

JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAII
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Toshio Kawamoto (TK)

Also present: Machiko Kawamoto, wife (MK);
Ellen Takamori, daughter (Ellen);
Larry Kawamoto, son; David Kawamoto, son; Kellie Takamori, granddaughter

Interview by: John Okutani (JO:)

and

Jane Kurahara (Jane)

Interview date: January 26, 2014

Note: Comments in brackets [] are by the transcriber. Inaudible words or sections are identified by ((?)) in the transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability.

JO: Today is January 26, 2014 and we are interviewing Mr. Toshio Kawamoto. My name is John Okutani and with me is Jane Kurahara and we're doing the interview. Along with Mr. Kawamoto's family we have Machiko Kawamoto, his wife; Ellen Takamori, his daughter; Larry Kawamoto, his son; Kellie Takamori, his granddaughter; and David Kawamoto, his son.

Jane: Mr. Kawamoto, when were you born?

TK: March 17, 1920.

Jane: And where were you born?

TK: Kuakini [Kuakini Hospital in Honolulu, Hawaii].

Jane: What about your parents? Can you tell me their names and where they were born?

TK: My father's name—Katsuichi Kawamoto; he died July 23, 1975. I don't know when he was born but he was born in Tsuzumura, now Iwakuni, Japan—Yamaguchi-ken, Japan. My mother is Matsu Kawamoto—maiden name is Muranaka—and she died in 1927. I was only seven years old at that time.

Jane: What about your brothers and sisters—can you tell me a little bit about your brothers and sisters?

TK: My brother died October 20, 2000. That time he was 90 years old.

JO: This is [presumably looking at photos] Takazu, your brother?

TK: No, no, no. My brother's name is Takuzo. He died October 20, 2000. My sister, born 1913, so that's how old now! [Laughter]

JO: So almost about 100.

TK: She died 2003, I think.

Jane: Yeah, you have a long-lived family. You have good genes. [Chuckles]

JO: What was her name?

TK: Her name? Kikue. Kikue Kawamoto, but married to Tanada, so Kikue Tanada. She died at 89 years old. My brother died at 90, my father 94.

Jane: Your family lives long time.

TK: I'm not sure how long I live [Laughter].

Jane: Okay, now John's going to ask you some questions.

JO: Can you tell us about just before the war? You know you're a *kibei* [someone of Japanese heritage born in the U.S. but educated in Japan], right?

TK: Yeah, *kibei*. So in 1927, my mother died, so my father cannot control [may have meant that he had difficulty keeping things among family members under control]. So my father sent my brother, me, and my sister to Japan. So we educated in Japan, and I graduated from high school in Japan and came back here 1938—that time I was 18 years old, and my father sent me to Mid-Pacific Institute, and I graduated from Mid-Pacific in 1942.

JO: When did your brother come back?

TK: I don't know when he came back, but ah...

JO: Before you?

TK: Before me? Yeah, yeah.

JO: So he was here then? Okay, so now can you tell us about what you remember about December 7, 1941?

TK: Okay, December 7th, surprise attack from Japan and then President Roosevelt declared war against Japan. And then Hawaii's Japanese national and U.S. citizen—1,440 people—are arrested and detained. 980 of them were Japanese national [citizens], like my father. And then evening of December 9, 1941, three MPs [Military Police] came to my house and they arrested my father and sent [him] to Immigration, and Immigration Office [held him in a] small room made for 80 people but they put him inside [with] 164 people. Ho, cannot sit or stand up. But next day they were sent to Sand Island. And then now, February 2nd, my father was sent to mainland—127, the first shipment to mainland, including my father.

JO: Where were you folks living at that time?

TK: I was living at Kaimuki. I was attending Mid-Pacific at that time. I was old [older than most students] but I was educated in Japan. So when I graduated high school I was about 21 or so. [Laughter]

JO: We have a lot like that.

Jane: Did you know [Harry] Minoru Urata?

TK: Yeah, yeah.

Jane: You knew him? He was there too.

TK: He went to Mid-Pacific too.

Jane: Yeah, he was there too. How about Dan Toru Nishikawa? Toru Nishikawa?

TK: Toru Nishikawa?

