

JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAII

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sadako Alison Watanabe Yamanaka (SY)

August 31, 2015

Also present: Bill Yamanaka, son (BI)

Interviewers: Mel Inamasu (MI), Betsy Young (BY)

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.

MI: Today is August 31, 2015. We're here at the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii to interview Mrs. Alison Yamanaka (Sadako Watanabe). I'm here on behalf of the Voices of Internment Committee of the Japanese Cultural Center. My name is Mel Inamasu and with me to conduct the interview is...

BY: Betsy Young.

MI: And joining us for the interview is Mr. Bill Yamanaka, son of Mrs. Yamanaka. Could you tell us just little bit about you, your name and how old you are.

BI: Yes, sure. Bill Yamanaka. I am 3rd generation Japanese American. My mom is Sadako Alison Yamanaka. I was born in Santa Monica, California in 1956 and I'm the second of two kids to my mom. [I] basically spent my whole growing up years in Southern California and then got in the Navy. I went to UCLA and had an ROTC scholarship which sent me into the Navy for a career and went all over the world after that. And intermittently my mom had stayed with me, or my sister, over the years. I kind of traveled the world and always did the same kind of Public Information or kind of PR work, Public Relations, or communications work. Now I'm semi-retired; I'm in the Hawaii Department of Education substitute teacher pipeline now and I'm trying to give back in that way. I came here last year, a year ago now, September of 2014 to be with my mom and take care of her in her twilight years. So we have a place in Kailua and that's where we are together. My youngest son lives with us as well, her grandson. So I grew up in Southern California, but now I'm calling Hawaii home. The last 24 years were in Virginia.

MI: Ok, Mrs. Yamanaka, could you tell us about yourself, starting with your name, date of birth, and where you were born?

SY: I am Sadako Watanabe Yamanaka. I was born May 18, 1921, in Hilo, Hawaii. When I was one year old, my parents moved to Waikapu, Maui. At that time, my mother came from Japan as a missionary and she was in Hilo when Mr. H.P. Baldwin asked her to come to Maui, to Lahaina, to open a school for the children who needed education. Mother agreed and she established a school for children in Lahaina. That was the capital [of Hawaii] at that time. She did her missionary work along with other things. She even helped during the second world war, teaching knitting and whatever there was to teach. She worked with the Red Cross for many years.

MI: Tell us about your parents, their names, dates of birth and where they were born.

SY: My father was born on a farm. His parents were very late in registering him, his birth date. So he took my mother's birthdate. They are both registered as October 21, 1888. My father was born in Fukushima, Japan.

MI: How and when did he come to Hawaii?

SY: I know about my mom. My dad, I don't really know. He had attended the Lyman Boarding school in Hilo and studied his English and whatever he learned here in Hawaii. At that time, his parents were living with us, too. I was a year old. Then we moved to Waikapu because there was a call for my father to teach at the Waikapu Japanese School. Then my mother, she was born on October 27, she was the one who was born on October 27. My father took her birthday. So they're both October 27th. Mother had gone to Aoyama Gakuen, a famous school in Japan, from the time she was in kindergarten through college. When she finished that, she was committed to teach two years in Japan. After two years, they sent her to Hawaii and she did her missionary work here, on Maui especially. She had opened the Henry P. Baldwin School for the children in Lahaina.

BY: What kind of missionary work?

SY: She did missionary work when she came here, Methodist.

BY: Interesting that she came here as a Methodist.

SY: Aoyama Gakuen is a Christian [school].

MI: How old was she when she came here?

SY: She must have been about 18 or 20. The church sent her [without her parents].

MI: Your father came with his parents?

SY: I see them in the picture so they must have come with him. I don't know how long they stayed. In those days, the Japanese people didn't talk too much about what they did or where and who. I learned it through my father talking to his friends about all different things. A lot, not directly from him. (laughter) My dad was very active in many things. He was Principal of the Waikapu Japanese School and he attended conferences in Honolulu, and he did a lot for his community. My dad had traveled, hip hopped through all the islands of Hawaii. He visited each island and he made a book of the people who came from Fukushima. He interviewed each family, from each island. At that time, all the Fukushima people were in that book. He interviewed each one. I don't know how long it took him. But he was like that. He committed himself to do things that were out of the ordinary. He must have done that while I was in California, during the war.

