

JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAII
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Yoshimitsu Takei (YT)

August 16, 2013

BY: Florence Sugimoto (FS)

Note: Comments in brackets [] are by the transcriber. Inaudible words or sections are identified by ((?)) in the transcript. False starts and repetitive phrases are edited.

FS: Please give us your name, your birthplace, and the year of your birth.

YT: My name is Yoshimitsu Takei. I was born in Paia, Maui in 1932.

FS: Please tell us about your family, your parents' names and so forth.

YT: Yeah, my father's name originally was Tokiji Takei but then when he started to write, he assumed the pen name of Sojin, so most of his writings were listed as Sojin Takei. My father was born in Fukuoka, Japan in 1903.

FS: How about your mother?

YT: My mother was born in August 20, 1912 on Kauai. She was born in Hawaii.

FS: What were their occupations?

YT: My father was a Japanese language schoolteacher because he was born in Japan and he grew up in Japan. But his parents came to Hawaii to work on the plantations so he went to Japanese school. He wanted to go to university but he had an older brother who also wanted to go to university. The older brother got the parents' support to study. My father actually was one of the few students at Waseda that was married and had a child. Most of the Japanese students went straight to the university from school.

FS: When you say "Waseda," does that mean that this was not your father, but his older brother?

YT: No, it was my father.

FS: So he did go to university?

YT: Yeah. See, he came to Hawaii and worked as a Japanese language schoolteacher, and he gave money to his older brother to support him when his older brother went to college. I forgot which university he went to. My father delayed his aspiration to go to university until his older

brother finished. Then my father saved some money and took my mother and me to Japan, and he enrolled in Waseda.

FS: How old was he when he enrolled in Waseda?

YT: He must have been in his thirties.

FS: I see.

YT: So his parents left my father, his older brother and younger brother in Japan. And relatives.

FS: So that means your grandparents worked on the plantation here...

YT: Yeah. On Maui...they had their three older sons in Japan, and left them to come to work on the plantation.

FS: Okay. That means you would be a dual citizen?

YT: I suppose I could have been. Yeah.

FS: Do you know for sure whether you were registered as a dual citizen?

YT: I don't know for sure. I didn't care [laughs]. Basically since I grew up in United States, I just assumed I was an American.

FS: Then your father was an alien.

YT: Yes.

FS: I see. Why did he come to Hawaii?

YT: Because his parents, I think, wanted him to come and also, his older brother was going to university and he admired the older brother. The older brother and my father were never, were not close.

FS: What was your family life like here?

YT: I spent my first few years in Paia, where I was born.

FS: Your grandparents, after working here at the plantation, went to Japan?

YT: Yeah, later in life. In fact, my grandmother left Hawaii soon after the war ended. And my grandfather, maternal grandfather, left Hawaii for Japan when he was, I think in his 70s.

FS: Okay. What was the primary language spoken in your family?

YT: Japanese. You see, my mother, although she was born in Hawaii, grew up in Japan. Now, part of her relatives took her in, and I think my maternal grandparents said that when they went to

Japan, they left the oldest daughter, my mother was second, and the youngest daughter. So, all three were raised in Japan.

FS: So your father met your mother in Japan?

YT: No, in Hawaii. Where they had a “go between”.

FS: Okay. So in other words, they were married here?

YT: They were married here.

FS: I see. What are some of the cultural values, traditions that you observed?

YT: Well, essentially they were Japanese. Whatever they practice at home, there’s the language, ceremonies and so forth for Japanese, hardly anything, anything connected with American culture that we practice at home.

FS: What about the values that you were taught?

YT: It’s hard to identify what particular values. Certainly part of that was respect for parents I think. I was not really aware of the difference between Japanese and American culture. I just knew that when I went to public school in Paia, I had to learn English. Thank goodness my first grade teacher was from Japanese ancestry, so I was able to communicate with her in Japanese.

FS: What were your relations like with your neighbors and the community?

YT: Oh, my father...both my parents were from Japanese language schoolteachers, so they had a very high status in the plantation community. And my father was the major principal, so he had a lot of other...or I could say the word, somewhat influential, although they did not participate in any kind of organized activities, clubs.

FS: Did the students come from all over Paia?

YT: No, just from upper Paia.

FS: I see. What language schools did you attend?

