JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAIʻI

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Ayako Matsuo (AM)

May 16, 2017

Interview by: Mel Inamasu (MI)

at Kahala Nui (AM's residence)

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

MI: Today is May 16, 2017 and we are at the Kahala Nui to interview Mrs. Ayako Matsuo. My name is Mel Inamasu, a volunteer at the Japanese Cultural Center. I'm going to have Mrs. Matsuo tell us her full name, when and where she was born, and we'll go on from there. I'll ask you about your parents and your childhood before we go on to learn about your husband's internment story.

AM: I was born on Kauai…

MI: What's your full name?

AM: Ayako S. Matsuo.

MI: What's the S?

AM: That's my maiden name, Sakoda. I was born on Kauai and lived a very simple life, very happy. After high school …

MI: When were you born?

AM: I was born on March 3, Girls' Day, 1919. This was after the First World War.

MI: What part of Kauai?

AM: I was born in Nawiliwili. We moved when I was a little older to Lihue, and my dad worked for the Wilcox family as a gardener.

MI: What were the names of your parents? Your father's full name, your mother's full name?

AM: My father's name was Seizo Sakoda. My mother's name was Teruno Nawahara. They were from Hiroshima, both sides. My dad was from the real countryside, so he was illiterate. My mother grew up in Hiroshima city.

MI: So, they were both first generation, Issei.

AM: Yes, Issei. I don't know their parents, really.

MI: Why did they come to Hawaii?

AM: It was quite similar to the potato famine in Ireland, when all the people came to the United States. It was a depression.

MI: Do you know about what year it was that they came to Hawaii?

AM: It must have been early nineteen something. I was born in 1919.

MI: Do you know why they came to Hawaii?

AM: Because they didn't have any work.

MI: Did they come to work on the sugar plantation?

AM: That's the only thing they could do.

MI: So they started out working on the plantation, living in the plantation village?

AM: No, no. He worked for a family.

MI: He never worked on a plantation?

AM: No, he never worked on a plantation. In a way, we were lucky because my mother didn't have to go to *hapai ko* [cane field work] because she was a good seamstress. She made a little side money from sewing. You know dowry, the Japanese had dowry. She used to make zabuton [cushions], futon [bedding], kimono, all those things. She was a beautiful seamstress. She made all those things.

MI: Was this something she learned in Hiroshima, before she came to Hawaii?

AM: Yes. And she was adept to that thing, she was really good at it.

MI: They were married in Hiroshima and then came to Hawaii?

AM: Yes, as a couple. She wasn't a picture bride. Then they worked for the Rice family, the famous Rices.

MI: What was the full name?

AM: Charlie Rice. And then, they moved to Lihue and they worked for the Wilcoxes.

MI: Which Wilcox?

AM: He's the one who built the Nawiliwili Harbor. He was the owner of the Grove Farm sugar plantation. It was almost like the old Southern plantations. You had the boss and then all the … we lived in a small little compound, twelve families. Each of these families had something to do. They were really rich people. My father was the gardener, my neighbor was a chauffeur, and the other ones took care of the chickens and the other one took care of the taro patch and so forth. One did the laundry and my uncle was a cook. It was just like the Southern plantation. We had a happy life there. We didn't covet anything, we didn't have anything but you know what? I was thinking the other day, we were lucky we were poor. [So] they couldn't give us candy or soda pop.

MI: So you have good teeth now?

AM: We drank only milk because my dad milked the cows, so we got free milk. That's why, at 98, I still have my teeth. [laughter]

MI: How many children in your family, and which one are you?

AM: I'm the second youngest. Seven children. Three are left, three are gone.

MI: Tell us about growing up on Kauai.

AM: We really had a happy life.

MI: You lived on the Wilcox family estate.

AM: No, not on the estate. Right on the outside, where all the employees' homes were lined up, but it was in the same place. It wasn't like the plantation camp, because there were only twelve families. So, all the kids got together and played together. We were really happy. Come to think of it, we didn't covet anything. We didn't have anything but we didn't covet. No "do what the Joneses do", you know?

MI: Where did you go to school?

AM: Lihue grammar school and then Kauai High School. After that, they don't have any college so I came to Honolulu, to the UH [University of Hawaii].

MI: What year was it that you came to Honolulu?

AM: '38. I must have been about nineteen. I went to school when I was … I went to kindergarten when I was six and a half. I don't know why they waited that long for me to enroll. So, I was one year behind most of my friends. As I was telling my husband, I a little country gal from Kauai, married a city slicker and lived in Honolulu ever since.

MI: So, you went to the University of Hawaii. What did you study there?

AM: I took humanities courses. We didn't have a major, those days. So, I …

MI: Your plan was to do what, with your college degree?

AM: I don't know. The only thing I was thinking of was [to] graduate. It turned out real good because I had all the humanities courses and my husband graduated as an electrical engineer with all his math, so the kids were lucky.

MI: What was your husband's name, what year was he born, and when did he come in to your life?

