JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAI'I

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Shinae Hirano (SH) and Naomi Hirano-Omizo (NH)

June 12, 2019

Interviewers: 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 June 12, 2019. We're at the conference room of the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii to interview Mrs. Shinae Hirano and her daughter, Naomi Hirano-Omizo. We're here to learn about the Hirano Store, which celebrated its 100th anniversary a year ago, very special on the Big Island. This story is very well captured by the family's narrative booklet so we're going to focus a little differently today as far as gathering information. We have learned from that booklet a lot of interesting things that we'd like to explore further. So today is going to be a different kind of interview, but whatever you can share with us, both of you together, might be very helpful for the historians. My name is Mel Inamasu, I'm a volunteer at the Resource Center and assisting me today with the interview is:

JK: Jane Kurahara, also a volunteer.

MI: I'm going to begin by having our guests just introduce themselves first. I'll start with the elder Mrs. Hirano. If you can give us your full name, maiden name included, the year and month of your birth and where you were born. Then I'll jump to your daughter and it will be a conversation. We'll ask you questions. Why don't you introduce yourselves?

SH: Well, I'm Shinae. My maiden name was Yanabu, Hiroshima-*ken*, Hirano.

MI: Born where?

SH: I was born in Mountain View [Note: on December 6, 1929].

MI: On the Big Island.

NH: I am Shinae's daughter and my name is Naomi Yukie Hirano-Omizo. I was born in Hilo, Hawaii, on the Big Island.

MI: And month and year?

NH: I was born on February 16, 1953.

MI: So I'm going to begin by having you go back one generation. Tell us, we'll start on your father's side first. Give us the full name of your father and if you know maybe

when he came to Hawaii, or when he was born here. Tell us a little bit about your father.

SH: My father came from Hiroshima. His name was Gengoro Yanabu. He married my mother, Hisayo Yamamoto.

MI: And from the same prefecture in Japan?

SH: She was born in Paia, Maui [Note: Her parents came from Hiroshima].

MI: If you can, on your mother's side, can you go back one generation? I'm trying to find out who came and when they came to Hawaii.

SH I don't know too much.

MI: Do you know if her parents worked on Maui on the sugar cane plantation?

SH: I think he was a mason.

MI: Your father came to Hawaii at what age and roughly why did he come to Hawaii?

SH: I don't know too much but the three sons, he had two more brothers, Morio and Jiro. We wondered why, in Japan especially, they would keep the oldest son, *chonan*, at home, but three of the sons came to Hawaii and one went to the mainland. One lived in Hilo. So two brothers lived in Hilo. They all came to Hawaii.

NH: But he also had sisters who remained in Japan.

SH: They remained in Japan.

MI: But there was no other male in the family who remained in Japan?

SH: No.

MI: That is interesting.

SH: That is interesting.

NH: They were from, you know the exact city right, in Kure? Was it, you told me the name of the city they were from in Hiroshima? Shin something?

MI: If you don't remember, that's fine. Father came here and then moved to Maui? Was that how they met?

SH: No, my father came to …

NH: He came to work on the plantation too, but he didn't like working on the plantation.

SH: He couldn't.

MI: So what did he do?

SH: He became a bus driver.

MI: Where?

SH: Mountain View.

NH: Mountain View to Hilo.

MI: How did Mountain View meet Paia, Maui?

SH: *Shinpai*, *shinpai* marriage.

MI: Really?

NH: *Omiai*. Because her family—I just asked her this yesterday—but her [mother's] family apparently moved to the Big Island from Maui when she was very young. And her father was a mason. I don't know what he was previous to that, but he worked on that Wailuku Bridge, right? That singing bridge in Hilo that connects the town to the Hamakua side. And I remember her telling me that that was one of the big jobs he had. So they were living in Shinmachi, right? On the Big Island, the part that got wiped out from the tidal wave, in Waiakea.

SH: Tidal wave.

NH: And I'm not sure how they met, because she was actually his second wife or something, right?

MI: Okay, we're going to move to your husband's side now. We're going to maybe get some help from your daughter. Tell us about …

SH: Naojiro.

MI: Yes, the Naojiro family side.

SH: She knows more, because she studied in Japan. She actually visited quite often so she knows a lot.

MI: Okay, let her tell us about Naojiro Hirano.

NH: Okay. Naojiro Hirano was born in Kakegawa, Kamiuchida, Kakegawa in Shizuoka prefecture. He was born in the early 1890's.

MI: No, 1891.

NH: And his family were tea farmers originally and they also grew tangerines. That's how they started off. And gradually with the second generation, they turned to other forms of agriculture. They turned to kiwi and some of the other family members did *ume* plum, *myoga*, various kinds of other forms of agriculture. But the original farmers were tea farmers.

MI: What was the last one you mentioned?

NH: *Myoga*. It's kind of like a ginger. So he [Naojiro] grew up there and from what I understand, he was kind of a rascal boy.

MI: Was he the oldest son?

NH: No he wasn't.

SH: The second.

NH: Magosaku was the oldest of his siblings and my grandfather was the second. Kinosaku was after him.

SH: Kinosaku was the third.

MI: Why is it, just curious, but on both sides, the eldest son left Japan and came to Hawaii? We always think about their obligation to the parents. Hardships in Japan?

NH: I'm not sure why, but he, Magosaku, eventually went back to Japan. But actually the third brother, Kinosaku was the one that actually took over the family. Because I'm not sure why the oldest brother came. He was here for a little while, he called his younger brother, who was my grandfather, over and then the oldest brother went back and eventually moved to Manchuria, during that war. And pretty much lost everything in Manchuria, returned to Japan. But meanwhile, the third brother was carrying on the line. So Magosaku's family moved a little bit further into the mountains. They called themselves the *kaitaku*, sort of the pioneers of that area, a very mountainous area. Even today, when you go there it's way in the countryside. But actually, we're closest to that family because Magosaku married Haru Hanai, who was my grandmother's older sister. So my grandfather sent his wife's younger sister to Hawaii, to marry my grandfather. And my grandmother was born in nearby Kikugawa, which is also in Shizuoka. She was born, and her birthday was just the other day, June 10, 1899.

MI: Now we can get a little easier. We'll go to Naojiro in Hawaii. So how old was he when he came here?

NH: We think he was seventeen, eighteen, around that age. We're not sure exactly when.

MI: That's what I recall, a young man. What do you know about what happened to him when he came to Hawaii?

SH: I think he went to Parker Ranch, yeah?

NH: No, he came to work on the plantations, first in [Aiea].

MI: On Oahu first.

NH: On Oahu first. And then his older brother was already on the Big Island. So his older brother called him over there and they were working in the Puna area, for Ola'a Plantation, working in the cane fields. Meanwhile, older brother Magosaku and grandpa and a few others from their prefecture Shizuoka somehow found out that—and I guess they didn't really enjoy working on the plantations, but they went to work at Parker Ranch.

MI: Did they fulfill their contract and then they went or were they allowed to just move to Parker Ranch?

NH: I believe so, but I'm not sure. But they went to work at Parker Ranch, became cowhands and so they went up to Parker Ranch and in those days, once they went up to the mountains, they couldn't come down. So he would tell us stories about how he loved to eat sour *poi*. The reason he loved sour *poi* is because when he was working at Parker Ranch, they would take *poi* and be up there for a couple of weeks and the *poi* would turn sour. So he acquired the taste for that. That and *pipikaula*, the dried meat that they smoked at Parker Ranch. But then meanwhile, my grandpa contracted beriberi. So his older brother told him, well he couldn't work anymore, so older brother knew that my grandfather had the ability to advance forward, so he told him to go to Hilo Boarding School and learn English. Which he did. And so after that, he went back on the plantation and got the job at the Ola'a Plantation Store.

SH: Ola'a Plantation Store. It was called Ola'a at that time, now called Kea'au.

NH: Then you can pick up the story about what happened there.

MI: What happened, while he was working at the store?

SH: Well because he could read and write English…

MI: He learned from what you talked about?

NH: Yes, he went to the boarding school and I think he actually received some sort of certificate.

MI: So he learned English. Then what happened?

SH: And because he could do that, they start loading him with all kinds of responsibilities. In Japanese they say, *bakarashii.* "*Bakarashii*, he's doing all the work." You know.

MI: Explain *bakarashii*.

NH: Foolish.

SH: Foolish. Yes.

MI: Because he wasn't getting paid for all that work.

SH: Yes, yes. So he just went up and down the Volcano Highway, then he found one spot that he thought was a good location, which was owned by Mrs. Martha Wakefield. It was just a one-fourth acre but right along the roadside, between Mountain View and Volcano. It was an ideal spot to have a business and it was the end of the railroad.

NH: And that's the reason.

MI: There was a railroad station there?

NH: Terminal.

MI: So that's why that village formed there, Glenwood?

SH: Yes, Glenwood.

MI: I was wondering why people chose to live near the station.

SH: And then they went to the volcano.