MI: What do you remember about Waikapu, Maui?

SY: Waikapu, Maui, I grew up over there. It was real country like. I don't remember the real young age. All I know is going to school in Waikapu Elementary, the English school and finishing grade school. [I remember] attending the junior high school, H.P. Baldwin High School now, and graduated from there. Upon graduating I left Maui to go to California, to study fashion arts. I finished my classes and in six months I would have received my diploma, but then the war happened. So I had to evacuate and leave school. I went to Denver, Colorado with my uncle and his family. During that time, I did a lot of domestic work for people of all walks of life. I did that work in order to be able to do things myself. Then my uncle took it upon himself to open a dress shop. And I didn't even ask him to. So I had to invest in all these machines, tables, tailor equipment and I was upset because at that time, we needed the money to live on, not to open a dress shop. I was really so angry with him. Then I decided I'm ... and then he was picked up by the FBI and sent to Santa Fe, where my dad was. While he was gone, I decided I'm going to quit this dress shop. I gave it all up. All my

machinery and tools, I gave it to my aunt, and I went into doing domestic [work]. I met a lot of people whom I trusted. I never had any hard time during those years. I met two brothers through a friend during that evacuation. She was a barber and she came from the same place that I came from. At that time, I was living in West Los Angeles. She was a West Los Angeles person. We got to be very good friends and shared an apartment. Soon after I met the two brothers, they got me the job working in the pie shop. At that time the wages were very low, a dollar and fourteen an hour. And Social Security was one per-cent. Later on I was put into the pie making, I had to operate a machine. This gave me a raise of four cents. (laughter) I got a dollar and eighteen cents [per hour]. So that's how I went through World War II.

MI: What do you remember about growing up on Maui?

SY: After the English school, we attended the Japanese school. My mother taught the lower class, dad taught the Junior High and up.

MI: Remember any of your classmates or activities?

SY: Not too much. I remember we played marbles. (laughter). We dug holes in ..., I was a tomboy, we played marbles. We had swings, and I would be swinging from that big tree, from the garage roof to the kitchen. Things like that. My sister and I were always doing things together and one day, we found a box of chocolates. So we peeled it all and put it in a can and it just melted. My mother caught us and she was very upset. She seldom got upset. Another time we decided to walk down to a river near where we lived, and we walked down the river and picked those little purplish beads [Job's tears]. Then we walked down and climbed the Australian plum trees. It's a purple plum that's so ... it's not really good but we picked them and got all purple. We looked like purple people eaters by the time we got home. We looked at each other, "Here, we did it again!" Oh, golly. Our dresses were purple. We were purple, fingers and [hands]. (laughter) We got into mischief.

MI: Any other sisters or brothers?

SY: I had two older brothers and two other sisters. There were six of us.

MI: Can you tell us their names?

SY: Next to me is Winifred Chinen. She was a judge's wife, Judge Chinen. My sister

Sue, Sueko, and my sister Hideko. The boy's names were Walter Hiroshi Watanabe and Mitsugi Brown Watanabe.

WY: If you want the order in age, Walter was the oldest, then Brown, then her [Sadako], Winnie then Sue, then Dorothy or Hideko.

SY: So one day Winifred and I decided to follow my two brothers. They were going to look into the punawai [reservoir] where they kept the water for the cane fields. My sister decided to go swimming in the muddy water, and she was being sucked in the quicksand. So I ran home, told my dad and mom "Oh, we have a big disaster". By the time they came, they [brothers] had found a big log and pulled her out. We were always doing things like that. (laughter) Oh, golly, I'm telling you.

BY: What a great life, yeah!

SY: We did a lot of things together, siblings. We had grandparents who lived in Maliko Gulch. My grandfather had a ranch there, he had all kinds of things, avocados, and ohia, unusual fruit that he called star fruit and lychee. He was like, to me, he seemed like he was a priest somewhere. He was so ..., he never got angry, he took things the way it was. I learned a lot from him. We had to sit every night, in that special room where he had that *butsudan*. We sat there and he gave the sermon and kept on and on and on. Time out. Our legs were sleeping and we could hardly get up. We had to go through that every night. And we were never to face that *butsudan*. We were Christians but he was a Buddhist. We observed. Then one day, sister Winifred and I were alone at my grandparents' house. So we got the washboard and we decided to swim in the pond that my grandfather had built. Murky and full of algae, we swam in there. The next day, the pond started to leak. We made a crack in the pond. (laughter) We were always doing things, my sister and I.