AM: My husband was born in 1914 and [his name was] Keijiro, because he was the second son. Keijiro Matsuo. He didn't have a middle name.

MI: And his parents' names?

AM: His dad was Isokichi Matsuo who was a *botchan* [literally, "young master"].

MI: A what?

AM: He was a spoiled, rich, rich family, from Japan.

MI: His father came, not to work on the plantation …

AM: No, he was going to the mainland to go to medical school. Then there was a cholera epidemic in Honolulu so he was marooned here.

MI: They wouldn't allow ships …

AM: No, they couldn't do anything.

MI: So, he couldn't go to medical school?

AM: No. And, he had the brains. He was the smartest I know of.

MI: How did he end up on Kauai?

AM: Not Kauai, in Honolulu. So, he was stuck here. He had to do something, so he started a Japanese school. He was a principal [of] a Japanese school. Then he fell in love with his student, and they got married.

MI: What was the name of this student?

AM: Her name was Suga Yoshida. They had nine children.

MI: What was their business?

AM: As I told you, he was a *botchan* from Japan. He didn't know how to work. His dad owned all kinds of stuff. They owned a mountain in Japan. They had a *shoyu* [soy sauce] factory and a *sake* factory and I don't know what else. So, he didn't do any work.

MI: How about in Honolulu?

AM: That's when he started the Japanese school.

MI: What was the name of that school?

AM: I don't know.

MI: HIs wife worked with him?

AM: I don't think so. She wasn't that schooled. She was good at bringing up children, I guess.

MI: How many children?

AM: They had seven boys and two girls. How can he afford to bring up all those kids? A Japanese school teacher. That's where my husband comes from. He was one of those *oya koko* [filial piety] boys, you know. Second son, third child. The oldest was a girl. So, he was a second son, the third child and he had all these young ones …

MI: That he was responsible for?

AM: Yes, kind of.

MI: You met him at the university?

AM: No. Well, I was still at the university when I met him.

MI: What was he doing when you met him?

AM: This was in 1942. He was already finished [with] his degree in engineering in Indiana and was home. He was working at the insurance company.

MI: What insurance company?

AM: Sun Life. When he came back, they weren't hiring any Japanese at Pearl Harbor any more. That's where most of the engineering people went.

MI: He came back with his degree from what university?

AM: Tri-State, a small college in Indiana. He couldn't go to a big college because it was too expensive.

MI: So, he comes back, no job, so he does what?

AM: He applied at Hawaiian Electric [Company] and they offered him two hundred dollars a month and he said he can't help his four little kids with that money. So he was thinking, he said, "Never mind engineering, anymore." He has to forget it. The only thing he can do will be selling. He thought that the sky's the limit, like if you work hard, you can do something. And, any other office job and things like that, set job, he said, he couldn't help his little brothers and sisters. So, he thought he'd go into insurance. And this is the thing, the boss gave him a test for salesmanship and he kinda flunked, because he was no salesman. He didn't have the gift of gab and he couldn't lie! [chuckle] A lot of these insurance people, they have to lie to sell.

MI: I didn't know that.

AM: Yes, most … all salespeople. You have to. My husband is the very sincere type.

MI: Too honest?

AM: Too honest for that job.

MI: So he never became an insurance salesman?

AM: No, but through hard work, he made a success.

MI: So they hired him anyway?

AM: When he went over there and said, "I made an application to your company and it's been two weeks now and I don't have any answer. Let me know whether you're hiring me or not." The boss said, "You're hired right now. I like your attitude."

MI: He demanded to know.

AM: He said, "If you don't want me I'm going to the other company", John Hancock or whatever. "Let me know right now," he said, "I can't be fiddling around for two weeks. I have four small kids to feed." [chuckle]

MI: And that became his whole career.

AM: After the war ended, I told him, "Why don't you take a refresher course and go into electrical engineering?" He told me, "Hell no." [laughter]

MI: Let's go back. Tell me, when were you married?

AM: In 1942, September 5th.

MI: This was after he got the job selling insurance?

AM: He had already gotten the job.

MI: December 7, 1941, did you know your husband, then?

AM: No, not on that day. I was at the university.

MI: This was a Sunday.

AM: You see, my parents couldn't afford to send me to college, but I was determined to go anyhow. I came here and worked as a maid for my room and board and ten dollars a month. My teacher from Kauai High School found me a nice family to work for.

MI: What was the name of this family?

AM: John Walter Garrett.

MI: Where did they live?

AM: Manoa, next to the university. It was very convenient. I didn't have to pay bus fare and most people to this day, children won't understand, but I had only ten cents for my lunch because I had only ten dollars a month.

MI: What could you buy, with ten cents?

AM: A sandwich. And of course, everybody's having ice cream and everything and I'm drooling. Just had one sandwich a day. Of course, breakfast and dinner, I could have at home, from the family where I worked. That was good for me. Hard work doesn't hurt anybody. In fact, all through high school, I worked. For eight years straight, I worked.

