

JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAII

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Tomoko U. Hisamoto (TH)

February 26, 2010

Interview by: Florence Sugimoto (FS)

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

TH: I am Tomoko Uyenoyama Hisamoto. I was born in Kurtistown, Hawaii, March tenth, 1924.

FS: What were your parents' names, the year and place of their birth, and their occupations?

TH: My father was named Toyogusu Uyenoyama, third son born to Shinkichi Uyenoyama on April second, 1880. He was born in Arida, Wakayama. He was a minister, also a Japanese school principal.

FS: What about your mother?

TH: My mother? She was born in Hidaka, Wakayama, October fourth, 1886. She had graduated from Shihan, Wakayama, and got married to my dad, came to Hawaii, taught at the Japanese school, helping my father's ministry as well.

FS: What were the reasons for your father and mother coming to Hawaii?

TH: My father, firstly. He came in 1909 as a minister. At that time, the immigrants were having such a difficult time working under slave-like conditions, the ratio of women and men were so different and their morals were deteriorating, and so the Abbot of the Jodo sect [of Japanese Buddhism] felt that they needed to send ministers to help boost the laborers' morale. And so, my father was one the sixteen ministers that came -- was about the sixteenth minister that came to Hawaii. And he brought my mother to help him with the Japanese school and the temple.

FS: Was this at Kurtistown?

TH: Yes, Kurtistown. Kurtistown temple was the third *Jodo-shu* (Jodo sect) temple that was built in 1902. It evidently was started from one rented room of a hotel.

FS: How many children were there in the family?

TH: There were seven; four boys and three girls. I was the middle girl.

FS: I'm sorry. Did you say that you were the only girl?

TH: I was the middle girl.

FS: Middle girl, I see. Were they then Nisei and dual citizens?

- TH: Yes, we were all Nisei, and according to the *koseki* (family registry), all six were registered as dual.
- FS: What was the language spoken at home?
- TH: Strictly Japanese. My parents didn't speak English, though my mom would understand English. She could write some, but it was easier for her to understand Japanese, naturally.
- FS: Please tell us about your family life.
- TH: Well, being born in a family with Father being a minister and Mother being a Japanese schoolteacher, we were always told to behave ourselves. We have to set an example for other children. So, I believe we spent rather a protected life. I know for sure that I didn't go out to play outside, except my friends would come over. Most of the time girls hardly came, however. It was the boys that would come over and would play with my brother. I'd join him. And so naturally, I was a tomboy, playing along with them. And, it was -- we had strict parents. We had to abide by the Japanese culture.
- FS: What were some of these cultural learnings that you had gotten from your parents?
- TH: Respect for others was important. Being the minister's children, they stressed to live life truthfully. We had to be honest in what we say, what we did, and we had to mean what we said. They were strictly against us being two-faced. Duplicity was a no, definitely. We were always taught to be polite to the elders and respect our *kyodai* (siblings) and elders. We were always taught to greet the elders, "*konnichi wa*" (good day) or "*ohayo gozaimasu*" (good morning) or "*konban wa*" (good evening).
- FS: Were there any traditions that you observed regularly?
- TH: Oh yes. Like any Japanese family, just before New Year's, every room was thoroughly cleaned. And, it was certainly a big job for us. [laughs] And the traditional *kadomatsu* (New Year's pine decoration) -- it was my brothers' duty to cut the bamboo and branch from the cedar tree for the *kadomatsu* for our home use. Something I think was special with our New Year's meal: for the *ozoni* (rice cake soup), my mother always used *kachikuri*, the dried chestnut. And she would say, "When you eat this, you think about overcoming difficulties. You *katsu kuri* -- *kuro* -- *katsu kuro* (lit. defeat + hardship). And that was a tradition with us. And, *otoso* (spiced sake). That was our New Year's toast. My father would serve *sake* to each one of us in this very special lacquered *sakazuki* (sake cup), a set of three. I think that was a special thing for us. And, also -- I'm jumping, however, being in the temple life, we made offerings for whatever we received from the people. We took it before the altar, offered it, and then partook. Then, Boys' Days and Girls' Days, my mom always made *sekihan* (rice with red beans) and this special *kashiwa mochi* (rice cake wrapped in oak leaf), like *omochi*. But, because we didn't have the *kashiwa* leaves, she used avocado leaves. And, it really tasted good. And, for Girls' Day, she would gather all the dolls, whether they were broken or not, and would set up a tier in the living room and would decorate the dolls and made an offering of *sekihan*. So, that was something that we always looked for. *Kagezen* is something that we always did. Because I was so different in ages between my older siblings much of the times my older sister or brothers were away, and so my mom always had *kagezen*.
- FS: Would you explain what *kagezen* is?

