One morning, I got up and went to the dining room and found the tables were all wet with water. I thought someone spilled the water, but no, water was purposely spread over the tables, so dishes wouldn't slide around. That was one thing I was very surprised about.

Then, we arrived in the Indian Ocean. The ship had yet to arrive in India and it was before we were exchanged. The towns around there were usually quiet, and the waves were calm. But, when I was sitting on the deck, I noticed that the ship's crew started throwing black tires and chairs and everything else into the ocean. To my surprise, it seemed that someone jumped or fell from the ship. They had to throw things into the ocean to mark the place, since the ship could not stop immediately. The ship went around and came back to the marked place and sent down a rescue boat to look around. They couldn't find anyone and decided to come back. Oh, but so many sharks already gathered around the boat. If anyone fell into the ocean, there was no way that person would have survived. The people in the rescue boat had to hit the head of the sharks with a long stick, but the sharks didn't give up. They just came up one after another. I was so terrified. The seamen, about five of them, had to be so worried, too, because the sharks

kept coming up with their jaws wide open and had to be continuously hit by oars to be chased away. I thought I shouldn't let my children see this, so I moved to the end of the deck and sat on a chair.

Anyway, the ship started moving again and sailed smoothly. After a while, we arrive at Goa, a territory of the neutral country Portugal, in India. When I looked, a Japanese ship had already arrived there, since our ship the SS Gripsholm arrived about a half day late.

The next day, ropes were set up from this ship to the other ship to separate the people going from here from the people coming from there, so they could be exchanged. Americans coming from Japan were very cheerful and asked if we had oranges or apples. They were so happy and whistled, when we told them there were many of them. We, Japanese, were very quiet and just went on to the Japanese ship and found out there was only barley rice, miso soup and pickled ume. No oranges nor apples. Those Americans would eat normal Western meals (from now on), but now, we had to eat only barley rice and miso soup. I guessed that detained Americans in Japan had to have had a very difficult time. I found rather miserable meals, although they could be better ones (at that time), when I arrived in Japan. I quickly realized while I was still on the ship that Japan might be in a very shaky situation.

TH: I don't think you had much information about the war before you left, but you gradually realized something was not right?

MO: Yes. Something was not right. As I said, the meals on the first ship were very poor. Nothing else was served. Not to mention fruits and desserts. My children didn't even look at barley rice and miso soup, which could be healthy meals, but they could not eat them.

Then, we arrived at Singapore. Suddenly, some of us were requested to disembark. My husband just said that we were getting off here. I could not ask him why, although I thought we were returning to Japan. There was no explanation. We were just ordered to get off the ship. I found out later that my husband was assigned to the Navy and some others to the Army. Singapore was occupied by the Japanese army and was under martial law at that time. There was "no ifs, ands or buts" permitted. So my husband was assigned to a Mitsubishi shipyard in the Naval port, where damaged ships were sent for repair. Many Malaysians and Indians who did not understand Japanese were working there. My husband had to teach them Japanese and also to do many other kinds of work. He was very busy, but he was given a car and a chauffeur and also given a title of Naval general or colonel or something like that.

TH: A rather high rank?

MO: Yes. He was given a high rank, a car, a chauffeur and a house which was a villa that had been lived in by an English man and one of those in the mountain side. We lived in a nice house with a tennis court, hired a yardman, a laundry lady, and a Chinese elderly woman cook. We lived a comfortable life (which was) all taken care by the military.

Nothing was bad in Singapore, except that we couldn't go out freely, because it was still under martial law. Of course, we could go out, if we wanted, but I did not want to go out with my children. So, I stayed home most of the time. Therefore, the life in Singapore was not difficult. It was so-so.

TH: Considering the war situation at that time, people in Japan suffered much more under air raids and so on.

MO: Since we lived near the Naval port, we heard that Japanese soldiers were coming the next day. I thought it was a rare occasion and went to see them. I was surprised to see old men, around 40 or 50 years old, walking humpbacked with rucksacks on their backs and carrying guns. "Ah, these are Japanese soldiers?" Old men were drafted in Japan and sent to the war front. Well, those who arrived at the war front were fortunate, because I heard, many of them were killed when their transportation ship was bombed.

I knew three or four persons who were killed. My cousin was also killed. The father of my eldest son's wife was an engineer and a captain on a foreign ship in Japan and also drafted and that was it. And the father of my daughter's husband was also killed on a transportation ship. So, so many transportation ships were bombed. I was really surprised, though, at that time, when I saw those old soldiers who were walking with their backs bent down with rucksacks and guns.

TH: I understand that you were really surprised, because you did not know what was going on outside.

