

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Satoki Ikeda, 84, clothing store and factory owner,
Lower Paia

"It's funny, but there used to be this old Chinese man who went around on his bike selling peanuts....From camp to camp. When I saw that, I thought even something like that would be all right, if I could just try running my own business. Because as long as you're working for someone else, you're limited, right? But whatever the Chinese man made, however much he worked, he got to keep the profits....So from the very beginning, I always wanted to see if I would have any luck in business--from the day I arrived from Japan."

Satoki Ikeda, Japanese, was born February 8, 1896, in Kamoto County, Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan. Since his parents left their farming village for Hawaii when Ikeda was a young boy, he was raised by his grandmother.

In 1913, Ikeda came to Haiku, Maui to join his mother. His father had died a year before. His first job was picking pineapple in Haiku. Soon after, he began working as a tunnel digger at Honopou for the East Maui Irrigation Company. Ikeda quit that job in 1918 and returned to Haiku and became a taxi driver. In 1925, Ikeda left the taxi driving business and worked as a car salesman for Maui Motors. At the same time, he got involved in a variety of business investments.

Ikeda opened his first store in Lower Paia in 1927. He left his wife in charge of the store and continued working as a car salesman for another year. Through his innovative efforts, his business has expanded over the years to include clothes manufacturing. Today there are branch stores throughout Maui.

Ikeda is now retired and still lives in Lower Paia, behind his original store. His sons now manage the business.

Tape No. 7-15-1-79 TR

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Satoki Ikeda (SI)

November 9, 1979

Lower Paia, Maui

BY: Yukihiisa Suzuki (YS) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

[NOTE: Interview conducted in Japanese. Translation done by Yukihiisa Suzuki and Yoshiko Nishimoto.]

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Satoki Ikeda. Today is November 9, 1979, and we're at his home in Lower Paia, Maui.

YS: Your name is Satoki Ikeda.

SI: Yes.

YS: Satoki. It's a rather unusual name, isn't it? How do you write it in Japanese characters?

SI: "Sa" is written with the radical "man." The right side is the character for "left." [左] The second character, "to," is the one meaning "climbing." [登] The third character, "ki," means "recording." [記]

YS: What does your name mean when the three characters are put together?

SI: Our next-door neighbor [in Japan] wanted to give the name to his own son, but he let my father use it for me. I'm not sure what my first name means.

YS: When were you born?

SI: Eighteen ninety-six [1896]. The 29th year of Meiji.

YS: Soon after the Sino-Japanese War ended. Where were you born?

SI: I was born in Kumamoto prefecture, Kamoto county, Mitama village.

YS: Generally, was that a farming village?

SI: Yes.

YS: Then your parents were engaged in farming?

SI: Yes. When they went to Hawaii, my grandparents took care of me.

YS: Do you remember why your parents came to Hawaii?

SI: They wanted to improve their lives.

YS: So, your parents left when you were only five or six years old. You must have been lonesome.

SI: Yes, but I really didn't understand what was going on.

YS: Then you came to Hawaii when you were seventeen years old [1913]?

SI: When I was sixteen. Of course, I became seventeen soon after I came here.

YS: Did you finish your grade school education in Kumamoto?

SI: Yes. I went to elementary school in Mitama village for four years. Then I went to Yamaga higher elementary school for another four years.

YS: So, you received your schooling before compulsory education in Japan became six years?

SI: Yes, a little before.

YS: What were your grandparents doing? Were they in farming?

SI: Yes.

YS: What do you remember about your childhood in Kumamoto?

SI: Naturally, I think about it a lot, and I missed my native place. But to grow up in a household without parents is not a very good thing. Once in a while, I was treated harshly.

Let me give you an example. One day, a relative of ours passed away. I was only thirteen and attending school in Yamaga at the time. Someone had to go and notify the other relatives the news about the death. Normally, two people would be sent for this task. But I was told to go to the various villages all by myself. They were not easy places to reach. I had to walk through mountainous areas and pass two cemeteries. I had to complete the journey before school started in the morning, and it was a one-hour walk. I was told to hurry and be there by 5:30 [a.m. with the news] because the people go to work at 6 o'clock. So I had to go here and there, not really knowing where I was going.

YS: Were you told to go on the journey by your grandparents?

SI: No. It was another person--the next-door neighbor--who told me to

go. It was a really difficult task for me. I was only thirteen, and most people would not have gone. In the mountains there were many tall pine trees. I had to walk through cemeteries, and the road was very narrow. It was really scary. (Laughs)

YS: So you went . . .

SI: Yes. I managed to get there around 5:30 [a.m.]. I left my home a little after 4 o'clock. It was pitch dark and I didn't have a flashlight then. The only light I had was the early dawn's light. But because I was still young, my eyesight was good. Walking through the dark country road was the scariest thing I've ever experienced in my life. (Laughs)

YS: Were there any wild animals around?

SI: No, there were none. But it was just scary. The most terrifying experience in my whole life.

YS: So you still remember that experience even now?

SI: Yes, I do.

(Laughter)

SI: While I'm still alive, I wanted to go and thank the person [i.e., next-door neighbor] who sent me on that journey. But when I went there [Japan], that person had passed away. So, I didn't have a chance to thank him.

YS: What did you want to thank him for?

SI: Well Such a terrifying experience made a man out of me and strengthened me. For that, I felt very grateful. After coming to Hawaii, I used to live in places that were far from my mother's house, such as Kailua and Honopou. Every month, I had to walk to her house and give her the money I had earned. Along the way, there were many oxen and cemeteries. But I never felt very scared. It really was nothing. On rainy mornings, I would put on a raincoat, walk about ten miles to see mother and give her the money. Early in the morning--about 3 o'clock. I would eat lunch early in the morning and start work at about 6 o'clock.

YS: Maybe we can get to your work experience in Hawaii a little later. But first I want to back up a little bit. After graduating from higher elementary school, did you work in Japan at all?

SI: Yes, I worked. About two years after finishing school. I bought a horse. (Chuckles)

YS: Did you buy it yourself?

SI: Yes, I did. My father used to send me money from Hawaii, so I

could afford it. I also bought some land, but I couldn't cultivate the land by myself. So, I asked someone to take care of it for me.

YS: What did your father do in Hawaii?

SI: For a short while, he was a greengrocer. In the beginning, he came to Puunene under contract and worked in the sugar plantation. He had a three-year contract. After the contract was over, he went to Peahi and started his own vegetable shop.

YS: When did he start sending you money from Hawaii? Was it after starting his own shop?

SI: Yes. My mother used to make about fifty cents a day. My father made seventy-five cents a day [on the plantation]. That's 7-1/2 cents an hour. I understand my mother washed the clothes of other plantation workers. She told me she used to make seventy-five cents a month per person. Plantation workers would get really dirty--even on Sundays, when they used to play. She got paid seventy-five cents for the work.

YS: It must have been hard work before washing machine days.

SI: Yes. She did it all by hand.

YS: Did your father and mother come back to Kumamoto to pick you up?

SI: No, my father died here in Hawaii. So my mother went back to Kumamoto with three children.

YS: Those three were born in Hawaii?

SI: Yes. I asked my mother to take me to Hawaii. So we all came together.

YS: Your father's name was Fujigami?

SI: His original name was Fujigami. But he became an adopted son in my mother's family. So he became Ikeda [which was SI's mother's family name].

YS: So your mother came to Japan to pick you up . . .

SI: Yes. My mother came to Japan with three children [born in Hawaii]. She picked up myself and my two older sisters [born previously in Japan], and we all came to Hawaii.

YS: You came to Hawaii in 1913. Please tell me some of the things you remember about your feelings when you departed Japan for Hawaii.

SI: Since I was so anxious to come to Hawaii, I didn't think about anything. (Laughs) I was very happy. But I was worried about the

tests. I wasn't sure I would pass them.

YS: What sort of tests?

SI: At that time, they were very strict about stomach worms and the condition of our eyes. But I passed. I left Japan from Yokohama.

YS: How did you get to Yokohama? By train?

SI: Yes. By train.

YS: What do you remember about conditions on the boat which brought you to Hawaii?

SI: The name of the ship was Persia-go.

YS: Was that a Japanese or British ship?

SI: I don't know what country the ship was from.

YS: The name "Persia-go" is a strange one, because Japanese ships usually use "maru" as a suffix.

SI: Yes, yes. Persia-maru. There's something wrong with my head.

(Laughter)

SI: It took eleven days [to reach Hawaii]. I was seasick for three days. (Laughs) I could hardly get up.

YS: Upon leaving Japan, what kind of clothes did you wear?

SI: I wore Japanese kimono.

YS: Did you bring along a wicker trunk?

SI: Yes, yes. (Laughs)

YS: What kind of things did you bring with you?

SI: I brought only Japanese kimonos. After I got to Hawaii, I bought Western clothes.

YS: Did you have trouble with English?

SI: Oh, yes. This was the most difficult thing. Of course, before I came to Hawaii, I didn't have to worry. But once I came here, oh boy, I really had a hard time.

YS: Do you remember something about Honolulu [where SI's boat first docked]?

SI: I don't remember Honolulu very well. Except that after I arrived,

I could eat sashimi and rice, and it tasted good. I didn't eat much on the boat for eleven days, so it was really delicious. The minute I would eat on the boat, I would vomit. (Laughs) So when I reached Honolulu, I ate sashimi--aku-- with rice. It really tasted good.

YS: Where did you stay in Honolulu?

SI: There was an inn called Kyushu-ya. I stayed there.

YS: Did you go to Maui immediately after that?

SI: Yes. I went to Haiku [Maui] with my mother and sisters.

YS: So then you started working in the pineapple field at Haiku?

SI: Yes. There was a man by the name of Mr. White, who was in the pineapple business. There was also a Japanese man named Mr. Matsushima, who worked under Mr. White as a luna. Since I was only sixteen, my mother was afraid that I would not be able to get a full wage [since SI was still a minor]. So my mother told me to report my age as nineteen, then I could get a full wage. (Laughs)

YS: How much was a full wage?

SI: Twenty-four dollars for twenty-six days of work per month.

WN: What was your mother doing at the time?

SI: Both my mother and my younger brother, who was fourteen, asked for jobs on the pineapple fields. They were told to be responsible for a certain area in the fields. They told my mother and brother that the only wage they could give them was ten dollars a month.

YS: What do you mean by they would be "responsible for a certain area"?

SI: By "responsible," I mean that they were going to weed.

YS: How big was the area they were supposed to weed?

SI: Probably about six acres, I think.

WN: Was this for the Haiku [Fruit and Packing] Company?

SI: This was Mr. White's farm. My mother and brother had to remove the weeds, called honohono. Even after you weed, they would start growing back immediately. They used to grow as tall as the pineapple plants.

My mother and brother could only do so much. So after my work was done, I would help them. I did this without pay. So if we put all three of our wages for this job together, it would probably come

out to one cent an hour. (Laughs)

YS: After working for four months in the pineapple fields, you switched jobs to tunnel digging?

SI: Yes. My mother managed to save some money. But because she went to Japan, she had to keep dipping into her savings every month. We started becoming a little apprehensive about the future. Since tunnel digging provided a handsome wage, I told my mother I will try it.

YS: How much is "a handsome wage"?

SI: Dollar twenty-five [\$1.25] a day. That came out to 12-1/2 cents an hour.

YS: Tunnel digging must have been hard work.

SI: Yes. It was very dangerous work.

YS: Does tunnel digging involve digging a hole underground?

SI: Yes. Water was taken from one valley to another. So there was a mountain, then a valley, then another mountain. Water would have to flow from a valley through a mountain. So we had to dig tunnels 500 feet, or 1,000 feet, or 2,000 feet right through a mountain so that the water from the valley would pass through.

YS: Do these tunnels still exist today?

SI: The water coming through these tunnels serve the Kula farmers. Without this water, the farmers would be out of business.

YS: Water is flowing from Kula?

SI: No. Water is going to Kula. The tunnels started about four or five miles this side of Hana. What was the name of that camp It was in the area around Nahiku. Water was taken from Mahiku. It was really long, you know.

YS: So you dug tunnels for five years starting in 1913?

SI: Five and a half years.

YS: Exactly how was tunnel digging done?

SI: Previously, we placed a steel bar with a sharp point against the rock and struck the steel bar with a hammer. That's how we dug a hole in the rock.

YS: Was this volcanic rock?

SI: No, volcanic rock would have been easier. It was nama ishi. You

know, that green-colored rock. It's very hard, you know. That's the kind of rock we had to hit.

YS: What was the height of the tunnel?

SI: It was about seven or eight feet. After reinforced concrete was placed around the tunnel, the height became about 6-1/2 feet.

YS: So you dug the tunnel with your bare hands. Didn't you use any dynamite?

SI: Oh, yes. We would place dynamite into holes in the rock.

YS: It was dangerous work, wasn't it?

SI: No. At first I didn't think it was that dangerous. But later on, they used machines--the kind of drilling machines you see on the street going "pa-pa-pa-pa." They would drill four- to five-foot holes. It was not dangerous as long as the dynamite sticks were placed close to the end of the hole. But if the sticks were not placed at the end of the hole, sometimes they were not ignited properly.