MI: So, on December 7, where were you?

AM: I was at the place I was staying with. Everybody knows what happened that day. My brother was one of the first draftees; he was at Schofield [Barracks]. He came over to visit me that morning. I remember he said, "You know, funny thing, I don't know why but these crazy people at Pearl Harbor, they're practicing air … I see all these guns going on. They're practicing on a Sunday." I said, "Jerry, that's the real thing." Over the radio, my neighbor came over to tell me.

MI: He was coming over to see you so he didn't hear the radio?

AM: Yes, that's right. He passed through Pearl Harbor and he saw all this fireworks and he said, "These crazy people, working so hard on Sundays." So when I told him that, he said, "Oh, is that right?" He put his things together and went straight back to Schofield. That was it.

MI: Did that day change your life at the university or did you just continue to go to school?

AM: No, that was my senior year. This was December 7 so the first semester was over. Everything stopped. The second semester, nobody went to class. It all stopped. But we all got a C [grade], passing and the guys who were making A's were so mad. I'm a poor student so I was happy with a C [chuckle].

MI: Because of that, you were able to graduate. In the summer of 1942, you graduated.

AM: Yes, June.

MI: What were you doing that spring?

AM: We just had to live and wait.

MI: You didn't work?

AM: No. I helped one of the professors because he had small children.

MI: So, you earned extra money?

AM: No, I didn't take any money. I just said that it's my war effort. I'm going to help somebody so I helped take care of the little girls during the day. Of course, I was still working at the family. I had to make their dinner, wash their dishes and straighten out the

rooms. Luckily, they had a full maid so I didn't have the heavy work to do. She did the laundry and the big cleaning and stuff, but I did all the cooking. That's how I learned to cook.

MI: You practiced on them?

AM: Kind of [chuckle]. So, I guess, that's about it.

MI: So, you graduated. You hadn't met your husband yet?

AM: No, I had met him in February.

MI: How did you meet him?

AM: My cousin, who lived in Waialua, was at the university but in those days, Waialua to the university was far. Now days, everybody has a car so … She lived with my later husband's family in Kaimuki while she was in school.

MI: Who was this?

AM: Cousin, my cousin. She lived with her uncle and aunt, who were my husband's parents. Right? So, she lived in Kaimuki during the school year. One day, she said, "Let's go to the beach". We didn't have classes because of the war, so I said, "Okay." She said, "I'll pick you up, we'll go to my aunty's house and we'll make lunch and then we'll go to the beach, Waikiki." That's where I met my husband. He was there, naturally. That was his home. Then, we went to the beach and I saw him at the beach with his girlfriend.

MI: He was already selling insurance?

AM: Yes, because he came back from the mainland in 1940 and this was 1942. We found out that we both loved the beach. I was really a water baby. Any time I saw water, I plunged into it. That's how we met and became friends. We liked each other and that was it.

MI: How long before you got married?

AM: That's the thing. This was in February and he said, "Let's get married right after your graduation." So, I wrote to my folks and my mother said, "Hell no, you don't know him enough to get married. Wait 'til December." So I said, "I'm sorry, I can't get married till December." He told me, and this is very unlike him, he said, "You've been such a good daughter. For once in your life, disobey her and let's get married." I said, "No." If they had been unreasonable, I would [have] disobeyed them but when you think about it, they're right. So, "Alright," he said, "I'll wait." In September, I got a letter from my mom saying, "You can get married right away. You don't have to wait until December." You know what happened? You know the Japanese; they used to investigate the spouse, right?

MI: I don't know. Is that right?

AM: Yes, in Japan, they always …

MI: So, she had him investigated?

AM: So, she wrote to my cousin, I don't know if you know him, he was Horace Sakoda, who used to run the Bon Ton Store.

MI: What kind of store was that?

AM: Ladies wear. Anyway, she had written to him to investigate K. Matsuo. Luckily, at the insurance company, there was a guy, Mr. Yatami, I think his name was. We used to work in the same company and my cousin knew him very well. He was kind of an elderly person. So, he talked to him, asked him what do you know about K. Matsuo? And, he said, "Why?" "The mother wants to know." He said, "You go and write to her right away and tell her, grab him this minute. You can't find a finer man." [laughter] So, that's why she hastily wrote to say, "You can get married right away." So, we got married around September 5th. Oh, my goodness! [laughter]

MI: The reason I came here was because there was something about internment in your story.

AM: Oh, yes. We were married, September 5, 1942 and six months later, that was the end of March or April [1943], on a Sunday morning, two guys from the FBI came over, looking for my husband. We were in Kaimuki. You couldn't find any home. You don't know what we went through to find a place to live. When they advertised home for rent, and they opened at eight o'clock, [by] five o'clock that morning, the line was that long.

MI: Why was that? Why was there such a demand for homes at that point in time?

AM: I think it was because of the military. Did you know that-

MI: Because a lot of soldiers were moved to Hawaii?