NO: Dan Nishikawa.

MK: Yeah, he was at Mid-Pac, too, but at a different time.

JO: Just when your father was taken—so just you and your brother and your sister [were left at home]?

TK: No. No. My brother was later arrested too.

JO: Oh, same time?

TK: Later, later.

JO: How later?

TK: I don't remember, but ah...

JO: So only you were left?

TK: Then it was only me [only sibling in family whom was not arrested and detained]. And in 1943, Sand Island closed, so my brother was still there. [Later] In 1943, he was sent to mainland, but March 1943, still in Hawaii, so he and other Hawaii residents were transferred to 160-acre Honouliuli. 1,200 people were detained there.

JO: Yes.

TK: That time my niece was born, November 16, 1941. So 1943, she is only one and half years old.

UNK: *Taihen, taihen* [Difficult, difficult]

TK: My sister-in-law took my niece twice a week—they went to see my brother.

JO: We have here—this is a transfer document from the military, and this is on your brother Takuzo, Takuzo Kawamoto. But then they have his name and they have Mitsuki—Ritsuki, his wife?

MK: No. Chiyuki.

TK: Chiyuki.

JO: Chiyuki? And then Robert Tadashi, must be the son, yeah?

Ellen: Oh, it should be Randall Kawamoto.

[There is an inaudible conversation between JK and Ellen regarding the names on the document.]

JO: Sometimes, with the military, the translation gets mixed up, yeah? So it's Randall, then.

Ellen: Yes.

JO: So what this shows is that they were shipped on March 2, 1943, and then they arrived in Topaz, Utah, March 14, 1943, and then sometime in September 1943, they went to Tule Lake, California.

TK: My brother was sent to Tule Lake, 1943.

JO: Yes, him and his family.

TK: Tule Lake. But my father was sent to first McCoy, Wisconsin.

Jane: Oh, he was sent to Camp McCoy? Oh.

TK: McCoy first, yeah. 127 people left February 2nd; then they arrived around March 9, 1942, Camp McCoy, Wisconsin; and then later transferred to Chicago, Indiana [means Illinois]; and then they sent them to...

MK: Santa Fe.

JO: Yeah, we show Santa Fe.

TK: [Apparently looking at documents] This is my father...

Jane: Yeah, your father.

TK: Santa Fe, New Mexico—and they stayed there until December 23—no October 23, 1945. And the war ended—September 2, 1945. But my father and brother returned to Hawaii, November 13, 1945, from Seattle.

JO: We show his name [as] Harold, but you said no English name for him, yeah? Because all the documents we have shows Harold. Sometimes it's like the unofficial name, but they didn't officially go to the courts to change the name, but they got adapted [adopted?] English names, yeah?—for whatever reason. But this is another—we have this from the National Archives database; we show your brother here also. And ah...

TK: I don't know this Jitsuko...

JO: What was her name? His wife?

TK: Chiyuki.

JO: Chiyuki, yeah. Different name, then.

[There are two conversations going on around this time with JO interviewing TK and JK having a conversation with Ellen, so some conversation is obscured and difficult to follow for a while.]

Ellen: The eldest would be Diane. The second would be Randall.

JO: He would not be with Kauai County?

Ellen: Then third would be...

TK: Chiyuki. She was born in Hilo.

JO: Maybe we have them mixed up then?

Jane: They all went with the mother?

JO: Yeah, okay, maybe we were mixed up.

Ellen: Well, they were here in Kaimuki. So they stayed here.

Jane: Maybe only one child, then, right?

Ellen: It would be Diane. She's the oldest.

JO: So after your father and brother were interned, did you still live in Kaimuki?

TK: Yeah, yeah. I still attended MPI [Mid-Pacific Institute]. Actually, I was boarding there.

JO: Did you write letters to your father or your brother?

TK: During that time we cannot write them. Even in Honouliuli. I couldn't go to Honouliuli.

JO: You could not?

TK: Only my sister-in-law did; my niece able to see my brother. I cannot go.

JO: Oh, later on. So what was life like, when you were all by yourself with your boarding and with Mid-Pac?

TK: Boarding, so I study English. Every week we have to make a book report so I have to read plenty book. [Laughter]

JO: Do you know why your father and brother were picked up but not you? Do you know why?

