

JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAI'I

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

AKIRA TANAKA (AT)

October 13, 2005

BY: Florence Sugimoto (FS)

FS: Please give your name in full, the birth year, and the place of birth.

AT: My name is Akira Tanaka and I was born 1923 in Hilo, Hawaii.

FS: What are your parents' names?

AT: My parents' names...my mother's name is Haru Tanaka and my dad's name was Takasuke Tanaka. And my dad came from Yamaguchi in Japan, and my mother came from Hiroshima.

FS: Do you remember about when that was?

AT: I believe it was around 1910, 1915. Yes, yes, that's right.

FS: In other words, they came separately.

AT: They came separately.

FS: What was your father's occupation?

AT: My father's occupation was, I believe he was a newspaper reporter, and my mother was a teacher.

FS: What was the language spoken at home?

AT: The language spoken at home was Japanese with English and Hawaiian between.

FS: In other words the language here in Hawaii in the family was Japanese. What was some of the important kind of values and traditions that you observed? For example, in some families the importance of education was emphasized, in some families every Japanese tradition was observed. What was your family like in that respect?

AT: I think really trying to be a good citizen. American citizen and also Japanese citizen because we were dual citizens at that time.

FS: How many children were in the...?

AT: Our family consisted of my sister, two years older than I am, and I had a brother, younger than I am, and we lost one baby at birth. My younger brother died I guess when he was five or six. So there were only two left in my family.

FS: What was family life like?

AT: Well, we had a busy family life because my mother taught, and from the time we moved to Wahiawa, few years later my father died. So it was only three in the family, and after all, she was the principal of the Japanese school, so we were pretty much on our own.

FS: What did you do around the neighborhood, being left all by yourselves?

AT: Well, we were pretty busy because we went to English school during the day up to 1, 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and after that, we had to go to the Japanese school. And we also had to attend Japanese school on Saturday morning. So we really didn't have too much time of our own. We just had to go to school like all the rest of the kids. We also had a very good kendo and judo school, classes. And that kept us pretty busy, besides in high school, playing baseball and different kind of sports program. So that kept us pretty busy.

FS: What were your relations with your neighbors like? Did you have neighbors close by that you...?

AT: Oh, yes. Most of the students and families that came to our Japanese school lived around the neighborhood, so we just about knew all our neighbors, I would say, within half a mile.

FS: Were they all Japanese?

AT: Yes, it was mostly Japanese neighbors, except there were some Chinese, I remember. He was in my class. Portuguese, and a few Koreans, but mostly Japanese.

FS: What was the English and Japanese school that you attended before December 7th?

AT: Well, for our elementary we attended the Wahiawa Elementary School and after that we went to the Leileihua High School.

FS: Before December 7th.

AT: I graduated high school in June of 1941 so between September and December, I was over at the University of Hawaii.

FS: What was the Japanese school you attended?

AT: The Japanese school name was Showa Japanese Language School.

FS: Of which your mother was...

AT: My mother was the principal. My father had died way back in 1929 so it was my mother who was doing all the work to get the school going.

FS: Do you have any special memories of that period, school period before December 7th?

AT: You mean...

FS: Any kind of special memories -- social, athletic.

AT: Well, the Showa Japanese School had a very good kendo team, so we always had tournaments between all the schools on Oahu. We had teams from Ewa and Honolulu, and Waipahu and Wahiawa. And we had a very good tournament. And we usually came out on the top. That was the kendo. And for the ladies we had that *naginata*.

FS: Oh, please explain. In other words, did all the Japanese school students learn naginata?

AT: Well, the ladies learned *naginata*. During that time, my uncle, which is my mother's brother, came from Japan and he was a teacher there also, for a few years. He brought his wife and I believe it was five, six years that he stayed in Wahiawa. And he was the one that really helped us get started on kendo and judo and those things.

FS: Now let's get on to December 7th. How old was your mother at that time? And how old were you?

AT: Oh, I guess my mother was 48, and I was 18 -- on December 7, 1941.

FS: Do you have any memories of the attack that day?

AT: Yes, it was about 8 o'clock when the first bombing took place. So we saw the planes flying over us, but at that time, we thought it was just a maneuver or something because there was Wheeler Field, which is the Army Air Force base and we all used to go over there on Sundays to fly model airplanes, and the week before, they had all the airplanes scattered all over the fields, behind the bunkers. Looks like they were having some kind of practice run. So anyhow we heard those bombings and everything so...