AM: Did you know that there were about four hundred thousand residents in Honolulu at that time and there were the same number, military members? Half and half. So, nothing was available. Nothing.

MI: The military had to live off post?

AM: I guess so. Even the theaters, you couldn't get in. They were all military people, the whole theater. They took over everything. Of course, in those days, they came first, right? And we were happy to let them have it. Where was I?

MI: You were trying to find a place in Kaimuki.

AM: So we had to live with his folks. Luckily, they had a five bedroom home in Kaimuki. We were all crowded. We had one room, his brother had one room. This was six months after we were married that these two guys from the FBI came and say, "Where's your husband?" I say, "He's at work." He worked Sunday mornings.

MI: You were at home, just a housewife?

AM: Yes. This was Sunday. And I said, "What do you want him for?" He says, "We don't answer any questions. We just came to get him. We're just FBI agents." So in a short time, my husband came home and he was surprised.

MI: They waited for him to come home.

AM: Oh, yes. They said, "We'll wait." I said, "Oh, you're kidding."

MI: How long did they wait?

AM: I don't remember. It wasn't that long. I can still remember my husband had this blue shirt, long sleeved shirt. He was surprised, "What is this?" So he says, "We're going to take you right away. Don't bring anything, just come." Just like that. And, of course, I'm crying.

MI: Let me go back a step. You had not heard about other people being picked up like that? He had not heard?

AM: No, slightly. The older people, first generation, and they were in some place called Honouliuli. They went to the mainland, too.

MI: Honouliuli opened in March 1943.

AM: Yes, it was something like that. So, it was new when my husband went there.

MI: Did you or anyone in the family know of anyone who had been picked up?

AM: No. I didn't know anybody. After he got in, I got to know one of the ladies, Mariko.

MI: Let me go back. Your husband's father was a Japanese school teacher.

AM: And they didn't even come to get him.

MI: That's what I was going to ask you.

AM: So we said, "How come?" after his son was taken. And so, anyway, my husband went and I'm crying and my father-in-law said, "What you crying about?"

MI: So, he came home from school, your father-in-law?

AM: No, no. The schools were all shut.

MI: Did he, your father-in-law, see the FBI agents?

AM: My father-in-law, they didn't even question him. That's the funny thing.

MI: So, they waited there for your husband to come and you father-in-law [Japanese school teacher] wasn't worried?

AM: He was downstairs, someplace, in his apartment. Separate apartment, in the same house. They had a two-story house. They had the downstairs. So, it's hard to understand why, but now I understand why. Then, that day went, I don't know how.

MI: You said, now you understand why? Why do you think they picked him up?

AM: They gave us the reasons.

MI: What were the reasons?

AM: Five reasons. To me, my husband was a patriot. Of course, nobody knows that because he's not going to shout and say "I'm a patriot." But I knew. The first reason was that he was, to make tuition money for college, he used to go to California every summer and dive at San Pedro Bay, the big bay.

MI: Dive for what?

AM: Agar weed, to send to Japan.

MI: Seaweed. They would gather the seaweed.

AM: Yes, with this helmet, that iron stuff. They didn't have SCUBA divers anymore, those days. And, he couldn't afford a new one so they went to a second hand shop.

MI: How did he find that kind of job?

AM: He made the job. He was the host.

MI: He knew that if he got the seaweed, he could sell it to Japan?

AM: I don't know who sold it to Japan for him. Whether he did it. But Japan wanted that for their *kanten* [agar]

MI: Where in California?

AM: San Pedro Bay. That's a huge bay, right?

MI: I don't know.

AM: So they figured he was snooping around because he went there for three summers!

MI: Was there a Naval shipyard there?

AM: I think so; I don't know anything about California. But that was the main reason. They thought he was snooping around for three years. That was the only way to make his tuition because that was pretty good money. He sent his younger brother to get his engineering degree also, with that money. They both worked together, with that long rope on the boat and the brother is pulling the cord. One jerk, pull me up. Two jerks, give me line. You know. When you think about it, it's a wonder they didn't die.

MI: Yes.

AM: That was one of the reasons. The second reason was that he had lived in Japan for a year and a half.

MI: At what age?

AM: Right after high school, before he went to engineering school. He was working for his uncle, repair shop. He didn't like the way the uncle was doing business, kinda crooked. [chuckle] So, he says, "I'm going home." He came home, and then he went to college. Then, the third one was in 1940, I think it was, he wanted, when he couldn't find a good job when he came back, he said, he's going to China. He wanted to go to China. That was to open new frontier. So, he had to go to Japan and then go to China. When he went to Japan, they won't let him in, no foreigners going into Japan anymore.

MI What year was this?

AM: 1940, I think it was. So, his cousin or his uncle, I forgot, who used to be a Vice-Governor of [?} Province, I forgot the place, Nagoya or someplace. Anyway, he called the uncle and the uncle told the guard, let my nephew come in. So, he got in to Japan. And, they didn't like that, of course. He tried to get into China but he couldn't, so he came back. That was one of the other reasons. That was three, right?

