JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAI'I

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Naomi Hirano-Omizo [NH]

January 17, 2020

Interviewer: Mel Inamasu [MI]

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 January 17, 2020, and we're on the campus of Punahou School to interview Mrs. Naomi Hirano-Omizo who is a teacher here in Japanese language. We have interviewed Mrs. Omizo before in relation to her family history of the Hirano Store on the Big Island. We interviewed her with her mother but today, we're going to focus on her life, her work and what she has been doing in relation to her family legacy. We're not going to repeat what's already been recorded but we'll be focusing on her life and what she has been doing for her students. My name is Mel Inamasu. I'm a volunteer at the Japanese Cultural Center and I'm going to have Naomi reintroduce herself with her full name, month and year of her birth and where she was raised.

NH: My name is Naomi Hirano-Omizo and my birth date is February 16, 1953. I was born and raised on the Big Island of Hawaii. I grew up in the very, very small community of Glenwood, ten miles from the Volcanoes National Park on your way to Hilo, going north.

MI: And Glenwood is the location of your family store which last year celebrated its 100th Anniversary.

NH: That's correct, so this year, February 22, will mark its 101st birthday.

MI: We have recorded that story with your mother telling us the historical details. Today I would like to focus on you. We've heard a little about growing up with grandma and how grandma [would] play student in encouraging you to go into teaching, which you did.

NH: Without me knowing. (chuckle)

MI: She did so successfully, but tell me about your education. Where did you go to high school and what happened to you after high school and how you ended up where you are today?

NH: As I said, I grew up in Glenwood and I grew up with my grandparents, fortunately, who were both from Japan. Therefore, when I was very little until I was nine years old, I heard a lot of Japanese. My grandmother told me that I spoke Japanese when I was little until I entered kindergarten at Mountain View Elementary School. I don't remember that.

MI: Are you a *Sansei*?

NH: I am mostly *Sansei* because on my father's side, my grandparents were both from Japan. They're from Shizuoka. And on my mother's side, my grandfather was from Hiroshima and my mother's mother was born in Paia, Maui.

MI: *Sansei-Yonsei.*

NH: Right. Anyway, mostly *Sansei*. I think of myself as *Sansei*. I think this goes back a little bit but as I said, I grew up with my grandparents and listened to their Japanese but I never really learned it. I take that back. Part of the reason I wanted to talk about this was because my grandfather was a Japanese school teacher, which was one of the reasons he was interned. So, I attended his small little Japanese school. At that point, it was just once a week.

MI: Where was it located?

NH: It was located just across the store. He was the Japanese school principal and teacher. By the time I grew up, it was a very small group of students. I would say maybe something between fifteen and twenty students. It was a one-room schoolhouse. It used to be a very big Japanese school during my father's generation, but because the population of Japanese lessened by the time I went, it was something like fifteen to twenty. And so, my grandfather was actually my first mentor. I would walk as a kindergartener across the street with my grandfather because there was that big Volcano Highway. He would hold my hand and up till then, he was grandpa. But when I turned five, he became my *Sensei* now.

MI: Did he treat you differently in school versus at home?

NH: I don't know that he treated me differently, but I felt differently towards him because I saw him in a new light. And I remember him teaching because it was just once a week and basically learned just hiragana. When I was in third grade, when I was nine, he passed away as a result of leukemia. The Japanese school just kind of closed, so my formal Japanese education just stopped there.

MI: Did he try to teach you at home, while you were at home? Or did he just restrict the teaching to class?

NH: No, I don't think he tried to push that role of "I'm your *Sensei*" on me when I was home.

MI: You mentioned briefly his internment and we have that story in a previous interview. Basically, because he was a Japanese language teacher, that was the reason that he was…

NH: Well, there were many reasons. One was that he was a Japanese school teacher. The other is that he had a business. And the other one, which is definitely a reason that he was taken, was because there were mostly farmers in that community. Most of them came from Japan as *Issei* and were not so very highly educated.

MI: And, they didn't speak English.

NH: They hardly spoke any English and so my grandfather was pretty much the only person who could do the paperwork on the American side. Yearly, they would have to report.

MI: He spoke English.

NH: He spoke English.

MI: How did he learn English?

NH: Well, because he was a businessman, he had to speak with his customers. To do business, he had to speak English. But also, I learned later that shortly after he arrived, he was in the plantation, didn't enjoy the plantation work at all, started to work at the plantation store, and there, he picked up a lot of English. Before the plantation store, he and his older brother for some reason decided that they wanted to go work at Parker Ranch. They worked at Parker Ranch for a short while, but when they worked at Parker Ranch, they had to go up to the mountains and be away for several weeks, so their diet was very limited. They had to eat basically poi, sour poi and dried beef. I don't know if that was the reason but he contracted beriberi. I don't know what causes beriberi.

MI: Thiamine deficiency.

NH: He only had poi. So it was basically poi and jerk meat. I don't know if that caused it, but anyway he contracted beriberi and so his older brother told him, "You need to go back. You need to go to the hospital. But I think that you should study at the Hilo Boarding School." So he started studying there and he also started taking correspondence courses from Waseda Daigaku, Waseda University. And so, he kind of raised his literacy in English and Japanese shortly after the plantation days. And because of that, he was able to do all the Consular work for the people in his community.

MI: And that was part of the reason that he was picked up.

NH: Right. So for those three reasons, he really had no chance. I mean, he was going to be taken.

MI: The other part that was interesting, now that I think about it is - he was taken away from the family, but at some point, I think we asked you this, the family was offered an opportunity to join him in the internment camp on the mainland.

NH: I'm not sure if they were offered to, or other families were offered to, but my father's family, by the time the war started, were all older. My dad was twenty-two, twenty-three and the youngest son was in high school. They had the business and they were able, between my dad and his two sisters and my grandmother, to keep the business going.

MI: That's what grandpa wanted.

NH: That was probably what grandpa wanted.

MI: When he came back, as I recall, after four years in camp, he had something to come back to.

NH: He had something to come back to, and not only did he have something to come back to but actually, before [his departure], they had all of these bills that they owed. But because they were very close to the KMC, the Kilauea Military Camp, there were a lot of military going back and forth.

MI: It got busier [during the wartime].

NH: It actually got busier.

MI: And as I recall, at some point, someone had asked your mom to start providing meals?

NH: That was later, about ten years later. [Note: actually thirty years later] So actually the

three siblings, my dad and his two sisters [helped pay the bills]. One sister was working in Hilo and one sister helped at the store. My dad actually did not work in the store very much. He was farming. He was with the U.S.E.D. [United States Engineers Department] where he learned a lot of carpentry.

MI: He wasn't married at the time.

NH: He was twenty-three at the time. And he also was going into the forest and picking hapu because he had a very good neighbor who was a rancher…

MI: I remember that story.

NH: He always said "It was because I was twenty-three. I couldn't have done it even ten years later." But he was at his prime and he could do all of that. So, with all of those things, my grandfather actually came back and was just so appreciative of what his family had done.

