

JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAII

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Mabel Kawamura (MK)

May 2, 2008

BY: Florence Sugimoto (FS)

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

MK: My name is Mabel Yasuko Ikeda Kawamura. I was born in Holualoa, Kona, Hawaii on February 18, 1926.

FS: Please give us your parents' names, the year and place of birth and their occupation.

MK: My father's name is Kazuto Ikeda. He was born in Paauilo, Hawaii on October 18, 1896. My mother, Kimiyo Ikeda, was born in Hilo, Hawaii on March 15, 1904. My father was a schoolteacher, and he worked for the Hawaii Hochi [newspaper]. And my mother taught Japanese school part time. And, we also had a little coffee farm that we all worked on.

FS: How many children were there in the family and please tell us about the family life and the language that was spoken.

MK: There were six of us in the family, three girls and three boys. And we were all bilinguals.

FS: What about the cultural values and traditions that were practiced in your family?

MK: Well, our tradition was purely Japanese and we held the culture very dearly. It was my dad who was quite strict about those things. The only thing we didn't was religiously, we didn't --- he didn't expect us to go to any of the Buddhist churches.

FS: Then you practiced all of the virtues and cultural events in the community?

MK: That's right.

FS: How were your relations with your neighbors and the community before Dec. 7th?

MK: Well we lived in a very small community and so I guess lots of people looked up to us, my dad, for guidance. And so it was a very warm, neighborly place. We shared everything. There were lots of different nationalities there, but we all got along very, very well.

FS: Was this a plantation town?

MK: No, it was not. You know, it was just a small community.

FS: What English and Japanese schools did you attend before Dec. 7th?

MK: I attended Keauhou Elementary School until the eighth grade, and then I went to Japanese school there, too.

FS: Did your father teach the classes?

MK: Yes. Both my father and my mother taught there. And after the eighth --- when I was in the ninth grade, I transferred over to Konawaena High School.

FS: And this is Japanese school?

MK: No. English School...

FS: Just English School. I see.

MK: Ninth grade.

FS: Let's get on to your father's arrest and detention. On Dec. 7th, 1941, how old were you and what were your memories of that day and what was the family reaction?

MK: Well....

FS: First of all, how old were you?

MK: I was 16.

FS: What do you recall of that day?

MK: Well it was...the day before Dec. 7th, Dec. 6, my grandmother, my father's mother, was hit by an automobile. A hit-and-run case. About 5:30 in the afternoon, when she was going to her friend's house for dinner. And so it was a terrible thing, because they couldn't find the person who hit her. And, of course, the next day there's war. They found the fellow late at night, at midnight, in somebody else's garage fast asleep, and they put him into jail. But the next morning with war, they opened all the doors, and told them to leave, so....

FS: When you say, "Told *them* to leave"...

MK: Told the prisoners to leave, so he was --- he never, we never did have a trial or anything either.

FS: So that seemed the most important thing on your mind on Dec. 7, other than the news about the attack on Pearl Harbor.

MK: Dec. 7th, well, my grandmother --- there's no crematory at that time going, so we had to cremate her, and the only way was to take her to Hilo. And since this was a police case, they allowed us to go with one car, to get enough gas in it and put the coffin in, and we all went.

FS: And this was on Dec. 7th?

MK: Dec. 7th. We left Kona around 10. We didn't get to Hilo until dark, around 5:30 or so...

FS: In the afternoon?

MK: Blackout. And so we left her in the crematory and then went to a hotel and stayed through blackout. By that time, there were tons of rumors about who was pulled out and who went. I can remember sitting in the hotel room, just so afraid. 'Til this day, I can still feel my body shaking. I was that scared, because we knew that my father would be taken. You know, with all things...

FS: With all things considered?

MK: With all things considered. Yes. And so, they cremated her the next day. And then we came on home.

FS: This was Dec. 8th?

MK: Dec. 8th. We were able to get enough gas to come home towards Waimea side. Oh, I must tell you this: while going to Hilo, why it took so long is every once and a while, there would be a sentry with bayonets and they would go in and just look...

FS: Into the car?

MK: Yes. And so that was another thing so every few miles, there'd be a sentry and they go and...But that was scary enough. It was a very, very scary experience for us, anyway.

FS: Now, when was your father arrested, and what were the circumstances, and the reaction within the family?

MK: My dad was arrested on December --- no, April 17, 1942. So, the night before, a police officer, a detective, came down very quietly and he told my dad, "You know, I'll have to pick you up tomorrow morning early." So he said, "If you have anything to say or anything like that." He said, "I think you'd better do that." Well, we were all prepared that my father would be taken *some* time. We didn't know when, but....So, the day had come and so he was picked up and left.

