

JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAI‘I

VOICES OF INTERNMENT PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Bishop Yoshiaki Fujitani (YF)

March 22, 2018

Interviewer: Mel Inamasu (MI) and Jane Kurahara (JK)

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.

MI: Today is March 22, 2018, and we're at the home of Bishop Yoshiaki Fujitani to have a conversation with him about his life and maybe to learn a little about his family. We know that his military career is very well documented on the internet by some of the military organizations and so we're going to focus today more on his personal life, his civilian life. So, I'm going to begin today by asking you to, well, first of all, my name is Mel Inamasu, a volunteer now at the Japanese Cultural Center and to assist me with the interview...

JK: Jane Kurahara, also a volunteer at the Japanese Cultural Center.

MI: I'm going to begin by asking Bishop Fujitani to introduce himself, his full name, the month and year he was born and where he was born. Let's start with your name.

YF: Yes. My name is Yoshiaki Fujitani, or as the Japanese might say, Fujitani Yoshiaki. I was born in August, 1923, which would make it today, I am 94.

MI: Very good. Now, tell me where were you born?

YF: I was born in a small village on Maui named Pauwela, which is next to Haiku. People might know Haiku, which is a larger town, but it was a [pineapple] cannery town. Next to Haiku was Kuiaha. Kuiaha was the site of Libby's Cannery and I think Haiku was something else.

MI: They also had a cannery there right I think before Libby's.

YF: Oh yeah. Anyway, there were three towns next to each other. Haiku, Pauwela and Kuiaha. And Kuiaha was known more as Libby's so we just said, Haiku and Libby's were our neighbors.

MI: Now, tell me the names of your parents—your father and your mother's maiden name.

YF: My dad's name, his given name was Kiyoshi but when he was ordained he took on the religious name Kodo, Kodo Fujitani. And he was originally from Shimane prefecture.

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- MI: In Japan?
- YF: Well, he thinks it's possible and he speaks of this in a way that he considers it a kind of a gossip but Shimane was very close to Korea.
- MI: Is this in Hokkaido?
- YF: No, no. It's in the lower part of Honshu on the opposite side of Hiroshima.
- MI: I see.
- YF: So there were three prefectures in that area. On the very end was Yamaguchi and on the Shikoku side was Hiroshima and on the Japan Sea side was Shimane. And so, in the Japan Sea side, the Korean peninsula is very close to the Japanese island of Honshu.
- MI: I see, okay.
- YF: And so my dad says it's possible that his family would be more Korean than Japanese, you know. And, there's a possibility because I notice he was, he didn't have any hair on his arms or his legs you know and I've always felt that the Koreans were hairless. But, ah...
- MI: And your mother's full name?
- YF: My mother comes from Toyama. Toyama is in the middle part of Honshu but she was, her maiden name was Furukawa.
- MI: First name?
- YF: Oh, Eiko Furukawa and she was born in Japan but when she was four years old, her family came to Hawaii, bringing her, and so she was a young girl and went to public schools and graduated even the highest schools, which was the Normal School [Institutions created to train high school graduates to be teachers by educating them in the norms of pedagogy and curriculum].
- MI: Let's go a little bit into your mother's side. Why did she and her parents come to Hawaii?
- YF: Her father was a traditionally Japanese you might say, and the people from Toyama were in pharmaceuticals or in—they were in massages and things like that. And so, I think the father came to Hawaii in order to earn a living, you might say.
- MI: He didn't come to work on the plantations?
- YF: No, he didn't come to work on the plantation. But he went to Lihue, Kauai and served as the masseur or the pharmacist for the plantation people, including the workers there.
- MI: So your mother grew up on Kauai?
- YF: Yeah, she grew up on Kauai and graduated Normal School, which qualified her to be a teacher. But when she graduated, she could not teach.
- MI: Because?
- YF: Because she was an alien. Because she was born in Japan.
- MI: Aliens were not allowed to teach in public schools?