FS: On December 7.

AT: December 7. So we got in the car, three of us -- two friends of mine and myself. From Wahiawa we drove all the way down to Pearl Harbor, down to Pearl City. And there we were, looking at the bombs...

FS: Thinking nothing?

AT: No, because I had the radio on and they had the regular Sunday morning program. So anyhow, we were at Pearl City watching the bombing, and all of a sudden the radio interrupted and said it was war, the bombing going on at Pearl Harbor. There we were watching the bombs. So we were there for hour or so and I said "Say, let's go home because there's a war here." So we drove back to Wahiawa and right when you got to Wahiawa, there was a Japanese plane, fell right into one of the neighbor's house.

FS: Directly into the...?

AT: Directly... probably got shot down. But when we got home, my mother was already gone.

FS: Oh!

AT: So I guess... But she did leave a note saying that they came and picked her up. The FBI.

FS: And that would be December 7.

AT: December 7.

FS: In the morning.

AT: Probably about noon because we were back probably afternoon.

FS: How did you learn about her, the circumstances? Did you know... Did your mother explain in her letter, anything about her arrest?

AT: Not really. She did leave a note saying that she was picked up by the FBI.

FS: And that was it?

AT: That was it. So I did find out where she was and I was able to take to her some essentials -- toothbrush, toothpaste, and clothing and everything. So I did get a chance to see her one day.

FS: At, where was this?

AT: She was over at Immigration on Ala Moana.

FS: What was your initial reaction when you saw the note?

AT: Well, I... There's nothing you can do about it. We just had to keep on going.

FS: Did you and your sister even talk about it?

AT: My sister was already gone. She was in Japan. She left in 1939 to go to Japan to study. So I was alone. So here I was now in Hawaii, all by myself.

FS: Did you get any support from your neighbors? Of course you were an adult by then, so you could manage by yourself.

AT: My neighbors helped me a lot -- bringing me food. They watched the house for us while we were gone. At that time, I was still going to the University of Hawaii.

FS: Was there any contact from your mother after that note and after she spent time at Immigration where you met her?

AT: No, we didn't have any contact until I found out that she was in Texas.

FS: How did you find out?

AT: I can't remember how I got contact. But I did talk to a couple of fellows from FBI. Well, while I was at the University of Hawaii, one day when I got out of the classroom there were two FBI people waiting for me, to talk with me, or they wanted to talk to me. So I did find out where she was and everything from...

FS: Oh, was that the reason they wanted to talk to you?

AT: No, that wasn't the reason. I guess maybe they wanted to pick me up too. So they asked me a whole bunch of questions, but they did let me go. That was a couple of months, probably February or March.

FS: Oh, that would be two months later.

AT: Yes, a couple of months later. Because right after the war started, I was attending the University of Hawaii, so all the men got into this Hawaii Territorial Guard.

FS: Did you?

AT: Yeah, I was one of them. So they gave us guns and everything. We were on guard over at the power station, right next to Immigration on Ala Moana.

FS: Did you get to see your mother?

AT: No. Well, we were on guard there. This went on for three or four weeks -- maybe not even, maybe two or three weeks.

FS: And you never saw her at all during that time?

AT: No, I didn't see her at all. And at that time all the nisei in the Hawaii Territorial Guard were all kicked out because they were Japanese. So here I went back to school again.

FS: What did you decide to do after that? Finish your education or...?

AT: Well, yes, I was still going to the University of Hawaii so I thought I was going to finish my education. But then when they were asking for volunteers for the 442, I did volunteer but I was rejected, and the next ad for volunteers were the MIS group, so I volunteered for that and I was accepted.

FS: When was this?

AT: This was in May 1942. May, June. As you know, we were shipped off to Minnesota in May or June 1942.

FS: In the meantime, then, you still had no contact with your mother.

AT: No, I didn't have any contact with her.

FS: What did you do about the property, all the assets, when you decided that you were going into the MIS?

AT: Well, my neighbors were taking care of the forms and everything. But a few years later I started to dig into what happened to that property, and that was hard to find out exactly what happened to that property. I went to the City Hall, tried to find out, look at the tax records and everything, and tried to find out what happened but...

FS: There was nothing?

AT: No, I couldn't find what really happened to the property.

FS: This was when?

AT: I started to look into that back in 1950.

FS: After you had come back?