MI: Right.

AM: These two is the bad ones. As I told you, he wasn't a clever person, he was a very sincere person and my husband told me that, too bad [that] he wasn't one of these shysters or clever person. "I wouldn't have gotten in to the internment camp at all." When they asked him "If you were drafted, would you go in to the service?" My husband said, "To tell you the truth, if I go in to the service, the government will have to take care of my four small kids, which is going to be more expensive than one soldier going in. So I think I'll explain to them why I wouldn't [go in to the service]." They didn't like that [answer]. He should have said, "Oh, yes, I'll go and get those Japs", you know? But he's not clever.

MI: Too honest.

AM: Yes, he was too honest. To this day, that's why he made a good salesman. He had referrals all the time because he was so honest. And the last one, the fifth reason was, they asked him, "If you see a Japanese soldier coming and confront you, what would you do?" My husband was shocked to hear that, "Oh, he could be my cousin, so I don't know. I might hesitate." That was no good. He should have said, "I'll shoot him right there. Right in the middle of his head." So those five reasons. To me, that was no good, but to them, it's reasonable, right? So, that's why they came in [to detain him]. Fortunately, my husband told me that he's not bitter at all. Some internees were very bitter, right? Sad. My husband says he not bitter.

MI: So, they pick him up. How long before you saw him again? When did you hear from him next?

AM: After he went in to intern? Must be several weeks.

MI: You didn't know what happened to him for several weeks?

AM: No telephone calls, no nothing.

MI: The government didn't tell you anything?

AM: No.

MI: The people at his work, you just told them that he got picked up?

AM: Oh, yes. And, they were shocked. So this is one thing that his boss and the family I worked for, they were school teachers, they knew what a nice person he was. Good person. Those two got together and trotted over to that FBI, I found out, to vouch for him, that he was a real good citizen and had no business in there. I don't know if that helped but those two trotted over and talked to them.

MI: When and how did you hear from him? When and how did you find out where he was?

AM: Well, they told me they were going to intern him. I guess I knew?

MI: When they took him away, they told you already?

AM: Well, this was sixty years ago, I don't remember the small details. [chuckle]

MI: But, somehow you found out he was where?

AM: He was, I think, interned downtown, someplace.

MI: The Immigration Station?

AM: I think so. I don't think it was Sand Island. And, then, he went … and then …

MI: Could you go and visit him?

AM: We had visiting privileges every two weeks. And that was the longest two weeks in between I ever went through.

MI: So, you went to visit him. When you went to visit him, did you visit him in Waikiki or out in the country? Where was he?

AM: No, he was in Honouliuli.

MI: How did you know it was Honouliuli? Was there a sign?

AM: I don't know. [laughter]. But it was a dry, awful place. Dusty.

MI: How did you get to Honouliuli?

AM: Luckily, the government supplied a bus. Anybody who wanted to visit, their family went to downtown Honolulu. We went there, on the bus, then they took us to Honouliuli. And, we spent about two hours with them. And, no place to sit or anything. We had to meet each other on the bus.

MI: They came on to the bus?

AM: No, they just drove to that place, then we all scattered.

MI: Outside the bus?

AM: Yes. But I visited him inside the bus. No place to sit.

MI: Other people got off the bus so he came [on]?

AM: Yes, I don't know where they went. I wasn't interested already [in them]. I was only interested in my husband, so I really don't know what happened. I don't know how many people were on the bus, even.

MI: Did you know where you were? Did you know where the camp was?

AM: I don't know where Honouliuli was.

MI: You sat on the bus and they drove.

AM: Yes. And I know it was a dry, dusty place with the wire fence around.

MI: They didn't blindfold you?

AM: No, no. And on the way over, I saw the German and Italian internees, looking at us. And, they said, they are Italian and German.

MI: How about women? Did you see any women?

AM: Yes. Yes. Mostly women, I think. I don't know. I wasn't thinking …

MI: But, you saw some women.

AM: And they were looking at us from behind the barbed wire fence.

MI: How long would you get to spend with him?

AM: About two hours, I think, if I remember correctly.

MI: Did you bring food, musubi and things?

AM: I don't remember if we couldn't or not. I just didn't.

MI: And every two weeks you could go and see him?

AM: That was the longest two weeks wait.

MI: What would you talk about when you saw him?

AM: Mostly, he's in and we planned the future. Talked about the future. And there were rumors that we were going to be sent to an internment camp on the mainland, so he told me to go buy some hardy clothes because we'll be working there. I did.

MI: Were you able to give him the clothes or you just kept it at home?]]

AM: At home, until we were going to go. But we never went.

MI: When you say we, what do you mean? You were going to go with him?

AM: Oh, yes. And so many people, even my parents, didn't want me to go. I said, "What are you talking about, he's my husband! I go, even to Hell, with him, so don't talk like that." I was defiant.

