

Talk given at the Buddhist Study Center

by

Walter Ozawa (WO)

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[Moderator unknown] (Mod)

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability.

Mod: Our speaker this evening is Mr. Walter Ozawa. He is Director of the City's Department of Parks and Recreations.

WO: This always makes me nervous having one of these things on. (laughs)

Mod: It's worth a thousand people hearing ... (laughs).

WO: At least.

Mod: I think we should mention that the whole idea of course is to get to know Walter a little better, so we'll have to let him tell us his story. I've known Walter's father many years ago, as a minister in Waipahu, but recently Walter's been in the news quite often, and so maybe we can start from there.

WO: Thank you for inviting me, I'm actually quite honored. I [didn't] realize that anybody would pay attention to Walter Ozawa. Of course, they do from my capacity in the Department of Parks and Recreation, but I tend to separate the personal Walter Ozawa from the public Walter Ozawa, so something like this is actually very special for me.

I am the Director for the Department of Parks and Recreation. I suppose that we should get some of these things out of the way. I was appointed by the Mayor in 1987 as the Deputy Director in the second half of his re-elected term. I was Deputy to Hiram Kamaka, who was the Director then for two years. When Hiram Kamaka was transferred to the Department of Housing, the Mayor called me one day soon after his bypass surgery from the hospital telling me that he was going to appoint me to be the Director.

I guess I should mention that the Department of Parks and Recreation is about a 80 million dollar a year operation, with about 1200 full-time employees, and with contractual and part-time employees, about 2000. We handle everything from the zoo, which is always in the news, to the golf courses, which are also in the news. We handle all of the lifeguards around the island. We have over 400 facilities. We maintain a quarter million trees around the island. We're also in the facilities

development business. We probably have more public swimming pools than any other agency on the island. We have seventeen of them and we run the summer fun program for 19,000 kids every summer. There are actually ten major divisions. I actually thought, went into the department with a little bit of awe.

I actually joined the department in 1986, although some people feel that I've been there a long time. I feel like it's been forever. But with all of the controversy that goes on, I'm actually not new to the City. I joined the City in 1971 about a year after I got out of the Army, and worked in the budget department for ten years. Then I was recruited away -- of all things!-- by the private sector, ran a private trucking company for four years, came back to the City under Eileen Anderson, who was mayor then, for a year in transportation because of my background in trucking.

The owner of the company, Wayne Kinoshita, built the company from one truck on Sand Island, working out of an abandoned fire station into a multi-million dollar business. He died suddenly and so I left the City to go back to resolve all of the problems that had been left over. I had stayed in contact with the family and then 1986, I turned the company back to the family, having resolved most of the contractual kind of things, and then rejoined the City in 1986 in the Department of Parks and Recreation as a civil servant. So many of my friends in government jokingly say, "Here's a guy who can't keep a job. He's been in and out of government three or four times." The lady who does the orientation always jokes about it because she says I no longer need to go through orientation. I can probably do it just as well as she can, giving the classes. But I've found that working in the public sector is much more exciting and satisfying to me, although I must admit that working in the private sector is much more economically rewarding. It is taxing in other ways, though. That spiffy little red sports car you see out there is fifteen years old. I could never have afforded it working for government. I got it when I was in private business and now I gotta hang on to it cause I can't afford a replacement. But I am a fairly low-key person when it comes to personal things.

I'm actually number five of six children in my family. There are five sons and one daughter. My mom and dad emigrated from Japan in 1931 to [the] island of Kauai and took over a very small Buddhist temple there in a place called Wahiawa. It's just about maybe two miles above the McBryde Mill, just short of Hanapepe. It's nestled actually right in the middle of the cane field on top of a hill, close to some irrigation reservoirs. I was born in 1945 in Tule, California, which is, which was a relocation camp.

Let me go back. In 1931, of course, my parents came to Hawaii, the island of Kauai. And while there, my brothers were born and my sister. I have three older brothers and an older sister. And then, in 1941 of course with the start of World War II, by early 1942, the FBI came knocking on my dad's door and we were relocated—that's the word that's used, I guess—to a place called Jerome, Arkansas by steamboat and railroad across from the West Coast into what they call the "ark" of Arkansas, I guess. It was carved out of the wilderness; there's really nothing there when they got there. And as the war progressed, the family

was moved to Tule Lake. And actually that's where—my understanding is that my mom and dad were reunited in 1944. All of the children were with my mother. My father was separated and so by January of 1945, Walter Michio Ozawa was born at Tule Lake.

By the end of the year, I guess, after August, we were relocated back to Hawaii. Back to the island of Kauai and the temple was being overseen by parishioners and at one point they even had a *haole* guy watching over it as well. That's what brings us back to Hawaii until six years later, 1951, when the minister at Waipahu on Oahu was relocating back to Japan and so my dad was asked to move to Waipahu from Kauai to another plantation camp. In between that time, in October 1946, my youngest brother was born. So now there're a total of six children in the family. I'm sorry to say that out of the five sons, no one took up the ministry (laughs). Probably much to the disappointment of my father who was a very stoic person and not even once mentioned the possibility of any of the children taking after him. He said that there are three things in a Zen Buddhist minister's life that needed to get accomplished. One was to bring in new minister into the religion, the other was to write a book, and the third was to build a new temple. And by 1974, he accomplished all of these. He died in December of 1974. He retired about six months prior to his death so my father was, even in religious circles, a type A or workaholic, I suppose.

So that brings us to Waipahu. My childhood recollections are pretty special for me. I tried to share them with my two sons, my two natural sons, and they really can't relate to it because it seems like so long ago. You have to remember that in the island of Kauai in the '40s and the '50s, used to have outside *furos* and outside outhouses. There was still a railroad in Waipahu operating. We still had mill trains and that's how we planted sugar up in the hillsides. I can still cook a pretty good pot of rice over firewood. Working in a kitchen and working with large quantities of food is not a mystery to me, simply because this is how I grew up. I didn't have much in the way of childhood friends so looking back at Kauai, I can't recall too many friends. Most of the people I do recall are adults, and older adults at that. I do recall the different kind of adventures I used to get involved with, uh, because we're near where you would find cows or cattle and horses, and of course dogs and pigeons. Same thing in Waipahu. Waipahu in those days still had a plantation stable where they had cattle and horses and mules. So my memories are connected pretty much to that kind of setting.