FS: And that would be the following day?

MK: The following day. In the wee hours of the morning. So, it must have been four, five, must have been four o'clock or four-thirty or something like that.

FS: So he did have one night to prepare.

MK: Yes, yes. But in the meantime, he knew himself what would happen, so he was quite prepared.

FS: Did he talk to the family at all about why he was going?

MK: No. We all knew. We all knew that. In some shape or form, we all knew, even the little ones understood that.

FS: Did he complain about anything, like being arrested?

MK: No my dad never complained. He probably had something in his heart, but he never said anything.

FS: And, how did the community accept that?

MK: Well, you know, by that time, we moved from Keauhou to Kealekekua. The year before, my father decided, well, since I was starting high school, it was such a long way to go on the bus, so he decided he would locate us closer to Kealekekua High School. He bought this acreage of six acres of property. You know, leased it. And then, we were going to farm it and subsidize earning a living that way. So, we didn't know too many people around. I mean, my dad did, but we didn't. But our next door neighbor became our very good friend. They helped us an awful lot. So, we didn't go through a lot of harsh antagonism. I can't remember anything bad.

FS: What were your neighbors like? Were they Japanese?

MK: Japanese people. And, one side was the Greenwells,* but it was a pasture land, and they had a meat market and things like that. But, we never saw them, we just saw the Japanese neighbors that we palled around with. But they helped an awful lot.

FS: Actually, weren't they also being watched by the police and the FBI, being Japanese?

MK: I'm sure. Everybody was watched at that time. And, so everybody had to be careful what they say, how they behaved.

FS: But, you were helped a great deal by your neighbors?

MK: Oh, yes, yes.

* A prominent ranching and farming family in Kona.

FS: What exactly did they do?

MK: Well, most of the time what they did was provided us with what they had planted in their farms. Actually, food mostly. And, after my father left, there was really no income. We did the farm a little bit, and then we planted things. My mother learned how to make *lauhala* cigarette cases, and so we all helped her gather the *lauhala*,** and things like that. There were some militaries starting to come in, and it sold, so a lady friend said, "Why don't you learn to do this?" So I guess she got five for a dollar or something like that. (laughs) I can remember by mother weaving until the wee hours of the morning, making these little cigarette cases, you know, with the cover on, like that. We got something from that. And she sewed for people, you know, dresses, so she made a little bit from that. And mostly, we ate from the farm.

FS: So you did manage quite well without your father.

MK: Well, it was really hard on my mother, but she never complained, never let us complain. We managed, I guess.

FS: Were there any other problems?

MK: Well, one of the things that affected my brother that was right below me --- so he would be, I was 16, so he would be 13 I think at that time. 13, 12. He was a very, very talkative person before then. You know, just --- my grandmother used to say, "This kid is going to be an attorney some day." That's how talkative he was. But, right after, my father's internment, he just stopped. He just never said anything anymore. He became such a quiet, quiet person, and that was almost scary. As little as we were, I thought it was scary. And, my mother was very concerned about him, because he just stopped talking. Billy was so quiet. And the thing of it was, among the six of us, he was the brightest. He was so smart, when we were little, I could hardly add one row, he used to add two at a time. We were quite little then. It used to be frustrating, because he could do --- he was so witty and so smart, and this little kid just stopped talking, and never really got back the spark of talking.

FS: Did you have any communication with your father while he was incarcerated? Oh, by the way, where was he taken?

MK: He was taken from Kona to Kilauea camp. But we didn't have any idea at that time, because he didn't write at all when he was in Kilauea. But, when he was transferred to Sand Island, that's when we got the first letter from him just saying that he was well.

FS: Would you remember about when that was after his arrest?

MK: Gee, I have no idea.

** The leaves of the pandanus or *hala* tree. Lauhala can be woven into a variety of items.

FS: That means that you didn't have any communication at all.

MK: Absolutely none. I have a feeling that it must have been about a couple months or so. I'm not very sure.

FS: So you received a total of how many letters from him while he was at Sand Island? Just one?

MK: No. Maybe about four -- four letters or so.

FS: What were his letters like?

MK: Just very brief, saying that he was well, and hoped we were well, too.

FS: When did the communication come from him regarding your leaving Kona?

MK: Oh, that would be --- we left in December, so....Must have been in November.

FS: Of what year?

MK: 1942. And he wrote and asked us whether we would like to go, because there was an opportunity for us to relocate, and he would join us too. As far as my mother was concerned, she said, well, if anything happened to our dad in the meantime, she would never forgive herself, so we all went.