TH: *Kagezen*? It was -- we served special foods -- a small portion of rice and *okazu* (side dish) and water or tea in a tray and left it at a special place. And then we would eat that.

FS: When you say "special place," where would that be?

TH: On a higher level than our table, there was a space.

FS: So, it was sort of like a special treat.

TH: Yes. Well, not as a special treat. We were sharing the same things with the ones that were away.

FS: You were sharing things with...

TH: Like the brothers and sister that were away. Or even when my brother was away in the war, my mother always had *kagezen* for my dad, for my brothers.

FS: Oh, I see. To help you remember the people who were not there in the home.

TH: That's right.

FS: I see.

TH: That we could share the food with them.

FS: I understand. Let's move on to your neighborhood and the community relations prior to December seventh.

TH: Well, I would say there was a lot of goings in-and-out, mainly because the temple was open and it was a Japanese school. And, then I noticed the people came to my parents to seek --- to get help solving their problems. I remember one time, I woke up and there was this young lady, a recent graduate of the Japanese school, helping my mom with breakfast. Later I found out that she had run away because she wanted to marry someone that the parents were against. And, so she was with us for about a week. In the meantime, my parents talked to their parents, and later on they were able to get married. Even those kids, when one in particular woke my dad after having an altercation with his neighbor and hitting him -- it was a younger boy that hit this young man -- he woke my dad up and asked what should he do, he hit this man, and he's sorry but, you know, he doesn't know what to do. And Dad said, "It's too late, so just go home and sleep it off. I'll go and ask for his forgiveness, because you're sorry about it. And, so go home." So, these were the kinds of situations. And even children, after Sunday school, the older ones would remain and ask my mom to play *karuta* (cards). This was when I was real young. And, they would play *karuta* and join us for a simple lunch. Even the young boys would ask my mom to play the piano as they played the guitar. Sometimes they would play tennis with my mom.

FS: So, you had a very close relationship with the community.

TH: Yes. Yes.

FS: What English and language schools did you attend prior to December seventh?

TH: Well, I went to both the English and Japanese school. In Kurtistown, there was an elementary school that I went to first, until sixth grade. From sixth to ninth grade -- intermediate -- I went to Olaa school and then to Hilo High. But then, December seventh '41, I was a senior and, you know, the schools were closed. And so, you know....

FS: You never graduated?

TH: I did. The schools opened in Olaa, using one of the rooms of the Christian church. Students from Volcano, the neighboring community -- there was a small group of us -- had classes [with] the few teachers that came to teach us. This was just a few months in '42.

FS: Now, let's go to your father's arrest and his detainment. Before December seventh, did you receive a visit from the FBI?

TH: No, nothing at all before December seventh. This was totally a surprise.

FS: On December seventh, how old were you, and what are your memories of that day?

TH: Yes, December seventh. I was seventeen. My sister was eleven. This was one of the Sundays [when] my father was going to go to Kilauea, Volcano, to perform Sunday services and to have Dharma classes. Once a month, one Sunday, he would go there for that purpose. And, this was that Sunday. It was after we had had our lunch. My younger sister and I wanted to go along with him, so we got in his car. He drove. It was not even two miles away from our home. A policeman flagged us down, just yelled, "Turn around! Go home!" And so, then I heard my father saying, "*Nani ka no jiken ga okotta no.*" (Something must have happened.) Then, I think he had some inkling, because he used to listen to the Japanese radio and would say to my mom, "*Omoshiroku nai. Honto ni omoshiroku nai jiken.*" (Not good. Truly, not a good occurrence.) I used to hear him say that, but I was young so it didn't mean too much to me. But, anyway, we turned around, came home, and the rest of the day was much like any other day. I did some studying, tried to get my clothes ready for the next day's school. And, we had dinner. Of course, Mom and Dad were talking a lot. They never said anything to us. And, as usual, I bade both my parents "good night," as we usually did -- said, "*Oyasumi nasai,*" and went to bed. The next morning, I got up to have breakfast. Then I noticed that my father was not around, and Mom had a worried look. I asked, "Where is Dad?" And she said, "Dad is not here." So, I asked, "Where is he?" She said, "He was taken away. A couple men took him away in the middle of the night." And, that is my recollection of December seventh and the morning of the eighth.

FS: How did your family react to the news that your father had been taken away?

TH: Well, it was a shock. It really was. It gave me a sense of fear and uncertainty. It was for my mom, too, but my mom was a very strong person, and she would not show that she was worried. She kept telling us, "*Otosan wa kaete kuru kara, shinpai shinasan. Mihotoke-sama ni oshoko shinasai.*" (Father will come home, so don't worry. Let's pray and offer incense to the Buddha.) However, every day, every day, I waited. We all waited. He never came home. And, nothing was said to anybody about what was happening.