TK: I was still a student at MPI. But my friend was sent to Tule Lake—I think some of my Japanese friends and I was in school at MPI, Mid-Pacific Institute.

JO: Urata-san ended up at Honoululi also.

Jane: He got picked up [at] Mid-Pacific so I think you were lucky.

JO: Yeah. When you look at the internment in Hawaii—there's really no rhyme or reason how—mostly at the beginning—the leaders of the community—because your father was a general manager at *Nippu Jiji*. A lot of the newspaper people and priests, people in a leadership position, were picked up—and then *kibei* also. Yeah, a lot of *kibei* were.

TK: Yeah, *kibei*. My brother was *kibei*.

JO: Yeah, because especially if you came back educated in Japan by the military, they were very suspect.

TK: I was drafted and then sent to Monterey, California and then studied there, and then sent to Japan, after the occupation of Japan [as part of the US military intelligence operation].

Jane: Occupied Japan.

TK: They sent me to Japan, counter-intelligence.

JO: When were you drafted? You were drafted, you said, into the military? When was this?

TK: Ah, 1946.

JO: Oh, '46, then after the war then?

TK: Yeah. After the war, and then one year after I went to Camp—Monterey—I studied what going happen with the occupation of Japan—especially Japan. Now that we have to control that—plenty riots too in Japan at that time.

JO: Oh. Now you mention 1900...

TK: Oh, that one is when—why Japan went attack...

JO: Yeah, can you explain that?

TK: 1900, European nation controlled China and leased Hong Kong and then France, Russia, and Germany controlled this other area. Japan war against Russia in 1905, and that war ended, and Japan occupied Manchuria and later invaded other part of China, yeah? And then so now in 1916 Canada is prejudiced against Japan, and they exclude Japan and broke our alliance—American and Canada...

[Conversation obscured for a while.]

TK: ...they made an economic blockade against Japan. And then Japan think America didn't sell the material that Japan need—no cotton and then especially oil. Without oil Japan cannot fly airplane. And then machine and then ship cannot control without oil, and without oil factory cannot produce goods. And then America and Britain in 1932 make an economic blockade against Japan. They tariffed about 1,000 items, yeah?—so Japan get hard time. So in Japan, naturally Japan's military—young people—was anti-American, and they want to go to war against America and Britain. But the prime minister—the name Keisuke Okada, the prime minister at that time—against the war—against military too, against war with America and Britain. Then February 6, 1936, the Prime Minister Okada was assassinated. Other person became prime minister. His name is Takahashi and he was also assassinated, so nobody wants to become prime minister. And then finally, General Hideki Tojo became prime minister. So war became very imminent. Then Admiral Yamamoto plan on attacking Pearl Harbor—said, "Enough is enough. You want us to survive, we have to attack." So he attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. So this is the Japan side of the feud. Why Japan attack America? Okay, people don't know why Japan attack. Because of blockade Japan cannot buy oil. They cannot fly airplane. They cannot purchase goods.

JO: This is an insurance form... [Referring to a document in the file, but uncertain of the relevance of the comment to the interview]

Jane: Um, this book is by Kumaji Furuya [referring to *Haisho Tenten*]. He wrote about his internment experience—it's in Japanese now but it's being translated and soon we will publish it. But there are pictures in here, and we think your grandfather is in here, and so we blew up the picture and we wondered if you could find him.

Ellen: I can find him.

Jane: Oh, you could find him!

Ellen: I don't have pictures of my grandfather.

Jane: He's supposed to be fourth from the right in the second row, but the second row is crooked so we're not sure—in the second row.

Ellen: Fourth from the right? This one?

Jane: So we even blew it up some more 'cause we couldn't figure out what the second row was.

Ellen: Yeah. It looks like him. This is my grandpa. Would be him.

Jane: Oh! That's who we thought it was.

Ellen: That was grandpa, yeah? Right here.

TK: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JO: That was in Santa Fe, yeah?

Jane: That was our first guess and then we thought it was him and then we weren't sure.

Ellen: 'Cause he looks way young [Laughter].

