

**JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAII**

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW**

**with**

**Emiko Watanabe (EW)**

**June 29, 2015 (Part 2 of 2)**

**Interviewers: Mel Inamasu (MI) and Jane Kurahara (JK)**

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

[At the beginning of Part 2, Emiko Watanabe, Mel Inamasu and Jane Kurahara ask for further details about her uncle, Minoru “Harry” Urata and the artistry of the family dance and music studio.]

MI: Today is June 29, 2015, and we’re at the Resource Center, the Japanese Cultural Center today to interview Mrs. Emiko Watanabe. We have previously interviewed her in February of 2015, but we’re here to find out a little bit more about her in one respect, and about her uncle, Harry Urata, who was an internee at Honouliuli, but we also want to find out a little more about her very interesting life that we learned about the last time. So, my name is Mel Inamasu, a volunteer at the Resource Center, and interviewing with me is...

JK: Jane Kurahara from the Resource Center.

MI: And today we’re interviewing...

EW: Emiko Watanabe.

MI: Okay. Tell us about yourself first. Your name, your date of birth, where you were born, and the name of your parents.

EW: My name is Emiko Watanabe. I was born in the family of Francis T. [Torao] Suzuki, and mother Cassolina Kimiko Urata.

MI: When were you born?

EW: I was born on October 8, 1930.

MI: Where were you born?

EW: I was born in Honolulu. I think it was in the district of Nuuanu at that time, near Jack Lane. When I was, maybe two years old, we moved to the lower portion of Alewa Heights, which was at that time very close to the teahouse that we know of today as Natsunoya. It used to be called Shunchoro, and during the wartime, it was renamed Alewa Tea House, and now, back to Natsunoya.

MI: I see. So, tell us a little bit about your parents. Where did they come from in Japan? When did they come? Why did they come to Hawaii?

EW: My grandmother and grandfather got married, and lived in a very, very poor farming

town called Yamata in Kumamoto. And from what I understand, Yamata is supposed to be one of the best *onsen* [Japanese hot spring] area. They came from very hard-working farmers, and they wanted to seek a better living area, so they turned to accept the contract that the United States gave them, the opportunity to come to Hawaii to become contract workers. I think my grandmother was only sixteen years old and [her] husband might be nineteen or twenty. They pursued their dream of wanting to come here to make a better life for themselves and their family.

MI: And do you know about when they came, what year they might have come?

EW: I don't really remember exactly. My father was born and raised in Lahaina, Maui, and he was the only son with three sisters comprising their family. As Japanese, the son gets the preference for education and everything, because he inherits the name and he looks after his family. Unfortunately, my father was the youngest of the four, and the money that his father left for his education was totally devoured by his oldest sister who took care of him. Her husband was a drunkard, drinker, and gambler, so he had no possibility to go to school, which the money was supposed to provide him. So, upon the advice of his second sister, he ran away to her home, which was in Pukuli, Maui, which is a small plantation town, and today, no longer there. His sister was very strict and a tyrant, and so demanded that my father would have [an] education. And Pukuli, Maui, being a farm plantation, they had no opportunity for him to seek higher education. So she told him to enter Lahainaluna. At that time, it was a boarding [school] and the oldest, school, west of the hemisphere?

JK: I think so.

MI: Yes, yes. West of the Rockies. [JK murmurs in agreement]

EK: West of the Rockies. And for him to be able to study there, he always told me, he says, "Emiko, I have a very difficult time because we had no money, so I had to work for my board and rent, my schooling. And how I did that, is we were able to exchange work for education. Get up at 5:00 in the morning and feed the chickens and milk the cow, and all that, prior to going to school. He was very diligent, and did that, and then his sister said, "Now, you're finished with Lahainaluna, now you must go straight to Honolulu to seek higher education," because Maui was not affluent and he didn't have the opportunity for better education. So, he came out to Honolulu, and of course, not having money to pursue, he had to rent a room with other friends, and he wanted education, but he had no money to, so he started to work as a pageboy at Shell Oil Company. It was a menial job, but he rose from the bottom, and he excelled very fast in his company. At that time, Shell Oil was known to be a British company and hired no Orientals at all, but since he was a pageboy, he worked himself up. He was already established within the company. Then, he pursued to go to Mills College, which at that time, it's today's Mid-Pacific. Today's Mid-Pacific is a high school. At that time, it was a college, and he boarded there, went to school and boarded there. He wanted to become a lawyer, but it was cut short. I don't know how many years prior to graduation. He married my mom and started a family, so he was not able to pursue his dream of becoming [a] lawyer.

MI: So, did he know Harry Urata at Mills College?

EK: No, my father was second generation; so was Harry, second generation. The only

connection was that Harry's sister was my father's wife, so brother-in-law, yeah? Anyway, Harry Urata had already left for Japan when he was six years old. And so we actually had no connection until the time he [Harry] came back, and that was just before the war. And when he came back, he didn't know English at all. So, my grandmother said, "This will not do. You cannot live, if you cannot speak the language in Hawaii, you must attend school to get your English language background." So, [she] sent Harry Urata to Mid-Pacific; at that time, it was no longer Mills College.

MI: Okay. Try tell us about your mother now, following the same path.

EK: My mother was the eldest of the Urata siblings, and she was highly gifted, but she didn't have the opportunity. Oh! But she did go to Phillip's Commercial Business School, and she was very fine at that. When I was a young kid, she used to have a treasure box, and in this treasure box, she had lots of tiny little medals. I used to go through and then I used to string it, my friend and I [would] string it up. My mom said, "I'm glad you're enjoying that." That was all little medals that when you go to business school, Smith-Corona, Remington, and all the typewriter companies, would have typing contests. And at that time, the typewriters were very antique, very, very slow. She used to type with that [raps the table several times] bomp-bomp-bomp, very slow typewriter, 74 words a minute, and that was considered very fast. You had the switchboard, and when one would put in one, she would put in three. So, she's very fast with her work. Very, very loving, kind mother, and she loved children, loved flowers and animals and everything. Everything she did, she became top, everything she did. She raised the flowers, top, raised animals, she's always top. She had a collie kennel, and she used to sell these collie dogs. She had the regular sable whites. She had the pure white-black collie, and white collie, and blue collie. Never heard of them, but she raised them, and she used to send for them, and buy from the mainland, wherever, and sell them. Pedigreed. At that time, \$75 was a lot of money in the early-'40s and '50s, but she was able to sell them for that price. Today, when you buy dogs with a pedigree, it's already over thousands of dollars! My sister gets [them] from Australia, \$2,000, one dog. The sky is no limit, but during those days, \$75 was considered, very, very good price. But she would put them in contests, and inevitably would win the contest. Not only in the collie division—Best of Show. Then we had Persian cats and also, they were in the "Popoki Patter" [Hawaii cat club in the '50s] contest or club. She used to win them all, everything that she would do. But I remember that, though she was not able to pursue her talent as a musician or dancer, she was very fine. She played shamisen, and I used to have a lot of nice memories of her and I. After we ate dinner, she would say, "Come on, come on." Instead of sitting on the *zabuton* [Japanese floor pillow], we used to go on top her bed, and she against me, opposite each other, we played the shamisen, yeah? And she loved it, but wasn't able to pursue her training in it, whereas her other sister, Hanayagi Kasho became top, yeah, dancer and ((*iyamoto?*)). And, so, she was highly talented and gifted, but since she was not able to attain that goal, she gave me the opportunity. She really gave me the opportunity to venture and to guide me into having the opportunity to have the best teachers. Usually, people when they send their children to study any kind of musical instrument, they would go to a teacher. The teacher would select, receive them. My mother was the opposite. She would audition all the teachers in that field, and she would pick the top. Completely different kind of idea, in how to get the best, and that's the reason why, if you get the best master, you're going to be the best student, and the best

student you're going to be.

MI: Now we have documented the story of your coming back from Japan, and that parts, so I'm not going to ask you about that now, but, what I want to find out, is, you know, I understand your training, and everything you did that for eight or nine years, learning from your aunt, and all of sudden, December 7<sup>th</sup>, Pearl Harbor attack, suddenly your life was changed.

EW: Completely.

MI: And this is what I want to ask you about, you know, you said everything seemed to have been so planned.

EW: You see, my aunt planned it to be that I would, at age twelve, go to Japan, like she challenged her master, and now I was going to challenge her to take away *hanayagi* [elegance and precision of traditional Hanayagi School of Dance]. But half a year short of becoming twelve, the war came. It spoiled our plans and so, my auntie, such an artist, and so intelligent, she told my mom, "Don't worry, let Emiko study (rapping sound) everything she wants, because I know, whatever she's going to study, she's going to be the top amongst everything that she studies, because our training, no matter Japanese or what, is the same. It's only a different cultural expression of music and movement," so my mom said, "Okay."

MI: So how did you feel about it?