FS: Then, you know nothing about your father's arrest?

TH: No, I don't, except from the information that [my daughter] had given [me, which she got] from the FBI. I went through the information a long time ago, when she first sent it to me in 1994. Since then, I went over it a little bit, but it was so painful that I really didn't finish it. And, even this time, too, for this purpose, I kind of procrastinated going over it. Most of the information about my dad's whereabouts, in fact all of that, was from

the files, the FBI. We [did have] full knowledge as to where he was from the letters he wrote later on.

FS: So, he did write letters.

TH: A whole lot of times, his letters were full of areas that were cut out, particularly the haiku that he would write to my mother. My mom would say, "Maybe they felt that Dad was writing the haiku with some hidden messages."

FS: How did the community react?

TH: Well, the community was fearful of they themselves being taken away, particularly so when there was a man that went around discouraging the people from coming to our temple or even to come to visit us. And so, we were actually totally isolated.

FS: So, in other words, no one came.

TH: No, hardly any. Once in a great while, there was this one widow, she would bring us some vegetables from her garden, but most of the time, we were in isolation.

FS: Did you ever get notification of your father's whereabouts?

TH: No, we did not. Not at all.

FS: What was the first communication, then?

TH: Well, my brother, at the time -- he was a dentist, and he had his office. He -- after a few days of my dad not coming home -- he took some clothes, a change, toiletries, to the police station to hand it over to him. At that time, he learned that [my father] was at Kilauea Military Camp at Volcano. And that's the only reason why we knew that he was there.

FS: Why did your brother decide to take the change of clothing? Did he know something?

TH: Because he was just taken away while he was sleeping. He just went away with the clothes on his back, nothing else. He took nothing else with him.

FS: I see. After he found -- your brother found out about your father being at Kilauea, what did he do?

TH: What do you mean, "What did he do?"

FS: Did your brother do anything further to get in touch with his father?

TH: He tried often, but he was not, evidently, allowed. He did say that there were many people, Oriental, in military trucks being transported somewhere from Kilauea toward Hilo. And so, my mom and my sister and I -- there were just the three of us then, at home after my dad was taken. So, my mom and younger sister and I would walk out to the road, trying to get a glimpse of my dad.

FS: Did you expect to see him going by?

TH: Well, we just wanted to see him, but we could never -- we never knew exactly when the military trucks would be traveling. And then, my mom said, "*Shikata ga nai*. (It can't be helped.) Let's not keep doing that. It's just futile to do this." So, we didn't do that after a while. So, we lived in so much uncertainty. Also, we had so much fear of -- well, that even my mom may be being taken away. During his absence, the FBI would come.

FS: Oh, did they?

TH: Unannounced.

FS: Please tell us about that.

TH: Oh yes, they came several times unannounced. And they were very cold, but not outwardly hostile. But I -- I was scared. My younger sister was definitely afraid. They went through every room. One of their first visits -- we had this big photo of General Nogi and General Togo in an area that was so obvious from the entrance. And this FBI [agent] said, "Look! The generals of the Japanese military." My mom said to tell them what we were taught in school about these generals. So, I said these generals were great men, loyal to the country and that we were taught that we should be loyal to our country as these men were to Japan. And they also used to tell us great men are great no matter their nationality. That's what they were teaching us, and that's what I told them. And so, he didn't say anything and walked into the other room. He rifled through all the bookshelves, opening drawers, cabinets; went through each room. And, when he went to my brother's room, he saw my brother's *kendo* (fencing) outfit, and he said, "Look. Martial arts being taught." I told him it wasn't martial arts that [they] were teaching. It was for discipline. It was my understanding that *kendo*, really -- they needed to just find the right points, and won by the points, not by disabling or hurting the opponent. They were taught that discipline.

FS: Was this FBI agent alone?

TH: No, there were two, but they were working separately.

FS: Were they both Caucasian?

TH: Yes. Another time, they went up the altar with their shoes on, to which my mother said, "*Shitsurei*. (Rude.) Take off your shoes." [The agent was] tall. She told me, "Tell him that the altar is a very sacred place for Buddhists, that we respect our religion, and we respect other religions also, and that he should show the same respect." I told him that, so he came down and took off the shoes, went back up and tapped along the walls and looked around. He never found anything.

FS: In the meantime, the other agent was going to your other rooms?