FS: There was no discussion or anything?

MK: Absolutely no discussion. My mother made this choice, and we all agreed. We thought that was a good idea.

FS: Now that you've decided to go to the Mainland with your father, what did you do about your assets, your property?

MK: Well, we were quite fortunate, because we didn't have to sell anything, because my mother's brother also lived in Kona at that time, and he and his wife just moved in our house and they farmed the coffee. And, so it was good for them also. So, as far as assets are concerned, money-wise, I guess my mother took whatever there was little left, and that was it. (laughs)

FS: That means she was able to withdraw all the money from the bank...

MK: Well, I don't think that was very much in there, anyway, because it took us some to live, too, all while my dad was gone.

FS: You had to prepare for travelling.

MK: Yes, yes. My mother decided that we needed some clothes, so she and her sister-in-law sewed all our clothes for ourselves, six of us, and for herself. Trying to get some warm clothing, because we were leaving in December, and where ever we were going would be very cold. So, she made some warm things and lots of flannel underwear and whatever she thought that --- material that she could find. That was another thing.

FS: Was that a problem?

MK: Well, she had some things at home, so she sewed them. I remember she making us some wool coats. My brothers all needed extra pants and she bought some sweatshirts, tried to keep us as warm as she could. I remember she sewing in the wee hours of the morning, too. So that must have been hard.

FS: What were your feelings about leaving Hawaii?

MK: You know, I have absolutely no feelings about leaving because our only concern was to be united with our father. Wherever he went, and we were all together, that was fine. I don't think anything [else] mattered at that time. We couldn't live without him, so the best thing was to go wherever he was.

FS: How did you happen to be reunited with your father? Please tell us about your trip from Kona to Honolulu and then on to the Mainland.

MK: On Dec. 23rd, in the early morning, 1942, we left Kona. Our house is--- we have a long driveway down, and for some reason a truck couldn't come down to the house. And so all six kids, my mother and our neighbors carried all our things up to the highway and put it into this truck. And so that was a real hassle because our youngest brother was only three years old. We had to carry everything up there and load the truck. And we went off. In the meantime we stopped at Honaunau, picked up another family, and we all went together. And then we left...

FS: May I interrupt and ask you, how much luggage you were carrying?

MK: I guess only what we could carry, really. Extra suitcases or one of those duffle bags. That's about it.

FS: Please go on.

MK: And we left Hilo on Dec. 23rd --- no, Dec. 24th, 1942 and arrived in Honolulu on Christmas Day 1942. And so we stayed at the Immigration Center that night.

FS: Was your father there at that time?

MK: Yes, yes, my father joined us there.

FS: Then you got to see him when you got to the Immigration Station?

MK: After we got there, just before we had left for the Mainland, [it was then] that they brought my dad --- you know, all the fathers that were supposed to go with us. We left about, we must have left [Dec.] 27, 28, 29....So we must have left Honolulu on around the 27th of 1942 and got there in San Francisco on New Year's Day.

FS: On New Year's Day?

MK: Uh-huh. 1943.

FS: I see.

MK: Maybe we left on the 26th....

FS: What was the trip like?

MK: It was on the *Lurline*. We were way down in the cellar. (laughs) I remember seeing troops. Everybody was seasick, terribly seasick. And so that's all I can remember of that trip. (laughs) On the bottom of the ship. The only time I got up was when we left, when we arrived in San Francisco, that was the only time. (laughs)

FS: Now, from San Francisco, how did you get to Jerome?

MK: San Francisco --- we left from Oakland and then on the train, and then we left on New Year's Day. When we got on the train, they asked us all to lower our shades down so that we couldn't see anything outside. So whenever we got to kind of a major city, we were all asked to close our blinds down.

FS: In other words, when you got into the station, you had to close the blinds?

MK: I think almost getting close to the place. But, I know when we left, we couldn't see anything because we had to keep our shades down. And, you obeyed. (laughs)

FS: Were there guards?

MK: Yes. They were stationed around.

FS: What was the train trip like?

MK: Not too eventful. It was a long five days.

FS: Oh, it took five days to get to Jerome?

MK: Yes, about. We got there on the 5th or 6th -- or something like that -- of January.

FS: You must have been warned, then, as far as the weather was concerned. You were prepared for the cold?