MO: Yes. Then the situation in Singapore started to change. I heard ships in the Guadalcanal area were being sunk by torpedoes. Then, more and more, here and there. From that time on, Japan began to lose the war and no airplane was able to fly. We had a notice that airplanes would come from New Delhi to air raid Singapore around 9:30am the next day. So we had to hide in a shelter by that time. But, I wanted to see the B-29s. How they would come, this way or that way. So I stuck out my head from the shelter and watched which way they went. It would be dangerous if they flew over straight towards us. I dashed into the shelter when they came too close. You know, my daughter, who was only 3 or 4 years old then, asked me when we were going to die. I realized that even children were only thinking about dying.

TH: You must have worried a lot.

MO: Yes. Even small children knew that we were in danger.

TH: Sure, your children were small, but how about the time when you exchanged the ships at Goa. Didn't you worry?

MO: No, I wasn't worried at all, because our ship, S.S. Gripsholm, was a Swedish ship which was maintained in America and had tables served by waiters.

- TH: The exchange was done in an orderly fashion and no one on either side felt uneasy.
- MO: I didn't think so. I think those Americans who came from the S.S. Teiamaru probably couldn't stand the meals of only barley rice and miso soup. That's why they asked if there were any oranges or apples. They were so happy to find out there were many of them. So, they whistled and boarded the ship which would take them home. I was impressed by their cheerfulness and wondered why they wanted to eat oranges and apples so much. I couldn't guess at that time.
- TH: But then you found out..... (laugh)
- MO: Now that we were on this side's ship, there was no sight of them. I realized right away that Japan had to be in a shaky situation.
- TH: From around that time...
- MO: I think it could be the reason why my husband got off immediately from the ship in Singapore when he was requested to.
- TH: Didn't he say why he was assigned to the Navy and why you got off the ship?
- MO: No. I didn't know anything. He didn't say anything. It was my question, but he didn't answer even when I asked. So I didn't know why only he was assigned to the Navy. There were good things and bad things because of it. Anyway, we started a good life in Singapore, with a maid, a yardman, and a chauffeur, all provided by the Navy. I didn't do anything, after all. There was a maid. There was a cook. It was a good life. However, the situation was getting bad. After one year, my son, Akio, who is there now, was born in Singapore. It was May 29, 1944. In 1945, we returned to Japan. But before that, (before they were off-loaded in Singapore), my husband wrote to his parents that we would be returning on a ship called the Awa-maru. (The exchange ship they boarded at Goa was Teia-maru. She probably remembered the name wrong). Therefore, at the time when the Awa-maru was supposed to arrive at Yokohama, his father, my father and my uncle who was in Kobe, and possibly my aunt, all went there to meet us. They waited and waited, but couldn't find us. There was no Okano on the name list. At the very end, they found out that we were off-loaded in Singapore. They were very disappointed and went back home.
- TH: Your husband might have decided to get off at Singapore at the last minute?
- MO: I have no idea about the situation at that time.
- TH: I see.
- MO: Anyhow, he advised his family in Japan that we would be returning on the Awa-maru a long time ago. I am sure he then wrote another letter, but it probably didn't reach them, because many ships were sunk by torpedos and the mail was often lost. Well, it wasn't a

telegram. After all those things, (this time), the Awa-maru was sunk off the Taiwan coast. On March 28, (1945), Mr. Asami with his son, and Mr. Masaki with his son from the Army side, and my husband with his oldest son, they all got on the ship. (Mrs. Okano and her two other children were supposed to go on the next ship). However, just before the departure, the people from the Navy were ordered to get off the ship. My husband didn't know why but came down from the ship with his son. So, they stayed back to return with us (next time). Vice-admiral Nakamura told us that he regretted this thing happened and promised that he would be responsible for providing another ship for us, if we waited until then. We had a "regret" party that night. While we were waiting, three or four days quickly passed.

On April 5, we got together to talk about the next ship which was supposed to leave on April 7. At that party, Mrs. Asami mentioned that radio messages to advise on the whereabouts of the Awa-maru had stopped coming in after April 1, and she wondered why. She was very worried and looked pale. At that time, my husband didn't know that the Awa-maru was torpedoed. If attacked by a bomb, even a large ship would sink in a minute and no one would survive. We were told later that the captain of the submarine which attacked the Awa-maru found one person floating in the water and saved him. The captain asked the man the name of the ship and was told that it was the Awa-maru. The man knew the name because he was the cook of Awa-maru. The captain regretfully said that he should not have hit the ship. It was the captain's mistake. The Awa-maru was scheduled to return to Japan way ahead of time, so it had a large load of natural resources from the South, many engineers who worked there, and many more people who were told this was the last ship. The ship displayed a white cross and was guaranteed safe passage by America. However, the ship was attacked. I heard that the captain was so infuriated himself that he became demented later. So many important people died. So many resources were lost at sea. The loss was immeasurable. But, my husband was off-loaded, because he was with the Navy. He walked down the gangplank with his son. I don't remember how many people came down, but I could see only my husband. It was a fortunate incident among unfortunate things. So he was saved.