TH: The other rooms. But, they never seemed to have taken anything. On their last visit, they took my mother's diary. My mother was very indignant. But, then do you know that my mom was also taken away for questioning? It was very scary for us. I didn't know whether she was going to come back or not. They questioned her for several hours.

FS: Was this just a one-visit?

TH: Yes.

FS: Did your mother tell you what was discussed?

TH: Not really. But she said, "I answered everything with honesty, so I have nothing to fear."

FS: Was this through a translator?

TH: Must be. My mom could understand English, could write, if they spoke slowly.

FS: How many visits were there?

- TH: From the FBI?
- FS: From the FBI.
- TH: Gee, I don't know how many exactly.
- FS: But, more than two?
- TH: Oh, definitely.
- FS: Now, when did you hear from your father?
- TH: It was quite a while into '42.
- FS: That would be about a year later?
- TH: Yes, almost a year. The first time was when he was in Louisiana.
- FS: Oh, he was already in Louisiana.
- TH: Oh, yes.
- FS: I see. So, he must have been taken from Kilauea to Honolulu.
- TH: Oh, yes. He was among the second contingent that left Honolulu [for] the Mainland.
- FS: So, that was when you found out exactly where he was.
- TH: I have the records of his internment through the FBI files here.
- FS: Did your father say anything about what he wanted from home, or what he....
- TH: Not really, but my mom told us that Dad wanted us to understand and not to be angry toward the government, that the government had to take him away for their own security, and that we must not be angry about it. But, it was very difficult for me to truly understand that.
- FS: When did you find out that your father wanted you to go and join him?
- TH: He never wanted us to join [him]. Evidently, he did ask Mom, because Mom asked my sister and I whether we would be willing to go and join him. I didn't want to go. My mother actually didn't want to also. And, so my father asked to be repatriated alone.
- FS: To Japan?
- TH: Japan. This was early during his internment, but later changed his mind to come to -- to be repatriated, because his whole family was here. In fact, his two sons were in the Army.
- FS: Now, please tell us what you know about your father's incarceration and his transfer to the different camps.
- TH: I really don't know much about that, only through the FBI files, what camps he went to and when.
- FS: Please give us that information.
- TH: December seventh, he was arrested for suspicion of being an alien, an enemy alien.
- FS: This was at Kilauea.

TH: Kilauea. He was questioned before the Hearing of Military and Civilians under the jurisdiction of the military government. They questioned and interrogated him and found him to be a national of Japan, with alliance to Japan. He had done some activities for Japan, but not necessarily anti-American. They claimed his taking the census for the Consulate of Japan as pro-Japan activities and labeled him as “alien enemy” and that he was in a position to cause espionage and sabotage. At that time, they recommended that he be interned for the duration of the war. So, he was at the military camp at Volcano until February twenty-first of '42. He was at the Honolulu INS Office between February twenty-first and March 4, 1942. And at that time, the Office of Military Government of Hawaiian Processing photographed him, fingerprinted him, and labeled him as “alien enemy” and “prisoner of war.” March fourth to March twenty-second, he was on Sand Island. March twenty-second through the twenty-third, he was onboard a military transport vessel bound to San Francisco. March 30 to April ninth, he was in San Francisco INS Detention Facilities on Angel Island. Also Fort MacDonal. I believe his inventory was done, and they slashed open his luggage to look at the contents. Because, when I met Dad when he came back in '45, I saw his old luggage with a great, big gash, and it was hand-sewn together. April ninth through May 30, he was at Fort Sill Enemy Alien Detention Camp. May 30, 1942 to June second, 1943, he was at Camp Livingston, Louisiana Alien Internment Camp. June second, '43, through April 3, '44, he was at Missoula, Montana Internment Camp. April third, 1944, through October 30, 1945, Santa Fe Internment Camp. There were twenty-three internees from Hawaii among them. My dad was the oldest there.

FS: How old was he?

TH: He was sixty-five then. Because, he was born in 1880.

FS: So that means he was at three camps. Is that correct?

TH: He was at Fort Still. He was at Livingston, and he was at Santa Fe. Did I mention Santa Fe?

FS: Yes.

TH: Santa Fe. He was at Missoula, Montana.

FS: That would make it four. I see. What did you learn about his life at any of these camps?

TH: Well, there was a record of his behavior. (voice trails) There was a record of his behavior when he was at Santa Fe. For cooperation, it said, “fair. Attitude: respectful. Associates: cooperative elements. Mental condition: active, cheerful. Work project: never volunteers. Detailing project: occasionally. Camp activities: leader.” I thought this was hilarious. (laughs) Especially the area where it says he didn't volunteer. Of course, my dad was a minister and he didn't do any work except ministry and teaching at home. Naturally, he didn't know what to do in detail projects.