MI: So, unlike some of the other internees, because of his family, he was able to resume his life.

NH: That's right.

MI: So many others never did.

NH: Yes, and even debt free because my dad and his sisters had paid off everything. So, I know my grandfather was till his dying day, very grateful to his siblings [children] and his wife.

MI: As you were growing up, grandma and grandpa were involved in raising you. Did he ever talk to you about his internment experience?

NH: No. Unfortunately, my grandfather died when I was nine. So that's when my Japanese education stopped, too. Because after that, there was no Japanese school. No, I think I was too young to even—I used to hear things about, "Oh, he was on the mainland" and I remember he had this petrified wood and it was on his desk and someone told me, "Oh, that's when grandpa was interned." But I didn't really understand what all that meant until I was much older and grandma and my dad and my mom told me the story of grandpa's internment.

MI: What did they tell you or how did they tell you the story? Why did they tell you the story?

NH: I think the whole family had such respect for my grandfather and I think I mentioned…

MI: This was after he passed away [that] they told you the story?

NH: After he passed away, because at nine, you don't think very much. And I really wish—now I wish that I had been smart enough at eight years old to think of asking my grandfather questions.

MI: What kind of man was he? Was he an angry man?

NH: No, he wasn't.

MI: Intellectual type?

NH: Intellectual type but he also was the funniest person and when people in the community thought of Hirano *Sensei*, they had this image of him, and even my uncle on my mother's

side told me that he was someone—gray hair, glasses, always looked nice with his tie and he always had a hat on. They had respect for him. They thought he was kind of a stern person but at home, he was just a character. When my friends used to come over, we had a big dinner table and we'd all sit around it and when my friends would come, he would be sitting in the middle, right across me every night. He would entertain us with the eating and he'd say, "Oh, would you like feed me my food over here, over here?" And he would also do that, even in Japanese school, with the kids. He taught us—he was telling the older kids about birds in Japan, then he'd talk about mynah birds and he said, "Do you know how mynah birds walk?" He said they walked differently from other birds and he would imitate how the mynah birds walked. So that was a very different person from the image people had of him. And so, he was actually a very warm person, but very intellectual.

MI: He spent four years…

NH: He spent four years [in internment] because he got picked up December 7th, three o'clock [p.m.], and returned November, 1945.

MI: As I recall, he looked at it as an educational experience for him?

NH: It was, right. And because the internees from Hawaii tended to be the more educated ones—the teachers, the priests, the business leaders, and so forth—they all were very knowledgeable about certain aspects.

MI: And they learned from each other.

NH: They created classes and they learned from each other. So he took bookkeeping classes, horticulture classes, things that pertained to his life. When I retire, I would like to go through his things more carefully, but we have all his practice bookkeeping notebooks and everything. I guess they had assignments and they had to write—barley, how many bales and all of that sort of thing. Someone had taught them all those things. So, for those reasons, I believe that he thought of it as a four year education. Recently, as I teach about the internment experience to my students, I realize also that I think what grandpa was talking about was not just the academic, the book learning, but just having the time to think about life. And having the time to think about different—all of those people, as I said, were intelligent people.

MI: How old was he at that time when he was picked up?

NH: He was in his fifties. So he was there with all of these highly educated, intelligent people and I am sure, they had these very deep conversations about life. Because, you know, they had the time. If he was just at home, he would be so busy with work. He wouldn't have time to think about those things.

MI: After he came back, did he maintain any of those relationships with any internees from the Big Island?

NH: I know there were a few but I don't know that. I think that there were some because he loved to write letters. I'm sure that he corresponded with some of them. He used to talk about certain ones of them. I remember names that my grandmother would say, but I don't know how much actual contact he had with them. I think he thought of it as a four-year education, not only because he took those courses in bookkeeping but I think also,

he learned a lot about life and had time to think about what life was. He did get to travel a lot.

MI: From camp to camp?

NH: Camp to camp.

MI: Did he understand, did anyone understand how and why these things were happening? Why they didn't just stay in one place?

NH: I don't think they knew why they were moved. And, they were on the trains, going from camp to camp, long distances, and the MPs or the soldiers [who] would be in there told them they couldn't look out the window. But when no one was looking, he would look out the window and very early on, he saw what a grand, great country America was. And he knew Japan was going to lose the war. He saw all those oil fields going [by]. He said he knew. And, I'm sure that's one of the things they talked about, too. He therefore, had a really, despite what happened, he had such love and respect for the United States, too.

MI: Now, let's talk about your father. Those were difficult years for your father. Did he ever talk to you about that, the struggles to keep the store…?

NH: Not so much about that. Again, he didn't want to toot his own horn. But my mother told me a lot of those stories.

MI: What kinds of stories?

NH: About him going into the hapu forest working late at night, all by himself.

MI: Just the hours of work. One job to another.

NH: Yes.

MI: But never complained.

NH: Yes, but my mother, of course, did not see that because she wasn't married to him. So it must have come from either my father to her or my grandmother. And he would come back and have a quick peanut butter [sandwich] after U.S.E.D. carpentry. He was a wonderful carpenter because he was trained with the U.S.E.D. And [he would] come back from that, work in the garden with his cucumbers and whatever he was growing until sundown. And then, he would go into the forest.

MI: When his father came back, then he just turned everything over to his father, and he went on his own way? What did your father do after his father came back?

NH: When his father came back, then grandfather took over the farm and my aunty got married so grandpa was involved with the store. He did pick up the Japanese school again and I don't think they did the hapu business anymore. My father went back and he became a mechanic, working first with his brother-in-law, Kea'au Service Station.

MI: Sister's husband?

NH: Sister's husband, the sister who got married during the war. Then, I'm not sure how he found out but then he started working at Hilo Motors which was, at that time, this very big car company. He was a mechanic there. His brother-in-law actually gave him blessings to go work there because it was a much bigger company, better benefits and so forth. So, when I was growing up, my father was working at Hilo Motors. And my father

actually got married when he was thirty-two, kind of older for that generation. My mother was eleven years younger so there was a big age gap, but they had a wonderful marriage. After my grandfather passed away in 1962, my father slipped back into the business and he took over and my mother was right there with him. Grandma was still helping around in the store and my sister and I worked every weekend in the store.

MI: And they took care of the store for how many years?

NH: Thirty plus years, from 1962. And then, they wanted to retire and fortunately my cousin who is actually on my mother's side, Eric Inouye, still runs the store. He wanted to continue the business so my parents leased the business to him. My sister and I grew up in the store and my mother, till this day, apologizes to us because she feels that we had no social life in high school.

MI: How did you feel about that? You agree with her?

NH: No. My sister—we talked about it and we both said no. We didn't think so. We were living way in the country. There was nothing to do anyway. And, we just knew that we had to help.

MI: It was just part of life.

NH: Yes.

MI: Were the other children playing as far as you were aware?

NH: Yes, they were going out but you know, we were way in the country. A lot of my friends didn't have a huge social life like the people in Hilo. But we always tell my mom that because we were in the store, I think we learned a lot about how to deal with people just by watching our parents. My sister's also a teacher.

