

JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAI‘I

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Richard Matsui (RM)

March 28, 2015

Interviewer: Mel Inamasu (MI)
with Marilyn Higashide (MH)

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

MI: Today is March 28, 2015, and we are here to interview Mr. Richard Matsui, who as a child was interned at Crystal City. My name is Mel Inamasu, one of the interviewers, and also with us to interview is...

MH: My name is Marilyn Higashide. I am a volunteer here at the center.

MI: And I am a volunteer here.

RM: [To Marilyn Higashide] By the way...

MI: Yes?

RM: Higashide? Are you related to...

MH: Yes.

RM: ...Higashide, used to be in camp?

MH: Yes.

RM: Our next—door neighbor?

MH: Next—door neighbor?

RM: Yes, in Crystal City, Texas.

MH: (Gasps)Really?

RM: They were from Peru?

MH: Yes. Yes. Oh!

RM: Ah, what was her name?

MH: Mother was Angelica, and um, the kids who were there were Elsa, the oldest...

RM: Elsa. Yes, I know Elsa.

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MH: You know Elsa?

RM: Oh yeah! (Starts laughin)]. She's very happy because I drew a picture of her. Hey, I'm not an artist, but it's a surfer coming in at Diamond Head, and she said, "Oh, that was a picture of Hawaii!" (Laughs)

MH: Oh. You drew it at camp?

MI: You gave it to her?

RM: Yes, yes. I think so. I don't know what she said.

MI: (Chuckles) That's nice.

RM: Oh yeah. Higashide. Oh yeah. Next—door neighbor at the camp.

MH: Oh. Oh! I should ask you questions afterwards.

RM: (Laughs) Anyway, sorry to interrupt.

MI: [To Marilyn] Can you do it afterwards? We'll do it together. Okay, anyway, we're at the Japanese Cultural Center, and we're here to do an oral history with Mr. Matsui regarding his family's experience at Crystal City. To begin with, we usually ask you to identify yourself: name, date of birth and also your parents' names, if you don't mind that. Why don't you go ahead and start?

RM: Okay. My name is Richard Matsui. My birthdate, 11—11—1934. I just celebrated my 80th birthday. My father is Yozo Matsui who lived in Sakamoto, Shiga—ken, Japan. He never was in Hawaii. My mother, Motoko Matsui ... her maiden name was Sato, Motoko Sato, she was born in Lahaina. The Sato fish market, that was her father, right on Front Street of Lahaina.

I was born in Lahaina too. My father never came to Hawaii, so she took me back to Japan. In those days, no more plane so we had ships. We had to go on seven—day cruise or whatever, going up to Japan. I was still a baby at that time. So I lived in Japan, in Sakamoto Shiga—ken, Otsu, until, I guess, before the war started. I guess my mother being American—born, American—educated, all of that ... maybe the war's going to come, so my grandparents from Lahaina, came to Japan and brought me back to Lahaina, just before the war started.

MI: Tell us a little bit more about the situation. I'm not clear. Your grandparents lived in Hawaii?

RM: Yes. They were in Hawaii.

MI: What did they come to Hawaii for? About when?

RM: I guess they were—he was 96 when he passed away, a long time ago. He had a fish market and his job was to have this fish market run by him and his wife.

MI: So he didn't come here as a laborer?

RM: Oh that, I don't know because that was before. Maybe he did, but he wasn't the laborer type, so he opened his own fish market. He had the fishermen go out to catch the *opelu* [Japanese mackerel] and all of that, which was plentiful at that time. He sold that at the market. I used to help him clean the *opelu* too.

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MI: And the names were? Your grandparents?

RM: Ichitaro Sato and my grandmother was Mamo, I think. Ichitaro and Mamo Sato.

MI: So they lived in Lahaina.

RM: Yes.

MI: But your father never lived in Hawaii?

RM: Never came to Hawaii.

MI: How did that happen?

RM: Well. (Chuckles) See, two brothers married two sisters. The oldest brother [Totaro] came to Hawaii. I guess he was a frail child, so they didn't expect to live. Anyway, I heard he taught at Lahainaluna and that's where he had an accident. He severed four fingers of his left hand. So what he has [left] is a thumb; well, that was already healed and in those days, I guess they didn't put them back. Anyway, from there, he went to get a business job because he's a banker. I don't know what he was doing working in a woodshop (Chuckles) because it's not his trade.

I strayed from my story.

Two brothers married two sisters, daughters of Sato, Motoko and Tatsuko. Tatsuko was the oldest one. Motoko is my mother—Motoko married my father Yozo. Tatsuko married Totaro. He's the banker. I think he was a big benefactor, donor of this [Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii] when it first started.

He formed his own bank, local, Pacific Bank they called it. But as soon as the war started though, they just confiscated it. But it's not a Japanese bank. It was money from the local Japanese. Anyway, he was interned, one of the first sent. He went all over the U.S.—Yuma [Arizona], Montana, Tennessee, Arkansas. He said he saw the U.S. on the backdoor! (Laughs)

MI: This was your uncle.

RM: Yes, my uncle, Totaro, the banker. In the meantime, I came back from Japan to live with Totaro and Motoko because they were here at that time, before the war started. Because the war started, I didn't see my mother for the next twenty years. I was raised by Motoko and Totaro, and the cousin that I'm taking care of now...

MI: But your mother? I'm not clear. So your father was in Japan, and your mother was in Japan also. You're born and raised there?

RM: No, I was born in Lahaina. I was born in Lahaina and then she took me back to Japan.

MI: And you lived there 'til how old?

RM: About six years old.

MI: And then you came back, but here you lived with your uncle?