FS: Is that all?

TH: That was all.

FS: And this was at Fort Sill?

- TH: No, at Santa Fe. Evidently, while he was at those camps, he did perform in religious services. And, he did tell me that he had studied accounting on his own. He even studied French, though it didn't make much sense to him. He would make *juzu* (rosaries) with the beads that he would pick up. He gathered some pine nuts also that I remember that he had sent to us once.
- FS: As a decoration?
- TH: No, for us to eat the pine nuts. He evidently found some pine trees with pine nuts along the camp, or within the camp site.
- FS: So, he sent you some things from camp.
- TH: Yes.
- FS: What about his other activities? Did he write to you about any of the things he did?
- TH: The letters were mainly to my mom. And my mom would say that Dad wants us to stay healthy and keep well and to study hard.
- FS: Is there anything else you want to tell us about his life in camp before we leave the subject?
- TH: That is about what I know, except he did tell me when he was living with me -- this was all after retiring -- that there were some German and Italian interns, as well. The Italians were the ones that showed meekness more than the Germans. The Germans appeared to be more stoic, like the Japanese, and the Italians would cry, wanting to get out of camp. There was an incident in the middle of the night. Dad heard firing of machine guns. Those internment camps had barbed wire all over. Evidently, one Japanese intern wanted to scale the barbed wire fence, and he was shot. Dad and the ministers that were in camp did hold a service for this man.
- FS: Was that the only thing that he told you about his life?
- TH: Well, I didn't want to prod and ask him. I knew that it was painful for him, as well.
- FS: Okay, let's talk about your family life in the absence of your father. What happened to the temple, first of all.
- TH: The temple was as it was. It was closed. Closed, closed. So was the school. And, so there was no income for my mom. Mom sewed some Japanese clothes, kimonos, and clothes for the children for a dry goods store in Hilo to make some money for a living. And my brother, who was a dentist, he contributed some. My older brother above me, he was doing defense work at that time, because he wanted to save some money before he went to school. He would send money to help us out. And then we had a lot of fruit trees and things around our home, which helped. And I planted some vegetables, like carrots and beans and potatoes. I would wait for the potatoes to grow some shoots, and I would cut the potatoes in sections and would plant them. I didn't know how long it took, so I would go and dig it up with my fingers to see how they were doing. They never did very well, however they were edible. I did that. And, because they were rationing gas -- we used white gas. We had a white gas stove, and we used white gas also for heating our bath water. Because of the rationing, I would gather dried twigs or would even cut

branches of guavas to dry and made a fireplace and boiled water for us to bathe so that we would preserve as much white gas for cooking purposes.

FS: How did you get your rice?

TH: It was rationed, but the store would bring us some periodically. We lived very frugally, but there was never a moment when we went without food. My parents always taught us not to waste, not to be wasteful, so maybe that was why we always had something to eat. And, of course, my brother would bring some food over, too.

FS: Did your mother receive any financial help from the church or from anyone?

TH: No, she had no income. The church and the school shut down. She never received any help from the government, either. The only financial help she had was from my siblings.

FS: Where were you living at that time?

TH: I was living in Kurtistown. We had the residence connected to the temple.

FS: How did you and your siblings feel about your father's absence?

TH: I was very angry. Really angry. And lonesome, too. My younger sister would always cry and keep asking, when would Dad come home? My mom would say, she doesn't know when, but Dad will be home -- [he's] certain to be home. I didn't want my mom to have added worries from my sister's behavior, so I would tell my sister, let's try and not to worry Mom, let's not talk too much about wanting Dad home. Let's try and help Mom as much as we could. Let's try to be good.

FS: How did life change for you at home and at school?

TH: Life definitely changed for me. I had intended to go to the university after graduating high school, but that -- I made up my mind that I had to change. And, so I stayed home to help my mom a couple years, helping her with the sewing and doing things around the house. I was good at fixing things. That old gasoline stove went kaput. I took it apart and found that one small portion that helped deliver the air and the gasoline for burning purposes was burnt and bent over. I didn't know what to do. It looked like something similar to my mom's pin, the headed pin. I looked for it. I knew the metal was totally different, but I took one of those pins and used my brother's dental drill. (laughs) He had an extra drill at home, so I used one of the burs of his drill, made a point, naturally cut it to the right length, and put it on. And to my mom's and my own amazement, it worked. I had to continue to keep doing that because of the softness of the metal of the pin.

FS: At school, during the period that you were in school, before you graduated, did your classmates and teachers treat you the same way as before?

TH: You mean before...

FS: December seventh.

TH: And after?

FS: Yes.

