JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAI'I

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

With

Ronald Sumida (RS)

February 28, 2015

Interviewers: Mel Inamasu (MI) and Gale Kobayashi (GK)

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

MI: Today is June, February 28, 2015 and we're here to interview Ron Sumida primarily about his family and his father who is, was Shinzaburo Sumida. With me today in this interview is…

GK: Gale Kobayashi.

MI: Okay, I'm Mel Inamasu. We're both volunteers at the Japanese Cultural Center. To start with, we'll just ask you some basic information.

RS: Okay.

MI: From there on, we'll just go and see what happens. You can start or we can help you get started, and we just go from there. So we do need to be out of here by five so we have a lot of time. Okay, tell us your name, date of birth, and tell us who your parents were.

RS: My name is Ronald Sumida and I was born in January, 1948. My parents are Mariko and Shinzaburo Sumida.

MI: Okay, feel free to ask questions. Let me start by asking a few questions. So let me start by asking you a little bit about your parents. You were born after the war?

RS: Yes, I was born after the war.

MI: Tell us about your parents, if you can. Date of birth, when they came to Hawaii, maybe what part of Japan they came from, briefly, and give a little bit about what they did as far as livelihood.

RS: My parents had interesting upbringings. My father was born in Hawaii because his father, his biological father, started an import/export business in Hawaii. So he was born

in Hawaii but they moved back to Hiroshima and he was educated in Hiroshima. My mother, on the other hand, was born in Japan. Because her father was a physician, he traveled to Hawaii and also did studies in England and in Mexico. They traveled a lot, so she has siblings that were born [overseas] - one born in England, two in Hawaii, one in Japan. So it's really interesting. But my mother, again, was born in Japan but she was pretty much reared in Hawaii and England. They both…

MI: Let me go back to your father. How old was he when he went back to Japan and when he came back [to Hawaii]?

RS: He was born in 1914, December. My mother was born in November, 1919.

MI: But you mentioned [his] father took him back to Japan for education. How old was he when he went?

RS: That I don't know. But I do know that he spent all his education years (I used to call it undergraduate), I mean from grade school to high school, I knew he grew up in Japan.

GK: So his first language would have been Japanese?

RS: Oh yes, yes. And when he graduated from high school in Japan, he went to the University of Dayton in Dayton, Ohio.

MI: Oh, really?

RS: His two brothers preceded him. See, I guess, to clarify everything and to kind of set everything [up] to see why I [call them] his brothers and sisters since he was adopted by his uncle. His biological father had three sons and three daughters. And so the two older sons, his two older brothers, went to Dayton University too. Because they couldn't pronounce the Japanese names, I think they [nick]-named them Tom, Dick, and Harry. (Interviewer laughter) Typical Irish names. I think Peter, Dick, and Harry. Anyway my father got Mike. My father was nicknamed Mike because they couldn't pronounce Shinzaburo. The two older brothers went to University of Dayton so my father followed when he graduated from high school in Japan; he went to University of Dayton. If I may interject, his roommate memorized the entire dictionary in the four years that he was at the University of Dayton. His roommate, not my father…

MI: Which dictionary?

RS: Oh, the regular American dictionary.

GK: Oh, not the British dictionary?

RS: Almost every word he memorized.

GK: Oh, my goodness.

MI: What ever happened to that person?

RS: I don't know. But that's when my father first started to pick up English, study English. He spoke a little bit with a slight accent, if you ever spoke to him. And a lot of his thinking—I know he thinks in English, he converts to Japanese, thinks in Japanese and then converts it back to English to talk to [others].

MI: So he went to school in Dayton, four years or so. How did he end up in Hawaii?

RS: Then after graduating from college, he went back to Japan to visit and he also enrolled in the Japanese university there. What is it called? Daiichi University? One of the most prestigious Japanese universities in Japan.

MI: To study what?

RS: Just study, get a degree from a Japanese university.

GK: Wow!

RS: When he got that degree, he got drafted into the Japanese army.

GK: Oh.

RS: Had the Japanese army known that he had gone to America to study at the University of Dayton, he would've probably been executed. He never revealed his past. But because he grew up in Japan, they couldn't tell that he had gone overseas.

GK: So he spoke Japanese?

RS: Yes. He served as a Captain in the Japanese army. He rarely talked about his military days, you know, but I know it wasn't very pleasant. If you know anything about the Japanese army, they're really strict. Discipline is really tough. So he spent years in China and then he came back to Hawaii.

MI: Lived in China in the military?

RS: Yup. In the Japanese Army. After he got out of the Japanese army, he came back to Hawaii, back [in] early 1940s and then he was introduced to my mother and …

MI: When you said he came back to Hawaii, who was here in Hawaii waiting for him?

RS: His father and his uncle. In the meantime, his uncle adopted him when he got out of high school in Japan. So, he was really— this is something I don't know should be on record but his brothers—remember the two who preceded him in college at the

University of Dayton? Their father, or actually my father's biological father too, they were getting $100 a month allowance.

GK: From their father?

RS: In Japan, yeah. So my father—remember he was adopted by his uncle, he went to the University of Dayton in the thirties. His adopted father–I guess uncle—gave him only a $50 a month allowance. I told my father, I said, "Are you spoiled? Are you crazy? The average American barely made $50 a month. Why are you complaining?" He said his older brothers bought new cars.

MI: What did that person [uncle] do to be able to give the children that much? What kind of…

RS: Oh, both my grandfather and my grand-uncle, I guess, were very wealthy. We owned a lot of land, hundreds and maybe even thousands of acres in Taiwan where they [cultivated] rice and also coffee. And then when Japan, of course, did their aggression into China and South Korea or North Korea, the (Japanese) government gave them some land in South Korea too, right before the outbreak of the war. So, in fact, I'm not bragging—I don't know anything about estimates, but they were really, really wealthy landowners and farmers.

GK: They had to have been to send sons to University of Dayton…

RS: Right. And not only that, but giving them a $100 a month allowance. I mean, that's pretty good. So naturally the older brothers bought a new car, a new Ford. They went over to Detroit, Michigan, bought a new Ford, drove it back to California and sold it. Anyway, my father was complaining that he only got $50 and I said, "That's way, way more than the average American even got," because the Depression years were just about ending. So anyway, that's how—both my grandfather and my grand-uncle were very wealthy. That's why they could afford that.

MI: So he came back to Hawaii. What's the story?

RS: Because his uncle, his adopted uncle, Daizo Sumida was here, running the brewery and wholesale business. Taijiro, who was my father's (Shinzaburo's) biological father, went back to Japan. But, as I said earlier, Daizo was here running the two businesses. So, naturally, as the son he would come back to Hawaii. Now my mother on the other hand…

MI: He came back to take [over], to learn?

RS: Yes, to help Daizo. I just refer to him as Daizo as his uncle, and Taijiro as his biological father. It's a little complicated there. And, of course, do you want to go ahead and do the onset of WWII or…

MI: How about your mother?

RS: Okay. My mother also came from a very prominent family. Her father was a surgeon. And a lot of the work he did was—he was actually beginning to do work - pioneering - in the area of cancer. Again, they had a beautiful home up Alewa Heights and my mother had a very comfortable life. She and her older brother went to Punahou and, of course, they graduated. Her older brother, her brother went to MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) but it was too cold in Boston, so he moved to New York. [Laughter]

GK: That's just as cold.

RS: Yes, I know. But my mother also went to and graduated from the University of Hawaii.

MI: What did she study?

RS: That I don't know. But I know that it's very rare [that] both my mother and father were college graduates.

GK: Yes, that's unusual.

RS: And my father especially, 'cuz he was a college graduate [from] a college in Japan as well as [a] university in America.

MI: So how did they meet then? Did the families meet…

RS: Through, what do you call that, arrangements.