MI: How did both of you become teachers? Did someone suggest that to you, as you were growing up?

NH: I don't know. In those days, especially way over there in the country, the only three options I had—I don't know about my sister because she's ten years younger, but in those days, in Hilo in my generation for a girl, the options were secretary, nurse or teacher.

MI: What you're saying is what's in the textbooks. Why were those the only three options?

NH: I don't know. Maybe that's what my parents told us.

MI: Were there obstacles, glass ceilings, in Hawaii?

NH: Maybe, but you didn't have models.

MI: What kind of children did you grow up with in your area? A variety of ethnic groups?

NH: Yes, a variety.

MI: Not primarily Japanese?

NH: When I grew up, there still were quite a few Japanese—grandchildren of the *Issei*, my grandfather's generation.

MI: In a typical class in your elementary school, what percentage would be Japanese?

NH: So, my dad went to Glenwood School but that closed. By the time I went to school, we

went to Mountain View School five miles away. We had to wait for the bus every morning and it would pick up the kids from Volcano, all the way down.

MI: So what percentage were Japanese?

NH: In my class, I would say half, about half.

MI: My impression was that there were a lot of Caucasians in Glenwood. Is that correct or wrong?

NH: No, by the time I grew up, there were few. The national park had a lot because they had the rangers, the superintendents. So Volcano had a large *Hakujin* [Caucasian] population. But in Glenwood, when I grew up, maybe about half Japanese and we had Polish families, Portuguese families, a couple of Haole families.

MI: Hawaiians, Filipinos?

NH: Not many Hawaiians. Half of the Japanese were Okinawans.

MI: Was there a plantation nearby?

NH: No, it wasn't a plantation village. It was the terminal for the train station, right. So, during my dad's time, there were dairy farmers, ranchers, farmers. Very early on, some people–they did charcoal business. So I think that was mostly what they were.

MI: Two stories we hear about the Big Island are the two tidal waves. That did not impact you folks at all?

NH: No, [it] did not impact us because we lived way in the mountains.

MI: Did you need to help the victims?

NH: There was the one [tidal wave] in the nineteen sixties and I know my auntie, my dad's younger sister, lived in Hilo so they were affected somewhat by the tidal wave. We were never directly affected by it. But continuing the story about Mountain View School, my sister went ten years later. In her class, only four of them were Japanese.

MI: Four out of how many?

NH: I would say about twenty-five.

MI: The demographics were changing.

NH: Right. So when I was there, about half were Japanese, a good number were Filipino and even in my sister's class, there were a number of Filipino, a few *Hakujin*, a few Portuguese. But in just ten years, the demographics completely changed.

MI: [For] high school, where did you go to school?

NH: I went to Hilo High School. So that was, again, a long bus ride to Hilo. So therefore, we didn't have much of a social life because we went in the morning, went to school, bus picked us up and brought us back home. So that's why, I don't think I missed very much. I was in a few clubs but we never had band or other things in the country school so we never could continue that sort of thing in Hilo. I graduated in a class of over seven-hundred students so I don't know all of my classmates.

MI: From all over the island?

NH: All the way from Volcano to Papaikoʻu. From there, they went to Laupahoehoe, in Honokaa.

MI: What year did you graduate?

NH: I graduated in 1971.

MI: And then, what happens to you?

NH: Can I also add here? When my sister [was there], they split Hilo in two, and there was Waiakea. So she was [in] the second graduating class of Waiakea High School. So after high school, I was kind of this mousy girl and I didn't want to necessarily leave the island. So I went to the University of Hawaii at Hilo which was, now that I think about it, sort of fate that I ended up there. Because I decided—in high school I took French…

MI: Did they offer Japanese?

NH: They did, but for some reason I don't know why, I didn't choose Japanese. I took French. And then I went to UH Hilo and for some reason, I decided I was going to take Japanese but the Japanese classes were all closed. There was this one [available] class that was a differently structured one, but I really wanted a regular class. So I went back—you know how you can go back and change your classes. I changed another one of my classes and then I found out that [in] the Japanese class that I wanted, someone had dropped. So I switched from the other class to that class and I later found out that the person who dropped that class was my classmate from Hilo High School whose name was also Naomi. Naomi Hisanaga. We were in the same homeroom [in high school] because she was Hi and I was Hi. And I remember she was a couple people ahead of me [in line to change courses]. She dropped the course and I was able to take the course.

MI: So she changed your life.

NH: Yes. I never saw her after that. But I took the class and we were so fortunate because we had this teacher called Dr. Tazuko Monane. She was Japanese from Osaka but she was married to this professor also in Hilo. Her husband was a professor of sociology at UH Hilo. Anyway, I had Monane *sensei*. I started off with Japanese 101.

MI: Was that fair to the other students?

NH: I don't know, but I wasn't that advanced. My listening was good but I really started learning Japanese from then. I really learned from the beginning, too.

MI: So, there was a lot for you to learn.

NH: No, I think I did have an advantage because I heard it at home, but I think almost everybody in the class were Japanese descendants. Everybody had a little bit, I think. But I'm glad I started with the very basics because I correctly learned all the grammar that I was supposed to know, not the broken Japanese. So I learned all the grammar and she was such an excellent teacher. Dynamic teacher. Young teacher. And she was my teacher for four years except for one year.

MI: When current Japanese from Hawaii go back to Japan and they start trying to speak Japanese, they get laughed at because they're speaking country, Hiroshima Japanese.

NH: (chuckle) Right.

MI: Is that what you learned? They were teaching you the city Japanese?

NH: Oh, yes. Standard Japanese in college.

MI: So it was different from what Grandpa spoke?

NH: Okay, so I was fortunate in that sense too because the Japanese I heard at home, yes it was kinda local, but my grandparents were from Shizuoka which is closer to Tokyo. And they were both Japanese language teachers. So their Japanese was more standard than a lot of other local Japanese.

MI: Farmers.

NH: So, I had that advantage too. But anyway, Monane *sensei* was wonderful and I learned so much from her. I just grew to love Japanese. And I was still kind of on the shy side but she really pushed me. She encouraged me to try for this scholarship and that scholarship, which I would never have done if she had not pushed me.

MI: You're talking about scholarships in Hilo or somewhere else?

NH: To go to Japan. I had never gone to Japan.

MI: She wanted you to go to Japan.

NH: Yes. And she took us. There was a group of us. She took us to workshops, she took us to conferences, she wrote me recommendations so I could study at Stanford one summer.

MI: Were you the best student?

NH: I don't know that I was the best student, but even to [study at] Stanford, there were two of us. She would take, even to conferences, she would take groups of us. And, at the end, the final one, my grandmother had read in the *Hawaii Hochi* or somewhere about this scholarship to Japan, the Crown Prince Akihito Scholarship to Japan. She gave me the article. She said, "Show this to your *sensei* and see what she says" because she knew that *sensei* was always encouraging us to try out for this and that and everything. So I did go to Japan, through Monane *sensei*. It was a short trip to Japan with students from all over the world who were studying Japanese.