Jane: He was young then, yeah? Santa Fe was the first internment camp where they allowed a commercial photographer in, so there are a lot of group pictures. You folks don't have group pictures?

Ellen: Not, not like these, of course.

JO: And then we have also some pictures of the...

TK: ...old Japanese people in Hawaii wearing muumuu style.

JO: Yes.

TK: I wrote in this—((?)) and then, you know, Japanese people never made spy or anything wrong, but was arrested. Only Japanese people were arrested.

JO: Yes.

TK: German and Italian people were never arrested.

JO: They had a few, but...

TK: Yeah, only a few. And so they got the compensation—\$20,000. So my brother [did] but my father died in 19...

JO: This is his book.

Jane: Oh, he was dapper.

JO: [Showing some large photos of Sand Island and Honouliuli internment camps] We have some photos, yeah?—this is the Sand Island Internment...

TK: Internment camp. They built that whole place.

JO: Yeah. They built the tents and all this barb wire.

TK: I think mainland, they treated good, but in Hawaii but, of course, because war had just started...

JO: Yeah, right. So they treated them like prisoners of war.

TK: Someone once told me this place—oh, they gotta become naked.

JO: Yes [Chuckles]. That was her.

TK: They were treated badly.

JO: That would be the "Untold" DVD [referring to *The Untold Story* DVD about Hawaii internment of Japanese], so...

Ellen: I let him watch that, so...

- JO: So this is another picture, too, of building the camp. So this is where your father and your brother ended up, too—in the camp.
- TK: So if it was about three years ago I can understand, but now I too old.
- JO: And this is Honouliuli. This is about 1944. [Showing a picture of Honouliuli]
- TK: 1943 to 1945.
- JO: Yes. So this is again some more pictures. These internees lived in these barracks here.
- TK: Oh, my brother was in Honouliuli two months, I think.
- JO: Yeah, then he went to mainland. Still, you know they were there... So when your brother and father came home, did they talk about their experience?
- TK: I wrote up why, how they were treated. When my father was sent to mainland, my father saw my brother, but they cannot talk each other. That one I wrote in there too.
- JO: Yeah, but did they want to talk about intern? When they came back?
- TK: After they came back, yeah. So I wrote that thing what happened in mainland and here they are treated badly. But this is only for my family, not for others, because I don't know about other people. And then I translated Japanese—Japanese books and magazines [inaudible].
- JO: So you have anything else to talk about? Was your father angry when he came home?
- TK: Not angry. He was not angry why he was interned, because everybody was interned.
- JO: *Shikata ga nai*. [It can't be helped.] And your brother too, the same?
- TK: Yeah, yeah.
- JO: Not angry.
- TK: So President Reagan sent my brother apology and...
- [Overlapping conversations for a while.]
- JO: Your brother was alive then.
- TK: Yeah. My father died already.
- JO: Yeah, yeah.
- TK: My father died 1975, but that president...
- JO: Reagan was 1980. [Actually President Carter, who approved the creation of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, was the president in 1980. Reagan was president in 1988, when he signed the Civil Liberties Act, which awarded a redress payment of \$220,000 to each camp survivor.]
- TK: 1980, huh? Lot of Japanese people had died [by the time the redress payments were made]—they didn't receive anything, but they knew they didn't do anything wrong.
- JO: Yes, yes. Did you—when you came back from Japan—1937 you came back from...
- TK: '38.

JO: '38. And then, did you feel anybody prejudiced against you and discrimination because you were Japanese?

TK: [Unintelligible portion of some of the conversation.] Hmm, couple of times.
[Explanation which followed did not seem to be germane to the question.]

JO: So do you have any other thoughts or anything else you have to say about that time?

TK: No, I don't have anything. No, that happened 19...

JO: Yeah, but your mind is sharp yet. You remember everything. Yeah, it's very good.

TK: Because I don't smoke and I don't drink and then I exercise three times a day. My heart is strong too—I don't take any medication.

JO: That's good.

JO: Okay, so this concludes the interview. Thank you very much. *Arigato gozaimasu* [Thank you very much].

Transcribed by JCCH volunteer Chris Imoto; with editing by JCCH volunteer Nelson Okino and JCCH Resource Center Manager Marcia Kemble; completed August 2017.