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- YF: At that time.
- MI: At that time?
- YF: Yeah, so, it's been changing I suppose.
- MI: On both sides, the histories are little unusual in the sense that most of the immigrants came Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Fukuoka, that area, yeah? [Your family] was a little unusual.
- YF: Yeah, and in our case, for instance, mother graduated Normal School but she couldn't teach, so she went back to school and so she went to Margaret Deitz [Business College] or something, some business college.
- MI: On Kauai or on Oahu?
- YF: Here—to learn how to be a secretary. And so, she learned typing and shorthand, perhaps, and something like that. But she was hired by the Bishop of the Hongwanji to be the house mother of the girls' dormitory.
- MI: Where was this Hongwanji located?
- YF: It was on the grounds of the temple, which is now on Pali Highway.
- MI: Oh, Honpa?
- YF: Oh, Honpa, yeah.
- MI: Okay. Let's go to your father's side now. Tell us a little about his parents and why they came to Hawaii.
- YF: Well, dad was the second son of the minister of his family and ...
- MI: His father was a minister also, your father's father?
- YF: Yeah. My father's father was a minister. And so he passed on the responsibility of the minister to his first son. That was alright but his, the first son's son refused to go in to the ministry. He wanted to be a doctor. And he became a doctor. And [that] left the temple open. And so I guess the father insisted that his younger brother, which is my dad, to come back to Japan and continue the succession of the temple.
- MI: I'm sorry, what happened to the first son?
- YF: The first son finally passed away. But he had to pass it on to somebody. But his son refused to accept that. And so he had to get my dad to take over.
- MI: But then, why did your dad leave Japan to come to Hawaii?
- YF: Yeah, well, being the second son, he didn't have the responsibility to take over the family temple and so he went his merry way to do whatever he wanted to. And, one was, he was accepted to be one of the explorers to go to India and so the head of the Hongwanji then was Ohtani. I can think of some names, just not right...
- MI: That's okay.
- YF: But anyway, the Ohtani *tankentai*, or the Ohtani exploration group, went to India and the *monshu* [head of monastery] wanted some scholars to go with him. And so, there were a

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couple of scholars, including a—there was a Doctor Abe and there were others. But dad was asked to go, not as a scholar but as a secretary of somebody to take care of the scholars. And so he agreed to go and he was there for a very short time, maybe I guess about a year or so, during which he visited different places and he collected a lot of artifacts.

MI: This was in India?

YF: This is in India. And he brought them back with him but later on, these artifacts he picked up in India were given to the Hongwanji, the Ryukoku University Museum. And so, whatever he collected in India are there now. But, being a traveler that way, a restless person perhaps, he did all kinds of stuff. So he went to India, he came back and then he went to Okinawa as a missionary and when he was offered the position of missionary here in Hawaii, he accepted that.

MI: So he was asked to come to Hawaii.

YF: Yes, yes.

MI: To which temple?

YF: Instead of going to the family temple, for the succession, he decided then he would not and he came to Hawaii then as a missionary.

MI: Which temple, in Hawaii?

YF: So, he went directly to the Honpa Hongwanji.

MI: About how old was he, when he came here?

YF: Oh, he was about thirty-something already. Anyway, when he came here, I guess he was expected to get married and he chose to get married to someone local here and my mother, being the housemother at the girl's dormitory in the Hongwanji, was chosen and so they got married. They just made 35 years.

MI: Did she have a say?

YF: I don't know that she had any say. But he was 35 and she was 20. In other words, fifteen years of difference. And so, his first assignment was Pauwela. And so, he left the main temple and was sent to Pauwela in 1921. In 1922, his first child was born and in 1923, his second child was born. I was that second child.

MI: What was the name of the church or temple in Pauwela? What was the name of that? Was there a church there?

YF: Yeah, it was called Pauwela Hongwanji.

MI: Oh, okay. Still there?

YF: Yes, it's still there but, huh, I don't think, the temple doesn't exist anymore.

MI: I see.

YF: The temple, Pauwela, was downgraded to kind of a *fukyojo* [small branch temple], a mission temple you might say. So it was an independent, it's not independent for a while and then it just disappeared.

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- MI: Oh, I see.
- YF: Because they didn't have enough ministers for one thing and maybe not enough people to support the temple. But, ah...
- MI: What do you remember about growing up in Pauwela?
- YF: It was a temple building that looked like any Christian church around that place and many of them were sort of identified as a Hawaiian church, with the steeple and...
- MI: But he spoke only Japanese?
- YF: Oh, yeah, yeah. He spoke only Japanese but my mother spoke English, being you know educated here. So, she really helped him to survive, you might say. But in the early days, the *Issei*, of course, were mostly the members and so they spoke Japanese. A Japanese speaking minister was enough. Late on, of course, with the *Nisei* and the *Sansei* appearing, an English speaking minister becomes necessary. Well, that's a little later.
- MI: Where did you go to school?
- YF: When I was a kid, I went to school in Pauwela and in Pauwela, there was the school named for the neighboring town. In other words, in Pauwela we had Haiku School. (Chuckles)
- MI: Why was that?
- YF: I don't know. Anyway, Haiku School was in Pauwela and across the road—dirt road of course—was the Hongwanji temple, Pauwela Hongwanji temple. So we were right next to the school. I remember going there. The principal was a Mr. Wade who was an Englishman and he was bald. So he had a wig and once, we were out in recess playing volleyball when he chose to come in and play with us and his wig shifted, and we all laughed. (Chuckles)
- MI: Did he know that the wig had shifted? [Laughs]
- YF: Yes, and he was so embarrassed. Well, his nickname was "*hage*" and *hage* means bald in Japanese, you know. But, we weren't sure whether he understood that we were laughing at his baldness or not. But, anyway, that was, ah...
- MI: What was it like growing up in Pauwela with your family situation? Did you have to work hard?
- YF: Well, perhaps it was because I was the first son in a Japanese family that I didn't feel any pressure at all, you know.
- MI: Wait, you were the first son or the second son?
- YF: I'm the first son, but the second child.
- MI: Oh, I see. Oh, okay. Was it, but there was no pressure on you?
- YF: No, no. They left me alone. And I was...
- MI: But that was not typical Japanese, or was it?
- YF: That's what I thought: that a Japanese son would have the run of the house. You know, everybody catered to him as the son. I think I had all the best.