AT: Right, after I came back.

FS: Does that mean that you lost that property completely?

AT: Yes, I guess so. It was completely lost.

FS: Now, you joined the MIS. What was your life like?

AT: Well, you know the MIS is the Army. Strictly Army life. We went to school at Camp Savage in Minnesota, and that was six days a week, Monday through Saturday, 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning 'til 9 o'clock in the evening.

FS: Gee, there was no time to socialize.

AT: No time except Saturday night, maybe Sunday. And not everybody could take a day off on Sunday to get to Minneapolis, which was the town outside of that Camp Savage.

FS: How was the instruction? Rigid? Strict?

AT: At where?

FS: The instruction at Camp Savage. Intensive instruction?

AT: Well, it was strictly Army life and also school life because in school we learned the Japanese language, mostly the military language of Japan. So that was all day. And in between we had regular Army training.

FS: Now, when did you first receive communication from your mother?

AT: Well, at that time I knew she was in Crystal City in Texas. So I did write to her down to Crystal City and found out if I could go down and visit her.

FS: When was this?

AT: This was in December of 1944.

FS: That late?

AT: Oh, pardon me. 1942. Oh, wait a minute -- actually 1943.

FS: Oh, a year later.

AT: Because 1943 is when we went to Camp Savage.

FS: Oh, I see.

AT: And in 1943 we were all allowed to take a week's furlough. Most of the boys went to New York and Chicago to visit their friends. So I thought I'd go and visit my mother in Crystal City. Like I said, I did find out where the camp was. So I got on the train and bus and went to Crystal City.

FS: Was it difficult to find out where she was?

AT: Well, I knew she was already in Crystal City in the internment camp.

FS: But as far as the other details were concerned, you had no problem?

AT: No, I thought maybe, I might be not able to see my mother, but I did go to camp...

FS: And you did get permission?

AT: I did get permission to get into the camp where I got to see my mother.

FS: What did you talk about? Explain the circumstances in which you spoke with her. Where?

AT: What we talked about was how she was doing, and how I was doing, what I was doing the past few years, and what she was doing. And really how the life was in camp.

FS: Did she say anything negative or positive?

AT: No, she didn't say anything negative. She was happy that I had volunteered. She wanted me to keep on doing what I was doing, and she really didn't have any hard feelings about Japan fighting the United States.

FS: Where was this meeting held between you and your mother?

AT: Well, she was in a duplex there, with another Japanese lady. And the duplex was... Each one had their own bedroom, and in between the duplex were your kitchen and the bathroom. So it was a nice, comfortable place. She had her own room, and the other lady had her own room. And it looks like the kitchen was well-equipped. Looked like it wasn't that bad.

FS: And it was fairly good sized...?

AT: Fairly good sized, with room like this here, and in between was the kitchen and bathroom.

FS: About the size of this conference room?

AT: Yes, about the same size as this. The bed, chairs and table.

FS: So she was fairly comfortable.

AT: Yes, it was comfortable, so it wasn't as bad as what people thought living in a concentration camp. And then it kept her busy because she did teaching during the day, Japanese class, and crafts, because she was good in crafts.

- FS: Now, during this time, did you speak of your sister at all in your conversation?
- AT: Yes, she did get a letter from my sister. But well, I guess the letter was all cut up because of the censors.
- FS: Did she learn anything substantial about what your sister was doing in Japan?
- AT: I'm not sure she knew what she was doing there, but she was living with my uncle there in Tokyo -- that was my mother's brother. And he was the one that was in Wahiawa for four, five years, so it wasn't really that bad. She was with a family.
- FS: So your mother wasn't as worried as she could have been.
- AT: Well, she could have been but... And my uncle had six, seven kids.
- FS: So your sister had good company...
- AT: Good company, and also there was another person from Wahiawa. He was also living with them in Japan.
- FS: And your sister was actually in Japan to study...
- AT: To study art.
- FS: Now, I have asked you about the circumstances leading to the visit, and you've already stated that it was one of the week's leave. Did you do anything else during your leave, to help your mother or...?
- AT: I stayed there for maybe half a day. That's all the time I had really. Because I had to leave. I mean, my stay there was only for a few hours.
- FS: So you didn't really spend that much time with your mother.
- AT: No, not that much time.
- FS: No lunch or anything.
- AT: I think I did have lunch there.
- FS: You did? Please tell us about your lunch.
- AT: Well, I don't remember what we had, but I know the neighbor, her neighbor. We all had lunch together, because her neighbor's son was also over in Camp Savage at MIS.
- FS: Then it was a very nice reunion kind of thing.