Very recently I started reading the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to my new twelve year old son. I recently remarried about 3 weeks ago on St. Patrick's Day and gained a third son. And Mark Twain's books, *Huckleberry Finn*, and especially Mark Twain [Tom Sawyer?] are really special books for me. I must have read Mark Twain at least a dozen times before I reached high school because many of the things, all you had to do was change some of the names. For me, *Huckleberry Finn* could have been, you know, John Saito, for all that mattered. I related very easily to catfish fishing and bullfrog fishing and catching fresh water shrimp and selling it the Filipino camps, picking *keawe* beans to sell to the stables for five cents a bag, bags being bigger than we were, dropping bags down the

chimney of the smokestack of the train going by, putting pennies on rails, and I also remember having neighbors coming from two or three blocks away in the camps to help my mother do the laundry, maybe the ironing.

I remember being next door to the Ishii's, um, ((?))*mochi*, making *saimin* noodles, homemade, cutting it up for home use, pickling mango, making all of these things all pretty much in a plantation camp environment. Of course all these, it seems like only yesterday that it's all been wiped clean. And so my children have great difficulty relating to any of these memories that I have.

Waipahu in the plantation camp days. Let's see, Ewa village plantation was a revelation for me because they had paved streets and all the homes had lawns for front yards. Because we lived in a plantation in a temple environment, we did have a very large front yard, about a quarter acre to half acre in size with a large *Bodhi* tree growing on one side of it, which made for a very grand entrance into our temple. It was an imposing building, especially in Waipahu when you consider tar paper roofs types of homes for my neighbors. We had a total of seven bedrooms, two half baths, a large *furo* downstairs with two, not one, two *furo* tubs as well as a shower. Everything was made out of redwood. On Kauai, we of course heated our hot water underneath the *furo*. In Waipahu, we were much more fortunate, we had a water heater. But the memories of putting on your *geta* and your cotton kimono and going out into the yard across a short ways to go take a bath.... In Waipahu, we did have a community *furo* as well. It was oil-fired and it was divided between men's and women's. Of course, all the little boys learned about little girls by peeking through the cracks (laughs). And it was right next to our Japanese language school, the Waipahu Nihongo Gakko, which is also quite large.

Now of course all of these buildings are gone. The temple is also gone. Burnt down and had to be raised after we had moved out of the temple. My memories of Waipahu were pretty much country. I remember not having to wear shoes for the longest time. I was not so much a teacher's pet in Waipahu Elementary School as I was principal's pet. I am today and forever grateful to Lillian Fennel, who was principal at Waipahu Elementary, who pretty much took me under her wing and took me to her home and showed me her little remembrances of World War II and encouraged me to study hard. And I really enjoyed Waipahu Elementary School. Of course, the elementary school went all the way up to the 8th grade so there was no intermediate school at that time.

When I was in the 8th grade [I remember] her calling me into the library and introducing me to a man by the name of Joseph Bachman who was then president and principal of Mid Pacific Institute right here in Manoa Valley. And he talked to me for a bit and explained to me what Mid Pacific was all about. And then I went home I approached my dad and said, "*Otoosan*, a man came to school today and" (this was all in Japanese of course we were speaking) "and he wants me to go to that school." Unbeknownst to me, and to give you what the range of my family's age was, my oldest brother graduated from Mid Pacific in 1950 and here I was in the spring of 1959 and I wasn't even aware that he had gone off to Mid Pacific. I guess I was sort of aware but never really realized that my older sister

graduated from Mid Pacific in 1957. I was very disappointed when I got there in the fall of 1959 to have all of these teachers approach me and tell me how smart my sister was, straight A's (laughs). But my dad, my dad pretty much told me that we couldn't afford to send me to Mid Pacific, that it cost money, cause money had no meaning to me up till that point.

If you wanted to go movie at Waipahu theater on Saturday morning, [it] was nine cents and it was pretty easy to get nine cents. A couple bags of beans or a bag of catfish would get you five or ten cents easy. If you only had a nickel, you stood there by the window and because it was nine cents, every kids that went through the line, if you asked him for his change (laughs) and you got every other guy to hand you a penny, you ended up with enough to get in. And if you had enough time, you could get an extra five cents and rush down to Hamada Okazuya and get a brown paper sack full of fried noodles which you would eat and the movies lasted till almost noon and kept us out of trouble at least for that long. And if you didn't have that of course you could rush over to the mill, sneak under the fence, and go visit Mr. Koagura who was also a neighbor, and ask him for a cone full of brown sugar. He was in the bagging plant and he would use the paper cones from the spool of string, tie up the bags, and he'd stuff a piece of paper at the bottom and then give you a little snow-coned shaped cone full of brown sugar, which you could lick in the theatre. We hated that (laughter) because, because the smell was associated with molasses. But if that was the best you could do, that was fine. So life was very easy and simple in Waipahu and again money meant nothing to me.

From the time I guess I was in about the third or fourth grade, I discovered Waipahu Library. At the time it was new and I talked fast and got approval from the librarian so she would allow me to borrow twelve books a week. And we would walk along the railroad tracks every Wednesday when it was open until nine with a shopping bag and stuff it full of twelve books. Normally we would end up reading one book [on] Wednesday night. I became a voracious reader and books really opened up the world for me. My dad never, ever encouraged us to study as I look back now and I haven't even thought about it until now. He never encouraged us to study. We spent a lot of time, or I did, in his office. He had a little office that had at least two walls full of books. Most of them in Japanese but many stuffed in between here and there were English books. They weren't just Buddhist books. There was a book that I discovered that I treasured and to this day I could kick myself for not keeping it, was *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*, about the mongoose, that I discovered and I treasured. I think Mark Twain also came out of there someplace. But he had all of these books that I'm sure he very painstakingly read because he was not a very fast reader, but I do recall him writing his newsletters. He had a radio show at KAHU radio station in Waipahu once a week where he would, wasn't really more of a sermon, as just a talk show, a one man talk show in Japanese. It was apparently very well received and for many years he kept all of his scripts, and before he retired he destroyed all of those. Every one of those. We could never get him to explain why. He just did.