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- MI: So you were special to the family, because you were the oldest son?
- YF: Yeah, and actually, in that early period, mother gave birth to seven children in Pauwela. And then later, in the thirties, might have been about number '32 or so, she took three kids and went to Japan to visit her folks and while she was there, she gave birth to the eighth kid. The eighth kid is supposed to come today.
- MI: Now, the eighth child is not an American citizen?
- YF: Ah, yeah. She was born in Japan but she was registered as an American citizen. So that was no problem. But, you know, the Japanese had a hard time. It was only in 1957, '57, you know that a Japanese could become a naturalized American.
- MI: *Issei*.
- YF: *Issei*. Yeah. So, it was a very hard trip for them. But mother, I don't know. Yeah, she became an American citizen, but, ah, well, dad couldn't. In fact, when the war started, you know, he wasn't considered dangerous enemy alien or potentially dangerous enemy alien.
- MI: I'll ask you about that in a few minutes. Let me follow you first. So, where did you go to high school?
- YF: Yeah, and so when I was in the seventh grade, the family decided to move up to Honolulu.
- MI: Was he called by a church here?
- YF: Yeah. yeah. Well, in the Hongwanji tradition, the Bishop appoints the minister to the temple. So Bishop Kuchiba, I think it was, was the minister when dad was asked to come to Moiliili Hongwanji.
- MI: I see, okay, so, you grew up in Moiliili?
- YF: Yes, so when I was eleven years old, in 1934, the family moved. So I remember that period. I was in the seventh grade then. So when we moved, I was a seventh grader at the Washington Intermediate School.
- MI: From there, you went to McKinley?
- YF: Yeah, and from there I went to McKinley. But when I was in Washington Intermediate, there are a couple of things that I remember. One was that I was hijacked. When I first came, a Hawaiian classmate of mine asked me for some money and I just had lunch money of a dime or something like that. And so I gave that to him and then went to the teacher and told him what happened. The teacher then got to that student and asked him to return that money to me. And then I felt that that student needed the money more than I did so I gave him back the money.
- MI: In front of the teacher you gave it back?
- YF: Yeah.
- MI: What did the teacher say?
- YF: Nothing.

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- MI: So at that age already, you already had some compassion. (Chuckle)
- YF: I don't know about compassion or fear or what. (Chuckle)
- MI: Did he ever do that again to you?
- YF: No.
- MI: Did he become a friend after that?
- YF: I don't think we became that close. But that was Washington Intermediate.
- MI: That's what you remember about Washington Intermediate.
- YF: Well...
- MI: But after that, no problems like that?
- YF: Yeah, the other problem I had was I wanted to take a course in music. And so, I asked around, "What kind of instrument should I learn?" And I was told, "Well, you can go into some kind of brass or if you want to, you can go in to strings." So I thought, maybe if I learn how to operate a violin, I can appreciate music a little bit more. So I told the band teacher that I would like to learn the violin and he said, "Okay." But a few days after the school started, I had an accident and I slipped down the side of the steps and broke my hand, you know the bone in my hand. And so I couldn't operate the violin and so the teacher said, "Well, then we'll have to have you learn to strike the drum." And so, I was given that beater and I thought I was keeping time with the beat. But the teacher tells me, "You're off beat!" And so, finally, my music period ended. (Chuckle)
- MI: They didn't try to shift, you couldn't do anything else?
- YF: No, I couldn't do anything else. Yeah, so, that was the end of my music.
- MI: Interesting. (Chuckles)
- YF: Well, anyway, something, ah...
- MI: Okay, McKinley High School...
- YF: And then, in 1937, then, I went on to McKinley High School.
- MI: Okay, what do you remember? Any interesting stories you remember from McKinley?
- YF: Yeah, McKinley. Well, let's see. It goes to senior high but...
- MI: Any famous classmates that you had there?
- YF: Well, I graduated in 1940, you know, and we had very good football teams in the earlier years of '37, '38, '39. In 1940, we, our team, I think, didn't win the championship but we had some pretty good [players]. In 1939, for instance, I think we were champions.
- MI: How about in academics? Who were the smart students in your class? Were you a good student?
- YF: No. In fact, I lacked one credit in order to graduate you know.
- MI: So you were not supposed to graduate?

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YF: So in 1940, I lacked one credit and so I had to make it up. So, I had to go to summer school to make up that credit. That I remember, not being able to graduate because of ...

MI: So, you couldn't go through the ceremonies and everything with your classmates?