MI: And how many from Hawaii?

NH: I think there were only two of us. I was the only one from Hilo and the other one, I think, was from here [Oahu]. But I got to meet many people from South America, Europe and we toured Japan. It was my first experience. Very eye-opening. The train system in Tokyo was, my gosh, I didn't know what was going on. I had to follow these other people from Peru and all because I didn't know how to ride a train. From Hilo. (chuckles)

MI: What year was this?

NH: That was the middle of my sophomore year. It was winter time and I froze like crazy. Yes, and so I had that experience and she had me go to Stanford in the summer of my junior year. And in the senior year, I showed her that article that my grandmother showed me. She said, "Yes, definitely. Try." She wrote me this recommendation and I got called by the Japanese Consulate. "Can you come for an interview?"

MI: In Japanese?

NH: No, because the people on the committee did not all speak Japanese. In fact, one of them, I will always remember, was Mr. Siegfried Ramler who was the Director of the Wo International Center. He was on that committee. He started up as a German teacher here [Punahou], became department chair, then he became Director of Instruction. Then, when the Wo Center was built, he became the Director of the Wo International Center. He was actually the first Director of the Wo Center. He was the one who conceived of the idea of the Wo International Center. But I remember he was the only *Hakujin* on that committee. He was such a friendly person and I was so nervous because there were all these Japanese or Japanese American people on that committee giving me this very stern [look]. I was so scared. But Mr. Ramler was the only one smiling at me. I had my interview and then flew back to the Big Island. My mother came with me and we just waited. I actually was not selected. I was the alternate. But something happened to one of the—I know! That person got the *Monbusho* scholarship, an even bigger scholarship that the Japanese government gives/award—the Department of Education scholarship from Japan. So I got the Crown Prince Akihito Scholarship.

MI: And what did that entail?

NH: That meant that it paid for my education in Japan. At that time, it was four thousand dollars which doesn't sound like much now, but it covered my whole tuition.

MI: How many years?

NH: Just for one year. I had already finished my four years at UH Hilo graduating in Japanese. It was a linguistic education major but I studied a lot of Japanese and linguistics and got my BEd in elementary education. So I did student teaching at Waiakeawaena Elementary in Hilo.

MI: So, you go there for a year.

NH: I was there for a year at International Christian University. Monane *sensei* highly recommended ICU because it's still a relatively new school but its strengths were language teaching and linguistics.

MI: So, for one year you took language courses there.

NH: Yes, I took language courses.

MI: Were you able to compete from what you had learned at Hilo?

NH: No, but they place …

MI: Were you competing with Japanese…

NH: No, no. For the Japanese language courses, there were a lot of students from foreign countries. A lot of students at that time from the U.C. schools—U.C. Berkeley, Irvine. A lot of California girls. And there were placement tests so we were in a Japanese language class with other foreigners. But the good thing about ICU which is why Monane *sensei* recommended it is, other than that class, you could take other classes with Japanese people sitting right next to you.

MI: How did that work out?

NH: It was difficult but some classes, depending on who the professor was because ICU has

Japanese professors as well as professors from the United States, England. If the professor felt comfortable in the language, it was taught in [that language], so I took classes in English and classes in Japanese. And unlike some of the other schools like Waseda and Keio where they have separate international divisions, ICU is just one school. So, we weren't just isolated on a separate campus as foreigners. We actually were with Japanese people so we got to mingle with Japanese. The one thing that I couldn't do, which I wish I could have done because I had already received my B.A., [was that] I couldn't stay in the dormitories. That would have been an even more wonderful experience because then, I would be mixing with Japanese people. But then, because of that, I was able to live with a host family. And so, I went through the ICU system and I lived with a host family in Tokyo. It took me almost an hour to commute. Distance wise, it wasn't very far but I had to go a roundabout way, catch a train, and then transfer to another line and then go from there on the bus all the way to my school. But that was a wonderful experience, too. So I wouldn't say I regret not being in a dorm but I also was able to get that experience. I lived with a family with a husband and wife, two very young kids. So that was good because I could talk with the kids and besides me, there was one girl from France and one girl from Thailand. The girl from Thailand had been in Japan for a very, very long time so she was quite good. The girl from France had been living in Japan for a year before me. So both of them could speak Japanese much better than I could when I arrived.

MI: So, you learned from them.

NH: Yes, and about what to do and things like that. And after the year was nearly done, I thought there's still so much for me to learn. I really loved that experience and so I talked to my parents and because I [had] stayed in Hilo and they really did not spend too much money on my college education, they said, "You can stay for another year." So I extended my stay another year but for the second year, I decided I'm going to try and live on my own. I found an apartment through the school just across the campus and I lived on my own. In the middle of the lettuce fields which are now not lettuce fields, there was one apartment building.

MI: And studied primarily the language.

NH: I could just continue the second year there, [taking] more advanced courses, and I learned so much not only in school but this time, I had to learn how to pay my water bill, my electric bill, how to handle all of that, do my grocery shopping and so, that was a wonderful experience too. Which I now can bring into the classroom. Those two experiences, with the host family and living on my own, I still carry with me and it's in the textbook. All those experiences, all those mistakes I made, they're in the textbook. (chuckle)

MI: What textbook are you talking about?

NH: The textbook that we wrote at Punahou School, with Peterson *sensei*.

MI: Who is Peterson *sensei*?

NH: She is the calligraphy [teacher at JCCH]. She was my colleague here for many, many years and…

MI: Hiromi Peterson?

NH: Hiromi Peterson, right. So, she was at Maryknoll School. She [came to Punahou] about four years before I did. And when I arrived, she said she was very disappointed because the students, very intelligent students at Punahou School, when they left the program, they could write *kanji* and things like that but they couldn't speak. She said, "Something's wrong." And she said, "If anyone could write a textbook, it's us here at Punahou School because we have the largest staff and we have the support system." And so, she had just started the idea of doing it. She had her own children in high school and so she would ask them, "What kinds of things do you talk about?" because up to that point, we were using college texts from the UH, things that were totally not interesting to high school students, about the Embassy, things that high school students would not be interested in.

MI: So, after your two years in Japan, you came back to Hawaii?

NH: So I came back to Hawaii and then I went back to UH here, did some graduate work.

MI: Japanese language?

NH: Japanese language, linguistics, that sort of thing. And I also got into the College of Education, picked up a lot of education courses, this time to teach at the secondary level because at that time, there were no jobs because I was trained in elementary education. There was nothing where I could combine Japanese and elementary education. And so, I did that. Actually, I didn't finish my Masters degree. I got a PD [Professional Diploma] degree and then, at that time, there were no positions open in the public schools in Japanese language.

MI: What year are we talking about?

NH: This was 1979. But there were a couple of maternity leave-type things at the end of my student teaching which I did at Roosevelt High School under Mrs. Ernell Nishiyama, a wonderful role model for me. She was a lovely person but she was such a strict teacher and she wanted things a certain way. That was wonderful for me because I did not know how to say "No" to students.