RM: Yes, yes, yes. Then the war started and that was it, so I couldn't go back. From there, I lived with them, raised by Totaro and Tatsuko. I guess, you know all of that, he was a very strict man but I guess, that's what I needed (Chuckles).

MI: They didn't have children?

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- RM: No, they had the one [cousin] I'm taking care of. Florence. My cousin. They had another boy. He passed away when I was young, so maybe I took his place. See? That's the way. We lived right on Maunaloa Avenue across from Liholiho School. That's where I attended [school].
When the war started, my aunt, Tatsuko ... when the breadwinner's taken, how's she going to live? They have no income. They don't give anything, even though she was a U.S. citizen.
- MI: Try going back to December 7th. You remember anything specifically about how he was arrested?
- RM: No. Not about that date.
- MI: You were living there with them though?
- RM: Yes. But I guess I was too small. He was one of the first taken. I have a copy of a transcript of his interrogation by the FBI, and about him. He said he's not in favor of the war with Japan. Then, he said in the transcript that his belief was already more American than Japanese. But of course, they don't believe him. In fact the people who came to testify for him were very influential people in the Japanese ... not only Japanese community, but Caucasian people. Big shots, up—there businessmen.
- MI: Do you remember any names of those?
- RM: It's in that transcript. I can look it up. I know that one of them was, I think, something Patterson. He's a big businessman. And then, because he was gone, there was no breadwinner, my Aunt Tatsuko said, "How are we going live? We don't a house. We don't have income." So she decided to join him in one of the camp. It just happened to be Crystal City. So we took the boat from here.
- MI: This was about how long after December 7th?
- RM: When I was about ten years old at that time when I went over to...
- MI: It was a few years later.
- RM: Yes, yes, yes, yes. Because we shuffled, I guess, here and there. Part of the time, they sent me over to live with my grandfather and grandma in Lahaina. So, part of my growing up was in Lahaina, which I enjoyed because Lahaina was really a child's playground. The trees and the beaches ... that was really nice.
- MH: Do you know why your uncle was taken? Why he was interned?
- RM: Well, he was a banker. He was the head of the bank. Pacific Bank, they called it.
- MI: Where was the bank? Where was it located?
- RM: I don't know. The location ... I don't have that. All the local big businesspeople, I guess, gathered around him. They liked him, the way he does business and all that. So they invested with him. After the war ended, he came back and his bank is all gone. No more job, so he formed his own commercial finance company.
- MI: What was the name of that company?
- RM: Commercial Finance. The local Japanese people liked the way that he did business. A lot of them invested with him, so he was in a lot of funds.

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- MI: Now, when they, at the beginning, when they confiscated his previous bank, all the local people who had their money in the bank, they just lost everything?
- RM: That I don't know. But it's not Japanese money but in those days, emotions run high. There's not rational ... you know, even with [President] Roosevelt and all that, they just ... if he's Japanese, he's a Jap. That kind of feeling. So that's what happened.
- MI: So you were in elementary school at that time?
- RM: Ah, I guess, yes, I was starting, being ten years old. Part of the time, I was in Lahaina growing up. I went to that grammar school right on the beach in Lahaina.
- MH: Kam Three ...
- RM: Kam Third [King Kamehameha III] School. Yes, I went to that school part of the time. And then they had me come back to Honolulu because I guess, they couldn't just leave me with the grandparents. The other uncle and aunt were running the fish market. The grandfather was getting old too. They sent me back to Honolulu.
- MI: They didn't get into trouble because they were working with the fishermen? I mean, as far as internment?
- RM: Who?
- MI: Grandfather.
- RM: I don't know. Philip was the fisherman for my grandfather. He was a good fisherman, a Portuguese man. He would come back with a canoe—load of *opelu*. We wonder how he got them. He used to tell a story, when he'd go out there, he would tap on the canoe and then the barracuda would come and show him where the *opelu* is. (Laughs) I don't know how true it is, but he would come back with loads of *opelu* so ... yes, yes. Lot of good fun days. My grandfather would hire a Filipino man. His name was Bantalian Balingding, and he used to make kites out of bamboo for us, us kids. It's too funny. Real nice kites. (Chuckles)
- MI: Could you say the name again?
- RM: Bantalian Balingding. (Laughs) Colorful name!
- MI: Very colorful.
- RM: Yes. That was really fun days in Lahaina. In fact, the back neighbor was Fukunaga family. He was the local postal service there. Right in his house. He had no slots where the mail used to come in. One of his sons was "Sunshine" Akira Fukunaga, the one who starred in the 442 movie, "Go for Broke." That was one of his sons. (Pause) Famous name.
- MI: So, your uncle was picked up, sent to the mainland and you're living with your aunt. Did things change at that point for you folks? I know she had no income. Do you remember how things were?
- RM: I don't know how she survived.
- MI: How about you?
- RM: Because I ate whatever was there. They fed me.

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MI: You kept going to school?

RM: At that time, yes, for a few years because I went to Liholiho. Those days, I don't clearly remember. Before I knew it, it was said, where are we going to go to find him in camp? So, then, I guess, those days when growing up was fun for me. I just went to school. I guess I took their son's place, who passed away. He was a few years older.

MI: When was it that your aunt told you that you were going to the mainland?

RM: When? (Laughs) I don't remember exact time.

MI: It was a few years after.

RM: Yes, yes. She said we're going to have to join the dad, because we cannot survive here. No income.

MI: So there were the three of you? You, and your cousin and your aunt.

RM: Yes. The three of us.

MH: Was your uncle taken right away? After December 7th?

RM: Yes. He was one of those first here because he was a banker. He owned ... not owned, but ran the bank. All of those ministers, bankers, community leaders...

MI: Educators.