YT: Well, Japanese.

FS: Which?

YT: Well, during the time my father was studying at Waseda, I did go to Japanese kindergarten. I started a year late, which is sad but good, because I didn’t know English.

FS: Does that mean you attended kindergarten in Japan?

YT: In Japan. So I was fluent, not only in Japanese but also reading.

FS: When did you go to Japan with your parents?

YT: Well, we actually went twice. Once when I was just a baby, and then my father had to stop attending Waseda because it ran out of money. So they came back and worked a couple of years, and then went back for him to resume his studies. I was, I guess, four and a half years old so I went to kindergarten in Japan.

FS: And then you came back a year later.

YT: Right before World War II. And I think that probably raised some flags [laughs] because my father was in Japan before World War II, before Pearl Harbor.

FS: So how long did you go to English school?

YT: Well, once we came back in 1940, I enrolled in Paia Elementary, and went to public school thereafter. I was attending school up in Kula...because you have to keep in mind that my parents lost their jobs as teachers, right? They closed the school. As far as I know, he was devastated. The American soldiers burned all my father's books.

FS: Before we go into that, let's go to December 7th. At that time, what was, how old were you?

YT: At that time, I guess I was around six and a half, almost seven.

FS: What do you remember of that day?

YT: Well, I think we were visiting my maternal grandparents and with my uncle, who noticed that these puffs of smoke in the horizon. We were on Maui and I think he suspected that there was some kind of battle going on. And so he came in and told us-that was it, as far as December 7th was concerned.

FS: When was your father arrested?

YT: After Pearl Harbor, they closed the schools. My father and mother decided to go to Kula. Several reasons: one was that Mr. Tanji the "go between" who arranged the marriage between my father and mother, told my parents that if they were farming, you're less likely to be arrested. The military had started to round up captains, leaders, and so my parents were aware of what's going on. Mr. Tanji, who had a very large farm up in Kula, suggested that this piece of land that was not being tilled, perhaps could support my parents. He suggested that farmers were less likely to get interned because Hawaii needed food! So they believed him and moved to Kula.

FS: Who is Mr. Tanji?

YT: Mr. Tanji was a farmer and he knew my father because they were both members of Itō-en, a semi-religious... ah, think of it as a commune [laughs].

FS: A commune.

- YT: Yeah.
- FS: Oh, I see. But it's sort of a religious group?
- YT: Yeah, yeah. Their fathers, I think, sold [their produce] in Hawaii. Itō-en...my father became a member when he was probably a teenager. After high school, he joined this community founded by the leaders of Itō-en, and they had to give up all their earthly possessions except maybe shoes and toothbrush [laughs] and they lived in barracks.
- FS: So he was part of that group?
- YT: Part of that.
- FS: So you were all part of that group, too? Is that it?
- YT: No, this is before my parents were married. He was a single man. And he was probably about eighteen, nineteen years old.
- FS: But-when you were in Kula and your father became a farmer? You also became a part of the Itto-en community then.
- YT: No, but they didn't have an Itto-en community in Hawaii.
- FS: But Mr. Tanji was part of...
- YT: He was a member. He arranged for my father to get married.
- FS: What happened that day that your father was arrested?
- YT: Well, it was at night. They came, and we were living in this garage that had to modify to be a cottage. We had just one room, where we lived and slept, and in the corner was a sink and refrigerator.
- FS: When was this?
- YT: This was right after Pearl Harbor.
- FS: Would you say December 8th?
- YT: Yeah, well, we didn't move to Kula 'til a few days after the bomb.
- FS: Oh, so not exactly December 8th?
- YT: No, because it took awhile to decide what to do. In fact, they were out of a job and we did all kinds of things to make ends meet, I remember.
- FS: Would you say a few weeks later?

YT: Yeah, yeah, few weeks. Maybe a month.

FS: Please tell us about the arrest itself, now.

YT: Yeah, well, there's not much to tell because they came at night and...

FS: Who is "they"?

YT: Military police. And my parents were prepared. They sort of expected it, so the military police told my father to "get your personal place ((?)) together and come with us," and so he went.

FS: What was the reaction of your family?

YT: Oh, of course, my mother was crying. All that. It was a shock although I think my parents expected it, that it was going to happen.

FS: Were you aware of it at all?