MK: I can't remember being very, very cold, so I guess my mother must have prepared us well. I remember she made a lot of flannel underclothing, so we wore that. She had my brothers wear their flannel pajama-type and then put their trousers over it, so they weren't cold at all. So, we got into Jerome at night, around eight- or nine-o'clock at night. And, that was cold. It was wet cold. It was really cold. Dark. Dreary. Didn't know where we were really. They trucked us out to our little barracks. There was only one pot-bellied stove and nothing to warm it up with for that night.

FS: Was it in your own so-called house or...

MK: Barracks, yes. They assigned us to certain barracks. We had eight of us, so we were assigned two rooms. Adjoining rooms. And, if you were unlucky and had less people, then you get more --- one little bigger room. But, we had two rooms. In the morning when we woke up --- we knew why it was so cold. They use, I guess, raw lumber, and there were cracks right through. And it wasn't made that well either, so there's all kinds of cracks around the window sill and stuff like that. It was cold.

FS: How did you set up your house, or your rooms, your barracks?

MK: Well, they all gave us those Army cots, the metal beds. So we, all eight of us, were assigned one bed. So that was it, you know, your bed. And we got these little crates are made dividers. And we tried the best we could, I guess, with what you have.

FS: Are you familiar with the camp organization and the routines, for example, the work orders for you father?

MK: You know, I don't know how they --- oh, we had a block captain. After a while they organized us. Because we were all Hawaii people in our block. So they elected a block captain. He went to all the meetings, I guess, and then came back and told all of us. I think it worked very well, as far as our block was concerned.

FS: What did your parents do?

MK: Well, my father found a job in the kitchen, of all things. (laughs) He was a good cook to begin with, so he did some cooking then. And, my mother washed dishes. Washing dishes so that she could come home every once in a while, so that wasn't too bad. We all ate our meals in the cafeteria. I think we all bonded very well, because we were all in the same situation. After a while --- it was strange coming from this very small community and having all these people all together like a commune. It was one of the most difficult things to get used to to in the beginning. But after a while, as kids, you know, you make new friends. That was wonderful, it was cozy, dinner together, breakfast together. At first, it was really, really difficult. You have to eat together, you have to bathe together. You know, all your shower stalls had no doors or curtains. All your toilets had no curtains at all. You were just exposed. You had to do laundry together. You always thought that somebody was looking into what you were doing, you know? It wasn't a very easy thing.

FS: In other words, there was very little privacy.

MK: Oh, absolutely not. The walls were so thin that you could hear what your neighbors were saying. And if you really scolded your children, you really could hear that, too. It was quite difficult, I think for parents to discipline some of their children, because you couldn't yell, you couldn't do anything like that. But despite of all that, I think we all fared fairly well. And that's because I think we were raised within our values and we all had this feeling of *gaman*. My mother always used to say, "*Gaman shinasai*." We never could complain because she always said that.

FS: How did your brother react to this?

MK: Well, you know, my brother was still quiet, never said very much. But he got sort of into, he gravitated towards kids that we thought weren't very good. He didn't do anything bad or wrong, but he sort of gravitated towards them. He was part of the group. I think that he needed that, probably. My parents were very concerned about him and talked to him for a while. But he didn't do anything --- he didn't do what some of those other boys were doing, but he was pals with them and that was kind of a concern.

FS: What did the others do?

MK: Oh they did -- not -- compared to things now, it's mild, but they did mean things (laughs) and my father just didn't like that too well, but anyway....

FS: For example?

MK: Well, they'd go and throw stones (laughs)...

FS: Oh, mischief.

MK: Yes, mischievous things you know --- it was not the thing that my parents liked. They'd go places where they weren't supposed to, like going out far into the railroad tracks, where they shouldn't and stuff like that. (laughs) He'd follow the rest and go, but I guess it didn't really hurt themselves.

FS: How was the food?

MK: Well, we survived. (laughs) We ate an awful lot of that catfish that came from the Mississippi River. You know, it's kind of muddy. Oh, I think we had that three times a week, I think. But we had enough rice and --- I can't remember too many other things. But at breakfast, we had bacon and eggs --- not bacon, but some kind of meat and eggs. But we were able to get that. I think they were powdered eggs by then. But we had lots of that scrambled eggs.

FS: What was your daily schedule like?

MK: After we got there in January --- I think middle of January, I started high school and all the kids went back to school. When I think back now, the Kona school started in November and we left in December, so I must have had just one, two months, maybe a week and then it's Christmas vacation. And I didn't start school until the end of January, and graduation was May 8th, and so I really didn't have a full year of high school, senior year. I don't see how they even graduated me. (laughs)

FS: Oh, I see. So, you spent only about five months in your senior year.

MK: Right. Yes.