My dad's life and mine intertwined only as I started getting a little older. Waipahu was a seat for the *Soto* Zen temple in that area, but he was also required to cover,

the Waianae coast. Ewa had its own temple but they had no minister, and so every Saturday he had a Sunday school there, so it was Saturday school. My kid brother was unfortunate enough to know how to play the organ and piano, so of course he was tapped to play organ at Ewa. It was one of those pump things and I was never blessed with any kind of talent or skill to speak of, so I just went along for support. And so every Saturday morning we went to Ewa for Buddhist services there. They didn't even have chairs. We had to sit on the floor. My dad would want us to sit on our knees on little mats and of course I remember my feet going to sleep all the time.

Sunday of course was in Waipahu, but he also covered Pearl City. Pearl City had a *Hongwanji* but it didn't have a *Soto* Mission. He also covered the Kawaihoa area over the north shore and as far over as Waiahole. Waiahole did have a temple, but he only went there on special occasions and once I got my driver's license at fifteen, and whenever I was at home, from Mid-Pacific, I was tasked to drive him to these various events, as well as to people's homes. I recall him getting calls in the middle of the night to go because someone's either in the hospital or had passed away and he had to go to perform the services. So for all I knew, my dad was a doctor since he was gone most of the time, and the rest of the time he was very scholarly and he spent much of his time in his office writing, reading for the temple. He'd get up at five o'clock or four thirty every morning without an alarm clock and he would have a service and people would check their watches by the time that he would strike the bell outside one hundred and eight times. And a few times, you know, as a young boy you get enamored with that idea so I would try wake up with him and go and sit there through it and of course end up falling asleep.

My childhood memories are essentially getting up in the morning to rake the yard. A bodhi tree essentially sheds at least twice a year, although it seems like it sheds every day of the year. It was a huge tree, so it means raking up the leaves and cutting the grass and mopping the *otera*. The *honpa* had an ashes room in the back. One of the spookiest things that any young boy like I was, had to go through, was to clean that by yourself at six in the morning when it was still dark. Buddhism as a religion was actually more a part of me and a part of our life and no one really set it aside and said, "Okay, this is Buddhism, you visit Buddhism every Sunday." Every Sunday we did visit Buddhism but we did it with other people. But most of the time, it was just something you did, it was more of a value system, a way of life and my dad, who agreed that I should go to Mid-Pacific when I asked him, said that I should come back with at least two reasons why. And so I thought about it a while. I can't recall now. I guess I should put my thought into it as to the reasons I gave. Apparently they were plausible enough for him to say okay. But I do recall going back to school and telling Miss Fennel that my father said that we couldn't afford to go. But she apparently arranged with the school for me to get a scholarship.

Now, room and board at Mid-Pacific in those days was \$660.00 a year for nine months of schooling, room and board, tuition, and supplies, although you had to buy the books separately. The agreement was that for that money, I would work

Three meals a day in the school cafeteria which was actually a dining room and students actually sat down and were served a meal by student waiters. The meals were prepared by a core staff of cooks, adults, but the rest of the kitchen was manned by students. And so I worked four years in the kitchen and I worked summers as well so I could get my *kozukai*, my spending money, and we were allowed to go home twice a month. I went home once a month.

Mid-Pacific was the turning point in my life because up until that point there was really no need to wear shoes (laughter). And they had to remind me that they wear shoes at Mid-Pac. But other than that, doing your own laundry, ironing, even cooking, was a natural thing for me. We had a huge kitchen [at home] that would seat all seven of us at one table with enough room left over for a sewing area, an area to lay around and talk, and three-compartment sink. So when I say that money had really no meaning to me, it was because we lived quite well. We grew up in an environment where rice was not a scarcity. People were always donating rice to the temple and my dad would keep those in the temple and we would only take out the bags that we needed. Every time there was a strike, or someone was in need of something, he would send the rice over. And people would be dropping by with vegetables. I recall eating a lot of vegetables and not really thinking much of wanting much for anything.

My first bicycle was bought in 1950 on Kauai in Hanapepe, and that bike lasted until I was in high school. Just meant putting on longer handle bars and higher seats and patching the tire. So Mid-Pacific again was really new to me. It was like my eyes being open to the world and again I had a very special person take me under her wing. She was a dietician for the school, Martha Bungy (sp?) who saw something in me that said that I ought to pursue bigger and higher things and she would invite me to her apartment. She had a, I guess now it we look it as a boyfriend, he was a crusty old police detective, I think. She never did get married. She died an old maid. But she was an artist, she was well read, so that kind of support that I had was mainly from adults. All through Waipahu, of course, as many of you may know, any *otera* is surrounded by people who are older. And so I essentially grew up around people in the *kyodan*, the men's association, or the women's *fujinkai*, the women's association. And most of them were either retired or working but at least in my eyes they were the older people. And so, um, there was not much in the way of playing. I had several close friends but very few.

I never considered myself to be scholarly and to this day, I don't. I actually did not enjoy school. I enjoyed Mid-Pacific very much because it was very different, very exciting because it was an eye-opener for me. Here was a young boy brought from Waipahu who, until that point, had never ridden a public bus before. Whose phones were still that type, the ring up type on the wall, although I guess we finally ended up with one of those black ones. We did not have a television in our house until 1961 or '62. When the first TV came to Waipahu, it was the Kon (sp?) family about three houses down, and we had to pay Richard, my classmate, two or three cents to be allowed to watch TV, and so TV was special to me. My father was death (?) on comic books. Three blocks away where there was a Matsuda family and Melvin was blessed in having a very generous mother who allowed

him to buy comic books. And so I would go there and read comic books in the afternoons, but I couldn't bring any home and if my father found out that I was reading comic books, I probably get whaled on. He was a very stern person. On my twelfth birthday, I remember him spanking [me], not very hard, in front of the family, much to my embarrassment, and telling me that it was the last time he would be doing this, that if this were Japan, I would be a man as of that day. I would be given my sword and so therefore, I would be expected to act like a man.