EW: I had nothing to say. I followed my mother's wishes, because I knew she was guiding me to the best that she knew how, and everything was turning out well. So, I had complete confidence in her, you know, discretion. And so, she says, "Okay. Now I want you to study hula, but not with any kind of a hula master. I want you to have the top." So, she did the research, and she found [Louise Leiomalama Walker] Beamer, the mother Beamer, not the daughters [Winona Beamer, Tita Beamer Solomon]. The mother Beamer [at Beamer Hula Studio]. And so I was, you know, just about twelve, thirteen years old. I started to study with her. At that time, she was located right adjoining the old Lau Yee Chai in Waikiki, and from there, she moved here and there, and we all followed. Then she wanted me to study Hawaiian singing, and she sit[s] down, [then] no other than Johnny Almeida, the father of all-Hawaiian music, I went to his house. He was living in Waikiki. I went to his home. He lived in a cottage. He always had old *tutus* [grandparents], you know, like ten *tutu* every—once a week. And my father would drop me off, and he [Johnny Almeida] was so fine. He was so loving and kind. He really appreciated me, because I was young, and I was not of his race. I went diligently, and studied with him. And so, I was very fortunate.

MI: Again, I want to take a different direction now. So, I want talk a little bit about Harry Urata. He was your cousin, but he was actually fairly close to you, in age.

EW: Um-hmm.

MI: So, like a big brother?

EW: Well.

MI: Did you have much to do with him before...uh.

- EW: Five...No. When he came back, he was living with my grandmother, [and] my auntie, at the old Palama Street, right near Tamashiro Market. An old gray house. Used to look so nice, and now it's really a tenement. When I pass that, I'm so sad, to see that part. There, it was a two-story house, and my Uncle Minoru [Harry] came back from Japan and lived there with my auntie, the *odori* [dance] master, with my grandmother. She taught there. He lived there, and he was doing odds-and-ends jobs. He became a teacher at Waialae, Waimanalo Japanese School, and things like that. Yeah. He had to go to Mid-Pacific.
- MI: So, he was older.
- EW: Yeah. We're just a matter of like, ten years difference between the second generation and the third. I'm third generation. He's second. But since he was so close to me, as a musician, and I was there every day, studying with my aunt, and he was living there, I had more communication with him than all the other siblings. They only knew him as uncle, but never saw him—never had, really, an opportunity to...
- MI: So, we have heard the December 7<sup>th</sup> [1941] story from Mr. Urata, from his side. But I'm just curious, from the family's side, what do you remember about that December 7<sup>th</sup>? He was in school, I guess, when it...
- EW: Yeah. He was in school, boarding at the Mid-Pacific, and they came [for] him. The MP, military police, and ironically, that very time when they came, they were studying American History. They just took him, and brought him to Honouliuli. Nobody knew where he went, so the family didn't know.
- MI: So what happened? He was boarding there.
- MI: How did you folks find out that he was...
- EW: Oh, after that, they informed his mother, and said that "We [will] allow you to come and visit him, once a week. Two members of the family can be representative, to be able to come." So, my grandmother, for the first week, went with my mother, who was the oldest of the siblings. Then the second one, L.A., she was taken to Manzanar.
- MI: Who was this?
- EW: Number two sister.
- MI: What's the name?
- EW: Grace. At that time, Grace Urata, but she married, and became Okamoto.
- MI: Grace Okamoto.
- EW: Um-hmm.
- MI: Where—she lived in California?
- EW: She lived—she was a migrant worker, too, in California. She worked in Salinas, which was the lettuce-growing place, and the grape place, you know, grape farm. Had [a] very hard life. But at a young age, she left Honolulu to go there. Now that's very unusual, because Hawaii people stayed here. But if your parents were immigrant workers in the mainland, in California, they were shipped there and stayed there too. But my grandmother was here with her family. Here. [Raps table]
- MI: So how did she end up in California?

EW: Somehow, somehow, she just packed up one day, and said she wanted to go to the mainland to live. So, when the war came, she was rounded up in Manzanar. But aside from that, all the other siblings were all here, except the three siblings went to Japan to study only, but—really home base was Hawaii. [Quietly] Yeah. [Louder] But, I would say that, in times of war, you have to make do. Do whatever you have to do.

MI: Now, the other siblings who went to Japan with Harry...

EW: One, was that one, that left to go back, go to the mainland.

MI: Oh, I see.

EW: She was the one...

MI: The other one...

EW: ...fashion design. And the other one was the dancer.

MI: Now, she was not affected? They didn't come to pick her up, or anything like that?

EW: They had [a] very close watch on her.

MI: I see.

EW: The same, as they had, very close watch on me.

MI: Why you?

EW: And [rapping table several times] I am, third generation, really American citizen, and so they are, American citizens! But since we had power, because my aunty was top dancer, and leader of the community, and I was her protégé, and I used to do all the performances, community performances, and with all the Japanese dance contests, I had [a] strong hold on the Japanese community. They used to come and see me dance. They used to keep up with my progress. They used to come to all my performances. When they come—the only auditorium, the largest auditorium that we used, was McKinley [High School] at that time—and so many people were performing, but I was the one highlighted. And I would have loads of fans come to, and so I had...

MI: So, throughout the whole war, your aunt was worried that they might come for her.

EW: No, they actually...

MI: Did come for her?

EW: Come for her, but she was not taken into Sand Island, or Honouliuli.

MI: I see. So, she was sorta cleared then.

EW: Yeah, but she was not allowed to do anything with dancing. So, what does she have to do? She had to make a living. She didn't know anything else but dance and music. She had to work in the restaurant, washing, scrubbing pans, you know. And though, later on, she went and entertained in the teahouse, which she's not supposed to do. She's a high-caliber artist, *natori* [with a professional stage name tied to dance school lineage]. The other kind of geisha that go and play, entertain in the, you know, [teahouse]; that's a different class. But she had to succumb to doing that, to earn, to subsist. But the beginning was, she had to wash dishes and scrub pans. I don't know which restaurant.

MI: Okay. So, getting back to your grandmother taking the family members to visit Mr. Urata, you're telling us, she would take, from week to week, for visit to visit, [EW murmurs, "Um-hmm, um-hmm"] she would take a different person.

EW: So, after she took all her own siblings then, I was close to her, because I used to go to take lessons at my grandma's home. So, she said, "Emiko, you come this time." And so, we went to Aala Park, that station. The railroad station, the old railroad? [JK says, "Yes."] And we waited there, and the Army truck would come, and I don't know how many people. [Counts "one..."]

MI: You all got on the truck, yes?

EW: We all got on the truck. Two, two, two, two.

MI: But it was all closed, so you didn't know where you were going.

EW: No. All with the canvas thing all rolled down. Everything is all black. And I remember that vividly. Until you reach the other side, Honouliuli, they rolled it up, and you came down, out. And then as you passed, you see that there. [Everyone looks at photograph] Yeah? Well, there's a road, yeah? [MI and JK murmur in agreement and MI says, "It's alongside."] They parked, they parked, yeah. What I remember is only them lined up...

MI: Along the fence?

EW: All the internees, along the barbed wire...

MI: Waiting for the truck.

EW: ...but I never saw those younger [pause]...might be, this is almost like it. Might be it's not exactly, but it was like that. Barbed wire, [JK says "barbed wire?"] and my uncle and my father-in-law, who became my father-in-law, because I married into the Watanabe...

MI: Did you see them at the fence?

EW: Huh? Yeah! Next to my uncle.

MI: They were standing...

EW: Yeah! Side by side, and I was shocked. I see my uncle and I look, "Oh, Mr. Watanabe's here." You know?

MI: How did you know Mr. Watanabe?

EW: He lived about five blocks away. Alewa Heights. It was our neighborhood.

MI: Were there other younger people, teenagers, say, who were taken to the camp, or were you the only one with them? To visit?

EW: I hardly saw any. Only older people, and that's the reason why it's very unusual, to find a young one. I'm eighty-something now, but at that time, I was very young. They would take their family, but older. [Quietly] The rest of the family, I don't know. Might be, a mistake, yeah?

MI: So, the other photograph, does that—do you remember anything? The one on the left?

EW: We couldn't see, really deeply. It was just a fence, and this road going...

MI: The outside?

EW: ...and going into—we walked and went into that [raps her hand] mess hall. [JK says, “mess hall.”]

MI: You remember the mess hall.

EW: I know the mess hall was big, compared to these little shacks. Because we all went into the same place, and I guess the internees all used the same mess hall to eat at one time.

JK: Yeah. There were five mess halls, but...

EW: Hmm. I don't know exactly.

JK: Yeah. I don't know which one exactly. Do you remember...

MI: What do you remember about the inside of the mess hall?

JK: Did it have a wall yet? Because this one started without walls.

EW: It had a wall. It was completely enclosed.

JK: Later, enclosed, maybe that's then. [Sound of mounted photographs being straightened] Yeah, that would be—because this was early, early, and this was later on, so. Maybe they...