GK: Oh.

RS: One of the parties was Soga family. I believe they were in the newspaper business. Walter Soga and those guys. They were on my father's side. Somebody else introduced them, my mother and my father, together. We have their early pictures. My father has his black rimmed round glasses and as kids we used to tease my mother. We said, "How could you fall in love with this ugly looking guy?" [Laughter] That's okay, if I can interject that. That's how they met, through arrangements. A lot of the Japanese families, especially upper-class ones, they always had pre-arranged or arranged marriages.

MI: I'm interested a little bit in the history of the *sake* factory and how it was confiscated. Before you start on December 7, could you tell us a little of the history of the *sake* factories?

RS: As I said, in the turn of the century around the 1900s, both Taijiro and Daizo came to Hawaii to start [their] import/export business. When they got here, they realized that one of the key beverages was *sake*. And what happened was, [the government] imposed such a huge tax on s*ake* by that time so the average field worker at the time, usually people

who worked in the sugar cane and pineapple fields, it took them three or four days' wages just to buy what they called an "*issho,*" one and a half litres of *sake*. So my grandfather, Taijiro and Daizo decided to go ahead and start a brewery. This was in 1906.

GK: So they came here…

RS: To do import/export business but realized that there was another business that they could..

MI: Did they know how to do it beforehand?

RS: No.

GK: So without knowing how to make *sake*, they…

RS: Yes, because they're farmers, mostly rice and coffee. They had an idea since in Japan, they make *sake* during the winter months, October through April. Those are the cold months where they can't really work in the fields. While in Hawaii, there's no such thing as winter months. So they came up with the idea that they have to refrigerate the building. So ours is the first *sake* brewery outside of Japan, in fact in the world, that was refrigerated back in 1907. It was actually incorporated in 1908. So they had to make the seasons within the structure, the building. So they refrigerated the plant. In 1908 they started making *sake*. That thing [business] just boomed. Again, following the…

MI: Did they have the same taxes?

RS: No. 'Cuz it was all brewed here. There's no import tax, no tariffs, no duties.

RS: Mr. Dole, remember Dole Pineapple? He purposely kept the taxes high because he wanted to keep the *sake* out of Hawaii.

GK: Oh.

RS: He didn't want his workers to be getting drunk or he didn't want his workers to—by making the *sake* in Hawaii, there are no import taxes, tariffs, and no duties.

GK: Because the prices were drawn here and everything made in Hawaii.

RS: So, there were a lot of—they even had rice paddies in Kauai. They had, that's why they had Hilo Rice Mill on the Big Island.

MI: They got the rice from Kauai then?

RS: Initially, it was here on Oahu. They were the pioneers that worked at the refrigeration

[business] getting it off. The *sake* brewery took off real well. Unfortunately, in 1918, I think that's when Prohibition came in so they had to stop making *sake* ten years after they started. During Prohibition years they made ice because they had the refrigeration capacity so they channeled it over and started the ice business.

MI: Is refrigeration different from freezing?

RS: No, no. Refrigeration cools the room down, but then you can also convert it and run pipe lines [to] make ice.

GK: Oh.

RS: They had saline tanks that had coils in them that kept the water real cold. And then they'd fill them up with water, and then they blew air into the water tanks so all the impurities would come out and that's how they made crystal clear ice.

GK: Very, very, umm. They were very good businessmen who changed…

RS: Adapted.

GK: To whatever was happening. Yeah.

RS: Once Prohibition had lifted…

GK: Yes.

RS: They went back into making *sake.* But they also continued the ice part too because back in those days ice blocks were literally an ice box, where you took a big cube of ice, put it in the ice box and as it melted, it cooled the box.

GK: Were they still running the import/export business?

RS: Yes, yes. It was known as T.Sumida and Company. That stood for Tajiro Sumida and Company. They ran that and, of course, the brewery too, now.

GFK: What kind of things were they bringing in?

RS: They bring in Japanese canned goods. Mostly canned goods.

GK: Anything for the plantation workers?

RS: Primarily aimed at them, yes. To give them some of the Japanese foods that they missed back home. It was a fairly—I guess it was called a good business.

MI: This was all at the same place in Pauoa Valley?

RS: No. The wholesale business was in Chinatown.

MI: I mean, the brewery.

RS: Yes. The brewery and ice company were both here in Pauoa. Then they went ahead and after Prohibition, they started the brewery back up. In five years they were making huge amounts of money because the demand is there. You got the perfect market, all these Japanese nationals, pretty much. They're all mostly first generation. One of the comfort drinks they could get was *sake*. Many of them were not married, and so on lonely nights, a good bottle of *sake* just kept them happy, I guess. But I think [in] 1939, 1940, the brewmaster went back to Japan because things were getting heated with racial prejudice. I remember my mother was saying, they were yelling, "You Japs gotta go back! Leave Hawaii!" She heard the word "J-A-P-S" many times. She heard it everywhere. So it was getting uncomfortable. But this is interesting because it was reflected in the corporate, I guess it was called the corporate books. They gave the brewmaster, as a reward, a brand new Packer and also $10,000 cash.

MI: Which he took back with him?

RS: Yes. I heard that in 1943 the Packer broke down. Of course, Japan was at war with America, no parts. So the Packer just sat in this small city for years and years.

GK: $10,000!

RS: That's close to maybe half a million. Maybe even a million dollars in today's dollars.

MI: So they learned the system enough that they could just continue [the brewery] without him?

RS: No, they got another brew master. But, unfortunately, WWII came.

GK: Yes.

RS: And then they took most of the more prominent businessmen, those that possibly could finance, I guess they called it, you know, internal aggression on Americans. And so one of the lawyers, I won't mention any names, to save his neck from being interned or being imprisoned, or whatever, agreed to work with the immigration people and bring in all these prominent Japanese names because he was a prominent lawyer. Of course, my father and my grandfather were interviewed within just a matter of days because their names were furnished to the US government, yeah. And shortly thereafter, they were sent to the mainland for the….

MI: So father and son were arrested at the same time and went to Sand Island at the same time?

RS: And then they were shipped to the mainland, yeah?

GK: When were they picked up?

RS: Within two weeks, my father said.

GK: Oh.

RS: They would have been imprisoned, or I guess, interned.

MI: Does your mother have anything to say about that day or that time? They were married already.

RS: Oh, yeah. In fact they were married for only a week.

GK: Oh, my goodness.

RS: They were married only a week. I think November 30 was their anniversary. December 7 is only a week [later].

GK: Yeah.

RS: Of course they had a few more days, but then eventually my father was sent…

MI: Did they have time for a honeymoon or anything?

RS: I don't think so.

MI: Wow! Has she ever talked about that year?

RS: No. But my father has.

MI: What did he say?

RS: My father kept saying, if it wasn't for that attorney, they might have had a few more months, you know, of being able to conduct business and kind of wind things down. Because they were taken away [so suddenly], my mother and my grandmother, they sold their Kaimuki home. They had a big home in Kaimuki but they were afraid that eventually the government was going to take over the properties. Which they did. They took over all the properties. They confiscated them. Bank accounts. Fortunately, they had sold the house and I guess they hid the money and so...

GK: So where did they live?

RS: They lived on Farrington Street, which is by Punahou School. It's off of McCully.

There's a place called Farrington Street. They had a real modest, two bedroom house there. My mother and my mother-in-law, I mean my mother and grandmother, lived there. This is Daizo's wife.

MI: When you say they "hid the money" because anything would have been…

GK: Right.

RS: Yes. They couldn't put it into the banks because…

MI: So somewhere in the ground or that…?

RS: I don't know where they hid it but they kept it [safe] during the war years. Eventually my father and grandfather were brought back from the mainland camp to Honouliuli.

MI: Oh, really?