MI: As a young teacher?

NH: As a young teacher. And so, when I started student teaching with her, she trained me to be this kind of *kibishii*, strict person who could hold my line. I learned that from her so I went and did a couple of small, short term subbing assignments at McKinley High School. And then, I started teaching at Mid Pacific Institute because private schools seemed to be starting their Japanese language programs.

MI: When did you come to Punahou?

NH: I was at Mid Pac from 1980 till 1988 and as I mentioned, I'm another person here because I had all these wonderful mentors who have made great changes in my life. Starting with my grandpa, Monane *sensei*, Nishiyama *sensei* for a short term and then, when I was at Mid Pac, Miyoko Kamikawa *sensei* who was the teacher there. For some reason, she had enough confidence to hire me even if I was still a very green teacher.

MI: These teacher mentors—are they all from Japan, or are there some local ones?

NH: Monane *sensei* was from Osaka. She was teaching at UH Hilo but she's from Japan.

Nishiyama *sensei* was Ernell Nishiyama. I think she's about *Sansei*, too. And then, Miyoko Kamikawa *sensei* who was at Mid Pac grew up here but she was *Kibei*. So she got stuck in Japan during World War II. She's of Okinawan descent, but she went to school in Kyoto. She says her Japanese is stronger than her English because she moved there, and she got stuck in Japan for a long time. She trained to be a Japanese teacher and eventually moved back here and married a *Nisei* here. So, I worked with her, learned so much from her. I learned leadership skills, the heart. She had a beautiful heart. She was running this summer program at Mid Pac because they had dormitories there. Students from Japan would come during the summer and she was running that program. She sort of groomed me to take over and she taught me a lot of things.

MI: So, why did you end up coming to Punahou?

NH: I was there for eight years and Hiromi Peterson—she wasn't someone who I knew very well but at that time, the HATJ, which is the Hawaii Association of Teacher of Japanese, was a Japanese teachers' professional organization that was very, very strong, very vibrant. And so, we were both kind of young teachers and we would take kids to camps. I would take my kids from Mid Pac, she would take her kids from Maryknoll and we got to know each other through all those camps. Then meanwhile, she came to Punahou. She was here four years before me and she called me. I was completely happy at Mid Pac. I loved Mid Pac but I thought, "Wow, Punahou, it's a much larger school." And that was also the year that I was getting married, that summer between Mid Pac and Punahou. And I thought, "Oh, if I ever have kids..." At that time Mid Pac was only seventh to twelfth grade; they didn't even have elementary school. "That would be wonderful if I could have my child go from K all the way to twelfth."

MI: Free tuition.

NH: Free tuition. That was on the back of my mind, too.

MI: How many free tuitions did they provide to the faculty?

NH: Two. I only used one, though. So everyone wants me to adopt their child. I say, "I'm not working that much longer." So anyway, Punahou has this wonderful reputation, too. So I decided to apply. And surprise, surprise, I got the job. And so, I left Mid Pac and started here in the fall of 1988. And I've been here ever since.

MI: Tell me about this textbook that you and Mrs. Peterson put together.

NH: So, as soon as I got here, she had already started the idea of putting together a textbook.

MI: How was this going to be different from the conventional textbooks that they were using?

NH: At that time, one of the reasons she was not satisfied was there were no high school [textbooks]. Well, there was one but it was too elementary. There were no high school textbooks in Japanese. And she thought, this was an open area that there's a need and as I said…

MI: You mean in America, there was no textbook?

NH: Yes, locally too, right. But even in America. Nowhere. There were no textbooks for Japanese high school students.

MI: But there were college textbooks?

NH: Lots of college textbooks.

MI: What's the difference, college and high school textbooks?

NH: You know, just the topics. Like I said, the high school students are not interested in talking about the Embassy and job-related things, yet.

MI: So what were they interested in? How did you change the book?

NH: Because Peterson *sensei* had children, her own children, her daughter was just starting high school. The way she approached it was, she said she just kinda tuned in to what her kids were interested in. What did they enjoy talking about?

MI: And you didn't have children at that time?

NH: Not at the time. So, she started off and I came and she said to me, "Naomi *san*, would you like to help me with this textbook?" Because she's a native Japanese…

MI: How could you help her? (chuckle)

NH: So, she's a native Japanese speaker. I'm the native English speaker. And to write a textbook, you need both. She was the lead teacher. She had the vision and she kinda had the structure, but she needed someone to write all those grammar notes. So whatever there's English, I did all that because I had the linguistic background. She was a native speaker but never learned the language, as a foreigner.

MI: It was a good combination.

NH: Yes. I had the linguistic background. So, I could write all the grammar notes, all the cultural notes, all the English translations. She did the Japanese. So it was beautiful. And when she first asked me, I said, "Okay, maybe about four or five years?" She said, "Yes, maybe four or five years." No way. It was thirty-five years and we still are revising it. (chuckle)

MI: But when did the student start using it?

NH: It started off in those days with just mimeograph [handouts] and gradually turned to Xerox.

MI: As you were writing it, you were already implementing it in your classroom?

NH: Yes. Here at Punahou too, we have that VPC, Video Production Center. So they were just copying things for us. It just started as handouts.

MI: So, you've been working on this for thirty-five years. Is that what you said?

NH: Yes. At first, it was just basically handouts and revise, revise, revise and then gradually it became bound, like those wire bindings. Then, other schools started to hear about it.

MI: Schools locally?

NH: Other local schools started to hear about it and say, "Can we use your things?" And so, Hiromi-*san* had to ask the principal and they said, "Your job is not to be writing textbooks. Your job is to teach classes."

MI: Really? Who was the president at that time?

NH: We were not supported very much so we spent a lot of our own time, weekends, doing

things and eventually, it got to a point where Hiromi said that—because too many schools started to ask us for copies of this and so it got to be copyright [problems] and all of that and so, it was recommended that we publish it.

MI: What year was this?

NH: I would say about 1995, 1996.

MI: Eight or nine years later.

NH: So the school said, "It's no longer the school's project, it's your project." And then, Peterson *sensei's* husband was a professor at UH so he wrote a lot of books. We said, "What shall we do about the royalties?" He said, "You guys aren't going to make so much money." So what shall we do? And there was another school who kinda was also at the same place where we were…

MI: Doing the same thing?

NH: Kinda doing the same thing. Again, two teachers, one native and [one] not. But at that school, the two teachers decided that they were going to take the royalties. But it gets really messy because even with us, both of us are doing it but still, we get a lot of feedback from our colleagues. We share and they're teaching too, so they shared their ideas. So, who's to say that Hiromi gets that percent, I get that percent and what about the others? That was a problem that happened at the other school. That was later but before that, Peterson *sensei's* husband, very akamai [wise] man, said, "I don't think you guys are going to make that much money. Just donate it back to the school." So, that's what we decided to do. All the royalties, whatever—the school now actually gave us some release time to work on the book because they were getting the royalties. So the school decided that they could support us. They got the royalties and we could take out whatever costs it took to write.