So one day, just before I quit this job, workers were drilling holes and placing dynamite in these holes. Those working in the shift after us were removing some broken rock and debris. When one huge rock was struck, some dynamite exploded.

YS: You mean, there still was dynamite in the rocks?

SI: Yes. When it exploded, one man's stomach was cut up and his intestines came out. His face and all the parts of his body was cut up.

YS: Is that what made you quit that [tunnel digging] job?

SI: Yes (Laughs)

YS: Did you quit immediately after that incident?

SI: Let's see Maybe a week I might have stayed on for about a month after that.

YS: Can you tell me something about the housing that was provided for the people doing tunnel digging work?

SI: The width of the building was about eighteen shaku. The length was Let me see I don't know. Maybe about 100 shaku. There was a four-shaku wide hallway in the middle of the building where people could walk. Each occupant had an area of about four shaku by seven shaku as his own area. And people used to sleep all in a row on both sides of the hallway.

YS: These were all single people?

SI: Yes, they were all single. As I said, it was seven shaku here [i.e., the length of each person's own area]. Four shaku was just wide enough for a single person to sleep. When we stretched out, as you can imagine, our heads were almost against the wall. So we made shelves above our heads, and we put our belongings on these shelves. (Laughs)

YS: When you say "personal belongings," you mean things like toothbrush and wash basin . . .

SI: Yes, but we really didn't have anything (laughs).

YS: What was your work schedule like?

SI: We started at 6 o'clock in the morning and worked until 4:30 in the evening. We stopped at 11:30 and had a half-hour lunch.

YS: I assume there weren't many safety precautions on the job. For example, a hard hat . . .

SI: No, there wasn't anything like that. We wore hachimaki on our heads. If a worker got injured and died, that was his own tough luck.

YS: What kind of footwear did you have?

SI: We would wear boots. Not the rubber kind, but the leather kind. They were hard to get because they were expensive. They were about eight dollars. (Laughs) But always had extra soles. We would replace our soles by placing our shoes on a metal shoe rack and pound nails into the new soles.

YS: How did you get the extra soles?

SI: We got them at the shoe shop for fifty cents a pair.

YS: So there was a store that you could buy from? For people in the camp who were working on the tunnel?

SI: Yes, there was, but as for buying soles, we bought them from a shoe repairman.

YS: Were there many stores for people working on the tunnels?

SI: There were many plantation stores which sent people out to us to take our orders.

YS: What plantation stores?

SI: Well, it's no longer there now, but there used to be a store called Paia Store. It was called the Maui Agricultural Company Store

before. This store had branches, one of which was near Honopou. That store used to have salesmen [order takers] take orders all the way to Kailua Camp. However, there were also many private Japanese stores.

YS: Were they in Honopou, too?

SI: There was only the plantation store near Honopou. There were no other stores. Salesman [order takers] would come from Peahi and Paia to take our orders.

YS: Were you living far from Paia?

SI: Let me see It was about seventeen to eighteen miles [from Paia].

YS: How long were the tunnels?

SI: The longest one was Maybe close to twenty miles. Maybe a little longer.

YS: How long did it take to dig one tunnel?

SI: Work was already in progress on a tunnel when I started working-- and it took about fifteen years. So it must have taken a long time.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

YS: What days did you work?

SI: I worked every day of the week except Sundays. So, it came out to about twenty-six working days per month. Since we had a large family, I had to give my mother about twenty dollars. Otherwise, we couldn't make ends meet financially. About sixteen dollars or seventeen dollars was required to buy food. Another \$1.25 was required to have the clothes washed. So, about seventeen dollars to eighteen dollars was needed.

But I wasn't able to raise that much within the twenty-six days. So whenever someone rested from work, I asked to work his shift. In other words, I did the work for two people. I would work my regular [day] shift until 4 o'clock. Then from 4 o'clock on, I would work another shift. I would sleep for a short while in the morning, then go back to work my regular shift.

YS: So you really didn't get much sleep.

SI: I didn't get a good night's sleep. But I didn't do this [work two

shifts] all the time. Every one or two days when someone didn't report for work, I would go and apply.

There were many things that bachelors could do on payday. (Laughs)

YS: Did you have any free or recreation time?

SI: No. No such things at all. For five years I never bought a stick of chewing gum. Not even a bottle of soda water with my money.

YS: So you saved some money and helped your mother . . .

SI: Me and my brothers and sisters all helped.

YS: Since you didn't have a father, you had to bear much of the responsibilities, didn't you?

SI: In 1914, when I was digging tunnels at Honopou, I didn't see the sun for almost a year because it rained every day. Even on a so-called good weather day, there were heavy clouds and the sun was hazy. This was said to be a good day. This weather continued for one year in 1914. During that time, a huge hole opened up on the side of the tunnel.

YS: The inside collapsed?

SI: Yes. To dig the dirt out, we were ordered to work day and night. So I worked as much as I could. I worked 537 hours. (Chuckles)

YS: Five hundred thirty-seven hours? In how many days?

SI: In one month. (Laughs)

YS: Five hundred thirty-seven hours a month?

SI: Yes. If a record is kept at the plantation (Laughs)

YS: Let's see There are 720 hours in a month Just a minute [YS is figuring on a piece of paper.] That gives you only 183 hours left. That's only six hours a day for sleep and other things.

SI: Yes. The following month I worked 400 hours. Then the tunnel was cleared, and water started to pass through. It was very dangerous work. Rocks and things dropped on us from above.

YS: Pardon me for saying this, but, physically, you are small. You must have had a rough time.

SI: Among the people working there, I was the most stupid one (laughs). Others didn't work that hard. The person who worked the next hardest put in fifty hours less than me. About 380 people were

working there.

YS: For people who performed hard labor there, what sort of recreation did they have at that time? For instance, was there drinking and other such activities?

SI: There were many who gambled. There were also many who drank. Some drank as long as their money lasted. When they ran out of money, they worked again. There were many people who did this.

YS: What type of gambling was it? Hana-fuda?

SI: Many played chō-han. Putting dice in a cup. When they lost heavily, they would go back to playing hana-fuda again.

YS: Was it only Japanese working on the tunnel [at Honopou]?

SI: No. There were Koreans and Japanese, but I didn't see any Hawaiians. There were no Filipinos there at that time.

YS: In Paia town, were there drinking places that you could go to?

SI: I don't think there were any.

YS: When people speak of mining towns in Japan, they often refer to drinking, gambling and women. Weren't there such things in the town of Paia?

SI: There weren't any. People who drank mostly had a bottle of higo-bin. Most of them drank that. Wine was plentiful.

YS: Was it brewed in Maui?

SI: It must have been brewed in Maui. I wouldn't know. Coming over from Japan, you never imagine that you'd be in a situation like this--drinking and gambling. (Chuckles)

YS: You'd ruin your health in the long run.

SI: Yeah.

YS: Did the workers have some sort of health insurance plan? What happened when someone got sick or hurt?

SI: People who got sick or hurt or had a stroke usually went back to Japan. They would receive contributions from other people--just enough for boat fare. There were many such people.

YS: About how much did one have to pay to return to Japan?

SI: Boat fare was about sixty dollars. No, it was sixty yen, I think.

YS: Then, when it is converted to the present time, it would be less

than \$100?

SI: It is half, so it would be thirty dollars.

YS: So you quit tunnel digging one month after seeing your fellow worker killed?

SI: Yes, that's right.

YS: Then you became a taxi driver So you must have learned how to drive somehow

SI: (Laughs) It's a somewhat interesting story. I asked someone to teach me. I bought a car with the idea of having [a certain person] teach me. But then this person told me, "Today I have too many passengers. So you cannot ride with me [i.e., learn how to drive]." So he wouldn't let me on.

YS: Was that your car?

SI: And he took the passengers in my car, charged me with the gasoline costs, and kept the earnings for himself. If he had taught me how to drive, it would have been all right, but this was not right. So I went to a person named Kitajima in Pauwela and asked him to teach me. He said okay.

I asked him, "How much?"

He said, "Ten dollars for one hour."

YS: That's more expensive than today.

SI: I agreed to pay him, so he took me as far as Paia. There was a baseball field there, so he moved to the passenger side and let me drive. After driving around this field for about thirty minutes, it was time to go home. I wondered whether or not I was able to drive home, but I did it.

It was difficult for me to pay another ten dollars for another lesson. So I asked my brother if he could teach me. He told me to hop in, and I drove. But while backing up, the car tipped over. (Laughs) Both my brother and I were underneath the car. Neither of us got hurt. In those days, the roofs of cars were weak--it was made of canvas. It was damaged, and I had to pay forty dollars for it.

I asked my brother if I could try it again. He said, "No, we can't risk our lives, we can't do it." (Laughs)

So, without him knowing, I went out and tried it alone. I thought, "This isn't so hard." I thought I could do it. So I went to Wailuku to the place where they issue licenses.

A man there said, "You get outta here!"

I said, "Why?"

He said, "You're parked in my yard." I was in the yard a little. So I drove my car out.

"I came all the way from Haiku. Will you give me a driving test?"

He said, "All right. Go to the front of the police station."

So I drove my car to the front, waited for the license man to come, and then I got my license.

YS: So that means you passed the exam at that time?

SI: He rode with me from Wailuku to Kahului and back. When we got back to the office, they told me they would give me a temporary license. But with this type of license, I would not be able to pick up passengers or collect fares. But I told them that if I didn't collect any fares, I wouldn't have any money. So when I asked them to please give me a taxi driver's license, they gave it to me. I was lucky (laughs).

YS: Did you have to pay a fee for that license?

SI: Everything seemed to be free. But I've forgotten.

YS: Did you already have your own car?

SI: Yes.

YS: So with your car, your license, and your ability, you finally started your own taxi business. Did you need any more capital?

SI: My mother had the capital to start the business.

YS: So you received capital from your mother. You had a car; you received your license. Then all you needed was money for gasoline?

SI: Yes, that's it. If you have a car, you don't need much capital.

YS: Did you have only one car?

SI: I only had one car.

YS: How was your business organized?

SI: I built a stand and installed a telephone. When the telephone rang, I took the calls.

YS: In general, what sort of people came to use the taxi?

SI: Not as many as nowadays. When I was in Peahi, most of the passengers were growers. I also had phone calls from the tunnel-digging people.

YS: For what purpose did these people use the taxi?

SI: As a whole, it seemed like they used the taxi to visit their friends. Unlike today, taxi was used more for that purpose than for shopping.

YS: What were your routes?

SI: Coming from Haiku, it was twenty cents for one mile. However, the rate increased according to the number of passengers.

YS: Were there many taxis at that time?

SI: There weren't too many. In Haiku where I stayed, there were about seven to eight cars.

YS: How much was gasoline at that time?

SI: Five gallons cost between eighty-five cents and ninety cents.

YS: What was your first car?

SI: It was a second-hand Ford. I bought it for Was it \$500? When I think about it now, it was very expensive. A new car cost about \$650. I got mine for less because it had been used for two years.

YS: Did your route mostly cover the Paia-Kahului area?

SI: I covered the entire island of Maui.

YS: How profitable was the taxi business?

SI: I thought it was very good. If I were a truck driver, for example, I would have to carry heavy things by myself. But as a taxi driver, all I did was open the door, and passengers would come right in. And on top of that, the income was much better than working at the tunnel.

YS: How much did you make from driving a taxi?

SI: In the beginning, I was able to save between forty to fifty dollars [a week] after paying my expenses. After a while, I saved between 100 to 150 dollars. When I quit, I had saved about \$2,000. This was after paying my living expenses.

YS: And you got married around the time you were driving the taxi [1924], didn't you?

SI: Yes.

YS: Why did you quit the taxi business?

SI: Because I wanted to go into the store business. It was difficult to expand the taxi business because it was difficult to hire people. I hired two or three people and tried it out, but those who want to be a taxi driver (Laughs) It would be simple if I did it myself. But, no matter how hard I work, I can't be putting in more than twenty-four hours [a day]. If I hired people who trusted me, then things would have worked out well, wouldn't it?

YS: So, for that reason, you decided to quit taxi driving?

SI: Yes, with the taxi business, I thought there was no chance of expanding. One thousand five hundred dollars is \$1,500. Two thousand dollars is \$2,000. I can't do more than that.

YS: Then you became an automobile salesman. You did it for about two years [1926-1928]?

SI: About two or three years.

YS: This must have been better paying than the taxi driving?

SI: It was far better than taxi driving. The car and gasoline belonged to the company, and what I earned was all mine.

YS: As a salesman, how did you sell cars? I mean, nowadays, cars are in a big lot and the salesmen wait for customers to come. In your case, did you have to take cars to people and show them?

SI: No. Most of the time, I took a book with me. Sometimes I would show and sell the car I was driving. When I knew there was a buyer, I took a car along with me. I took a book with me, and, if possible, I did not want to use a new car.

YS: It means that you sold both new and used cars?

SI: Second-hand cars were taken in as down payment.

YS: Oh. Trade in?

SI: Yes, yes.

YS: How did you get started in the car-selling business? Did someone suggest it to you?

SI: Since other people were doing it, I also wanted to try it. I thought there would be more hope selling cars than being a taxi driver. The more [cars] you sell, the more [money] you earn, right? I worked until late at night.

YS: Did you make much more selling cars?