TH: Therefore, all of your family members were able to return to Japan together. So, in the beginning, only your husband and Thomas (son) boarded the Awa-maru.

MO: Yes.

TH: That meant it was somehow decided that three of you would stay back in Singapore?

MO: Well, I still don't know why even now.

TH: You had mixed feelings, I guess?

MO: It was decided at that time that this could be the last ship returning from the South. Many, many ships were bombed and sunk in the Guadalcanal area and Japanese Navy was losing the war. I heard that this ship would be the last ship to Japan and loaded whatever, as many people and things as possible. And America had to guarantee the safe

passage, because this ship was originally sent to deliver comfort articles to American people and was supposed to return with a white cross mark displayed. However, a huge load of resource materials from the South such as mules, quinine, and rubber were all lost in the sea. Lost in the straits of Taiwan.

TH: You saw your husband and the son get off the ship?

MO: Yes, I saw them walking down the gangplank. I think there were some other people who also got off, but I watched only my husband and son. I thought that my husband was not the only person with the Navy, but I didn't know who else got off the ship. Our house rented by the Navy was already vacated, and I had moved to another house in town. I thought I had to live there alone (without my husband), since my husband was supposed to go back to Japan, but now luckily my husband was off-loaded and stayed back with me.

TH: So you had been prepared to live separately before your husband boarded the ship, which eventually was sunk.

MO: Yes, only one day earlier.

TH: Wasn't it a big decision for the Okano family?

MO: Yes. I did not know what was going to happen after I was left alone with my daughter. I wondered why only my husband was going back, but I resigned myself to accept it as fate. Japanese women at that time were willing to give up things. (laugh)

They sent off soldiers to the war front telling them to come back dead. They had to be resigned to it. It couldn't be helped if it was fate. So, we moved to the new house happily. When I attended a meeting when my oldest son was about to start his school on April 5, I saw Mrs. Asami and Mrs. Masaki looking very worried. I had to hide my happy feelings. Anyway, we were notified that the next ship to Japan, the Hikawa-maru, a hospital ship, would leave on April 7. Both the Asami and Masaki families would return to Japan with us.

My oldest son was a first grade student at that time and had to attend the Japanese school. I was so busy because we just moved to the new house and needed to clean up boxes, on top of taking care of my baby just born in May (of the previous year). Oh, no, was there a baby or was I pregnant with a big stomach? Anyway, I couldn't accompany my son to the school. Luckily my husband was available, so I asked him to meet the son at school at 12:30 p.m when his classes finished. My husband said "Ok, ok" and went to work, but he came back after 12:00 and asked me if the son was home. "You are supposed to meet him". "He wasn't there, when I went to school. The school was already closed." "Oh, no! He must have been left alone in the large school property. He could have just walked to come home. But where..."

TH: They crossed somewhere.....

MO: Yes, they did. Hearing that, I was so worried. What should I do? What happened to him? Anyway, we had to look for him, if he was not at the school. Our house was a temporary house, situated behind a main house, where someone else was living. So when my husband opened the gate door to go out to look for him, my son was just standing there. "Oh, my God! He came back!" The school was away across a very wide Orchard Street, where even I didn't remember exactly. A child, only 6 or 7 years old, crossed the wide street from the school and came back home. I was so relieved and amazed how he came back.

TH: Your son had to be worried so much, too.

MO: He was worried but able to come home. But someone else was living in the front house, and he couldn't open the gate. He was standing there and wondering if this was the right house. Then his father opened the gate and came out. He was so relieved to find out that this was his house. I was so worried that I thought I was going to die. He told us later that, when he was walking by himself carrying the school bag, a Chinese man asked him to get in the wagon which was attached to his bicycle, just like a side carriage, so he would take him back home. But my son didn't even know his house address. He just said, "no, no," and ignored him and kept walking. Good thing! If he got in the wagon, he could have been sold to a circus or something like that. It was so good that he walked, even though it was very difficult for him. He remembered the way home somehow and was so relieved when he reached home. After that incident, we decided that he didn't need to go school, since there were only two more days, and my husband could not meet him while he had to work. He could go to school in Japan and eventually he did attend the school in Japan from the first grade to the seventh grade. Now that I had one less concern, I had to pack things to get on the Hikawa-maru. Since the ship was a hospital ship, my husband pretended to work for the hospital, and I pretended I was a nurse. But I was told not to let the children go up to the deck, since a nurse was not supposed to have children. So we sailed, but it felt dangerous off the Taiwan coast after all.

TH: Around the area where the Awa-maru sank.

MO: I think it was a little before that. I didn't know exactly. Somewhere around there. Nurses were looking for katsuobushi (dried bonito) and mops. They seemed to be moving around in confusion. I was sleeping in the nurse's quarters. I asked them what happened and they told me that an enemy submarine had ordered the ship to stop. To the Hikawa-maru. So, the ship stopped making a squeaking noise. Children were all told to go downstairs and stay quietly. I felt it was an hour, but actually it was only 10 or 15 minutes. Finally the ship was allowed to go, since there was no violation found.