EW: Oh, how long after the war [started], they got the internees to go into the camp?

MI: About March of '43. Maybe a year and a half later.

JK: Because they were all at Sand Island first, and then they sent the *Issei* to the mainland. And then when they sent most of them to the mainland, then the *Kibei* were left, like your uncle. And then they went to Honouliuli.

EW: And the reason why my father-in-law—he's actually Japanese national, *Issei*, but he was with my uncle. Um-hmm.

JK: Yeah.

MI: Do you remember anything about the time before that, when they were at Sand Island?

EW: I was not aware. Only after they came from Mid-Pacific, and then we had a connection to go to Honouliuli, that's all. I heard about Sand Island, but I have no idea.

MI: Yeah. Because that's a gap of almost a year and a half, yeah? When you saw him [Harry Urata], was he different?

EW: Well, I can see that, inwardly, yeah? Very, very withdrawn. Not from what I knew. He [Mr. Watanabe] used to be a contractor, and he used to, you know, wine and dine the Japanese Navy, when coming to Honolulu.

MI: Oh, this is Mr. Watanabe you're talking about.

EW: Coming to Honolulu Harbor, you know, because he's [the] head person of the contractors' union, so he represents, and so when they come here to wine and dine them, you know, go to the big teahouses...

MI: How about your uncle? Was he different?

EW: What you mean, different? When I saw him in Honouliuli?

MI: Yes.

JK: Um-hmm.

MI: How was he different?

EW: How was he? [Pause] Very, unlike him, when I knew him, prior to—because he felt like, you know, he did wrong, that being a Japanese,—strong in the Japanese culture. They feel like they're humiliated. I felt that.

MI: Was he angry?

EW: They don't want to...No. He never, never, never, never mentioned it. But you can feel that, you know, feel like they somehow, being Japanese national and pro-Japanese, because he lived in Japan, you know, all these years, from the time he was six. And now, this happened, like the feeling was, well, cannot be helped. *Shou ga nai*. You have to accept it, yeah?

MI: But was he happy to see you, or was he ashamed that he was there when you saw him?

EW: Well, he was happy that I was there, but kinda withdrawn, yeah? Not the same as before. Oh, we would kid around and play. He would get the *kendo*, that mask, and he'd put it on me, and [makes a sound like "o-min!"]. "Batter me up!" I'd go [makes a sound like "Voom!"] He used to play around like that, so it was like an uncle-and-niece relationship. But in Honouliuli he was very somber, solemn spirit. And when they don't have the guests from the family, all the time, they're making trinkets, yeah? So, when you come, they have something to give you. They would make those toothbrush rings, which I've never seen since I don't know, umpteenth years! Did you see those rings anymore?

JK: We saw [the rings] from the Nishimuras [Sam Nishimura family]. Yeah, they still have their rings.

EW: Yeah? Oh, they still have? I don't know what happened to ours.

MI: But he gave you one?

EW: Yeah! He would give it to my grandmother. He would give his sister one when they go. Give me one. Memorable. But I knew...being the type of person he was, very loyal, to [pause] Japan, but very loyal to America. [Sound of turning pages] Very, very beautiful creations. They would do it with the toothbrush.

EW: The handles.

MI: Did he ever do anything like that after he left Honouliuli?

EW: No. No. They only did that while they were in there. Something to do, *omiyage* [gift] to give their family when they come, yeah? To enlighten them. Like a memorable, memorable gift.

MI: Do you remember anything he may have told you when you let him? About the camp? About how he was doing?

EW: He said that [pause] in time, we would all tell something like, this will all come to pass, so don't take it so seriously, because he said you can't do anything about it. But he knew...

MI: Accept it.

EW: He knew that I was really suffering, because—he knew I was very frustrated because I wanted to be like my aunt. I wanted to be a Japanese artist.

MI: So, he was trying to console you.

EW: Yeah. He was trying to make me feel [noise, inaudible]. But he was in the same position. So, after I came back from the mainland, after my husband died, '86, I used to go and visit him. He was teaching right across Hosoi Mortuary, on the second floor. He had a tiny little studio that he shared with Ohta-san.

JK: Oh! Herbert Ohta.

EW: Ukulele. There was a waiting room here, and Mr. Ohta had this little studio here. My uncle had the studio right next, but it was so tiny. My Aunt Doris, she always said, “O-oh. Uncle’s studio is like a”—what she always say?—“clow-set!” I said, “Closet.” She said, “So small.” And yet he was so successful. He taught so many students and so many people appreciated his knowledge.

MI: What did he teach?

EW: He taught piano and singing. But his singing is not really building the voice. His singing is mostly interpretation. Interpreting the song, because actually he had no voice training, like I had voice training. And that’s why, when I came back, I said, “Uncle, I’m back now. So, I have all the time, and I want to teach you voice production, so that you can incorporate it in your teaching.” [He said,] “No, no, *are amari muzukashii* [that’s too difficult] to have to go through learning voice training.” I said, “Not *muzukashii*, I can teach it to you, so, you know, you can utilize it.” But he imagined it to be too involved, and he was more saturated into the interpretation, and so, he did it well. In fact, I think, he was considered one of top teachers here, in that realm. And he focused himself for the young generation. He said they would remember, the children’s song and Japanese singing. And he would teach them culture along with it, the reason why, and the song is telling about this, and interpretation has to be this way, that way. And he goes into history to teach them, some history, and anything to do with Japan. So, he was a very fine teacher all the way around. Very committed to disseminating Japanese culture, but at the same token, very, very appreciative of the American way of life.

MI: Did he talk about music in Honouliuli?

EW: He said, the only thing that he really liked was the time that he can spend to do some music for himself, that he can play and enjoy, that usually when you’re out, you don’t have the time for it.

MI: What instrument did he have there?

EW: Guitar. He used to strum guitar.

MI: And how did he get a guitar?

EW: And, you know Koga Masao? Famous musician and composer in Japan. He studied with him. He played the guitar, I remember. And what’s so very interesting is when he came back from serving his time at Tule Lake, he went to join his sister, the one, the fashion, studying in Japan. She was from Manzanar. She went to Minnesota. Somehow she went

to Minnesota. And then, my uncle went to join her, to live with her, in Minnesota. And that's the time when the University of Minnesota or some[one], wanted him to teach, I think, in the university, Japanese language, so he can train all the new M.I.S. [Military Intelligence Service], the language.

JK: That's right. Yeah, he was there.

EW: Something like that. I'm not sure, and that's why he's saying, "Yeah. One minute I'm a traitor. Next minute, if they want, they beg me to teach." He said, "I'm bouncing this way, that way." He said, "I'm the same person."

EW: So, he said, "funny kine war," you know?

MI: Going back to Honouliuli. How did he even get a guitar there?

EW: I don't know.

JK: They were allowed to request [items] from their families. They had a form they filled out, and they said what they wanted and then, if the authorities approve, then the families, the next visiting day, they can bring that. Yeah.

EW: I never thought about that time. All I know is, he mentioned that he enjoyed the solitude that he had there. Once in a while, he can really enjoy.

MI: So that was the only time you saw him, that one time.

EW: I saw him only one time in Honouliuli.

MI: And you didn't see him again until he came back from Minnesota.

EW: Um-hmm.

MI: How many years later was that?

EW: [Pause] You see, I stayed in Chicago since '49.

MI: So, when you went to Chicago, he was working in Minnesota.

EW: He was still there, I think. And I would come back from Chicago once in a while. Then I'd meet him here. You know, family gatherings.

[Rapping the table] Oh, oh, oh. After the war, he was very devoted to bringing the community back to Japanese music. So, he formed a Shinko Gengakudan, Shinko. They had a Nippon Gengakudan, and this and that. But Shinko was his. And truly the best of all. They had quite a few Japanese orchestras. His was really the highest caliber. And he enjoyed, you know, forming the group, and doing music. He used to accept all kinds of engagement, here and there, weddings and this and that and all kinds, to play. The group was not big at all. Might be about ten people, twelve people in the whole group, mainly Japanese orchestra, Japanese song. He also had a Hawaiian group. Only Hawaiian group, only steel guitar, bass. The bass player, Japanese, can also play the bass in the Hawaiian. So, steel guitar and bass and might be one—the guitar player from the Japanese group filled in to make a trio. And at that time, he requested—he says, "Emiko, I want you to dance the hula," and so I danced the hula for him. He said, "And don't worry," he says, "I'll pay you something." The payment was—big deal, \$10. One performance, one shot with the group, that evening. But it was enjoyable, because I was side by side with my uncle.

MI: Do you remember the first time you met him, after all of this? I guess you probably met him back in Hawaii.

EW: Um-hmm.

MI: You had gone to Chicago. He had been in Minnesota. Do you remember the first time you saw him back after, from Honouliuli?

EW: [Pause] Um-hmm.