YT: Not really. I knew that he was taken away but I was, I guess, at that time, around seven and a half years old or eight. I was maybe probably eight.

FS: Did the community react in any way?

YT: No, we were away. See, we had left Paia to go to Kula.

FS: Okay. How about telling us about your father's detention. Do you know the details?

YT: No, I don't know much details. My mother probably received some word. Not officially though, I don't think. We think he was taken to Sand Island and then from there, he was taken to the mainland. I'm not sure exactly where. As far as I know, he ended up in Santa Fe [Santa Fe Internment Camp, a U.S. Dept. of Justice internment camp in New Mexico].

FS: So you never were able to visit with him at all while he was here. How was life without your father?

YT: Well, it was really tough economically. My mother tried to [laughs] farm, but she was not a farmer. And my maternal grandmother came to visit and she immediately saw the situation and she told my mother, "You can't do this. You can't make a living farming. I want you to come and live with us." And so, my brother took my sister and I down to Haiku; that's where my maternal grandparents lived. And so we lived with them until we went to Crystal City [Crystal City Internment Center, a U.S. Dept. of Justice Internment Camp in Texas], which was far. A year and a half, I think. About a year.

FS: What was life like with your living with your maternal grandmother?

YT: Well, it was crowded! My mother's two sisters, as well as two brothers, were living there, too. And it was a two-bedroom house. I slept in the hallway, the only room there was.

FS: How about your sister?

YT: I think she slept with my mother.

FS: And during that time, then, your mother did not work at all. Is that it?

YT: No, she did. In Haiku, she worked for a while. I guess until we left home to Crystal City. She worked at a chicken farm. So she had to get up at four-thirty in the morning, collect the first batch of eggs and hang around, I guess, doing something, then picked up the eggs in the evening. It is a long day. She had to feed them and give them water and all that. That's what she did. When they established a military training camp near Haiku, my mother and her mother, and sisters all did laundry for the soldiers. That's how they made some money.

FS: Was there any communication at all between you and your father?

YT: Not between me and my father, no.

FS: Or your mother?

YT: Well, my father and mother corresponded.

FS: Where was this communication from?

YT: Well, from Haiku to Santa Fe, where he was.

FS: So, in other words, he first wrote when he reached Santa Fe?

YT: I think so.

FS: Would you say that was a year, two years that you didn't hear from him?

YT: About, I would guess, it was about a year and a half. I'm not sure how often he wrote but I know he was censored and the military assigned people to read the letters. Somewhat like what they do in prison now.

FS: When did your mother decide to join her husband?

YT: The Army offered to transform [Note: Could have intended to use the word "transport" rather than "transform"] us to the mainland. They actually asked whether she wanted to be reunited with my father and she said, "Yes!" And so, we were given very short notice, pack up and we went by boat from Maui to Honolulu.

FS: Now, did your mother request it from her side?

YT: No, I don't think so. I think the Army contacted her and asked her whether she wanted to be reunited with my father. I'm pretty sure that's what happened.

- FS: Do you know if maybe your father communicated through the letters that he wanted all of you to join him?
- YT: That, I'm not sure. I think if he knew that there was an opportunity to do that, he would have certainly agreed to it. In fact, that's why we went to Crystal City and then they shipped him from Santa Fe to Crystal City.
- FS: When did you leave Maui?
- YT: Leave...it was sometime around 1943.
- FS: Now, before you left, did you have to dispose of any assets?
- YT: No. See, [my] parents, they hardly had anything. And especially when we went to Kula, I think we only had the clothes on our backs and some kitchen utensils. That was about it. So, we didn't own any land or a house or whatever.
- FS: Do you remember what you packed?
- YT: Toothbrush, toothpaste, that kind of thing.
- FS: Bare essentials.
- YT: Yeah, bare essentials.
- FS: How did you feel about the whole experience of leaving Maui to go to the mainland?
- YT: Actually, as a child, I didn't feel much. That's the amazing thing about children. They can adjust to, or accept situations with a kind of shrug because they can't control the situation. It happens to them and so...I remember just going along! I was told to "pack your things" and I packed my things and we went.
- FS: What are your memories of that trip to the mainland?
- YT: It was not bad. It was long-because we had to go from Maui to Honolulu and then Honolulu to, I think, San Francisco! I'm not even sure now, but anyway the ship was fine; it was the *Lurline*, and we had lots of room on it. I was comfortable. Not like the return when we came from the mainland to Hawaii, which was a terrible trip. But, anyway, when we got to the mainland, we were put in a railroad car. I don't think I remember anybody else from Hawaii on that trip. They had the shades drawn on the train and we just went from California to Texas when we got there, they unloaded us and we went to camp and my mother was shown our quarters. It was a two-room cottage, a prefabricated cottage; we had one room. Then my father showed up!
- FS: When did your father show up?
- YT: I think only about one or two days after we got to Crystal City. And, frankly I didn't even recognize him! You know, he was a stranger.

