

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Kikuji Ujiie, 83, retired medicine peddler

*"We stuffed a bag with our medicines and left it at each family[home]. After they used some, they paid for whatever amount they used. If they didn't use [a certain medicine], they didn't have to pay for it. That's how it went in our business.."*

Kikuji Ujiie, Japanese, was born February 12, 1897, in Habutai, Fukushima Prefecture, Japan. His parents were farmers. When Ujiie was very young, his father died, leaving his mother and the children to farm the fields.

In 1913, Ujiie immigrated to Hawaii to join his older brother, who worked at Paia Plantation. He labored in the cane fields until 1920, when he became a teacher at Paia Japanese Language School.

Ujiie in 1922 became an office boy in the Paia Plantation office.

Between 1927 and 1941, Ujiie was a peddler of Japanese medicines for Hawaii Taiyōdō. With three other peddlers, Ujiie canvassed Japanese homes on Oahu, Kauai, Maui and Hawaii.

At the outbreak of World War II, Ujiie's peddling stopped because officials disallowed the handling of medicines by people other than doctors. After the war, Ujiie was a tour guide, escorting groups to Japan.

Now retired, Ujiie is an active member of Maui Issei Congregational Church.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Kikuji Ujiie (KU)

October 4, 1979

Spreckelsville, Maui

BY: Haruo Yamamoto (HY) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

[NOTE: Interview conducted in Japanese. Translation by JoAnn Hamayasu.]

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Kikuji Ujiie. Today is October 4, 1979, and we're at the Reverend Haruo Yamamoto's home in Spreckelsville, Maui.

HY: Your name is Kikuji Ujiie, right?

KU: Yes.

HY: And where were you born?

KU: Fukushima Prefecture [Japan].

HY: When?

KU: Eighteen ninety-seven [1897], February 12.

HY: Your mother and father--what are their names and what were they doing?

KU: Gisaku is my father's name. My mother was Nao. They were farmers. My ancestors were farmers for many generations. I was about three years old [when my father died] and I don't remember him at all when he was alive.

HY: So he died young?

KU: Well, he always used to work very hard--too hard, in fact. He had a kidney ailment, and he went to the doctor. I remember he would throw away on his way home the medicine that the doctor gave him. He was very stubborn. He suddenly fell ill while he was at work, was carried to the hospital, and then passed away, never recovering. But I understand he suffered from his illness for a very long time. So I didn't have any recollections of my father. My brother, being three years younger than me, doesn't remember him at all either.

HY: Your father--what was he doing?

KU: Where we came from, called Habutai, it was very cold, so in order to feed our silkworms we grew mulberry trees. The crops that we needed for our family to eat, such as rice and wheat, we grew only what we needed. The land was large enough just for that.

HY: What did your mother do?

KU: My mother had to take care of seven children, but she had to do a lot of farm work on top of the housework, too.

HY: When you came here were there a lot of people from Fukushima in Paia?

KU: When my brother came here [Paia], there was no one from my hometown, the Habutai Mountains. There were a lot of people from Shinobu, which is in the western part of Fukushima. But in my case, my older brother learned about Hawaii in the newspaper, and since his youth, ever since his mother told him that he must take on the family business, he started thinking that he can never be successful where he lived.

Lands everywhere were being put on collateral, unemployment was increasing; everyone had only survival in their minds. Our next-door neighbor was a successful farmer--a very rich one for four generations--so my father had borrowed money from them by putting our farm on collateral. Since we children were the only ones left to take care of the farm, my elder brother was very worried as to how we would ever repay the debt that we inherited after my father's death . . .

HY: How old was your brother?

KU: He was ten years older than me. Being the eldest, he felt a great responsibility but knew he could never pay back the debt even if he worked all his life. So, he decided to head for Hawaii.

HY: Wasn't that about the time that many people from Fukushima came here?

KU: Yes, I would think so--same as the rest of the people that came here.

HY: Did you help on your father's silkworm farm?

KU: No matter how young we were, we always were given something to do to help around the house. We were never allowed to play. Even when we reached school age, as soon as we came home from school, we were made to do chores which children could do. So all children, whether of rich or poor families, always helped because we were taught to be ashamed of playing.

HY: What kind of work did children do?

KU: First of all, children--as soon as they were toilet-trained, even in wintertime--would, first thing in the morning, sweep the snow off the road to school. And then, we got ready to go to school. In every family, it was like this . . .