MI: How was he, compared when you had seen him in camp?

EW: Oh, very, very different.

MI: He was back to himself?

EW: He was back into being, you know, happy with himself, what he's doing. You know of that [radio] station, the newest—we used to have KGMB, right? And what was the other one?

JK: KGU?

EW: KGU and KULA. You know, KULA. When that formed, [Rapping the table] he was the chief of the Japanese section. KULA engulfed all the different ethnic groups, the Filipino, the Hawaiian, the Chinese, all the different ethnic groups. But you know who made the most money amongst all, was his group, the Japanese group. At that time, KGU and KGMB were the dominant radio stations.

JK: That's true.

EW: He overtook, because everybody, before that, always turned to KGU, KGMB. After he took over KULA, everybody was all KULA.

MI: What kind of program did he have?

EW: Japanese program.

MI: I mean, music? Or talk?

EW: Everything. Talking and varied, variety, but one day, he said—he used to call [me] Emi-chan. “Emi-chan, you think you can come to KULA?” I said, “What for?” “I want you to sing.” I said, “Sing what?” He said, “Oh, you're studying music now. You have a voice teacher.” I had a *haole* voice teacher. He said, “You think you can come in, and be [a] guest artist to sing in my show, my radio station?” I said, “Okay.” So, I asked my teacher, Peggy Hitchcock. “Can you come to the KULA and accompany me at my uncle's radio station?” She says, “Yes.” So, I went and sat, and when I was there, I was shocked. All of sudden, he's announcing, “We are happy today to discuss” this and that, and talking, and all of sudden, he turned around, he said, “And now today we have a special guest here.” Not me. “We have a special guest, Kobayashi Goro.” That's him! [Laughter] And he goes to play, and nobody knows that the announcer [is also the guest]! [More laughter] And he plays, yeah?

JK: It sounds like him [chuckles].

EW: Yeah! [Giggles] He sings the songs he learned from Kobayashi Goro, and he also performed Kobayashi Goro's name. He said, “We have Kobayashi Goro” and that was

him, alias.

JK: [Laughs] That's funny. That is so funny.

EW: I tell you, I was fit to be tied. "Now what is he doing?" I said, "Uncle Minoru!" He's doing as [laughs] Kobayashi Goro, he's singing! And afterwards, he said, [lowers his voice], *doomo arigato* [thank you very much]

JK: Oh my. I like that story! [Chuckles]

EW: Yeah? I tell you! He does it a lot.

MI: Did he change his voice when he...?

EW: N-o-o! You mean from his speaking voice?

MI: Yeah.

EW: He only had one voice, only nobody connected that the announcer was singing! Yeah, he was comical, you know, but true to form. Genuinely, a very spontaneous and lovable person. [JK murmurs, "He's so funny. Yeah. Wonderful."] After that, he decided that we need to, now, continue our local Japanese community spirit. [He said] "I'm going to foster that, so go get 'em," and all Japanese music, that's why he, from that orchestra, tried to play Japanese music here and there, weddings and parties and this and that, everything. Even to the time, he had the Lavenders. That's a female chorus group, you know that he got together. He got the Taisho Boys.

EW: And that was, during that Taisho era, like Yoshinaga-san, and all of that, about.

JK: Yeah, *Kage Oda-san, Takahashi-san*, yeah.

EW: Um-hmm. Men's, the group, and women's group. The women's group more, he was able to get quite a few Japanese women, Japanese girls to belong to his Lavender group. So, he was always community-minded, and wanted to give to community. He's a very giving, and I call, spiritual person, because whichever, whatever he does, he's with a sense of wanting to give, every which way he can.

MI: Did he ever talk about Honouliuli, as he got older, I mean, when he finally told his story?

EW: Yeah. When I came back from the mainland, I used to go and visit him, across Hosoi, in this small little, like my aunty said, closet, studio. I used to try to visit him as much as I can. Not every day, but might be once a week, once in a half, one-and-a-half week, I used to bring him lunch, *bento*, so I have a chance to, in-between his teaching, his lesson, I can get to talk to him, and he used to tell me all kinds of stuff. Experiences, and...

MI: Do you remember any of those things?

EW: Well, he always pointed out that we take everything for granted, which we shouldn't. We should always remember and appreciate whatever hardship of people before us, and that's the reason why he remembered his mother. In the fields and everything, went through hardship, he wanted America to remember that! And so, [for] forty years, every time when I would see him, he's still doing the research, all on his own. Money that he didn't have, he'd scrounge to put in his research, because nobody was funding his research. He did it for forty years!

JK: That "Holehole Bushi" [folk songs from Japanese immigrants who worked on Hawai'i's

sugar plantations]

EK: He would tell me that “I’m doing this now” and “I went here” and “I made several more recordings.” He was always so dedicated to his project, because he knew this was important.

MI: And he was doing it all by himself?

EW: All by himself. Yeah. He says, “Emiko, I do this. I need to do it. This is my contribution of my life, to help the cause.” He said, not enough appreciation and understanding. He’d say, “[If] somebody doesn’t do it, we’re going to miss out.”

JK: It would have been lost.

EW: It would have been lost.

JK: If he hadn’t done it, yeah.

EW: Um-hmm. We used to share our experiences. When I told him, he really was shocked. He said, “Emiko, you’re going through that?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “In another sense, you go through the same thing that I go through, hardship as a pioneer, in your field, as Japanese, in the white field. Hard, hard. But you’re doing it, I’m so proud of you.” I said, “Uncle, I’m so proud of you!” He said, “No, no, no, no, I do it because I enjoy it. I have to do it.” I said, “Me, too.” He said, “Yeah.” He said, “Not everybody puts weight on their shoulders to do these things, extraordinary, not ordinary.” But he said, “Somebody’s gotta do, otherwise, all lost.”

MI: He was fairly young, as far as the internees. Is that correct?

EW: Yeah! Because when he came back from Japan, he was only twenty years old. But, you see, [raps fingers], he studied philosophy, so they’re more serious, and more down to earth. But because of that, it was a blessing in disguise that my grandma said, “Don’t study music. Anything but.” So, he studied philosophy. With a philosophy background, when this came, to the war, then he could fill just the right spot, you know. [JK murmurs] And that’s the reason why he made that research. But he didn’t lose out at all. To the time he died, he was in music that he really loved! You know?

JK: That’s right. Yeah.

EW: So, he had the best of both sides. But lucky, he had the philosophy background. That was a blessing in disguise.

JK: Broader, much broader thinking.

EW: Much broader, depth, [pause] and so, my brothers, though older than me, hardly knew him. But because I was his niece, who came to study every day at my auntie’s home, my grandma’s house, where he was living, we were able to spend time together and have a closer relationship, of which I really appreciated. None of my brothers or sister [knew] him that well.

JK: You were kinda like kindred spirits.

EW: Um-hmm. Um-hmm. Um-hmm.

JK: [Showing her internment information] By the way, this tells you when he received his guitar, on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1943, this is what he received. One guitar and instruction book, one

album of favorite songs and four pairs of underpants.

EW: This is from where, you got this?

JK: This is from his records, from the...Honouliuli.

EW: Oh, you see!?

JK: Yes. [Chuckling] I do...

EW: You have even more information. I didn't know that. [Reading] Aloha shirt. Socks, neckties, slippers. So, this is what he probably requested my grandmother to bring.

JK: Yes. Your grandmother's [name is] Take?

EW: Um-hmm.

JK: Yeah, yeah. She...

EW: And you know, her name Take is "bamboo," right?

JK: Yes. Mountain...

EW: She's typical. Str-rong! And she's so short, and so stout, but mind and spirit, like a warrior. So strong. And the thing is, she affected so many people because what she illuminated to people and siblings and grandchildren, all received that precious gift that she illuminated, and that's the reason in our generation, younger kids, they're different than other kids, because they really, somehow, were able to get that spirit that she had, you know?

MI: How did she give the spirit? Did she actually talk to you folks, about this, and this is, or just by the way she lived?

EW: Just the way she lived. She was down to earth. She proved herself. When her husband died, age thirty, in 1937, and left six children—I think the youngest one was just born, or in her, she was pregnant. And then when he died, she told herself, "I have to do something to raise all these children, by myself." Because nobody is going to marry her. She's got children already. Nobody's gonna [want to] marry. She's got to raise all these children [raps table] herself. So, she demanded, commanded herself, I have to do something nobody would do. How can nobody do? She had no money. She had no education. She had nothing. But she pondered, what can I do that nobody else does here? [Inaudible] she said, "*Fugu* [pufferfish]." And that, I don't know what age she learned it in Japan. And that was her real precious background, that she used to the hilt. So, how's she going to do it? She has no money to invest, nothing. That old brown long house where now Borthwick is. I remember that house. Ugly, ugly, ugly. Brown, but an ugly brown. The whole house was the same color, with two trees in the front there. That's all. And she used half to take care of her living [space] with the children. The other half, three café table[s], no bigger than this, with three chairs, three of them, and her daughters to help wait the table. No need the other waitresses. Only a few customers, and she would man the fort, kitchen. I remember she had a steel aluminum sink, deep, and the *fugu* all swimming in there, yeah? And then, she would skin it. They had no scales. [MI and JK murmur questions] Just like rabbit. Just like rabbit, yeah? You pulled it. The skin, you pulled it off. After you pulled out the skin, the meat and the eyes and everything, still swimming! Doesn't die for a long time. I never—[quiet laugh]

swimming, still swimming! Yeah. Yeah.