FS: That was your reaction then.

YT: Uh huh.

FS: As though he was a stranger to you.

YT: Yeah, yeah. And I thought, in my child's mind, I suspected that the U.S. government had sent this imposter [laughs] and that was my father, so I was a little bit suspicious who this man was.

FS: And that was when you were about nine years old?

YT: I'd say I was around...yeah.

FS: Wait a minute, this is 1944 that you went to the mainland.

YT: Yeah, '43.

FS: Okay, then you were eleven!

YT: I was eleven, yeah.

FS: Now how were you received by the residents?

YT: We hardly had any contact with them. We were all in these segregated tracks, the Japanese were. The Japanese from Hawaii and from the mainland were integrated; they were in one section. The Germans were in another section. The South American Japanese, mostly Peruvian Japanese were in another section. And we hardly had any contact with anybody else.

FS: Did you make friends with your neighbors?

YT: I don't even recall who the neighbors were [laughs]. We were, I think because of the situation, we knew we weren't going to be there permanently...just a temporary situation. Even in the past, we didn't try to get to know each other. Each family was isolated.

FS: Although you were all living in the same barracks?

YT: No, [we] were in separate cottages.

FS: Separate cottages. Individual houses, then?

YT: Well, there were two families.

FS: Two families in one cottage.

YT: One cottage. We had a partition.

FS: But you never really got to know your neighbors.

YT: Neighbors, no. Next-door neighbors. ((?)) I don't recall who they were! You know, whether they had kids or nothing. We had so little contact with them.

FS: Do you remember the housing itself, what it was like?

YT: A little bit, yes.

FS: Please provide the housing conditions.

YT: We had I think two sections in each cottage. One section for the family. It was one big room. I shouldn't ((?)) but a room where they had a kitchen area and bathroom.

FS: For each family?

YT: Yeah.

FS: But this partition was the only thing that separated you?

YT: Us from the other family.

FS: What kind of partition would you call that?

YT: Some wood, plywood.

FS: How were the beds and the other amenities?

YT: There were cheap, spring beds. I guess what they use with the soldiers and with the military, those beds.

FS: Were you comfortable there?

YT: Reasonably. I don't recall being particularly uncomfortable. The worst living situation was when I contracted chicken pox at the camp. And hot, in the summertime, hot, itching all over. It was terrible.

FS: Were you taken to the clinic?

YT: No, no, no.

FS: Does that mean you suffered through your chicken pox at home?

YT: Yeah, at home.

FS: Did you have any kind of relief at all?

YT: [Laughs] Just fan. It was very, very uncomfortable.

FS: Does that mean you didn't go to school very long?

YT: Yeah, I guess. I'm not sure. Maybe it was summertime and there was no school. I think that was it.

FS: How did your family adjust to the camp organization and the routines?

YT: I don't really remember much. We had fake money that they gave us, I think, every month, which we bought provisions at a...like a commissary. So we were, in that sense, given the freedom to spend the money in any way we wanted! [Laughs]

FS: And did you?

YT: No. Of course, the money was just barely enough to get the necessities so we ate a lot of bologna. So, I don't particularly care for bologna. [Laughs] We had it so much! Well, 'cause the civilian population of the people outside had restrictions in terms of buying meats and so forth.

FS: Did you go to the cafeteria for your meal?

YT: No, no, no. Each family cooked for themselves.

FS: Where did your mother get the rice?

YT: The food?

FS: The rice and all the...

YT: Oh yeah, there was a commissary-like store where we spent the money, the fake money. You know, like Monopoly money.

FS: So in other words, she spent all her money on the necessary foods?