TH: Well, I didn't have much contact with the teachers except for the short period of time that they held classes at Olaa. It was just -- they were very civil. The teachers were civil. Of

course, I didn't know whether they knew about my dad being taken away, because I never spoke to anyone. I never volunteered that information to anyone. There was no difference in the way my friends treated me.

FS: You said that you went to Oloo. Was that Oloo High School?

TH: No, the high school was in Hilo, but with the outbreak of the war, the high schools were closed. And, so a good while later, they held classes in different areas, and they had used one of the rooms of the Christian church for a few of us from our community and the neighboring communities. There was just a handful -- almost a handful of us students.

FS: Will you please tell us then your education from elementary to high school. Elementary school was at which school?

TH: First to sixth grade was elementary school at Kurtistown. Sixth to ninth grade was at Oloo, and then high school -- the rest of that was in Hilo High.

FS: When you say the rest was at Hilo High....

TH: From ninth to the senior year. But, I didn't finish senior year in Hilo High. It was finished in this one classroom in Oloo.

FS: Then you still got your degree?

TH: Yes, [unintelligible] certificate.

FS: What did you do after you graduated?

TH: I helped Mom for a couple years and then I applied to Queen's [Hospital] nursing because I felt that I can learn something and without having to pay. But I couldn't make it. I was below average height. They required I had to be at least five-foot. So, I applied to Kuakini [Hospital], and I was accepted, so I went through the nursing school at Kuakini.

FS: How long was this training?

TH: It was from '44 to '47. Nineteen-forty-four to '47, and then I worked about a year and went to Chicago for advanced training in the operating room technique. Then I worked in Chicago for several years, came back and worked at Children's Hospital for a couple years, and then worked from 1957 to 1960 at Kuakini. This was all in the operating room. I taught university nursing students the operating room technique and I taught technicians the operating room technique.

FS: Were you able to go to Chicago for additional training through Kuakini or...

TH: No. I worked my regular job and sought private duty work to make money to go to Chicago. It was a nine-month course in Chicago, but it was strictly for aseptic operating room nursing, which I wanted. I didn't have money to come home, so I looked for work in Chicago, and it was so interesting and I was learning so much being in different hospitals, so I stayed in Chicago until 1943. This was from 1950 to 1943.

FS: Nineteen-fifty to...

TH: Nineteen-fifty-three.

FS: Three years.

TH: Almost three-and-a-half years. I went in January -- I landed in Chicago on January first, so actually, it was almost.

FS: What are the memories of the war years that you have?

TH: It was scary, very scary that the soldiers were beating up the Japanese, especially, that they found along the way. There were all kinds of stories that we'd hear. I didn't go out naturally, but I would hear these things, and it scared me. I heard about some Chinese teacher [who] was roughed up by a soldier. And, when I would go to the post office, the Filipinos in the camp, some of them were carrying this *bolo* knife that they had sharpened down and would call me names like, "You yellow Jap." And so times were very fearful.

FS: Was there any other occasion when you went out into town?

TH: Oh, yes, we would occasionally go to town. But we just did our own business, and you know, we didn't go out very much. But during the war, near our home a company of soldiers was stationed. They had a motor pool near our home. There were guards sometimes and my mom would make coffee every night for us, for my sister and I to take for them. There was a little receptacle along the wall of our garage. Our temple was up the hill and our garage was at the bottom of the hill. And there was a receptacle in the side of the garage where the milkman -- this was before the war -- would bring milk and would leave it there. During the war that never happened, so that was where we used to put the coffee, the thermos bottle for the soldiers there. And my mom said -- then at that time my brother was in the war zone. He had volunteered and was in the army fighting. And so my mom would say, if somebody, somebody would be kind to him, she would be very happy. And these soldiers had mothers, and so every night, she would brew coffee and my sister and I would take it down.

FS: And leave it in the receptacle.

TH: Yes. And in the morning we would go and pick [it] up. Of course, we would bring them -- we had to observe black-out so we made sure that before sundown we would bring that.

FS: How did they ever find out that you were putting the coffee in the receptacle?

TH: Well, we did tell the first time, and so when there was a change, the guards would tell each other. And they were guarding near the garage also. I don't know whether mainly for the garage or that they were guarding us, I don't know. (laughing) But then, our Japanese school was closed and soldiers from this camp would use the classroom for their own learning of some sort. Some of them would wander around the yard before their class. Some were very nasty, some were nice. One time, this one guy saw this Buddhist four L on the hand-washing receptacle that was made of concrete in front of the temple, and he said, "Look, swastika! You're pro-Nazi." So, I did tell him, "You don't know what you're talking about. The swastika is not the same as this. It is entirely opposite. These are the four Ls, the Buddhist four Ls that stand for love, light, life, and labor. We had incidents like that. And yet some of the soldiers were really young kids and they were very friendly. They would come up to the temple and would ask my mom to play checkers with them. I guess these were the kids -- those that had guarded must have talked to them about it, and you know, they came quite often. And, my mom would serve

tea or snack. They even sometime joined us in our lunch, simple lunch when we had food that was suitable for them. (laughing)

FS: You were like a hospitality committee.