AT: It kind of was, you know. Although I didn't know her son personally at that time, but after I got there I got to know him.

FS: Then when you went back to Camp Savage were you able to contact that son?

AT: I did at that time.

FS: Do you remember anything else about the camp itself when you spent this time in camp? Conditions? Activities going on?

AT: It looks like they had all kinds of activities going on. There were quite a few Germans there, and quite a few Italians there.

FS: Mingling together with the Japanese?

AT: Together, right. In fact there were a bunch of Japanese people from Peru, also in the camp. And there were enough kids over there, to start a Japanese school, and crafts – Japanese crafts, sewing and things like that. And if I recall right, they even had baseball teams and everything. So it was an internment camp but it wasn't really that bad.

FS: So there was barbed wire around?

AT: Barbed wire is all around...

FS: Armed guards?

AT: Armed guards, yes.

FS: The towers?

AT: Towers.

FS: They were all there?

AT: They were all there.

FS: How large would you say this camp was?

AT: Oh, I think it was pretty large. I really don't know how many people were there, but... Oh, I would say maybe a couple thousand or so; it was a big place.

FS: After that first visit, did you make any further visits to your mother?

AT: No, that was the last time I saw her until she came back to Wahiawa. I think that was 1947, '48.

FS: What did you do during that period?

AT: Well, after we got though with our first year's class at Camp Savage, in April they sent us to basic training in Florida.

FS: Which was in 19...

AT: That was in 1944. So we were in school almost one year, and we graduated, and our next step was basic training, and this was in Camp Blanding, Florida. We spent a month and a half there for basic training. That's when you learn to shoot the rifles and everything. Then back to Camp Savage again. Actually by that time they moved Camp Savage to Fort Snelling. Fort Snelling was in St. Paul.

FS: Also in Minnesota?

AT: Yes. I think they moved the school to Fort Snelling. When we got back from Florida, we were divided into groups of ten. Then each team, which had ten members, was sent out to a different places – like Alaska and the Philippines and different places. So we got our assignment, and two groups, that's 20 people, were sent out together. From Minnesota we went to Seattle; from Seattle, we were put on a boat, and we had our overcoats and everything, so we thought we were going to Alaska because at that time fighting was going on in Kiska and different places in Alaska. So anyhow, after couple days on the boat...

FS: Excuse me, you said "boat." You really mean "boat", not "ship"?

AT: Troop ship. After couple of days, we were all supposed to turn in our overcoats and cold weather gear. So we all turned it in...

FS: Before arriving in Alaska?

AT: That was after couple days. But then after a week or so, we landed in Pearl Harbor. So instead of going to Alaska, we were diverted to Honolulu.

FS: Was there any particular reason do you know?

AT: Well, I guess the fighting in Alaska was just about over, so our ship turned around and headed for Hawaii. So there we were, this was in June, July in 1944, so here we landed in Honolulu. So we were here for couple of months and at that time we had a chance to interrogate a lot of captured prisoners -- Japanese prisoners that were caught in Saipan and Iwo Jima. So they were all brought to Honouliuli here. So we had chances to go down there every day and talk to the Japanese prisoners.

FS: May I ask what kind of questions you asked them?

AT: You know, where they were from, their names, and what Army group they were with. Questions we would ask if went out to the front and talked to captured prisoners. So we did have a good practice to talk to Japanese prisoners. So this went for couple of months.

FS: How many prisoners did you interrogate?

AT: Quite a few because there were quite a few prisoners there.

FS: That many?

AT: I would say two, three hundred maybe, maybe more.

FS: At Honouliuli?

AT: Yes, there was a prisoner camp there. In fact there was a fellow from Hawaii over there in the Japanese Army that one of our boys in the group knew him because they went to school together at Farrington. But he went to Japan, he got into the army, and was captured in I think it was Saipan or something or other.

FS: And at the same time in Honouliuli there were people from here who were interned.

AT: No, there wasn't. This was strictly prisoners of war.

FS: But according to Gambare, there is a list of these people who were at Honouliuli Camp. Would that be about the same time, I wonder?

AT: Gee, I don't know. Maybe they were separated.

FS: Oh, that's what I would think.

AT: This is people from Hawaii?