MI: So, your understanding was, on the same ship, you would go with him to the mainland.

AM: Sure. I think I understood that we could go with him. There was no reason … no thought in my mind that I wasn't going.

MI: If you had a car, those days when you were visiting him every two weeks, could you have driven there by yourself?

AM: Yes.

MI: You knew the road?

AM: No, I didn't, but … in fact, on one trip his brother took me with my husband's car.

MI: They allowed you to drive your car over there?

AM: I guess so.

MI: And, your brother took the same road that the bus took?

AM: I don't know, I guess so. I don't know roads. [chuckle] Even today, I don't.

MI: How did he know the road?

AM: I don't know? He seemed to know. Drivers seem to know all the streets. And it's been such a long time. This is 2017 and this was in '42.

MI: Seventy five years.

AM: Seventy five years and everything is so clear in my mind. So clear.

MI: You didn't take any pictures?

AM: I don't think they allowed. And then, I made a big mistake. I wrote to him every day, the three months he was there. Every day, so I must have had almost fifty letters.

MI: And he would write back to you, every day?

AM: Very seldom. And it was all -- what do you call it?

MI: Censored?

AM: Yes. I don't know if they cut out or blacked out.

MI: But, he would receive them.

AM: Yes. The funny thing is, one friend that I befriended, her name was Mariko-

MI: What was her last name?

AM: He was one of the-

MI: Sumida?

AM: I think so.

MI: You knew Mrs. Sumida, Mariko?

AM: You know Mariko?

MI: She was one of my patients. Mr. Shinzaburo was one of my patients. The *sake* factory, Pauoa Valley.

AM: I think so. She was kinda wealthy. I met her at camp.

MI: On the bus?

AM: I don't know, on the bus or what. She came to me one day and said, "You know that all the inmates got mad at you."

MI: Because?

AM: Because I was writing letters to my husband every day. And, they said [to their wives], "Why don't you write to me, too." [laughter]

MI: They were mad at you?

AM: To me. Mrs Sumida told me all the guys are mad at her because I wrote every day and how come you folks not writing to me. How can she write every day when they were there for two or three years already?

MI: For her, it was her husband and also her father-in -law.

AM: Something like that. I know she was …

MI: Her husband's father was the main *sake* brewer.

AM: I see. I know they were one of the stellars [sp] in the Japanese community.

MI: Because of business?

AM: Yes. It was so funny. I had a big laugh at that. Anyway, the thing is, all the letters they wrote me and said they're sorry …

MI: The government?

AM: The government. And then, he made a necklace for me from the shells they picked up. They rub, rub, rub until the knuckles hurt, made it flat. Beautiful, lacy things, the shell became. He strung it up to make a necklace.

MI: Do you still have it?

AM: No, that thing broke; it came apart and I threw it away. And the Apology Letter; I threw it away. All the letters, I threw everything away. I didn't want to have anything to do with the internment. Now, I regret it. What if I had had all that?

MI: When did you start getting letters from the government?

AM: Only one letter.

MI: What did the letter say?

AM: "We're sorry"-

MI: This was three months after they took him?

AM: "So we're going to release him".

MI: From what you remember, they didn't explain why they were sorry?

AM: No.

MI: They just said we're sorry so we're going to release him?

AM: Yes. Something … I don't know the details. So, his friend picked him up, brought him home.

MI: Do you remember when he came home?

AM: You mean, what day? From March, I think it was the end of March or early April he was [picked up] and then he came back in early July. His friend picked him up and brought him home.

MI: You had seen him all along the way.

AM: Yes, every two weeks.

MI: What was it like when he came home? Do you remember that day when he came home?

AM: Yes. I cannot tell you the happiness. That was the happiest day in my life. More than anything else.

MI: When he was released, there were other people still in the camp, right?

AM: Oh, yes. He was the last one to get in and the first one to get out. He was the last one to get in, in 1943.

MI: Did he feel bad? Were there others who were released at the same time, or just him?

AM: I think it was just him.

MI: Did he feel bad about getting out with all his friends still left behind?

AM: Actually, three months, he didn't have many friends.

MI: Did he mention any names of the other people he got to know while he was there?

AM: No, but he had a very bad experience with the kitchen boss.

MI: Who was the kitchen boss?

AM: I don't know his name but he must have been one of the internees. He was a big guy and he was the boss of the kitchen. So, when my husband was assigned to the kitchen duty at one time, he noticed that he wasn't doing anything. Everything was dirty. His dishes weren't clean, knife, and so he spoke up and he said, "You know, if you do things like this, one person going get salmonella or whatever and then the whole camp going be sick. I think you should change your way of washing dishes" or something, I don't know, whatever. He got angry and he said, "You little squirt!" and he tried to grab him and do physically. But he didn't know that my husband used to be a boxer. Not a professional,

but at home. That guy was big and strong but my husband was tiny, he was only, let's say five feet seven or eight and a hundred forty pounds. Compared to a Caucasian, he was tiny. But he was taller than most Japanese, of course. So, he wanted to fight, right?