MI: After Waikapu Elementary School, did you go to Baldwin High School?

SY: Yes. Waikapu to H.P. Baldwin Junior High School, to the high school. I spent my education years at Baldwin High School. When I graduated, I didn't even know that I was leaving. My parents had gone ahead and made arrangements for me to leave on June 6, to go to California. So I was booked to sail on the Lurline. I went to Honolulu and stayed overnight with my uncle and aunt, my mother's sister. From there, I left for California to go to school.

BY: Were you particularly interested in the education you pursued?

SY: Yes, I was. Actually, my uncle didn't want me to. But I wrote to my dad that I had secured some information. I had decided to go to Metropolitan Trade School and there I learned that I would be able to be doing a school girl job. In those days, they called it a school girl job where you lived with a family to help the mother do whatever needed to be done. So I did that. Finally, I decided I'm ready to go to Woodbury [College]. By that time, I decided that I would go to Woodbury. So five days a week, I went to school and on Saturday and Sunday, weekends, I helped Mrs. Cantor with her household. I decided.

MI: Was she the one who recommended this school [Woodbury]?

SY: No, a teacher I met at Metropolitan. She advised me. She was the nicest teacher. She told me that is what I should do.

MI: What kind of school was Metropolitan.

SY: Metropolitan is a trade school. It's where you attend, do the same thing as in high school. I decided, after I learned that I was able to do the school girl job and stay and live with the [Cantor] family, I decided to go to Woodbury College.

MI: From Maui, you went to Metropolitan school?

SY: No, I went to my uncle's. I had an uncle and his family, his wife and their two boys. They met me, picked me up at San Pedro Harbor and I stayed with them for about six months. Then I realized that he wasn't going to let me go to school. So I decided, "No way, I'm not here to help support them!" I could have done that at home for my parents. So when I found myself preparing to go to Woodbury, I wrote to my dad and mom. They agreed with me a hundred per cent, and I left my uncle's house to go to the west, near Santa Monica. My uncle lived on the east side [of Los Angeles], near Whittier. So I made my change then. He was so upset with me, he wouldn't even drive me to my new address. I had to carry my two suitcases and little valise on the bus, but I got there. Finally got to my destination where I would be living. From there I started going to Woodbury, the school that I wanted to go to.

MI: You sound like you were quite independent.

SY: Yeah? I wasn't! I wasn't very independent. I was a real sentimentalist. In fact, a crybaby. (laughter) I decided that I had to be strong and do what I want to do to make my parents happy. So I did that. It just came. So I went to Woodbury, did very well. When the war came I was ready for my diploma, but I had to leave. It would have been six months before graduation, so I left Los Angeles with my uncle's family and patiently stayed with them for a while. When he set me up in a dress shop. I just didn't like it.

MI: So on December 7, 1941, you were attending school in the Los Angeles area
. Do you remember that day?

SY: Yes. Mr. Cantor said, "Pearl Harbor was attacked." It was on a Sunday morning, while we were having breakfast, he said "Pearl Harbor was attacked". We just couldn't believe it. I really wasn't prepared to leave Los Angeles. I didn't want to leave. But on the final day at Woodbury, I closed my account, I closed everything and said goodbye to my teachers, and the President and left. There was my uncle, right in front of the school, to tell me that I am to go with him to Denver, Colorado. I really didn't like it.

BY: That was the same uncle in Los Angeles?

SY: Yes. (laughter) I didn't like it. I just kept it to myself. [Thinking] I'm not going to go, I would rather have gone to a relocation camp.

MI: How did you learn about the option to evacuate?

SY: No. He just swerved in front of the school, the college, to tell me that I was going with him. I had no option.

MI: When was this?

SY: Soon after Pearl Harbor. I closed my school accounts and classes, went home and packed.

Transposed from end of interview:

MI: Were you able to take your possessions with you?