SI: Yes, it wasn't bad. I made more than \$3,000 in one year. I didn't have much expenses--I only spent for my own groceries. Gasoline was paid for by the company, and even the cost of repairing damaged tires was paid for. So, there was very little expense. If I thought this was a car I could sell, I took it from the garage.

YS: What was the name of the company?

SI: It was Maui Motors.

YS: Were you receiving a commission?

SI: I worked for a commission at first. Later, the owner told me, "I'll put you on a salary base."

"How much could you give me?" I asked.

"Seventy-five dollars," he said.

"What are the other people [employees] receiving?" I asked.

"One hundred dollars," he said.

So I told him, "If I don't get the same \$100, I don't want the salary."

Even if I received a salary, I would have received a commission, too. I would receive both a salary and a commission. The commission was to be cut down by about half. My earnings became one-half commission and one-half salary. So even if I received \$75 or \$100 in salary, my share of the commission would remain the same. So I told the owner that I had to have the \$100 salary. After two or three days, he offered to give me the \$100, so I accepted.

YS: What was his reason for giving you the salary?

SI: I had to sell a certain number of cars. Otherwise, they wouldn't give me a salary.

YS: Did you sell a lot?

SI: Yes, I sold a lot. (Laughs)

YS: About how many would you sell in a month?

SI: In one year's time, I sold twenty-three Federal trucks to pineapple growers living in the back country. Only new Federal trucks. A competing company would sell one. That salesman sold one. Another competitor would sell one. So, it was one-to-twenty-three, one-to-twenty-three [meaning that the competitors would sell one truck each, in comparison to SI's twenty-three trucks]. (Laughs)

Ford cars, I think about eight were sold--these were only trucks, going toward Haiku side. At that time, eight trucks were sold--new trucks--and Fords were cheap. My Federal cars cost \$1,500, and Fords cost \$500-\$600. One man would stop by my place and turn in three of his [Ford] cars. Then I sold him my cars. I sold three Federal trucks to that person. I then took in his three cars and sold them to another person who could only afford to buy Ford cars. This caused a slight headache for the Ford Company. (Laughs) They were [sold] new cars.

YS: So you sold one right after another. What was your secret to selling so many?

SI: Well It was because I knew a lot of people, and I trusted other people. We trusted each other. I didn't feel that a certain person was a stranger. When people ask, I would lend them money, whenever I had it. When every cent was gone from my pocket, I would go to the bank, mortgage my house, and borrow money in order to lend it out. I made it as convenient as possible for them. Because I did these things for them, they bought from me.

YS: It was give-and-take, then?

SI: But, when I started my store, most of the money wasn't returned. Only a small amount was returned.

YS: Did the pineapple growers have much money?

SI: Relatively, they didn't have much money.

YS: They paid with credit?

SI: Yes, with credit most of the time.

YS: At that time, how would credit work?

SI: From the company.

YS: Maui Motors?

SI: No. The pineapple company made it convenient for the growers. Even with purchasing such things as manure and seedlings, they could get credit.

YS: So, would the growers return the money they borrowed to the company?

SI: Payment is guaranteed by the pineapple companies, after the pineapple crop is harvested.

YS: You started your store while you were still selling cars, right? So were you doing both at the same time?

SI: No, no, no. It wasn't like that. While I was selling cars, my

store was being built. Then I quit selling cars and came to the store.

YS: What made you go into this store business?

SI: After all, when you work for someone else, there is a limit to what you can do. When you're in your own business, you can start small. When it starts to grow, you can get help from others and work together with them. With the thought that the business could expand a little more, I started my own business.

YS: So you always seemed to have had hopes that your business could grow and grow. Today we'll go as far as this. Next time we'll talk about your business in detail.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 7-18-2-79 TR and 7-19-2-79 TR

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Satoki Ikeda (SI)

November 29, 1979

Lower Paia, Maui

BY: Yukihiisa Suzuki (YS) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

[NOTE: Interview conducted in Japanese. Translation done by Scott Lehman.]

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Satoki Ikeda. Today is November 29, 1979, and we're at his home in Lower Paia, Maui.

YS: When you left the car dealership and went into business, what was your motive for starting a business?

SI: From the time I got here, I always thought that I wanted to go into some kind of business. (Laughs) It's funny, but there used to be this old Chinese man who went around on his bike selling peanuts. He would roast them, and put them on his bike, and carry them around. He had them in little five- and ten-cent packages, and this Chinese man would go around selling them.

YS: To the plantation?

SI: Yes. From camp to camp. When I saw that, I thought (sighs), even something like that would be all right, if I could just try running my own business. Because as long as you're working for someone else, you're limited, right? And of course, you can't expect anyone to want to hire you unless you really feel that half of what you do is for your employer and half is for yourself, right? (Laughs) But whatever the Chinese man made, however much he worked, he got to keep all the profits. So from the very beginning, I always wanted to see if I would have any luck in business--from the day I arrived from Japan. I never liked farming in the first place and I had come over here to get away from that. (Laughs)

YS: So you disliked farming--having come to Hawaii, you found it wasn't only digging in the fields, but working at the plantation, too--you didn't like pineapples, or sugar cane, or any of that sort of farm work?

SI: Farming? (Laughs) Well, I liked having a horse, but I really disliked farming.

YS: So you started a business because you didn't like farming and you thought even a little peanut-selling like what the Chinese man did might be a good idea?

SI: Yes. I had felt that way for a long time. I had also thought of going to this store--there was a big store that brought over material from Japan--and buying material and peddling it around to the camps. But even that had its limitations, right? And if I got into something like that with my mother and brothers, and failed, or not made any money from it, then mother and all the rest of the family would suffer. So I went to [work in] the tunnel.

YS: And then you drove a taxi, and started to work at the car dealership, but in what way did you come to start your own business?

SI: Which business is that?

YS: In 1926, was it? When you started your own business?

SI: The store? No, that wasn't in 1926. It was in 1927 that my wife first started here in a small way.

YS: It was your wife who started it?

SI: Well, she would run it while I was out, and I would help her whenever I wasn't out selling cars. So it was around the middle or latter part of 1928 that I came in, I think.

YS: Were there some special circumstances why you didn't enter the business until a year later--while your wife ran things? Or was it that . . .

SI: Well, that was because the money hadn't come in. I kept working for another year because the money I loaned out hadn't come in yet. But even then the money didn't come in, so I finally just gave up and started on my own. (Laughs) But I suffered many times more hardships than I had expected.

YS: Your selling cars insured that there would be income, didn't it? So the income you got from selling cars at the car dealership was also important?

SI: Yes, I put it into the business.

YS: In your first business or store, what sort of . . .

SI: Well, there was a doctor here [near the site of SI's original store and current home]--Dr. Ohata's hospital--so we got together [and sold] things they needed at the hospital and other odds and ends. All sorts of toothbrushes, toothpaste, towels, hot water bottles, all sorts of things like that that were needed at the hospital. And letter paper and envelopes, and things like that--there were often

people at the hospital who wanted to write a letter and send it, right? Things like that. And then we had a few other items--things that sold well--pants and shirts. We had things like that.

YS: There was a hospital here?

SI: Yes. Right below here, from over by that next house to the other side there, there was a long hospital. They cut that hospital into four pieces to make these cottages here. This place here used to be the examination room, and the other three [cottages] were the hospital.

YS: So the one here was Dr. Ohata's house?

SI: No. There are three rented houses over on this side, right? There's one here, right? So counting over two, three. Three houses. They were all connected.

YS: They were connected? That means they moved this one up here?

SI: Yes. They cut it off from the rest and brought one over here. And then they cut the other ones apart and swung them around to this side and partitioned off rooms inside.

YS: When I came to visit four or five years ago, I remember his wife had injured her hip and was in bed, but Dr. Ohata gave me a book--a songbook, I guess you'd call it--of songs his wife had written.

SI: Oh, really?

YS: Had you known Dr. Ohata a long time?

SI: Yes, I had. I bought this land from the doctor way back--fifty-five or fifty-six years ago.

YS: So the actual capital for starting your business was all your own? You didn't borrow from anywhere--borrow from tanomoshi or anything like that?

SI: (Laughs) Well, I must have been kind of funny in the head, because even though I wanted to open a store, I would let other people have all my money. So having loaned all my money out and not having any left While I was building my house, and even after that, there was a fellow in business in Makawao who was asking me to lend him money.

So I told him, "Well, I've lent it all out right now and don't have any."

But he said, "Please, can't you do something?"

So I told him I would think about it and went to the bank here. I

asked the bank manager to give me a loan, and he said, "What are you going to do with this money?"

So I told him, "So-and-so who is in business in Makawao is asking to borrow it, and I already told him that I would do something for him, so if I can't borrow it from you, I'll have to think of something else. But I'm in a bit of a spot, so can't you please lend it to me?"

So he says, "Well, I'll lend it to you--I'll lend it to you, but do you think you'll get back the money you're going to lend to this businessman?" That's what he said to me.

So I didn't know what to say except, "Ah, well. It'll work out somehow."

So he says, "All right then, I'll give you the loan," and he loaned me \$1,800. (Laughs) I got the check and went to Makawao and loaned it to this man without getting any [promissory] note or anything--because I'd never gotten a note from anybody--so I loaned it to that person, too, without getting any note. (Chuckles) I loaned it to him and he told me he would pay me in September of the following year when his pineapples would be ready. And I said, "All right." So I was counting on that, and I also had about \$12,000 or \$13,000 loaned out elsewhere. But I had loaned it all out just like that, without any collateral or anything, so as I look back at it, I was lucky if people paid me back. (Laughs) But eventually two people did pay me back--one person who ran a big poultry farm--he paid me back \$3,000 with interest right on time; and another man paid me back \$1,000 complete with interest, too. But of the rest of the people, nobody else paid me. (Laughs) One of those people was someone whom I had sold a car to, but the company was going to take the car back because the person wasn't paying for it.

So I said, "You're going to take it back? I'm the one who sold them the car. Can't we let them use it another year until they harvest their pineapple?"

So they [the car company] asked me, "Well then, will you go out and collect?"

And I said, "Yes. I'll go collect."

(Laughs) But they didn't give me any money. So I went back [to the car company] and said that I had collected and gave the boss \$350 [out of SI's own pocket], which was the balance up to that point. I didn't pay the rest of their balance after that though, because it wasn't my responsibility, but I paid the \$350. Then, because pineapple prices went down, that person unluckily went bankrupt. (Laughs)

YS: That was the man you mentioned earlier in Makawao?

SI: No. This was in Kula. He was a good person, though, a quiet person. I told him that it might be better for his name if he didn't go bankrupt--that I could go settle things for him wherever was necessary, rather than him declaring bankruptcy over that kind of money.

"Well, maybe I should do that," he said. But he was advised that it would be better to declare bankruptcy, so that's what he did.

YS: The person who went bankrupt was the person you had loaned \$1,800 to?

SI: No, not that person.

YS: That person [the one who had borrowed \$1,800] was in Makawao?

SI: Yes. That person--he died this year in Honolulu.

YS: So the story you just told was about one of the people who had borrowed the \$12,000 from you?

SI: He was among those who had borrowed the \$12,000. (Laughs)

YS: So when you started your own business, were you able to raise the capital for that yourself? For the store?

SI: The capital? I raised the capital by reselling pineapples--it was quite profitable. I made \$12,000 in three months.

YS: Reselling pineapples?

SI: Yes. (Laughs)

YS: Was this when you were selling cars?

SI: Yes, besides the cars. (Laughs)

YS: You were a pineapple broker?

SI: Yes. Well, if I knew someone who had a good field, I would go and try and buy it. I would put up a little money and agree to put up a certain amount more within six months, or whatever it was, or renegotiate the first note. We would decide on a rough outline, and I would put up some earnest money--say \$300 or \$500. And since I was a taxi driver at the time, as I went here and there, I would encourage people to consider it, saying, "How about you? Are you interested?" And eventually there would be someone who wanted to buy. So I would sell [the pineapples] to them . . .

YS: When they [the pineapples] were ready?

SI: Yes. And I would just get my own profits--say \$2,000 or \$3,000--and then say to the people, "From now on, please talk it over and

set it up yourselves." (Laughs) And I would just get a little off the top.

YS: How much did you make at that time? Twelve thousand dollars?

SI: Twelve thousand dollars. I made it in three months. In Makawao-- up above Kokomo, there was some land that belonged to someone that was in ranching. I couldn't do it myself, so I asked a lawyer in Wailuku to negotiate an agreement. I paid him \$800 to draw up the papers and negotiate the agreement. Then I took those 300 acres and got a fellow in Kokomo to be the luna. Then I hired five or six other people and opened that land up [for pineapples]. Eventually I found a buyer, and, well, because I thought it was a little too big, I just made twenty or thirty dollars off it and then I let it go again. I did lots of things like that on different pieces of land here and there.

YS: Did you actually buy the land?

SI: No. It was leased. I actually bought twenty acres in Makawao, though. I bought twenty acres and made an agreement with a man who was from the same part of Japan as me to farm the land as a tenant for a 25 percent commission. I think I paid \$1,650 for that land and then had it cleared a little. I probably spent only about \$100, I guess, to have the guava [trees] dug up. Because there were a lot of guava [trees] growing there, you had to dig them up. But I spent maybe \$50 or \$100--about \$100 or so for that, although I don't remember very well. But then I sold that to a person in Kokomo for \$2,600. So I made about \$1,000 there, too. (Laughs) So that I did by buying the land myself. All the rest was just buying and reselling pineapples.