NH: From there they had to take a carriage to Volcano.

MI: To do what, at the volcano?

NH: Because it was beautiful, sightseeing.

MI: When you say people, you mean visitors.

NH: Yes.

MI: They would come on the train and from there they went to see the volcano.

SH: Yes.

MI: So it was a busy place, the train station.

SH: It was a busy place.

JK: Smart.

NH: And if you go to Glenwood now, the only way you can tell whether the station was there are the palm trees, about four or five of them. That's where.

MI: The tracks are all gone.

NH: Yes, all gone.

MI: Where does the name Glenwood come from?

SH: Yes, with all the Hawaiian names? I guess, with so many missionaries.

MI: Probably, you don't know?

SH: No, there were some missionaries around.

MI: Named Glenwood? Possibly.

NH: But actually, that whole Puna area, it starts up from Kea'au. After Kea'au, it's Kurtistown, Mountain View, Glenwood and Volcano. So they're all English names. Although they all have originally Hawaiian names, too. I think I've heard that Glenwood actually meant something about sweet potato hill, or something, in Hawaiian.

MI: I'm going to ask, and you probably might not know, but she might know. This is a historical thing that I'm learning from the textbooks. Is the name Katsu Goto familiar with you?

SH: I've heard about him. Honoka'a side.

MI: What do you know about the name Katsu Goto?

SH: Kinda negative.

MI: Okay, tell me what you know. I'm just curious.

SH: I think he was falsely accused of some things and then he got lynched or something.

MI: So that story was in the community.

SH: We kinda heard, you know, stories like that.

MI: I'm not picking her, would you like to, in very few sentences, tell them the story?

JK: I'm not sure. I know just as much as she does.

MI: Okay. Katsu Goto was actually like, you know, your grandfather. He came very early but he picked up the language, so he became like an intermediary for the Japanese people who needed English language services. Anyway, when he fulfilled his obligation to the plantation, he left, but set up a store near the plantation store. He became a competitor. I don't want to tell the whole story, but eventually, like you said, because he was a threat to the plantation owner, he was hanged.

NH: Oh, yes, I remember reading that story now.

MI: I was just wondering if he might have known the story and maybe that's why he put his store way in the middle of nowhere versus competing with a plantation. But no, there's nothing about that? Okay.

NH: Maybe, maybe. When did that happen?

MI: He came with the first group I think, you know. First or second group, very early immigrant, so it would be years, ten years before your grandfather. But I thought maybe the story would, you know, be there, because it was unfair.

MI: And I kinda saw a pattern there, as far as your grandfather.

NH: Yes, and no plantation in Glenwood.

MI: Yes, because of the competition thing, maybe your grandfather was… Sounds like he was a wise man.

SH: Very independent.

NH: Yes, very intelligent.

MI: Independent but he was very community-oriented.

SH: Oh, yes, very. He just left the store just to help the community. Whatever their problems, with the Japanese Consulate or something.

MI: So tell me a little about the origin of the store now. In Glenwood, middle of …

SH: Nowhere.

NH: Now, but not at that time.

MI: Yes, a station hub, so an important community. He had someone help him build the store? Or was that an existing building?

SH: I was asked to talk about the Hirano Store, to seniors at several places. I always say how simple it was at that time. Not like now. Building permits, environmental impact statements and on and on. He just asked his carpenter friend to put up a building. And that was it. He started the store. Started selling rice and shoyu and salt, the basic necessities for the community. Gradually his inventory grew as people asked for more things. Then he carried more and more merchandise. That's how the store grew.

MI: The store opened; you remember in what year it was?

SH: 1918.

MI: Because it was a hundred years.

NH: That's the same year my father was born.

MI: Okay. Now, your husband, was he the first son in the family?

SH: Second son.

MI: What was the name of the first son?

SH: Chris Terumi.

NH: Hirano.

MI: The reason I ask is because your husband eventually took over the store. Again, the concept of elder son. What happened to his older brother, just in general terms?

SH: He just left the family.

MI: So he grew up and was not interested in the store.

NH: He graduated from Hilo High School and actually did very well in school. He was very artistic and so he wanted to come here and I think one of his goals was maybe to go to the University of Hawaii. But that never happened. So he left the family at a very young age, even before the war broke out. So I guess by default, my father ended up being the head of the family. And the war broke out and my uncle was back here and he got married here and had a son here. I actually have a cousin, the only Hirano cousin, lives right in Manoa.

MI: Your husband talked about growing up with the store?

SH: Yes.

MI: Was it hard work for him?

SH: Oh, they were rascals.

NH: When they were kids.

SH: He said, nowadays the kids, they don't know what's fun.

MI: It was fun growing up?

SH: It was fun growing up. They used to do naughty things, too.

MI: Like what?

SH: Oh, just stealing the neighbors' oranges or guavas. Real, clean fun you know. And then ponds, they couldn't even swim. They swim with the tadpoles.

NH: They would catch the frogs and grill the frogs.

SH: The frog legs. Make a fire.

MI: Those were his memories of growing up?

SH: Yes, like Tom Sawyer.

MI: Didn't he have to help at the store, work?

NH: Not when they were that young.

SH: Yes, he used to help.

MI: But he never complained about that?

SH: Well, kids are kids so they want to go and play with their friends.

NH: Actually he and his brother, they were very close when they were young.

MI: The older brother.

NH: And they got into all kinds of mischief that their parents never knew about. My grandmother later on heard these stories and she didn't know they almost started a fire in the store. And one of the special things that they used to do that not many kids got to do was, because the terminal was right there, they used to go to the terminal.

MI: They used to what?

NH: The station. And they would have fun there but also cause trouble there. He and his brother were very rascal.

SH: He did everything that his older brother did.

NH: Or what his older brother told him to do.

MI: But as they grew older, they did have a lot of store responsibilities?

SH: Well, he was there you know. Especially when grandpa was interned.

MI: So grandpa and grandma were able to pretty much handle the store.

SH: Yes.

MI: They allowed the children to have a fun childhood.

SH: Oh, they had to work hard.

MI: They did have to work hard?

SH: They had to work hard.

NH: No that was after … he doesn't talk so much about working at the store when he was in high school or anything like that. But when the war broke out, of course, everything just fell on his shoulders, he and his sisters. He worked not only at the store but I know he always worked with my grandfather on the farm. That's what they did. The brothers worked on the farm because grandfather also had a farm. He did so many things.

SH: Yes.

MI: That struck me. I heard the farm, he was a teacher, principal.

NH: Postmaster.

MI: So while grandpa is doing all these things, grandma is taking care of the store?

SH: And the children.

MI: And the children.

NH: I think the girls helped out at the store, his sisters. But I think, I'm not sure about Uncle Chris, but I know that dad worked in the farm a lot, raising, at that time, potatoes.

SH: Cucumbers.

NH: Cucumbers I think, came later.

MI: For sale in the store?

SH: To sell.

NH: To markets, even in Hilo.

SH: But he said, "I'm never going to be a farmer." He said, "Oh the cucumbers, you know this time I'm going to make money, you know, the cucumbers." Then the price would come right down. He barely paid for the fertilizer. "I'll never be a farmer," he said.

NH: Always a gamble.

MI: Unpredictable, not only the price, but weather, insects.

SH: The weather. You have to fight the weather. He said, "Oh, this time I going make money." But he doesn't.

MI: It probably was an educational experience for him.

SH: It was, it was.

MI: He seems to be that kind of man, who learned from every experience he had.

SH: Not afraid to work. Because farming is from morning to night and, you know, sometimes until ten o'clock at night, they'd be washing the cucumbers [so] they can bring it to the market, you know, next day.

MI: I'm still thinking about the store. While he's doing all of this, he has a store that his wife is having to manage. At that time, for the store, did they used to prepare food or was it just things on the shelves, so it was just a matter of cashiering?

SH: When I first got married, it was more merchandising on the store side. But then at that time, J. M. Tanaka, a contractor from Kona, they got the contract to widen the road.

MI: What year are we talking about?

NH: That was her generation. So the food preparation started with my mom.

MI: This was after your husband took over the store. What year did he take over the store?

SH: After my father-in-law passed away.

NH: 1962.

SH: Until then, I helped my in-laws.

MI: So up to that point, it was mainly merchandise.

NH: Merchandise, produce.

SH: Manila ropes, you know what the cowboys, kegs, nails.

MI: You didn't have to cook food?

SH: No, that was only when they're widening the road and J.M. Tanaka, Takeo Wakida was the superintendent. He said, "Hey Mrs. Hirano, my men, they don't have anything to eat. You think you can prepare breakfast?" "Okay".

NH: Fortunately, she's a good cook, so she could do it.

SH: Then we have to get up [at] three o'clock in the morning.

MI: So prior to that, they didn't have to get up at three o'clock in the morning?

SH: No, no.

MI: It came with the food, the breakfast, the preparation.

SH: Yes, for the contractors. That's when we started waking up early in the morning.