SY: I couldn't. I left it all with Mrs. Cantor.

BY: *Mrs. Cantor, was she a Jewish lady?*

SY: *Yes. That's why I learned a lot of Jewish things. (laughter)*

MI: Your uncle contacted you about moving?

SY: He didn't tell me. He just was in front of the school, Woodbury College. I was so

surprised. I kind of resented it. He never took me home. So then I had to take the streetcar back to where he lived. Mrs. Cantor went on the streetcar with me to say goodbye to me. On Broadway, Los Angeles, we hugged each other and we cried and cried and we said our goodbyes. I had left all my projects, my school books and everything with her. You couldn't take all those things, there's too many. That was about all I experienced except, in Denver, I met people who were very nice. I kinda liked it, not enjoyed it or anything like that, but I made friends, good friends. I went into domestics so I don't have to worry about overhead and all that. Then when I met Amy, she was looking for a roommate. So I decided that this is the time for me to make a change. So I decided to room with her. Then these two brothers found me a job where they were working at a pie shop.

BY: Were these [brothers] Japanese, as well?

SY: They were all Japanese.

WY: One was my father.

BY: And Amy was the Japanese girl?

SY: Yes. They went to Colorado on their own.

MI: From Los Angeles, also?

SY: Yes.

MI: Could we go back. On December 7, you were in school. Did things change in school? Did people treat you differently?

SY: No, people didn't change. They were the same. Except the Chinese [students?] wore a little Chiclet under there, saying "I am Chinese". It was under the collar and you couldn't see it. But they did that. But I had a very good friend, Chinese

friend. Her father was an herbalist and she, Mary Chu ((?)), wore one of those. I didn't say anything. And [another] one was from China, called Lin Ki ((?)). I used to go over and stay overnight with her. You know, I met really nice friends, I was really lucky. At that time, I didn't know very many black people. I had no prejudice. I had met this lady on Pearl, her name was Piccolo. I went home with her, I was so trusting. (laughter) I went home with her and her uncle owned a bar. She took me over there and from there we went home. They cooked, they had a great big dinner prepared. I enjoyed it, got full of their good food and they took me home. They were really, really nice. I wasn't afraid of them at all. I met all kinds of funny people, but to me they were people like me, they had problems too. So I was pretty lucky, I guess, meeting all these people. One of the girls I met was, her father was a dentist in Little Tokyo, and I made friends with her. I had dinner with her quite often. I remember meeting a lot of nice friends, even in Denver I made great friends.

MI: Do you remember saying goodbye to your classmates?

SY: No, they were all gone already. It was some time in, I guess, February. We had a deadline to move. They were all gone. They were probably at the train station, going to relocation camp.

MI: They were going to relocation camps while you were getting ready to go to Colorado?

SY: Yes, through my uncle. If it wasn't for that, I would have gone to relocation camp. Which I might have liked. (laughter) I like to experience ...

MI: Do you know where those classmates went?

SY: No. I know that they went to relocation camp, which one I don't know. Manzanar was the one where most of the Los Angeles people went. I've passed through there, going fishing. It's a real windy, dry place. I didn't experience that so I don't have any comment on it.

MI: Have you had any contact with any of your former classmates?

SY: One of them had the same name I do, Watanabe, Amy Watanabe. She was from the Denver area. She called me and she got me a job working at a courier. It didn't pay much so I decided to go back into my safe domestic [work]. Then I

met quite a few young people and we picnicked and we enjoyed ourselves. I didn't feel any animosity or anything. The war happening, or anything. I was OK.

BY: Was there a large community of Japanese Americans in Denver?

SY: Yes, of course it was limited. They had streets where most of the evacuees went to. People went there on their own, but there were a lot on the street. [Champa], Lawrence and a couple of others, I don't remember.

WY: Dinner table storytelling was that the Governor of Colorado welcomed the west coast Japanese Americans with open arms. You can imagine there was a lot of chaos and prejudice and reactionary behavior. That's why independently, my father, the two brothers, they had gone to Denver. That's where they [mother and father] met.

SY: Governor Carr invited the Japanese people. They were welcomed. That's why my uncle chose Colorado.