GK: So they went from Sand Island to the mainland.

RS: I believe it was Minnesota. Then they were shipped down to Mississippi.

GK: Okay.

RS: Then eventually came back to Honolulu. I don't why they didn't take the same route as the California people. Most of them went to Nevada and Colorado, I think, and Utah.

GK: So were they always together?

RS: My father?

GK: And grandfather?

RS: They were at separate barracks or facilities at times, but they were pretty much moved together.

MI: That's pretty interesting, the father-son kind of thing.

GK: I've never heard of that.

RS: So my father, being spoiled so-to-speak in luxury, wasn't used to carrying his own things, but my father had to carry his and his father's luggage onto the boat.

GK: I can imagine what a shock that was to them.

RS: Now, my mother's father, because things were getting really bad in the late thirties, had sent his wife and my mother's siblings back to Japan.

MI: Say that again?

RS: My mother, when she got married here in Hawaii, she was by herself pretty much because she was going to the University (of Hawaii). Her brother already finished up with college. Remember, he had gone to MIT and the University of New York, I think. And because of all the prejudice, he couldn't find any jobs in engineering. Even in California, even in Hawaii. So he went back to Japan too, and all the younger siblings went back to Japan with their mother. So my mother's father practiced medicine here and when the war broke out, they had the choice to go home, or back to Japan. He forfeited everything. My mother's father forfeited everything so he could take the last boat, so to speak, back to Japan and be with his family [leaving my mother] because my mother was married and she had family here. So my grandfather, my grandfather on my mother's side, forfeited a beautiful yacht, forty-eight foot yacht that they used to travel on during the weekends and sail between the islands. He also forfeited one of the bigger homes in Alewa Heights, and two cars, and all his bank accounts. He just went home, pretty much empty [handed] with nothing. But he couldn't take that to Japan because America was at war with Japan.

GK: What happened to the family business during the war?

RS: Okay. As far as my mother's side, everything's shut down, her father quit his practice here and went to Japan. My father and my grandfather were taken to camps. So, one of the plant managers managed the *sake* plant until the Corps of Engineers took over. Engineers took over the ice plant and the *sake* plant.

MI: When was this?

RS: Right after the war started. So, naturally, all the workers lost their jobs because [they] no longer could make *sake* and ice. But the workers got together and went ahead to build the shoyu plant where they built a building. The Corps of Engineers allowed them to build a building on the South side of the brewery. So they built a huge building and they started making shoyu during the war. So that's how they pretty much kept some of the employees employed during the war by having a shoyu factory, starting a shoyu factory. I remember the manager's son; his name was Mr. Nomura. He was just a small, young lad. Young boy. He used to remember, every day at one-thirty, they had a changing of the guards. Of course, they changed guards at night too, but he's up during the day. He used to stand outside in the parking lot and watch the army troops march up, change over, march back down to town.

MI: So this shoyu business, did your family, or your father's family get any income out of that?

RS: It was marginal though because it wasn't full-scale. But yes, it was there. So they were able to pay wages but I really don't know how they got the materials. Soy beans and wheat are the two primary ingredients, plus salt. But they did make shoyu during the war

years, they said. But I did research, how they acquired the raw materials. After the war, my grandfather was able to hire two of the top Japanese lawyers in the state. One of them being the one that turned them in, but the other one I can tell you his name was Kashiwa. Kashiwa was a real prominent [lawyer].

GK: [Kashiwa] Genro?

RS: Something like that. They had a beautiful home in Aina Haina. And through the two prominent lawyers, they were able to get almost everything back in just a few, in fact, less than a couple years. And the Corps of Engineers turned the *sake* brewery portion back to the company, so they could make shoyu, *sake*, and ice after the war. And by 1948, three years after the war when I was born, they brought me home to their home in Alewa Heights. So my grandfather had bought an even bigger home, one of the largest homes of Alewa Heights. It was a super big mansion. That's where I remember growing up. And my mother said that's where I first came home to; it was the Alewa Heights home. And I remember when my sister was born, you know, I remember her being watched over by my grandmother because my grandmother never had children. Daizo's wife never had children. But she had one child but it died at birth. So she kind of raised me and my sister because she wanted, I guess she missed the opportunity of raising kids. So I remember that, but…

GK: Did your father ever talk about the internment experience?

RS: Yes. [but] not the ones on the mainland. I guess they were very bad, but in the Honouliuli one, he talked about playing on the softball team. He played baseball in high school, so he was really good. Winning the camp softball tournament. He also, I was telling Mel, that I know of, you know of the stories they were trying to make *sake* out at Honouliuli. And you know, the brew master says, even if you don't have the mold culture, they said you can make the same kind of enzymes with your mouth - saliva and that. I guess that's how they made the culture to ferment the rice.

GK: Is that how he did it?

MI: They didn't have to sneak in the culture?

RS: I don't know. They may have had some. But the [same] mold culture is called aspergillus oriziae. The same mold culture that they used for *sake,* they also used for shoyu. So they must've–you could visit people in internment camps, so somebody must've brought them some of the mold culture.

GK: We've stories of it being sneaked in.

RS: Okay.

MI: The *sake* itself or the culture?

GK: The yeast. The yeast being sneaked in.

RS: Now, I don't know how they got the yeast because shoyu doesn't use yeast, you know. So that's…

MI: I've heard stories about a secret compartment...

RS: They had to hide the brew.

GK: Yes.

RS: I don't know how they kept it cool, 'cuz fermentation generates heat. I don't know how they kept that brew cool. If it doesn't stay cool, that's the reason why you have to have refrigerated room to keep the fermentation cool.

GK: And it was a very hot place down in the valley.

RS: Yes. Maybe the *sake* came out tasting really very bad.

GK: Yes. It probably was not at the very best quality, but if that's all they had…

RS: I would think, probably the best place to store it would be underground or in the ground where the dirt is much cooler. But It's still not as cold as refrigeration or winter months.

GK: Did your mother talk about visiting your father while [he was] in camp?

RS: She did. But they were only allowed one-on-one visitations so my grandmother-in-law, my grandmother wanted to visit my dad too. So my mother had to share time.

GK: Oh, really.

RS: It's interesting that my grandmother would visit my father because they never really seemed to be a bond. They always kind of looked at each other as Uncle/Aunty and as nephew. They didn't really look at it as mother/father and son. My father was kind of distant from his—Daizo and his adoptive parents. So…

GK: What other stories would your father talk about?

RS: They passed the time away by getting some old—but we can't find it, but he made a little ring for my mother.

GK: Oh, yes.

RS: And he made a bracelet with toothpaste handles.

GK: Yes. Toothbrush ring, yes.

RS: It must've been common because other people must've made those things too. Rings and bracelets.

GK: Bracelets.

RS: And the other one was, my father never cooked. The only thing he could do, even till the day he died, was boil an egg. But he worked in the Honouliuli kitchens.

GK: Oh.

RS: That way he could eat what he cooked. [Laughter] So he always volunteered working at the kitchen. These are things—he worked in the kitchen to eat some extra food. He also played softball in the camp. He also tried to make moonshine, I guess, a better word than *sake*. And then they fashioned different kinds of jewelry. I think they also made bowls. I don't know how they carved out the wood, but I remember seeing one bowl that was really crude-looking but I guess, you have many hours, you just keep grinding away at it with a spoon.

MI: How about shells? Did he mention shells?

RS: No, not shells.

MI: One of the stories I read, it said that your father taught them how to make, well, pineapple. I don't know how you ferment the pineapple.

GK: Oh, yes. It talks about making alcohol using pineapple, of fermenting it.

RS: Right. Any fruit that you ferment is gonna generate alcohol, so, of course, rice is not a fruit but it's a grain…

GK: Did they ever talk about bringing in things like tofu or shoyu into the camp?