FS: Yes. Apparently some of them spent all their time in Honouliuli, then were released from Honouliuli.

AT: Oh, is that right? All the ones we saw were strictly in the prisoners' compound.

FS: That was the Japanese prisoners' compound?

AT: Japanese prisoners captured in the Pacific.

FS: Was it a large camp at Honouliuli?

AT: Well, the prisoners' camp fortunately wasn't that big. I wasn't aware that there was another camp, another portion.

FS: It could have been two separate places?

AT: It could have been a separate place. We strictly contacted the Japanese prisoners. I guess maybe...

FS: What seemed to be the attitude of the Japanese prisoners, would you say?

AT: Mostly at that time they were sad because they were captured, captured alive. But after a few weeks over there, they were treated pretty nicely, they were very receptive to us.

FS: So they were cooperative?

AT: They were cooperative, most of them, cooperative.

FS: Did you learn a great deal from interrogating them?

AT: We learned a lot, talking to the Japanese and getting to know the Japanese military language. So it was good experience before we actually went into the battleground.

FS: Oh, okay. How interesting. Now from there, then, what happened?

AT: From there, we got on the ship and, for our next assignment, so...

FS: In what year?

AT: That was still in 1944. So it was in August, it must have been in August because we landed in Philippines October 20, and we were on the ship for 52 days. Troop ship. We did make two stops. We stopped at Eniwetok, and we stopped at New Guinea, but actually when we went to Eniwetok we were supposed to invade the Marshall Islands. But on the way to Marshall Islands we were again diverted to New Guinea because we were going to start the Philippine campaign. So we, our convoy, stopped at New Guinea. So from New Guinea MacArthur and all his group got together and October 20 we landed in the Philippines, Leyte.

FS: Now what happened after that?

AT: Well, we were right behind MacArthur when he landed, the first day. So that was at Leyte. So we were, our two groups that went in there. We were in Leyte until March of the following year.

FS: What was your job then?

AT: Well, the campaign in Leyte went on for couple of months. We had to clean up all the Japanese troops around there. So, the Philippines, in Leyte, we didn't see too many Japanese, captured Japanese, that we could talk to.

FS: So there was nothing much for you to do?

AT: Mostly it was trying to translate the books we caught, picked up, then of course we had to listen to the radio. Mostly it was...

FS: Translation work.

AT: Translation work.

FS: Was any of it useful?

AT: Well, I'm pretty sure useful because it tells you what Japanese group happened to be in Leyte, what areas. It also tells you if it's a battalion or infantry regiment. This tells you how many soldiers were there. So that's pretty important to find out because they had lists of all the Japanese armies. They want to find out where all the armies were stationed, how big a regiment, how big a battalion.

FS: So after Leyte, what happened?

AT: Well, we were there from October to March. In March we got into a convoy again, and this time we headed for Okinawa. The invasion of Okinawa began April 1st, 1945. So on April 1st, we all landed in Okinawa. The fighting on Okinawa really didn't last too long.

FS: But it was intense, wasn't it?

AT: It was intense, right. By the time we got to Okinawa, the town of Naha was completely leveled. There wasn't anything standing there. So the hardest part on Okinawa was trying to get all the people, the natives, all back to their homes, because they were all hiding in groups in Okinawan graves, and also hiding in the rocks by the ocean.

FS: Was that your job?

AT: Well, we had to try to get the Japanese people out.

FS: Would you say you succeeded fairly well?

AT: I think we succeeded fairly well. We had couple boys who were originally from Okinawa. They knew Okinawan pretty well. We helped them. They got on the mike, loudspeaker; they tried to get all the Japanese people out.

FS: Well, these Okinawan people were hiding in all kinds of places...

AT: All kinds of places, yes. Do you know what the Okinawan graves look like?

FS: No.

AT: Well, it's a little cave with a door inside that's dug into the side of a hill. The Okinawan graves, there's more than one, a whole bunch of them. And they were all, a lot of Okinawan were hiding inside of the graves.

FS: And that grave was big enough to hold...

AT: Big enough to hold a lot of people.

FS: About?

AT: Oh, maybe a family. Ten people, maybe fifteen people. So we did get a lot of people out of the caves, or graves. And also on the south side of Okinawa there were a lot of those cliffs, and down the cliffs next to the ocean there were a lot of caves, and they were all hiding in there. The native Okinawans, and also the Japanese army, so we did get a lot of people out.