MI: This other guy was a Caucasian?

AM: No, all Japanese in the internment camp. So, he broke my husband's glasses and my husband gave him the one-two, the technique. He had the strength but my husband had the technique, I guess. He floored him. He said, "Okay, okay, okay, I give up." Just like a worm, you know.

MI: But you don't remember his name?

AM: I don't remember the name, thank goodness. And another bad one, only two bad things he told me about, there was this Japanese guard, a big guy, Japanese, with those big boots on, guarding the place.

MI: They actually had Japanese guarding the internees? Just one, or many?

AM: I don't know. I know of only one. My husband saw him kick one of the older internees. They're mostly old guys. Small old guys. I don't know what he must have said or did. He couldn't have done anything physically, small little guy. My husband saw him kick him. My husband said that was the saddest thing. The big Japanese guy hitting the small, little Japanese man. And, you know, I happen to know who that guy was. I'm not going to say it. He became a professional man, later on, after the war.

MI: I'm just surprised that he was Japanese because there was so much fear about Japanese. Why they would have a Japanese guarding that [place]?

AM: That's right. And, he was a guard. But that was the saddest one.

MI: So, what happened with that one? Your husband saw him kick-

AM: But, my husband couldn't do anything. That's something my husband couldn't do anything. I don't know what he was kicked for. But he said that was so sad. If he had been a haole guy, or colored guy or something, it would have been a little different tone. But, a Japanese hitting that small little Japanese. That hurt him a lot. My husband always fought for the underdog, all through his life.

MI: You mentioned making the shell leis. Anything else you remember about what your husband did to pass the time in camp?

AM: Well, he played a little bit *Go*. He was a pretty good *Go* player.

MI: Did he mention who he played with?

AM: No. Some of the older ones, I guess. And most of them were old, right?

MI: Maybe half-half. There were some old ones.

AM: Not too many young ones, huh?

MI: Well, the older ones were arrested right away. Many of them were shipped to the mainland. Later on, the younger ones, the Kibei, educated in Japan and came back to Hawaii. I think, when the camp opened, there may have been some old ones but some young ones also.

AM: He didn't mention anything about who or what. No names come to mind.

MI: Only Mariko.

AM: Only Mariko, not from my husband. Mariko [chuckle] what she said was so funny, I laughed. Was so funny. But I didn't get to know anybody. Maybe I had five visits there and we just stayed together.

MI: You got to look around the camp?

AM: I don't know what their living quarters were or anything. I just know the outside.

MI: Outside of the barbed wire.

AM: That's all.

MI: How would you describe what you saw? What the camp looked like? Whatever you remember.

AM: The only thing I can remember is the dry and dusty with the fence.

MI: How were the men dressed?

AM: You know, I really didn't look around.

MI: We have some photographs and some of them are walking around in underwear. I would guess that they would dress up for the visitors.

AM: Really! But, what an experience. I sure grew up and looked at life differently from then on. I think it was for my better.

MI: So, he comes home. How is he at that point? Is he the same man that left Kaimuki or is he a different person when he comes home?

AM: The thing I remember was when he was there he was quiet and very sad. He looked so sad.

MI: When you met him on the bus, would he complain?

AM: He didn't complain, but naturally he wouldn't complain because I'm going to feel bad, right? So he didn't complain at all, for the food or anything. But I knew that he wasn't happy. And not knowing the future… If I knew he was going to come back in three months, I'd be happy and singing away.

MI: But you had no idea.

AM: I had no idea, and it just came like that.

MI: He comes home. Does he go right back to work?

AM: Yes, he was that type. Next day, he's dressed, I say, "Where are you going?" He said, "To work."

MI: He assumed he still had a job.

AM: Oh, yes. He knew. Mr. Fortye would never fire him. He was the boss for Sun Life. He was such a good boss.

MI: Was his desk the same way as he left it?

AM: I guess so. I don't know but I'm sure it was. And then soon after that, he was drafted.

MI: He was drafted? How old was he, then?

AM: When he was drafted, he was one of the oldest ones in the group, he said. These young kids, they're running-

MI: He was born in 1914, he was about twenty nine.

AM: I think he mentioned that he was one of the oldest guys so when the Commander says, "On the double, up the hill", he said he was always the last one.

MI: What did he say when he opened the [draft] letter?

AM: He said, "Well, it's my turn, so I'll go."

MI: Really?

AM: Oh, yes.

MI: He wasn't mad or bitter?

AM: Oh, no. He wasn't, as I said, he wasn't bitter at all. He told me, "So many people get so bitter, which is sad." He said, "You know, when a country goes to war, they have to do everything to protect themselves."

MI: How much time was there from when he got home from Honouliuli until he got the draft letter?

AM: It wasn't too long, I guess. I don't remember. Soon after.

MI: He joined up, he went to training. How long did he have to serve?

AM: Twenty-three months.

MI: Where did he serve?