MI: Was your family aware that there was a Japanese internment camp in Colorado.

SY: No. But I think there was. There was one especially for people called the Kibeis. They were born in America but educated in Japan. They were not like I was. They had their opinions and ideas about Japan. They favored Japan, so they were put in a separate camp.

MI: Among the people you associated with, you were not aware of an internment camp there.

SY: No. Then when my dad was taken (on Maui), he was the first person to be taken and put in this jail that was built but never used. There wasn't any electricity in it yet. He was there in the dark. School teacher friends were, one by one, put in there. They were all saying I wonder when they were going to be able to talk to my dad. When would he be coming. But he was already there. It was so dark, they couldn't see him.

MI: How did you learn about what had happened to your father?

SY: My mother wrote to me so I knew what was going on at home.

MI: From the detention center in Wailuku, was he then sent to camp in Haiku?

SY: After that he was sent to a place somewhere in Sand Island. I don't know about Haiku, whether they had a camp in Haiku. My dad was sent to Lordsburg, New Mexico and from there, they sent him to Santa Fe. They were still working on the camp, they were building it. He stayed there until the war ended. I went to visit him when he was there in Santa Fe. I took the course and I was so scared about the people in Santa Fe. I was lucky because I was looking for a place to eat, I was so hungry, and I met this Japanese person who was also looking for a place to eat. His father was also in the same camp as my dad. So we became friends for a short period, since he was from Hawaii. I forgot his name.

MI: I'd like to find out a little about your father. Were you still in school when he was sent to Lordsburg and Santa Fe, New Mexico?

SY: No, I was already in Colorado.

MI: Your mother sent you a letter saying that he was in Santa Fe?

SY: Yes.

MI: How did you decide to visit him?

SY: I decided that I wanted to see my father.

MI: How did you get to Santa Fe?

SY: I took the bus. I wanted to give some news to my mother because he was first in Lordsburg. From there, when Santa Fe was ready, he was sent to Santa Fe. He stayed there till the end of the war, 1945.

MI: How did you get to the camp on the bus?

SY: They take you there. Somebody from the camp comes to pick you up to take you to the camp. I made arrangements. What I did was, I took a bus to Santa Fe, and ahead of time I had reserved a hotel room for myself. When I got there, I didn't have my room. Somebody else had it. I complained about it. They gave me a room upstairs and I stayed up there. I was hungry so I went looking for a place to eat. I met this young man from Hawaii. We had dinner together, went to Santa Fe together. They sent a car to take you there. He went to visit his father. I forgot

his name. You can't just go, they take you there. It's arranged, they know that you're coming so they have the bus or car to pick you up to take you to the center.

BY: Who is driving the bus or the car? Military or civilian?

SY: The bus is regular, public. The car to the camp, it's some kind of official that works for the camp.

BY: That was a Department of Justice, Fed camp. This is in reference to the Santa Fe camp.

SY: No. They would ask my dad about the different people from Hawaii, what they did and what they were doing in their spare time. My dad told them "I cannot tell you anything, after all, they're prisoners here. They're not doing anything and I don't have any information." There's nothing to do. I know my dad used to go to the petrified forest and pick those {rocks] from over there.

MI: How did you feel when you first arrived, when you first saw the camp?

SY: You don't see the camp. You just see this office building they take you to. You don't see the camp at all. All you see is the building they take you to.

MI: They brought your father to this building?

SY: Yes. My dad said it was a huge camp. Since he spoke English and wrote English, they would ask him all kinds of questions but Dad would never commit himself. He doesn't know anything. He told them he's a prisoner of war and so are my friends. Can't do anything.

MI: From the time you had last seen him on Maui, how did he look?

SY: He looked fine, he didn't look bad at all. He had things to do. They would ask him all kinds of questions, talk to him. He had means of communication with the officers.

MI: Do you remember things he may have told you?

SY: No. He said, he's treated fine. He's OK. The only time he eats ((?)) when the war was over and he came home, is when he didn't know what to do.

BY: What did he end up doing?

SY: He worked for the newspaper, Maui Shinbu. They were friends. Then after that, he decided this isn't for me. There was an opening in Makawao, school teacher, so he applied for that and went back into teaching. He taught there until he retired.

MI: How long was he in camp?