JK: Oh, my goodness.

EW: But that is the fish that's poisonous. And to know how to do it, not many people know that. If you do that in Japan now, if you don't have a high credential for it, you can never have that kind of restaurant.

MI: I think I know how to do it. No. I'm just kidding! [JK laughs] I know where it's coming from, so I think I have an understanding of how you clean it. It's in the bile, yeah?

EW: Yeah!

MI: So, you have to take out the gallbladder. You soak the liver, because there's bile in the liver.

EW: Yeah! That's the poison. You have to take that out. Any...[exhales] yeah! And she knew how to do that. That was the savior, the bile that she knew how to handle. Otherwise, she cannot...

JK: How did she know how to do that?

EW: That's why I say, I think when she was in Kumamoto. She was a peasant, and I don't know who taught her. [JK murmurs, "She learned there."] Somehow she knew that. But the incredible thing about it [is], when she needed to have a resource to earn a living for her children, somehow she thought about that. And so, where's she going to get the balloon fish here? You know, long ago, remember when Kaiser owned that area in Hawaii Kai? Used to be ponds, like half fresh water, half—and they used to have lots of farmers raising flowers? Do you remember that? [JK murmurs] Yeah. And Kaiser—but at that time, those balloon fish used to hang around in there, and so, other people couldn't eat it. So, they would bring it to her shop, and sell it to her. So, she had her stock of fish coming in, that nobody wanted. And she would—and believe me, I saw the soup bowl. Small, that small. Only clear broth, just like water. Only about three small pieces of that *fugu*. Small pieces, with some tofu, and I think, green onion. That's it! With rice, and I don't remember, maybe *tsukemono* [pickled vegetables].

MI: How much?

EW: I don't know, but very expensive! You couldn't—no—only if you're wealthy, you can come and eat that. When I was in L.A.—I lived there eight years—toward the end, before my husband passed away, and I moved, might be one year before that, in the L.A. Times newspaper—it's this thick—and comes the section for—for like the "Our Dining" article, I remember there was an article and it said, in Japan, at that time, one small bowl of *fugu*, \$150. Only that soup, *fugu* soup. So can you imagine, in the olden days, not going to be \$150, but not like you could eat [it] at the restaurant, you know, 75¢. It's going to be very high, compared to other foods.

MI: So, did you ever have a chance to taste it? Did you ever have a serving?

EW: No-o! I only saw that fish running—even now, I cannot eat sashimi, because—[pause] psychologically, it's raw. If you cook it, or something, I would eat, but when I did know that it was raw. I used to wait for Sunday—my father's very busy—but on Sunday, he can sleep a little late, but the children, restless, you know? [Raps her hands several times]

“Daddy, Daddy!” My brother Herbert and I go and wake up my father. “Daddy, Daddy.” My father, one day he wants to sleep, yeah? We woke him up. “Go to buy sashimi.” So, he had to get up early in the morning, go to Oahu [Market] to buy the sashimi for us, because we liked it so much. But one day, all of a sudden, my brother, it didn’t bother him. He knew it was raw, but he kept eating it—when the day I knew it was raw—I stopped eating. Psychological. Only psychological. Until then, it was a gourmet meal for me. [Laughs quietly] I don’t know. Since then, never. Yeah, but—she knew how to do the *fugu*. And she made a killing, and she became one of the richest [ladies] in Hawaii. So, she had so much money, now she sent the money home to Kumamoto, the village where she came, and supported all her family, the village people, yeah? And she would take trips there. And she would go, the relatives would come, “*Obasan* [lady], *Obasan*, buy that property there.” She would buy it. Then next time she goes, buy property then. Well, in the valley, she bought that—the whole valley practically. Was for sale. Nobody is buying. She had the money. She bought it. But when the war came, completely—if she doesn’t give it to the relatives, then the government is going to take it. But they don’t have land. They needed the land to propagate, so my grandma said, “You’d better take it all.” So, [she] gave all the family, the relatives there. They were poor, poor, poor. Now, they have all that land. They can raise various things. And the most important one, they raise is Japanese *nashi* [crisp apple-shaped pear]. You think the Korean *nashi*? Japanese *nashi*? Her—that *nashi* that comes from that property, that farmland is the top *nashi* of all Japan. Can you imagine? I guess because of the soil. But she didn’t know the soil or what. They just bought at random, and they tried planting this. I had a chance to visit them, because my aunty said she’s getting old, and I’ve never been able to meet my relatives. “I’m the key person of my third generation, so I’d better introduce you to family in Kumamoto.” My oldest brother’s wife and I and my aunty went for vacation to Japan—Kumamoto. I was very, very surprised. The family—was so nice. Nice, nice. When we first went there, we go to the farm and pick up all the *nashi* you want, to try. Oh-h! It’s so delicious! These trees—every spring, when the blossoms go on, every blossom is going to produce one fruit. Every blossom is already sold—in market, already bought out. Every blossom [was] that much in demand, because it’s the top *nashi* of all Japan, came their farm. And so, they’re so grateful, these relatives, and, when we went there, they show us their property on the little dirt road. On this side, is a small temple, on the wayside. *Obaasan* [grandmother] built that, from my grandmother’s money she sent. And [you] go in like a mess hall, clubhouse. Big! They use [it] for all occasions, that my grandmother sent [money] for the whole entire village to enjoy, community house. And my grandmother’s house, my goodness, it looks so sturdy and so beautiful! It’s old, old, but it doesn’t show its wear. So strong. Only thing is when you go inside, there’s no floor. It’s all dirt, but so compacted. [Clapping hands rapidly] It’s so—already solid, yeah? But outside looks magnificent. A farmhouse? I would think a farmer’s house would be just rickety-rack. [Quietly] No. So that’s where *Obaasan* lived. That’s a big revelation for me, you know. So, when we were planning this trip, yeah, we went to Lanakila [Senior Center] because we lived right there, Alewa Heights. And they make all these leis with yarn. You know, those crocheted leis? And we always get it! So much in abundance! My aunty said, “I’m going to send them the money to make a big, big gathering, dinner or party. Since we’re from Hawaii, we’re going to do a luau. [Giggles] So she sent all the money. She said, “You buy everything you want, and buy

the best, the best! Buy the best sashimi.” Use all the money, the best of everything! And they look at her sashimi fish. They said they want horsemeat for sashimi. That’s in Kumamoto. That’s what they eat for sashimi. They’d rather have that, than fish. And that’s a treat for them, because meat is very expensive. Fish is cheaper. So, it’s really interesting.

MI: May I ask you a little more about your uncle, one more minute? After he came back from Minnesota, did he keep in touch with any of his Honouliuli friends? Or did he just not—just try to forget [inaudible]...

EW: No, they would run into each other, sooner or later.

MI: Do you know any friends whom he kept in touch with?

EW: Oh, oh, that I don’t know. If he would tell me, I wouldn’t remember anyway. But he would mention some days, sometimes, you know. Because he didn’t want to lose contact while they were there.

MI: Um-hmm. So, friends for life?

EW: Friends for life.

MI: Did you go with him to the Day of Remembrance? You know when they had this Day of Remembrance for Honouliuli [March 2, 2008]?

EW: No-o. I didn’t go. I didn’t know about it. Somehow, he didn’t...he mentioned something, but he never invited me. [Tapping a finger] The only time I saw it, Jane, in the movie, *neh?*

JK: Yeah, I remember.

EW: That’s the only time.

JK: [quietly] Yes.

MI: Well, let’s ask a little bit about you, then. Your life. I’m really interested in the difficulty you faced...