TH: Because it was a hospital ship, the American army let it go.

MO: Yes, they did, because it was a hospital ship. This was the second time. The off-loading from the Awa-maru and again this happened to the Hikawa-maru. And finally when the

ship arrived at Sasebo, it was asked to move away from the coast, because there would be an air raid by B29s soon.

TH: The ship had to go back.

MO: Yes, to leave, because Sasebo was dangerous. An air raid could be anywhere. I wondered how long we had to stay away. It might have been about 2 or 3 hours, when we entered Sasebo port again and were ready to disembark. But we were told that both the Sanyosen (train line) and Tokaidosen line were not operating, due to damage to the rail. Since it was not possible to go through, anyone who was going to the areas of the Japan Sea side or Tohoku should get off from the ship at Maizuru port. A navy destroyer would escort the ship. I said I would go to Maizuru which was closer to our home town.

Two or three destroyers escorted our ship and went to Maizuru. It was already early evening when we arrived at Maizuru. My husband wanted to send a telegram to his house and wondered where the telegraph office was. We decided to take a train, because a telegram would take about 3 days anyway. It was faster to take a train. So we got on a train from Maizuru and went to Kurayoshi, Tottori ken.

TH: There was a train operating?

MO: Yes. The trains of Sanninsen line. There were no air raids. Sanyosen and Tokaidosen were not operating. We arrived at Kurayoshi (station) at around midnight. Then, we walked to our house for thirty minutes. It was a full moon night. I remember that we walked the road under the moon light, because no outside lights were affordable in the country at that time.

TH: All five of you walked?

MO: Yes, all of us. No, the last child was not born. (He was born) next year.

TH: So, four of you?

MO: Four of us. My husband was carrying a big rucksack and I was carrying...what? Oh, yes. He was there. He was born in Singapore. Five of us. Yes, five.

TH: When you were approaching Sasebo, you could see Japan. What was your feeling, relieved or a little nervous?

MO: Well, relieved after all. I wondered how we could go home, if Sanyosen and Tokaidosen were not operating. I was so happy when I heard the ship was going to Maizuru. Worry and joy came alternately. It was the most miserable time in Japan at that time. Our parents did receive the letter saying that we would return on the Awa-maru, but then, they found out that the ship was sunk in the straits of Taiwan. Therefore, they were having a memorial service in front of our pictures.

- TH: No information was received about the off-loading?
- MO: No.
- TH: That meant you all died.
- MO: Yes. They assumed that we all died and were conducting a twenty-first or forty-ninth day memorial service that night. They had all left except (my husband's) father. His mother was at his sister's house, because the sister gave birth that day. So the father was immensely surprised. It was night time, too.
- TH: Many things were happening at the same time and the supposedly dead people...
- MO: Supposedly dead people came home out of nowhere.
- TH: They just showed up in front of him.
- MO: Yes, he was just so surprised. He thought my husband was a ghost. (laugh)
The house wasn't well lit, because the electricity was scarce then compared to now. He was surprised but so happy. Everything was just overwhelming.
- TH: I suppose you were very much relieved when you finally arrived home.
- MO: Yes. Very relieved. His mother was called back and came home hurriedly. They said they had to pound mochi (sticky rice cake) to celebrate, since they thought we hardly ate anything before coming home. They were old and had to pound mochi to celebrate this happy occasion in the middle of night. I remember that I told them I had already eaten but I was made to eat mochi anyway.
- TH: After all, I think you had mixed feelings after the long trip from Crystal City via Goa, and finally walked home. "Relieved" was the word?
- MO: Yes, I was most relieved.
- TH: Then, did you think about your children and the future of Japan?
- MO: Yes, enrolling in a school. My oldest son had to go to school. Enrolling and all other things together. Relatives of a married daughter from Osaka were staying at the house, but they had to move out to their sister's house, because we came home. So we helped them move out, and all other things came about together. Then, I enrolled my son in a school. On May 1, ten days after we arrived home, my husband said his stomach was hurting after the dinner. When he complained his stomach was hurting a lot, he bent down and couldn't move. I couldn't tell what was wrong, but we had someone rush to the hospital in Kurayoshi, which was at the distance of about a one hour walk, early the next morning. We were told to send him to a hospital if his stomach hurt so much.