MI: A whole different thing.

NH: And you know back then, people were very trusting. And it was the old kind of store. We had the store on the bottom, the family right above. So people would come and say, "Mrs. Hirano" and then she comes running out. So it wasn't … yes, as you say, mostly cashiering. It wasn't where you had to be in the store all the time. When people came,

you went out to the store and conducted the business and then you went on, you know, with your own family matters.

MI: So by the time 1941 comes, the war, they'd been in business over twenty years. They're doing well, they're comfortable. He's doing the gardening. I don't know if he was finished with the gardening and what about the Japanese school? What's the story of the Japanese school? Because at what point, when did he open or start the Japanese school? While all of this is going on, right? His gardening, he has a store.

NH: By the way, he also had a charcoal business, which didn't do well at all, right? He also drove [a] taxi, right, for a little while. I don't know how he did all those things.

SH: I don't know how he did it.

MI: Amazing man.

SH: He was amazing. I mean, I was so fortunate.

MI: I'm wondering, okay who's watching his garden when he's doing the charcoal or driving the taxi? How did he manage to multi-task, I mean, to do all these things? It's interesting.

NH: I think grandma and the daughters probably took care of the store.

MI: The family had to pick up, especially grandma, to me.

NH: And the postmaster thing, he was authorized to do it, but one of his daughters was actually doing it, I think.

MI: Postmaster also. Was he working with the Japanese Consulate on these things, helping other people?

NH: Yes, he was doing that.

MI: So that's another thing he was doing.

SH: He was very community-minded, always helping people.

NH: Now that I think about it, I think my father was the one that was doing a lot of the work on the farm.

MI: That makes sense, yeah, picking up.

NH: Yes.

MI: So your husband did a lot of things for his father.

SH: He did a lot. I never thought, until I got married.

MI: Did you know, when you married him, he was having to do all these things, your husband?

SH: No, I always thought, oh schoolteacher's son, he was a *bocchan*, but then I found out how he struggled during the war, when my father-in-law was interned.

MI: Okay, we'll get to that. So they've been in business twenty-something years, then comes the war and he is picked up, I guess on the first day, December 7?

SH: Yes.

MI: Why do you think he was picked up on December 7? Why was he targeted? Because not many people were. They were very selective. What was it about?

SH: They say it was a surprise attack, but it wasn't. They knew exactly what was going to happen, because they had all the names.

NH: The U.S. government, right.

MI: So as far as the family knows, his name was on a list.

SH: Yes, he was on the list.

MI: Why does the family think his name was on the list?

SH: Actually he was helping the community, because they had dual citizenship, Japan and American. So my father used to write to the Consulate and make them American citizens and get rid of their Japanese citizenship, dual citizenship. So all those things. Actually, he was helping the community but for that, he was interned.

[Note from NH: This part is inaccurate. None of the *Issei* could be American citizens until 1952. What my grandfather did as consular agent was to report to the Japanese government annually about the status of each of the *Issei* in the village. I think it was required since they were all Japanese citizens.]

JK: Yeah.

MI: Any other things? Well, actually there were several strikes against him. Also the language school, that was another reason. Was he also doing other things with, for example, the Japanese Navy ships that came, those kinds of things?

NH: I don't think so.

SH: I think at the time, all the families used to go down, raise the flag and go and see the ships. I know I did, too, with my father.

NH: I don't think he had any direct contact.

SH: No, no direct contact.

NH: And the other thing was, he had a business, so he really had at least three strikes against him.

JK: Yes.

SH: Of course, you can never find anybody who loved America so much. He always said, "No place like America."

MI: So when he first learned about the bombing of Pearl Harbor that morning, and I guess you were not there yet, but from what your husband may have told you, was that a point of worry? At that instant?

SH: Oh, yes. It's one thing I've never seen again.

MI: Really.

NH: Not at that point. When he was picked up, that was the worry.

MI: Did your husband ever talk about him being picked up? Who came?

SH: The MPs.

MI: How about any other Japanese Americans who came with them, to help them to pick up your father-in-law?

NH: No, there was a local police captain, I guess, he was actually a friend of my grandfather's.

MI: What was his name?

SH: Araujo.

MI: How do you spell that?

SH: A-r-a-u-j-o, Araujo, Portuguese.

MI: Portuguese. And he was a policeman who was a friend of your father-in-law?

SH: Yes.

MI: He had to pick him up.

SH: Yes.

NH: Along with the MPs.

SH: My husband always said, it was so sad you know. Just what he had on and they just took him away, you know. Just the clothes he had on, that day he went to KMC [Kilauea Military Camp].

NH: Well, they didn't even know where he was going.

SH: Yes.

NH: They put him in this black car, but he went in that direction [toward Volcano, where KMC is].

MI: Let's take a tangent on this. It's kind of curious. In that village, in your narrative you say mainly Portuguese.

SH: Galicians.

MI: What's that?

SH: Galicians, Polish people.

MI: Polish people. Yes, I was wondering why Portuguese, Polish, Europeans, I think you know, that was the community.

SH: Yes. Interesting.

MI: Why were these people congregating in that area?

NH: We always think that's interesting, too.

SH: Yeah.

NH: Because their descendants, a few of them, still live [there], the Polish.

MI: Were these like children of the missionaries?

NH: No.

SH: No.

NH: Actually, Mountain View, which is the neighboring village, also had a lot of the Pyszck, there's a road, actually the Pyszck Road, where the Polish congregated and then I guess some of them moved to Glenwood, too.

SH: I guess the whole family comes. They start calling the family over, yeah.

NH: I'm not sure why, but there's the Gambsky family.

MI: But there were also a lot of Japanese there.

NH: Mostly Japanese.

MI: Oh, mostly Japanese.

NH: I would say mostly Japanese and they were dairy farmers.

MI: Well, let's get back to December 7th. So they come and pick him up. How long before you heard from him or you found out anything about where he was?

SH: He was up at KMC.

NH: Well, actually they were so busy that day after the neighborhood heard about the attack. Everybody started to, you know Hawaii people, they all stock up, right?

MI: The store was very busy.

NH: The store was very busy, mostly all the Portuguese. They came first, according to my grandma, to buy flour and things like that. And the Japanese just congregated because the Hirano Store was the hub of all their activity. So especially, the Japanese came and they came to talk to my grandfather. "What's happening?" Of course, my grandfather doesn't know what's happening, but they all congregated, "What shall we do? What should we do?" And when the Japanese husbands saw all of the Portuguese women and so forth coming to buy flour and staples, they went home and told their wives, you better go and buy the rice before it gets sold. Then all the Japanese, so that store was really busy in the morning. My grandfather, according to what we hear, didn't have time to eat lunch until about three o'clock. Then at three o'clock, about that time, was when the MPs just, as I said, the store is on the bottom and the kitchen is in the back. He was eating and they just walked through the store and came in. And came to take my grandfather in the afternoon.

MI: As far as you know, were there other people in that community who were picked up like him? Do you know any other names?

SH: No.

H: No one.

MI: No meaning nobody, or you don't know?

SH: No, no one else.

NH: He was the only one from that village.

MI: How about any friends of his from different parts of the island that you're aware of? This might be some of the stories, did he go to the mainland internment camp with anyone he knew?

SH: Nobody from Mountain View.

MI: So he was alone, actually.

NH: I think he may have known some of the people from Volcano.

MI: Hoshida, George Hoshida?

SH: Yes.

NH: I'm not sure if he became friends with them after, but you know, he was a Japanese school teacher so he must have known the other Japanese school teachers.

MI: How about Buddhist priests?

NH: Yes.

SH: Hasegawa [Kenryu].

MI: Which Hasegawa?

SH: Hasegawa, he was a minister.

NH: But that was, I think, after they were interned.

SH: Yes, they were interned. They became good friends.

MI: What was his church, Hasegawa?

SH: A Buddhist church.

MI: You know the name of the church? In Hilo, or?

NH: Pahala side, I think.

NH: Pahala side, Naalehu, that's Ka'u.

NH: Southern.

MI: Met him in the camp or along the way.

NH: I think, yes.

MI: Any other names that he might have mentioned, or he became friends with?

SH: While interned?

MI: Yes.

SH: He talked mostly about this Hasegawa *sensei*. They became very close. And when he [Hasegawa *sensei*] stopped by one day, and we had to tell him that grandpa passed away, he just started to cry. A minister, he just started to cry. I can never forget that.

MI: How long before you found out where he was, how long before the family found out where he was, after December 7?

NH: Okay, so what happened was, he was taken that day and they didn't know where he was taken because they weren't told. But my father just assumed it was KMC, because

KMC is just ten miles away and that's where the car was headed. And so they had no idea what he was doing there or how long he would be there. But then a few days later, I think about three or four days later, they received a call and they told my grandmother that she needed to pack a suitcase with warm clothing in it.

MI: For him.

NH: For my grandfather. Without explaining why, but they assumed that he was going to be shipped somewhere, right.