YF: Yeah.

MI: You remember the principal, by any chance?

YF: Oh, yeah. Our principal was Dr. Miles E. Carey, a very well known professor and teacher. He was the one who emphasized participatory democracy, you know. So, everybody had to participate in something. So, you look at our annual and after each name, there is a list of things that that person participated in.

MI: What did you participate in?

YF: Well, I was appointed chairman of the Student Body Permanent Buildings and Grounds Committee.

MI: What did the Buildings and Grounds Committee do? (Chuckles)

YF: Actually, we were supposed to be responsible for looking around and say what has to be done and things like that.

MI: Keeping the campus clean?

YF: Yeah, things like that.

[They are looking over the McKinley High School Annual]

YF: Here's Richard Ando.

MI: Okay, I knew Dr. Ando.

YF: Here's Shiro Amioka.

MI: So, you had some famous classmates?

YF: Oh, yeah.

MI: Who else?

YF: Mmm, well, Shiro was our president, Student Body President. [Dr.] Chew Mun Lum was our Vice President. This guy is Hirota, Jun Hirota.

MI: What became of him?

YF: He was a football player on our team. Also, a baseball player. He was a well-known sports figure, you might say.

MI: Do they make any comments about what they expect out of life from different students? What did they say about you? (Chuckle)

YF: I don't know.

MI: Were you a good student?

YF: Just an ordinary student.

MI: Average student?

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- YF: (Laughs) I'm looking for a picture of me.
- MI: What were you thinking when you graduated, as far as your future? Did you have any idea where you were heading?
- YF: Well, everybody's going to the University [of Hawaii]. I figured I'd go to the University.
- MI: Okay. But not knowing which direction you were heading?
- YF: No, no. In fact, I wanted to be a teacher.
- MI: Oh, is that right? So, you were in the College of Education?
- YF: I was going to but I changed my mind.
- MI: But, you were also in the ROTC.
- YF: Oh, yeah.
- MI: Why did you join the ROTC?
- YF: Oh, destiny. Well, yeah, that's another story. There's a guy named here, Caesar Tsutsumi. Have you ever heard of him?
- MI: No, I've never heard of him. What became of him?
- YF: Well, Caesar...
- MI: You should have Kate read you the notes and see what people said to you. (Laughs)
- YF: See Tsutsumi.
- MI: What became of him?
- YF: Okay, he was, in ROTC, there was a program called, well, we called it Crack Squad but it was a program to get [at McKinley] and Caesar was a Cadet Captain. I was a Cadet Lieutenant. And, we had this drill team competition in which a Cadet Captain and above, Cadet Major, Cadet Lieutenant Colonel and so on, could have their own squad. Caesar had a squad. And he trained them and was nearly perfect. Except when the day of the competition came, he couldn't make it. He was ill or something or he had something else to do. So he asked me whether I would command his squad.
- MI: You didn't have your own squad?
- YF: I didn't have my own squad.
- MI: Okay.
- YF: So, we entered the competition and we won. So, everybody congratulated me when we had our...
- MI: Did you expect to win?
- YF: Oh, yeah. And, when we graduated high school, there was a bronze medal given to me from the ROTC Department. So, everybody considered me to be the squad leader, to win this thing. Except, I knew it was Caesar who had done all the work and he's the one who deserves the credit. But anyway, that has been with me throughout. You know, whatever I do, I feel that somebody is helping me along. I guess that's what it is.

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- MI: So you were almost destined to go in to the ROTC at the University.
- YF: Oh, yeah, yeah.
- MI: Okay, so you are at the University. You joined the ROTC. Who were your leaders there?
- YF: Well, our outfit was Company B and the commander for that was a man named Nolle Smith.
- JK: Oh, yeah.
- YF: Nolle Smith was a...
- MI: How do you spell the first name?
- YF: Hmm? N-o-l-l-e.
- MI: Okay.
- YF: Nolle Smith. Yeah. Yeah, and he was a black person but he excelled in sports, you know, before the war. So he was in track and he was in football and he did everything well. And he was a star and everything. But he was our captain.
- MI: I see.
- YF: And our Company B top Sergeant, First Sergeant, was Ted Tsukiyama. So, anyway, Ted Tsukiyama was my top Sergeant. I was a Corporal—two stripes and he had five, plus the diamond. Well, anyway...
- MI: He was like a year older than you?
- YF: Yeah, he was a couple of years older than me.
- MI: So, when you're in this ROTC at the University, are you thinking in terms of like a military career or are you thinking about going off to war? Why are you in the ROTC?
- YF: Well, at the University of Hawaii, the ROTC program was something like a required physical education program. So if you went in to ROTC it's okay. If not, then you went in to some kind of physical ed or phys ed program to satisfy that requirement. So we had ROTC guys but many who couldn't enjoy that so they would go in to some kind of physical ed kind of program which is well, they would go to Phys Ed class, in other words just as we went in to ROTC class.
- MI: Okay, December 7, 1941, where were you?
- YF: Yeah, I was at home. This was a Sunday. There were a lot of things that were going to happen because on Monday at the University, we were supposed to have an archery contest and, I was in the archery class. But that never happened. And, on that Sunday, the Hongwanji had a softball game planned. But that never happened either.
- MI: Were you at the church when the bombing occurred?
- YF: No, I was at Moiliili. But there was a group, offered by the Hongwanji, called the *Seinen Kyodan*, which means youth program. It was the youth program of the Hongwanji. And, we used to have a softball competition of different schools, Sunday schools, temples. And we sort of looked forward to that, that activity. But that never happened.