RM: He was one of those, because he had Japanese, what you call it? Business association. They have it here yet, the Japanese. He was kinda instrumental in that. A lot of ... because he was fluent in Japanese, and even in writing, he could write with the Japanese pen. Difficult kind, real difficult kind! (Laughs) It was something! Kanji and stuff.

MH: Do you remember when he was taken away? Do you remember how they took him away?

RM: I don't remember offhand. They just ... just like all the other people, they knock on the door, and they say, "You're gonna go with us." I just briefly heard that from my aunt. He said, his one hand cannot ... he doesn't have fingers already. How he's going to hurt anybody? But those days, the emotions ran high, I think.

MI: But you remember the trip over to the mainland?

RM: Yes. Well, they said, "We're going go on a boat." What was it? It said *Matsonia* or *Lurline*. Nice ship and we're treated very nicely on the boat, although they always had guards around. But we had nice dinners on the ship. We went up to [Camp] Sharp Park, California, just outside of San Francisco I guess. We landed there and then spent some time waiting for the train to take us down to Texas. From there, we boarded, after a long stay there, the train that took us all the way down the coast and inland, and in those days, they said, "Oh, when you're going through one of the towns, pull down the shade because if they see Jap faces, they're going to start shooting."

MI: For your own protection.

RM: Yes. So that's how it was.

MI: How many families were in your group? Do you have any idea?

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- RM: (Sighs) I don't have any ... because the one doctor I remember, Dr. Robert Kimura, he accompanied us.
- MH: Oh. You know what? Dr. Robert Kimura. Sorry, this is just an aside. There is a woman who works at the school I retired from, and she's retired also but she came back to work as an aide. She said her uncle was Dr. Robert Kimura and she was trying to find out if he was ever interned at Honouliuli first, and if he went to the mainland at all? ... Dr. Robert Akiyo Kimura?
- RM: Yeah, yeah. If he's the same doctor then, I guess. (Chuckles) I don't know his second name. He went on the train with us.
- MI: And on the ship with you?
- RM: Yes, yes. Because he's a very local guy. He told the guards...
- MI: He went as a physician to take care of you folks, or he was one of those?
- RM: I think he was one of those, but I'm not sure. I don't know. He wasn't introduced as one of the...
- MH: So he stayed at Crystal City until you folks were all released?
- RM: Yes, as far as I know. Yes, yes. And there was another dentist, which Florence, my cousin, went to work as a dental technician. Robert ... Dr. Puhatey we used to call him. He's a Caucasian. I don't know what he was doing in the camp. Then, we spent [time], I guess, until '44. War ended in '45.
- MI: So you were there for about a year?
- RM: Yes, about a year.
- MI: Now you folks went there, to join your uncle with the intention that you were going to be sent to Japan?
- RM: Well, at that time, there was this *Kattagumi* group, they called it, the guys that wanted back to Japan. Those people that said, "No-No." We're going to leave the U.S. but that was my uncle's side [of family]. He didn't want to go back to Japan. He said, "You folks are foolish." They had a big argument. But he said, "You folks don't know what the conditions are going to be in Japan and you're going to go back and you're going to be not liked." You know, those guys born in America, they go back, they get ostracized by the Japanese. He knew that. "You become a U.S. citizen." And he became a citizen too, later on. He was active in the society. He was very open, looking at those things. There was this other group in the same group that was very strong, pro-Japanese.
- MI: So roughly how did it split up? Fifty-fifty?
- RM: I think fifty-fifty. Because those people who went back ... wasn't that much, as I recall.
- MI: Do you remember any names?
- RM: No. They had a hard life, I think. That's what I understand. I don't any of them. I was too young.
- MH: So everybody was given a choice then?
- RM: Yes, that's what I understand. But I don't know.

MH: Oh. I think the Higashide grandparents went back.

RM: Uh-huh. They went back?

MH: To Fukuoka. Because they were rounded up in Peru, came to camp, but then, at the end of the war, from what I heard from the family, is the Peruvian government didn't want them back. So it was either stay in the U.S. or go to Japan, and they chose to go back to Japan.

RM: When they first came here, they told me that they were here illegally.

MI: They lost both their Peruvian citizenship.

RM: They were shanghaied by the guys that said to get out of the country, came to the U.S. and they said, eh, you're here illegally. Oh, that's hard times. Your life was even worse.

MH: Very unfair, yeah?

RM: Oh yes. And when the war ended, they didn't want you folks back. And on top of that, you know the reparation pay? They would only give what? Did they ever give the \$5,000?

MH: Well, you see, it was my husband who was interned. It was his family. He was only a baby. But he got \$20,000. They all got \$20,000. The others, I heard, later, the others, the Latin Americans? They got less.

MI: \$5,000.

RM: \$5,000. At first, they didn't want to give anything.

MI: That's right. They had to fight for that.

RM: Talk about a rotten deal. Anyway. That's what happened.

MI: The people in your group here, in Honolulu, did you know them in camp?

RM: The Matano family. I don't know if you know the Matanos? One of the daughters, Shari, she was Dan Inouye's chief-of-staff in Washington. The father was the *bonsan* [Buddhist priest] for the Moiliili Hongwanji over here. So all of them, Bernard, well, we used to play ball in camp, and after that, we kinda... and I don't know other parts of his family, but I know they were active in the Moiliili Hongwanji.

MH: Did you know the Tomitas? Ella Tomita? I think her father was the *bonsan* for Jodo Mission.

RM: Oh. Jodo over here?

MH: They all went, too.

RM: My uncle was Honpa Hongwanji. They had this side, the Jisshu. They had this separation. I don't know. (Laughs) The place where my father and aunt, their ancestors come, which is Hieizan which is overlooking Miwako, Lake Biwa, and there's a mountain up there called Hieizan.