YT: Yeah.

FS: So there was really not much that you could spend yourself.

YT: That's right. Hardly anything. And in fact, even our clothing was something that was handed out to us; we would go and take a jacket or shoes or whatever that they brought in the pile. I guess like Salvation Army.

FS: I take it you didn't find many clothes or shoes that you really could fit into? [Laughs]

YT: Ah, we had to just take whatever that fitted us.

FS: What did your parents do as "work"?

- YT: Well that's the thing that I think was the worst for my parents. They had absolutely nothing to do. Except for my father. My father at least could sit and think of poems and write poetry. But my mother, as far as I remember, had nothing to do.
- FS: Wasn't there any kind of work being offered at that camp?
- YT: Well, no. They did try to, the camp administration, try to win the support of some of the big farmers in the area by offering young *nisei* [second generation Japanese American] men to go and work in the farms, on the farms for pennies. [Laughs]
- FS: I guess it would be nearby.
- YT: Yes. So, every morning there would be a truck that picked up workers and they were permitted to leave the camp and I'm sure the farmers were happy as hell with the cheap labor. Some of the people with special skills, like nurses, were able to work in the dispensaries, but the vast majority was like my parents, Japanese language schoolteachers and how many Japanese schoolteachers can they use? (Laughs) Not much!
- FS: Did you go to Japanese school or English school while in camp?
- YT: I went to English school. They offered us Japanese school or English school. And my parents chose to send me to the English school. Maybe they asked me what I wanted, and I don't remember anymore.
- FS: Did you learn much?
- YT: I think the school was a little better, no worse than public school, but the teachers were all *haole* [Caucasian] from the mainland and were willing to get a teaching job in the camp. I don't think they lived in the camp but they were bussed in and bussed out. Aside from that, the doctors—I guess the positions that were a bit like working in the dispensary and they're all paid minimum wage, but they were happy to have something to do.
- FS: Were there any social organizations within the camp?
- YT: There might have been for the adults, but I don't remember any for the kids. They had organized activities like baseball. Baseball was big, and softball, and there were lots of men eager to coach kids [laughs]. In fact that's one of the few things that Peruvian kids and kids from Hawaii and California could do together.
- FS: Oh, so you did... that's how you met some Peruvian Americans.
- YT: We met. We played softball. [Break in interview tape recording. The beginning of the second part begins while the conversation was in progress.] Well, the things that kids could do, which kept them occupied. They were, like I said, organized activities like baseball and softball; baseball for the older kids and softball for the younger kids. There was *kendo* [Japanese martial arts using bamboo swords] and I guess *judo* [Japanese wrestling martial arts]. Most of them were for boys. They had hardly anything for girls as far as I remember.

FS: So what did you participate in?

YT: I did a little bit of softball. Not very good. Never played ball before in my life and...

FS: What made you join the baseball team?

YT: For something to do. And I think there were a few boys in the neighborhood who were going to play and they put out the word, "Hey, there's a softball team." I remember one Peruvian Japanese family where the oldest boy was a very good pitcher, on the end ((?)) pitcher and he was sort of the star of the team. [Laughs] His younger brother used to hang around and bad mouth the kids of the other team in Spanish.

FS: What was your routine like? In the morning and the afternoon?

YT: Well, the usual things. Brush teeth, and then eat breakfast, go to school.

FS: When did you get home?

YT: I think around 3 o'clock. We had a lot of time after school to play in the neighborhood. The kids in the neighborhood knew each other but as far as I remember, the adults didn't socialize much.

FS: Did you have any chores?

YT: Not really, no, just hardly anything to do. The cottages were tiny. It was just one room and there just wasn't much to do. I guess the girls might have helped their mothers with the laundry or something like that, but the boys, there's nothing much to do except run around and play with other kids. We played a lot of marbles; that I recall.

FS: Did you have to buy the marbles from the commissary?

YT: I think some, yeah. Well, they didn't give it to us, I don't think, so there was a lot of trading going on.

FS: Did you receive any "care packages" from home, for example?

YT: Not that I remember, no.

FS: Then you were limited in the number of toys that you could have...

YT: Oh yes, that's right. We were very limited.

FS: How about books?

YT: There was a library. We could go there and borrow books to read but their selection was very limited, very small selection.