RS: No. That part—somehow my mother and grandmother never talked about really bringing food to the camp. And so food must've been very scarce in the camp. Otherwise, my father wouldn't have talked about volunteering as kitchen help so he could get the extra food.

GK: Right, for somebody who wasn't accustomed to that kind of work, he really wanted that extra food.

MI: As far as camps on the mainland—I guess he went to Sand Island and then from there shipped to the mainland.

RS: To the mainland.

MI: Can you go over again anything you might recall that he mentioned?

RS: I think it was Minnesota and Mississippi. Yeah, Mississippi. I'm not sure.

MI: And when Honouliuli opened up, they brought him back.

RS: Yes.

GK: Do you know when that was?

RS: No, but I know my father said that—my father's not the emotional type of guy, but he told me, "I had tears in my eyes," when he saw Diamond Head because he was finally coming back to Hawaii. He didn't think he was gonna come back, I guess so. When you look at that, you kind of conclude that maybe those intern camps on the mainland were harsh, especially winter months.

MI: Any letters between your mother and father from that period?

RS: There may have been but we haven't seen any. Oh no, no. I think there were some in Honouliuli because we were reading some and we were laughing over it. "You wrote this kind of stuff to dad?" [Laughter] I don't think it was the camps on the mainland, but Honouliuli 'cuz they had limited visitation times so they corresponded a lot with letters. That's right.

MI: Would it be possible to bring those over some day for us to photograph?

RS: I guess so. I don't know where we put it. We may have thrown it away because we cleaned everything out when my mother moved out to Hawaii Kai. I don't know if we still have any of those letters around. I remember reading some with my sister, when she and I were cleaning up the condo. Ho! They wrote such letters! We [were] looking at my mother and father like, "They not the type to write this kind of romantic letters." But it was nice. Of course, when I read those letters I should've told my dad, "Did you write this or did someone else write this?" [Laughter] This is not you."

GK: Well, when they're separated that way, maybe their true emotions are expressed.

RS: Maybe. But, otherwise, I would've said, "Dad, you had me totally fooled." [Laughter] I didn't think you that type of a romantic person."

GK: Yeah. Did your grandfather have any kind of big sorrows or anything that you remember him sharing?

RS: No, he never shared. I remember my grandmother and grandfather—well, grandfather didn't show it too much, but my grandmother was very hardened by the war experience. She really hated the Caucasians.

GK: Oh.

RS: As I said, we lived in a huge home in Alewa Heights. Most homes you have a neighbor on the right, neighbor on the left, and neighbor in the back. We had four neighbors on one side, three on the other side. It was a huge house, over an acre and a half, and in the front we had two neighbors. In the back, well, the neighbor had more like a strip, piece of land. But we had a huge back parking lot that was paved and so we set-up a basketball court.

GK: Wow!

RS: Whenever I had Caucasian friends over, my grandmother would come out and she'd look, and then at dinner she would say, "Ron." She didn't call me Ron but—"Masao-san, don't bring those Caucasian kids anymore. Don't invite them over." So she allowed anyone that was not white or Caucasian. See, I had Korean friends, Portuguese friends, Hawaiian, Japanese, but no 100% Caucasian kids. Blonde hair was not allowed on our property.

GK: Oh.

RS: Or I should say, our home. So it was really hard.

MI: Until she died, she was like that?

RS: So when we had—you know, when you're in high school, you want to have parties and our house was huge! I mean, we had a patio that most houses could fit in there. We'd invite like 60 couples, huge dance. And my father, before we did that, first he went over and talked to the two neighbors' houses. Told them, "Do you mind if my son has a live band? And we'll try to end it by 9?" The neighbors were very obliging, said, "Oh yeah, yeah." We had bands and we faced the band towards the open area so that the music would go down the hill.

GK: Okay.

RS: Not impact the neighbors right there. But we had 30 couples, that's 60 people there. It was almost like a night-club atmosphere. We had tables and people would dance. My grandfather had built that huge patio with an open bar too. So we served cokes and drinks and it was a great time but of course, I had Caucasian friends. So we always had to shuttle my grandmother, I say mother, to our relatives.

GK: Oh.

RS: A couple of times, it was funny 'cuz my dad comes rushing [out] and says, "Ron, how much longer can you hold out? But can you end it early?" I said, "Why?" "Grandma wants to come home. She's tired."

GK: Your grandfather never felt that way?

RS: He never expressed it, no, [not] as much as my mother, grandmother who would tell me right there, "No Caucasian friends." She said, "No Haoles [white people]. No Haoles here. No Haoles. No Haoles here." So it was really tough. But, my grandfather, he probably was not [that type of way] because 'fifty-four was—Governor Quinn. Do you remember Governor Quinn?

GK: Yes.

MI: He was the first Governor. 'Fifty-nine.

RS: Yes. There was a territorial governor in 'fifty-four. I forgot his name. Anyways, he was a Caucasian, of course, territorial governor and he came to our house and I sat on his lap. So, my grandfather [associated with] all kinds of businessmen.

MI: Your grandmother, was she traditional Japanese?

RS: Oh, yeah.

MI: 'Cuz most of them, I mean, they just said, "Cannot help."

GK: Right.

MI: Sounds like she.

GK: During the war, what were she and your mother doing?

RS: Just pretty much staying at home and they didn't work, you know. I know other families had to work, but my parents, mother and grandmother didn't have to work. Because they had money.

GK: Right.

RS: And as I said, after the war, I don't know where my grandfather pulled all the money out to hire the two prominent lawyers.

GK: Right.

RS: In fact before the war started, my grandfather was President of a bank, too. He was also the President of T. Sumida Company, President of Honolulu *Sake* Brewery, and also I believe it was called Pacific Bank. But after the war, ten years later, actually 1953 or 4, Central Pacific Bank was formed. Did you know that? Before 1954 though, Matsunaga, Inouye and all those other people, and I think there was a Mr. Kido—all these 100th Battalion/442nd men, they all got to go to college with the GI Bill. Most of them were

attorneys. Also college-educated. They wanted to start a bank in the early fifties. And they almost started a bank but my grandfather ruined it all.

GK: Oh.

RS: They had my grandfather and all his cronies who had the money, and then they had all these young, I guess…

GK: Returning GI's.

RS: Returning, yeah, GIs that wanted to start the bank. They agreed to have seven from the young group, and seven from my grandfather's people, including my grandfather. They were all set to go, seven-seven, but then my grandfather stepped in and said, "No. We're gonna have seven of yours, but we're gonna have eight. I want seven plus me, eight." And so it's written in—you should read the Central Pacific Bank book. They, the young college GIs, said "Nope," and they walked out of the meeting because they knew the older people wanted to monopolize.

GK: He wanted the majority.

RS: Yes. My grandfather wanted to run everything with his hand.

MI: So what happened to them after the Central Pacific Bank meeting?

RS: Eventually, then, a couple of years or two later, they started Central Pacific Bank, but they didn't include my grandparents, I mean my grandfather. He was out "at the sea." [Laughter]

MI: You said he had a bank already?

RS: Yes, but it was confiscated during the war.

MI: I see. And they were never able to reopen the bank…

RS: Most of it was other people's money. I don't know if they ever got their money back or you know, or what. Again, these are things I wish I had known more about. Things that my father really didn't reveal as much.

MI: Was he angry?

RS: I don't know.

MI: An angry man?

RS: No, no. My mother was a little more prejudiced. She harbored a lot more prejudice than

my father did. Again, my father never showed it. My mother did. Sometimes, we're on tape now but, she'd cuss at us saying "(blank) those—she didn't say (blank) the Haoles!" But my father never said things like that, being derogatory towards any Caucasians.

GK: I wonder if your mother and your grandmother made…

RS: Maybe.