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- MI: So you were in Moiliili? You heard the bombing?
- YF: Oh, yeah, and when we heard the bombing, we went out to see. In fact, I took the kids in our neighborhood and went down to Ala Moana Park, to see what's happening in Pearl Harbor.
- MI: What did you see when you got there?
- YF: It was a dark column of smoke going up from, I think, it was an oil tank burning, you know—just black smoke going up, planes flying up in the air, flak going up.
- MI: So, could you tell that those were planes from Japan?
- YF: No, not way up there. But occasionally a plane would fly over us in town so we could see then that they were Japanese.
- MI: You could see that? Okay. Were you also listening to the radio?
- YF: Yeah, the radio announcer wouldn't say that these were Japanese planes but he would say the insignia of the Rising Sun is seen on the plane. So we figured out, "Why is he saying it that way?" Well, it was very unexpected and so we had to just go along and accept whatever the authorities were giving to us.
- MI: Did you feel at that time that this was somehow going to change your life?
- YF: No. (Chuckle) But anyway, the radio announcement said, "All ROTC students at the University, report to school right away." So, because of that, we responded. Of course, many of us didn't, I didn't believe that this was really war or anything like that. And so, even our response to that call to come up to the University, that wasn't accepted thoroughly.
- MI: You didn't take it seriously?
- YF: Yeah. I felt that, "No, it must be some kind of maneuvers going on." And so I went up to school but I was bare footed and I had on corduroy trousers, I remember.
- MI: Were the other students in uniform?
- YF: Well, some guys were. Some of us just didn't believe. But gradually, we came to accept that, you know, that this must be true. And so, during the day, we gradually came to accept the fact that it was true that the Japanese were attacking.
- MI: What was the feeling among the boys, when they came to realize that? Or did they...
- YF: Well, some of us just refused to accept but gradually, we just had to you know.
- MI: Did your leaders get you organized? [Did they say,] "Get your weapons. We need to start defending the island."
- YF: Yeah, you see, December 1941, when we didn't expect at all that anything like this would happen. So we weren't prepared at all. Even the equipment that we had, we had metal helmets that looked pretty good but that was the helmet from World War I. And the rifles that we were given were the rifles that we used for our ROTC training. We knew that all the firing pins were taken out of these guns. The Springfield 03 five round bolt action weapons would not fire because the pins were taken out.

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MI: Were you sent out to guard the island or anything like that?

YF: Yeah, yeah. So, the first thing that the ROTC guys—the soldiers themselves were doing—was to put the firing pin into the rifles again—and, armed now with five rounds of bullets—we were sent out to guard different places. There's a story of my squad, I was a Corporal in Company B and I had one squad. The thing is, I was only eighteen, you know. And there was a guy who came in to our squad who was twenty-five. He was a cab driver—a guy named Fujioka. But his nickname was “Pro” Fujioka, “Pro” because he was a professional gambler. You know, he controlled me, you might say, although I was the nominal head of the squad.

MI: So, he told you what needed to be done.

YF: Yeah, he told me what to do. (Chuckle)

MI: Was it helpful to you to have him?

YF: Yeah. I still remember he took me to one of his gambling sessions which was all night long and he told me, “If you're going to gamble, you have to learn how to gamble. If you're not going to learn, don't gamble.”

MI: Did you learn?

YF: That made a lot of sense to me. So I still remember that.

MI: So which choice did you make? Did you learn to gamble?

YF: No, I gambled, but, well, in a way, I didn't make any money at all. But anyway, that was the situation. Our squad was located on Bishop Street, lower Bishop Street, in the, what was that? One of the solid Bishop Street building and our job was to go and guard the pier. It was sensible. But then, there was a story, kind of a fable. It wasn't a real story, it was somebody joking. Anyway, the story goes that on one of these mornings, a troop ship came in and it was filled with [American] Marines. And it came in to Pier Seven or someplace around there. And when the ship docked, somebody mentioned that there were a lot of soldiers on the pier. So the Marines all came to the front of the ship and looked over and saw that these guys were dressed in World War I helmets, (Laughs) with the old rifles, bayonets which was chrome plated, which was actually a description of what we looked liked, you know. And, it is said that one Marine nudged another and said, “Hey, Mac, we're too late.” (Laughter) That kind of story was going around and we laughed about it.