EW: The difficulties, I never realized. As far as I’m concerned, I’m completely devoted to art. I don’t care what form. Has to be classical, like Japanese dancing, classical. Japanese instrumental, classical. Shamisen. Not domestic. Not o-koto. Virtuoso instrument is the shamisen. The domestic is the koto. Make a difference, like, in Western violin, is the same, only short. We are strumming. They are bowing. And shamisen, longer neck and violin, shorter neck. And music, either is a little different but it’s music to each different country, you know, the music. But [pause] I play the violin. In fact, I was very shocked that when I was in Farrington [High School], I belonged to the orchestra only. I never took private lessons, but as an elective, I took orchestra class, and I ended up playing the violin. But I wasn’t going to major in violin—to become a violinist. I just was in the class, playing the violin. There was a Filipino boy sitting next to me, by the name of Filomeno, and he took lessons with Lee Breck, who was of the Honolulu Symphony. He was the principal concertmaster, principal violinist, so he studied privately. He wanted to be a violinist. With me, I wasn’t studying from anyone privately. I just took the class and played the violin. Moses Sato, from the University of Hawaii, came and became our orchestra teacher in Farrington. And one day, lo and behold, I was at home, washing

clothes because we came from a large family—I had to help my mom with all the clothes, washing—and then, all of sudden, my brother came. “Emiko, Emiko.” I said, “What?” He said, “There’s somebody here to see you, a man’s here to see you.” I said, “Who?” and Moses Sato came. He says—he called me “Frances” because that was my English name. “Frances,” he said, “I’m here to give you something.” I said, “Give me what?” He says, “You have a full scholarship for the University of Idaho in violin.” I said, “Violin!!” I said, “No, no, no, no. I don’t want that scholarship. Thank you very much.” He says, “But you won it.” I said, “No.” I said, “Give it to somebody else because I appreciate it, but give it to Filomino. He wants to be a violinist, and he’s serious about it, and he’s very good.” He said, “No, but it was given to you.” I said, “Well, whoever, but I cannot. My conscience will not let me, because I’m not interested in becoming a violinist. I want to become a singer.” That was the only thing that I studied that I did not have a private teacher. All the other things, I had private teachers. But those were all for interest, but my major interest was to become an opera singer. Why opera singer, is when I thought about it, here I was so lucky to have a background, the best background to serve me as a classical opera singer. Opera is music, dance, and voice—all that I had in the Japanese realm. I had in the dancing—*buyō*, *shamisen* and *nagauta* [vocal music accompanied by the *shamisen*]. But Japanese theater is the most perfected theater background that I had. That was the key. The opera singers during my day—nowadays they’re better, but during my day, they were clumsy, very clumsy, they didn’t know how to use the body, they didn’t know how to—they only knew one thing, is the voice. But they were not all-rounded, all-the-round rounded. In our kind of music, we don’t have any conductor to go by. We all fuse together, feeling each other, without having to be dictated by somebody giving you the beat. Our kind of training is mental, therefore, we go farther along. When we have—when my aunty trains her student, to perform, you never see, she doesn’t give you a lecture before the performance, nothing. She sits you in the corner of the room, [you] sit there, and meditate your whole performance, before you do it, not when you’re up there, struggling with it and do it. It’s a different kind of technique, and that was ideal for opera. I had not only Oriental background, classical, I had Polynesian classical background, but now, I’m going into the Western background. All three put together, so the fusion is really invaluable, and therefore, I knew what I have to do. I knew it’s difficult but I need to do that, so consecrate my life.

MI: So, did you get a scholarship to go to Chicago, or...

EW: No, that’s the whole thing.

MI: So, you turned this thing down, and you had nothing.

EW: No, I had zero means of scholarship at all. Other things, other people, those days, went to the mainland because we didn’t have it here. We didn’t have medical school. We didn’t have law school. We had music school, but junk, junk, junk, at the university. The only ones were the private teachers and these private teachers, I had the best of them, and she couldn’t already handle me. So, I had to go abroad. I went to a professional music school that handled everything but different systems so, it turns out [I was a] different caliber of student, and the only thing I couldn’t control was social matters, me, because of...having...[raps fingers] *haole*?

MI: Discrimination?

EW: Discrimination, and that I never thought I [was] going to encounter. I never thought about it when I went to the mainland. I know it's a bigger place and with lots of *haole*, but I didn't know that I was not going to be accepted, being yellow, different from being *haole*. And this I was going to venture into a *haole* world in opera. But that's okay, the Midwest is not like New York or West Coast. Those are port cities that have influx of all people from Asia, from Europe. They're more...they're not [of] racial discrimination as the Midwest. I was in the place that was the worst, the Midwest.

MI: The family didn't feel...

EW: They didn't know.

MI: ...with Uncle Harry, they didn't talk about discrimination against your Uncle Harry and that kind of thing?

EW: Oh, they talked about [it], because they were in [the] relocation camp, that discrimination.

MI: But that was different.

EW: Different. Mine is going into Chicago, big city, where the white was supreme. They didn't care if you were Chinese, Korean, or whatever. You were not white. As long as you're not white, they're not going to accept you. And what is really strange when I first went there, when I walked on the street, believe me, the heads all turned like that. I walked this way, like that. I was so surprised, but the showdown was that I lived in a professional building, professional school. We had dormitory, two-and-a-half floors of it, but they served no meals. We didn't have cafeteria, so we have to go out and eat our three meals a day. But Chicago has lots of restaurants. It's known as the city of restaurants and city of churches. So, if they have a lot of restaurants [sneeze heard in the background], I should be able to eat in a restaurant, right? No, they don't serve me. They don't serve me. You can sit there until the sun goes down and come up, they're not going to serve you. And how am I going to eat? To begin with, in this professional building, two-and-a-half floors with only forty girls from all the states, only those who don't live in Illinois—they come from, you know, out of state, can live in the dormitory. I was from Hawaii. Another girl, Chong Song Che, from Korea, one girl, Hisako Ito, from Sendai, Japan, and one girl from Galveston, Texas, Mexican girl. They put us in one big room. Already discrimination. The other rooms, all two, two, two. All *haole*. But they can go and eat in restaurants. They have money, they can pay, they can eat. We cannot, so what we have to succumb to. We have to eat. We go to Goldblatt's of Sears, on State Street. Two big department stores in the basement. They sell all kinds of fruits, vegetables, and meat. We have no stove to cook! So, what we have to live on, sandwiches, only sandwiches. No such thing as cooking. We cannot make any smell in the dormitory, even if we had the heating—heat plate. So, you can only eat so many sandwiches every day, morning, noon, and night. We have no refrigeration, nothing, so you have to accept that.

MI: Do you know what happened to your roommates, professionally?

EW: Yeah.

MI: Because you had to face both social discrimination and also, professional discrimination. They're two different ways.

EW: I tell you. Hisako Ito, she came from Sendai, Japan. She was much older than me. And she was an organ major, you know this pipe organ? She [came] from Miyagi College, that's in the northern part. They have a men's college, and a women's college. Hers was a women's college. Dr. Henson was sent [to Japan] from the Evangelical Reform Churches to be their department head. Now she was getting old, and they needed to find somebody to take her place, so they nominated Hisako to come to the mainland to study and to go back to become the dean of the school there. And so, she was one of them. Then, Chong Song Che came from Iwa University, Seoul, Korea, she came as a pianist. Marilyn Roulette came from Galveston, Texas, but she was Mexican, as a pianist. I was the only one amongst them, a singer but it made no difference. All discriminated. Can you imagine, even the yellow race is discriminated. What about the black race? Even worse. Right? So, one day I came downtown. Oh, I wish I could have some rice, *neh*? Oh. There's very good Chinese restaurant on Lake Street. I'm going there for lunch! 11:00, I'll be there for lunch, then I can have rice, as *Nisei*. I go there, 11:00. I get seated. Chinese restaurant. The waiters are in bow tie, black suit, very nice. They seat me, and then, I'm waiting, waiting, waiting. Come 12:00, then all the office workers all come in. And they all eat, then at 1:00, they have to go back to work. They all go. I'm still sitting there. But I know something is wrong, but I have to see. I wait, until all—everybody went back to work, and I'm still sitting there. Then, the waiter came. "We saw you sitting here, so sorry, but we cannot serve you." I knew, but I said, "Why?" "If we serve you, we lose the whole business. Nobody is going to come to this restaurant anymore." And they were lovely, lovely Chinese, Mr. and Mrs. Wong, Ruby and George Wong, who owned that restaurant. And that waiter, waited on me, who told me that Danny Wong—he was no relative of the owner. We became friends. He says, "I know, but we can't help it. So, if you want to eat, you're welcome to eat, but not here. [Taps table] You come one hour ahead of lunch. You come one hour before dinner, and you will eat with us in the back." See? So, people, they don't know what I see, I told this to somebody, "Oh yeah. We were waited on." "Where, in Chicago?" "Yeah." "Yeah! But you served—you were in military clothes. They have to." I'm not in military clothes, so...

JK: What date? What year were you there?

EW: I was there from 1949 all the way to 1978.

MI: Did things improve over that period?

EW: They improved. But still there's prejudice. Don't let it fool you.

MI: Did you join them in the back?