FS: Do you remember anything about your lessons?

MK: Well, one thing I know, I took Spanish. (laughs) And, I remember taking a little bit of accounting. The regular things, science, and all that, we did. When I look back now, you know, those teachers weren't really very good ones. I'm sure they were outcasts, you know, teachers that nobody else wanted. But, they were kind. So, I guess (laughs), we survived. (laughs)

FS: Did you have Japanese school?

MK: Never. Never. We didn't. I don't think so. But, in the camp, there were lots of things like Japanese --- what do you say? *Shibai*, and things like that. The old folks used to go. That was fun for them, I think.

FS: What did you do in your leisure time?

MK: I really can't remember having too much leisure time. (laughs)

FS: After school was out? Did you go home to help your mother?

MK: After school we all came home. Of course, we did our homework and studied and things like that, and then cleaned the house, what little two rooms we had, and took care of my sisters and my brothers, who were younger and so made sure that they did their work -- their homework. That was our job. And, then of course, we played with our friends that we made.

FS: What did you play?

MK: I remember lots of time, we'd walk around the block and go for picnics, explore places we didn't see before. That was just a short while, because right after I graduated I went into nurse's aid at the hospital. I took a course, a short year course, and then they hired me at the hospital as a nurse's aid.

FS: In the camp?

MK: In the camp. It was a fairly large hospital. In fact, there were even about six TB patients also, on the TB -- tuberculosis -- ward. So we worked our rounds.

FS: Do you recall any experiences with the patients?

MK: Well, one thing I remember is this lady that was in our block, she had a baby, and she labored for 36 hours and we were there to help her. And so when I see this lady once in a while, I always think of her. (laughs) But, she was young, naturally. I remember all the doctors. Lots of mainland doctors, but like Dr. Miyamoto, they were there, too.

FS: Were there any other serious cases that required care outside of camp?

MK: That I wouldn't know. I don't know about that.

FS: Did you work all throughout the hospital?

MK: Yes, most of the time. Pediatrics, the TB ward, the general ladies' ward. We didn't go to the men's ward. We went to the ladies' ward.

FS: About how many patients were there? On an average?

MK: I guess about ten. Pediatrics --- lots of times there were about a dozen children. I guess they kept them in a little bit longer than they would do now. But nothing happened that I remember that was serious.

FS: So, you don't know [about] any deaths in the hospital?

MK: I remember one. He was in our block. So we went to see him. And, he died. And he was buried right there in Jerome. He was a bachelor.

FS: Oh, I see.

MK: He was *kibe*. They buried him there. Since he had no family, I think the block always felt that we were his family, so....

FS: So there was a cemetery within the camp?

MK: Yeah, there must have been, because he was buried there. I didn't go, but he was buried in camp.

FS: When you graduated from high school, did you have any plans beyond that?

MK: Well, you know, with no money, with the strange place, my father always wanted all of us to have a good education. But that was not possible at that time. And so I just worked at this nurse's aid thing. Because we couldn't get out and earn a living yet. Go to school?

That was impossible. And so we just kind of had to wait until everything was over, whatever happened...

[End tape, Side A.]

[Begin tape, Side B.]

MK: After a while, about June of 1944, the relocation center decided to dismantle Jerome and consolidate all of the relocation people to other camps. So my father decided --- we had several choices, whether to go to Arizona or to Heart Mountain, Wyoming. My father said, "Well, it's been so hot in Jerome for so long," so he would rather go to Heart Mountain where it was cool. So, Frank, a family friend of ours, and we decided to go to Heart Mountain.

FS: May I ask when this was?

MK: This was in June of 1944.

FS: Does that mean that the whole family relocated to Heart Mountain?

MK: Yes, yes, after closing the camp. We had a certain day that they were supposed to leave and certain train, and so we left and got into Heart Mountain.

FS: Was this a large group?

MK: Well, the whole camp was dismantled, so lots of people when to Arizona. But, we decided to go to Heart Mountain.

FS: Were those the only choices?

MK: You know, I don't know. There must have been other places, but it was very popular to go to Arizona -- Gila, Arizona -- because it was warmer. So, this other family and us, we choose Heart Mountain. Maybe there was a reason for that, too, I don't know. (laughs)

FS: How did you get there?