With that kind of background and environment, going to Mid-Pacific, I was introduced to for the first time Christianity. I was handed my Bible in a box the first time I went on campus to buy my books and I was scared with this. I had always, well, I, until that point I didn't realize that Mabel Ishii, the first gal that I ever had a crush on, we used to sit on the temple steps and tell us these stories were actually parables that she had picked up out of the Bible, although she belonged to a temple as well. When I went to Mid-Pacific and being handed this thing called the Bible, and not really knowing what it was, I was fifteen years old at the time. For at least of couple of weeks, I didn't open the book. In fact, I didn't open the box. Reverend Ki Mon Chong (?) was, at the time we were required to go to bible study classes at Mid-Pacific. We'd ask questions about it and I couldn't answer, so he started really picking on me. He's still alive today and he doesn't remember any of this. I was rooming with two other boys: Milton Ozaki, whose father owned a clothing store on Kauai, and Roy Nishizawa, who I later found out was a minister on Kauai, Zen Buddhist, and my dad's counterpart who had actually taken over after my dad on Kauai. Roy was there for one year. I'm told, I guess I was pretty naïve. I'm told now that Roy was asked not to return after his freshman year. I thought it was because his dad had to go back to Japan and in fact they did move back to Japan, and today Roy Nishizawa, I'm told is a Buddhist minister because in Japan, they go through the family line and so the families actually own the temple.

Mid-Pacific opened me to the world and actually changed the person that I am. It made me suddenly realize that I could be anything I that I wanted or whoever I wanted to be. If I wanted to change my personality and change people's perceptions of me I could do that. This was a complete break away from Waipahu so until this day most people think that I'm either a city boy or someone from the mainland. After graduating from Mid-Pacific, to make that short, I was very active at school. Last year for the first time, one of my classmates told me that their perception of what I was while in Mid-Pacific was that I was a real square (laughter), that I was a real Pollyanna, that I never saw any wrong in anyone, that I was hopelessly naïve, hopelessly optimistic, and I was. I didn't grow up in any other way, and so I never really saw anything bad.

There was only one time where I was having real problems at school and these were personal ones in discovering myself and I went home frustrated and in tears and my mother sat me down and said, "Did you ever stop to think that it's you who are wrong?" And she's saying this in Japanese, and she said, "Stop and think about how they're looking at it and then look at you through their eyes." Up until that point I had never done that. I was pretty much a self-centered person. And

things changed dramatically for me. I do recall at Mid-Pacific my sophomore, junior years, of doing meditation in my room, feeling like I was trying to find myself. By then I was going to chapel twice a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, and we're going to Sunday services every Sunday. I was going to our temple in Waipahu once a month or less. When I moved back to Waipahu, at least for a year in college and I helped with the Sunday school program and got involved there again. But it was a kind of troubling time for me in that I was, I thought I had to make a distinction between me, my religion, and Christianity. And was very interesting and [an] eye-opener for me because at that time I finally ended up with a high school sweetheart. She and I ended up getting married after college. She, one day, when she was troubled about something, and tearfully asked me why I was never troubled, why I was always so calm and I said, "I don't know. This is how I've always been and I always think things out." And so she said, "Is it because you're Buddhist?" I said, "I don't know. I've always been one. It's like saying are you Japanese or are you male, are you Walter Ozawa?" And so she said, "Well, can you take me to your temple?"

She grew up in a Christian environment, she is part-Hawaiian and so she came to the temple and after a while asked me if she could become a Buddhist. And I guess she expected to be going through some ritual and so my not knowing any better (laughs), I said sure. I talked to my dad, and my dad said, "Okay, you're a Buddhist." (Laughter)

And she said, "Just like that?"

"Well, what do you want? Do you want me to hit you on the head with a book? Put some ashes on you or whatever?"

And she said, "No."

So he said, "Just come to the temple".

From that point [she] became a Buddhist and I guess for me that's essentially the kind of person I've always been. Even after I got out of college and I joined the Army, went to Europe, got out of the army, came back to Hawaii, joined the 100th Battalion, 442nd, ironically (laughs), I say ironically because my, all of my family, except for my kid brother, were interned at one of the relocation camps in World War II and we did have a chaplain in the battalion, a Christian Chaplain, and he was having great difficulty in finding people to go to his services. Since having some kind of spiritual leadership I thought was important, I volunteered to round up people in the unit and of course having studied the Bible a lot in high school, first because I had to and later because of pure interest, I used to gather them up and in fact we used to jokingly talk about having his sermon on the mount and I promised him a bush which we wouldn't burn, and arrange for a guitarist to come and play and we'd sign along with the doxology.

I troubled in doing that sort of thing in high school because I felt as if I was apologizing for being a Buddhist and I think that's probably what troubled me the most about being a Buddhist is that it was like apologizing for being me. Even the Army tried to change that on your dog tags because they see the bu... the "B" ,

they automatically type Baptist so for a little while, because I didn't pay attention to these things, on my records [they] showed me as a Baptist. And in college, while I was in high school still, my then-wife was staying at the Baptist dorm right up here on University Avenue, and one of the requirements was that she had to go to Baptist service. She was a year ahead of me, so after Mid-Pacific's nondenominational congregational services, I would go just outside the gate to the University Baptist School, and go to Baptist services till past noon. I guess a lot of people thought I was very religious (laughter) because all I was doing was going to church. But I guess it was really tough then because of that for me. I recognized that a lot of people felt that I needed to be saved, they would put people to the left and right of me at the Baptist church for reaffirmation, and they would, you know people stand up when they ask for reaffirmation, and they kind of expect you to be caught up in the spirit of the thing, and I never did. I only went because my wife, at the time my girlfriend, had to go.

That brings us pretty much into the '70s now and then I joined the City, worked there and so here I am today. Personally, I guess the thing that satisfies me most [about] my religious upbringing is that there is a young lady by the name of Dawn Horn from California. She is an over achiever, super type A, she had to out do her male counterparts in the Army, she is a skydiver, she had done at least 30 jumps at night, she's a scuba diver, she's a pilot (laughs). She's done just about everything and has tried to out-do most of the men in the reserves. In November of 1983, I went for the very first time to Japan. I've never been to Japan. I'm fluent in Japanese by the way, and she tagged along because her husband asked me to watch over her so she wouldn't get into trouble, being that she is the strong person that she was.

She's Caucasian, and she and I went to a place called Tsukiji on the outskirts of the Ginza and Tokyo ... and a (?) temple there. I recall very vaguely that my mother indicated that her oldest brother had his funeral there. I had no uncles or aunts anywhere in the United States. I have one cousin in New York and that's it. Everybody else is in Japan or dead, and her oldest brother was a man by the name of Mori. He was well known in the Philippines because he had the Mori bicycle factory and he became chairman of the board of a company called Marubeni which is like "Big Five" in Japan. All of this means absolutely nothing to me, by the way. I do recall meeting him in Waipahu. I remember Pan American treated him with great deference, and as he got older they would have a wheel chair for him so he wouldn't have to walk anywhere. He had Cadillacs in Tokyo, where Cadillacs could hardly fit down the streets.