TH: Yes, and so before the soldiers -- they were mainly from New York and called themselves "the apple knockers." That's what we learned from those -- the friendly ones that came over. Before they moved out of camp, the captain from that camp came over looking for my mom and said he had heard from so many of the soldiers that the people from the temple left coffee for the guards. He just wanted to thank my mom.

FS: What a wonderful story.

TH: Is it?

FS: Then, you were never afraid of these soldiers, were you?

TH: Well, there were elements of fear. However, those that came to visit us, I had no fear. But I never knew which ones were the kind ones, so I tried to stay away as much as possible.

FS: You said that your mother didn't tell you too much about your father's incarceration.

TH: We never spoke too much about it. It was painful for her also, and she felt that talking about that would make us feel badly. My younger sister used to cry a lot. But then despite all that, I have nice memories. Especially evening times, after we did our evening prayers, before the sun would really go down, we would go out on the porch and we would sing songs. When it became dark, my mom used to teach us the constellations and said, "Look, this is how you would locate the North Star." So she talked about Minor and Major Ursula. And she said, "Look at the North Star. Your brother may be looking at it. Your father may be looking at the same star. And through them, we have connections." Those are the kind of memories. And, while even singing, my mom would harmonize with us or we would ask her to sing the songs that we just loved to hear her sing, like "Kojo no tsuki" [Moon above the ruined castle], which I really used to like. And "Hakone no yama" [Mountains of Hakone] also.

FS: Did your brothers come to visit at all during that time?

TH: My older brother did.

FS: You mentioned that they were in the military.

TH: Yes, my third brother was attending the University of Michigan. He was in the law school. He was drafted. Just before he was to graduate he was drafted. My brother just above me, he volunteered as an AJA and went to Camp Shelby and then went to the war zone. I think he volunteered thinking that perhaps it might help my father.

FS: Your oldest brother, then, became a dentist.

TH: Yes.

FS: In other words, he served during the war.

TH: No, this was after the war. He was in the National Guard and he joined the Army at one time and went to Vietnam. Didn't want his son to be in the Army at the same time. However, his son was drafted and he was shot down and killed. He was a pilot for

helicopters picking up the wounded, because he didn't want to carry arms. He was drafted despite the fact that the father was in Army.

FS: That would be your cousin?

TH: My nephew.

FS: What about your other brother then?

TH: He was in the States at Camp Logan. He never went to the war zone.

FS: So the war ended by the time he actually was ready to go into the...

TH: War was still going on.

FS: Now, when did you find out about your father's release?

TH: I was in training in Honolulu. I was at work. I was on evening shift. This was in November of '45. I got a call while I was at work. I was really shocked. The nurse called me and said that there was a phone call. I picked it up and I heard, "*Otosan, yo.* (It's Father.) Would you come?"

FS: So you didn't know anything about his release until he actually spoke to you?

TH: I didn't know anything. Yes. It was such a shock.

FS: Didn't your mother let you know that he had been released?

TH: No. Evidently, she didn't know.

FS: Oh, that's unusual. In other words, your father never communicated with your mother that he was going to be released.

TH: That I don't know, because I never knew. We knew that he was going to be released soon, but we didn't know exactly when.

FS: Oh, I see. So, you did get some notification.

TH: Yes.

FS: But you don't know too much about it?

TH: No.

FS: I see. Oh, well, please tell us more about that conversation that you had with your father.

TH: Well, I was on duty so I didn't talk too much. I said I will come and visit you tomorrow during my break.

FS: You said that?

TH: Yes, I said that to him. And I asked him where he was. He was at Komatsu-ya -- at the Komatsu Hotel. So next day, I did go to him. I walked over. And I saw him. He had lost quite a bit of weight, but he was healthy. That's the time that I saw his luggage that was hand-sewn -- that gash in the luggage that was hand-sewn together. I forget what was really said at the time. I couldn't say too much, you know? He didn't say too much, except that he was very happy to see me, that I was doing well, that I needed to do my best in whatever I do, as he always did. He said he has confidence that I would do that.