We didn't have a car nor a bicycle. We had to carry him on a futon (Japanese mattress) on a wooden board with ropes. I had to give him water from a kettle on the way. When a doctor examined him at the hospital, he said my husband had a hole in his stomach due to a gastric ulcer. Actually the doctor didn't know that my husband had a stomach ulcer. He found out when he tried to operate for appendicitis. He noticed it wasn't the appendix, but some rice grains fell out from the stomach into the intestines. More than ten hours had passed since he became ill. Actually, already eighteen hours out of 24 hours had passed and he couldn't wait around. He had to be operated on immediately, otherwise he would be in danger. The doctor could not operate on the ulcer, but just covered the hole using a cut part of peritoneum as a temporary measure. He returned home after one week supposing the operation was done. During his stay at the hospital, a lady acquaintance who came back from Hiroshima or Okayama, brought an apple for him as a gift. Just one apple as a gift! And his mother troubled herself to bring just one apple to him.

Those were such miserable days in Japan then. Well, luckily there was no air raid in the Sannin area, so Tottori-ken and Shimane-ken were spared. However, the government ordered the houses on the main street in Yonago to be demolished, because there would be some air raids coming soon and damages from incendiary bombs had to be minimized. So the houses were demolished. It was only one day before the end of the war! What a terrible thing. How miserable. Japanese people suffered a lot.

TH: You arrived in Japan only a while ago and not accustomed to the life yet, but the war situation was getting worse...

MO: Yes. There were no young people in the neighborhood. Not even middle aged people. Only old people, wives, and babies. All others were drafted. That's why I saw those humpbacked soldiers in Singapore to my surprise. No wonder, all the young people were drafted and none remained in the village. Such a pity in Japan.

TH: Children also had difficult times?

MO: Luckily, Tottori-ken wasn't air raided. There was no air bombing and no houses were burnt down by incendiary bombs. We also had enough rice. I heard that people in the large cities had to eat rationed rice mixed with corn. Some didn't have enough rice to eat and fainted at a train station and just died there. The situation was something like that. Although we were lucky in Tottori, my mother said we had to save rice after all five of us suddenly came home and joined the household. I think my mother had a difficult time. There was no rice left in towns. Corn was distributed instead of rice. Corn that chickens would eat. It was miserable in Japan.

TH: The war ended in about three months. What do you remember about that time?

MO: End of the war. My mother told us to listen to a radio, because there would be an unusual broadcast. A village caretaker went around to advise villagers. So we were

looking forward to listening, but it was an announcement of the end of the war. The Showa Emperor's announcement. I felt relieved. I felt we were saved. I thought Japan was saved. But the villagers were all worried that American soldiers would come and get all women and children and kill them. I wanted to say that it would not happen. But I couldn't guarantee it. I could just say that we all had to be careful at that time. Village women were saying all women and children would be captured. I wanted to say that America would never do something like that, but could not say it out loud. They would think that I was on the American side. I had to be quiet to avoid being seen as favoring America.

TH: Do you think the people around you naturally knew that you had come back from America and gave you a sort of cold shoulder?

MO: I think so. But only ten days after we had arrived, my husband became ill and had a big operation. I had to take care of him and couldn't pay much attention to other things.

I was concerned only my family. However, I think people might have looked at us that way, because our clothes were different. Everyone was wearing patched up "mompe" (loose work pants). We didn't have mompes, so we wore regular clothes. Not good quality clothes but regular cotton clothes. People probably felt envious. I had to buy a citizen's clothes for my oldest son to go to school. Everyone was wearing it, so my son had to wear the same one too. Even those clothes were very poor quality, woven with mulberry leaves. It was a very sad time. Well, how far did I go?

TH: We were talking about Tottori, when the war ended. We still have a little more to talk about, but let's take a break.

MO: All right. (Break)

TH: The war was about to end, but were you investigated, or just inquired about by the village people or Japanese military by any chance, because you came back from America?

MO: Yes. Once in a while. The Kusaka elementary school was my husband's alma mater. So villagers wanted my husband to talk to them about America (at the school.) My husband said "Ok" without thinking much more. On the day before, he was asked what kind of lecture he was going to make and was told not to say that America was strong and Japan was weak and so on. There were so many restrictions. He thought he would cancel the talk because it seemed very troublesome, but he felt he said "ok" after all. When he went the next day, he saw two military police were there to listen to his talk. He had so much he wanted to talk about but couldn't. He wanted to share good things about America and how Japan was exhausted now. He decided that he would not do talks anymore if he couldn't say what he wanted to say. It was just one occasion before he became ill on May 1. He declined all other talk requests, saying he was ill afterwards.

Instead, the war ended in August, August 15. Before that day, atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We could hear some shuddering sound from Hiroshima in Tottori. It was a large vibrating sound. Everyone wondered what it was. No one knew. One week later, we found out that an atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki again in the newspaper. It was not a normal thing that two atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki one after another. As we were wondering, a message to listen to a radio on the fifteenth, at an exact time, for an unusual announcement came to us. So we listened. It was an announcement of defeat by the Emperor. I shouldn't say "defeat." The Emperor announced the end of the war. I thought that Japan finally lost the battle, and it was no wonder, because Japan was so exhausted. However, the Japanese people still believed that Japan would win because of the tremendous amount of effort made. They heard a huge shelter which would accommodate a whole Japanese army was built and another shelter was also built off the Chiba coast, and so on. They thought the army would go out and shoot and then hide, and then go out to shoot or something like that. I thought that could not be possible, but, of course, I couldn't say it.