MI: So she did.

NH: So she did but she couldn't drive so my father had to drive her. They drove up and they told them that he was in KMC and they took him to KMC and when they arrived, there were all these guards, right, all the military at the entrance waiting for them. And they directed him to where my grandfather was.

MI: The barracks?

NH: A small little room. It just had one window and apparently, he was looking out the window when they arrived.

MI: He saw them.

NH: And there were these two military guards, right in front of the door. So they took his suitcase and, I mean, because of the two guards, they couldn't really talk to him, they were afraid to talk to him.

MI: They saw him but didn't talk to him.

NH: They spoke but then they were even afraid to talk to him in Japanese. So they really didn't communicate very much. And then they were let out and then they went. Then after that, they don't know.

MI: They had no idea what was going to happen to him. They just brought the suitcase.

SH: Yes, that's the thing, they had no idea what was going to happen.

NH: But then maybe a week or so, the store is right along the highway, right? So my father saw all these military buses going down and he thought to himself, "I wonder if my dad is in there?" Apparently he was, because the next thing they knew, he was over in Sand Island.

MI: Now, did you hear from him when he was on Sand Island? When was the next time the family heard from him? Was he already on the mainland?

NH: I don't think they heard from him when he was at Sand Island.

SH: I don't think so.

NH: They just later on found out that he was there.

MI: He sent a letter back from the mainland? How did you folks learn that he was on the mainland? Do you remember?

NH: He was sending letters.

MI: He was sending letters.

NH: That were censored.

SH: Oh, but those letters were all *pukas* all over. All censored, yeah, all censored. *Pukas* all over.

NH: All censored. My grandmother, in fact, we have some of those letters. They're all written in Japanese. In old Japanese, I couldn't read it, even Hiromi Peterson.

MI: Why couldn't you read it? Too small?

NH: It's all like written in all *kuzure*, all cursive writing and then in old Japanese. Very formal writing. And so I had my colleague, Hiromi Peterson, I had her read it and even she couldn't figure it out, some of the writing.

MI: Who was he sending it to?

NH: To his wife.

MI: She could read it?

NH: Oh, yes. She could read it and she was writing.

MI: She spoke English also?

NH: She spoke English, because of the business, both of them. I think grandpa was better.

MI: So she would translate those things to the family.

NH: Yes, I think as long as she read it, they could understand.

MI: She understood what he was saying and she would share that with the family.

NH: So one thing we didn't mention was grandpa, somewhere along the way, took correspondence courses at Waseda, in Japan.

MI: Those were courses to learn more Japanese?

NH: I think because he wanted to become a Japanese teacher. Because, you know, he left Japan when he was young and so that's why he was good in both English and Japanese. Not just Japanese from when he was a kid, but he also took correspondence courses in Japanese from Waseda *Daigaku* [University]. And so I think that's why he could do all those consulate types of work, too. But anyway, the letters all came.

MI: You folks have saved all those letters?

NH: I don't think we have all of them. In this book we have one of them which, with Hiromi's help, we translated. So they were all like this and this was the actual envelope it came in.

JK: Oh, yes.

MI: How many letters do you think you have?

NH: I would say we have about ten or twelve. I'm sure there were more than that. So this is my grandfather and so he wrote the beginning part in English.

MI: Were those special letters to your grandmother or just random ten or whatever that she happened to save?

NH: Unfortunately, when they had to break—the old store was built along the old highway. Then they had to widen the road and the old store was all rickety and all.

SH: It was leaking. We lost a lot of stuff.

NH: We lost a lot. I always think it was so sad. So those were the only letters I think that were saved. I know there were more than that.

MI: Go back a little on that December 7 morning and you wouldn't know, I guess, but did they bury things that were Japanese, like other families did?

SH: They did hide a lot of things.

MI: They did? Where did they hide them?

SH: My father did, too.

MI: Where do you think they hid their things? Under the store?

NH: I don't know if she knows, because she wasn't married to them, but she knows what her father did.

SH: No, he burned. We all had *furo* [baths].

MI: Her family burned.

SH: Yeah. Burned. Precious. Now that you think about it, oh, what a shame.

MI: Were there any swords or anything?

SH: No, nothing like that.

MI: So everything, they burned.

SH: Everything, he burned. I can still see the beautiful black book with gold tassels, with Emperor Hirohito and everything. The first thing, he took it to the *furoba* [bathhouse] and burned all of that and all of the precious books.

MI: Your husband say anything about his family doing the same thing?

SH: I'm sure they did the same thing.

NH: They did the same thing, the *furoba*.

MI: Oh, really.

SH: They burned a lot of precious things. What a shame.

MI: They didn't bury anything.

SH: No, I don't think they burned everything.

NH: I don't think so—they burned everything.

SH: Because you don't know when the MPs would just… they won't even talk. They would just come in the house, you know. Look through everything.

NH: The family came and went to your house, too, right? Went through our family's house with the bayonet. My aunty remembers that.

MI: Translation on this, by Peterson…

NH: Actually, she wrote this in Japanese. The writing, she just typed it for me in Japanese and I did the translation. So she typed all of this for me so that I could read it.

JK: Oh, I see.

NH: And then I translated what she typed. And then with her help…

MI: So this is the original and then she typed it to make it clearer.

NH: She typed it for me so that I could read it. Then I translated with her help a little bit, too.

MI: So you've done translations of other things before?

NH: Not so much. It's not one of my favorite things to do.

MI: To me, it's very scholarly, the way he writes. Am I correct?

NH: That's correct.

MI: How did he get to be that way?

NH: I think it's that being a Japanese school teacher and that training from Waseda.

MI: How did he learn his English so well?

NH: I think that boarding school experience and his daily conversations, dealing with business. And talking about my grandfather being very independent, he was not afraid of anyone. So tell the story about the Eucalyptus tree. About the state planting the eucalyptus trees.

SH: Yes. My father-in-law, his English was limited but then he was very independent. And along the highway, Volcano Highway, we had beautiful ohia trees all along. Then the state started to plant eucalyptus trees. He went to the head, he said, "No, I no like talk small potato. I like see the big boss." That's how he was. "I like talk big boss." And he went to the head of the state. He said, "You make big mistake. You plant eucalyptus, ohia all *make* [die]. Don't plant."

MI: Really? It's toxic to the ohia plant?

SH: And that's what happened.

NH: That's what happened.

SH: Now all the ohia, all died. The eucalyptus all along the highway, all eucalyptus trees.

MI: Why did they want the eucalyptus trees?

SH: I don't know.

NH: Windbreakers, I think.

SH: And the eucalyptus trees would fall and you know, the state had to come.

NH: And the electric company had to, you know, because they would fall.

MI: They didn't listen to him.

SH: They didn't listen.

NH: But he did go up to talk. He wasn't afraid.

MI: Anybody come back and say, "You were right."

NH: No.

SH: No. My father-in-law, to this day, I still admire him with his limited English. He wasn't afraid. He said, "I no like talk small potato. I like see the boss."

MI: How did he know that the eucalyptus was going to harm the ohia?

SH: Oh, he knew. He knew. He was a smart man.

JK: Yes.

SH: He had trees, you know. He always tells, we should preserve the ohia trees.

NH: So he was way ahead of his time.

SH: Yes, that's why I always say, "Grandpa was way ahead of his time."

NH: Yes.

MI: Okay, why don't you tell us what you know about his internment history. Which I don't know how much you know. Where was he, the first time the family heard back from him?

NH: We don't even know.

SH: We know he went to Sand Island.

NH: Yes, but even the letters, as I said, they were kinda spotty and one of my [goals], after I retire, is to go through all of those letters. And you know, some of them I haven't … this is the only one that I've really translated.

MI: How long did it take you to translate this?

NH: I would say, more than a day. Because I had to contact Hiromi Peterson. "Did he mean this?" And there's a lot of personal things in there and she doesn't know about who's who and she would have to ask me, so we had to really work together.

MI: So it's a two-step process. You need someone to clearly convert his handwriting into Japanese characters and then you translate that?

NH: And even after I read that, I had to confirm with her, you know, this old Japanese what does it mean? And then she would help me. Sometimes she just said, "I don't know. I don't know what he meant." Or he'd mention people in the family or in Japan and she doesn't know who they are but I know who they are so we really had to work together. So after I retire, I think I have to work with her again and then finish the rest.

JK: Yes.

MI: So the best you know, what is the story as far as the different places he was sent to and about his internment experience. Anything that you can tell us?

SH: Well I did give a talk to the senior group too, you know, about the internment. But I always say that my father-in-law was a very positive person. He didn't dwell in negative things, yeah? He talked about the food. And because he was so westernized…

MI: What did he say about the food?

SH: Oh, he enjoyed the food.

MI: He enjoyed the food?