MK: By train. I guess the relocation center arranged for our trip to take us to Heart Mountain. And, there must have been other people who went, too, but the only ones I remember is a friend of ours. We got there at night. We went --- we were assigned to this one block. Heart Mountain was an interesting place. It was around the Shoshone River that ran across. I stayed there from June until August. And in August, a friend of ours who lived in Minneapolis by then said, "Why don't you folks decide to come out? Maybe you can go to school there." So my father thought it was a good idea if I can get some kind of a training at least, because going to college was out of the question. And so when we talked about it, this lady that was living right across from our barracks was a *haole* lady, and she was married to Japanese person, who was a minister. And, so she said, "Oh," she said,

“we’re going to Minneapolis. I have a daughter living in Minneapolis whose husband is in the military service in Fort Snelling. So, why don’t I contact her?” And, she asked us a lot of questions: what we wanted to do and stuff like that. I said, “Well, the easiest thing to do is to go to beauty school because it took only eight months or something like that, and the most economical thing to do.” So, she said, “Well good.” Then she asked Skipper to look around, and she doesn’t look Oriental, she looks pure *haole*. So, she scouted all the schools around the downtown area, and she interviewed all of them and chose a school that was sort of sensitive to other people, you know?

FS: This would be your neighbor in the camp?

MK: Yes, who lived right across from us.

FS: And who did all the scouting?

MK: Her daughter who was living in Minneapolis at that time with her husband. And so she picked the school and decided we should apply for it. So when we got into Minneapolis, we stayed with her for two weeks until we found a place with room and board. I mean, work for our room and board, and go to school in the day. That’s what we did.

FS: When you say, “we,” who do you mean?

MK: My friend who went with me to Heart Mountain. Ruthie and I decided to do the same thing because she was a year older than I was. So we both went to beauty school together.

FS: Oh, you had company?

MK: I had company. And, so it made by father more secure, too. And, then we also had another friend there. We were very fortunate, I think.

FS: Going back to camp at Heart Mountain. Tell us something about the place and the facilities, the living conditions.

MK: I really don’t know very much, because I was there just a couple months or so. But, my parents liked it. They thought it was nice. My father found a job in the office.

FS: In camp?

MK: In Heart Mountain. He worked for the Hawaii *Hochi* many years and he likes writing and things like that. There was a news bulletin at Heart Mountain, so he worked in the office there. And my mother worked part time. She washed dishes and she worked in a poultry farm the other half of the [time].

FS: You had a poultry farm in camp?

MK: We did. In Heart Mountain there was. She was in charge of the little chicks. (laughs) It was sort of funny because when we were little, we had this --- we started out with a few chicks, and then they got to be a few more, and a few more, and at one time we had hundreds of chicks to keep us working. (laughs) So my mother had some experience in chicks. So, she took care of the chicks. That was her job. (laughs)

FS: Was the pay comparable to the pay at Jerome?

MK: Yes, it was all the same. If you were in an advisor capacity, you earned \$19 and the rest earned \$16. (laughing) So, my mother must have gotten \$16 for the two jobs.

FS: Your parents were very fortunate in that they were able to find work that they enjoyed.

MK: (laughs) Well, I don't know whether they enjoyed it or not.

FS: At least, they were qualified for. (laughs)

MK: (laughs) That's where *gaman* comes in.

FS: Now, you mentioned that you went to Minnesota with your friend to attend beauty school. Tell us about your experiences there in Minnesota.

MK: Well, I worked for a family who had no children. Her husband was a --- she was a business woman and he was an engineer for one of the railroads, so he didn't come home very much. They were very kind to me. But, it was not like a family with children. I didn't really feel like a family. But, we're used to that by now. So, it didn't matter whether life was like a family or not. It was a job, and they treated me well. And really, I worked hard.

FS: What were your duties?

MK: Every --- after school, when I came home, I cleaned all the bathrooms and vacuumed the floors and cleaned the kitchen and do whatever thing that we could find, I guess. Did some laundry at times. I can hear my mother say, "Now you do more than you should." You know, we always had to do that. Put your best foot forward and do whatever you can. This kind of kept us on our toes. And, during the winter months, I used to shovel snow out in the --- I don't think it really was my job, when I think about it. But, you know, coming from the country, and your mother always expected you to do these things, so you just....Sunday was my only day off. I was supposed to have a full day off. But, you know, I never, never felt that I deserved to do that --- to have a full day off. I used to do all these little chores before, and then went off. Nobody told me to do that, but I did.

FS: It was probably ingrained into you.

MK: Yes, I think so. I think so. (laughs)

FS: Did you like Minneapolis?