MI: Whatever you needed to work on it.

NH: Yes, and the school received all the royalties. Hiromi and I got nothing. To this day, we've gotten nothing. However, the only benefit we got is we got some time because we were able to work on it.

MI: The book is now in a published form?

NH: Yes.

MI: What's the name of the book, the title?

NH: *Adventures in Japanese.*

MI: And you are the two authors.

NH: Yes.

MI: Where is it sold? Just in Hawaii?

NH: Nationwide. All over the world now. And it is now the best selling secondary language textbook in the world, in the nation.

MI: Do you have to keep changing it, print new editions?

NH: Well, we made a big revision before Hiromi retired.

MI: She has retired?

NH: Yes, she has retired and we made a big revision. But things keep on changing. Every so often the publisher would ask us, can you do this or that.

MI: The children like it?

NH: Yes, it's been very successful. And so, the royalties—the publisher actually, because again, we're very ignorant, right? We're not in the publishing business. The publisher only gave us ten percent of the money they earned.

MI: To the school?

NH: Yes, and that went to the school. But even [with] that over the years, the school has earned over 1.6 million, just from the royalties from that book.

MI: But the ten percent was negotiated by the school, not by you folks.

NH: No, negotiated with Peterson and the publisher. So the publisher gives us ten percent of the royalties and Hiromi just gives it to the school. So, our donations to the school are almost two million dollars already. Who knew? We had no idea that it was going…

MI: A lot of work.

NH: Lots of work. Lots of tears. Lots of work. Difficult times.

MI: But interesting that she had the vision to recognize that there was a market.

NH: Recognized that there was that need and she just knew what was the right thing to do.

MI: So, are you folks proud?

NH: Yes. Peterson is. She talks about her book all the time. So I'm happy that I could help her.

MI: Are you both planning to keep working on it, or just let it go?

NH: No, no. Yes. And things are changing now, even at Punahou. So we don't know what will happen, how it's going to be used. It might be used in a very different way now, but we know that other schools are still using it.

MI: But the language itself changes?

NH: Language itself changes. And technology changes. So there's going to have to be changes. But the most recent news was that it's adopted in Europe. It's even being used on military bases in Japan.

MI: How about being translated into other languages, like French?

NH: We've heard that someone wants to do it in Spanish, but I don't know if it actually happened. So all of that experience in Japan, all of these things I'm telling you about, learning from my different mentors, just being in the classroom as well as what's in the textbook, that experience in Japan–I am very grateful for the Crown Prince Akihito Scholarship which is now under the umbrella of the Japan America Society of Hawaii. I'm so grateful to them for giving me those two years because I can use it in the classroom but it's all in the textbook, too. Whatever I learned. The many, many mistakes I made in Japan.

MI: You're telling us about your personal relationship to Japan. What about you and Japanese American history? Where does that come into your life?

NH: That interest comes from my grandfather's internment experience.

MI: It was a family thing, but has it become a part of your classroom?

NH: Yes.

MI: How and why did it become a part of your classroom? You have incorporated Japanese American history?

[Interruption by students. Interview moved to another building.]

MI: Your story up to this point has been about Japan.

NH: Yes.

MI: Where does Japanese American history come into your classroom?

NH: So, the first level, Japanese I, is sort of talking about oneself. Level 2 is going out into the community. Level 3 is going to Japan, modern Japan, traveling to Japan, and Level 4 is *Nihon no kokoro*, the spirit of the Japanese. So, a much deeper understanding, more of the traditional Japanese cultural arts and so forth. And this is the level I teach now. And also, the values of the Japanese people.

MI: So, there's more to teaching the language than just teaching the language?

NH: Right.

MI: You're getting into the culture.

NH: Very much so. In level 4, these are the topics we do. So Peterson *sensei* wanted to have this strong sense of *kachikan* [values], like the JCCH. In fact, she looked at those values at the JCCH too, and kind of taught these things with the idea of teaching the kids Japanese values. So with the exception of this one.

MI: You had to learn these things in order to teach it? Did you already know it?

NH: Well, as you teach it, you think about it more. It's a "*ha, naruhodo"* ["aha, that makes sense"]. You just keep on going. And so, the first one [lesson] is the life of the first generation immigrant. This is the story of—and Peterson *sensei* got to know a lot of *Nikkei* while she's living here, so the first story, it's sort of [about] a historical, fictional character.

MI: I don't know how these things are taught, so maybe you can show me something.

NH: Okay, this one, *Issei no obaasan* [first generation grandmother], by the end of this lesson, you should be able to do this kind of thing. So this particular one is about the *Issei no obasan*. This is where JCCH [comes in]. What they have there, it's just amazing how it supports us with this lesson.

MI: Tell me a little more about how this integrates with what specifically at JCCH that you're talking about?

NH: This is about the first generation Japanese. So, we take the students to JCCH. At the time, they're learning about this and the next lesson which is the internment lesson. And then,

World War II.

MI: So, you're learning history as you're learning the language.

NH: That's correct. So, we're talking about, here…

MI: That's the unique thing about your books?

NH: Yes.

MI: There's meaningful stories as you learn the [language].

NH: Right.

MI: You're learning two things at once, rather than just the language.

NH: Yes. Yes.

MI: Is that something unique to the teaching of languages?

NH: I'm not sure because at schools like Punahou, we have the luxury of teaching it for five years. So we have that extra year where we can—this is where we teach this.

MI: But how about other languages, French or Spanish? Do they do the same thing?

NH: I don't know.

MI: They try to teach history as they teach the language?

NH: Yes, I think they do, but I don't think many of them can connect to Hawaii as well as Japanese and Chinese can.

MI: These are unique stories.

NH: Yes, yes. Because this is really the story of a person who came from Japan, worked in the plantations and suffered through that, had a husband who drank too much, got beaten up, but she was still…

MI: These were the hardships of women.

NH: Yes, but at the end, she had a good family. She was very thankful for her life. So, we have here the *Holehole Bushi* [canefield workers' songs] so when we go to JCCH, the kids hear that, "Oh, yes. This is what we learned about." And the message [at JCCH] is kind of the same message. And so, even in class, we show—like Allison?

MI: [Ellison] Onizuka?

NH: No, Allison. She sings [*Holehole Bushi*].

MI: Arakawa.

NH: Arakawa. She sings all of the *Holehole Bushi* songs. We show that. And, this is kind of related but we do all these cultural notes, too, so that these would be the ones I wrote. This would be the history of Japan.

MI: Is there somewhere else at Punahou, maybe a history class, where they're learning the same stories?

NH: They do, they do. Not the stories but the history part.

MI: Yes, the history.

NH: Right.

MI: They do teach Japanese American history to some extent?

NH: Yes.

MI: Internment and the 442?

NH: Yes, but I understand that it's very, very brief and it kind of depends on who teaches it, too, the interest [of the teacher].