SH: Oh, he loved the cheese and all these Buddhist ministers, "Oh, *kusai, kusai* [stinky]. Oh, Hirano, Hirano" and they'd bring all the cheese. He said he never ate so much cheese in his life because internment, they used to give them all the surplus, yeah, surplus cheese, the surplus. And many of the ministers couldn't stand cheese, but my father-in-law was just the opposite. He loved cheese. "Ah, Hirano san, Hirano, Hirano" they all used to say. He never ate so much cheese. He was such a positive person that I didn't hear too much about the negative side about his four years. But those funny things that used to happen, you know, how he ate so much cheese and all those things.

NH: But one story he did share that was really sad was, I think, the worst part of his experience, was on the ship going from Honolulu to San Francisco where all of these Japanese school teachers, businessmen, editors, you know, writers, teachers, they were all put in this ship, right? And they were put at the bottom where it was dark and smelly, because they weren't allowed to go to the restroom any time and there were only one or two who went so they had to … and many of them were just seasick and there was just … throwing up …

SH: Worst experience he had.

NH: And urinating. And that was just, he said, that was one negative thing he said. That was the worst part of his whole …

MI: At what point in time did he tell that? After he was back in the Big Island?

NH: I don't know. It came down. I don't know even now, who told me that story. But that's one of the stories that we have in our textbook, too. That was one of the most difficult experiences. And then we saw "The Untold Story", about their treatment at KMC, right? And I said, "Oh, to think that grandpa had to go through all of that." But still, that ship one was the story that he told us. And so when they finally landed, I think it was "Whew", it was a good thing. And we don't even know the exact route that he went and we kind of heard. I was only nine when he passed away. I wish I was older, then I would have asked a lot more questions. But one of the things, and this was the rascal part of him, too, because they would put them in these trains and they constantly moved them, right, from place to place. But people would not know where they are or that they even existed. And so they were put in these steam engines that were long and they weren't told that, everything was curtains closed, right. They told them, the military, the soldier told them they're not supposed to look outside the window. But when the soldier wasn't around, my grandfather would open the curtains and he would peek outside. And that's when he said he saw, thinking of going through Wyoming because we tried to when I did my sabbatical trip, we tried to follow what we thought my grandfather's route was. And when you go through along the Rockies, everything is so grand, the mountain ranges are so beautiful and that's when he realized what a great country America was. And he said when he reached the mainland United States, he knew Japan was going to lose this war. "How could Japan win against such a great country, with all of these resources?" But the other thing he also told someone in the family is, that I heard, he saw all this grandeur, all this wealth, all these resources.

But in Hawaii, when you looked at the Caucasians, they were always the top people, at the top, right. But when he went to the mainland, he saw that there were all kinds of white people. And so he said, "Oh my gosh, they're just like us. You know, they're just like us." And so I think that was a great learning experience for him. And I think that's why he said, his four years in the internment camp was like a four years education. Not only because he was taking all of these courses from others who were interned. They were all educated people with him, right. So they all taught each other, they went to each other's classes. He took courses in business, in accounting, in bookkeeping, in horticulture, all the things that he kinda dabbled in. But later on, I thought, he not only learned those things, but I think because he was a thoughtful person, he learned a lot about life and I think that made him even a greater person. And that's why he came back feeling that he was educated.

MI: Was he a different person when he came back? Well, you wouldn't know. Did your husband say, I mean, I'm going to get back to the family in a minute. But did your husband say he was a different man when he came back?

SH: No, I don't think so. They were so close, my father-in-law and my husband.

MI: He sort of became that oldest son.

SH: Yes, and he knew how much he sacrificed, you know, for the family.

NH: So he came back, I think grandfather, I think the only difference was, my grandfather came back a much more appreciative man of his family. Because he saw how well the family had carried on. Actually through the letters, he kind of knew.

MI: Your husband was about how old during the war days, 1941?

NH: Twenty-three, so he was really young. But my father also said, it was because he was so young that he could do it, physically.

SH: Yes, that's right.

NH: Tell them about the other things he was doing, besides running the store and working still, right, as a mechanic.

SH: We had a very good Chinese friend, Mr. Wung. He had about two thousand acres.

MI: How do you spell Wung?

SH: W-U-N-G. He was the chief engineer.

NH: In Hilo.

SH: And he knew that the Hiranos were struggling with grandpa interned. He knew they were struggling. He said, "Wataru, you go up to my ranch anytime, don't even have to tell me. And I'm going to find you Mr. Siu." He said, "You cut all the *hapu* you want, you ship it to Young Brothers and Mr. Siu going send you." And so after you are working USCD he said, he used to eat peanut butter sandwiches and whatever, and he used to go up to Wung's ranch and he used to cut *hapu* and he had a small Caterpillar, loaded it on and bring it home and ship it out.

MI: This was for extra income.

SH: For extra income.

NH: And this was at night, after work, right?

SH: Yes, he worked hard. I never thought he worked so hard.

NH: And can you imagine, he was up there in the forest by himself, doing all of this? If something had happened…

SH That's what I said, "What if something happened?" He said, "No, I was young. I was young."

NH: Yes, that's why he could do it, because he was young.

SH: I never thought he worked so hard. I always thought he was *obocchan*, you know. Hirano's *obocchan*. But no, after I married him and listened to the stories, he really worked hard, struggled.

NH: His father knew that.

SH: Yes, that's why everything was "Wataru".

NH: And that's why my mother said she's never seen a father and son so close. Because my grandfather just loved his son, for all he did for the family.

MI: So while the family is working hard at home, father is in an unknown location, was the family ever asked if they wanted to join him?

SH: Yes.

MI: When was this? Like how far into the…? Can you guess what year, roughly? He was picked up in December 1941. How long before the family was given the option to join him?

SH: I think, right after.

MI: Within months?

SH: Yes, because there was a family at Volcano.

MI: Which family was that?

NH: Shiotanis.

SH: Shiotanis.

MI: What's the first name?

SH: I don't know. [Note: His name was Motoi Shiotani]

NH: Was he a Japanese language teacher?

SH: Japanese school.

MI: I know the family.

SH: So they went. They were all young.

MI: One of them was Kenneth Shiotani.

NH: I know there's Elsie Shiotani, that's one of the younger ones.

MI: Yes, yes. I know her.

SH: But because my husband could work and everything …

NH: And the kids were all grown. The youngest one was already in high school.

MI: So wait, wait, I'm sorry, I was thinking about Shiotani. So what happened? There was another family that was asked to join the father on the mainland? And did they do it, did they join?

NH: The Shiotanis went.

SH: The Shiotanis.

MI: The Shiotanis went?

SH: Yes, the Shiotanis went because the kids were young.

NH: The kids were young.

SH: Yes.

MI: Do you know anything about that family? Why the father …

SH: He was a school teacher.

MI: Japanese language?

SH: Yes, language teacher.

MI: So the family did go.

SH: Did go, because the children were young yet. She couldn't …

MI: They didn't have an income, right.

SH: Yes.

MI: You had a store. They didn't have a store and the school was closed.

SH: Yes.

MI: Some people talk about the assets of Japanese Americans being frozen, bank accounts and that kind of thing. Was that something that happened to the family? Maybe this was on the mainland, I'm not sure. That didn't happen, the store could operate?

NH: No, because they continued. I'm not sure if they had any problems in that respect because grandpa was not … and actually because Kilauea Military Camp was just ten miles up the road, the store actually did well because they had all these military people going back and forth, back and forth. And you know and so for that reason, the store also did well, in addition to everything else you know, my father was doing. My father always credits his sisters, too, because his sister, just below him, who we just visited yesterday. She's going to be a hundred years old. She was the one always at the store with my grandmother. And the sister after her, Momoye Yanagihara, was working at the *Hawaii Tribune Herald*, the newspaper. And according to grandpa, they would all pool all their assets together.

MI: So family members who were not working at the store came to help the store while he was away.

NH: Oh, no.

MI: They always did help him.

NH: Yes, because the younger sister was … my father was twenty-three so the younger sister was still like in her early twenties, not married yet. And the younger sister, I guess, after she finished high school, then she started working in town. And they would pool their assets together.

MI: Let's go back to that story again where the family was given the opportunity to join him. And the decision was made not to join him?

SH: Yes.

MI: Who made that decision? Or did you somehow hear from him that he didn't want you to join him? Or how was that decision made?

SH: I guess it was between my mother-in-law and my husband.

MI: He wanted you folks to join him?

SH: No, not really.

MI: The government is just giving you the opportunity?

SH: Yes. He wanted the store to be very … when he came back.

MI: He wanted you to stay back to take care of the store?

SH: Yes, to take care of the store.

MI: So he could have something to come back to.

SH: Come back to.

MI: I see. So there was agreement that that was the best for your family.

SH: Yes, and they were all grown up, too, yeah. Not young, like the Shiotanis.

JK: I have a question because here on this island, like the Nishikawas, when he was arrested, she had to close her sewing school because he was arrested, and their bank account was frozen. So I'm just wondering, maybe, was the store not in Naojiro's name?

NH: Was it under daddy's name?