MK: Yes, I loved Minneapolis. It was a nice city with lots of lakes all around it, and people were really kind. It was interesting. I lived around the lake and it was just around the end of the bus line. It was 45 minutes to work. One day --- I always sat in the back of the bus. This must have been around in February or something like that. And all the people who waited at the bus stop always had black hats or brown hats and brown coats or black coats. But this day, when I looked out, there was this woman. She had a bright purple hat and a purple coat and purple galoshes and a purple cane. And you could see her skin was milky white with red hair. And I thought, "Oh, she's so outstanding, because with all the blacks, it looks like ah... spring. And, she hobbled around with her cane so everybody let her come on the bus first. And when she came up, I thought to myself, "I hope she doesn't sit right next to me." And here she came hobbling up and plopped right next to me. I thought, "Oh no," because she was so vibrant that I didn't want people to see her and look at me. So, I looked out the window for a while and then all of sudden, she chirped up and said, "Oh, isn't this a lovely day." So, I said, "Oh, yes." She was a curious type, so she said, "Do you live around here?" I said, "Yes, I live around here." And, she said, "Are you from Minneapolis?" (laughs) I said, "No I'm not." "Where are you from?" (laughs) And, all these questions. I didn't want to answer, but she kept on. Nice lady, nice lady. And, she said, "Where are you from?" So I finally said, "I'm from Hawaii." And she said, "What are you doing here?" (laughs) And, so I guess, it was time for me to say something, so I just said --- I poured it all out. And she looked at me and she said, "So, you were interned?!" And the whole story came up, and she looked at me with such compassion, and then she said, "Now, are the people you're working for kind to you?" I said, "Oh, yes they really are." "Oh, that's good." And she told me all kinds of things, but she was so joyous. I said, "You're so remarkable, you're so joyous," I said. She said, "Well, you know when I was first married," she said, "my aunt told me something I never forgot. She said, 'Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift. Enjoy.'" I said, "Oh isn't that wonderful." She said, "Now, dearie, you remember this." (laughing) She said, "Repeat after me." (laughing) And so, in pieces, I repeated this. "And, now you remember this," you know? When we got off after 45 minutes Downtown, she got off the bus with me, and she held my hand and she said, "Dearie, remember what I told you: 'Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is the present. It's your gift,'" she says. And so, we said goodbye and left. And ever since then, every day I was there for all those three months, I looked out, I never saw her again, ever. It's just like a little angel I know. That's one of the things that helped me throughout this time.

FS: That's a nice story. What about your beauty school?

MK: Oh, that was fun. The owner of the school evidently must have told the kids that we were coming and we were, they were to accept us, I guess. I know she did say something. And so we were fine. We started out with 30 girls, the September session. We got along real fine. We had all different --- we had two little black girls, as well, and they were fine. We all got along very well. I can't remember ever a time when we weren't --- but, on the same token, we were careful. We learned how to live, too. Not to say anything and always

refrain from a lot of personal --- not saying rash things to hurt their feelings, you know?
Not to make waves.

FS: Now after you graduated from beauty school, what did you do?

MK: I found --- I had to take the state board, and after passing it, I found a job right away. It was a little outside of town, but it was fine. I enjoyed it. I came across a lot of people. We weren't entirely discriminated upon, but I'm sure they were curious. A lot of people were curious more than anything else. I managed.

FS: How long did you work in Minnesota?

MK: I worked at Cal's for almost five months until they decided --- they asked us whether we would like to go back to Hawaii.

FS: When did you find out that you could return to Hawaii?

MK: That was in November of 1944 -- five? '45.

FS: In the meantime were you communicating with your family in Heart Mountain?

MK: Yes, yes, yes. All through letters.

FS: I see. Is that how you found out that you had a choice to...

MK: I think they wrote too, but I think the War Relocation Authority in Minneapolis must have let us know that this is what was available.

FS: How did you find out that you were going to return together?

MK: I think my Dad wrote and said that we were all supposed to go home together. It never occurred to me that we would come home alone. We met in Los Angeles. I got there before they did, so I went to the train station to meet them and we all went to Santa Ana ra... the Air Force base. And we all stayed there for three weeks before we got passage home. There were lots and lots of Hawaii people who went with us at that time, too, and so they were coming from Arizona and all the different areas and we all came home together.

FS: How was your return trip?

MK: Well, seasick again. (laughs) But on the return trip, now, I can remember lots of the 442 boys that were coming home.

FS: What ship was this on?

MK: On the *Shawnee*.

FS: Not the *Lurline* anymore.

MK: No. It was the *Shawnee*.

FS: Were the circumstances a little different as far as your facilities and the treatment?

MK: I don't remember because I was seasick from the day first until I got back home, so I can't remember too many things about that. (laughs)

FS: Now when you arrived in Honolulu, what happened then?