HY: How about in the summer?

KU: There are many things to do on a farm. For example, at harvest time, children must pick up the loose pieces of crop that fall as they are hauled to the barn. We swept the yard. In the evening, we had kerosene lamps in those days, so we had to put the kerosene in the lamps around the house and prepared the house so the adults can start cooking right away.

Those are times when we wanted to play the most, but every household would be calling the children in. There were always chores for children. When the time comes to gather the silk from the cocoons, the children had to pick the mulberry leaves.

HY: How old were you?

KU: From the beginning. I was too young to even remember my father, so even before I was old enough to go to school--before I was old enough for kindergarten--I followed my older brother and cleaned the yard. They made small brooms just for children.

HY: So, at home, did they ever pay the children for their work?

KU: Never. Not even in rich families. At O-bon, though, or on New Year's Day, we did get a small amount of money. In every family it was commonly understood and it was the rule that children help the family in their own capacities.

HY: What else did you do in your childhood?

KU: For elementary school I went to a temple which was right next to our farm. My secondary school was at Kawamata City, which was far away. Children from Habutai Mountains and Rokkasan went there, also. The elementary schools in those days were not six years. We had only four years of elementary schooling and four years of secondary schooling. Secondary school was equal to our present-day junior high.

HY: When you came here, what was your first impression? Where did you first land?

KU: In Paia Camp. There was another camp called Kaheka Camp which is no longer in existence today.

HY: Where did you land? Did you land in Honolulu first?

KU: Yes, I arrived in Honolulu first, on S.S. Mongolia.

HY: How old were you?

KU: Sixteen years old [1913].

HY: When you left home, did you cry?

KU: No, I had lots of dreams. My brother had sent me some pictures of himself and he was always wearing nice clothing. His pictures never showed him in work clothes, so I thought what a wonderful place it must be. I thought Hawaii was a wonderful place.

HY: How many years before you did your brother come to Hawaii?

KU: Eight years before me. My brother worked mostly on hoeing. When I came, he was already a ditch man, teaching others. Using the hoe here is different from the way it's used in Japan. In any kind of work, people had to be taught how to use American tools. Even people with farming experiences had to be taught. My brother was very good with his hands and was teaching . . .

HY: You must have come here with a big dream. What were your first impressions when you arrived in Honolulu?

KU: When I first arrived, I didn't know anything. I had no idea yet. I arrived one day before the Fourth of July. All offices are closed on the Fourth of July, see--the day after I arrived--so I had to sleep overnight at the immigration office because on the Fourth of July, it was closed. I couldn't see the Fourth of July festivities. On July fifth, I was released from the immigration office and walked in Honolulu city for the first time.

HY: At that time in Honolulu, did they have buses, streetcars?

KU: No bus, but they had many horse-drawn wagons. It was 1913. Only a few automobiles were running in Honolulu. In Maui only rich, baldheaded haoles had cars, and among Japanese, only one man named Kuwabara owned a car. He was a camp boss. Mr. Kuwabara's adopted son came to Hawaii on the same ship that I came on. I didn't know that. The car came to pick him [the son] up, so I caught a ride with him.

My brother said to me, "I haven't even ridden in a car yet, and here you are, just fresh from Japan, and you've already been in one." Camp boss is something like . . .

HY: Like a supervisor?

KU: Well, someone who was a leader or a head of the camp, you see.

HY: So he was the top-ranking man among the Japanese?

KU: That's right. The adopted son came on the same boat with me.

HY: When you came to Hawaii, you came with many dreams. When you went to Maui and saw the overall conditions and situations in Maui, how was it? Were you disappointed, honestly disappointed, or did you think it was a wonderful place?

KU: I thought it was completely different from what I had thought when I was still in Japan, but I was not discouraged. I looked around and saw everyone working hard in good health.

Before that, my brother had sent [to Japan]--twice--money amounting to more than \$1,000 each time. Thousand dollars, in those days in 1913, were not like what they are worth today. The Japanese people were really impressed to see that kind of money. So, I was never discouraged.

What I had thought--when I was a youth--was that in any event, as long as I worked hard, I can get money. Depending on the type of work--some work required working even on Sundays--as long as one worked so many hours a day, the rest of the time was left free to do anything one liked. This orderly system of daily life, I thought, was different from the one in Japan. Even though I was still a youth, this is what I first noticed.