SH: It was under my husband's name. My husband used to farm, so he could borrow from the farm loan.

NH: Even back then?

MI: So in 1941, it was already in your husband's name?

SH: He was so much part of the …

NH: I'm not sure about that.

SH: And his two sisters.

NH: Because, even though the land, right, the one they leased, wasn't it under Dad's name also?

SH: All Dad.

NH: Because Mrs. Wakefield didn't want to lease it to grandpa.

SH: But she liked my husband.

NH: But she loved my father. So I think that lease was also in Dad's name, from the beginning?

SH: Yes, because she liked Dad.

NH: She liked my father. She didn't like my grandfather; I don't know why. But maybe that's why.

JK: That might have been … maybe, that's why.

MI: Meaning it was in the son's name.

JK: Yes, and not …

NH: American citizen.

MI: So it was frozen, accounts were frozen, on Oahu?

JK: Oh, yes, yes. If you were interned, it was frozen.

MI: Just for the internees. Not for the general community?

JK: No, just for the internees. Maybe that's why. How fortunate.

NH: That's interesting.

JK: Yes, that's interesting. Wow.

MI: So when does he come back to Hawaii?

SH: Right after the end of the war.

MI: Roughly, what month, what year, are we talking about? 1945 was when the war ended.

NH: I think around November.

MI: Did they know he was coming back or did he just show up at the door?

NH: They knew he was coming back.

MI: They had sent a letter or the government…

NH: They all went to the harbor to greet him. And that's when the story is, that my grandfather got off the ship and said, "Wataru, Wataru, Wataru!"

SH: Yes, that's what my husband said, "He's coming down. I can see my father coming down. Wataru, Wataru."

NH: I'm not sure that she [grandma] even went. But yeah, maybe that's why, yeah.

SH: Because he knew how much he sacrificed for the family. He was proud.

JK: Yes.

MI: Did he come home alone or was there a whole group of men who came back?

SH: I don't know.

NH: But we know that story, when he returned. He was just all excited to see my father.

SH: My husband always said, "That's the only time I cried."

NH: And then right after that, my father got a draft notice. As soon as his dad came home.

SH: As soon as he came back.

MI: Within weeks?

NH: No, within a couple of months.

SH: Amazing, how they keep track.

JK: Yes.

MI: I was going to ask you about his military. So he had never been bothered up until that point? How did they interpret that? Was his father angry when the government did that to his son?

NH: Nope. In fact, he told my father, "You enlist. You're an American, go."

MI: He would have been in his late twenties, at that point?

NH: Twenty-six or twenty-seven.

MI: And he gets drafted.

NH: Just to over here, Schofield Barracks. He was an MP. So he didn't go far.

MI: How long did he spend at Schofield or in the military?

NH: Not too long. I don't know how long, few years.

MI: So your father-in-law had to quickly take over and get back to his old ways?

NH: Yes.

MI: Anyway, it was good for him.

NH: Yep. So that was so beautiful too, because you know, my grandfather held no bitterness against…

MI: Were you married at that point?

SH: No.

MI: You had not met him yet?

NH: Dad got married when he was thirty-two. There was a wedding after that.

MI: So I guess with the return of your father-in-law, several things happened. For one thing, the business may have changed, right, with the military disappearing. Or did the military disappear from Kilauea?

NH: No, KMC was still there but maybe that the flow wasn't as …

MI: The troops were no longer there.

NH: I think they gradually pulled out. They still had to do all kinds of things, even after the war.

SH: I think we had the advantage because you know, of course, the supermarkets start popping up in Hilo. But [it's] eighteen miles [away]. So even if it's a few cents higher, it's cheaper to buy from Hirano Store than to run all the way to Hilo.

MI: That's what I was wondering, how he competed as the supermarkets came in. The location.

SH: So that's why it's still there. It's the location.

NH: And also, for people from South Point, Pahala, Naalehu, that was a good half-way mark. So we had a lot of people stopping to have coffee, soda, whatever, ice cream.

SH: Hot dogs.

NH: Stop at the store for gas or whatever and then do the next stretch to Hilo. And the tourists, too. They were going to the National Park. So we had a lot of tourists, too, especially when the Pu'u O'o vent … we had one of the best views across the street for the volcano.

SH: So we met a lot of celebrities, Maria Shriver, Henry Kaiser, Gary Moore. I just wondered what happened to the autograph book I had.

NH: Miss Japan.

SH: Dan Inouye used to drop by quite often.

NH: Yes, all the politicians did.

MI: Because they were going to visit Kilauea Military Camp? What were they doing there?

NH: On their way to the volcano. Senator Inouye was her brother-in-law, was Senator Inouye's campaign manager on the Big Island.

SH: My brother-in-law was his campaign manager.

NH: So actually, they got to be good friends.

MI: Who was your brother-in-law?

SH: George Inouye. He was a veteran, too.

MI: Campaign manager for the Big Island. He was in the 442.

NH: They were together because of the same last name, Inouye.

SH: So he used to drop by quite often, very nice. Even Maggie [Inouye] dropped by.

JK: Yes, Maggie.

MI: So do you think your father-in-law, after he came back, did he just continue doing the same things or with his new, you know, exposure, education, did he go into new directions? Or did he withdraw? What was he like after he came back? Or was it like he didn't miss a beat and he just kept going on? It's hard because you didn't know him.

SH: Yes.

NH: I think in his younger days, he dabbled in all those different things. And his family had all grown up. He didn't have to support all those kids anymore. But he did continue the Japanese school. He reopened the Japanese school. And also, at least when I was

growing up, they got into orchids. So they were growing cymbidium orchids and they were shipping to all the florists here on Oahu.

SH: Beretania.

NH: And occasionally, Dad and he would raise cucumbers. I remember when I was small, helping with the cucumbers, too. Occasionally they would farm.

MI: The way he described it somewhere is that this whole internment experience was an education.

SH: That's what my father-in-law was, such a positive person. He never talked about the negative things.

MI: How about his wife? Was she angry that her husband was taken?

SH: No. No.

MI: She just agreed with him?

SH: They did. They just loved America. My father-in-law always said, "No country like America." So when they say that they were traitors, I say, "No, my father-in-law, you couldn't find anybody who loved America so much."

MI: Did he ever go back to Japan after the war?

SH: Oh, yes.

MI: As a tourist?

NH: As soon as they got married.

SH: Yes, as soon as we got married. They went, three months.

MI: What do you mean? Why was that?

NH: They were waiting for my father to get married so they could go back to Japan. So someone could run the store. And fortunately, she [Shinae] had a business background. She went to Hilo Commercial College, so she was perfect. She just picked up the books and did all the accounting.

MI: So you were chosen for your technical skills? What about cooking? Did you have cooking skills?

SH: No, not that much.

MI: But you started the cooking part of the store?

SH: Yes, yes.

NH: But she acquired it very quickly.

SH: And all the rice cookers, about three rice cookers going on.

MI: All because of the construction people.

SH: All because of the construction, J. M. Tanaka.

MI: Up to then, nothing was cooked in the store?

SH: No, we didn't sell food like that, yeah. But that was the money maker, you know, food.

MI: Is that right?

SH: You can sell all the merchandise but it's just maybe twenty percent. Whatever, twenty percent, the numbers. But it was the food. That's when we start making money, buy land here and there you know.

MI: So you bought land around, adjacent to your… separate?

SH: To the side.

MI: Just for personal property.

NH: Investment.

SH: Investment.

MI: Not to build a new store?

SH: No, no, and that's why we built the house in Hilo.

NH: Because actually, you know, grandpa started off with that small, leased land. And eventually my dad bought seventeen acres all around that. And so even 'till today … well, now my sister and I have five acres each, but the rest, the store, is seven acres, all around the store.

SH: I still have seven acres.

MI: What's on that seven acres?

NH: The store and they have another home right back of the store.

SH: And I have a tenant.

NH: And now it's just vacant land in the back, other than the store. Another thing that we wanted to mention is that after they came back from Japan in 1954, I think, my grandparents got their citizenship. They were so proud. In one of those pictures that we have of them is the day they got their citizenship. Not only were they proud that they became citizens, but the fact that they took their citizenship test in English. They both passed, in English. So they were both so proud of that.

JK: That's amazing, yes.

MI: You mentioned that as soon as your husband took over and they went to Japan. Tell me about the Japan family, wartime. What happened to them? One family was in Hiroshima, right?

NH: That's her family.

SH: That's my family. His family are all from Shizuoka.

MI: Tell me what you know about the family hardships in Japan, during the war. Or do you know anything?

NH: Do you know about Hiroshima?

SH: Not too much.

MI: They were not in the city?

NH: In Kure.

SH: In Kure, countryside.

NH: Kure was just outside of Hiroshima. But the thing about Kure was that they had a lot of military installations there, too.

MI: Japanese military?

NH: Yeah, I don't know very much about there.

MI: They survived the bombing?

NH: Your family, no one died, yeah?

SH: No.

NH: Because they were outside.