SY: He was taken right away. I guess, about four years. He went through Denver upon release but I didn't know that. He was in the train looking around, but I didn't know that. Santa Fe to Denver, must have been around when the war ended. They were on the way home. I don't know what route they took. Right through the desert country. Nothing but desert.

MI: Was there any talk of him going back to Japan?

SY: No. He loved Hawaii so much. He used to say he would want to die here. He loved Hawaii. Mother, too. The work that she was doing kept her busy, very busy.

BY: She had children still, right? During the war, after they took your father.

SY: My oldest brother and my sister, they took turns. They all lived on Oahu. My second brother had bought a house for them in Kahului, that they lived in.

MI: How did your mother support herself without your father?

SY: Social security and my brothers and sisters would help them. I was in California. I wasn't able to come home. I had a family. My siblings, they were all doing things for them. I worried about them but I couldn't do anything while I was away. I was already settled in Los Angeles or Santa Monica. It was hard to just quit, move out. We had opened, my ex-husband went to a watch school in Illinois and got his degree. He decided to open a watch shop, jewelry store. I had taken on a job as a domestic for Mr. and Mrs. Carey, a well-known actor. You don't hear about him too much.

WY: Harry Carey Senior. Harry Carey Junior (also in movies). She had a lot of

good stories about that. She used to cook for John Wayne. His guests were John Wayne, Gregory Peck, Alan Ladd, Boris Karloff. They would come [to] visit Harry Carey, she was the cook.

SY: I cooked for them. (laughter)

MI: How did you meet your husband?

WY: That was in Denver.

SY: And when the war was over, we came back to California. We had a friend who had opened an employment agency in Little Tokyo. He advised us to go into domestics while we decided what we were going to do. I didn't want to go into any of those hotels. The Japanese town became an extended Watts area. So Japanese town was no more.

MI: Tell us more about the Denver period.

SY: My husband moved to Denver with his uncle and aunt, and his brother. Got married there. We lived in Denver for a while, he worked for a jewelry store. That was about it. His brother was an Army medic during the war and belonged to the 442nd. His name was Ben Yamanaka.

MI: When did you and your husband move back to Los Angeles?

SY: When it was over in 1945.

MI: Did you think about returning to school at that point?

SY: Yes, I had. I looked it up but they had moved to the Valley, San Fernando Valley. Now they're a big university.

BY: Where were they in downtown L.A.?

SY: Right in town, they were on Wilshire, close to Broadway.

MI: Did you think about another school?

SY: No, I decided not to since I was already working as a domestic. Then Ted had

decided to open a jewelry store. I went along with that. But after a few years, I decided that I've had enough of this so I gave up domestic and I got a job working for Saks Fifth Avenue. Then Saks closed their custom made department, so I got a job working at a jewelry store. I worked for a wholesale pearl company. They would give me hundreds of strands of pearl for me to grade and make into necklaces. They were called Marvin Hymes ((?)). I did all kinds of things! (laughter) But I have been very lucky because I've met such nice people. I'm really, really grateful. Otherwise, being alone by myself during the war years and before that, kinda scary. But I couldn't let myself be negative about it.

MI: What would you consider to have been your primary occupation?

SY: I guess it would be the different domestics that I did.

WY: I would think a seamstress, with all the sewing you did.

SY: Oh, yes, I forgot about that. I had my own business. I did it at home because I had Bill and I had Joan. So I had to stay at home. So somehow, I was fortunate, I got all these great clients as my customers. They were all from Beverly Hills and places like that. I would sew for them, create new designs. In fact I have a book, my album, my favorite model. Then I gave up the sewing machine and I went into crocheting and I crocheted all kinds of things, outfits, dresses. I have one in the box that I'm donating.

BY: It's pretty incredible.

MI: So you ended up doing what you had hoped to do when you went to school, without your degree?

SY: Yes. And I did get an honorary degree.

WY: Only seventy five years later.

MI: Tell us about that.

SY: I only wish that my parents could have seen it. They would be so happy.

MI: So who is the granddaughter who made this happen?

SY: Bill's second child, Cheryl. She somehow contacted the school. I had contacted

them but since it was in the Valley, I gave it up. Cheryl looked into it and all she wanted was ...