YS: And the money you made in that way is what you put into the store-- what you used to make the store?

SI: Uh, no. I lost almost all that money in Molokai.

YS: In Molokai? Why was that? In pineapples?

SI: There was a place called Brown Ranch that was a little over 3,000 acres. And over up above Kalaupapa there, next to the land Libby owns now--I think it's next to it--there was about 800 and some acres. I don't really know the person's name--I've forgotten it. It was on a 25 percent basis, but the other one was five dollars at first, then ten, then fifteen. It went up like that. And I paid the surveyor's fee, the lease money, and the rent--everything--on the 3,000 and some acre parcel.

YS: Surveyor's fee?

SI: For the survey We divided it up, and after we had divided it up into lots, we let the people have it. At that time, [my partner]

had just sent his wife back to Okinawa. And he had wanted to send her back with all their money, so he didn't have a cent. He asked me to kōkua for him for the time being. (Chuckles) So I helped him out and put up all the money. I put up \$11,000. After that, he really kept moving, but I was lazy and stayed on Maui. The money came rolling in. It was funny, but when the money came in, he would take it and go right to Irifune. (Chuckles)

YS: Where?

SI: Irifune. There was a drinking establishment in Honolulu called Irifune. I went there once, too.

YS: So your funds were misappropriated?

SI: Yeah, yeah. Afterwards, when I found out about it, I didn't think it was a very good way to do things. There wasn't really anything I could do though, so I hired a lawyer. I got back \$2,000, but the rest was never collected.

YS: So you lost over \$10,000?

SI: Yes. It was \$11,000--plus all the money spent going back and forth [to Molokai]. I lost my money, but I was lucky because when I was on the sampan, it almost turned over. I always used to go across to Molokai at that time on a sampan about twenty shaku long. But a big storm came up then, and the boatman was drinking 'ōkolehao--because they didn't have liquor back then--it was handmade spirits. He had it in a gallon bottle and he would drink from it like this. (Gestures) And the boat would go like this. (SI makes rocking gesture with hands.) I was spread out like this on top of the boat and couldn't move. (Laughs) The water came up all around, and that was how I went there. So coming back, I thought I wouldn't go back that way no matter what. So I waited for the [boat] and went back on it. After that, I never went back [to Molokai]. (Chuckles)

YS: If we can go back to what we were talking about earlier How did you make the capital to start your store?

SI: Well, gradually as I went along, I had merchandise, but then I never had any money, right? But because it was really hard that way, I started peddling. I outfitted a truck and put things in the truck, and I would wait for each payday and go around to each camp.

YS: So did you make your first capital yourself, or did you borrow it from a bank?

SI: I couldn't borrow from the bank because there was already that \$1,800, right? And I was determined never to borrow money unless I knew beforehand that I would be able to pay it back. I was determined not to cause anyone any inconvenience. So even if I borrowed \$1,000 or \$2,000, I would only do so if I knew I could pay it back the next

month, or the month after next. Otherwise . . .

YS: So, actually, at first you put the money from selling cars into the store?

SI: That's right.

YS: So you didn't borrow money from tanomoshi, which was so popular in Japan at the time, or anything like that?

SI: Uh--there were tanomoshi.

YS: But you didn't ever borrow money from a tanomoshi?

SI: No. I didn't. There was a tanomoshi--I was in someone's tanomoshi, but it got so he couldn't run it anymore and he went off to Honolulu. I lost on that, too. Another person ran one over here [Maui], too--it was a thirty-dollar tanomoshi. But you had to put in fifteen dollars to--you have to pay half for interest--you have to pay a 100 percent, right? So I said, "I'm not going to use this tanomoshi money to stock up. I don't think this business of making easy money is a good thing. I'm new and don't know, but I don't think it's for real."

Then when I got back to my house, somebody else came running after me. And he says, "Oh, Ikeda-san, won't you let me have your tanomoshi?"

"Well, depending on what you have to propose, I'd like to have you take it [i.e., take over the monthly payments]."

There was a little money that I could use to accommodate him, right? There was a little money like that--I guess, maybe, I had about \$500 or \$600, and this person wanted to use it. So he asked me to turn it over to him.

So I said, "Well then, please take it." And I gave the person the money. But then that person asked me to be his guarantor for the tanomoshi. So I said, "No. If I was going to go so far as to be a guarantor for people, I wouldn't take the tanomoshi. If I'm going to be a guarantor, I'll use the money, myself."

So he said, "Well, it can't be helped, I'll go to someone else," and he went and got someone else to act as his guarantor. I thought at the time that I was going to lose a lot, but I got by without losing much on it.

Then there was a man who had a solar ray business. I don't know if you've ever heard about it, but they would catch the sun's rays--I still have one machine here--they would use it to catch the sunlight and burn people with it wherever they had some pain. People said it was very good, and it was quite popular, so that person said he wanted to get more machines. He'd had only one, but then he increased to

two or three--to three, I think. He came to me at that time and said, "I don't have money now, so I can't make much profit from a profitable thing. I want to increase to three machines--I want to buy two more machines--so couldn't you witness for me?" So another man and I both signed for him. But what that person had said about how he was going to make money was a lie. (Laughs) He didn't make any money. Finally, we wound up paying \$1,000--\$1,000 and something to the bank. So as collateral for that, I kept one [machine]--I had two, but even if I kept them as collateral, that person said, "Loan them to me; please loan them to me. I can't even eat." So naturally I loaned one to him, and (laughs) now I have only one. It's probably worthless though.

YS: Maybe you could put it in a museum someday.

SI: (Laughs) Yes.

YS: At that time, though, how much capital was necessary to open a store?

SI: Capital? Not that much, really. Maybe \$500 . . .

YS: Five hundred dollars?

SI: No, not \$500--\$5,000 and \$4,000 from over there--about \$9,000, I guess.

YS: When you say, "over there" \$5,000 and \$4,000?

SI: Yes. I had about \$5,000 income from the cars [sales] left over from what I had saved. And the \$4,000 was what I received from the two people who paid back their debts. Putting up this house--the store--was \$2,400. Two thousand four hundred.

YS: So the rest of the . . .

SI: The \$5,000? The other \$5,000?

YS: Five thousand dollars and \$4,000, right? That makes \$9,000, so \$2,400 from that makes So you used the other \$5,600 to buy your stock?

SI: Yes. While I was peddling and my wife was here [in the store] running things, I thought we would make money, so I hired two Filipinos and sent them out to take orders. I would sell by cash over here and by credit to people I had known before.

YS: People you had known before?

SI: Because I still knew everybody from over on the Haiku side. But then with the depression, that money [from pineapples] didn't come in anymore, right? And . . .

YS: Because the pineapple business was bad?

SI: Yeah, and the Filipinos I had hired hadn't gotten very good results, so I had them quit. I also quit the charging--selling on credit. I decided at that time that no matter what happened, I wouldn't give credit, or lend, or borrow money anymore. So if someone who owed money to our store came in, I would quickly sneak out the back and send my wife out. I told her that if anyone came, she should tell them the truth and say that because things weren't going very well with the store, we weren't doing business on a credit basis anymore, and turn them down. But there were people who would come to pay off their debt--they said they wanted to pay. One person came, saying he wanted to pay, but I had told my wife that even if someone like that came, she should tell them that we didn't have our accounts anymore--that we had burned them all. So that's what she told him. But he said, "No, my wife has been buying from here, so I really must pay. I'm going to go to Honolulu and I won't be coming back here anymore, so I'll pay," and he insisted that she call me. (Laughs) I didn't have any choice, so I went out and explained it to him.

"This is how my accounts are now, so please understand. I don't lend, I don't borrow. My policy is to ask for everything in cash from now on, so the store can get a fresh start."

So he said, "That's not right. I won't stand for it. I insist on paying."

(Laughs) He was from Okinawa prefecture.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

SI: So he insisted, and left the money, and went.

YS: How much did you say it was?

SI: About eighteen dollars, I think.

YS: So even for a small amount of money like that . . .

SI: But there were people who just couldn't stand it (laughs) unless they paid. Most people back then would rather not pay than pay even one dollar.

YS: So when you started your business, you did so entirely on your own, single-handedly, and without consulting with anyone?

SI: Yes, and I didn't [consult] with my parents or brothers and sisters at all.

YS: However, when you finally started your business, weren't you very

happy or very excited?

- SI: (Laughs) No, I was in a daze--didn't know anything. I'd never sold [had a store] before, right? Even when I was dealing with the customers, it was almost embarrassing, wondering if what I was saying was right or not. (Laughs)
- YS: At such times, you wife's efforts at the store must have been considerable.
- SI: She didn't have any experience either. (Laughs) She just stayed at the store and worked hard. As far as work went, she did the work of two people.
- YS: At that time, did you need any sort of special license, or permission, or permit--an operating permit--to open a store?
- SI: A license was twenty-five dollars Big store or little store, it was the same.
- YS: Who issued things like that at that time? Where did you go to get it? To the county office or someplace?
- SI: Yes. The county office.
- YS: In Maui?
- SI: Uh huh [yes]. Peddling was expensive. At first, peddling was twenty-five dollars, but then it went to fifty dollars. How much was it after that? And then at the very last, it was \$125.
- YS: What was the reason for a peddling license being so expensive?
- SI: I think that it was because there were people like me who went around selling at ridiculously low prices, for the purpose of advertising our own store. We didn't plan to continue peddling, but eventually, we wanted the customers to come to the store and buy. So we felt that it [low prices] was all right as long as we could cover expenses. We sold very cheap. (Laughs) When I used to go up around Puunene, the camp security guard would be waiting for me, and when he saw me, he would say, "Go outside! Go outside! This is a plantation camp." (Laughs) So I'd run away and go to a different camp. At first, he wouldn't follow me, but later, he would follow me around wherever I went. So once he had found me, I couldn't go [to other camps].
- YS: You said the cost of a peddling license--the permit--was \$125 and that it was \$25 for a store. But that's quite a difference--a hundred dollar difference. Why was the license for peddling so expensive?
- SI: Probably because, before, there was plantation control. The plantation controlled everything.

YS: So at that time, you were both peddling and operating the store?

SI: Yes, yes.

YS: What type of things did you sell when you were peddling?

SI: Mostly work clothes--pants, jackets. And stockings, blankets, belts--all sorts of things like that.

YS: Where did you get things like that?

SI: Oh, [Theo H.] Davies, [and other places].

YS: How long were you peddling? Did you do it a very long time?

SI: No, no. I didn't go out often. I would do it when things were bad for a half year or so at a time. And then if things got bad again, I would do it for three months or half a year again. I'd do it a little bit at a time. (Chuckles)

YS: You said, "when times were bad." Do you mean at the store?

SI: (Laughs) That's right. I didn't want to go [peddling] if I could help it Only when I needed money. I wouldn't be able to pay for the merchandise I had bought, so I would desperately try and get money together to fill in what I had overdrawn on my checks.

YS: Was it just by chance that you set up your store here [Lower Paia]? Was the location of the store determined by the fact that you had bought this land from Dr. Ohata?

SI: Yes, that's right.

YS: Or was there some special reason why you selected this place?

SI: No. It was just because I was inexperienced. If I had been more experienced There used to be very few cars that passed this way. So if I had had more experience, I wouldn't have built the store here. But because I didn't have any experience I first noticed how few [people] passed here when I opened the store. Standing here watching, you would be able to see five or maybe six cars start down from the big [Paia Plantation] camp up above here. But of the ones that came down, maybe only one would finally come by here. Now it's the other way around.

YS: So the reason that you set up the store here was because you had bought the land from Dr. Ohata?

SI: Yes. Because I had bought it and it was here, I thought I would do it here.

YS: Is the building the same now as it used to be? As far as size and everything?

SI: Yes.

YS: It's completely closed now?

SI: Yes. Now it's a carpenter shop.

YS: Did you have your store here all the way through--from the very beginning up until the war?

SI: Yes, yes.

YS: Mr. Nishimoto here is asking if you could describe the inside of the [original] store a little bit--how it looked and how the merchandise was displayed.

SI: In the beginning, well, a few school supplies, drinks--soft drinks--and work clothes, and women's dresses and such. We had most things.

YS: And to display them, you would lay them out on tables, or hang them up, like at any ordinary store?

SI: Yes. Most of the things were lined up on top of the counter. And because advertising was so expensive---to save on advertising expenses, I would take a kimono or something and nail it up on the wall outside in the window. And then . . .

YS: With nails?

SI: Yeah.

YS: Through the sleeves?

SI: Yeah.

YS: Outside the store?

SI: Yeah. And in big letters, I would write the price, so that everyone who passed would see it. I did that a lot. It was much cheaper than running an ad. Even then an ad was twenty-five dollars--and it would only be a small ad for twenty-five dollars, right?

YS: In something like a newspaper?

SI: A newspaper ad, yes.

YS: What newspapers did they have [back then]?

SI: There was one here called Shin Jidai. I used that one. But in Wailuku, they had The Maui Shinbun and The Maui Record.

YS: English-language newspapers?