MI: But it's more than you got as a student?

NH: Oh, yes. When I went to Hilo High School, I learned nothing about internment.

MI: Nothing.

NH: Yes, internment.

MI: So, how did you learn?

NH: Just because of my family.

MI: I mean, to write a book—it has to be beyond the family.

NH: Oh, yes. Well, just my own research and learning.

MI: In terms of your personal learning, are there any particular mentors or books or things that got you started? Things you would consider important for someone who knows nothing about the history, like a student?

NH: Yes, I guess it's reading on my own and then listening to people, going to workshops. I had just bits and pieces from different places, resources.

MI: You never took a course from Dr. Dennis Ogawa?

NH: No, I never had him but did read many of his books.

MI: Franklin Odo?

NH: Right, I read those books.

MI: You read their books but you never took [their] classes?

NH: Yes. I have taken maybe a couple of classes [but] because I was at UH Hilo, I didn't have the opportunity to take too many of those classes. But I did listen to them when they did lectures or I had the opportunity to learn. And as I said, a lot of these things, I looked up. Like *Obon*, I know, just from my background but going to Japan gave me a different look at how the Japanese celebrated.

MI: So, the *Okage Sama de* exhibit at JCCH complements…

NH: Oh, definitely. Right.

MI: It brings it alive for the students, with the artifacts.

NH: Right. The artifacts and just the additional stories that Derrick [Iwata] might tell them. Or one of the docents might tell them[something] that we don't have in the book and that they find interesting. And still, the bulk of our students are of Japanese descent.

MI: At Punahou?

NH: Yes, in the Japanese class. We have them do one project each semester. [Note: actually each quarter] The first project is "Roots". I sent it to you, right?

MI: Yes. Tell us about "Roots".

NH: The "Roots" project is—they have to just find someone in their family who can tell them about their immigrant roots. So it's connected to this lesson.

MI: They have to interview someone and then write up a narrative?

NH: Write up whatever—well, they do the interview, they videotape [record] the whole interview, so they have that record. And then they have questions first that they have to write. And they have answers to the questions and then to help them with the language part, we give them some prompts and they write this all out.

MI: They have to convert [translate] the interview from English to Japanese for the class?

NH: Right. And some of them, the more recent Japanese kids whose grandparents are from Japan, they interview them in Japanese too.

MI: Good practice.

NH: Yes. But most of them have to convert what they heard because we have other Filipino kids and Korean kids and they have to—some of them interview their grandparents in Korean. And then they change it to Japanese. And then they do their Japanese report which is kind of basic but their English report has to be thorough. Everything that they heard has to be in that English report.

MI: So they get graded two ways.

NH: Yes. Then they have to do a presentation with this to their class. And then we ask the class—cause they're hearing all these stories—we ask them to see if they see in the case of immigration, any common threads that seem to be running through all of the reports. And it's amazing what they come up with.

MI: Like what, for example?

NH: Like, most of them had to immigrate because economic conditions in their country were very poor. They came here to make money. Some of the more recent ones came also because of better job opportunities. Their parents felt that they wanted their kids to learn English. They came to learn English.

MI: But you're also getting stories on different ethnicities.

NH: Right, but it's still the same because whether they're coming from Korea or Philippines, it's still the same.

MI: From Europe?

NH: A few, we have a few from Europe. And we even had one coming from Austria or Germany for the same reason, for a better life in America. So that same theme, it doesn't matter where they come from and what generation, it's the same theme. And the kids are "Ahh." They get that just by listening to everybody's stories.

MI: Do they get a connection to immigration today?

NH: Yes. And so, we ask them to connect with those people from South America trying to get

in [to America]. How are they feeling? Is that how your grandpa felt? What if it was your grandpa? What would you feel? We bring that up, too. We follow that up also with conversation. After they're done with all of that, then we bring in Japanese ex-pats who live in Hawaii, retired people.

MI: Where do you find those people?

NH: There's this organization of them. They do all kinds of volunteer opportunities and they come here just to talk story in Japanese, so the kids get practice in Japanese.

MI: What is the name of this organization?

NH: They no longer exist. It used to be HISLEA, and I don't know what HISLEA stands for. [Hawaii Senior Life Enrichment Program] It's called something else now. I don't even know what it is but they still come in regularly.

MI: These are all ethnicities or just Japanese?

NH: Japanese. People who speak Japanese. So they come and they—because for them, Japanese is their native language.

MI: Just to tell stories in Japanese?

NH: No, and to have our kids listen to them. And our kids, for example, they tell their stories too. Their grandpa's stories, too, to the Japanese people. And for them, they're mostly first generation Japanese, right. They don't know this whole history of the Japanese Americans. So for them, it's very interesting too.

MI: New immigrants.

NH: For them, it's interesting for them also. They learn from the kids too. So, anyway, we continue to—then Peterson *sensei* said that when she grew up, she never ever learned about the internment camps, so she was very fascinated.

MI: When did she come to Hawaii?

NH: She came as an adult when she married her husband. But the Japanese, they don't teach that. So she was fascinated about my grandpa's story.

MI: This is actually your grandpa's story in the book?

NH: In this lesson. This is my grandpa.

MI: The photograph. [in the textbook]

NH: He was in the internment camp in Missoula, Montana. And this is the store, and this is me with my grandparents.

MI: So, this part is real. Other parts, you created.

NH: Some, but yes, this one is real. The next story is her [Peterson *sensei's*] story, about her Hiroshima roots. She's from Hiroshima, her family experienced the Hiroshima bombing. Fortunately, she was not yet born but all of her family have either passed away or are ill because of the radiation exposure. So, this is her story. And in all of these stories, whether it's the *obaachan* story, my grandfather's story, her story, all of the Japanese values, *ganbare* [perseverance], *gaman* [quiet endurance], *shikata ga nai* ["can't be helped"], they're all in there. They're all in there. And that's why the Japanese

Americans did as well as they did.

MI: This is a really unique teaching [textbook].

NH: I think so. I love this edition best of all the ones we've written. It's volume 4.

MI: But not everybody gets to this level.

NH: No. Because we have five years at Punahou, we have the luxury of having this additional year for our kids.

MI: [Have] you ever thought about making this [volume 4] simpler, for number 1?

NH: It's hard.

MI: Hard?

NH: Yes. Just the concepts are really hard. So sometimes we have heritage kids who are really good at speaking but we put freshmen in this class.

MI: Unless you take it for four years, you don't get…

NH: No, it's just the maturity level [of students], of understanding the struggle and challenge. We've had freshmen take this course and even if their language skills are good, it's hard for them.

MI: It doesn't resonate.

NH: Yes. But these are mostly juniors. And they get it. Juniors get it. And then, other topics in this book are…

MI: As far as you know, is your model being implemented in other subjects by other teachers?

NH: I don't know. But even in language now, when you go to language teachers' conferences, a big topic is now social justice. And I keep on telling Hiromi, "We were doing that years ago." (chuckle) And now, it's a popular thing to do, to talk about.