GK: Experienced some kind of really major experiences…

RS: Maybe, 'cuz they were left here on their own in Oahu. Maybe they were subject to a lot of hatred and prejudice.

GK: Yeah, yeah.

MI: Some of the families of the people who were picked off, the business leaders, religious leaders, they suffered because the community people felt they deserved it. They were doing too well in Hawaii. Was anything like that ever sensed? "But he deserved it because they were so well to do?"

RS: No, no. But I do know that, as far as my grandfather [goes] he was very successful but he also stepped on a lot of people, so I imagine a lot of people must've felt the same kind of sentiment that you[are] expressing. Where a lot of not-so-prominent people felt that these wealthy Japanese business leaders deserved it because they took money. They became wealthy.

MI: Yeah.

RS: Not so much at their [own] expense, but they were wealthy and they never really helped the Japanese community as much, maybe. But, you know, my grandfather helped with Kuakini Hospital. He also helped here (JCCH) too. I see their names on the board too. My grandfather, Daizo, is on here. Honolulu *Sake* Brewery is on that plaque. And at Kuakini there's T. Sumida and Company, Honolulu *Sake* Brewery, Daizo and my father, Shinzaburo. So we know that they gave back, but probably not as much as they could have.

MI: Well, maybe not at the beginning when they were also struggling.

RS: Yeah. But you know, the company was doing good because he got a brand-new 1950 Olds [Oldsmobile], and then he got a '52 Olds, a '54, and a '56 Olds, the car. The company was doing good less than five years after the war, because he was getting a brand-new company car. Now, I don't know if it was at the sacrifice or the expense of the company operation, you know, but he had nice cars. Now my father, on the other hand, I remember he got his first car in 1954 when my mother got her license. Until then we drove in one of the company trucks.

GK: Oh.

RS: So my father didn't have that kind of money that my grandfather had. And, you know, you would think, "This is your son. You'd help him out. At least buy him a car, you know."

GK: Or increase salary.

RS: Yes, or increase his salary. Or pass on the two-year old Oldsmobile when he got a new car. Pass on the used Oldsmobile to my dad. But I remember we had these old panel trucks. He'd stack up the boxes—he'd double stack it so it wouldn't tumble forward and we sat on the boxes in the back. My mother and father sat in the two seats, and the kids sat on the boxes, shoyu boxes and *sake* boxes in the van. We used to travel around like that. (Laughter) We used to go to the beach like that.

MI: So what [position] was he at the brewery, your father?

RS: He was just the manager.

MI: He managed it, your grandfather owned it?

RS: Well, grandfather didn't really own it. It was a corporation. They had over 250 stockholders, even back then. Most of them had bought $10, $20, $50 shares in the company. But later on, he became President, Vice President of the Wholesale business, when he became President of the Wholesale business. That was in the late 50's. Then he started getting his own company car. [Laughter]

MI: Oldsmobile?

RS: No, it was a Ford and Plymouth. (Laughter)

GK: He didn't want the same kind of car as his father.

RS: Yes, I guess so. But it's really funny because, actually, he had two cars. Company cars. And so the IRS checked us out one time, so my mother had to go down and pretend she was the Vice President. I shouldn't put this on record, but it was so cute because she said, "What am I supposed [to do]?" "Just tell them, you get the mail, you go to the bank. Look at the sales. If they wanna ask about the sales amount, tell them to go talk to the accountant." [Laughter] So my mother sat there when the IRS came to visit, 'cuz they were saying, "How come you have two company cars?" She had a brand-new Ford and my father had a two-year Dodge that she could drive. She didn't drive, they wouldn't need a car ….
I know he struggled because all three of us kids went to Punahou, too. So we were fortunate to go to private school. My mother used to always threaten me, 'cuz I used to always play around. I wasn't a very academic student. She says, "You wanna go to Farrington [High School]?" [Laughter] I said, "No, no, I don't wanna go Farrington."

That was motivation to stay at Punahou. She says, "You gonna end up a Farrington." Already Farrington back in the '50s and '60s had a bad reputation.

GK: Yeah, yeah.

RS: My sister was a straight-A student. (Laughter) She's two years younger than I am. So, when I was a sophomore [junior?] and she was a Freshman at Punahou, they always had these quarterly assemblies where they read the names of the students who made the Honor Roll. They get to the Freshman [list], they read my sister's name, Irene Sumida, Honor Roll. It goes to the sophomore class. Then they go to the Juniors [list] class. And then they go, "Ron Sumida, Residence Honor Roll." And my friends at the assembly [go], "Sumida? Are you serious?" [Laughter] I told them, "I have to keep up with my sister. I can't be getting bad grades."

GK: Bad grades.

RS: Junior and Senior years I got real good grades. In fact, I made Honor Roll so I was able to choose the University I wanted to go to. But [otherwise], I'd always been a poor student.

GK: You had to keep up with your sister.

RS: The last two years of my high school years, yes. She motivated me. Anyways, those are fun days, you know. Of course, owning a wholesale business, import/export business—my father provided food for the family but he took all the food from the company. (Laughter) Brought home rice, canned goods. By that time, the company had started bringing in American food. Cans of corn, peas and carrots. They also started bringing in laundry soap and dish soap because they were supplying restaurants and a lot of them needed it. So it wasn't just Japanese food. In fact, before the business shut down, the Japanese food portion only accounted for 20% of the total sales.

GK: Oh, during the war, did that part of the business stop or…?

RS: That I don't know. I think it was—it probably had to stop because all the items at the T. Sumida Company originally had was all [Japanese food]. With the war, there's nothing there.

GK: But so they started up after the war?

RS: And that's when I think my father started bringing in other jobbers or wholesalers would bring in...

GK: There probably wasn't anything to bring in from Japan from that point.

RS: Yes, 'cuz Japan was struggling.

GK: Right.

RS: In fact, it was really sad 'cuz a lot of the Japanese were—they really had nothing left. All of their resources, everything went towards the war effort. And I know that's where my grandfather kind of capitalized on that. He used to go to Japan. He used to buy up all of these scrolls and he'd buy up all these samurai swords. And these were swords that were in different samurai families for generations, and they were selling it off to make money to buy food.

MI: He brought those things back to Hawaii? What did he do with them?

RS: Well, we donated a lot of it to the Art Academy. He had one of those armor suits that were actually worn by samurai, two armored suits worn by the samurai in the 1600's, 1700's. Really [a] gold mine today. And one of his passions was the Japanese game called *Go*. So he brought back, oh, dozens of beautiful Japanese *Go* tables. Solid wood. In fact one of them, that my brother has now, was appraised for $50,000 five years ago. I have a couple myself, but….

MI: How soon after the war did your grandfather [and] your father go back to [post-war] Japan? You have any impressions of what they saw there when they got back?

RS: I don't know. I know they must've gone back…

MI: As soon as they could.

RS: As I said, I don't know where he got the money but my grandfather had some money. Of course, to get everything back, he, my father had to forfeit his property in Kalihi. That helped bring in some money, not to sell the property in Kalihi to make money….

MI: So they did end up losing, yeah…

RS: Well actually, they only lost the property that my father had. All the properties my grandfather had, the Pawaa property, they also had property in town, Chinatown. The wholesale business, the Brewery. all of that, they were able to get back.

MI: Many "Aliens", non-citizens, I guess, who had property had to go through the same processes individually.

RS: I believe so, yes.

MI: Had to fight to get it back.

RS: When I hear some of my friends that came from California, when you hear their stories about how their parents were interned. I go, "Wow." I mean, that was really harsh.

GK: 'Cuz they lost everything.

RS: That's right. And some them…

MI: They never got any of it back.