SI: Japanese-language newspapers.

YS: So the Japanese-language newspapers were Shin Jidai, The Maui Shinbun . . .

SI: Maui Record.

YS: So there were three?

SI: Yeah. Over here [Paia], they had Shin Jidai, and then the other two--The Maui Shinbun and The Maui Record [were published in Wailuku].

YS: Did you actually run advertisements in these three newspapers? Or were there . . .

SI: No. I ran ads in Shin Jidai all along, because it was right here in Paia.

YS: And that cost twenty-five dollars?

SI: It was about fifty or sixty dollars. At the least, sometimes it was twenty-five dollars.

YS: For one time?

SI: Yes. But fifty dollars was a half-page price--you got a half page--more than half a page. The others in Wailuku charged twenty-five dollars for about an eighth of a page.

YS: And when you were running the store, you also were peddling, is that right?

SI: Yes, yes.

YS: Could you give a little description of what it was like when you were peddling? Would you also do some advertising and such, as you went around to the different camps?

SI: Uh, yes. I would go to the plantation bathhouse The baths were all--what you say--the group kind . . .

YS: Public baths?

SI: Yeah. I would take a lot of handbills and nail them up by the door. And so each person could take one, I would put fifty or however many it was up there.

YS: So you would take the handbills---when you say "put" them, do you mean you would punch holes in them and hang them on a string or something?

SI: No, with nails. (Laughs)

YS: With nails? About how many [did you put up]?

SI: (Laughs) I'd put up forty or fifty at a time. So the people who came to the bath would each take one.

YS: You didn't need a permit from the plantation?

SI: (Laughs) No. I didn't have any permission. Sometimes people who were in the bath would [do this:] (SI huffs indignantly). (Laughs) "Who's making that noise?" they'd yell. (Laughs)

YS: Because of your pounding?

SI: Yes.

(Laughter)

YS: The advertisements at the bathhouse were only in Japanese?

SI: Only Japanese [went there].

YS: The advertisements were only in Japanese?

SI: The advertising was in Japanese and English. We did both.

YS: Who wrote the English version?

SI: Oh, they would do it for you there. Yeah, into English or Filipino. If you said you wanted Filipino, they would hire someone who understood Filipino and do it for you.

YS: You said they translated it into English for you, but who were "they"?

SI: They--at the newspaper publisher.

YS: Oh--they printed all your advertisements for you at the newspaper?

SI: Yes.

YS: So you didn't print those yourself?

SI: No. I didn't do it myself until after 1952 I bought a [printing] machine in 1952.

YS: So the business of nailing up advertisements at the bathhouse was something you thought up yourself?

SI: (Laughs) That's right It was an absolutely reckless thing to do since I was doing it without the plantation's permission. (Laughs)

YS: Were there a number of public bathhouses where you put up your advertisements?

SI: Yes. There was always one in every camp. If it was a big camp, there would be two or three.

YS: At about how many of the bathhouses would you put up your advertisements?

SI: Well, sometimes I would go there [to the camp] to do business, put them up, and then go home. Or sometimes I would take the children and have them fold the handbills first, and then have them leave one at each person's house before we went home.

YS: Were you ever discovered and got in trouble with the plantation afterwards?

SI: No. I never got in trouble. The people who were working didn't seem to like it very much--the people who worked at the plantation store--the Japanese manager of the store and some other persons apparently didn't like it.

YS: Probably because of the competition.

SI: Yes.

YS: And you said earlier that your prices were cheaper?

SI: Yes, that's right. To the Paia Plantation [Store] one time, I sold six dozen pairs of denim pants that we had made here to the [store] manager, who was Portuguese. But then afterwards, he told me to come take the pants back because they weren't selling. I thought it was strange, so I went over. He told me that the boss of the Japanese department--what was his name?--had told him that he shouldn't buy our pants--that if he bought our pants, he couldn't sell them at the store, because we sold too cheaply. The Portuguese man told me, "So there's nothing I can do except return them to you."

So I said, "That's all right, that's all right," and took them back home.

YS: All six dozen?

SI: Yes, all six dozen--without selling much. What he had said about them not selling was a lie, though. There was no possibility of them not selling--I had sold many of them in my store. Probably the plantation had sold a lot [of work pants] at first, but after I got going producing them, they probably didn't sell much. Because I was selling hundreds of dozens.

YS: Where did you sell them?

SI: Here.

YS: At your store?

SI: Yes.

YS: Everyone came down here to buy them?

SI: Yes.

YS: You said you made the denim pants at home, but who made them--who sewed them?

SI: Oh, there were six or seven girls here.

YS: Where did you get your material? The denim--where did you get your material from?

SI: The material? At first I didn't know where and had a really hard time. It was really hard to sell cheaply [without a good source of material], so one time I ordered from [a Mainland firm] for thirteen and a half cents a yard.

YS: You bought your material from them?

SI: Yes, I bought from them, but stuff that I had ordered at thirteen and a half cents, by the time it got here, [the price of] denim had gone up over there [Mainland], and it cost fourteen and a half cents. And they fixed [adjusted] the price before they sent me the bill. So I told them I didn't need it, and that they could [have the goods back]. Then because there wasn't anyplace else I could buy it--I didn't have any choice--so I bought from [a local wholesaler]. I had a little money then, and I was a little annoyed [at the Mainland firm] and thought I would show them. I had bought 3,000 yards from them [the Mainland firm], but then I bought 30,000 yards from [the local firm]. But the color was a faded kind of a color. It wasn't bad dye. The dye was good--it was well dyed, but [the pants] were hard to sell because the color was light. So I slipped up again there and thought I was going to have a rough time of it like before. I went there and said, "My prospects for paying now aren't good. Would you wait six months if I pay you with interest?"

So [the manager of the local firm] said, "Oh! No, no. That's not necessary. Six months is all right. We don't need interest, just let it be."

"But it's such a long time, " I said.

"That doesn't matter, I'll take care of it."

So they waited four months for me, and then I paid them. I bought 30,000 yards. I purposely stacked it up in the store, and when the salesman [from the Mainland firm] came, I said, "What I got from your place last time was just a little bit, and the price went up, too, so I bought some that was cheaper." It was a lie that it was cheaper--actually, it was more expensive. (Laughs) It was fourteen and a half

cents, and I paid the freight, which made it fifteen cents. But I calmly showed them to him like that. (Laughs) But when denim went up, they all went up at the same rate. [It went up] at every one of the companies. If it went up one cent, then one cent; if it went up a quarter cent, then a quarter cent; even if it was an eighth of a cent, they would all make it the same. So you didn't really have any freedom of choice in where you bought. So because they were doing that [i.e., not notifying SI of a rise in price], I got mad and did something like that [out of principle]. Oh, but did I have a hard time. But once I had taken care of that [the debt owed the local firm] after four months, things went back to the way they had been before. And before long, it turned out that the hard times had been worth it. Because I had a rough time then, I determined to recover my losses. So I sent a letter to [another Mainland firm]. They're still operating today.

YS: Where are they located?

SI: They have an agent around New York side, too. They're the biggest in America now. I wrote to them, and they sent back the same kind of letter.

YS: Did they actually have agents in Honolulu?

SI: They all had agents in Honolulu--there were agents for all of them [Mainland firms] in Honolulu. So they [main offices on Mainland] wouldn't let me have anything, right? Usually they had three or four agents. So while I was doing all that, I just happened to discover the name of a denim company among some merchandise that I had previously gotten from the place where I had bought the sewing machines. [The company will be referred to as T.H.] So I asked someone [to write it in English] and send a letter off. Having done that, a rather unexpectedly good letter came back. "Send cash and we will send merchandise," it said.

YS: From where?

SI: From over there [T.H.]. And according to the letter, it was quite a bit different, compared with buying over here [in Hawaii]. There was a difference of at least three cents a yard. And with that three-cent difference, you could cover the manufacturing--all the sewing costs. So that was a big difference, right? After that, I thought, "Well, well," and from then on, things started to pick up momentum. I gained confidence after that and thought, "If it's like this, we'll be able to do it." And I would always send cash in advance, and then have them send the merchandise. Later on, they told me from their end that I could wait thirty days or sixty days.

YS: On the payment?

SI: Yes. And every time the price went up or down, they would send us a wire saying it was going to go up a quarter cent or down a quarter

cent. They'd say, "It's going to go up a quarter cent within the next week, so if you're going to buy, buy now." A quarter cent made a big difference, right? (Chuckles) At that time, I was ordering about 10,000 yards at a time. (Laughs) After that, things really got going. And when the war [World War II] started, everybody said sugar was really hard to get [on the Mainland], right? And since those people [at T.H.] had really helped me out, I sent a half bag of sugar to each of the directors of the company and the people at the shipping place. They were really pleased. (Laughs)

YS: Where was their office?

SI: The office was in New York.

YS: Didn't you also get some merchandise from Georgia?

SI: Oh! I think so, I think so. I think that's where their mill was I think so, I think so. The mill's in Georgia, I think.

YS: So it came to you from Georgia?

SI: Yes. The office was in New York.

YS: You actually did the sewing here in the store?

SI: Yes, yes.

YS: About six or seven people?

SI: Yes.

YS: How many altogether? Your wife and yourself, and six or seven people to sew? So you did it with about eight or nine people?

SI: Uh, no. I mostly worked at night. During the day, we had the store--my wife and I would take turns at the store. My wife would work both here and there [factory and store]. And there was the cooking and four or five children, too.

YS: When you say that you did it at night, do you mean that you, yourself, sewed?

SI: Yes. In the beginning, it was me who sewed, and then I taught everyone else. (Laughs)

YS: Where did you learn how to do that--to sew?

SI: I went over to Honolulu and took a little look I went and watched. They seemed to be doing a pretty good job of it and made it look easy. So I said to one of the girls there, "Oh, this kind job good fun, eh?"

And she laughed, "Ha-ha-ha-ha." (Laughs)

On work clothes, the rolled seams are the most important thing.

YS: What's a rolled seam?

SI: (SI shows them on the clothes he is wearing.) You take the clothing like this and roll the edge over--so that the edge is inside, you see? And there're two needles going all along here, right? Well, this here is done with a single needle, but [usually] it's done with a double needle.

YS: Like that there? (YS shows SI.) That's a rolled seam, right?

SI: That's right, that's right. It's really hard at first to roll it--it's all in how you hold it. Nobody can roll it at first. I would tease them [the girls that SI hired to sew] by saying, "If you can roll it right from the beginning, I'll give you one dollar," or "I'll give you two dollars." Nobody could do it--not until they could get the hang of it.

Some people would just say, "I'm quitting. I can't do it." People who were good with their hands would learn fast.

YS: So you learned by watching and actually using a sewing machine yourself?

SI: Yes. I'd use the machine myself--step on the pedal like so. You would just step on it steadily. You would step on it steady and sew a long stretch.

YS: The sewing machines were electric?

SI: Yeah, yeah.

YS: So you had electricity then?

SI: Yes, we had electricity. They were run by electricity, but it was a big five-horsepower motor with a real long shaft on it that would run all the time. Now they're all single units, but back then, it was still the old style, and twenty sewing machines would be running at once. So when you stepped on it [the foot pedal], it would run. There was one belt that came from over there [main shaft], and then there was another one here (gestures), and when you would step here, it would run. So when you stepped on it, you had to decide how much of it [the seam] you were going to sew. If you just pressed the pedal a long time and didn't keep the . . . It [the seam] wouldn't roll, right? So if it was this much, you had to step on it just that much, and with your hand, control it as you went along. Over here (gestures), there was a thing that would roll it up, but that metal piece alone wouldn't do it--you really had to use your hand.

YS: You must have had a hard time at first.

SI: (SI signs loudly and laughs.) I had never used a sewing machine at all, and the buttonhole machine just wouldn't sew [work]. I just couldn't figure it out--it wouldn't sew. But there was a man down below here who was a tailor, and he said to me, "Well, are the sewing machines working good?"

And I said, "They just won't work."

"I'll come take a look for you." Later he came and took a look for me. "This is odd," he said. He spent about two hours [on it], but then he finally gave up.

"Well, this is really strange," I thought. It took me quite a lot of time. I spent weeks on it. I just couldn't figure it out. Then one day, I pulled the thread and watched as I lowered the needle by hand. And I saw that the thread wasn't winding onto the thing by the bobbin, and only when it winds around it that it picks up the thread from above. But it wasn't going around. "Why isn't it going around?" I thought. "Could the needle be up too high?" I tried lowering the needle a little. And when I did that, it wound right on there. (Laughs) "That's it, that's it," I thought. But doing it with the needle--over a length of time--the screw over here would loosen up and the needle would slip upwards and it wouldn't sew again. "This'll never do," I thought. So then inside, there were two screws which held the shaft inside in place. So I tried lowering the shaft inside and raising the needle all the way--raising it until it hit. And when I tried it like that, we could sew with it. So I thought, "Now that I've been able to do this--there are good single [stitch] sewing machines and there are bad ones. But if it's like this, we should be able to make it," and I started hiring people. Up until then, (laughs) it had been night after night of practice.

YS: Weren't they having similar problems at other [clothing] factories with the relation of the needle and thread?

SI: No. It was just that the needle on the sewing machine was up a little bit. And because it was up there, the thing here (gestures) wasn't able to wind around.