FS: Now what were the circumstances that led to your father being released?

- YT: Well, he was...mostly the end of the war. I remember the word spread like wildfire that Japan had surrendered and then soon after, we were told, and each family was told, to decide, "where do you want to go?" And my parents wanted to, decided to come back to Hawaii because they had no experience living on the mainland.
- FS: Did they ever consider going back to Japan?
- YT: I don't think so, not seriously anyway. They knew Japan was in shambles. My mother was from Hiroshima and almost all the relatives in Hiroshima were killed in the atomic bomb. So, she had no place to go. And my father, thankfully, pled to come to Hawaii. So, it was a serious choice for them and they knew that the Japanese economy was in terrible shape, after the war, so going to Japan was not much of an option, I don't think. Not a serious consideration.
- FS: Now when he received notification, what kind of preparation did you have to make?
- YT: [Laughs] Again, it was just pack up and go. We had hardly any possessions as such...just the clothes on our backs. And so, we were again put on a train to go to, I think it was Oakland. I'm not sure. And then, put on a troopship and we came to Hawaii. That was a terrible trip. The boat was just over-crowded, and we had bad weather and I was seasick about six out of the seven days. [Laughs] So, I guess I don't remember the trip very fondly.
- FS: So, you enjoyed the trip going to mainland much more than you did coming back?
- YT: Oh, yeah! That was definitely the case.
- FS: When your family returned to Honolulu, what did your father and mother do?
- YT: Oh, my father got a job as a janitor for one of the Lewers and Cooke [large mercantile company in the islands] building. And my mother worked as a maid for this *haole* [Caucasian] family, ah, one of the "Big Five" families [The five largest mercantile companies in Hawaii, including Lewers & Cooke, which controlled the local economy]. In fact, in return for her work as a maid, they gave us this garage to live in. So, we stayed there for about a year, I guess.
- FS: So, as soon as you arrived back home, you actually were able to find a place to live?
- YT: Right, right, I think the U.S. government helped a little bit, because it advertised that his family is coming back and somehow my father was connected to the Lewers and Cooke families, Lewers, I guess it was. That's how he got a job as a janitor and my mother got a job as a maid.
- FS: How did you feel living in the garage?
- YT: Well, it was all right. Like I said, as a kid, it's amazing how kids adapt to situations. It's not something they can control anyway, but I think they make the best of it. I think many kids react that way to situations like being homeless or, some disaster where a flood destroys their house, and they find some kind of temporary house somewhere.
- FS: Do you recall when you came back?

YT: Yeah, it was December, I think, of '45.

FS: Oh, it must have been cold.

YT: On the mainland, it really cold there. But, Hawaii was fine⁵

FS: How did you adjust to your new environment?

YT: Actually, in a way, it was difficult because we lived in a garage at the top of Maunalani Heights. And it was rough [laughs] to walk up and down the hill! School was okay. They tested me and I guess I scored pretty high.

FS: Where was this?

YT: That was Liliuokalani. And at that time only seventh graders, it was a school entirely made up of seventh graders. Eighth and ninth graders were counted as intermediates. I had kind of a rough time because the local kids didn't accept me very well.

FS: That means that you must have had pretty good education on the mainland?

YT: Well, most of the kids in the neighborhood were kids from California. So...

FS: This was in Crystal City?

YT: Crystal City, yes. And so I, as one local kid said to me, "Eh ((?)) how come you talk like a *haole* [Caucasian]?" I had a difficult time fitting in.

FS: Did you have fights?

YT: Ah-h, not really. But, one local kid liked to bully and what he did was he would hit me from the back while I wasn't looking, and then when I would turn around, he'd run to his big Hawaiian friend. He said, "Hey, looky, look! He's chasing me!" [Laughs] So I couldn't do anything to get back.

FS: Any other experiences in school?

YT: School? Not really. I was pretty flabbergasted by some of the behavior by local kids.

FS: [Pause] Describe that for me.

YT: Oh, oh, like one kid found condoms and he blew it up and he acted as though he was having sex with this rolled-up mattress. And, things like that that I had never seen before.

FS: How was school itself?

YT: Not very good. But, actually I suppose it's not all that worse than school in the [internment] camp.

FS: Not much different, you would say. Is that it?