FS: Were there Japanese soldiers around?

AT: Yes, there were Japanese soldiers around, also in the caves.

FS: In the caves?

AT: Yes, with the Okinawan people.

FS: That would explain some of the deaths, the suicide leaps.

AT: That's right. Because the ones that the Japanese army people were hiding were the ones we couldn't get out too easily. So I don't know how long they were hiding in there. But we did get a lot of them out. Big towns like Naha were all leveled down. And there was that big castle there, Shuri Castle, and that was down too. And I heard that it's completely rebuilt again.

FS: Was that all that you had to do at that point?

AT: Well, at that point, yes. Well, we had to. After the fighting was over when all the Okinawan people came out, we had to help them. We registered all the Okinawans, and we had to help them out. So we did a lot of work, trying to help the Okinawa people. We landed April 1st, it happened to be Easter Sunday. The war ended in August, and before they signed the treaty on the Missouri, two days before we were already on a troop ship and we were headed for Korea.

FS: Why?

AT: Well, as you know at that time, the Russians were coming into Korea. And they were already coming down from the north and the Americans wanted to get to Seoul before the Russians came. So even before the treaty was signed we were already in Seoul... Inchon.

We landed over there. We got there before the Russians came down. So that's when they set the, was it the 48th parallel? So there we were now in Korea. And it wasn't too bad in those days because the Korean War hadn't started and Seoul was pretty much intact yet. Very nice.

FS: What was your job there?

AT: Well, our job mostly at that time was trying to get the Japanese back to Japan.

FS: Oh, the Japanese in Korea.

AT: The Japanese in Korea. There was a large number of Japanese in Korea. And we had to... Well, the Japanese could only take so many personal items and so much money back to Japan, so we – our job was to make sure all the Japanese left for Japan without too much problem. So mostly the work was trying to help the Japanese people. So they were trying to give us all kinds of things. The Japanese people since they couldn't take too many items back to Japan, they had their money and they had their family treasures and everything, and if remember right, they could only take one big suitcase and so much money. So they were giving us all their money and things that they couldn't take back. So they give it to us and we gave it to the GIs as souvenirs.

FS: Oh, that explains all the distribution of souvenirs to...

AT: That's right. Gee, in fact, some of these people left their katana and all that, Japanese *katana*.

FS: The swords.

AT: Yeah. They had a lot of yen, but they couldn't do anything so they gave it to us. And at that time, yen was what? Five hundred yen to the dollar, something like that. And here, I gave all my yen to the GIs, for souvenirs. Hey, I could have kept all that yen and when I went to Japan I could have used it! (Laughs.)

FS: Oh, I see. Now, let's talk about how you finally ended up in Japan.

AT: Well, we were in Korea in September and we were supposed to get discharged January of 1945, so before we got discharged, I applied for a furlough for one week. So there were three of us, we went together from Korea to Tokyo, for the week's vacation, furlough. So after we went to Tokyo, I knew where my sister was.

FS: How did you know?

AT: Well, fortunately in 1939 our group from Wahiawa took a trip to Japan. In fact this was...

FS: When you say group...

AT: Group, because it was a kendo group, so there was a bunch of kendo people like us from Wahiawa. And there were quite a few people from Honolulu. So it was a group of about 50 of us. So we went to Japan in 1939. We had a tournament there which we went to in Osaka. I think it was in Kyoto.

FS: And one of them knew where your sister lived. Is that what it is?

AT: No, I knew where she lived because I went to visit my sister. Well, actually after the group got through with their tour, we stayed a week later, so my uncle at that time took us all over, up to Hokkaido and everywhere. So there were maybe 7, 8, 10 of us.

FS: And this was in 1939?

AT: 1939. So fortunately I knew where they lived. So I was hoping that they still lived in the same place in 1945. So when we got to Tokyo, I said, "Let's go see my sister." It was evening so we got on the train...

FS: It was easy?

AT: It was pretty easy because it was simple. I was familiar with the train, what station to go to, so we did get to Setagaya where my sister was. So it was in the evening; it was dark. I knocked on the door. And sure enough, my sister answered, opened the door. So we were able to... It was the first time I saw her since 1939. My uncle's family had moved to Nagano to get away from the bombings. So my sister and I, the following day, got on a train and went to Nagano to visit all the kids. In fact, the first three kids were also born in Hawaii, so they were actually American citizens. In fact, my cousin, she lives in Honolulu now. And the next two were the twin boys. In fact one of the boys joined the U.S. Army. After he came back to the United States...