But his service was at the Hongwanji in Tsukiji and so I said, "Come on, Dawn, let's walk in" and she was a little reluctant to walk in. You know, all of the ornate carvings and sculptures and whatever you have in a Buddhist temple. We walked in and we sat in the front row and the minister came in and I just briefly said that we were from Hawaii and I just came to visit and to *tateru senko*. So I asked her to come and do it also so she would feel more comfortable and we sat in the front and we just talked about the various things that were there and what they represented and in talking about it she became fascinated and wanted to know

more and more. It reached the point where she was asking me questions of such philosophical depth that I realized that I was doing her an injustice by continuing. And so I told her, “You know, you’re now asking the driver of the car how it works. I can only tell you how I use it. I can’t really tell you how the different parts work or how they fit together although I, we can appreciate it. You have to go to a prac— I’m just a practitioner, you have to go to the mechanic” and so I referred her to Reverend Roy Kokuzo in Wahiawa because I knew he spoke English.

She at the time was living in Makakilo. And he did the right thing. He refused not openly, but he ignored her. And she went regularly to try and see him and call him before and see him before he finally said okay. I had at that time handed her a small pamphlet that was written by Reverend Sinkaku Hunt. It’s out of print now. It’s, it’s about three by five or five by seven and it’s glossy and it’s blue and was printed I think in 1957 or thereabouts that I always kept. Well she kept that in her purse that she uses in reference. I was amazed that someone would find such deep abiding interest in this. She has never expressed, and to this day has not expressed, the desire to become Buddhist, but she has accepted a lot of the precepts as a means of adding stability to her life. She was, at the time that I got to know her, a nuclear engineer at Pearl Harbor under great, great stress, twenty four hours a day, working overtime 30 hours a week added to her 40 hour regular day and going through the need to get recertified every year. You have to continue to prove yourself, that you’re up to the task of working on overhauls of nuclear reactors. And so she was almost always under stress and in tears. She has finally left the job, by the way, and she is now in real estate (laughs) and doing quite well. She’s a real bright gal.

But that kind of made me take stock of myself as to what I was doing. For several years, I was very active with the temple after my dad passed away as a means of transitioning Reverend Oyama, who took after for my dad in 1974, ’75 until this past year, 1989, when Reverend Oyama left because his father is in poor health and he went back to take over a temple in Japan so we have a new minister there. But after several years, it dawned on me that I really was not doing Reverend Oyama a great deal of justice, simply because I [was] becoming a crutch and that the temple was counting on them and most people were still relating to Waipahu Soto Mission as Reverend Ozawa’s temple because he was the one who built it. He had been there since 1951 until 1974. And Reverend Oyama was not trying very hard to learn English because to this day you have first and second generation Japanese in the congregation that speak Japanese and only Japanese. In fact my mom, who lives with me, is 82 [and] still speaks only Japanese. She can do English, but it’s her preference to speak Japanese, and so she does that ordinarily without thinking or pidgin English so my children learn to do it just for her. I have two natural sons who could not speak pidgin English to save their lives who have to do it for grandma.

I was involved with the summer with the Sunday school program for many years. And then I finally left with a great deal of guilt by the way because the ladies who were working with the Sunday school children are still there. One, Mrs., um, oh

my goodness, I forgot her name. Anyway she is in her eighties, and there's a retired school teacher who is in her sixties, were still working with young kids and every time I go to for various services, they always shake their fingers at me for having left them pretty much in a lurch. But they have a new young minister now and apparently he speaks much better English. So I now see a lot of wisdom in the kinds of things that my dad, did not so much in what he said. And I've always thought of being kind as being gentle and caring and carry ((?)). I now know that being kind doesn't necessarily mean being soft. That being kind also means allowing people to struggle and to suffer first-hand so that they can see what's it about, so they appreciate better and they're better able to solve their own problems rather than us trying to solve them. I see that I failed in many respects with my children, but I'm trying to make amends now.

I was divorced recently. We were separated several years ago, and as I said I recently remarried. My current wife—I shouldn't say current, it sounds like I'm going to have another one after this (laughter). My new wife, her parents are of the Nichiren sect, and very, very strong followers of ASA. And her oldest brother is in fact, sort of a lay leader and they pray daily fervently in their living room. I find this kind of a revelation to have that so close to me but she is not. She is in fact, she was married to a second generation Latvian and so had for a long time kept her former husband's name, ((?)), and actually seriously thought about keeping it even after we got married. I pointed out to her that culturally it was not her background and if anything I would, I would be... I had some very strong feelings about that, that I wanted her, if anything, if she wanted to attach a last name with a hyphen, it would be her parents' name, Hataye. But she does have a son who carries his father's name and so therefore I said "Why don't you use your former married name as your middle name? And that way your son will have a name to relate to" because in the old days, you normally adopted your step son, these days, uh, they still belong to the original father. So now it's Gayle Yoriko Sindance ((?)) Ozawa without a hyphen so she is Mrs. Ozawa.

But she has great reluctance to address things religion, religious. And I have pretty much soften the blow for her saying by saying I didn't really expect her to be a Buddhist or Zen Buddhist for that matter but that I would wish for her to at least attend some of the special events like the *obon* service and the *Ohigan* services or *hanamatsuri*— which we missed this past weekend— and services such as that and if she wanted to rationalize it by saying it was more cultural that was fine because many of these services are culturally based as well. People just take it into their lives and in stride, and even find it very interesting to go New Year's service and be blessed with a thump to the head with a book and blessed and get this mochi and this sort of thing. And that's fine because I think it's more exposure at this point. My two sons, who live with live with their mother in Mililani, go to the services. They went to Sunday school. They went to the services. They don't go as much now, I guess, except for the special services. But the temple is not a strange place for them. In fact, sometimes it's too familiar a place when you start laying down in the pews and relaxing rather than sitting up and paying attention.