MI: What about the hardships, after the war?

SH: You mean, my family?

NH: In Japan?

MI: Yes.

SH: Oh, in Japan. I don't know too much about Japan. But like in my case, Mountain View, which is about fifteen miles from KMC, Kilauea Military Camp, they took away all the Japanese schools, English schools, and the gymnasium. The Army took over.

JK: They confiscated.

SH: Converted that into a great big general hospital.

MI: What's the name of the hospital? Is it still there or gone?

SH: No, no, all gone. Only during the war, it was a hospital. So we used to see all the injured servicemen from the South Pacific. All maroon colored robes. So Mr. Yamada, who had a theater, used to run first for the patients and next for the civilians and next for the military, you know, the doctors and the nurses. He made money during the war. He had three small little theaters, three times a day.

MI: What about your family's here, Big Island war experience?

SH: Well my father was a bus driver. So during the war, he couldn't drive for a while.

MI: Where were you folks living at the time?

SH: Mountain View.

MI: Mountain View. Was there a big impact on Mountain View? I guess there were more soldiers and everything.

SH: Yes.

MI: Any other kind of impact in your area, where you grew up?

NH: That big general hospital and because they took all of the school facilities, they had to go to school in people's private homes, in the basements of people's homes.

SH: Private homes, in the basement, that was our classroom. And my good friend, Tomiko Asato …

MI: Did you used to go to Hirano Store?

SH: Hardly.

MI: Why?

NH: She was too small. [Note from NH: Also, they were living in a separate village, 5-7 miles away.]

SH: Yes, so one of the schools we went to was my girlfriend, Tomiko Asato. She had a big basement so we used to study in the basement. I said, "Tomiko, did they ever pay you for the water and the electricity?" No, not a cent.

MI: So are there people you know who lost property or businesses and never got it back? Lost it to the military during the war time? Ever got it back?

SH: I don't think so.

MI: You're not aware of anyone.

SH: But Mountain View was a totally different village.

MI: Population wise?

SH: Oh we had so many hamburger shops open up, you know.

NH: For the military you know. So Mountain View saw a lot of changes during the war.

SH: Oh, a lot of changes. And a lot of the girls went out with the servicemen and I remember this Kaneshiro, she got married to one of them. She lives in Kentucky, I think.

MI: So that also changed, in the community itself. Acceptance of haole people, Caucasians, as part of the community. I mean, how can I put it, not separate in the community but they became a part of the same community.

SH: Yes, we didn't have any problems.

MI: You don't recall any problems the other way, during the wartime? Specifically, your family because, you know, not you, but I guess your husband's family. Were there any stories about discrimination, those kinds of stories?

SH: Oh, there was discrimination.

MI: Upon the Hirano family, during the wartime, because the father was taken away?

NH: I never heard of anything.

SH: No, not because of that.

NH: Although as a child, I think, just going to school, you did experience it.

SH: We were called, Japs, Japs, Japs.

MI: During the wartime, okay.

SH: But now when I think about it, the people who used to call us Japs were the ignorant people, yeah. The real smart ones never called us Japs.

MI: But for your husband's family, while he's away, how did the community treat the family?

SH: Oh, they were so close.

MI: No negative kind of … something wrong with your family.

NH: Not that I know of. Because they still depended … people still depended on the store a lot.

MI: Important to the community. So they maintained their relationships with the community, positive relationships.

NH: Right, right. Because I know some people distanced themselves, right, from internees' families. I don't think that happened in our case.

SH: I don't think so.

MI: So you folks take over the store. You actually build up the business, with the food.

SH: Yes, we built up.

MI: What was the most popular food?

SH: I think shoyu pork.

MI: Shoyu pork.

NH: And the plate lunches. I think your breakfasts were popular, too.

MI: Whose recipe was that? You made it up?

SH: I had a good friend who was a cafeteria manager. She gave me the recipe for the shoyu pork. That was a good seller. And that I used to buy from F & Franks, about three big chunks of pork butts.

NH: Oh, no, you used to let us go, my sister and I, it was on sale at KTA or something and we'd be on our way back from school, "It's on sale, go over there, and go to that market, ninety-nine cents."

SH: Yes, it was cheaper than the wholesaler.

NH: My sister and I always remember going to buy pork butts.

MI: Was there something about a secret hamburger recipe?

SH: Yes, yes, yes.

MI: You made that secret public?

SH: No.

MI: It's in the book, I think.

SH: Yeah, I used to make sandwiches; people loved the roast beef sandwich. So I used to roast the big chunk of roast beef, yeah. And the ends would be kinda crusty, yeah. So I used to chop it up and put it in my hamburger. And people said, "Oh, your hamburgers

are so good." It was because of those. So nothing went to waste, yeah. The soft part I used for sandwiches, the crust I chopped it up and put it in my hamburgers.

JK: Oh, that's a good idea.

MI: That was your idea?

SH: Yeah. Actually I wasn't a cook or anything, but I just picked up all those things.

MI: Any other things like that you want to share with us?

NH: She would have a different lunch menu every day, but I think it actually started out with breakfast, right. Because they wanted breakfast. And so you know, typical rice, you know, then they had a choice of meat, spam, ham, Portuguese sausage, bacon and eggs, however they wanted the eggs prepared. That's how it started out. And then the supervisor said, "Oh, Mrs. Hirano, can you make lunches, too?" So she started making lunches. And then we did all the sandwiches, too. And then pretty soon, the tour buses used to stop for the sandwiches and whenever, you know, my sister and I or my father, or my grandmother, by the way, would always come to the store so she would help, too. And "Tour bus is coming". We all had to come, whatever we're doing, just drop it and start making sandwiches.

MI: The tour bus would call you, "We're coming with twenty people?"

SH: "We have twenty-five people or fifty people", you know. They always called ahead of time. And I would call them, "Come down, come down, you have to make sandwiches."

MI: You cannot really prepare. You just offer that this is it, take it or leave it, whatever you prepare?

SH: But they would always tell about how many in the bus.

MI: But would they order? I mean, come there and order? Or order before-hand?

NH: No, but you could tell. If you knew that they were mainland people, then you know, you would make like ham and cheese.

MI: Is that right? You could customize your…

NH: Just by the type of tourists, you can sort of figure out what they would want.

MI: That's nice that the community work like that. The bus drivers would call you.

SH: We were lucky. We were lucky.

NH: And they would get a free cup of coffee or something and a sandwich. Those were fun days.

MI: Then you get old and it's time to retire. What happens to the store? What year are we talking about?

NH: Eric. It's in there somewhere.

SH: When he heard that we were going to retire, he said, "Aunty, you think I can lease the store?" I said, "Oh, yes, keep it in the family."

MI: 1984. He just came out of the blue or would he hang out at the store when he was young?

NH: Well, he was my mother's oldest sister's youngest son. And yeah, they would come occasionally, to visit aunty and uncle. But he studied business here at Manoa and he was working for another company in Hilo for a while. So he was interested in business.

MI: He was interested in the cooking part or the other part?

SH: Just managing the whole store. He wanted to be independent.

MI: But he's the cook now.

NH: Yes, he does a lot of the cooking, yeah.

JK: Chili.

SH: Chili, he's known for his chili.

MI: That is what we should all go there for?

NH: Yeah, if you like spicy food. Too spicy for me.

SH: He makes good chili.

MI: Better than Zippy's chili?

SH: Oh, yeah, better.

NH: He has secret ingredients, too?

SH: Yes, he does.

NH: That one, we cannot disclose. But the other thing that he got from mom, is the ohelo berry jam. She never made ohelo berry jam or jelly when she was in business. But she always made really good jam and jelly. So Eric got the recipe from her and he started making.

MI: So he has it on the shelves now.

NH: That's another thing he sells that's popular.

MI: So you folks retired about 1984. What have you been doing since then?

SH: I went back to school.

MI: You did? What kind of school?

SH: My family was seven [children], yeah. My father could never send us beyond high school.

MI: So all your life, you wanted to go back to school?

NH: Judge Kimura.

SH: My schoolmate, Shun Kimura, he was the mayor and then he became a judge. His family lived right below the store. So whenever he came to visit his family, he used to come up to the store. "Hey Shinae, how are you?" We were schoolmates. He knew that I was going to retire. He said, "What you going to do?" I said, "Nothing much."

"Go back to school." I said, "No, I'm too old." "You're not too old, go, go, go, go, go back." So he was the one.

MI: Was he doing the same thing or he had retired already?

SH: He was a judge by that time.

MI: He was still a judge.

SH: Very humble person. Exactly the way I remembered him going to school. And he became a judge but never did he …

NH: And mayor.

SH: And mayor. Of course, we all backed him up when he ran for mayor and everything. We passed out brochures and all kinds.

MI: So where did you go to school?

SH: Mountain View.

NH: No, UH [University of Hawaii at] Hilo.

MI: No, after you retired.

SH: I went to UH Hilo.

MI: And what did you study?