FS: Oh, I see...

AT: ...and he got into the U.S. Army.

FS: Oh, although he had been living...

AT: Although he lived in Japan for ten years, probably.

FS: I suppose that means that he gave up his Japanese citizenship?

AT: I guess he had to, like we all had to give up our Japanese citizenship. That was back in 1946 or '47? Because we were dual citizens until then, right?

FS: Yes. Oh, then you were not stationed in Tokyo.

AT: No, I was not stationed there. I went there for a furlough before I got discharged. In January of 1945, I mean '46, I got discharged over here.

FS: Over here, Honolulu?

AT: Honolulu.

FS: What were conditions like in Japan when you first visited your sister?

AT: That area where she lived was all intact. Some of the buildings downtown were gone.

FS: Were there problems regarding food, supplies...?

AT: There must have had problems, but she was kind of lucky because she worked for the government, and they supplied a lot of things. And I guess also my aunt being in Nagano, they probably raised a lot of food there in Nagano. So it wasn't really too bad.

FS: Now please tell us how you all got together as a family, after all the experiences.

AT: Well, I think my mom was discharged before us, because I was in Michigan at that time already.

FS: This was in 194...

AT: 1946. 1946 I was in Michigan, going to college. But I did make a few trips back to Honolulu from Michigan. She came back first. And while I was in Honolulu one summer, my sister came back from Japan.

FS: Oh, this was one summer?

AT: Yeah, one summer vacation. So I was able to see her, and my mother was already back. So we were able to get together for the first time as a family.

FS: In what year now?

AT: It must have been in 1947 probably.

FS: Your sister did say that it wasn't until several years later after the war that she returned.

AT: Oh, yeah.

FS: Because a lot of those people living in Japan didn't get back for two or three years.

AT: I think she had a problem like every person that lived in Japan on American citizenship. So they had to get that cleared up before I think they can come back again. They could regain their American citizenship, because I don't know, they probably lost it.

FS: And so you went back to Michigan and graduated?

AT: I graduated in 1949. From '46 to 1949 I was at Michigan State.

FS: What is your occupation now? Or what was your occupation until you retired?

AT: Before I retired, I worked for General Motors for 20 years in Detroit. In fact, I was one of the only Japanese persons working for General Motors. But they treated me real nice. I didn't have any problems. So I got all my promotions like the rest of the people. So that was for 20 years and...

FS: What[were you] doing?

AT: Well, I was a designer, automotive designer. So when I left there, I was in charge of the experimental group that came up with new ideas on parts for the automobiles. So that was chiefly my job there.

FS: Now you told us all these experiences. Are there any really outstanding memories that you have that you have not already mentioned that you'd like to leave with us as a closing comment?

AT: Well, you know, that, even after the war, even after I graduated college, there's still a lot of discrimination. In fact, back in 1950 when I graduated and moved to Detroit, we had a hard time trying to buy a place. Because there was one place we even put a deposit in, but the escrow did not close because the neighbors complained. They didn't want any Oriental living next to them.

FS: And this was in 1950?

AT: That was 1950. So it was still... It wasn't really that bad but...

FS: Then you must have had a difficult time, at least for awhile.

AT: It wasn't really that bad. The people we knew, they knew what we were, even though we were Orientals, and even at General Motors, I'm the only Japanese ancestry. I didn't have any, too many problems at my working place. They were all pretty nice. Made a lot of good friends.

FS: So now you live in Detroit?

AT: No, now I'm living in Los Angeles. Well, after 20 years, it got so cold. Too cold in the winter, so we thought we'd move closer to Hawaii. And Los Angeles was halfway. Our two girls went to Santa Barbara, University of Santa Barbara. They graduated there, so they're kind of stuck in Los Angeles now. They've got their own families.

FS: Is there any message you would like to leave with the younger generation who may not know very much about this internment experience? You haven't mentioned how you felt about the whole internment experience.

AT: Well, that's something you couldn't do anything about it. You just have to make the best of what's happening and you keep on going toward your goal. And you forget about what really happened, because something good is always going to happen, although there's a lot of blocks in between but...

FS: Well, thank you very much for all the information that you've provided. I found it very interesting and we certainly will value this interview as part of our collection. Thank you for your cooperation.

AT: Thank you.