The weakness of in system still is of course language. They have a lay leader now, Kenichi Watanabe, but from the Watanabe clan in Waipahu who have always been strong supporters of the temple, and he speaks English and Japanese fluently. He's retired military, and so he does it. A tremendous job of walking the congregation through the service which is a great help especially since on the few occasions that I've taken Gayle, rather than having her sit there and not really understanding what's going on. She understands a little Japanese but she has never been to Japan and I want to take her there so that she needs to re-establish some roots to her culture as to why she thinks and feels about certain things and that there are millions of people who actually feel and think and act the same way.

I have never seen myself through any other eyes except Western ones. Although inside of me, I am very Japanese, I was told by Dawn Horn—the gal that I mentioned earlier—that she watched this transformation, immediate transformation in Japan, when she would watch me, she became a very good observer of me and she would notice I picked up the mannerisms almost automatically. Japanese tend to tilt their head to side and suck in their breath and then say something. They don't just come right answer and look you in your face. They kind of look away, look down and go, "Saaaah..." (laughter) and then answer in Japanese. And she noticed that I was doing that in Japanese and it was a kind of interesting observation and she noticed that there were other things that I did that were the same way, at least while I was around the Japanese. And then the immediate retransformation whenever I was in the military setting because of my position—I'm a colonel now, I was lieutenant colonel then—people pay a certain kind of deference to rank. I took on a completely different personality and it's a natural thing for me to jump from culture to culture. I suppose that I—it's never dawned on me that I was doing things any differently. I have Caucasian friends who love to say that I'm probably the most un-Japanese Japanese guy they know. And yet at the same time, they say, "You're the most Japanese guy we know" mainly because being second generation, many of my values systems go back to that. It's not something that you're in, that they teach you, it's just something that you live with.

So, I'm pretty self-effacing as far as I can tell. There are some things in the department now that kind of reflect that. I made conscious effort—I consider myself a shy person by the way, although most people will laugh at that (laughs). But I forced myself to go out last year, all of last year, to every park that I could find where there would be groups of employees gathered to introduce myself to them and to explain pretty much what I was all about working from some background. And as of today, every, well as of the time I joined the department, every new employee that comes into the department and they come in regularly, they all spend at least 5, 10 or 15 minutes with me when they first join the department going through the orientation process, to be welcomed to the department and then to be told about me by me about how I saw the department. And the pyramid of hierarchy starts with them on top and me on the bottom. That my job is to work for them, giving them what they need so that they can do theirs and they seem to appreciate that and I hope they do because I think that is very important that they see themselves in that light. And then I invite them to call me

by my first name whether they're groundskeepers or planners or engineers, they all call me by my first name, Walter. There are some who feel uncomfortable doing it. Then I say, if you're uncomfortable, please call me what you want but with that I expect one thing from them, and only one and that is that whether they see me at Longs Drugs or Times market or on the job some place, that they'll walk over and stick their hands out and say "Hello." And then I'll try to remember their names if they would try to remember mine and if they forget not to be embarrassed and say, "I forgot your name," because that's okay, too.

So we do that kind of bonding. Most of my—I hate to say technique, but my way of working that way with people—is because I have watched my dad and remember my dad, saw working with people in that light they always held him in honorific sense. It showed deference. It was normal for older Japanese visitors to our home from Kauai coming to Waipahu to come and step up to the porch and get on their knees and bow to my dad. And my dad would, of course, hurriedly rush over and tell them to please get up. But they would have to go through the bowing ritual before they would stand up stand up and join us in the house. It always amazed me that they held my father in that light. I used to think before that it was because he was the minister. But I think also because they were a lot of is cultural, but a lot of it also was in recognition of the kind of things he was doing in the community. He was roundly criticized after World War II for organizing a, I guess like a foodbank and clothing bank I think to ship things to Japan, because Japan didn't have anything and he would explain to everyone that Japan was after all where we came from, you could not get rid of your past, you could not get rid of your culture, and they were human beings just like we were and they had absolutely nothing—that they were eating grass, they were eating whatever that was there because people were starving. So he was not the most popular thing to do but he never wavered from the thoughts that they were the right things to do. So, on my desk today is a little note I got from a book, actually it was very recently written, and it says, "There is no right way to do a wrong thing." And I use it as a guide for myself as well as for people who visit us. But a small little post-it sticker on the bottom I added my own footnote which says, it reads, "There is no right way to do a wrong thing, but there are so many ways to do right things wrong, to mess up doing something right. So why waste time doing wrong things?"

So that kind of pretty much serves as a guide for me and it kind of hearkens me back to the way my dad, he never preached to us. He never set me on his knees to explain the facts of life. I had to do that on my own. My sister had to sit down and explain to me about women (laughs) and which was no help by the way. She was more embarrassed than anything so (laughs) it was no help at all. But most of what I did get came actually from observing my dad, living our lives as we thought was the right way based on what we saw and all the readings that we did. I was a super achiever when it came to reading. Reading contests, I read books that would—we had a bar chart in school one day and most of those went half way down the chart. Mine went around the room because I just loved to read and to this day I still do. And so even in my office, and I'll share this thing with you, I discovered one day when I got into my office my second son visits me—he goes

to school in town and he stops by the office before he catches the bus home to Mililani, pretty independent—here he is twelve years old and from eleven he was catching the bus from town, catching the express bus to Mililani, to go home from the municipal building. But I have discovered that he has been taking books from my library, my personal library in my office, just as I used to in my dad's library and although I need to remind him that he suppose to bring them back, too. But he has discovered that there are books in my library that are interesting. So I'm glad that both my sons are voracious readers, they love to read.

So, anyway, that essentially is—I'm not very exciting a person, um. In the reserves as I said I'm a colonel, I command a unit called the 1085th training exercise maneuver group and we do exercise, design and these are simulations, they're not the real running around with the rifles thing in seven countries in the Pacific: Singapore, Philippines, Australia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand. We'll be starting in Alaska as well as here, in the Pacific including Guam and Samoa. So we stay very busy with just a little over a hundred people. That and this work that I do and politics is pretty much part of life from the seventies because I'm an admirer of how Frank Fasi operates. I don't always agree with what he says and sometimes I regret deeply some of the things he says (laughs) because it makes it harder for us to get our work done but by and large he's a pretty forthright person and a man of great, deep conviction about what he does. He comes from a poor family in Connecticut and I can—now I look back and relate to it.