RS: Yes. And not only that, but they sold to their neighbors. I remember, one of my friends said they sold their house for like $80. And after the war the neighbor wouldn't sell it back. So literally, all the Japanese—I guess *Isseis, Nisseis* in California, I give them credit for coming out of war and virtually starting with nothing, and acquiring beautiful homes in Palisades, California, down by Inglewood side, and all these in Pasadena. And having thriving businesses. Many of them are multi-millionaires and all of that [came] from ground-up, having nothing.

MI: What's even worse is they probably had something. They had built up something from before the war and then they were set-back. Everything lost, everything had to start over…

RS: But then to start over and yet to build themselves back up again.

MI: And they were not as young [as before].

RS: A lot of the Japanese, maybe because they're industrious, I don't know what it is, but many of them are success stories in California. I believe, maybe the reason why a lot of the Japanese here [in Hawaii] weren't interned like the California ones—first of all we're on an island so it's pretty much hard to go anywhere. Whereas California, they could go inland and do terroristic actions [in internment camps]. Over here, we're on an island. Also, I believe a lot of Japanese, they're not in management and ownership positions. Our family was probably one of the rare ones that owned or managed business. A lot of them were probably in the labor force.

GK: Right.

RS: So these companies like the big ones, pineapple and sugar, they probably could not function without the field workers.

GK: Exactly.

MI: That was the big issue.

RS: Yeah.

MI: They needed the labor.

RS: That's right. And Caucasian people probably couldn't do that kind of work. And I'm not sure the Chinese workers wouldn't have done either.

MI: I believe they wouldn't do that kind of work.

RS: Yes. So I believe that's the reason why a lot of the [Japanese] Hawaii people were spared from going to the [mainland] intern camps.

GK: Well, because the Japanese comprised nearly 40% of the population in Hawaii. They were not interned because what would happen to the economy if you had shipped them all off?

RS: Exactly. There'd be no labor force.

GK: Yup.

RS: And companies like the "Big Five" type of companies would've been in trouble because they would've had no…

GK: Labor force…

RS: Employees.

GK: So your family was different because they had their own business at that time. And they also were able to keep it or regain it after the war.

RS: Many of them took five to ten years to get it back, but in our family's situation, we got it back just a year or two after the war, which was amazing.

GK: And that's sad.

RS: And my grandfather buying a huge mansion in Alewa Heights before 1948 speaks volumes of how some families are fortunate, maybe because of wealth, because of connections, to get back everything, pretty much everything that they lost. Whereas other these people, like those in California—you know, you come back from camp and there's nothing. There's no home to come home to. There's no lawyers, there's no one to help you out. You have no money. It was a struggle to get their place back in society.

GK: Did your father or grandfather ever talk about other people who were interned with them?

RS: No. My father made friends and he talked to a few of them. Unfortunately, many of them passed away already. But some of them turned out to be—one of them was his insurance agent. He became an insurance agent and sold my father, you know, all the insurance. There were a couple others that he was in business with. And so, there were some friendships that were bonded in camp.

GK: And they maintained ties after?

RS: Yes, yes. My father was pretty much a private person so his circle of friends was very

small. In fact, towards his latter years, the circle of friends–you know how you're all retired [and] you go out to have breakfast once a week or—most of those friends were my mother's friends. Many of them were real prominent people. One of them was one of the first Captains for Hawaiian Airlines, Umaki, Roy Umaki. There was another one, Gerry Young. Her husband was Chinese but he owned Young's Meat Market. These were all big, prominent people and in retirement years they all ran around together. My father, he goes to football games with some of the intern friends, but other than having friends over for dinner and all that, it was pretty much my mother's friends only.

MI: So those interned friends - did they, after camp, they still associated with each other or they all went their separate ways?

RS: No, a few of them kinda stuck together and kept in touch. Oahu's a small island so they all, you know, kept in touch. But as you start your families, your interests and direction and priorities change. They got—I know that one insurance agent, he was on my father's softball team. The T. Sumida softball team. He was a second-base man. He wasn't really good but my father let him play because before and after the football season, he'd invite the baseball team up for steak and beer. [Laughter] I told my father, "You're so mean. You're just keeping this guy just so you guys can get steak dinners." But the guy was very nice because he bought season tickets, and my father and him used to take the [shuttle] bus to the stadium, watch the university games.

MI: So he never mentioned, as you were driving up Kunia Road, he never mentioned that that's where the internment was?

RS: No. Actually, Honouliuli is Ewa side so…

GK: Kunia.

RS: Yeah. but…

GK: He never pointed out the area or anything?

RS: He never really talked about the, like, unpleasantries. Must've not been something he could brag about, or [that] he was happy or he was proud about. In fact years later, he told us all of the things he had to do in China as a Japanese officer. It's gruesome. How he disciplined his own soldiers, how they tormented the prisoners. I know he was reluctant to talk about those things, but...

MI: Especially the military. Military people don't cannot talk about this.

RS: Cannot. Because a lot of the things that they had to do were inhumane.

GK: Right.

RS: So it's sad but those are things of war, you know. Even now, you see ISIS executing and

beheading people. Shooting people. It's pretty much like that in any war. So I don't know if I gave you any kind of, what do you call it, scenario or type of background, but that's our family.

GK: Yeah.

RS: It's something that my brother is more into just collecting the pictures, but he's told me that there's really not any pictures from 1941-8.

GK: Oh.

MI: Because nobody had a camera?

RS: Yes, that might've been. The cameras may have been confiscated. I don't know. They had pictures prior to that, after that. I think that…

MI: Except for the jewelry thing, your father never had anything, artifacts, from Honouliuli?

RS: I remember he had a bowl.

GK: Uh huh.

MI: A bowl that he made?

RS: Yeah, in camp. I was kind of wondering, I guess he must've thrown the soft ball around a lot…

GK: Yes.

RS: Because even I know [that] when T. Sumida Company started back up after the war, he always had a softball team. Again, this is part of who he was. My father, and I'm not bragging or boasting, but he was one of the best shortstops on the softball team. They had this Makule League, they call it, and T. Sumida and Company took [the], I believe, champions five years in a row.

GK: Wow!

RS: Other teams in the league started to get upset that they had no chance to take the Championship, so they told T. Sumida and Company, if [they're] gonna play in the league, my father would have play—to move from shortstop to center field so that they might be able to get some in-field hits. My father was real quick. He could cover from third to second [base].

MI: I had read somewhere about him being a good baseball player.

RS: He was a real good baseball player and a softball player so…

GK: That was his passion or something?

RS: Yes, he liked it. I know even though I'm small, I had his quickness and speed. At Punahou, the P.E teachers, they tell me, "What are you doing playing after-school intramural sports? You should be playing on the varsity football team." I said, "No way, I'm too small." Because I was really quick and shifty, I told the intramural's coach, "If I have to put on those pads and helmets, I won't be as shifty and speedy as I am out here." But this is something I wanted to talk about after (the interview) but at Punahou, I experienced a lot of indirect prejudice too. They used to call me "*Sushi*."

GK: Right.

RS: "Rice ball." They call me "Rice ball."

MI: You went from kindergarten all the way through [to grade 12] at Punahou.

GK: So there was still that discrimination [at] Punahou at that time?

RS: Punahou, at the time I was going there, Asians are kind of only 10% of the student body.

GK: Wow!

RS: You know, in my graduating class in 1966, 40% were 100% Japanese, Chinese or Korean. The other 360 [students] were either mixed or all-Caucasians.

GK: Wow!

RS: And so it was almost 10% pure Asians against, what you called 90% mixed and Caucasians. That's why, even in 6th grade I remember when you pick teams, they would pick first all the Caucasian kids [to] become team captains.

GK: Yes.

RS: They'd go, "Jones" or you know, "Smith," and they keep on calling and all of a sudden what's left in the pool are the Pangs, the Sumidas, the Fukudas - these are all my friends. The Auyoungs, all the Asian kids are the last ones to get picked.