I didn't have any experience before in farming, and physically, I was weaker and smaller than average, so I was just about able to keep up with the healthy women. I was just [barely] about able to use the women's hoe. I was unable to use the men's tools, so I worked using the women's tools.

At first, my boss said, "You're quite small. Aren't you lying about your age--aren't you only twelve, thirteen years old?" He wouldn't believe me that I was really sixteen years old. Then he said he'll watch me work and judge me on my performance. So, he came and kept an eye on me every day from morning, all day. That sure was hard on me. I couldn't even rest. Some people stood up to rest, but I never stopped.

I said to myself, "I'll do it. I'll work until I fall." And I kept working. Worse yet, he said he couldn't give me a bangō. At any rate, he said he'll have to see how much work I can do first. So, he came every day and watched me work from morning. But I wasn't discouraged.

For about ten days he watched me, and nothing was said. He watched only me among all the workers. Then my brother came, so he told my brother something. I didn't understand Hawaiian nor English at that time, so I didn't understand what was being said. Then my brother told me that he said, "You boy small, but too much hana-hana. so I give number." I was so happy!

Next I was given a contract to work on a section of field--called kompany--to grow cane. It takes eighteen months for the sugar cane to finish one cycle from planting to harvesting. It doesn't take a full two years, but it takes over 1-1/2 years. I contracted a section, growing cane for three cycles, so it took about six years, total.

I concentrated just on the cane because, in those days, working in the cane industry was the fastest way to get money. Even though I was only a youth, I was always haunted by the debt back in Japan which had to be repaid. I had always believed that the debt had to be paid back, no matter what. This is what I always had in my mind.

My brother folks sometimes took time off from work when they saved some money, but as for me, I never stopped working for a single day. We didn't have any chance to go to church in those days. I used to go to bed while it was still very early in the evening, as soon as work was over for the day, because I was so tired. I only had the payment of the debt in my mind.

Nobody ever took Sundays off from work. Only on New Year's Day and on the Emperor's birthday, I didn't work. I worked even on my own birthday. Those two days were the only days out of the whole year on which I didn't work. I was paid at the end of each harvest \$300. Three hundred dollars was big money in those days.

HY: Were you paid extra for working exceptionally hard, or were there any situations when you were given more money because of, for example, working a little harder?

KU: No, I was paid only for the extra number of days I worked. If I worked a few more days, I was paid for that many number of days. But no special increase of any kind . . . . The more days you worked, the more pay you got because you worked that many more days.

After harvest was over and when you go into town, some people would get only \$200; others got \$250; others got \$300 or even \$350. People who worked without taking any days off got paid more. Also, the pay did depend on how much tonnage [of cane is harvested].

For example, a certain number of acres of land is assigned a number of workers. The bigger the land, the more workers were assigned. If ten men worked on an area, before harvest time is over, some of them may work 350 days, and some others 280 days because some people do take days off to rest. So, the more days you worked, the more pay you got.

HY: Okay, that I understood. Then also, for example, does the amount of sugar produced make a difference in pay--whether or not a large amount was produced?

- KU: Yes, it is different. The amount of sugar produced is measured in tonnage in weight.
- HY: About the weight of the sugar . . . . Are you paid for the number of days you worked, plus tonnage?
- KU: Yes, after the harvest is over, a certain amount of cane is produced in so many tons. At that time, they don't measure how much sugar is produced from that amount of cane. They pay by how many tons or the weight of the cane. According to that, it's determined whether or not there was a lot of money.
- HY: In your case, were you paid more than that \$300?
- KU: Yes. So, the more days you worked, the more pay you got. The less days you worked, the less you got paid.
- HY: If the yield in tonnage was greater than what was stated in the contract, then what?
- KU: The greater the tonnage, the more the workers will . . .
- HY: Who gets the money?
- KU: The worker gets it. The worker signs at the plantation office, and the money is divided according to the number of days, and they pay it to the worker. The old, so-called kompang in my days worked in that system.
- HY: At any rate, then, the \$300 that you, Mr. Ujiie, said you got means that you were paid that much for eighteen months' work, right? And at that time, that amounted to a lot of money.
- KU: Right. The personal expense of one person in those days for twenty-six days--but, of course, we worked thirty or thirty-one days every month--one person's expense for twenty-six days was about seventeen dollars. That was the same every month, whether or not we had a good cane harvest. Even if the crop was bad and the company was losing money, the monthly living expense for one person was seventeen dollars. At least seventeen dollars were given to us every month. Without that, we couldn't live, you see.
- Seventeen dollars in those days . . . . Well, today, you can't even call it an adequate allowance. But, out of that, we put some money in a hui and lived a risky, day-to-day life. Of course, this seventeen dollars was taken out of [i.e., deducted from] the money given us after the cane harvest. It is not the plantation that pays, but the contractor that pays us after the harvest.
- HY: In those days, what kinds of houses were there?
- KU: Barracks. It was like a long, multiple housing. Married couples,