MH: Yes, that's a famous religious place.

RM: Yes, that's where Oda Nobunaga burned the thing down. You know when they rebelled against him, this was oldish, and the warriors, monk warriors but they were not monks.

They were obstructing him so he went up there and killed all of them. He burned the old temple down. As a result of that, my brother who lives there, he tore down the old house and built a new house. When he dug all of that dirt, he said, "Oh, there's all this brown dirt." He kinda dug deep and when the government guys came to inspect, they said, "What's this?" "Oh, Oda Nobunaga, he burned the whole mountainside, and that's the dead." (Chuckles) Wow. Interesting, yeah? So that place, when they're building the highways up to there, they find a lot of old artifacts, stuff a lot of time because they're finding things.

MH: So your family lived on Mt. Hiei?

RM: Yes, overlooking but more lower, looking over the lake.

MH: Were you folks connected with the church up there?

RM: No. Well, I guess in a way, yes. When the *bonsan* used to come and give blessing to the house, the high priest never ... I went up there a couple of times to look at the temple, but we're not that ... we're lower ranks, I guess. (Chuckles) That area had a lot of historic wars, back and forth.

MH: So that's interesting. The dirt was a different color.

RM: Yes. Then he told me, my brother told me it was a deep layer of dirt. I said, "Well." But Nobunaga was...

MH: He was kinda ruthless.

RM: He was cruel ... brutal, the history about him.

MI: Let me ask you about Crystal City. Do you remember ... things about the camp? You mentioned one of your neighbors.

RM: Yes. Higashide.

MI: School ... playing around.

RM: We had this ... in fact I went to look at that in L.A., they have a reconstruction in the Japanese [American National] Museum. I went to visit there. I saw they rebuilt the house, the typical house that we lived in. Paper wall-type. No more walls and all that, and wintertime, was very cold. So we went to see that. Surrounding it, in the middle, there's this community bath and shower. Everybody had to go and use it. That was one of the things. I remember that.

Of course, the schools where they used to hire teachers from outside to come teach us.

MI: From the outside.

RM: Yes, yes. I met one *haole* teacher. I forget her ... Mrs. Fanning? Or Mrs. ... something ... Lansing? Anyway, she used to come in and teach us. That wasn't that many years because after that, the war ended and we were going go.

MI: Some of the families there, had like units. You folks did not have units?

RM: No. We had one of those portions of those houses. We had to survive. We had three, well, four, I guess...

MI: There's four of you.

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RM: Yes, four of us. I don't know how they split up. They just put up blanket and that was the partition, the separation, I guess.

MH: Did you have a kitchen in the house? I mean, in your barracks, a kitchen to cook?

RM: I think there was a kitchen, yes, because my aunt wanted. But there was a cafeteria, but I don't remember too much about eating in there.

MI: It seems like some people had their own meals in their own units. Other people had to go to the cafeteria.

RM: I don't know. I wasn't, you know, being a kid, I just want to eat! (Laughs) So I don't remember that part.

MI: So what grade were you in school?

RM: I was ten years. It would be ... what? When I came back here, I started sixth or seventh grade in Waikiki School. It must have been about the same, because it was only about a year or so that I was there. When I came back, I remember my aunt, she tried to get me into Jefferson [School], because that's where, if you get into there, you go the English Standard route. Stevenson [Intermediate School], then to Roosevelt [High School], university. But I guess my English wasn't too good, so (Chuckles) I ended up having go to Waikiki School. Then, it was quite close. Waikiki was right close to Jefferson. That's more for the local-kine guys that cannot speak [standard English]. My cousin Florence ... she went to Roosevelt before the war. She was the same graduating [year] as Tom Gill, you know the lieutenant governor? Same class. Anyway, I went to Waikiki, then Washington [Intermediate], then to McKinley [High School]. So that was the route we had to take.

MI: You had started to mention one of your teachers at Crystal City.

RM: Yes. Mrs. Fanning. I think it was Fanning or Lansing.

MI: What do you remember about her?

RM: She was Caucasian, but we didn't think too much, you know. I don't remember too much about her teaching. Us, we were more interested in other things, baseball, and playing at six to ten years old.

MH: So did they have a lot of activities for kids in the camp?

RM: Yes, they had leagues and stuff. That's where, like Bernard Matano, we used to play softball. And we had sumo too. We learned to dress in those...

MI: You used to do this?

RM: Yes, yes, as a kid, yes. When you're kids, we used to have to put on that thing (Chuckles).

MH: You know, on the map that we saw of Crystal City, wasn't there a swimming pool?

MI: Do you remember the swimming pool?

RM: Ah-h. I don't remember a swimming pool.

MH: What about ... did they make any kind of Japanese gardens or fishponds at camp? Because we saw that when we went to Manzanar. It all got covered over the years but

they dug it out. That kind of surprised me.

RM: Well, I guess our interests weren't (Laughs) that kind!

MI: How about animals?

RM: Well, I remember the skunks. Oh yeah! You get [them] a little frightened, and they let out a smell which just permeates the whole camp. And oh, it's awful! You cannot breathe. You're kinda choking. And once ... if ever it gets into your closet, they say you got to throw all that clothes away.

MH: You can't even wash it out?

RM: No, you cannot. Once in a while, there used to have one come through from the outside. Then we said, oh my goodness! It's awful. Talk about stink!

MI: We heard that kind of stories.

MH: I can't even ... what kind of, what kind of ... it's like a rotten smell?

RM: It's rotten, but it's a choking kind of smell too.

MI: Irritating.

RM: Yes. (Laughs) I can't describe it!

MH: Just one skunk can give out that?