YS: I'm afraid the technical specifics are completely . . .

SI: (Laughs) Yeah. When I bought it [the buttonhole machine], they didn't tell me about it. It had probably been out of whack from before, and they had just left it like that.

YS: So you learned how and then taught everyone else?

SI: (Laughs) That's right.

YS: You hired seven or eight people?

SI: Yeah.

YS: So that means you had seven or eight machines?

SI: There were lots more machines. I think we had about twenty or so.

END OF SIDE TWO

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YS: So having all those machines, how was the work done at the time? Did one person make one complete pair of pants? Or was the work divided up?

SI: It was divided up. If one person did it, it would take a lot of time.

YS: So, for example, one person would do the stitching, and then the next person would put on the buttons or something?

SI: That's right. Yes.

YS: Like an assembly line at a factory?

SI: Yes. The buttonholer did buttonholes; the buttoner, the buttons; the person doing single [stitch], the single [stitch].

YS: You did pants and shirts? All kinds of work clothes?

SI: At first, it was just pants and 'āhina jackets. But then Let me see, from about 1937 or 1938, I think, we started making aloha shirts--children's aloha shirts. I think it was around 1938 or 1939.

YS: Your working hours at that time were quite long, weren't they? From such-and-such a time in the morning until . . .

SI: At first, when we did it, it was about ten hours a day. But then, the NRA [National Recovery Act of 1933] started, right? President Roosevelt called it the NRA--when they went out in the mountains and planted trees and such to alleviate the unemployment. Starting then, it became eight hours.

YS: Was that five days a week? Or every day of the week?

SI: We were allowed [to let people work] up to forty-eight hours [a week].

YS: In the daytime, you looked after the shop, and at night, you sewed, right? So you worked over ten hours a day.

SI: (Laughs) Not ten hours--it was twenty hours!

(Laughter)

YS: Then you must have only had about four hours to sleep?

SI: No. I would always go to the store at 7 [o'clock] in the morning, right? And in the evenings, I would stay at the store until 9 [o'clock], right? Sometimes, if it was very busy in back, I would go in back--I would go to the factory--but usually I worked until 9 [o'clock]. And then there was what everyone had sewn during the day--I had to prepare for the next morning. So after I went to the factory, I would cut the patterns for the next day. And no matter how I did it, it would be 2 o'clock--1:30 or 2 o'clock. One-thirty or 2 in the morning. So from about 1933 until 1941, when the war started, I didn't even sleep one hour at night. That was the way it was, right? I started in the morning at 7 [o'clock], right? And I would be doing things until 1:30 or 2 [o'clock] the next morning, right? So it was straight through. (Laughs)

YS: But couldn't you sleep from 1 or 2 [o'clock] in the morning until 7 [o'clock] in the morning--about five hours?

SI: From 2 [o'clock] in the morning--then I needed a bath, right? So I would go to the bath, and then the next morning at 6--well a little past--at 6:15, I had to get up. So, (laughs) it wasn't even four hours. My body gradually got skinnier and skinnier, and afterwards . . .

YS: The factory was behind here?

SI: Yes, it was here. Over here, there was a place that stuck out about twelve shaku from the main house.

YS: It's not there now?

SI: It's there, yes. In back, it's there, but the front is cut off by about ten shaku.

YS: Was your residence here at that time?

SI: It was. It was a little house over there. I built this [house where SI lives now] in 1940. I built this in 1940.

YS: Was your wife's daily routine--her schedule--the same sort of thing every day?

SI: Yes. Sometimes though, she wanted to go to the movies. So I would say, "Go ahead," and send her off to the movies. That was the only extra thing, really. And at night, she liked to go to sleep early. (Laughs) And we had a lot of children, but she would even do things until about 10 or 11 [o'clock] at night.

YS: At that time, about how much did the people who did the sewing make?

SI: Pay? I don't remember very well. At the very beginning, I think

it was about fifteen dollars.

YS: A month?

SI: Yeah. (Chuckles) That was at first. Then, after two or three months, they would learn how [to sew], and then . . .

YS: We still have lots more.

(Laughter)

YS: You must be tired, but we still have many more questions.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

YS: You sold things like household goods, stationery, clothing that you had made, and things like that?

SI: Well, yes. We tried to keep most dry goods on hand.

YS: Wehn you say "dry goods"

SI: Cloth--cottons, most Yeah, we had most things.

YS: Cloth--oh yes, of course. Jackets? Outer wear? Underwear? All

SI: Yeah. We had most things.

YS: Of course, when you speak of the merchandise of that time, it was mostly what we would call necessities?

SI: Yes. It was mostly household goods. And the low prices on merchandise in 1932 were a surprise. Even undershirts--the knitted ones--were two for about fifteen cents. For two. (Laughs) And blue shirts [work shirts]--when our price was at the very lowest, we sold them for nineteen cents. At that time, I nailed a lot [of clothes] up out front. (Laughs)

YS: Nineteen thirty-two [1932]. The depression was

SI: Yeah. It was at its worst.

YS: Were there any other stores that nailed up clothing out front to advertise?

SI: I didn't see it anyplace. (Laughs) Just this bakatare.

(Laughter)

YS: You shouldn't say bakatare. You were a genius--using your imagination like that.

SI: It was a lot like the sidewalk sales they have now. (Laughs) When

my younger sister was working in Dr. Yamashiro's hospital, someone came to her and said, "Your brother is pounding all sorts of clothing and material up on the front of the store with nails. What's he going to do?"

And my sister supposedly said, "No, he wouldn't do that."

So she called me on the telephone and told me that.

And I said, "Yes, yes. It's true."

"What are you doing that for?" she said.

So I told her, "Why? I'm doing it because I like money."

"But if you nail the clothes up there, you can't sell them, can you?" she said.

"It's only one or two that I can't sell. And even if I can't sell one or two, I can make money off the remaining tens or hundreds of pieces that I sell. So what does one piece matter?" (Laughs)

But she had supposedly argued with the person and told them that I wouldn't do something like that. [And the other person told her], "No. He's pounding them up there--he's pounding everything up there." (Laughs)

YS: So among the merchandise at the store, the best-selling item was clothing?

SI: Work clothes. When I had first gone out peddling and wondered what merchandise would sell the best, the 'āhina work clothes had sold the very best. So I thought that if I made them myself, I would make money, and so I did it.

At the Paia mill alone, there were 5,000 people And in Puunene, there were 6,000 So it wasn't just 500 people or 800 people, the way it is now. (Laughs)

YS: Did work clothes sell well from the beginning, all the way through until the end?

SI: Yes. After the war, it [the sale of work clothes] began to decline little by little.

YS: So what sort of things began to sell after the war?

SI: Well, aloha shirts and muumuus became popular.

YS: But from the beginning, until the war, work clothes sold steadily? They were your best-selling item?

SI: Yes, that's right. Even the students at the schools would all

happily buy the new 'āhina patch-pocket ones. Now there's probably no one who would go to school wearing 'āhina patch-pockets.

YS: Patch-pockets? But now jeans are very popular.

SI: Oh, yeah. That's right.

YS: A patch-pocket is where the pocket is outside, isn't it?

SI: Yeah, that's right. Now they cost about twenty dollars, right? Back then, children's and such were forty-nine cents. (Laughs) Forty-nine cents. That was . . .

YS: Did you sell the things you made only in this area? Or did you sell them all over Maui?

SI: All over Maui--west--as far as Lahaina.

YS: In that case, was there some middleman or broker? Or did you go and sell them yourself?

SI: In Honolulu, there was someone. And then in Maui, Kahului Store did a little.

YS: Kahului Store? What was Kahului Store?

SI: It was A&B [Alexander & Baldwin]. Where the Yamaha bicycle place is [now]. That was A&B's wholesale department.

YS: Is that right? And they carried the things that you made?

SI: Yeah. But because there was some trouble with the man in Honolulu during the war, I quit. Even though the man in Honolulu had been selling in Molokai, the man [at A&B] who was getting them for the same price sold them cheaper over there [Molokai]. So the man in Honolulu got mad. That was my mistake. So I quit [selling to] both of them. Then I started selling on Molokai, Lanai, Hawaii myself--I would go.

YS: According to what you said earlier, it was all cash when you sold merchandise like that?

SI: No. For the stores, it would be charged. I was thinking about it carefully, so I didn't have many mistakes.

YS: This time, you kept proper accounts and did your recordkeeping?

SI: (Laughs) Even if I got an order from some store, I would ask at the bank, or ask people in the neighborhood. And if I thought it was a sure thing, I would send the merchandise.

YS: Charged?

- SI: Yes. Otherwise, even if I took the order, I wouldn't send it. After I quit and the wholesale side became (tape garbled), some of the salesmen went here and there and made quite a few mistakes.
- YS: About when was it that your selling expanded into Lahaina and Kahului? About when did the business expand beyond Paia and Puunene area over into Kahului and Lahaina?
- SI: About 1934 or 1936, I guess.
- YS: Until then, you were here at this store and sold the things you made here?
- SI: Yes. That's right.
- YS: And most of the things you made were sold in this area?
- SI: Uh huh [yes]. The man in Honolulu sold for me. Most of the other places Yeah, mostly we took care of them here.
- YS: So until about 1935 or 1936, the sale of your merchandise was really limited to this area?
- SI: That's right. And we had a mountain of goods that we had already made, right? (Laughs) The first things we made didn't have the customer's confidence. And because [a certain competitor] had been around a long time, [their trademark] looked like a dollar sign, right? And they [the customers] would say, "Dollar mark, dollar mark. I want dollar mark pants." Even when they came to my store, they would say they wanted dollar mark pants. (Laughs) So that was a problem.
- YS: The clothes--you didn't make them to order?
- SI: No, no. Nothing like that. Amateurs can't do that. (Laughs)
- YS: Did you deliver the merchandise?
- SI: No, I didn't. No deliveries and no charging. While I was running things, if merchandise--any merchandise--was more expensive than some other place's, I said that they could return it within two weeks and get their money back. (Chuckles)
- YS: What Mr. Nishimoto wants to ask is that from about 1928 or 1927 until 1935, your business was limited mostly to this area, right? And then from about 1935, you expanded into Kahului and Lahaina, right? Well, he wants me to ask what sorts of things--what sort of motives--caused the business to expand?
- SI: It was because I was able to get good material at a low price from T.H. that I was telling you about earlier. And the labor costs for me, or in Honolulu--or over here--were the same. There wasn't much

difference. So just my working at night was a big difference, right? So if those people [other manufacturers] bought over there [Honolulu], they would also have to pay the freight to send it over here. And most, generally, their cost was higher to begin with, so I went in there because there was a good chance for me.

YS: You were the only one in Maui [who manufactured clothing]?

SI: Yes, only me.

YS: Your place was the only one in Maui?

SI: Yes. On Maui, Hawaii, and Kauai, there weren't any--only my place.

YS: How was it that no other competitors appeared?

SI: (Laughs) Well, let me see It [making clothes] wasn't very easy. And before, sewing wasn't as developed as it is now, right? So when you said that you would train people, if the people who came to learn quit in one or two months, it was really a loss for the person who had hired them, right?

YS: Mr. Nishimoto finds it very interesting that no other competitors appeared. He's saying that the fact that your place was the only place on Maui, Hawaii, or Kauai, and that no other competitors appeared, is an interesting fact.

SI: (Laughs) Ah, yeah. It . . .

YS: There were lots of stores where you could buy work clothes, weren't there?

SI: Yes. There were lots of stores where you could buy them.

YS: But just one place [outside of Oahu] where they were made?

SI: Yes. I guess it was probably around 1950--they started one on Kauai and one on Hawaii. But what I think is that maybe they didn't know where to get the materials, so they didn't become much of a competitor to us.

YS: So that was your trade secret? Where you were getting your material was a secret of the store?

SI: [SI misunderstands question.] Yes. For example, even if [someone] was buying from Hawaii or Kauai, if I went and showed them samples and said, "How about these? They cost such-and-such," soon they would buy from me. And then from the next month, they would be my customers. (Laughs) Even on Molokai, there was a person who was buying from here and there . . .

YS: So did you, yourself, go anywhere as a salesman to sell the store's merchandise? To Hawaii or Kauai?

SI: That's right. When I went to Molokai in 1951 to take orders--I saw the pineapple fields, and they were all yellow, right? In the pineapple fields on Lanai and on Molokai, all the pineapples were yellow because of the strike--the 1951 strike. That was a long one, right? [The 1951 pineapple strike on Lanai lasted seven months.] So, even pineapple stocks that had been going for twenty-two or twenty-three dollars were to seven dollars.

YS: To go back to an earlier question Did other people know that you were buying material from T.H.? The company that had their office in New York. Did other people not know that you were buying material from them?

SI: That was a absolute secret. (Laughs)

YS: At that time, were the people who came to the store--we'll be stopping soon, you're probably tired--but at that time, did Japanese, Chinese, and Filipinos all come to your place?

SI: To work?

YS: No. To buy.

SI: Oh, yeah. Everyone.

YS: For work, it was mostly Japanese---Were they all Japanese who did the sewing?

SI: Yeah. Uh huh. Yes.

YS: So it wasn't only Japanese who were your customers?

SI: No, no. Everyone.