TH: Your neighbors who had lived there for a long time might have worried a lot.

MO: Yes. American soldiers would land soon. When they landed, they would capture all women and children. One old lady once started saying something like that and "might capture" became "would capture."

TH: Rumors got out of control.

MO: That's right. Everyone in the village was so terrified. I didn't believe such a rumor.

Besides, my husband was sick. Whatever would be would be. I was taking it easy. But my husband wanted to know what happened (to his temple) and also wanted to see the people to whom he didn't even say "Good-bye" when he left. He had no intention to stay in Japan indefinitely. He didn't change his mind even if he became sick. I said just once to him that I would rather stay in Japan, because my son had graduated from the elementary school already and would go to high school soon. Well, his mind was set and I had to prepare myself to leave someday.

TH: What were your children thinking?

MO: My children? We didn't ask their opinions. Even we ourselves were not so sure. (laugh)

TH: Were they already accustomed to Japan by that time?

MO: They could speak only Japanese. Small babies could not remember anything about Hawaii. They even forgot English. They hadn't gone to American schools yet.

TH: After the war, occupation forces came to Japan. Did they come to stay in Tottori?

MO: There were some of them in Tottori and Yonago, but they didn't come to Kurayoshi and Aki. I think more stayed in Yonago than Tottori.

TH: That means you didn't have many chances to see American soldiers after the war?

MO: No, hardly, because we were in Kurayoshi.

TH: I suppose your case is slightly different from those who stayed in America and came back to Japan after the war. Wasn't there by any chance an interrogation by the American army?

MO: No, not at all.

TH: I think the neighbors felt differently after the end of the war. How about the living situations? Was there any difference?

MO: Although we were living in Kurayoshi, my husband had to go to Matsue, where a Sannin parish office was, by an order of the headquarters (of Hongwanji temples). I forgot the name of the person who called.

TH: I see. There was a parish in Matsue.

MO: Yes, it was in Matsue. He had to work there.

TH: He was transferred.

MO: Yes. He worked there and came home once in a while.

TH: Oh, the family stayed in Tottori?

MO: Yes. After he was discharged from the hospital in May, he was fine and he was transferred to Matsue by an order of the headquarters. So no one from the military came to check on us.

TH: Was there any rumor in your neighborhood that the American army might come?

MO: No, no such rumors. I guess some occupational soldiers might be seen moving around in jeeps in Yonago, but we were in Kurayoshi, the countryside.

TH: There was no difference on the surface before and after the war?

MO: No, not much difference. We were lucky.

TH: I think there was a big difference in large cities.

MO: Yes. (But) there wasn't much inconvenience to us. (Only change was) that my husband

was away in Matsue and came home once in a while.

TH: Your children attended schools there (in Kurayoshi) and your husband was living alone (in Matsue).

MO: Yes, living alone. His title was a preaching instructor. There were five hundred temples in the Sannin parish including Tottori. He had to visit all of them. That was his job. He advised me on his whereabouts daily. He was often asked to do a lecture at temples.

TH: I know you returned to Hawaii in the end, but how did you feel when you actually realized that you had to go, although your husband's mind was set from the beginning?

MO: Well, I did suggest his going alone to Hawaii. However, I also thought that I should see the people who took care of us so much and felt obligated to take some appreciation gifts for them. "Well then, I should go with him," I thought, though the children would have a very difficult time because they had to enter the English speaking world. It would be difficult, but couldn't be helped.

TH: How the children felt?

MO: Well...

TH: They were accustomed to life in Japan and were attending Japanese schools. Didn't they feel going to Hawaii would be very difficult?

MO: Yes. They were already Japanese elementary school children. After being a Japanese during his elementary school time, (my oldest son) now had to live in an English (speaking) world. I think he was in the seventh or eighth grade. He sure had a difficult time. He had to start with "A,B,C," when he was already twelve or thirteen years old. After he studied with a private instructor, he was supposed to enroll in a lower grade class, but he was enrolled in an eighth grade class, because he mentioned that he knew some of the classmates. Well, the principal was very accommodating. I think his younger sister was enrolled in a sixth grade class. They were, though, very quick to learn. They learned almost at the same level as others in about a half year. Of course there were so many things they had to learn. I had to ask many people to help me, too, to have them review their work at home.

TH: I suppose that they could learn English in half a year, because they were once in an English speaking environment before.