MI: But at some point, they took away your bullets and your weapons. You remember that time?

YF: Yes. That's right, a month and a half later, in January of 1942, yeah.

MI: How did you feel about it?

YF: Captain Nolle Smith called us to—it was late at night you know. He called us in to the gym at the University, and...

MI: Wait, were all of you confined to the University? You didn't get to go home, from December 7th?

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- YF: We didn't go home. Yeah, but anyway, we were assembled and Captain Nolle Smith, with tears in his eyes, told us that he had some sad news that our Hawaii Territorial Guard was being inactivated. That's the term he used. In other words, the Hawaii Territorial Guard was ROTC activated as an Army unit, and so, in 1942, January, that activation was inactivated. So, we didn't have anything left. We didn't have the ROTC anymore.
- MI: How did you feel about this?
- YF: Ah, I didn't care. I was too young to think.
- MI: You just went home to your family?
- YF: Yes, I went back. But some of the guys, I remember, some of the students sat on University Avenue under the trees across from the Atherton YMCA and, sitting under the tree, they were griping. You know, "It's a bad thing that we're kicked out. There's nothing to do," and this and that. And it was there that Hung Wai Ching, seeing the boys through his window, I suppose, decide to come out and talk to the boys. And he said, "Well, if the Army doesn't want you to carry arms, then maybe you can do some good with your picks and shovels." And so the boys took that to heart and they decided to join the 34th Engineers Battalion. Maybe regiment. I thought it was battalion but some people say it was regiment. Well, anyway, the 34th Engineers Auxiliary was the name of that unit. 169 guys signed up to go and, you know, work with the engineers.
- MI: 169 out of how many in the ROTC? How many were in the ROTC?
- YF: I don't exactly know how many were in the ROTC.
- MI: But you didn't join them initially.
- YF: No. I was one of the 169 that signed up. And so, we all went to Schofield Barracks as the 34th Engineers Auxiliary. But the nickname, adopted right away, was Varsity Victory Volunteers, triple V, you know.
- MI: Who came up with that name?
- YF: I don't know. But, anyway, right away, it was adopted. And, in fact, I think it was in March [1942] or so, that we were in Schofield. In April, my dad was hauled in, as a potentially dangerous enemy alien.
- MI: Tell us about your dad's part of the story—April of 1942.
- YF: Anyway, he was pardoned, you might say, but not really pardoned. He was given a—I don't know what it was.
- MI: He was not arrested like the other [religious leaders]?
- YF: No. Usually on December 7<sup>th</sup> [1941], the, ah...
- MI: Yes. The Buddhist priests, Japanese school teachers.
- YF: Yes, that's right. They were hauled in on December 7<sup>th</sup>, but dad...
- MI: Why do you think he was not picked up with the others, on December 7<sup>th</sup>?
- YF: Because there was a—you remember a Kanemi Kanazawa?

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MI: I know the name.

YF: I think Kanemi's twin brother Kinji Kanazawa is more famous, maybe. But Kanemi and Kinji were twins. But Kanemi was with the ROTC at the University and he became an officer of the Army and when the war started, he was already part of the FBI because he was, well, he was in the Army so-called, the military connection. So, he was with the ROTC but he was also an officer and he was with the FBI and, you know, that kind of connection. But, he was also a member of the Moiliili Hongwanji. So he vouched for dad. And, he said, "I can take care of him," or something like that. And so dad was free 'til April of '42, a few months.

MI: But the church was closed, right?

YF: Yeah, but there was some help, some people. At Moiliili, my mother was doing some religious work, so-called.

MI: She took over?

YF: Yeah, she took over. At the main temple, for instance, there were some *wahine* [Hawaiian for female] ministers too. There was a Reverend Yoshikami from the Big Island.

MI: Now, so what happened to your father? Was he taken to Sand Island?

YF: Yeah, so, when [he] was taken in, I guess there was no real excuse for him so, anyway, he spent time at Sand Island and then was sent to San Francisco. What's that island over there?

MI: Angel Island?

JK: Angel.

YF: Angel Island, yeah. And then, from there, they were shipped to Texas.

MI: [Fort] Sam Houston?

YF: Sam Houston. And then, they came back to New Mexico, and finally ended up in Santa Fe. So, dad was there from '43 to '44, when the authorities gave him a chance to leave camp.

MI: To return back to Hawaii?

YF: No, no. Just leave camp. But, he couldn't come back to Hawaii because Hawaii was under martial law, or something like that.

MI: I see.

YF: And so they said, "You're free to go but you can go to any of the Relocation Centers or you can go to any eastern city, like New York or Philadelphia, even as far as Chicago." He decided that he doesn't know anyone at camps or people living out in the cities so "Well, maybe I can go back to Japan." So, he asked our family, "Okay, how many of you want to go back to Japan?" And nobody in the family wanted to go back to Japan. So, we said, "There's none. So if you want to go, go by yourself." He said, "No," he won't do that. And so he stayed in Santa Fe.