You know, I was once invited to Dr. Osumi's residence in Nuuanu when I was in high school because of his daughter, Glenna. She was not a girlfriend, just a friend at the time, we were singing in the same group and we went to her home. It was a big home with a fish pond in the middle. And my friends who went along were just immensely impressed with this house. And I remember thinking to myself, "Oh, this is just an ordinary house," you know, forgetting that my home actually was provided by the temple. Seven bedrooms (laughs), two kitchens, uh, two living rooms, big *furo*, and a fish pond in the middle. So it was a big house and we always had big houses to live in. Until recently I was living in a two bedroom apartment (laughs) so I've been in and out of different kinds of homes. Now I gotta look back at it, I was blessed with these kinds of experiences without ever having felt the need of wanting.

I discovered work for the first time and I thought it was the greatest thing. It was a great discovery for Walt Ozawa to discover that they actually handed you money for doing things. And so at the university here, I worked as many as three jobs at a time. I went through four years of college. I had gone through two motorcycles, a bicycle, and three cars in four and a half years. They were not brand new cars and I love tinkering with things but I never felt that there was anything called poverty simply because I always felt that I there were things I could do with my hands to survive. And I also tutored Dr. Kainuma's son. I lived in their garage, took care of their yard. They had a huge yard by our standards, I suppose, but I look back at raking a half acre, which was nothing, trimming trees, and cleaning the swimming pool with the side benefit of being able to swim there and eating with the family. I

though was just great. Life just never got better. Ah, and life has been very good to me. I recognize now that it comes from hard work. It comes from commitment.

In my job with the department now as I see it is really to transmit value more than anything else. It's leadership by value systems and so every person that walks out of my office usually gets a clap on the back and a reminder to work hard because that's what my mother always said whether it was at school or at work, "*Isshokenmi shinasai*," "Work hard." And so they get that. I think of myself as being soft spoken so many on the staff think I'm a pretty tough task master simply because I demand a certain standard and I don't do openly I suppose but the expectation is quite clear. I find the work extremely satisfying and this is a position in the last twenty years that they have had only one director, parks and recreation, that has actually gone longer than two years. The average life expectancy as parks director is two years. I'm now going into my second year (laughs). I have told the mayor I expect to be there four years to kind of break that mold. He kind of chuckled about. It is very taxing but I find it very exciting and very satisfying, very rewarding to be able to work with people and watch them grow, watch them struggle and watch them grow.

We're now going through a strategic policy-planning thing which I think is going to be something that's needed to be implemented in the department. And I guess the word we use here is vision and I have discovered that Walter Ozawa lacks vision. And I've shared that with the core staff and that what we need to do is to develop that vision in the staff so that no matter who the director is, whether it is a political crony, whether it is a professional engineer or whatever, that personality wind doesn't direct the direction the department takes, because it's not a department issue. I'm now trying to dream broader and look broader. What's the saying, "think globally, act locally," is to establish this kind of dream building in the department for the city, for Oahu, rather than just looking at us as piece of city of government. And it's very difficult to ask a civil service employee to step outside of that mode and to change the way he looks at his surroundings. It's very difficult for me as well and I've been doing a lot of reading recently and a lot of soul searching and I've tasked a special group of brainstormers, not necessarily the key division chiefs, but the young, bright thinkers to stretch their imaginations to help me develop this vision so that I can leave the department with something and I don't want any kind of edifice to be associated with Walter Ozawa. Nothing would please me more than to have the department simply say that the department had become *the* most exciting, *the* most satisfying place to work.

It was only like five years ago that I told the mayor about a litany of problems we had to resolve in the department. You know, I brought this because it always serves as a reminder. I have another book like this for the reserves; it goes back to 1972. This one only goes back to 1986 but in this I just shrank it down. I won't read it and bore you with it at all but in here I wrote an overview for the way I saw the department and the kinds of things that needed to be done. And thankfully, in looking at it, I found that we have accomplished all of those things. To me were just interim housecleaning kinds of issues that had to be settled in

personnel, in organization, and that sort things, and that's been, I shrank it down and put it in. Because nobody gives me a report card.

That's probably one of the most frustrating things about working with organizations. In the military, you know, you get your evaluations forms and your performance forms that tell you how you did and your jobs usually goes three or six years or two years at a time or whatever. But in this kind of business, there's nothing. There's no guide that tells you whether you're doing okay or whether you're reaching for something. And I said that we need to do that.

When we looked at the last long-range plan that they did in 1978. It's now twelve years later and it's no longer a long-range plan and for me ten years is not long enough. But that kind of vision-building is something that is very scary. But then when I look back and I say, you know, they're probably smarter people than me or dumber people than me back in the '30s or even earlier that decided Ala Moana Beach Park would be where it is and the design would be such, that Kapiolani Park was needed when there was absolutely nothing there. And then you look now and you look at the kind of places we have, we no longer have that kind of opportunity to do these kind of significant things. And so we're now stuck with looking at different ways that we're going to deliver parks to the future. Ah, and that place is in central Oahu and the Ewa plain. So we're telling Campbell Estate we want a hundred acres from you and they're saying, "No way (laughs)." Ah, but we're explaining that it's not a new community you're building but a brand new city and so it's a requirement as far as we're concerned. So they're looking like we're blackmailing them but it's I think it's important that somebody has to come up with a vision. It's not going to be me. But it has to be something that's built into the system for vision-building so it's tough to try and then translate that into an organization. Because it doesn't relate to anything that I've learned before in government or in the military where everything is so neatly structured. So we're going to be struggling with that for the next few months to put something in place, at least to get started.

I don't consider myself to be that smart a guy. In fact I always tell people how dumb I am and that if people think I'm smart, it's because I've had good teachers. And if people think I'm dumb, it's because I've been a poor student. That kind of self-effacing thing is actually something I truly believe. I feel that way about myself because that's how I grew up, you know. We, in Japanese you say, "*You ebaru*," or "you brag." Some things, as you feel your way through life, you do that, you brag to kind of make yourself feel like you're macho or big or strong or smart but deep down inside you kind of know (laughs), when you're getting there or not. And so, that's, that's it.

Questions?

Audience member: Can you say some of the things that you're finding to read nowadays that are interesting?