MO: They just entered into the English world because other children spoke only English. That's why they were so quick to learn English. So after he enrolled in the eighth grade, he would now go to ninth grade, which was high school. He entered Waipahu High School as a ninth grader, and then would be a 10th, 11th, and 12th grader soon. I wondered if he could master English in four years, but he did. He passed the university entrance examination in English. I told him that he shouldn't feel ashamed any longer,

because he passed the (English) test. Everything should be all right.

TH: So you felt things were going well in spite of all your worries.

MO: Yes, I thought so. It wasn't a big problem that they had to enroll in one grade lower class. Just one year. My sons and daughter, they all graduated from universities. My oldest son entered Ryukoku University in Kyoto to study further to become a Buddhist priest. He said he was often asked why he decided to become a priest, but he didn't have any problem becoming a priest, because he accepted naturally that he would be one. Anyway, he went back to Japan and learned the basics and doctrines of Buddhism from a special professor and continued to a graduate school. At the graduate school, he studied with another special professor again. He was in Japan for seven years altogether and returned (to Hawaii). I know seven years of training was not enough to be a full-fledged (priest). He probably needed to make lots of effort to work as a priest. I am grateful that he is now a bishop. He has to work three more years, then, he will finally come back to me.

TH: Aren't you looking forward to it?

MO: Surely. So, I must live three more years.

TH: There is no doubt that you will. (laugh) When you returned to Hawaii in 1951, I am sure that people related to the Hongwanji temple welcomed you, but was there any problem with other people? Do you think your experience in Japan had a positive effect?

MO: I think so. Everyone wanted to hear our story. They invited us to many places to hear our stories. I think it was an unusual experience at that time that we could come back to Hawaii in the very beginning on the ship S.S. Gorton-go (possibly S.S. Wilson?), when passports were not even issued yet.

TH: The people here didn't have any information about those things...

MO: No, no one knew.

TH: They regarded you as very exceptional people.

MO: It could be. We went around the earth in a reverse way and stayed in Singapore during the war. That was something very rare, because Singapore was a territory of Japan (then), although America never recognized it. Japan claimed Singapore as her Territory and raised a Japanese flag boastfully.

TH: (Singapore) was called as Shonan Island.

MO: Yes, Shonan Island. America did not recognize it, though.

TH: Did you have any other problems, other than the children's education or language? Or

did you smoothly fit back to the previous life?

MO: I think I did. I am an optimistic person. (laugh)

TH: That's the best! Some old acquaintances were still at the same places?

MO: Yes, some, but the closest friends and old people had already passed away. Eight or nine years had passed, including (the time in) Singapore. After eight or nine years, some died, some moved, and so on. Times change after ten years. People say ten-years is an epoch. The first thing I noticed when I returned to Hawaii was that foods and goods were abundant. In Japan, they just started to recover. If I had stayed there longer, I probably could have seen the recovery, but they didn't have enough food when I left there. I was so impressed how Hawaii was rich and had plentiful food.

TH: But what do you think of now?

MO: Those were days the opposite from now. How about now? I haven't returned to Japan for the last fifteen years, so I am not sure, but I think Japan is now very rich. Japanese people don't appreciate their wealth. They have changed and don't think like we did ninety years ago.

TH: It is regrettable a bit.

MO: Yes. Changed. Japan has totally changed. Its country side may have not changed so much. But changed, compared to the old days.

TH: Especially the people in big cities.

MO: Yes, they have changed. They don't even know who lives next door.

TH: Right after returning in 1951, your husband went to Moiliili (Hongwanji mission)?

MO: (We stayed at Pearl City Hongwanji) until '64.

TH: I see.

MO: We stayed in Pearl City for about ten years after the war. Until '64.

TH: And then, moved to here.

MO: We stayed here (Moiliili) till '75. So it was ten years.

TH: Did he pass away in '76?

MO: He was 68 years old. We performed his thirty third memorial ceremony the other day. Thirty three years have already passed.

- TH: Although he had the unfortunate war experience, he believed that he would come back to Hawaii and preach (Buddhism). So I think he was satisfied with his life.
- MO: I think so, too.
- TH: How about you? Do you think you are rewarded in the end after all the hardships you went through?
- MO: Yes, I think so. I tried to change hardships to happiness. It is a blessing that my children understand both Japanese and English and live well. We had help from our parents during the difficult time after the war. We tried to think troubles were not troubles and made efforts to disregard the troubles, otherwise we couldn't go through the hardship.
- TH: I am sure. Well, we are nearing the end of this interview, but may I ask just one more thing? After the war began on Dec. 7, your husband was sent to the internment camp. And then many things happened, but you came back to Hawaii and have stayed till now. Of course, I understand it was hard, but what is the one word to explain your feelings?
- MO: Well, I think I am an optimistic type which helped me a lot. I don't consider troubles to be troubles. A nervous person might not be able to go through the hardship I went through. Since I was young and healthy, I had energy to take whatever came. Of course, I am old now. I think, after all, it must be a Buddha's blessing that my husband could concentrate on preaching Buddhism. On the other hand, I engaged in the management of Japanese schools and was able to help my children become bilingual. I would like to draw my curtain after I enjoy my current happy life.
- TH: That is wonderful. I pray that you will be in good health for a long time more.
- MO: Thank you very much.
- TH: Thank you very much for such a long time today.
- MO: Not at all. Thank you for your trouble. I'm not sure if I was any help to you.
- TH: Oh, yes. Your story is very valuable. I am in the same generation as your oldest son, but I was in Japan at that time. It is very interesting to compare how I lived and what I thought in those days (to your experience). It was really an interesting interview. Thank you very much.
- MO: As I think back, the school textbooks were very poor quality at that time after the war. How about in Tokyo?
- TH: Well, I didn't study much, but I think there were textbooks...