MI: Continued to stay [there], even though he could have left.

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- YF: Yeah, but he could have left in 1944. But he stayed in.
- MI: Did he ever ask the family to come up and join him?
- YF: No, there was no choice—because he was sent to Santa Fe. If he had been at that—what’s that other town...
- JK: Jerome?
- YF: Hmm?
- JK: Was it Jerome?
- MI: Jerome?
- YF: No.
- MI: Crystal City?
- YF: No, there was another camp that was for those going back to Japan.
- JK: Oh.
- MI: Oh, Tule Lake?
- YF: Tule Lake, yeah. Yeah, there were some people at Tule Lake and they did go back. Like Reverend Okano? Reverend Okano’s family, I think, stayed in Tule Lake. And then, they were shipped to Shanghai or some place.
- MI: Do you need a break?
- YF: No, no, no. I’m okay. How about you guys?
- MI: I’m okay.
- YF: I’m okay.
- MI: We can go a little longer. So, this was your father. He stays in Santa Fe, ‘til, I guess until the camp closes, which is end of ‘44, early ‘45? And then, he came back to Hawaii?
- YF: Yeah, and then he came back.
- MI: At that point in time, what was happening to you?
- YF: I was in the Army from, let’s see, yeah, early 1944. Well, actually, I joined in ‘43 but I was admitted in ‘44. Then I went to school and camp.
- MI: You were in the MIS, right? Before you get into that, were you angry that they had picked up your father? How did you feel about that?
- YF: Yes, I was angry that, well, here I was, volunteering, you know, as a true American, I felt. And they’re treating my dad, my family so roughly. I felt, “They shouldn’t do that.” And so, yeah, my stay in the triple V was shortened, because of that.
- MI: Because your family needed you?
- YF: Because my, the family needed me but at the same time, I wasn’t going to cooperate, you might say, with this America, you know. I lost all patriotism, you might say.
- MI: What changed your mind? Why do you end up joining?

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- YF: Yeah, later on, that was later, you know. '43, '44, '45, yeah, in 1943, I looked out there and all my buddies are gone.
- MI: They had joined the 442 [Regimental Combat Team]?
- YF: The 442 and other units, you know. They're volunteering. And so I felt very lonely.
- MI: Did you feel guilty?
- YF: No, no guilt feelings at all. For one thing, I figured, now, when the war started, I was 18. Now, what can you expect of an 18 year old? You see, I compare myself with Ted Tsukiyama, for instance. Ted was 20 years old, already. And his thinking was a little different, and he was able to couch his thinking in words that made sense. At 18, you don't make too much sense. That's what I thought, anyway.
- MI: But you had learned about democracy and equal justice.
- YF: Yes, things like that.
- MI: Was his father also picked up? Tsukiyama?
- YF: Oh, yeah. Tsukiyama, yes. Ted comes from a very strong Christian family, you know. And he spoke very good English. That's why he was permitted to enter Roosevelt. Roosevelt was an English Standard School. So he was a little different from us, I think.
- MI: But his father was also picked up?
- YF: I don't know if he was picked up.
- MI: So, you're coming from different places because you had your father's situation to deal with.
- YF: Yeah, that's right. Another person who might have been more comparable was Akira Otani. Akira Otani and Ted were, I think, the same age. But Akira's father was hauled in and Akira stayed with triple V and later on he volunteered for the 442, you know and things like that.
- MI: So when your father was released, you were serving in the MIS at that time?
- YF: Oh, yeah. And so, when dad came back here, then he had a heart attack or something.
- MI: How soon after he came back did he have the heart attack?
- YF: Oh, I don't know. It was in '45, anyway. So I don't know how long it was afterwards. But when I heard that he was ill, I asked right away for an emergency furlough. So in '46, October, I came home. And while I was here, dad recovered.
- MI: You had not seen him for about four years or so.
- YF: Well, I saw him in '44.
- MI: How did you get to see him in '44?
- YF: When I was in the Army, in Minnesota, that summer break, I think it was open, so I took a trip down south to Santa Fe.
- MI: You were able to visit him in Santa Fe?
- YF: Yeah.