WO: Well, I, Bob Fulgum, who's a Christian minister, has written two books. One is called, *The Only Things I Need to Know, I Learned in Kindergarten*. And his most recent book is called, *It Was Burning When I Went to Sleep On It*. Those are the

two that I read. I've read some of these simpler books because they capture just essence. Sometimes, you know, you go to these thick books like *Passion for Excellence* and *In Search of Excellence*, *The Chaos Factor* and these kind of management books I read regularly and I've revisit regularly as well. I've read *Made in Japan* which is, well, Sony Corporation, and—what's his name—the father of Sony Corporation, I've read his book recently. I've read all five novels of Miyamoto Musashi. Did that in a week.

Mod: Oh, my! (laughter) All five of them?

WO: All five of them. I read it going to Pittsburgh and back. And I've read in the last, several weeks, at least four novels which are related to the space shuttle and star wars. And these are books that, like comics to me. They're about three or four hundred pages that I'll read just to relieve my mind of anything. It just cleanses me. There is a book written recently called, *Ethics and the P... no, let's see...and the Power of...* It was called, I can't recall. It was *Ethics and Management* but it's a real thin book. It was written by the same person who wrote *The One Minute Manager* but he got together with John Norman, Vincent Peale. So it's not like ethics in *The One Minute Manager*. It's ethical management and the power of ethical management, I guess. That's the book that I got the little phrase, "There's no right way to do a wrong thing." And these books are important to me because they pick up little essences that I can revisit. My books get dog-eared...not the dime novels, those I read and pass on to other people to read. But these other books get dog-eared because I like certain phraseology.

I was going to be a schoolteacher. My oldest brother teaches at Willamette University. He's on sabbatical now at the East West Center. His wife is a schoolteacher. My third oldest brother is a principal, was a principal at Mililani High School and he's now with the DOE district office. My sister taught here at the university, she went to teach at Sophia [University]. She's married to a professor of chemistry at Tokyo University and she lives there now. My younger brother got a degree and a Masters in English literature also. He works as an information officer now with the Navy at Pearl Harbor. I'm the frustrated schoolteacher. I was going to major in history, art, and English and my mother talked me out of being a schoolteacher. She said we had enough schoolteachers because she taught and dad taught and so I, it was so late in my college career that all I could do was switch over to psychology. So I took up psychology, my degree is in psychology, I tried to break off into industrial psychology thinking it might help me in my future business career, which was very short lived although who knows, by the time the next election comes I might be back in it that line of business. But most of my readings are of that nature. I have not visited any of my Buddhist readings for quite a while although whenever I go to this temple, I pick up the book and go through sections of it. I have not, for fear of scaring off, maybe the word would be, my wife, and because I know she is very sensitive about it simply because her family is so strong in Nichiren Soshu that I normally don't talk too much about it. I don't want her to think I'm preaching in any way. But you know the books are in my office and in fact I invite the entire staff, any one of them, groundskeepers on up, that if they happen to be in the building and

they want to browse through my collection and I'm in the office, just stick their head in, say, "Hi, Walter, can I look at your books?" and if I'm not having a meeting, they walk in, I ignore 'em, they go through the books, pick up what they need and it's on a honesty system, and they return it. So books are really to be shared so regardless of the kind of the reading that I do a lot of sharing of that. I've also read all of the Tom Clancy books. As soon as they come out, I'm on the waiting list at Walden Books and as soon as they're issued, they call me, I pick it up, and I read it. They're the running-away books. The books I use to run away. Unfortunately, those only allow me to run away for maybe a week, you know about an hour or so after midnight usually between twelve and three in the morning is when I do a lot of my reading.

Mod: When do you sleep?

WO: I sleep normally about three to four hours a night. If I feel really lazy I'll sleep five hours. It's a new thing for me because Gayle likes to sleep in late on Saturdays. So I can't use the alarm clock (laughs). I like to take cold showers in the morning as well. My mom is a practitioner of *nishishiki*. When she was in her fifties, she was stricken with arthritis to the point where I would have to carry her to and from bed and turn the pages of newspapers so she could read. She was sent to Japan in a wheelchair. She came back one year later, walked off the airplane, skinny as a pole, about sixty or seventy pounds, but walking and she's been healthy ever since. She was doing, *nishishiki* is a system of exercise and diet, no meats, different kind of vegetables which I used to grind up for her—this is in the fifties—and for flavoring you use lemon or daikon—the radishes—and today she goes to the pool, she goes in the jacuzzi for the hot water and then into the cold water. She does it in the evening when the water is cold. I remember in the *furo* she used to put ice cubes in the water to get it cold and demand that we go (laughter) in the water for three minutes and into the other for three minutes. I would slowly sink into the hot water and it was hot, turn the timer, egg timer over, wait for three minutes, splash the cold water because she would be upstairs listening. But she is very healthy at eighty-two she says she's going to dash out to pick up something. It means getting on the bus on Date Street by Kapahulu, and riding out to what's that Japanese store out by Oahu prison?

Mod: Marukai.

WO: Marukai. All the way across town just to buy a few things in a bag. She crosses the highway and then catches the bus home. She goes to Aiea Hongwanji to visit her senior friends every Tuesday by bus. She walks the length of Date Street and she's been known to walk all the way to Ala Moana just to pick a flower so she can bring it home, revive in water and do her water colors. She belongs to a writing class that publishes poetry written in calligraphy in Japan. And so she writes, she paints, she walks, she exercises, she's made friends in the building, she loves to cook, she loves to sew. Several years ago, she presented me with a present of a quilt which I nonchalantly took and one day when I was laying on it realized that these were tiny little quilted, quilt patchwork of shirts when I was at least five, six years old and growing up. That she had kept these patches over the years and put it all together and each piece bring back, evokes a certain memory

and, uh, I'm just amazed at the kind of things she does. She's a very special person to me. Very strong. She's outlived my dad by sixteen years now.

Mod: Fascinating. Thank you so much Walter.

WO: Oh, thank you, thank you for sharing, um. If I were to share this to my kids, they would say, "Oh, dad, not again!"

Mod: Hope you can come back and listen...

WO: (laughs)

Mod: Appreciate it.

WO: I did take them back to Kauai. In fact, the, the Wahiawa Camp was knocked down about three or four years ago but just before they razed all of the buildings, we had a reunion. And I discovered then that Dan Inouye's parents lived in that camp for eleven years and so just the social hall is still there. All the other buildings were knocked down but we walked through the buildings my sons and I and my mother and they were picking up bits and pieces of things that were still there underneath the house—old kerosene stoves, and that sort of thing. But of course, it's a little different for them. I hope someday that both... *[tape ends]*