MK: My dad's mother had a, my grandmother's relatives were here so they came to see us and we stayed with them for a couple days.

FS: Where was this?

MK: In Honolulu. In Pawaa, I guess.

FS: During this time, what did your father decide to do?

MK: There was no doubt we were going back to Kona. The perfect time, when they had passage for us to go back to Hilo, we went. I guess somebody came to meet us in Hilo to take us back to Kona. That's the reason why I lost a luggage also. Lots of my things are not --- you know like mementos that I had during the wartime, they're all really gone.

FS: Did your father go back into teaching?

MK: No there was no Japanese school by then, and there was no job for him at the Hawaii Hochi either. All the things that he did before was gone. He really did farming, which he never did before. It must have been really hard for him, because never doing that before and then not having anybody to --- not being needed by the community was another thing, too. Because he did a lot for the community and it wasn't the same anymore. It was a different life, and I think that must have been hard for him. He worked hard, because we needed the funds. My brother was going to start going to college and all this other... So, my brother that lost all of his desire to talk, well, he decided he wasn't going to college. My father begged him and begged him, but he said, "No, absolutely no," because he knew that it would be a hardship. That was the reason.

FS: Financially?

MK: Financial reason. And so he said, "No, I'm going to work." That was it. After that --- after a while, he was inducted in the Army to go to Korea. He was in Japan for a little while. And when my --- when he left Schofield my father made him promise, "When you come back, promise me that you will go back to college." And, my brother had to say yes. "Because now you will have some GI Bill of Rights and all that and so you have to go

back to school.” He said okay. And so when he came back, he came back in August, by September he was in school. The counselor at the high school got him a place to live. The first place was West Virginia University with room and board. That’s where he needed to go, so that’s where he went.

FS: What counselors?

MK: At the high school. In Kona.

FS: Oh, so he did go back to high school in Kona?

MK: Yes. He finished high school in Kona.

FS: This was before the Korean...

MK: Oh yes. After we came home from...

FS: Oh, I see, I see. During --- right after he graduated, he was drafted, you said.

MK: No, after, he worked --- he worked at fishing and things like that.

FS: But, eventually he did go back to college?

MK: Yes.

FS: Okay. I see.

MK: My two sisters and my brother went to college. And we all helped. My second brother decided he wouldn’t go to college because he knew he needed to help everybody, so he just sacrificed himself, I guess. (laughs)

FS: And so you became a beautician in Kona?

MK: No, I came here to work as soon as --- a month or so after we get back into Kona, I came back to Honolulu to work.

FS: Then I take it your father remained a farmer for the rest of his life.

MK: Yes. He was a coffee farmer. But around 1952, he and my mother embraced this teaching called the Tensho Kotai Jingu Kyo and I think that sort of helped my dad and my mother have a new meaning in life. They have been really blessed.

FS: May I ask what you just said? *Tensho*?

MK: *Ten-sho Ko-tai Jin-gu Kyo.*

FS: *Ten-sho Ko-tai Jin-gu Kyo*. I see. This is a religious group?

MK: Yes, our *dojo* is in Palama.

FS: Well, in conclusion, what are some of the positive and negative aspects that you'd like to have us remember about your internment?

MK: Well, as far as our family is concerned, I think it's helped us all. We bonded very well, and we got a lot from my parents. We did okay. My sisters are --- they are doing fine. They went to college. And my brother in Kona has done very well, too. And he has good health. We all can't say anything bad about that. We've learned a lot. And we all know the value of being together and thinking about one another and all the Japanese virtues like *gaman* is so important.

FS: Would you like to make some comment about the negative things?

MK: The negative things? I can't say too many negative things. One thing. I'm glad we went through all this, but I don't want anybody, anybody to have to go through this again. It's just not right to be imprisoned by your own country. All citizens. And I don't wish this about anybody, because it's a hard, hard, degrading type of a life. And I'll do whatever I can in my power not to let anything like this ever happen again.

FS: What are your feelings about the government redress?

MK: Well, I think it's a little too little too late as far as I'm concerned. They should have given just a smidge of this, one fourth of it, when our parents were really, really struggling. They were the ones that needed the money the most at that time. I wish they could have. By the time the redress came, they were all gone. And, for the rest of us, it's fine, but it doesn't mean that much.

FS: Is there anything that you'd like to say to the young people of today?

MK: Yes. I say: get a good education. Just get as much education --- do as well as you can and try to help the community and have an open heart and be kind because kindness comes around. Be kind. Be humble. That's all I can say really.

FS: Thank you very much for your interesting story. This concludes today's interview.