though, were given a small, separate structure. But the unmarried ones were housed in many long, barrackslike dwellings.

HY: Then all the single men . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

HY: When you came here, your mother was already here with your older brother?

KU: No, that's not so. My older brother came here first, alone. As a law [i.e., the Gentlemen's Agreement], brothers and sisters were not allowed to call over each other [to Hawaii], but a parent was allowed to call the child, and a person was allowed to call his or her parent to come over. So, first, since we didn't have a father, [my brother] called my mother over. One had to stay [in Hawaii] over six months in order for even the mother to call [the next relative].

HY: Then, first, your elder brother came; then he called the mother over; then--since she had to stay over one year [six months]--then she called you, is that right? The brother of a person can't be called?

KU: No, he can't. In my case, I was called after my mother stayed here for one year.

HY: I see. Then when you came here, Mr. Ujiie, your brother and your mother were living together?

KU: Yes.

HY: In a small house?

KU: In one part of the barracks, they gave married couples a slightly larger room. Also, a separate kitchen was provided for married couples. So, they [KU's mother and brother] were given roomier quarters.

But with three people, it became crowded, so my mother and I moved to another place--an old, single-unit structure just a short distance away. Since it wasn't very far, my brother and I joined at mealtime, and we ate together.

HY: But when compared to a Japanese home, it was quite a difference, right?

KU: Yes, oh, yes. The Japanese here were living in a doghouse. The Japanese who came to Hawaii literally lived in doghouses. We used

to talk in Japan of what we heard about Americans making fun of the Japanese here who lived in houses that were like doghouses, you see. I remembered about it then and thought to myself that it is really true. You can't blame them for making jokes out of those houses because they were really small. (Laughs)

In those days, there was a place or a house where they made box lunches for unmarried people. The unmarried people paid a certain amount of money to that person every month to have their meals cooked. There were also quite a few unmarried people who did do their own cooking.

HY: Then, those houses, in those days, were really like doghouses . . .

KU: Well, yes . . . . On the floor we had goza mats. The Japanese tatami were . . .

HY: Did you have beds?

KU: There were maybe one or two persons using beds in Paia . . .

HY: No, the house that you were living in--did that have a bed? What do they have?

KU: Nothing.

HY: What did you sleep on?

KU: Goza mats. On the goza we put a blanket and the Japanese futon. Some of the people were sleeping with just a thin blanket on top of the goza. When I think about those days, I can't believe how lucky we are today. What today's children who are born here have today . . . (Laughs)

HY: Next, then, after going through the hardships and after you've grown a little older, you wanted to go to school, right?

KU: Yes. What troubled me the most was the fact that from the time I was very young, our family had a debt to pay. I've watched my mother go through real hardships. I am truly grateful to my mother who worked so hard. Last year, I went to visit my mother's grave because I never knew when it may be the last time for me to be able to go. And I talked to everyone: my mother truly deserved honor; how she worked so hard for us.

When I was just a kid, I remember her wiping her tears away in hard times, trying not to let us see her crying. I clearly remember the hardships she went through from the time I was very young. So, she really worked very hard after father died, and she took care of her seven children.

In those days, there wasn't a single soul who knew anything about

Hawaii--not a single person among the people whom we used to know [in Japan]. So when my mother worked hard to finally send her eldest son abroad to Hawaii, everyone told her what a stupid thing she was doing and talked very bad about her. They said that just when the son has finally reached an age where he's become useful and someone whom she can count on, she was sending him to Hawaii--a place which no one knows anything about. They said she was really stupid because she wouldn't know what would happen after he's gone.

So, mother asked my brother, "Do you know what you're doing?"