RM: Yes, yes. You have wild kind, all of them. Used to come through and sometimes it gets frightened of some people. But the camp, when you first entered, you saw barbed wire fence. They get the towers with the guards on top. They're pointing their guns inside. They're supposed to protect us!?! (Chuckles) The enemy's outside there.

MI: By the time you went, were they still very strict, the guards? Or would they let go outside?

RM: No, they never. They wouldn't let us go out.

MI: They wouldn't let you go out?

RM: No.

MI: So you never went outside the camp?

RM: No, we never did go out. We wouldn't have dared to go out, because you look out there, there's nothing but desert. Oh man. You wouldn't go because there's no road or anything like that. It's cactus and you know, that's ... was probably rattlesnakes.

MI: You pretty much stayed by your unit? You didn't know there was a swimming pool? Or a grove of orange trees or that kind of thing?

RM: I don't remember that. I know we used to go around and ... but I don't remember any.

MH: Did anybody grow vegetables?

RM: Yes, I think there were, like even our neighbors, they had, to supplement.

MH: So what kind of food did your aunt cook? Because she had to cook just what she could from the supplies she got?

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- RM: Yes, I think so.
- MH: Did you have Japanese food?
- RM: Mmm. I can't say it was Japanese food. Whatever she ... as far the seasoning, I don't think they could get. I understand Eleanor Roosevelt came in.
- MI: Is that so?
- RM: Did something, not there. But from the history books I read, she wanted to have better housing, for say, for the women because ... she kinda influenced.
- MH: She was a rather compassionate person, from what I can gather, just from reading.
- RM: Yes. Yes. That's what I understand.
- MH: What about churches? Did you have churches in camp?
- RM: Yes, I know the *bonsans* would have their Buddhist thing, you know, but as far as the Christian ones and that, for many years I didn't make an effort (Chuckles) to attend services. I guess if somebody passed away, they get Buddhist services.
- MH: Yes, I was wondering that because at Manzanar we saw little cemeteries. Very small. But do you know if you folks had one?
- RM: I didn't ... I didn't recall seeing any cemeteries but I'm sure that people passed away. That's the way. I don't know if they set aside, by saying this is, you know...(Pause)
- MI: Yes, we had heard that two girls drowned in the swimming pool.
- RM: Oh?
- MI: Might have been before your time.
- RM: I didn't hear about that. (Pause)
- MI: So as far as you are aware, the main conflicts within the camp were between those who wanted to go to Japan and then those who didn't think that was a good idea.
- RM: They called them *kattagumi*, they used to call them.
- MI: Huh?
- RM: *Kattagumi*. Means that Japan didn't lose. (Laughs)
- MH: Those people wanted to go back?
- RM: Yes, yes, so they called them *kattagumi*.
- MI: Did they have a name for the other guys?
- RM: I don't know. (Laughs) Losers. (Everyone chuckles) No. But that's what they were known as. I remember, I always heard the term. (Lowers his voice) "Oh, *kattagumi*, yeah ... you can go back Japan."
- MI: When ... I guess ... so you were there towards the end. Did you hear any stories about people who left before? I mean, they went back in batches, that sort of thing. Did you hear any stories about the ones who went on the first ship?
- RM: No. I know we had, I think, one family friend. Asami was the name. They were on one of

the boats that got torpedoed on the way from either Singapore...

MI: So that was the first?

RM: Yes. (Quieter) Yes. I guess it was torpedoed by either the U.S. or the Japanese. I don't know. [*Awa Maru* was sunk on April 1, 1945]

MI: Tragic.

RM: You look at that army, the Japanese army, they were landlocked. They don't travel around the world. They don't see what the world was like. They were very limited in their outlook. That was the guys that were in power. That's what happened to Japan. Like Admiral Yamamoto, Navy, he goes around and sees ... he said, that's why he said, they made the biggest mistake, to bomb Pearl Harbor. He said, you have a tiger over there. He understood but the Army, [General] Tojo and the others were very limited and opinionated ... stupid and ignorant, I guess. If they were given the chance to go around the world, they would have had a better ... it was too bad.

MH: Did you, in camp, have opportunities to mingle with the other races? Like the Germans and the Italians, too?

RM: Yes, yes. We were kinda in a limited way because I was still ... but I remember some Germans and Italians. They were in the camp too. But I don't know if they exchanged food or exchanged stuff. Had adults, but us kids were...

MH: You know that book signing that happened a couple of weeks ago?

RM: Yes.

MH: When I went, I was really surprised because they set up chairs. There was the author. So many *haoles*! I looked, and I walked in a little late, and they were talking. The audience members were talking, and many of them were in camp. They talked about the camp experiences, a number of them. Very emotional. But they were in their own section, separate.

RM: Yes ... now that you're talking about the book signing. I heard about that afterwards.

MI: Were there sections separated by wire? There were fences between the different sections?

RM: I don't remember any place we had to go to another...

MI: In your classes, you didn't have any?

RM: No. It was all open. Only the outside fence.

MI: But, I mean, you didn't have German or Italian classmates?

RM: No, not in our class.

MI: (Pause) Any bad memories in the camp? Bad things happen to you or your family that you remember?

RM: Heh-heh. Hard to remember that.

MI: It was sorta routine for you. Just go to school?

RM: Yes, yes.