EW: Oh yeah! I used to go all the time. They welcomed me. In fact, they got better food, because [laughs] they're cooking for themselves! In fact, Danny, the waiter that came to me, we became so good friend[s] that my husband, later on, needed to find accommodations to live. He rented a room from him, at his house. But it was really very bad. But people, unless they knew, they don't realize how bad it was. Now, whatever I study, I'm going to be the top. My teacher, not Nellie Gardeni, I was top student of hers, too. Later, I became top student of Bianca Saroya. Bianca Saroya, [pause] had—she put out very fine heavyweight singers, and I'm a heavyweight. I'm a product of her teaching. B-I-I-G voice! It's only through training, you can make—cultivate that instrument, that

they make the instrument. You're only the talent and you have your house as an instrument, but you don't know how to use it, how to grow it. It's a teacher that carves your instrument. In other words, Stradivarius only has the same wood, but the one who made Stradivarius, his violin is top. You cannot buy it. Same thing. The master has to carve this body into to make it an instrument. And so, different, so, I have to become, because of the prejudice, I have to be better than anybody, too. Overcome that. So, I become the best of her students, and so, they have all kinds of recitals. They have jobs given to students, who are fine, to attain the position, whatever. Contests, too. Any Tom, Dick, and Harry can join that, and they'd be allowed to sing a note, sing a song, and they go. With me, they see me, "Go home." The minute you go on the telephone, you inquire, you heard about that audition, they say, "Who is this? Whom am I talking to?" "Emiko Suzuki." They think it's Amelia Sususkyi, Russian or Polish, so they say, "Come!" So, I go. When they see me, they're troubled. "Cannot." These are all church people. Mostly, all the church positions, from the smallest church to the biggest—they say they're going to lose all their congregation. Same thing like the restaurant. They're going to lose all their clients. Same thing. It's discrimination. That's what I had to go through. So, I had to pioneer. Today, they don't have that problem.

MI: So, do you think you helped?

EW: I...I'm very sure. Somebody got to do something. Today, the road, the pavement, you know? So, one good example is that, if they go from color, it's because they see you. There was one, biggest, voice, biggest voice contest in the whole United States. I told you that?

MI: You can tell us again.

EW: And because there was a curtain. If [there] wasn't a curtain, I'd be out. Not even one note. So-o bad, and this is reality.

MI: Were the only people of color in that contest black people? Other Asians?

EW: Nobody, nobody else. They never thought of entering, because it's already hush-hush. Yellow, you don't enter. [Tapping finger] My dear friend [Mary Sauer], she's American, she's American-German, third generation American, born and raised in Kenosha, Wisconsin. And today, she's the only orchestra pianist in the Chicago Symphony. And she got that position when she graduated from Chicago Musical College in 1953, and today is 2015? She's still in the same position. Nobody can take her position. No man. Nobody. Every year, hundreds apply. No can take, unless she gives it up. There's only position, and the one position takes care of not only piano, organ, harpsichord, clavichord, this and that, and one person. And Fritz Reiner was the one who discovered her, and after that, many, many conductors, and no other person can get that position. Why? She's one of a kind, and why is she one of a kind? She doesn't play the piano like anybody else. Have you ever heard of any pianist getting a technique? Playing the piano [rapping her hands to simulate piano playing] like that? She practices sitting on the floor. Have you ever heard of any kind of piano lessons given on the floor? [Raps the table] That's how. She builds these muscles so good. So, nobody can play the piano. She has strength of two, three men play the piano, only by herself. She's a female. Nobody can touch her.

MI: How and why did you decide to go?

EW: Oh, she was the one. She was the one who insisted—she was my roommate for a long time, and we gave moral support to one another. I taught her things that she could never get from anybody, and she gave me, in turn, moral support that nobody else can give. She was a truly beautiful spiritual person, and so, 'til today, she still lists with them. Over fifty years now, fifty-three years, she's, uh? Everybody's all waiting for that one position, hundreds and hundreds every year. And she comes to Kauai every summer and we get to meet each other, once a year. And incredible. She was the one...

MI: She's the one who inspired you to enter the contest?

EW: Yeah, she was the one. She says, "I won't let it go." Oh, same thing. Sorority, the musical fraternity, Sigma Alpha Iota? Until the time, 1953. I was in [the sorority] in 1949. 195—no, earlier than that. 1951. That sorority, that's the only sorority that's called fraternity. The top musical fraternity in the whole United States. They didn't want to accept me, and she was president, and she persisted until all the Sigma Alpha Iota chapters and all the universities, they said, "No. We will never allow non-white. Just forget about her." She made such a big fuss, she said. They depended on her, because she was so terrific, as a musician. She said, "If you do not allow me to rush her, to be able to attend, as one of the members of Sigma Alpha Iota, Alpha's I chapter," she said, "I will resign my post." She really—and only then, they had to, and I was the first non-white to join that fraternity. And that song contest, 1958, the first time they ever had anyone [win], non-white, and that was only a mistake, because they didn't know that I wasn't white. If they knew I wasn't white...

MI: That was a mistake that they allowed you...

EW: Only because the number, they picked a number, they didn't call the name, they didn't look at the face and...

JK: And they didn't do it that way again, later? That was the only time?

EW: No. No. I think it started that year, and it remains that way. But it's been long gone. That was such a big, big, big song contest during that time, it was always going on, many years, but it was such a controversial thing that when I won it, and *Chicago Tribune*, one whole page, it was all about that contest. It was all on me.

MI: Do you have that by any chance?

EW: I don't have anything. Within the course of years, everything, all, I moved, and things got shuffled around. But I had it for many years. The *Chicago Tribune*, that's the top paper of Chicago, and all the churches from the smallest church, all had the same discrimination, and it shouldn't have to be, to begin with. But it is. Like even the glass I told you about Uyesugi, the father of the lens, contact lens, is Japanese.

MI: I don't think you told us that.

JK: Yeah.

EW: *Nisei* Japanese. He was not an optometrist. He was just a regular person, and he found out that he was losing his sight, so in concern for his own eyes, he researched and developed the glass contact lens. Remember the very beginning? Never used to be

plastic. Used to be glass, yeah? It used to be very irritable, but that was the first one he invented. He became...but he couldn't operate in this field. He didn't have the credentials, plus he was Japanese. He had to change his name from Uyesugi to—wait [raps hand], a *haole* name. He had to use a *haole* name, otherwise he couldn't, in Chicago, in the city, have a factory for lenses. The biggest lens company. [Newton K. (Uyesugi) Wesley, an optometrist and medical doctor, who with his partner Dr. George Jessen, invented the first plastic contact lenses to successfully treat keratoconus in the 1940s and 1950s and formed the Wesley Jessen Corporation of Chicago (<https://oregonencyclopedia.org>)]

MI: When is this? What year?

EW: Was...all that time, since I think late '40s, all the way, and even optometrists here. They don't know that the father of the lens, [was] him. He's Japanese, but he had to use a *haole* name. You'd be surprised, at the very end, I was to marry him. His mother used to be my fan, and she used to go everywhere, where I used to sing, and especially, she came to Fourth Presbyterian Church, that's the biggest Protestant church in the city. I went under my professional name, which was Emiko Suzuki. But I'm married to Watanabe. She didn't know that I was married. Her son was Wesley—you know, just slipped my mind, but he had a last name, *haole* name, but his real name was Uyesugi. She thought, oh, his wife died of cancer, and so she was looking, the mother was looking for a suitable wife for him. She thought I'd be ideal, but she didn't know that I was married. I was using my professional name. So, one day, she's inviting me to her condo, where she lives with her son. You know what? In the door, you know, I'm looking for, to press the buzzer. I don't see the name, Uyesugi. So, I called her. I says, "I'm here. I'm waiting." "Oh-h-h," she said she forgot to tell me. You cannot. You got to look under another name. Ullman. Ullman. So, she let me in. And then after, I said, why is that your name? She said, we cannot [use our true name]. He's the father of lens, and because of the discrimination, he cannot live there. He cannot rent, knowing that he's Japanese, but if he poses as a [pause] white man, he's okay. But being okay, he cannot even get in from the front door, he had to go from the backdoor, like a deliveryman. That's how bad. Can you imagine? People cannot believe, because they don't know these stories. These are really true.

MI: You actually broke a lot of barriers.

EW: This is what I think I was brought here to do, not to be going into the Japanese field, but going in the operatic field, and breaking this barrier.

JK: When did you leave Chicago?

EW: 1978.

MI: So, what eventually brought you back to Hawaii?

EW: My husband was actually—Watanabe, was about five blocks away from where I was living, Alewa Heights, his father and parents. He was highly talented. He became an inventor. Industrial...

MI: Where, in Chicago? Well, actually you knew him here.