My brother said, "Mother, how, do you think, can we ever pay our debt by working the rest of our lives in Japan? We can do it only in Hawaii, so please let me go to Hawaii."

My brother was serious. So Mother cried, feeling trapped between the opinions of her relatives and her son. I was only a first or second grader when this happened, but still, I was able to understand the misery my mother was experiencing.

When I visited her grave, I told my relatives of how hard mother worked for all of us. We are here today thanks to the sole efforts of mother. Father was a great man, too, with his efforts in the mulberry farm, but if mother hadn't worked that hard for us at that time, I don't know where we'd be today. I'm able to visit mother's grave; I'm able to build a new (tape garbled), all because of mother. Everyone listened to me and cried.

HY: Your mother, brother, and you were all living in the same house, right?

KU: Right. On the plantation, they assigned us to a different house--my mother, myself, and our neighboring friends . . . . My eldest brother was by himself . . .

HY: Oh, you mean all the children came? Or is it . . .

KU: No, my younger brother and my older brother right above me. My older brother right above me got permission at the same time, but we had to go through physical inspections. They said something about us having or not having worms. They said we picked it up at the inn where we stayed. So, everyone came separately. We came together up to Yokohama, but when boarding the boat . . .

HY: Oh, I see. Was it the same boat?

KU: My younger brother came first because he was the first to pass. Since he was too young to work, he was sent to school immediately--to Paia School.

HY: How old was he?

KU: He was three years younger than me, so thirteen years old.

HY: Thirteen years old, and he came by himself?

KU: Yes, by himself, but once on the boat, everyone is together, so there was nothing to worry about. I caught the following boat. Next came the second brother who was nineteen years old. My eldest brother was hoping my second brother would come first because he can then start working right away since he was already doing farm work in Japan. My eldest brother didn't have any plans for my younger brother and me, but we came first, and then the brother that he was waiting for the most came last. And so, the three of us reached safely.

HY: Did about half [of the people] pass the inspection?

KU: At first, only about one-third . . . . In the same boat, the majority came from Hiroshima, and also, a lot of people from Okinawa were on, too.

HY: Now we must proceed a little further. You worked on the plantation, and then, in 1922, you became an office boy or something, didn't you?

KU: Yes--not so fast. Anyway, when the work on the three kompang on the plantation was finished, the money was used to pay off the debt in Japan, and we finally became free. Until then, I never could say I wanted to go to school. My younger brother was too young to work, so he was already attending Paia School. But I was sixteen years old, so although I was physically small, I had reached the minimum age, so I had to work. It was hard work every day, so I couldn't even go to night school. Then, after finishing the plantation work in 1919 [at age 22], I climbed Mt. Haleakala on foot with everyone because our contract was over. After that, I went to Lahaina, so it was 1919.

I went to Lahaina, and I was so excited that I hardly slept. Before that, I had already been ill, actually. Since I overworked myself, I think it must have been just a nervous breakdown because even after two weeks, I hadn't been able to sleep. I couldn't sleep day or night.

HY: You mean at the dormitory?

KU: Yes, at the dormitory. My schoolwork was pretty good. I was always scoring 99 or 100, but I started to lose weight, and my health started to fail. I went to see a doctor, and then I was advised not to read any books. I couldn't hold my food down. Then I was told to quit school and even to stop reading newspapers for a while. I didn't know what was wrong with me, and I became very discouraged. I had finally finished my work and thought I could finally start my schooling, but now there was nothing for me.

HY: You went to Lahaina and became ill, and in five months . . .

KU: Yes, five months after I went to Lahaina [to attend Lahainaluna School]. The first five months went fine, but in the fifth month, my health went into that condition, and I couldn't fall asleep, day or night, no matter what I did. I even went to a cold place at midnight and used cold water on myself, but still I couldn't fall asleep. All I did was panic.

I went to the doctor and he said I was at a critical point toward getting better, so he said don't study, don't read books or newspapers. He said to go home for a while and take a rest. I was really, really discouraged.

I was not a Christian at that time. I just thought that the church was a good place. But I was told that I shouldn't go into religion either. I was told that I should . . .

HY: Why did you stop working? Can you go over . . .

KU: The debt was finally taken care of in Japan, you see.

HY: Is it the kompang?

KU: The kompang was over. The third kompang was finally over and so the debt in Japan was paid off.

HY: I see, I see. How much was that?