AM: Schofield.

MI: So, he did his training in Schofield and they kept him in Schofield. He didn't join the 442?

AM: No, that was already gone. They were all gone.

MI: When he got drafted, you were separated again?

AM: Right. At that time, already, we had children and this is the thing. This is the kind of guy he was. When he came out of the … he was with the 1399, Engineering …

MI: He could come and visit you from Schofield?

AM: Right. He advanced so much that in that twenty-three months he became a First Sergeant. So he had a driver to bring him home every Friday and then the driver would come on Sunday night to pick him up. He had it made, as First Sergeant. He couldn't go any higher, for a draftee. Of course, he advanced so fast because many of them were getting out by then, from the service. But the funny thing, he was always the last one running. So the young guys were up the hill sitting down and yelling, having fun and he's just … a twenty-nine year old. But he made it. And this is the thing. The day he was discharged, when he came home, the next day, he went to work.

MI: Again.

AM: He was that kind of person. And I said, "Why don't you take a week off", you know, loosen up and …

MI: So again, the company just kept the job for him.

AM: Yes. Oh, yes. And then he said, "No, I lost two years time already." I said, "Why are you working so hard?" He said, "You know why? Because I want, if I should pass on, I want you to be able to send my children to college and I don't want you to have to live with your children and be uncomfortable for everybody. That's why I'm working hard. Have a nest egg so you can do things." So he said, he's working, and "I don't want you to go to work, and you bring up the children right." So, that's what we did and we were happy.

MI: From the time he was released from Honouliuli, did he ever go back to visit Honouliuli?

AM: I don't think so. And, I don't think he knew anybody in that short a time. He wasn't that gregarious type.

MI: So, after the war, he never kept in touch with anybody from the camp?

AM: I don't think so. I don't know. Maybe he did but I don't know about it.

MI: The only one you know is Mrs. Sumida.

AM: [chuckle] She was such a nice lady.

MI: So, you were a housewife, raising children until they grew up. Then, tell us about your life. You husband is selling insurance for the rest of his life.

AM: And, I'm working at the hotel.

MI: Tell us the hotel story.

AM: We built this hotel on Ewa Beach Road and then we built another one by the shopping center, small ones. We were catering to the military.

MI: How and why did you decide to build hotels in Ewa?

AM: Ewa Beach. Because the military needed housing and that's something that you call TLA, Temporary Living Lodging. It was a good business.

MI: Accommodations.

AM: Yes. It was a good business. So, they had to stay in a hotel until they got housing so they stayed with us and the government paid them.

MI: What was the name of your hotel?

AM: Ewa Beach Hotel, I guess. Anyway, we wanted to put the name Ewa Beach so they'll know where it was. Before we built it they all went to Waipahu. They used to call that "Waipahu Roach Haven", lots of cockroaches. So, they like us. We were very [fastidious] about … so we were very popular.

MI: How did you control the roaches in Ewa Beach?

AM: Oh, we had … we sprayed every three months or so. We were vey fastidious about it. So, I did practically everything except cleaning the rooms. We had a few girls from Japan. They couldn't get jobs at any other place because they couldn't speak English.

MI: And, all this time, you're living where?

AM: In Ewa Beach. We had one of the apartments. My husband was still working at the insurance company while I ran the two houses. It was hard work. But you know, funny, if it's your own business, you work hard. [chuckle] So, fifteen years, we worked, and then we retired. And then we sold the place. Then we were in a condo for thirty years. That was a good time for me. I used to love to dance, Japanese dance. We used to dance the *min'yo*. Just like they dance at the bon dance, part classical, part not-classical. I used to dance five days a week. Somebody told me *kichigai*. In Japanese, *kichigai* is crazy. That was my pleasure. While my husband went to golf I danced my head off. Then, my husband passed away in 1996. I was alone for ten years, and then I came here when I was in my late eighties. I've been here for about ten years now.

MI: Looking back, what do you think about your early life?

AM: It was the best … we had a really wonderful marriage and I've been really blessed. I think the war made us stronger. It's good to go through hardships, human beings, I think. I think, so many children have too soft a life and they covet everything. They want everything the Joneses have. And if you have it, it's an artificial thing not to give them, right. So, it's difficult but we were generally poor so we appreciate things more. To this day, I'm very frugal.

MI: How many children?

AM: I have two, I lost one. I have a boy who lives on this side and my daughter in Manoa who lives on this side. I'm in the center. And, they visit me often. They're the nicest kids, I'm so lucky. When I thank them for everything, they say, "You were so good to us, we just love to be good to you." They do anything. So, everything turned out well.

MI: Is there anything you'd like to add to the story?

AM: The only thing is I'm so blessed with two good kids who loved their dad because he was such a good father and he was such a good husband. The good thing is I dream about him all the time. All the time. He doesn't say much but he's there.

MI: Thank you.

[Transcribed by JCCH volunteers Mel Inamasu and Nelson Okino; edited by Mary Campany.]