WY: Because of the way she is, her grandchildren and children are so devoted to her because she is this selfless, angel person. Through all of this, the war, she gave to the husband she married, deferred to his desire for a certain career, and put her desires for a professional career on the back burner. Then myself and my sister came along, she took care of us. Again did what she had to do, from beadwork, to crocheting, to seamstress, and it's all incredible work, the kind of workmanship she did. So all this selfless giving, so her kids and her grandkids always want to give to her. That's what I'm doing here. My daughter, in that spirit of wanting to do something for grandma, emailed Woodbury University and said it would be kinda neat to just give her an honorary degree copy, something very simple. That grew and the timing was such that the President of Woodbury University was going to be in Hawaii for some kind of conference and they said, "We'd love that." They saw the timing and the opportunity and they said "Our President would like to present it in person". It just started snowballing from this innocent little request from my daughter to just send her a little thing in the mail saying here's an honorary degree. Then we got invited to the State Capitol for the ceremony with all the politicians involved. (laughter) It was an incredible event with the President of the University, State Representative (Joseph) Souki from Maui, a number of people. So she got a very nice honorary degree and other recognition, all coming from this email from my daughter.

MI: How did you feel when you heard that this was going to happen?

SY: I was kind of angry. (laughter) I didn't want to be ..., I just didn't want to have anything to do with it, I was really angry.

MI: How do you feel now?

SY: I feel great now. (laughter) Really, I was almost not going to go to it.

WY: It was almost overwhelming. She loves her simple life. That's the whole thing about her, it's simplicity. She has this incredible strength, but so simple, so selfless. She got this from her mother, all this selfless giving, humble and honest.

SY: You know how Japanese are ...

MI: Your mother was a Christian (Methodist)? How did your parents raise you? Did

they try to teach you Japanese values?

SY: No, they weren't like that. Mother wasn't like that. However it came, it was. She had to learn to drive a horse and buggy. Her mother had opened a school in Waihee, and when mother went over, she helped with it. Mother also translated Japanese into English because she was good in English and so was my father. For their generation, their English was just terrific. It's hard to believe.

BY: If she went to missionary school in Japan, that was probably the beginning.

SY: Her father had built an orphanage in Japan for children who didn't have parents. When my mother was with them, she started attending school. She and her best friend lived so far away from home, my mother was from Gifu. They couldn't go home because it was too far, so they became really, really fast friends. When they had to be sent to different areas as missionaries, they were so sad. All through her life she'd gone through Christian [schools]. Aoyama Gakuen is Christian and now it's a very well known university in Tokyo.

MI: Looking back, how do you feel the war affected your parents?

SY: They seemed to be alright. They were worried about me, being out there all by myself.

MI: They were not angry or bitter over the experience?

SY: Oh, no. You can read the letter that my dad wrote to me when the war came around. I was very lucky to have parents like I did.

MI: How much time did you have to prepare for the evacuation?

SY: Only a day. One day. I heard of it before then. It was in the papers and on the radio. I knew I had to do it. I hadn't decided anything. My uncle decided, so I went with him.

MI: Do you think your uncle made the right decision for you?

SY: Yes, I think so. When he was there in front of the school, I thought, Uncle's right in front of the school, I was so surprised. I hadn't even thought about it.

MI: Did you get to meet Mrs. Cantor again, after the war?

SY: No, I called her but she had dementia. She wouldn't recognize anything. But her son, Seymour, had become a lawyer or went into real estate. Mr. Cantor had died soon after I left.

WY: Your dad lost quite a bit of his possessions.

SY: Yes, they took it. My father had a Samurai sword on a stand, a long one and a short one. Every day he would bring out this little ball with a certain kind of powder in it and he would powder the sword and polish it. He would say, "a Samurai's heart is known by their sword." If it is rusty, it means that you're not doing what you should be doing. It was on a nice black stand.

WY: Never returned.

MI: They confiscated the sword when he was picked up on December 7?

SY: I guess so. He was the first one to be picked up on Maui and put into that jail without electricity.

MI: After that happened, did your mother clean up the house of anything Japanese?

SY: No. She lived the same way she did when I was growing up [before the war].

MI: Thank you very much.