MI: But you don't have the mainland [internment] story.

NH: No, we don't have the mainland story because the mainland story is very accessible. The Hawaii stories are not.

MI: So, deliberately, you…

NH: That's why JCCH is so important, because it's telling the local story. And, it's different. Very different. And so, part of the Hiroshima story is talking about Sadako, "Sadako and the Thousand Cranes" story. So, we have big projects, having to go to Pearl Harbor [where] we take our kids for community service. They go to Pearl Harbor, talk about Sadako, teach people how to fold cranes. And that's a whole different thing again.

MI: And there is a very active political movement today, as far as the cranes and advocacy for other immigrants, the new immigrants.

NH: Right, right. And then, this [part of the textbook] is going into more traditional Japan. We teach them tea ceremony, we take them to the UH teahouse. Experience a little bit and Hiromi *san* is the master calligrapher. Well, not in this class, but she teaches at JCCH, too. So she comes in and teaches that. And I dabbled in i*kebana* too, so I do a little bit of

ikebana. And there's always some of our students who do some sort of martial arts, so we have the kids do martial arts demonstrations. That's this lesson. And that one, too, is just packed with Japanese values, right. And then the next one…

MI: Have you gotten any kind of recognition or awards, you and Mrs. Peterson, for this?

NH: For the book? No, not really.

MI: Isn't this something very…

NH: But Punahou now is very supportive.

MI: Isn't this something very innovative?

NH: Yes, so we've gotten a lot of publicity from the school and Peterson *sensei*, when she goes to Hiroshima, she gets a lot of publicity. And she talks about this all the time. We had a couple of articles–we had one in the Star-Advertiser. Yes, enough. (chuckle) And so, we teach them *haiku*, too.

MI: How about in the field of education, though?

NH: No, not so much.

MI: This is not that innovative?

NH: We think it's really worthwhile.

MI: What do you think?

NH: I think what we've been doing is now, as I said, something that they are looking at—the social justice movement, about teaching language with a purpose.

MI: That's what I mean, teaching language with a purpose.

NH: Yes.

MI: Or teaching anything with a purpose. I mean it could be maybe applied to other disciplines.

NH: Right. And so, now that social justice thing—I went to the big national conference and it's a big thing. I said, "Hiromi *san*, we've been doing this for years already." (chuckle)

MI: That's why I'm wondering. So, no recognition?

NH: But unfortunately, this volume is not out. Many schools don't use this volume because they don't have enough years to teach [four years of language].

MI: Yes, but just the idea.

NH: But this is the rich curriculum, I think. [fourth year]

MI: If you can somehow translate that into volume 1 and volume 2.

NH: Yes, yes.

MI: It's just the teaching method. It must be very effective.

NH: The kids first start off with, "Oh yes, the project doesn't sound so interesting." But once they do it, because it's their family, right…

MI: Have you seen growth in your fourth year class because of this book?

NH: I think so. Well, Hiromi thinks that nationwide, because so many schools are using it, it's gone up partly because they now have the standardized national AP exam and all those have really boosted the level of Japanese language education. But I think this had something to do with it, too. Taking some credit.

MI: Very interesting.

NH: And then, we get into more modern issues like the environment. We talk about—you know how Japanese always recycle, why it's been around in Japan for so long.

MI: She brings that in? You're right, Japan is way ahead of America.

NH: Yes, way ahead. So we have this lesson on recycling and we talk about why Japan recycles and why we should be recycling more.

MI: Amazing.

NH: So, I love to teach this volume. (chuckle) Because, to me, this is really the heart.

MI: It's interesting that you're not just teaching the history part but actually the culture, traditions and values…

NH: Right. I'm trying to connect to them, making it worthwhile for them. Finding out about their families and the second project we do is the "War" project where they have to go and interview someone in their family who has experienced war, preferably World War II, but if not, any war.

MI: Have you seen Viet Nam War stories?

NH: Oh, yes, even the Middle East, we've seen those, too. And some Viet Nam, some Korean. We used to get a lot of World War II but it's getting less and less. And the ones they get are stories seen from a child's eyes. Not like ten, fifteen years ago when we first started, where it was an adult's perspective.

MI: You have a repository of the better stories?

NH: Some, yes. We haven't been really good about it. And if they are internment related, we send some over to JCCH, too.

MI: The other wars—you must have quite a collection.

NH: Right. And the same thing we ask them, "What are some common themes about war?" They all come out and say, "Oh, we should not have wars. It's just terrible." So, even if they come out learning that, that's a good thing.

MI: Are there other teachers at Punahou doing the same kind of things? Or they're just ordering the book and …

NH: I think at Punahou, a lot of them are actually trying to get away from textbooks and…

MI: Creating.

NH: Yes.

MI: Creative teachers. And I don't know if you can measure something like this but does it show, when these kids go to college, when they grow up?

NH: We hope so.

MI: Is there any way you can measure something like that? That you're having an impact?

NH: There's no way to measure, but when students come back or parents, they say, "Oh my gosh, we didn't realize our students were getting so much in their Japanese language classes." It's after the fact that they realize.

MI: Because, I think, the typical person would think you're just learning [the language].

NH: Yes. The parents are just so grateful when they do the projects and the kids find out all these things about their family. [Like] what you're doing now, recording all the history about their family…

MI: Well, I recorded one very grateful parent.

NH: Yes, that was Peterson *sensei's* student I think. That's what we want to do, to help preserve those stories and learn from those stories so they can pass them down.

MI: It's not just learning the story but actually growing the children, to make them think about these things.

NH: Right. Just like my grandfather did to me.

MI: Well, his internment camp experience—he grew from that.

NH: Yes.

MI: Very good. I'm very impressed.

NH: Well, we try our best. But I must credit Peterson *sensei* with the vision. I just partnered off with her and helped her however I could.

MI: Thank you for sharing this story. To me, it's a remarkable story as far as what you're doing for the next generation. And, it's not just Japanese values. Just as an American teacher, as an educator, I think that's the bigger story. It's not [just] about Japanese Americans.

NH: Right. Connecting with things like war and immigration.

MI: Yes, and these are ongoing political issues.

NH: Very current topics. And if they can see how their own families connect to what the immigrants are going through now, or the racial prejudice that the Japanese Americans experienced during the war, it's still happening now. If they can make that connection...

MI: And also, elevating them to another level where they can take that history and knowledge maybe to a new level where they can recognize that with that history comes a responsibility in terms of advocacy for other minorities.

NH: Right, right.

MI: Thank you for what you're doing.

NH: It's enjoyable to see the kids, especially these older kids. I enjoy teaching these older kids because [they're] more mature and you can see how they grow.

MI: Well, you can see it just from day one of your class to the end of your class.

NH: Yes, and the fact that they can actually articulate that too and say, "I've grown in this

way." We've changed them.

MI: Prepared them for college and life.

NH: Right, right. Most of them, not all of them. (chuckle) Thank you very much. I'm glad I could share our story.

MI: Thank you!