GK: Oh.

RS: So in the 7th and 8th grade, you know, we decided we're gonna play and have fun, so we formed our own team and we went around and played other teams in the park.

MI: Really.

RS: We challenged other kids in the park [whom] we didn't know. We got to 9th grade, where we had intramural sports or 9th grade sports. Somehow one of us would get to be nominated as a captain, so all these other guys were calling "Smith" or "Jones" and I'm calling "Fukuda" and "Auyoung." Calling all my friends. We played together; we played so well. In sophomore year, when they watched us play football, we beat everybody because we knew how to play, we knew how each guy was gonna run. And because we were a little bit smaller, we depended on quickness and shiftiness, and we weren't so much into blocking but trying to play without blocking. That's when the coach said, "You shouldn't be playing here. You're way too good to be playing for these kinds of after school sports. Play for the Punahou varsity team."

My father was really nice. He'd come home from work when I was in 9th grade and this is something you remember as a child, you know; he'd throw the football with me. He'd make an effort to come home at least three times a week to play football. We had a huge backyard. Probably, yeah, almost this whole concrete patio area, about three times this size. So I'd run out for passes with my father when I was 15. He'd be close to in his 50's (age) and he's running pass plays too, you know! That's where I got to learn to pass, you know. So when I played with my friends I knew their speed, I knew how to pass because I knew the timing from my father. He'd run quick, he'd run slow and then we'd reverse. I'd run pass patterns and he'd throw to me. That's why, when my father asked me to come back in 1974, I had a high-performance (racing) business in Arizona, doing real well. In fact, I loved that life. Building race cars and racing and fixing cars, repairing cars. But my father said, "Can you come back?" so I came back in '74 but I had that real close bond with my father.

MI: To come back to take over the business?

RS: Well, to work in the business and we always discussed business at lunch only, so when I went home, no business. But my brother and my sister were not as close to my dad because he never really had time to play with them or he didn't play with them. It really matters when you have that bond.

GK: Yes.

RS: When I had my two sons, I gave up golf 'cuz I could only golf on the weekends. I gave up golf so I could spend time with my two sons. My older son is more like my wife; he's a little bit slower. The younger one's a little bit quicker so he got to play—I don't know if you know the Pack-Five football team. Punahou and Iolani [School] used to beat up on Pack-Five…

GK: Yeah.

RS: But he was out there. He was gutsy. It's important because now we have such a close bond with our two sons.

MI: Going back to your parents, it seems like the men came back and just tried to move

forward.

RS: That's right.

MI: The women did not.

RS: Yes. They harbored some of that prejudice.

MI: Any particular stories they may have told you or incidents that happened to them? Either your grandmother or mother?

RS: Well, maybe this is not during the war, but when my mother and father [grandfather?] were living in Hawaii. The rest of the family had gone back to Japan, so it was only my grandfather and my mother who lived in this huge home in Alewa Heights. But sometimes they had people throw rocks into their yard and a note that said, "You Japs, go home!"

MI: When was that? What point in time?

RS: Before [19] '41, before the war.

MI: Really!

RS: So that might've been something that was ingrained in my mother, that these people hate us. And they'd throw trash all over their lawn. They had a beautiful one and [others would] throw trash and they'd always have a note saying, "You Japs, go home!" [Note: Stated on the tape as "WWI," but it should have been stated as "WWII."] You know, there was a lot of racial tension, so maybe that matter had an impression on my mother. She was probably not as reluctant to "forgive and forget." I'm proud that my father never revealed any prejudice, like saying, "Don't hang out with those people." He welcomed (people).
You know at Punahou you only dated—had 10% Asians, so the choice—I see I'm talking (laughter) of finding females to date is zero. I know if any of the girls who went to Punahou heard this they'd probably kill me, but the Japanese girls at Punahou, they weren't active or brave.

GK: Right.

RS: They don't have looks. They don't have personality, you know, but what they have [is] brains. They excelled in school, but not sociable, but when you want to go out and have fun, they just weren't the type to go out with so I dated haole girls. I brought haole girls to the house when my grandmother and grandfather were taking trips to Japan, or when my grandmother was out with friends. My father never told me [no]. When I went to college my parents actually said, "You know Ron, you're going to college in Arizona State. You're probably gonna date Caucasian girls." I said, "Well, whatever." They said, "The only thing we ask that you not get serious with is a black person."

GK: Oh.

RS: I don't know how that came into play, but they said, "You know Ron, if you marry a black girl, she being African-American, she's gonna be not accepted in the Japanese culture."

GK: Right.

RS: "But you being Asian, you're not going to be accepted into the African-American culture. Please don't do that." So I said, "Okay." I said in California, they discriminate against Asian-American and Caucasian relationships. Well, my parents back in Hawaii, they assumed I would come back here and said, "Hawaii is beginning to be a lot more tolerant." I had no problem with dating Caucasian girls in Punahou, and Caucasian boys never harassed me, like "date your own race." They never said those things. It was not uncomfortable. Only time I experienced prejudice was when they chose sports teams.

GK: Teams.

RS: And I guess that was more in elementary and junior high years. In high school it was more of a melting-point. {Noted: Must have intended "Melting Pot" but it came out as "Melting Point"] Plus, because my other Asian friends had a really hard time dating Caucasian girls, we'd team up with Roosevelt High School. We had all these social clubs. At Punahou, we had a bunch of Asian guys, but there's no Asian-girl club at Punahou. So we hooked up with one we found at Roosevelt. And the Roosevelt guys were kind of upset with us because we took one club. We did picnics together, we went out on dates. So I dated some of those girls too but it's just interesting growing up in these years.

GK: Have you passed on any of your family stories to your own children?

RS: Not really. Because I was spoiled. I did a lot of street racing even in high school. My lifestyle was not really something you'd want to mentor someone with. My sons never knew that I raced cars and…

GK: Oh.

RS: That I [was into] hot rods and did bad things in Punahou. So now that they're way older, they said, "Dad, you did that?" [Laughter] "Yes, son." I tell my sons, "Do as I say, not as I do." Even now, maybe I might do something bad. Don't do as I do, do as I say. "Okay dad, okay dad" but…

MI: What did your father say when you were doing all these bad things?

RS: He didn't know half the stuff. [Laughter] So it was really amazing. You learned to hide

those things. So one thing that I have to give credit to is my father's accountant. He sat me down one time and said, "Ron, I know your father doesn't really hug you or show any emotion towards you, but every time you do well, like when you got on to the varsity wrestling team, Honor Roll or were recognized for your accolades at school, your father would always brag about you." I said, "My father never told me this." He (the accountant) sat and talked to me. Final talk. "Ron, one thing I want you to remember when you go to college [is] you're not going to be near your parents, you're going to be in a totally different setting. The one thing you need to protect is your name. Don't ever get your name on the wrong side of the fence." So that means don't speed, 'cuz he knew I was hot rodding my father's trucks. too. We used to race Fred's Produce [truck] down Ala Moana Boulevard. Light turned green and we'd all drag race down Ala Moana Boulevard. Street racing in company trucks.
Anyway, he told me, "You know, temptation's gonna be out there. But you've got to realize you cannot get a girl pregnant, you cannot be caught for drugs, caught for drinking, especially when your father works in a brewery. You've got to make sure your name does not get muddled in anything." And I think that's what kept me straight in college, even though I was doing a lot of bad things too. If it wasn't for Mr. Harada (his name), I think I might not be talking to you people here today.

MI: Who was Mr. Harada?

RS: He was my father's accountant.

MI: Oh, I see.

RS: Faithful guy, so he served, how many years?

GK: Oh, my goodness!

RS: He [served] for five generations.

GK: Oh, my goodness!