- MI: How about your aunt and your uncle? They had no complaints? No problems?
- RM: My uncle, well, he would come and talk to us, but I don't understand a lot of the stuff he was saying, because it was adult talk.
- MI: Politics?
- RM: Yes, yes.
- MI: Did they try to organize in camp? He was a banker or financier.
- RM: Yes. I'm sure they did, but I guess we were too young to understand. I know even after they came back, a lot of them used to come and ask him for advice. In fact, the commercial finance, people had a hard time paying back the loan, so he used to ...
- I heard him say those people that had stocks in his company, he told them to try and get them to pay their loans. He said, you know, the dividend that every year they give, he keeps; he's going to take it out of his pocket to pay the (Chuckles) ... that's the kind of thinking he has. He'd tell me, oh, you cannot take over this business (Chuckles). Yes, so that's the kind of person he was.
- MI: What about property that the family had? You talk about losing the business, but what about their home?
- RM: Yes, that part, if they made a loan on their ... they had to pay.
- MI: No, but was the home confiscated?
- RM: That, the business part, I don't know about. They would make loan for their business, and how they were able to pay back, I used to ... I would hear him on the telephone, "Just pay a little bit at a time."
- MI: When you folks came back, did you go back into the original home?
- RM: No, no, no, no.
- MI: That home was gone.
- RM: Oh yes. You know, at that time, the house was only \$4,000. (Laughs) So, when we first moved back, you know where Queen Kapiolani Hotel is? Right across from the zoo? We lived over there. But those were all cottages. All the hotel workers used to ... my father knew this Fred Ikeda. He was a big businessman. He owned that hotel there, so he asked him to repair the cottage. We started there.
- MH: Where was your home at, before you left for camp?
- RM: I think it was on Maunaloa [Street], across from Liholiho School.
- MH: So that one, the government took?
- RM: Well, I know who took it, but I won't say. I don't know if he owned that. Maybe. I know at that time, they were thinking, should we buy it? Maybe if they bought it, it was so cheap, but probably would be confiscated. Then we lived there, where Queen Kapiolani Hotel is, and when I graduated from high school, I went to U.H. and that's when we moved. He bought another place by Aina Haina. So we moved up to that, and lived there until he passed away.

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- MI: When it was time to come back, how long after the war ended was this, the war with Japan? You had to stay there for months after that?
- RM: (Coughs) I guess they had to wait for the ships.
- MH: But you remember when you folks came back, anybody teasing you because you folks were in camp? Being looked at funny?
- RM: (Takes a deep breath) There's always that. In school, I don't remember them teasing me because they didn't know the background anyway.
- MH: Were you ever teased ... "Jap"? Called that kind?
- RM: (Coughs) Oh yes. A lot of time, they would use that. At that time, you know, right after the war, if you were at that kind of ... if they found out ... even some of the teachers were, you know...
- MH: Prejudiced?
- RM: Yes.
- MH: You felt it?
- RM: Yes, because when I went to McKinley High School and we had to introduce ourselves, I told them the background. I said, "I spent a year in concentration camp." This one teacher said, "They're not concentration camps." I felt like saying, "Did you stay in one?" But maybe, it's a different word, but they call it internment camp to sound nicer. But if you were in one, I think you would call it ... but that's the kind of feeling they felt inside.
- MH: Um-hmm. Was that a Caucasian teacher?
- RM: Yes, yes. This was at McKinley High School. I guess when they grew up, they all had their prejudices.
- MH: Was that the only teacher? That made it so obvious.
- RM: No. When I first started at high school, there was a Japanese, I think, Mrs. Nakano. She came from the mainland because her English was really good. Not like local, you know. (Chuckles) Very attractive lady, too. I remember her as one of my homeroom teachers. I remember this one teacher, a famous football coach at McKinley. I guess he didn't like girls because he had, I don't know how many daughters, but anyway, he was a brilliant math teacher. I went through trigonometry and all that differential equations with him. When a girl in a class couldn't catch on, he tell her, "Okay. You! Go out there by the window. Stand there by the window. Now, jump out!" (Laughs) He's ... you rotten. If you do that now! But [on] the first day of class, he would write this long formula. He said, "Anybody can solve that, I'll take the whole class to chop suey dinner." (Everyone laughs) And one guy did it. I understand he became a professor at M.I.T.
- MH: Did he take the class to dinner?
- RM: Yes! (Laughs) Not us though. There was another guy, Richard Miyamoto. He was in his class too. They called him "Slack" because he would sit in the first seat in the classroom, and he'd be sleeping. But today, he's an M.I.T. professor! (Laughs)
- MH: Maybe he was bored.

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- RM: Anyway. There were a lot of characters there.
- MH: But McKinley was known, before, they used to call it “Tokyo High.”
- RM: Yes, yes.
- MH: It was predominantly Japanese.
- RM: Yes, yes. Yokohama or Tokyo High.
- MI: How about the principal of McKinley? Do you know any kind of memories of the principal?
- RM: Geiger was the principal. I don’t know what his first name was.
- MI: There was another one.
- MH: Miles Carey.
- MI: Is that a familiar name to you?
- RM: He was before, I think, that’s before.
- MI: He was very well, uh, respected.
- MH: Very well-respected.
- RM: Well, you look all the class, the school over there, get a lot of big ... Dan Inouye. All those kind of guys who were very famous and well-to-do in the community. They produced! (Chuckles) A lot of good people.
- MI: How much do you think, looking back, these experiences affected you in your life? Compared to the ones, your friends who didn’t go to camp?
- RM: Well, I think...
- MI: Did you come back different then?
- RM: Yes, I’m sure I came back different. I would tend to look at things more openly, because having been first-hand, subject to ridicule and taunts, and all of that. I had to go through all that, even going up to the military education.
- MI: Where was this ridicule and taunts?
- RM: Well, any of the organizations you go to. At that time.
- MI: In school, you mean?
- RM: Yes, at school and in education as such because when you go to school, they look at you, like, eh, you know. At that time, you’re a Jap. I guess ... gradually, as it goes on, you learn to just live with it.
- MI: You never got into any fights, or anything like that?
- RM: Oh well, we had some but it’s not unless the guy became really insistent. (Clears throat) Some guys liked to beef all the time. (Chuckles) But, I’m not the biggest. Just small.
- MH: People who liked to fight, were they non-Japanese?
- RM: Some of them were. Yes. Most of them when they first ... they gradually let their emotions, in the war, you know, they became more educated. Their kids wouldn’t take on

the same kind of stuff, because they're not taunted in the same way.