EW: The family used to come to all my performance[s]: the mother, father, but not the

children I have lots of brothers, and they used to play with my brothers; my husband was the oldest of the Watanabe children. His father was [a] contractor. He wanted his oldest son to be [an] architect, so [he] can work within the company. My husband said, “No, I’m not interested. Architecture. Boring. Static and boring.” He said, “I don’t know. I have to look and see what I’m interested in.” So, he went to the university. He studied medicine. You know, he’s into—he’s interested in medicine. He studied engineering. His professor was so concerned. He said, “I’m going to look for engineering or something. I’ll find you grants.” So, he finds scholarships, four-year scholarships for M.I.T., Pratt Institute, and another one. Three of the top United States in that field. And he got three of ‘em. So, he gives the big, good news to my husband. “I got you four-year scholarships for all this top!” My husband said, “No, thank you.” “What you mean, no thank you?! These are the top! Anybody would give their—and you have the whole scholarship. You don’t have to pay...” “No, no, no. I don’t want it.” [Professor asked] “What you want?” He said, “That doesn’t fit, for what I want.” He [professor] said, “Which school is gonna fit?” He said, “I looked. You know, in the catalog for all the universities, catalog, all the different schools. I don’t find anything. Only one school: Art Institute of Chicago.” [Professor said] “But that’s a fine arts school.” But it had a section that had, as a course, industrial designing. That’s the only catalog that any school that had anything to do with design. But, he [husband] said, “I want to go there.” By that time, he spent most of his GI Bill. He was in the second war. He was in M.I.S. So he spent some time at the university here. He got frustrated. He went to the University of Brazil. And then he came back, and then he said, “I want to be an inventor. There’s no school, only this art school in Chicago. I’m going to go there.” By that time, he spent all of his G.I. Bill. He had only very little left. Then, the teacher said, “How are you going to do it? You don’t have money, and how are you going to go to school, if you don’t have [money]? He said, “I have enough to just get in. Once I get in, no problem.” So he went, applied, and he went into...and do you know? They found out he’s [a] genius. He had to take [an] art course, sculpting course, and then, the industrial designing course. And, the Guggenheim Foundation gave him a full scholarship, paid for everything. Now for his housing, all this expense, state of Illinois paid. Why? They knew, he’s invaluable for our country. Ah? So, he got everything paid for, all his supplies, everything, his books, everything, everything—living expense, food, and education from Guggenheim, and so, he accomplished what he wanted to be. So, the father didn’t know, to what extreme he wanted to extend himself. During those days, nobody thought if one wanted to be an inventor. But now, people are more aware. Technology has expanded. It’s very important. And people say, “What did he design? Anything significant?” The most important thing he contributed was a new conveyor belt. You see, before, the conveyor belt was very clumsy, very expensive because they had to use rollers, all underneath. Each, each place, you need one roller, roller to...and very expensive, because use stainless steel. Heavy and expensive. He eliminated all that. He only put two at each end, going round and round. Over here, he invented friction to friction. Surface. [Raps table] No need for the belt. Sliding. You know what I mean? [Demonstrates with sliding motions] Heavy, heavy plastic together like that. And friction to friction, just going. So! Cheaper, better, everything. He made the prototype at our apartment. I saw him working on it. And this...what it was, was, you know the exercise machine?

MI: Treadmill.

EW: Treadmill. That's him! All that, from that, comes only bigger factories! The whole thing. This is only a small, short area.

MI: Hmph. What was your husband's name?

EW: Richard Watanabe. People cannot understand, but he's always thinking, thinking, and with him, it's not the money. It's not the patent. He gave it all away. He just has to put it down. He's happy. That pays already. He's happy that it can be used, yeah? Most people, they're looking for money, money, money. He—no. Fast as it comes, his idea, fast he gives. You know? Like that.—You know what? In Chicago, everywhere we go, they said, “Those are the two nuts. Get-together [laughs] nuts!” Then we said, “Thank you very much.” [JK laughs]

JK, MI: Thank you.

JK: Thank you very much Emiko. Very good.

MI: So, we're finished already, but, so, do other people know your life story, or are we the only ones? [Laughs] I mean, have you written about it or talked, you know?

EW: Everybody says, “Your life story should be told over and over, and be published.” So, what is my thing now? After I came back, I came back from the mainland. My husband passed away. I was living with my aunty for ten years, Alewa Heights. And then, I decided I'm going to go to Sedona, Arizona. That's another thing. Funny, funny. You know what I went there for? You'll never guess it. I opened a cowboy restaurant. Cowboy restaurant! [JK, MI quietly laugh] Can you imagine? My partner and I, both Japanese, we're in cowboy uniform. All my waitresses and waiters and cooks, all in cowboy, yeah! In a cowboy town. And we did the incredible, within one year time, we became the top restaurant. You know how long it takes to make a restaurant work out, to be successful? Very hard. In one year, I went there alone, and I prepared the restaurant. My partners came in the second year. We opened the restaurant, and we go get 'em for one year. By one year, it was so popular in Sedona, the restaurants, thriving restaurants for many, many years, they lost all their business. They came to us. Far away to Camp Birdie! We got all their customers, in a one-year time. We're just starting, and we're already in one-year time. It was so popular and so successful. My partners couldn't continue. For them, it was so stressful. They cannot continue. With me, nothing. I work harder than them, but nerves. They had no control of the nerve, but I was in performance. It was very easy for me.

MI: Is the restaurant still there?

EW: No. It was in one-year time. They said, “You continue. We can't. We're both sick.” Yeah, and they came back to Hawaii. They said, “You operate it.” I said, “No way.” So, I bought a big house, a beautiful big house there, not knowing how long it was going to be, you know. It took two years after that to sell that house, so I had to stay there, so altogether, four years. One year, I went there alone. One year, we had the restaurant. Two years, I have to sell my house. Four years. Then I came back. But my interest was in orchids. So, I delve into the orchid hobby. When I became a specialist in orchids, I went to South America into the jungle, to do my research, with the American Orchid Society. I like to go beyond, to do research.

MI: Are you still raising orchids? [Repeats question]

- EW: I was, but I had to stop, because I live in my brother's apartment building. "Come and live in my apartment building. We'll build you a hothouse." So, they built a hothouse for me in the apartment building. Then, they're getting old, so now they said, "Oh, [you] want to sell the apartment building." What am I going to do with 450 big cattleya orchid plants? I gave this collection to my sister who was very happy. She's eleven years younger than I am. She's doing very well. She's winning all the awards for orchids. Just recently, do you know in real estate, the 'Aina Award, once a year comes the real estate top award, she's the top of the top, my sister! So, what I'm trying to say is that, in our family, no matter what they do, [MI and JK chuckle] they got to head to the top. Doesn't take them long, because they're just following the mind. They will themselves, because they had the talent, and they're hard working, and patient, and they all start with no money, *yo*, like my grandmother. No money. It's just they command themselves. They want to attain. They want to be of service. The values are different...
- MI: That's another book you could write.
- JK: Volume one, volume two. [Laughs]
- EW: I tell you. They say, "How come? Ten children, all different." I say, "Come from the same parents, but the seeds are all different [starts to laugh]." Yeah, the interests. But the main thing is that we all got the one important seed from my grandmother.
- JK: Yeah. That's what it is. Yeah.
- EW: Yeah. The willing [willpower], like she said, Mrs. Urata, "How you did it. How you did it." Yeah. You know what she said? With her, she has no education, no money, no nothing. She said, "*Narao yori nare.*"
- MI: Which means?
- EW: Which means, instead of looking to learn, just do it! Like her! She never learned it. She never learned the business. She just created herself in the time of need. She just rolled with it. She did it, spontaneously, and with all your might, with all sacrifice. And so, I give her lots of credit. Yeah, so...*Omoshiroi* [Exciting], yeah?
- JK: *Omashiroi*. Very much so. Thank you.
- EW: Yeah, but this is the first time I've seen these things [refers to artifacts]. It's been a long time. I had, you know, but somewhere...And you know, when I was young? Do you know that dancers don't talk at all? Always. They're very withdrawn. Especially Japanese. Dancers, especially Japanese music, Japanese. They hardly talk, if we can withdraw, and that's one good point, and one very bad point. In our society today, we are handicapped, because they're not able to verbal[ize]. You got the Chinese that [makes rapid fire sounds], you got Korean [makes jabber sound], in this world, they get ahead. Japanese, *sumashite* [cannot]. Cannot penetrate beyond this kind of society. For our kind of society, excellent, but we lose out, one way. Yeah. Perfection it doesn't come to the best use in our society.
- MI: But it helped you and your family to survive the hard times.
- EW: You know, I have to reinvent myself, because here I was, as an Oriental, especially Japanese, now I have to forge through that. I have to force myself, the only way I can force myself, is to alter my thinking. And so, because I—I was strained mentally, I'm

able to do it. I can transfer—just like my conductors, yeah? They said, “We don’t know how you do it, but you must have eyes in the back of your head.” I said, “Why?” [They said,] “All the other singers, I’m conducting them, and they don’t get it, as good as—you don’t even look at me, and you—precision.” I said, “Because, our music, we don’t have a conductor. We don’t need a conductor.” We calculate it all, the computer, in our brain. We go into hibernation. We go into the corner. It’s just mentally focus the whole performance, like we already did it. When we go on the stage, it’s already perfected. Comes out, perfection, you know. It’s a different method.

[Closing remarks][Sounds of moving thing]