RS: He saw my great-grandfather, then my grandfather, my father, then me and my son in his lifetime. He came to work for my family when he was 17 years old. He graduated from St. Louis. My grandfather used to fire him every week. First time he was fired, he went home. His mother says, "How come you not going to work?" Mr. Harada goes, "Mr. Sumida, Daizo Sumida, just fired me." So the mother would go back and talk to my grandfather. "No, no, no, I just got upset with him. He's not really fired; he can come back."

GK: (Laughter)

RS: So then he got fired the next week, [laughter] so the mother took him back. My grandfather said, "Don't worry, your son will not be really fired. I might tell him go home, but he's not fired."

MI: What year did your father take over and what kind of boss was he? Was he a very different boss from his father as far as running the company?

RS: Oh, yeah.

MI: What year did he take over?

RS: The wholesale business he pretty much had from the '50s. Yuh. When my grandfather died in 1961, all of a sudden, my father became President of not only the Brewery but also the wholesale business. He ran both sides from '[19]61. As I said, he was much more lax. He wasn't really the domineering or what do you say it, the dictator-type. Traditional Japanese, more or less, were like that. More arrogant. But he was more gentle, mellow. So, when I came back in 1974, the wholesale business had collapsed. He just let it go. Even when I was going to college, I'd say, "Dad, look, your Japanese foods are dying. People are not—you're getting beat by Shimaya."

GK: Oh, yeah.

RS: They bought a huge warehouse in Kapalama. "You've gotta find a better niche. Look at some other food products," I said when I came back from college. "There's all kinds of possibilities. Maybe you can go into food plus sundry items or something else," I said, "Hanging on to all these dead items…" Another one was in those days, they canned peas and carrots and corn. That thing tasted yuck. Pretty soon, restaurants are serving frozen. So these cans are just sitting there. I told him, "Japanese foods too." I [told] him that you gotta get out there, find out what the market was, what the hotels want, what the restaurants want. But he just sat back and said, "It's all right." The brewery too. When I got back in '74, I found it was like a train ready to derail.

GK Oh.

RS: And so the first thing I told him to do was the General Manager's not running the plant, [the] place right. It's kinda hard when you have an absentee President. He spent half the morning at the wholesale, and then in the afternoon he spent at the company, really not being involved. So within a year after I got back in '74, we got rid of the general manager, Vice President, rid of the two sales people. I brought in three new sales people. We had salesmen that were 78 years old, no, 68 years old and 72 years old and they only had like 10 accounts each. Big accounts. So we had like 80 accounts in 1974, that's all. I told my father I rode with them and also followed them in my car. I said, after lunch they're not working. One of them is hanging out at—what is that place called, Kimdig Bar, Shindig Bar. The other guy's helping out at the Kalihi Super Queens packing groceries.

GK: (Laughter)

RS: Our salesmen aren't even getting you business. Gotta get rid of these guys. And we

grew from [19] ‘74 to ‘84. In those ten years we grew to almost 300, almost 400 accounts. We quadrupled the business at the brewery and the brewery almost at max capacity. He just wasn’t focused. They had another [problem]. What do you call it? We had other internal thefts. Pilfering.

GK: Oh.

RS: As soon as I got rid of the General Manager and the Vice President, I stepped in. One of the things—I liked cars so I looked at the gas and I see that the company’s using enough gas to run all our company vehicles 24 hours a day. In other words, gasoline that should be maybe $300 a month; we’re paying $900 for gas. Three times what it should normally be. I [kept] telling my father, something’s not right. There’s a small meter in the gas meter so I recorded it every day Friday night to Sunday morning, Monday morning. From Friday night to Monday morning, we lost 100 gallons. The employees were coming up because they knew the big boss didn’t come around Saturday and Sunday. They are all filling up their gas. Every time we hang up the pump, it goes back to zero so they think nobody knows what’s happening. But there's a running total, a small meter that they didn’t see. I stopped that. Then the ice plant was losing money. And I looked at that and [at] the first meeting I went to in January, before I started work, I kinda talked to the ice men. “Hi, how are you? How much sales do you make on New Year’s Day?” “Oh, New Year’s weekend we made big money. Three-four thousand dollars.” So, okay. So then in January when I started work, I looked at New Year’s and Christmas sales. It’s only like two thousand and they’re telling me in two days they made seven thousand. I think, where’s the money going? I found out, fortunately, that the accountant for the company was taking forty-thousand a year. Can you believe that?

And the brew master kept telling me, “You know Ron, I don’t know how he does it. The accountant, he sends his three daughters to private school. His wife drives a new car.” I said, “Maybe because his wife’s a realtor.” He said, “No, no. something’s wrong.” We had to let him go as soon as we found that out. We tracked it and my father brought him in and said, “Mr. So-and-so, Ron has been tracking you for six months. This is the amount that you recorded in sales, ice sales, and it shows that, let’s say, $100. But the ice man had a duplicate receipt that you didn’t know about, and that says $200. So what happened?” He says, “Every time, it’s like exactly $15.46, exactly $1,500.” So my father says, “You know, you really been working hard but this is not the way to compensate for it.” He told him you have a choice: quit now or be prosecuted. So he quit. And then I found out all of these other leaks. I tell my dad, “I saved you almost quarter-million dollars a year on losses, finding all these loopholes. Don’t I get a raise?” [Laughter] It was really touchy, because it’s not a family business. We had shareholders for the account plus the brew master was really fearing nepotism. Boss’s son gonna get everything, so he had to keep it cool. But I told my father, “You guys have money. You can make good profit if you know how to manage it right.” We ran it real well and in 1986, we sold it to a Japanese company. We got double of what we wanted because the company was showing great potential and great profit. So that’s something that was interesting but….

MI: Interesting idea.

GK: Yeah.

RS: Our story was one of those that went from platinum or gold spoon to plastic spoon. [Laughter] Unfortunately, I haven't really done too much. Again, I told my mother, by the time that I got back in [19] '74, he lost the wholesale business. He gave up the wholesale business. I said the brewery's almost on the track to fall off, too. In 1980 we got the shock of our lives. So that was going to be my nest egg. We owned property on the Ginza, the Sumida family. And we also owned a huge warehouse. We continued the coffee business in Japan, and in 1980 the manager called and said we're insolvent. The bank wants to close. So my father asked how much money, and the company in Japan had borrowed $35 million that they owed the bank.

[?] Wow!

RS: So we sold it to Fuji steel, which is my aunty's husband's company. He was retired but his company bought and paid it all off. But in the '50s, '60s, '70s, even, we supplied a lot of these small coffee houses. They bought our coffee and we ground everything on the Ginza. You can walk by the Ginza blindfolded and smell it, the freshly ground coffee. Our building must be here because you could smell all the freshly roasted coffee. But that was where our family—it was owned by my father and his brother. The other brother passed away and they bought his shares and gave the money to the widow. Basically, the three girls didn't have anything. So this was about a 20, 30, 40 million dollar property, warehouse and business that I thought that if I inherit this, I want to sell it and live off of that. But it never came to[be] because one morning [a] phone call comes and says $35 million in the hole, so—it seems interesting that, you know, it seemed that my father didn't really care.

MI: He wasn't a business owner.

RS: But, you know, that's his life, that's what he did. We ended up with nothing but it doesn't matter.

MI: He was a good man, even from other peoples' stories.

RS: He was kind and generous but there's some things that might've been questionable too. The only thing I can say is that I'm grateful that my two sons are doing real well now. So they both make over six figures, so I'm happy they're doing well. And maybe they can look back and say, "This is what we came from and now we're going into—starting a new generation." So that's our history.

MI: Thank you for sharing the story with them.

RS: Yes. I need to share it because I'm the only one who has the last of the resources.

GK: Yes, so that's part of their family history then. They should know about it.