MO: Yes, there were, but they were just like pamphlets.

TH: I think they did look like books.

MO: I suppose it was the government office's policy, but the Japanese language textbooks were so thin and poor quality. I really felt that the educational system was neglected by (General) MacArthur after the war.

TH: I don't remember too well, but I don't think I experienced a trouble with not having textbooks.

MO: There were textbooks, but they looked like pamphlets.

TH: I think they were books. Did you have used textbooks?

MO: No, I bought new ones, since my son was the oldest son, but the textbooks looked like they were bound by Scotch tape. They had to study Japanese language with those books and didn't study geography or history. Education in Japan at that time was very unsatisfactory.

TH: Now at the end, may I ask the names of your children and their spouses and also of grandchildren?

MO: My oldest son is Thomas Ryoju. He is now 71 years old. The oldest daughter is Mayumi Grace. My oldest son was enlisted in the National Guard, so his English name is his first name, but Mayumi Grace's first name is Mayumi and Grace is her middle name. She didn't change (the order), because she was married and lived in New York for ten years, so she didn't have a chance to change. The next child is Francis Akio Okano. Francis. He was born in Singapore...

TH: In 1944?

MO: Yes. Therefore, he was a Japanese citizen, and didn't have American citizenship. When he came to Hawaii in 1951, he obtained American citizenship. Naturalization, wasn't it? He was naturalized, but he enrolled in the army, and Francis is an official name now. Akio is his middle name. So my sons' first names are English, but my daughter's first name is not.

TH: And they all have children?

MO: Yes. My oldest son was married and has three children. And four grand children. My daughter has two children and one grandchild. Francis Akio has two daughters.

TH: Do you remember the names of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren?

MO: Yes, I do.

TH: Can you tell me for a reference?

MO: Yes. The name of the daughter of my oldest son is Ann Akiko. She is now Azuma because she is married.

TH: Oh, she is already married?

MO: The oldest son of my oldest son is Brian Jyo..Shinjyo? Oh, Kengyo. Kengyo Okano. The second son is Craig Okano. Craig Shinjyo Okano. And, the names of the great-grandchildren are...

TH: Yes, if you remember.

MO: Great-grand children. On the oldest son's side, there are three children of Ann who is now married. Three girls. Casie, Alyssa, and Erin. Brian has one daughter, Ayda. Grace, now Yamamoto because she is married, not Okano, has one daughter, Keiko who is now married and (has a son) Marshal. So I have seven grandchildren and five great-grand children.

TH: You sure have a big family! (laugh)

MO: Twenty five. Total of twenty five.

TH: Aren't you happy to meet them and watch them grow up?

MO: Yes, once or twice a year, we have a chance to get together. It is too bad that the Yamamotos now live in Japan, in Nagoya, Aichi-ken. So we always miss the oldest son of Yamamoto and his oldest son. We also miss the two daughters of Francis. One daughter was in Japan and is now back, but the other daughter is attending a school in Oregon.

TH: Everyone else is in Hawaii?

MO: Yes, every one of them is in Hawaii, moreover, in Honolulu! (laugh) I can't ask more.

TH: They all live within a stone's throw.

MO: That's right. Yes, very close by. In Kaimuki. I live at 22nd Avenue and the oldest daughter, Yamamoto, at 12th, and the second son, Akio, at 6th Avenue. 6th and 12th and 22nd. And grand-son Azuma, Dr. Azuma lives at St. Louis Heights. So everyone lives very close by. Only Yamamoto and Jon are not here. I miss them all the time you know.

TH: But they do come back once in a while to get together....

MO: And the two daughters of Francis are still in school. One already graduated, but she went to Japan on the JET program to teach English for three years. She came back last summer and now working at the Halekulani hotel. The other one is still in school. She wants to get a PHD.

TH: A large family, isn't it?

MO: Yes, a large family of twenty five.

TH: Thank you so much for a long time. Please take care of yourself.

MO: You are welcome. Thank you.