- FS: So he didn't know too much about your work.
- TH: No, frankly, it was -- working and studying was very hard for me. So, we didn't have -- at least I didn't have much time, and it would take so long to write in Japanese. I would write to Mom, but I would write to her in English.
- FS: So, there was really no communication between you and your father while he was in camp.
- TH: I would get information from my mother.
- FS: Now that he has returned, where did he go?
- TH: He went directly to Kurtistown, to the temple. And he resumed his duties as minister. I don't know exactly when the school resumed, but school also started.
- FS: Was the temple and all the rest of the facilities in good condition?
- TH: Yes.
- FS: Had you been taking care of the temple?
- TH: I was away, but my mom. There wasn't much to do except sweeping the place, keeping the temple -- the altar was closed, so.
- FS: Four long years, though.
- TH: Yes, of course, my mom would go in and dust around. That area was off-limits to us, kids.
- FS: So it was only your mother who could go there to do any kind of work. I see. Now that you are all together again -- well, you are still on Oahu at that time, but did you go back to Kurtistown to visit?
- TH: During my vacation. But then I got married. I was out here, I got married. My dad stayed in Kurtistown until 1955, when he retired. He went to Japan with my brother, who was in the Army then. He was going to be transferred to Japan, so he took my father to Japan for two years. When he came back two years later, he came to live with me.
- FS: This is your father?
- TH: My father. And he stayed with me until his death in 1966. He came back from Japan in 1957.
- FS: What about your mother?
- TH: My mother had passed away when I was in Chicago in 1951. She had written a letter to me the day that she had died. Of course, the letter came later, but on it she had written that a heavy weight has been lifted off her. She had paid the very last cent that they had owed.
- FS: Oh, you had a family debt.
- TH: Oh, yes. We were very poor. We were in a small community. Very poor. Poor church mouse, as you say. (laughs) And the school was a small school. My brothers went to the university. My sister had gone to Japan to Musashi no Ongaku Gakko (Musashi Music School). So my parents had big debts. That's one of the reasons why the brother just

above me decided to work for the defense before going to college, but then he volunteered for the 442nd. And I also sought the type of -- would be educated without much, without having to pay tuition, so I went into nursing.

FS: You say, your sister was....

TH: My sister then was in Honolulu, she was working.

FS: This would be the younger sister?

TH: No, my older sister.

FS: You had an older sister, oh.

TH: There was the older sister and four brothers, myself, and a younger sister.

FS: I see. That's what you meant by middle daughter. I see. After your father came back, you didn't have too many discussions with your father?

TH: No because he had gone back to Kurtistown and I had spent most of my time here and then was in Chicago.

FS: But after he came to live with you, did he speak to you at all about his internment?

TH: No, not much. I was working also, so you know, I didn't have much time, and then....

FS: I see. What is your opinion regarding the internment and government redress?

TH: The internment I think was very unjust. My understanding is that Japan was provoked and the U.S. did all sorts of things to have Japan fire the first shot, and under those circumstances and having to call that a sneak attack and take my father away as an enemy alien, I was very -- I still am, when I think about it. It was not right. As far as redress, I think they should have gotten it, rightfully. But, I -- personally I feel that not only those that were relocated and interned, but what about, like my mother? What about my sister who was only eleven? I was seventeen and would soon become an adult. But, my mother and my younger sister, I feel -- my mother died before that, however. But, my sister, I felt that she should have gotten something.

FS: For all the suffering.

TH: Yes. I think we suffered in a different way. It wasn't a happy time for us. Emotionally, it was very trying. You know, we lived with anxiety and fear, and it wasn't just us. I think emotionally it affected my brothers and my [older] sister, as well.

FS: Did your older sister say anything about how she felt?

TH: Not really. She understood -- we all understood each other. But our ages were so different, so we were apart most of the time.

FS: Would you just for general reference list your siblings in order. The oldest was?

TH: My sister, then my brother who was the dentist. Then another brother, he was a social worker. He had gone to the university here and got his Master's at Columbia. The third brother was a reviser of statutes here. Then the other brother was the one that joined the 442nd, and I'm below him, and my younger sister.

FS: The one who joined the 442nd is just above you?

TH: Just above me.

FS: I see.

TH: My older sister was twelve years above me. My brother next was eleven, the other brother three years younger than the older one, and I was six apart from my third brother, and two years below [him was] my brother above me. And, then my younger sister was six years below me. So there was this difference in age, so most of the time, they were away.

FS: What is your message for the young people of today and the future generations?

TH: All I can say is just live truthfully in whatever you do and whatever you say, and I think everything will fall in its place.

FS: Well, thank you very much for your story. I think that this will become an important part of our Oral History Collection.

Transcribed by Sheila Chun, completed Sept. 2016.