YT: Yeah, yeah, public schools tend to be pretty similar. But, I'd say I had some pretty mediocre teachers. In fact, that's what made me decide to become a teacher, [laughs] you know, because I remembered how poor some of them were.

FS: Then, other than that, your adjustment to home was—would you say, adequate?

YT: I wouldn't say it was great [laughs] because we were so poor most of the time. In fact, I became very, very frugal. Part of that is my maternal grandmother who I liked very much. She was one of those Japanese who didn't want to waste a grain of rice. So, that stuck with me.

FS: Then from Liliuokalani School, you went on to...

YT: Kaimuki Intermediate. After that, my, my parents found a lot in Manoa Valley, which they bought and they put up a pre-fab [shortened version of "pre-fabricated" which referred to a structure already assembled in parts] house in a shack, much like the place we had in [internment] camp [laughs] in Crystal City. We moved there and then I was in McKinley District. So after I finished Kaimuki, I went to McKinley [High School]. Then, UH [University of Hawaii] Hawaii and I got a teaching certificate, got a fifth-year certificate and I had been in the advanced ROTC program at UH as a way to finance my education. I didn't have to ask my parents for money. They gave us a stipend and paid my tuition which was only a little over a hundred dollars. [Laughs] So, that's it. But anyway, after I graduated and got my commission, I served in the U.S. military for two years, then came back and taught two years at a public school. I decided I wanted to try something different so I went back to UH for a Master's Degree. And after that, I worked with the Peace Corps training center Hilo for a couple years.

FS: Would you repeat that? What department?

YT: The Peace Corps. [Volunteer program for Americans initiated by President Kennedy to assist economically deprived areas in the United States and throughout the world] My advisor for Master's Degree was the Director of the Peace Corps training center in Hilo and it was two years, an interesting experience. And then I was able to get a scholarship to study at University of California Berkeley, so I packed up my wife and two kids and we went to California. After I got advanced candidacy, I still had another year of scholarship money left, so I decided to go to Malaysia and collect material for my dissertation. So we spent three years in Malaysia, and came back, got a job offer at Penn State University. I went there and I was there for about four, five years. Yeah, five years maybe.

FS: Doing what, may I ask?

YT: I was teaching sociology of education and then my wife and younger son died in a car accident.

FS: Was this on the mainland?

YT: On the mainland, in Pennsylvania. So, I just stayed on teaching at Pennsylvania State University at ((?)). In the meantime, I had remarried a Pennsylvania girl and I had a son. He

graduated at the state university, too. He got a discount, a tuition discount. And he is now working, living and working in Philadelphia. And, ah, he's on his way. [laughs]

FS: Oh, you've had an interesting life!

YT: Well, it has not been dull. Let's put it that way.

FS: Okay now, in concluding this interview, I'd like you to make whatever comments you'd like about the positive and the negative aspects of your internment experience.

YT: Well, the real effect that I remember, it might have been when I was a child, so it was not all that impactful, but my mother really suffered. She always kind of liked the finer things in Japanese culture, tea ceremonies, *ikebana* and so forth, and she lost all that. She used to play the *koto* [stringed Japanese musical instrument], ((?)) so she lost almost everything and they resolved ((?)) the war and the internment. I think the real tragic trigger in our family is my mother. [Long pause before interviewer asked another question]

FS: How about your father?

YT: My father was able to get a job with the newspaper, *Hawaii Hochi*, worked for a year and a half, or so, as a janitor and then he also taught at the Moiliili Japanese Language School [laughs]. But eventually he ended up becoming an engraver, the Japanese urns with the ashes? So he would write, stenciled in the person's name and place of birth and all that. Well, he was very good in writing. His calligraphy was very good so that's what he used, and then I guess, the dentist drill inscribed the urn.

FS: Was he self-taught?

YT: Yeah. My father was an incredible man! He was so good in so many different things and, for instance, the foundation of the house now, he cracked all the stones, and he broke the foundation and he made stone walls.

FS: What was the impact of the internment on him?

YT: Ah, I don't know. My mother said he had a good time sitting around writing poetry. [Laughs heartily at length]

FS: It must have been difficult for your folks.

YT: I'm sure it was.

FS: Especially since he was transferred from camp to camp.