SH: Linguistics.

JK: Oh.

SH: Japanese.

MI: That's what you wanted to learn?

SH: Yes, because my mother was born in Paia, Maui. So she only spoke pidgin. So we never really spoke Japanese. I wanted to study Japanese.

NH: Just by living with my grandparents, she actually learned a lot, right. Listening to them.

SH: That helped a lot.

NH: Conversing with them a little bit. Because they were from Shizuoka and because they taught Japanese school, their Japanese was not like the Hiroshima or Yamaguchi kind of Japanese. It was a little bit closer to the standard. So even for myself when I grew up, I was listening to that.

SH: That helped a lot.

NH: Yes, that helped a lot.

SH: That was one of my proudest accomplishments in life, to get a degree.

MI: You got a degree?

SH: I got a degree.

NH: Yes.

MI: How long did it take you to get a degree?

SH: Five years.

MI: Five years after you retired?

SH: I went back to school.

NH: Initially she didn't intend to get a degree. She just took courses, right? And she enjoyed it and it wasn't so hard.

MI: You could compete with the younger people?

SH: That's what people ask me. "Oh, the young people …" I say, "No. You'd be surprised how nice they were." When we had to work as a group, "Mrs. Hirano, come, come, come." And five of us, you know, we worked together.

NH: And the professors liked them because they're experienced and they're not afraid to speak up, you know, and so the professor actually liked it when …

SH: We still keep in touch with them. Dr. Honda and …

NH: UH Hilo was smaller at that time, too, so they really welcomed the senior citizens.

MI: Terrific.

SH: In the beginning it was free for the seniors. Toward the end, we had to pay.

MI: It was worth it.

NH: And then she would call me whenever she had problems.

SH: Yes, I would call her.

NH: For her Japanese homework.

SH: I said, "You know, this sentence doesn't sound right." "Sure, you're using the honorific with the, you know." She helped me with my homework.

MI: I'm going to ask your daughter to share her Betty Hirano story. I found it interesting. It just struck me as very unusual for a grandma and a granddaughter to have this kind of relationship. Tell us the story.

NH: Well as I said, my grandmother loved children. So she was just overjoyed whenever she could be with her grandchildren. I think my sister and I were very fortunate that we actually lived with my grandparents and … well, my grandfather died when I was nine. So up to that point, I did hear some Japanese between my grandfather and my grandmother and after that, I think it was kind of mixed. But I'm really grateful that I had the opportunity to live with my grandparents when I was little. I think I learned so many things. Without knowing, I learned so many things from them. But then I'm not sure exactly when this started. I think it was after I started school. And back then girls didn't have too many options, what you were going to do. You could be a teacher, you could be a nurse or you could be a secretary or something like that. So I wanted to be a nurse. And then I got sick. I had tonsilitis and then I ended up in the hospital and that was not a very positive experience for me. Then I started school and then I had some wonderful teachers. First one was Miss Nishihara. We were at Mountain View School and at that time, you know, everybody wanted to teach in Hilo so they would send all the young teachers to the country schools. I actually benefited from it because so many

of my teachers were just so gung ho. They were young. Now as a teacher myself, I think, "Oh my gosh, that was so much work and they went through all of that for us." But anyway, from a very young age, I think I had really good modeling of teachers in my life. Including my grandfather, because I went to his Japanese school for a little while. So I think that's why I developed a love for wanting to be a teacher. And grandma was always willing to play. I had no siblings at that time and our neighbors were all far away so I didn't get to play with peers very much. So grandma was my playmate.

SH: Was her student.

NH: And we had this little room behind the store and our relatives in Shizuoka would send these big boxes of tea every year, *sencha*, green tea. Every year, good tea. So we had these nice wooden crates all the time. So I would line them up and put *zabuton* [cushions] and grandma used to sit, and I used to put my stuffed animals around. And then eventually some time along the way I must have gotten for Christmas, this chalkboard. And then my grandmother was really good at math, so I didn't want to teach her math because she was so good. But one thing she wasn't good at was spelling. So we used to have spelling lessons all the time, where I could mark her up. To this day, right, I'm a strict teacher. Then she couldn't spell the word "enough". And so I would always put "enough" on her spelling lessons. Red mark! And I don't know, she always played along with it. I don't know how we gave her the name Betty. I think we gave her a choice, because in those days, my book had Susan, Betty and Tom, those were the primaries, right? And so I think those were the choices I gave her and she chose Betty. So she became … on her notebook, she had to write Betty. And then do her spelling test, all the time.

MI: What struck me about this whole thing was the relationship. I'm learning from the textbooks; the grandmothers and grandfathers didn't behave like that. They were the ones who told you, "Be good, study hard."

NH: Well she did that, too.

MI: Did she teach you values, Japanese traditional values?

NH: Definitely, all of that.

MI: But she was also able to play the role of your student, when you were a child.

NH: Yes, maybe she was training me to be a teacher. I know, to them, being a teacher was a big thing.

JK: Yes, *sensei*.

NH: Maybe she was happy that she was training me. I don't know what she was thinking.

MI: Isn't that unusual?

JK: That's a wonderful story.

MI: When you think about values and your grandparents, you had time to spend with them.

SH: A lot of time.

MI: What did you learn from them?

NH: Well for one thing, my mom and dad were really busy so mostly my grandmother raised me and my grandfather spoiled me like crazy, too, I think. He would build me a sidewalk so that I could ride my tricycle.

MI: He built a sidewalk so you could ride a tricycle?

SH: Yes.

NH: He built a long sidewalk. And he built me swings in the guava tree. He built me this sandbox right outside the store where my friends and I could play. I don't know who bought me that slide right by my grandparents' house. That slide set and so when my friends would come, they would play. So even as I teach Japanese now, a lot of the values that are sort of ingrained in me, I know came from my grandparents. That's why I'm so grateful to them.

MI: Like what values?

NH: *Oya koko, giri,* all of them. You know, staying humble. But I think my sister and I, as teachers, we sort of had that little bit of that edge that my grandfather had, too. I couldn't wait to come down and tell these kids, "You gotta do it that way." You know.

JK: Yes.

NH: So there's just so much. And hard work. That I learned from my parents, too. My mother always apologizes to us because we hardly had a social life because we were always working in the store. But I tell my mother now, we learned a lot about how to deal with people, that there are people from all spectrums, we have to treat them all equally alike, even if they come in as hippies or the mayor, or whoever, and always, as she says, the customer comes first. Those interpersonal skills, I think, what we learned just from being at the store.

MI: So if you were to say now, who are you more like, your grandfather or your grandmother?

NH: You answer that question.

SH: I think her grandfather.

MI: Do you have children?

NH: Yes.

MI: How many?

NH: Just one. Actually we adopted her from China and she's now in Boston and she's studying to be a pharmacist. She's in her last year of pharmacy school.

MI: Any of these values from grandpa being passed on to the next generation?

NH: We hope so. We hope so. These Hawaii values, when you go to Boston, people are just … you know getting up and helping people.

MI: Hawaii values are different.

SH: Oh, yes.

MI: When you say, "Oh, yes", what do you mean, "oh, yes"?

SH: We have the best of both sides. The western and the Japanese.

MI: When you say western, do you mean Hawaii or American?

SH: American ways.

MI: American values and Japanese values.

SH: And Hawaii Japanese traditions. We picked the best.

MI: For example?

SH: Being kind to your neighbors, sharing. All those things.

NH: I think humility is the big thing.

SH: Yes, humility and sharing.

JK: Yes.

MI: I think your father-in-law saw that, too. He could recognize the good on the American side and incorporated that into his life.

NH: Oh, yes.

SH: Yes, he was my mentor.

MI: Really?

NH: Yes, we all admired him.

MI: Directly or indirectly? I mean, he spoke to you about these kinds of things?

SH: Well we had this country store, yeah, so lunch, we'd all sit together and all I did was listen to him.

MI: And he would talk about values and things, during lunchtime?

SH: Japan. Values.

MI: During lunchtime. Interesting.

NH: Yes, I think my grandfather was someone we all truly respect.

MI: Very interesting.

SH: He was a very interesting man, smart.

MI: Very intelligent.

SH: Very intelligent. He was way ahead of his time.

NH: Yeah.

SH: In his thinking.

MI: Okay. Do you have any more questions you want to ask them?

JK: Oh, I wanted to ask you if you have another copy of this set?

NH: You may have that one.

JK: We can? Oh, that's wonderful.

NH: I also sent you the electronic copy, but you may have that one, too.

MI: That's precious.

NH: My sister and I worked on this for the 100th anniversary of the store and we thought that we wanted to put a history as much as we could together, but we also wanted the contributions from the rest of our family, whoever wanted to, and our neighbors, so it's a collection of all kinds of memories of people who remembered the Hirano Store, in the old days, and more recent days.

JK: Precious. Will you excuse me while I go get a donation form? Then it can go into the Resource Center collection.

MI: Thank you. I'm going to turn everything off.