MI: Did you ever meet any after you got back? Anyone who was in camp who went to Japan and came back to Hawaii? Did you know any of those people?

RM: No. The only one that I know is Shimoko. Used to be S&S Saimin.

MH: Oh yes. I remember that.

MI: What's the name?

RM: Shimoko. Clarence Shimoko. He passed away.

MI: His family went? And came back?

RM: Yes. I think so. He came back. He was one of those.

MI: Did you ever talk to him about what it was like there?

RM: Yes. Briefly. He had a hard life and then he and his father ... I guess the father was the one that started S&S Saimin. The *dashi* and all of that too. It was a hard life. Gotta get up early in the morning, can hardly sleep and then you gotta make all those things.

MI: How about in Japan? Did he talk about their experiences in Japan?

RM: Well, he said they weren't treated very nicely because they're not Japanese. They experienced a lot of hatred. Looked down upon.

MI: As far as your uncle, how did he recover from all of this? Did he ever get where he was before?

RM: No, his business never grew, you know, but it was never his intent to try to be such a big, big ... like that. But the respect and love for him, it came from the people, as far as the way he did business. He never tried to gouge anybody. He tried to help a lot. He was a champion of telling people to get their citizenship. In fact, he became one of the first to have a ... what to do call it? Citizens something group?

MI: In the 1950s, I believe, they allowed...

RM: They were the first.

MI: Was he bitter about the whole thing?

RM: No. No. The way he talked, he didn't sound like he was a bitter type. That is, in fact he welcomed that opportunity and then he looked forward rather than looking backwards. He tried to be.

MI: How about your aunt?

RM: My aunt? No, no. She was born and educated in Lahaina. She went to the university's teachers' college. And my mother, same thing. When she married and in Japan, the war started. Then the war ended and all the Occupation Forces came in. A lot of them were GIs who went into the villages and confiscated all the swords and things. So here comes this tiny old Japanese lady out of the woodwork, and comes up to say, "Eh, you cannot take this." They were shocked because most of them cannot speak English. Here comes this little lady. "You guys cannot take this." They said, "Why?" "This is not weapons. This is a ceremonial kind."

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MI: The swords and things?

RM: Yeah! They were going to take them home... give as souvenirs. They thought...

MI: Was she telling the truth?

RM: Yes! Yes. (Laughs) That was interesting.

MI: So they did listen?

RM: Yes. A lot of the weapons, so-called, were saved.

MI: What happened to your parents [during the] wartime?

RM: My parents?

MI: In Japan.

RM: Well, my father...

MI: Did he have to serve?

RM: Yes, he was in the Japanese army. I remember when I went there as a kid, we went to Korea. I remember one winter, I was skiing down, with a sled, down the mountain, slipping, in Korea. It was very cold. I guess he had Japanese uniform. I guessed he served in the Japanese army but I don't know. He was on his horse. It must have been kind of high up there. I don't know anything about it. (Chuckles) I only remember that one scene, that time being in Korea.

MI: But your mother came back to Hawaii?

RM: No. She never came back [to reside].

MI: Neither of them came back to Hawaii after that?

RM: My father never came back. He passed away. My mother came back for a trip afterwards, to see old Lahaina. She came back with my two sisters.

MI: Like, how long after the war?

RM: Well, this was way after, when United Airlines planes and all that. She came to visit to see how Lahaina is.

MI: But she never wanted to move the family back?

RM: No. Not with the kids being educated and raised in Japan. It would be tough.

MH: So when did you ... after you separated from your parents, when was the next time you actually saw them again?

RM: My mother was alive. My father was still alive. At that time, the U.S. had already won the war, and they were in Japan. My uncle, Yukichi Asato was with the Occupation Forces. He ended up being a civilian there, in Japan, a businessman. That was the one who went to Harvard. Anyway, he arranged it so that I was on my way ... I had to serve those years, two years in the active army after my commission at the university. I was on my way to Korea. He arranged it so that I would meet her [my mother] at the Daiichi Hotel in Tokyo. That was the first time I saw her in twenty years. (Chuckles) That was pretty nice.

MI: You were drafted?

RM: No, not drafted. At the university, I went to R.O.T.C. commission.

MI: After you graduated from McKinley, you went to U.H.?

RM: U.H. And then took R.O.T.C.

MI: Got your commission.

RM: Got my degree in engineering and then commission. Those days, you either get drafted, (Chuckles) so I guess, I took the better route to get a commission, go out as a lieutenant. Then you had to go to physical training. I went to New Jersey, took my commission in Signal Corps, even though I was an engineer, because the engineer portion was full. I went to Monmouth, New Jersey, took my training, had to wait for another class. Finally, after they spent all the money training me, and another guy, local guy too, they said, “No, you guys cannot take this one. This is communications center and your parents are Japanese ... you are not U.S. something. You cannot get some kind of clearance, crypto—clearance,” they called it. “Ah, okay.” We just sat around for a while, and then, we got ordered where we’re going to go.

I wanted to go to Japan, because I wanted to see my mother. I went down to Washington, D.C. to the Pentagon to try who I can talk to. So they said, “We’ll send you to the next closest place.” “Where’s that?” “Korea.” (Laughs) So they sent me to Korea. This was right after the war ended in Korea and things were really spartan. Not like Korea now. When I got there, I got on a real little train, go up the track, all the way up to about five miles south of the DMZ. At that time, it was kinda hard. Every so often, they would blow the horn, and you had to go out and get into positions. Korea ... talk about cold ... Korea is cold! When you drive on the road, and the snow, the wind is so hard and cold, it turns to sand. That’s how cold it is! (Laughs)

MI: Now, your father. Did you get to see him again?