YT: Mmm, yeah. But he was an incredibly... I don't want to say good-natured man but he was very, very calm and broad-minded person. For instance, he never spanked me. I mean I don't remember how bad I was. [Laughs] He just accepted things the way they are. Very philosophical about life, how things don't always go the way you want it to go. So, I think

when he went back to teaching Japanese language school, he was not very happy because the kids don't want to study Japanese.

FS: When was this?

YT: This was in 1948. So '49...

FS: Before he became an engraver?

YT: Yeah. He went from being a janitor, to being a reporter in the newspaper *Hawaii Hochi*, and then I think he taught at Moiliili Japanese School for a year or so. In the meantime, he picked up engraving. But he said the children don't want to learn Japanese [laughs]. You know, discipline was very, very difficult and since he was not a violent man, he couldn't beat the kids the way some Japanese teachers do.

FS: What are your feelings about the government redress?

YT: It was appreciated. It helped us financially but the damage was fine ((?)) excess to what we got. I think my sister and I didn't suffer all that much but my parents certainly did. And what they got was a just a small token compared to the sufferings. I think that's true with a lot of the Japanese on the mainland.

FS: Now, you became familiar with the Peruvian Japanese?

YT: Yeah.

FS: Would you like to tell us more about them?

YT: Well, I could never figure out why we had Peruvian Japanese in our camp but then I found out later that—I think it was Gary Okihiro's book *Cane Fire*. I think that he pointed out that the U.S. government paid the Peruvian government to give the U.S. government the Peruvian Japanese. The intent of that was to use those Peruvian Japanese as exchange goods to get American POWs [prisoners of war] back. The Japanese had thousands of American POWs but U.S. government had very few, only hundreds, because the Japanese soldiers preferred to die, rather than be captured. So this imbalance of prisoners of war in Japanese hands, and those in American hands, led the Americans to want to have some other people that they could exchange for American POWs with the Japanese government. That's how these Peruvian Japanese ended up into the U.S.

FS: What were they like?

YT: Well, they were, for all intents and purposes, [laughs] they were Peruvians. They spoke Spanish and in the camp, they went to Japanese language school because, choice between English and Japanese, that's all the choice they had! They chose Japanese. I think at that time, many of the parents would have wanted to go back to Japan, but with Japan losing in the war they decided it was better to stay in the U.S. When they were given a choice hardly any of them chose to go back to Peru. Most of them chose to stay in the United States and now, they're still trying to get some reparations. Oh, anyway, that's another pretty sad incident in American history.

FS: Did you get to know any of the Peruvian Japanese persons outside of baseball?

YT: No, not really. We were in separate areas in the camp and there were hardly any interactions between the sections. For instance, I never saw any of the German kids outside the school. That was it. So, the camp did not promote inter-ethnic cooperation or understanding.

FS: As a finale, could you give us some words of wisdom for our generation and for future generations?

YT: Well, basically I'd say, be careful of your leaders. After all, this decision to intern Japanese and Japanese Americans was made by the top people in our government, just the way the war in Iran and Afghanistan was decided upon by our leaders. Our leaders are not all powerful. They make these terrible mistakes! And when they do make mistakes the consequences can be very, very severe. Thousands of people die, and in the case of Japanese Americans in all those disruptive lives, and now people in Iraq and Afghanistan have to cope with it. Their countries have changed!

FS: Are you aware of any funerals that were held in camp at all?

YT: No, I don't remember any. I'm sure there were, but if there were, it was not publicized. I'd say definitely there was hardly any communication among families. We had very little information about the outside world. For instance, the end of the war was a surprise to a lot of people in the camp 'cause they hadn't been getting word about what was happening. Ah, so when time came to decide where to go, the government offered to send the people anywhere they wanted to go. A handful went back to Japan but most of the mainland Japanese decided to stay in the U.S. Some of them from California went to Chicago 'cause they were angry—their neighbors in California in a sense offering them as prisoners of war—but I understand now that many of them have by now drifted back to the west coast. And many of the Peruvians chose to stay in the U.S.

FS: Well, thank you very much for all the information you've provided. Crystal City-was a little bit different from some of the other camps.

YT: Yes, I think so.

FS: Ah, it was basically a family camp then.

YT: Yeah.

FS: Thank you again for this interesting story.

FS: Oh, you're welcome.