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- MI: What did he look like when you saw him in Santa Fe?
- YF: He looked okay. There, there was a photograph of him somewhere around here.
- MI: Oh, at Santa Fe?
- YF: Yeah, at Santa Fe. He was okay.
- MI: What did you folks talk about when you...
- YF: There wasn't much to talk about except the kind of food that we were eating. I guess they were having powdered eggs and spam for breakfast. It was sort of similar to what we used to have in camp.
- MI: Was he an angry man, at that time?
- YF: No, no, no. He didn't care.
- MI: He just accepted it?
- YF: Yeah.
- MI: How about you? Were you angry that your father was there?
- YF: No, it was okay. But then it was okay. They used to go out into the fields and look for wood to carve in to—there's some ...
- MI: He did carving?
- YF: To make in to bookends and things like that. There, the bookends over there. Yeah.
- MI: He carved that?
- YF: That's what dad brought back. Things like that, you know.
- MI: Ah, huh. But, he was never bitter for having been put through all of this?
- YF: No.
- MI: Yeah. Okay. So you served in the military, you get out of the military, then what do you do? You have to decide what to do with your life.
- YF: Yeah.
- MI: How did you decide?
- YF: I had this notice saying that I have money that the G.I. Bill [provided]. I can go to any school I want to and all that. And so, I asked, "Dad, what should I do with this money?" And he said...
- MI: Now, how much money did they give you?
- YF: No, well whatever the school requested.
- MI: Oh, just a letter saying that they would pay for your education?
- YF: Yeah.
- MI: Okay.

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- YF: And so, he said, “Since you were born in to a Buddhist family, why don’t you go study Buddhism?” And, my answer was immediately, “Okay.” (Chuckles)
- MI: You had never thought about that before?
- YF: No, I’d never thought.
- MI: Well, why did you say okay?
- YF: Well, it made sense for me to study something that I should know more about. So he said, “Go study Buddhism.” [I replied,] “Okay.” And it continued. I was at the University of Chicago for five years and then, Kyoto *Daigaku* [University] for three years, studying Buddhism. Because in the back of my mind, I had this feeling that I should know Buddhism to pass it on to future generations. I wasn’t a holy person or religious person or whatever, you know, but my decision to go in to the ministry was to assure that my dad’s religion would continue for a few more years. So it’s not a religious decision. It’s a practical decision.
- MI: But—I’m not sure but—you brought the English language to Buddhism in Hawaii? Is that correct to say that, or...
- YF: No, I think I’ve brought a kind of...
- MI: Were others preaching in English at the time you...
- YF: Oh, yeah. But there was a need. Well, you know, we had Reverend Oi, Newton Ishii were around. But, ah, I kinda felt that Buddhism could be a little bit freer in expression. And so our Living Treasures program, you know, it’s a real good program I think. It’s open to everyone but it’s something that the Hongwanji started.
- MI: What year was that you started it?
- YF: 1976.
- MI: How about the Project Dana? Were you involved in that also?
- YF: Well, I backed them up but Project Dana, it’s Shim Kanazawa’s and Rose Nakamura’s *kuleana* [Hawaiian word for responsibility]. Rose really contributed a lot to that program.
- MI: So, what other things, looking back on your career, in terms of your church or your religion, did you innovate or change in Hawaii, try to change?
- YF: Well, I don’t know whether we can put it in to words or not but it’s just that I was born here, you know. Because I’m local! And so, what I feel as a person should be meaningful for this place. This is the kind of feeling I have. And so, I’m glad, you know, we have the Living Treasures thing but one area that we see still working very hard is the inter-faith area. I think the Buddhists need not feel that they’re supposed to keep quiet or, you know. The *enryo* [avoiding conflict through self restraint] that the Japanese have, I think, need not be used, you might say, in this area. This is our faith. We have to let people know that it’s alright to be what we are. And so, yep.
- MI: Do you think Buddhism fits well into America?
- YF: It should. Yes. I think it’s very free. I feel very free with it. We don’t have a lot of things to keep us—you know—I feel—except for those who want to emphasize the Japanese

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part. I don't know about that. Buddhism is what I was born with. In other words, it's a Hawaiian, American kind of thing.

MI: It's more universal, not so much Japanese or Asian.

YF: Yeah, yeah. It would be something like that, yeah.

MI: So, looking back on your life, what do you think?

YF: I think I had a pretty good life. I'm grateful for all the help. Like even guys like Caesar Tsutsumi. The opportunity I had, to go to school, to serve in the [military] service, to do things for the community. You know, things like that. I think we all can really appreciate that. You know, if you would think too, Doctor or Jane. You have contributed so much so you can—you don't have to be nasty about it. You can say, "Yeah, I've done my part."

[Fujitani later added that he considers his most important contribution to the community to be the "Living Treasures program" because "it seems to be accepted by all people."]

MI: How do you feel about the next generation?

YF: They're different, for one thing. I can see that in my grandson, for instance. Well, but, well you don't have to worry about that. Do what you can do in your own way and that's it. Let them worry about their methods and things.

MI: Very good. Anything else you want to add?

YF: No, no.

MI: Do you want to ask him anything?

JK: No. It's okay.

MI: For me, thank you very much for sharing the story.

JK: Thank you, thank you very much.

YF: See, but we're all dependent on people. Especially, now, I feel my dependency quite a bit.

MI: Physical?

YF: But even before. Doctor, he used to take care of my wife.

JK: Mmm, hmm.

YF: You know, we're all dependent beings.

MI: We are. Okay. Thank you very much.

YF: No, thank you.