YS: Wasn't it hard though, as far as language went, to sell things to the Chinese or the Filipinos?

SI: No. We would use broken language; they would use broken language. We could understand [each other] fine. If an educated person heard us, they would find it an amusing language. (Laughs) Even now, my grandchild's husband--he can't understand me when I talk. My grandchild's husband. He's from Oregon. (Laughs)

YS: It seems we still have about three areas we would like to ask you about, but would it be all right if we came and bothered you again?

SI: (Laughs) I just talk about such uninteresting things . . .

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 7-22-3-79 TR and 7-23-3-79 TR

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Satoki Ikeda (SI)

December 1, 1979

Lower Paia, Maui

BY: Yukihiisa Suzuki (YS) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

[NOTE: Interview conducted in Japanese. Translation done by Miyuki Rickard.]

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Satoki Ikeda. Today is December 1, 1979, and we're at his home in Lower Paia, Maui.

YS: Today we came to visit you to sort of tie together your story you've told us before. Did you deal with any other company to buy your material, or did you deal with T.H. [the Mainland mill] exclusively?

SI: No, I completely depended on them. This was merchandise for my factory--I completely relied on them for merchandise for my factory. The other merchandise [i.e., ready-made], (laughs) I bought from any company.

YS: The merchandise you needed to manufacture in your own company?

SI: Yes, for manufacturing.

YS: From when to when did you deal with T.H.?

SI: From 1934 to We were buying all the time I knew, but I don't know now what's happened now. Until 1965 for sure. The merchandise is different now. The 'āhina and khaki as it was then won't do now.

YS: What was it then?

SI: 'Āhina, and khaki, and canvas, all these heavyweight textiles.

YS: While you were active, the things you manufactured in your factory were made with merchandise bought exclusively from T.H., right?

SI: That's right, all from them.

YS: Amfac [American Factors], [Theo H.] Davies . . .

SI: No, no.

YS: You sold merchandise other than the ones you manufactured, right?

SI: That's right.

YS: Since you dealt with T.H. for such a long time, did they give you any special service?

SI: Yes, I did get special service. They always notified me of price changes by telegram.

YS: So did you adjust your prices according to that?

SI: No, they notified me so that I wouldn't make any mistakes when I bought from them.

YS: Did they also notify other companies in Maui?

SI: No, no one else, not even in Honolulu.

YS: But you bought everything from T.H., right?

SI: Yes.

YS: When you bought in bulk, did you receive a special price?

SI: I don't think that was so. But the notice by telegram was the special service. Even in bulk quantities, they figured the price per carton and included the labor cost, and sold at minimal commission. They wanted to sell large quantities this way, so they couldn't sell at special prices.

Their special service meant \$500 to \$1,000 [savings] to me on a yearly basis. For instance, if I didn't know about the price increase which was to occur next week and placed my order past that time, it would mean several hundreds of dollars.

YS: I suppose as soon as possible--in business, timing is so important.

SI: Yes. (Laughs)

YS: You mean no one else in Hawaii dealt with that T.H.?

SI: No, I don't think so. Long time ago there was a Chinese. (Pause) There was a Chinese person who was the one who [first] found [out about] the company [T.H.]. I [once] bought some old [sewing] machines from him and it was in there. I bought all the machines from there. He was in Liliha--I'm pretty sure it was Liliha.

YS: Inside with the [sewing] machines? You mean there were many things which came with the [sewing] machines?

SI: I bought twenty or thirty--I bought all the old [sewing] machines they

had. I rebuilt them and got them to operate. (Laughs) Packed inside with the [sewing] machines was the address.

YS: What was it? Fabric?

SI: No, it was a quotation they [T.H.] had sent.

YS: A piece of paper?

SI: Yes, there was a paper in there.

YS: Did your dealing with T.H. continue all during the war?

SI: No. I bought some from here.

YS: What do you mean by "here"?

SI: Kahului Store and Paia Store--I bought a little from them, thinking just in case. But their [T.H.'s] letter guaranteed to send me all I needed so I stopped buying from here.

At that time, a special permit was required.

YS: From where?

SI: No matter where things were purchased from, we needed a special okay during the war.

YS: Okay from where?

SI: OPA [Office of Price Administration]. That was only for merchandise purchased from overseas. From the local distributors, I could buy as I choose. Large quantities brought in from America had to have special permission.

YS: By "overseas," you mean it also included the U.S. Mainland?

SI: Yes, it included the Mainland and all that.

YS: Was it ever difficult for you to get such permits because you were Japanese?

SI: No, not particularly. But when picking up the merchandise at the wharf, it was a little bit (laughs) different. When I went down to the wharf--there wasn't one in Kahului--I went to the wharf at Lahaina and sent items over to Lanai.

YS: The things you manufactured?

SI: Yes. At these times, they said some strange things.

YS: Such as?

SI: (Laughs) Such as My truck was paneled and enclosed on all sides so that I could make deliveries even in the rain. On that, I had put on the mark of the rising sun. (Laughs) So they told me to erase it. (Laughs)

YS: Was the rising sun your trademark?

SI: Yes, that's right. (Laughs) [SI's manufacturing brand name was "Asahi," meaning "rising sun."]

YS: So you needed a special permit for bringing in merchandise from the Mainland and also for shipping the merchandise you manufactured to the other islands?

SI: It was when I went directly there [wharf] I think they were suspicious of me. They told me that if I wanted to enter the wharf, (laughs) I would have to go to the police to get a permit. So I went first to the Lahaina Police Station and got an okay. (Laughs)

YS: And also you had to erase the rising sun?

SI: Yes. I would enter the wharf with my truck full of merchandise, and then unload it there to have it transferred to Lanai. It was there, before I entered the wharf, they said I couldn't go in. (Laughs) As I just mentioned, I went to the police to get the okay, then had to show them that before I could enter the wharf.

YS: Was the okay from the police easy to get?

SI: Yes, they gave it to me easily because I knew the people there from before.

YS: Your trademark, was it only on the truck, or was it also on the garments?

SI: No, I didn't particularly do that [i.e., put the Asahi trademark on the garments].

YS: So when they said to erase the rising sun, it was only from the truck?

SI: Yes, the truck--it had nothing to do with the merchandise, just the markings on the truck. (Laughs)

YS: When they said to erase it, did you change the trademark or anything?

SI: No, I just painted it black, and left it that way. (Laughs)

YS: What was the brand name of the shirts you made at that time?

SI: It was also the rising sun [Asahi brand].

YS: On the shirts, too?

SI: Yes, but when that supply was gone, I changed to another brand.

YS: You didn't have to remove the brand tags?

SI: No, I didn't have to do anything.

YS: What did you change it to?

SI: It was "Miki." (At first, the name was "Condur." "Con" meant "with" and "dur" meant "durability." But we felt that that name was difficult for the people to remember. So it was changed to "Miki" because it was an easier name to remember.)

YS: Did you have any other problems during the war?

SI: No, not particular. (Pause) Let's see There wasn't anything more in particular.

YS: What was the percentage breakdown on what you made from T.H. material against what you sold that was made by other companies?

SI: Let's see

YS: Approximately.

SI: Probably about a 12 percent difference.

YS: What do you mean by "difference"?

SI: The raw material No, not the raw material, but the finished product With the raw material, it was at least 20 More than that, there was a difference of about 25 percent.

YS: The price of raw material?

SI: Yes, the raw material.

YS: T.H. was cheaper.

SI: Yes. 'Āhina pants and jackets, which were in regular use on the plantation, I manufactured, myself, and sold.

YS: So there were no garments manufactured elsewhere?

SI: Because of the price difference, I couldn't sell what was made by others. The merchandise was exactly the same thing. Because of that For example, a Honolulu company would take the fabric and sell it on Kauai, where it would be manufactured [into garments] and sold [the finished garment] on Molokai. I took my garments there directly. I don't know who made what profit where, but their wholesale price was thirty-six dollars, and my wholesale price was twenty-four dollars. So once I got there, they couldn't do business. (Laughs)

YS: Thirty-six dollars versus twenty-four dollars?

SI: My price was twenty-four dollars; their price was thirty-six dollars.

YS: So in your store, you only sold merchandise you made yourself.

SI: These 'āhina, and khaki, and canvas garments we all made by us.

YS: Because you bought the fabrics from T.H. and made everything you sold yourself, you were able to help keep the price down.

SI: That's right. Once you were involved with a local agent, the cost of the fabric would go up at least 20 to 25 percent.

YS: Did you supply the Paia Plantation Store [with garments]?

SI: (Laughs) At that time, [other companies] were strong, and they [Paia Store] bought from them. But after I had been in business for a while, around 1936--1935 or 1936--I went there and sold them six dozen pants. Soon after I delivered the merchandise, the buyer told me to come and take them back. When I asked him why, he said to take them back because the merchandise didn't sell. I thought that was strange because they sold well in my store. But I did go there to take them back. What had happened was that the manager who oversaw the sales people there had told them not to sell my goods because they cost less and would make the other goods in the store seem expensive.

YS: But the people at the plantation knew that your merchandise cost less?

SI: Yes, they all knew. So they came to buy mine. Over there they could charge, but I dealt only in cash. The ones who had the money came to buy from me, and those who didn't have had no choice but to charge, even if they had to pay a higher price. The [other] store let people charge their purchases. There were all kinds of rumors, some people not paying for six months, and others not paying for a year. (Laughs)

YS: You didn't let them charge at all?

SI: No, not one cent. I didn't even let Mrs. Baldwin charge.

YS: Mrs. who?

SI: Mrs. Baldwin of the Alexander and Baldwin. (Laughs) I didn't want to discriminate saying, "You can charge because you have money, or you can't because you don't have any." Once she came shopping for Japanese clothing.

YS: A kimono?

SI: Yes. She bought Japanese clothing which we sewed. After that, she came back again and said she'd like to buy some things here again, and [asked] if she could charge them. (Laughs) At that time, I had to tell her no.

YS: Did you have special sales or reduced prices from time to time?

SI: Yes, all throughout the year. (Laughs)

YS: Since your prices were low to begin with, how did you manage to still sell at special sale prices?

SI: If I figured in the cost of things, I could never do that. I never figured the cost. It was just to let people know and to advertise our name. It was totally reckless--absolutely crazy. (Laughs)

YS: Then you must have lost quite a lot of money at these sales.

SI: Depending on the item, [some were] below cost. Right after the war [World War II], 'āhina reversed material pants became popular-- called "inside-out." [It was first sold by another company.] It sold for, I think, \$4.75. Then I also started to make them. They [the other company] bought theirs from Honolulu, and I made mine here to become the competition. I sold mine for \$3.50. At that price, there was quite a price difference, so they started to lower their price a little--down to about \$4.25. Then I'd lower my price to \$3.25. They lower again to \$3.75, and I'd lower to \$2.75. (Laughs) Their price was over \$3.00--I knew well that in Honolulu they had to add 10 percent to the figured cost price. (Laughs) Then they kept on following me [in lowering the price] until I went down to \$2.75. At that time, they were selling for about \$3.50 or \$3.75, so they finally quit. Then since I needed to make a little profit, so (Laughs) Even at \$2.75, I still didn't take a loss; I just didn't make any profit.

YS: Your cost price was \$2.75?

SI: Cost price was usually \$2.75. Maybe I made about a 5 percent profit. I went about that far. They couldn't compete with me since there was at least a \$1.00 to \$1.25 difference. It didn't make any sense for them to cut below their cost. This wasn't something they were selling from before, but a new item. So in the time it took them to sell one dozen, I . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

SI: In the beginning when my wife first opened the store, we bought two dozen pants from a local manufacturer. These pants were \$18.50 per dozen. A competitor sold them for \$1.75 [each]. Since I bought for \$18.50, I couldn't sell for \$1.50--it came to about \$1.60. At \$1.60, even when adding on only 10 percent, it came to \$1.76. I thought this was kind of strange, so I went to another store which was the most popular store in Maui [to do some investigating]. I went there and asked the owner, "I just started a store and don't know much about buying stock, so can you please take some off my hands?"

He said, "Where are you?"

I told him I [SI's store] was in Paia next to Dr. Ohata.

He said, "There's no store there." (Laughs)

I told him, "Yes, there is one small store." I asked him, "Can you do that for me? I'll give you 5 percent commission."

Then he said, "What? Five percent commission? With only 5 percent commission, how do you expect me to pay the bookkeeper's expenses?" (Laughs)

Then I realized that at 5 percent, expenses of the bookkeeper couldn't even be covered, so he was allowing close to 10 percent for that. Then allowing his own profit of 10 percent, delivery was another 5 percent, so he had to add on more than 20 percent--around 25 percent, total. Compared to the [first store], it was about the same kind of store, so No, not exactly the same, the [first store] was a much better store. So, when I figured all this, I found that the price I paid [\$18.50] for my merchandise was not the real price. At the least, I was charged 20 percent more. Then deciding I shouldn't buy from there anymore--the days started to go by quickly, so in 1928 when I started checking around, I came across another manufacturer. I went there, and they gave me all the prices of each item. Their prices were about 20 percent less than what I had paid before, so I bought from them. I started to sell these items without any profit--well, it was not at a loss--just about 10 percent markup to cover my expenses. I started to gradually attract a lot of customers. It was then that the first manufacturer whom I bought from came to me and said, "We hear you sell lots of pants and jackets. Why don't you buy from us?"