RM: Yes.

MI: When and where did you get to see him again?

RM: When I went to Sakamoto to visit a cousin. On my way over there, I stopped at a commissary in Japan, a U.S. commissary. I would buy foodstuff, because those days, it was really hard, yeah? So I would take it to them and drop it off, then I went to see [him] but it’s hard to talk to somebody that you don’t even grow up with. Especially the Japanese (Laughs) military type, too! He wasn’t the type of person that you can discuss stuff because his English is non-existent. My Japanese is (Chuckles), the same thing too.

MH: Sakamoto. You talk about this place, Sakamoto. Is that the Mt. Hiei place?

RM: Yes, on the slope, going up there. There’s a town called Otsu, right on the Lake Biwa. You take a small train and go up to about five train stops, and you end up in Sakamoto. From there, there’s a road that goes up to Hieizan.

MH: So your brother still lives there?

RM: Yes, yes. We have a house with an estate. I guess the Matsui clan had a lot of land before, so my grandfather took pity on the people. A lot of people didn’t have any land. They didn’t know where to bury their people, their parents, their relatives. He said, “Okay, this

mountain here, a small one, you guys can bury.” So there’s a lot of small stones up on there. He just let them ... they were grateful to him. That’s the kind of person he was. Our family grave is beyond that. I go up there because my mother, the one who was born in Lahaina, she’s buried over there. Also, I have a part of her in Diamond Head [Memorial Park]. I have a plot for her.

MH: I notice the Japanese do that. They separate. Some are there.

RM: Yes. (Chuckles) Yes. I put some there, because I want a portion of me too.

MI: But your father, when you met him, didn’t talk about the war?

RM: No, we never discussed the war too much. Probably would end up arguing. But anyway, we couldn’t understand each other because his English was very limited. And my Japanese is...

MH: Have you ever been to Crystal City after you were released?

RM: No. I never did get a chance to go.

MH: What is there at Crystal City? Is there anything? Is it just a marker?

RM: Ah. Only the pictures that you’ve seen and I’ve seen, that’s all I know. I haven’t gone there. But I know, before the war, when we were there, there was a statue of Popeye. In the town square, because it used to be the spinach center of the U.S. That’s what I understand. When I was young, I said, “How can you grow spinach?” (Chuckles)

MH: And the Crystal City group, the one that meets every so often, is that only Japanese? None of the other internees, just Japanese?

RM: Yes. Clifford organizes it but I don’t know if he makes contact with anybody living here. Not too many. (Pause) I leave it up to Cliff.

MH: You knew him in camp.

RM: Yes, yes, yes. We were about the same age too. His father was the *bonsan*, I think, at Honpa Hongwanji.

MH: Have you seen the map of Crystal City, which shows all the...

RM: Yes.

MH: Would you be able to know, if you looked at it, where you lived?

RM: No. I wouldn’t. I know we were right along, close to the ... bound by the fence. But I don’t know exactly where.

MI: Can you remember playing football there?

RM: No, no. I was mostly in baseball.

MI: Clifford was telling us about how he played the Germans. (Everyone laughs) And they lost.

RM: Football was not the favorite. You need cutting ... you need all kine helmets.

MI: (Pause) Interesting. So, it actually, in a way, it helped you grow up a little bit faster.

RM: Yes, I would say so. Yes, thinking back. I think when I came back, my uncle—my father,

I called him my father, he made me take this paper route because, at that time, it was the whole block going up Paoakalani [Street], going back, that was my route. I had about 150-200 people subscribe to the paper. It was like I had my own business. Every month I had to go and collect. Sometimes, guys gone. They disappear. I got to pay for that out of my...

MI: Really?

RM: Yes. There were some people...

MI: The newspaper would make you pay for it.

RM: (Chuckles) Yes. Yes. That was a good learning experience. But there was some real nice people. You go to them, you collect, and then they give you a tip. What my father would do, is, in those days, Japan was really poor. 360 to one yen. He said, whatever amount, you'd like \$25 a month? He would send to my mother in Japan to help.

MI: Really? So your newspaper went to your mother. Wow.

RM: Yes, yes, yes. So that's why I remember, he used to say, at least, help her out.

MI: Did she use to write to you?

RM: No, I never got a letter from her. I guess he [his uncle] had the letter. I just paid him. So he made it so it came from me, because he used to send a lot more. (Pause) That was the situation. That way, it helped me grow up and learn...

MI: It was like your whole family was there. You were the only one.

RM: (Chuckles) Yes, yes. That's the way it seems like. Yes. So I just met my brother on the last trip to Japan. The trip was by Lake Biwa, stop in Kyoto, so I had them come. He and my sister came to meet me at the hotel. He's the one that's four years younger than me, but he's balding! (Laughs) He's the one who went to Keio University. He was with Sama Bank, went there a long time until he retired. At least, he's a businessman, so you know, he can handle the real estate problems that the Matsui clan has yet. Anything happens, I don't think my sisters would be able to.

MH: How many brothers and sisters do you have in Japan right now?

RM: I have one brother and three sisters. One is just like Naoko is, you know. I have the two younger ones. One is Yoshiko. The second is ... the third one is Michiko. She lives by Narita Airport. She's married and they live over there. She had a son, one boy, and he graduated from *Todai* [Tokyo University], good school. He went to work for ATT.

MI: [To MH] Do you have any more questions?

[To RM] Okay, we're done. Thank you. Very interesting.