I told him I'm now buying from somewhere else, so to please go sell to someone else. He said they could give me a good price, so I asked, "What kind of good price, \$18.50 per dozen?" (Laughs) Then he showed me the price list book--the truth came out--the prices were so low. Since their price was lower than the second manufacturer, I bought from them. And again, with very little profit, I sold these items. (Laughs)

I started to buy again from them. My prices were so low, I couldn't even pay the electricity. (Laughs) What had happened was, at that time they [the first manufacturer] had what was known as "plantation price" and "outside price." The "plantation price" was different because of the much lower percentage rate the banks charged for such transactions. The other stores began to complain, saying, "Ikeda, how can you do this? Your [retail] price is lower than our cost price." (Laughs) Then finally they [the other stores] gave up and gave their customers [lower prices] Every month, I studied and researched who paid what wholesale price and sold at what price. Then the prices suddenly began to come down a little--and I found out that others were paying the same cost as me. [The first manufacturer] had promised me "plantation price" and said they were depending on me, but now that

they were doing this, I decided to make my own merchandise. That's how I started to do my own manufacturing. (Laughs)

YS: That's when you started your factory? You didn't have a factory when you first opened your store?

SI: In 1932 I made a little profit, and so I started in 1933.

YS: The factory?

SI: Yes. (Pause) In business, if it's big, you have to figure so much percentage for this and that, but in a small business, it seems such figures were not necessary. Even though my store was getting better, when I first opened, I couldn't meet my budget--the money that was loaned out--so I endured hardships then. In 1929, it was a boom time for America.

YS: Then it crashed.

SI: Yes. Then it went like that. [SI makes downward motion.] At that time, it was a good thing because I didn't have much money. Had I had money, maybe I would have been overstocked and would have had to give people credit in order to move my inventory. But since not much money came in, and I pushed to the point of sometimes wondering if it was going to work out--some nights, I couldn't even sleep. (Laughs) The bank account was constantly overdrawn. Because I had to deal only in cash, my store was saved. The economy fell, and merchandise became scarce. But because it was scarce, it was a blessing that the merchandise which was available was lower in price, so it could be sold for less. If I had had money and had a big inventory, I would have felt that, for example, this item cost a certain amount, so it would have to be sold for that amount. Even when they [the manufacturers] came to sell [at the lower price], I think I would have had to refuse it and hold onto the things in stock--waiting to at least recover the original cost. [But] because I didn't have money, I didn't have much merchandise.

While I was having this problem, the prices fell, so I loaded my truck up to peddle these lowered cost items. The merchandise started to sell very well, and I began to make more profit than when I first started out. So unlike when I first started out, I made a little profit starting in 1931, and also in 1931. In 1932 I had \$5,000 left over--after (food and other expenses) and raising the children. (Laughs)

In 1932, when the salesman came to ask ten out of ten [store owners] how business was, they all said they were losing money. That year, no one was making money. They said whoever said he was making a profit was lying. (Laughs) But my store . . . In the morning, even before I opened, all the customers would be lined up in front of this little store. (Laughs)

YS: Because the prices were lower?

SI: Yes, and because I had sales. In the morning, I would quickly eat

something and open the store. The people would start to file in--I had no time to eat lunch or dinner. You know, it was just the two of us--my wife and I. One of us would take turns in running into the office for a few minutes to drink a soda and pick on some candy or cookies and run out again. (Laughs) We did this all the way until 10 or 11 [o'clock] at night. There were times when we sold \$500 worth of this low-priced merchandise.

YS: In a day?

SI: In one day. On those days, (laughs) everywhere I looked in the store, it seemed almost empty. Each item was such little price But this didn't last long. After payday [came, it was busy for] maybe two days. On the third day, it stopped because most people didn't have much money. Then for another month, I would have to endure seventy-five dollars or fifty dollars days in sales. It continued like that until payday came, at which time it was the same again. (Laughs)

YS: The factory started in 1932?

SI: It was 1933. Because I made a profit in 1932, I decided to give it a try. (Laughs)

YS: But how was it that you were able to keep your prices lower than anyone else?

SI: First of all, employees were about the same for all. But I could use my own strength with almost no limit. As I mentioned before, for almost ten years I never slept at night. (Laughs) I'd go to bed at 1 or 2 [o'clock] in the morning and get up again by 6:30 in the morning without fail. (Laughs) No [rest on] Sundays or New Year's Day. (Laughs) In other factories, there would be one person to cut from the patterns-- [cutting] so much in eight or ten hours. On top of them, there would be a luna to be in charge of things--I didn't need all that. Every morning, I had everything ready for sewing all lined up on the tables. Everything down to the buttons were ready and just needed to be sewn. I would have had to pay someone to put all this in order, but I did all that at night myself. (Laughs)

YS: What was the salary of the people who did the sewing?

SI: Once they learned to sew, it was \$1.00 or \$1.25 per day. That was only for a little while. In 1933 OPA [Office of Price Administration] regulations started. Then Uh, I don't remember very well Let's see It was a little less than government regulations, which was \$1.50 per eight hours. This was the government regulation. I paid probably 12 cents per hour. (Pause) No, it was more--about \$1.20 for eight hours.

YS: Can you tell us about the growth of Ikeda enterprise in chronological order from that time to today? You started in 1928, and in 1933 started

the factory--the history of your growth and prosperity.

SI: (Laughs) In 1927 my wife was working it by herself. Then in the middle of 1928, I also became involved. In 1929--(laughs) if I had the nerve, I might have declared bankruptcy--day after day we suffered overdrawn accounts in 1929. (Laughs) Then from 1930 we started to have fewer overdrawn checks.

Then in 1930, I stopped giving credit and changed to nearly all cash business, so it became a little easier. [SI told his charge customers to forget their balances and pay cash thereafter for all purchases.] Finally, in 1931, there was a little money left over [i.e., profit], so in 1932, I finally paid myself the last three to four year's salary. (Laughs)

Then in 1934, I suffered again over some 'āhina swimwear. As I mentioned before, I bought the wrong color. (Laughs) Then from about 1935 or 1936 up to the war, everything went smoothly.

During the war, I didn't even have to try hard to make a profit because things were so scarce. Everything that came in sold well. Even though the store looked empty, as soon as the merchandise came in, they would sell. So during the war, I saw little hardship and just sort of played around and enjoyed life. (Laughs) But it was a difficult period being citizens of the enemy nation. (Laughs) But we were able to continue our business as long as we didn't make any trouble--I continued without worry. At that time The war ended in 1945, right? At that time, the store was running smoothly. In 1949 my (oldest son graduated from the university) and came home. (My third son returned from the university in 1950.)

YS: Which school?

SI: University of Hawaii. (My first son) was in the army and was a little delayed [in coming home]--he was in school before coming home. He was the one who said to me, "Father, I hear the Maui Dry Goods location is for sale. Why don't you buy it." So I told him okay, and we bought it [i.e., the present site of Ikeda's]. We didn't build it [the building] from scratch.

YS: What year was that that you bought it?

SI: (Pause) It was in 1952.

YS: This store [Maui Dry Goods] was here when you bought it?

SI: I bought that one, and for a while this one [i.e., the old site] was turned into the factory.

YS: When did you move the factory to there [i.e., the present site]?

SI: (About 1960.) It was around (1960) we moved to there.

YS: At that time, how much did it cost to buy the Maui Dry Goods store?

SI: It cost \$27,000. On top of that, I spent about another \$4,000 to renovate. We changed all the store front show windows and fixed the inside and also the warehouse in the back. About \$31,000.

YS: When did you open your other branches in other parts of Maui?

SI: I was anxious to open another location, but there was no suitable place. Then this time, I heard that the Shibano Shōten in Wailuku was for sale. We opened that location 1964. [SI gets piece of paper.] After that we opened in Lahaina on February 2, 1965. Then the Maui Mall [branch] opened on November 24, 1972. Kaahumanu [Center branch] opened August 10, 1973. After that It was probably (1968 or 1969) when we enlarged the factory.

YS: It was a tremendous expansion all in such a short time. (SI laughs.) How have the customer buying habits or preferences changed since the 1930s as you see it?

SI: Back then, even the large stores For instance, even if a store was in Kahului, they went to Haiku to take orders and make deliveries. Also, things were sold on credit. Nowadays customers look at newspaper ads and if they feel something is a good buy, they come from Haiku or Makawao or Wailuku to shop where they want to. There are no such stores left [which operate on a credit basis]. Up until two or three years ago, there were stores that went to take orders and delivered the goods, and since it was on a credit basis, waited a whole month to collect their money. There were two or three stores like that up until about two or three years ago.

YS: The influence of the automobile had a great impact?

SI: That's right. The number of automobiles that pass by here [Lower Paia] has increased by tens of times--not just five or ten times. From Lower Paia, people used to walk down to shop, but now hardly anyone walks. (Laughs)

YS: As you think back to your success and expansion--looking back, you must have many thoughts--what are your thoughts about your past?

SI: Let's see (Laughs) My biggest mistake was to start the business without enough preparation. This was the start of all my difficulties. (Laughs) In starting a business, there must be sufficient preparation. For example, to learn about wholesale buying and stocking of merchandise, one must have some experience even if that meant working for free to get it. Knowing what kind of percentage to mark up, how to handle customers, what to do when a piece of merchandise is returned--when the other person says it's damaged or whatever, and returns it--how to deal with such situations. I think these experiences are necessary.

YS: Listening to you, it seems whenever you were faced with a problem, you

studied it, and coped with it perfectly, and pressed on. (SI laughs.)
When you first started your store in (1927), did you dream that
someday it would be as it is today?

SI: (Laughs) No, I didn't. I just wanted to send my children to school
and not have to worry about making a [modest] living.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 7-23-3-80 TR; SIDE ONE

YS: When you first made the decision to start and decided that this was
going to be the beginning of your work, what was your first goal?

SI: Whatever I started I wanted to achieve something, no matter how
seemingly small. So since in the beginning, I didn't know anything--
I didn't know if [selling by] charge was okay or if cash was better,
or what merchandise to sell--I didn't know at all. I figured I would
experience much hardship, and if I was to die, my wife and children
would suffer. So I decided I needed to buy insurance--even with all
the [financial] difficulties, I bought a \$3,000 insurance policy. I
asked if there wasn't a better way since with only \$3,000, they [the
family] would be in trouble in just a short time. I was told that
with only an additional one of two dollars more--if I died as a result
of an accident--the payment would be doubled. So I paid the extra and
got that. Then I worked as much as possible. (Laughs)

YS: I think you have answered much of this already, but in looking back,
were there things you would have done differently?

SI: Of course, there are. Before the war started, I wanted to buy 1-1/4
acres near the Union Station [in Lower Paia] which had a building and
rented for \$250. I asked if they would sell it to me for \$20,000,
but they wanted \$25,000, so I decided not to buy it. Right after
that, the war broke out--a man from Wailuku came and said that he'd
heard that I wanted to buy some property and offered to sell it for
\$20,000. I consulted my wife--I was checked up on from time to time.
(Laughs) The checking up wasn't particularly--but they asked if I'd
ever been to Japan and what I've done here and there. At night they'd
peek into my windows through the space between the blinds with a flash-
light and through the screen door like this. (SI gestures.) I didn't
have a very good feeling about it, so when I consulted my wife, she
said we didn't need to buy the property now nor try to make any money.
When I had decided [to take her advice], this man came back, after two
or three days, and offered to sell for \$18,000. It was so cheap, I
wanted to buy, but she put up a fuss. (Laughs) But because of the
times, I didn't know what the future would hold, so I left it at that
and didn't buy. If I had bought that, maybe I would have become involved
in property. If I had done that, things would not be as they are today.
(Laughs) I may have become . . .

YS: In the property line [of business]?

SI: Yes, I may have become that. Even now I don't have any, when I buy, I sell again when the time is right. But they always become available. In Honolulu when the Wilson Tunnel reached the ocean--at that time while reading the newspaper articles describing various places for ten cents or fifteen cents per square foot, I would think they were excellent chances to make money. At that time, my wife was ill, so I had to go back and forth to the hospital and care for her constantly. So I finally gave up the idea and attributed it to my bad luck. It was my bad luck to not be able to buy then. (Laughs) If I had, nowadays I (Laughs)

YS: Now that you have become successful and enjoy a time of more leisure--looking back again over all the things you have done--what shall I say, success

SI: No. (Laughs) I'm not a success. (Laughs) I feel very fortunate that my children have completed their education and didn't turn out to be bad boys. (Laughs) Financially, I'm not a success. (Laughs)

YS: Do you have any future plans or projects? Things you want to do from now?

SI: From now on?

YS: Business that you might want to expand.

SI: I think there's opportunity still available in Wailea. But now, my wife needs constant care, so I don't have the drive to push on. That's about it, because if I expanded to the other islands, there's some complications with the wholesale which could become a negative aspect. (Laughs)

YS: Any last words?

SI: It would be a postscript, so I can't find the energy. (Laughs)

END OF INTERVIEW

**STORES and
STOREKEEPERS of
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Volume I

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**Ethnic Studies Program
University of Hawaii, Manoa**

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