KU: I didn't pay the debt all by myself. The whole family worked to pay it off. At that time, we paid in several installments, but . . .

HY: How much did you, yourself, have to pay?

KU: One kompang [gang] had eleven to twelve [people]. At the most, eighteen at times. When I joined the Watanabe kompang, it had a lot of people. Always, I was small physically, but I was healthy. I never became sick enough to take off from work. I worked without taking any day off, and I always had the most number of days on work. So, at any harvest, I always had the best pay.

HY: About how much did you get?

KU: The most was about \$380. Then, there were times when I had about \$200 or so. When it goes over \$200 . . .

HY: Isn't that for eighteen months?

KU: Yes, that's after the kompang is completed, not the monthly pay. For each month, it was seventeen dollars for twenty-six days per month. That was the same for everyone since everyone lived on their own. So, the amount received after the kompang was over

could be put entirely into savings. But for us, all of us brothers just put our money together to, first of all, send to Japan. Even my younger brother did it too, because he also eventually started working. After the debt was paid off, we became free to do anything, so we were finally able to go to school.

I'm not the eldest, you see, so I didn't have to be in Japan to take over the family business. I'm in a position where I have to be independent and make my own living. So, in order to live in Hawaii for many years, I knew that English will have to come first.

HY: At that time, what was your elder brother doing?

KU: He was working on the plantation. We gave our house in Japan to our relatives--our nephews and nieces there--after we cleared the debt. We let them be free to . . . . It'll be a shame to make them take over the debt, so our property in Japan was taken care of in Japan, and the things here were taken care by ourselves. My elder brother's children were born and raised here, so instead of going back to Japan, he thought it was better to make a living here.

HY: At that time, did all the Japanese go to Lahaina, or how was it?

KU: No, not everyone went. Maybe one or---oh, Mr. Kinoshita who worked for the Japanese Chamber [of Commerce] or somewhere in Kahului went to Lahaina [to attend Lahainaluna School]. We had heard about him. He was our senior. So, at about the same time, Kurisu, Omuro, Yamamoto, Kato, about seven of us. Oh, and also the man who is now in Honolulu . . . . Not Asato, but . . .

HY: Chinen?

KU: Chinen! They were all my colleagues--Kurisu, Omuro, in the same year . . .

HY: And so there weren't too many people, then?

KU: No. The reason why we went is that, at that time, a group of young haoles--I think they were ministers--were starting a movement for education. They hinted about going to Lahaina.

HY: Were they missionaries?

KU: Yes, missionaries.

HY: Missionaries from Japan?

KU: No, no. They were local. When we were working on the plantation, the Paia Japanese Church had night classes. While I was attending night school, they came to class and talked about it. I think it was before the new church was built.

After I returned, at first for a while, when the Reverend Nagamori

was at Waiolani Church, he sent his family back to Japan because he had planned to go to the U.S. to study. However, just at that time in Maui--Paia and Wailuku didn't have any ministers at their churches. Plans were being made to bring in ministers from Japan, we were told. So, just until they arrived, the Reverend Nagamori was told to go to Maui to help and to postpone his plans on going to the U.S. So, my teacher, the Reverend Nagamori, couldn't refuse, and he came to Paia. Then, after he came here, he said that since he was already here, he couldn't face God unless he stayed not only for six months, but until he was able to build something that's worth calling it a church, and made up his mind to stay and teach us.

It was the Reverend Nagamori from whom we first learned what the teachings of Christianity were all about. He really gave his whole self into teaching us, even getting up in the middle of the night to pray and teach me. I was really grateful for his ardent enthusiasm and concern for me. I've been repeating this too many times to so many people, so I don't think they would want me to say more, but thanks to the Reverend, I was able to get into religion. So, in Lahaina, I was not very successful, but for the most important thing . . . .

HY: When did you get married, by the way? Was it around that time?

KU: Oh, no . . . . [KU was married in 1930, at the age of thirty-three.]

HY: How old were you at that time when you went to school? Weren't you 20-something? At least twenty-four or twenty-five?

KU: [KU was twenty-two when he first started attending school.] I came back and I was so discouraged. The Reverend Nagamori didn't know about it at first, but I think he talked to my younger brother who started going to school. The Reverend Nagamori was alone too, and so he said, "Ujiie-san, I'm also alone. Come over to my house." It was quiet and a good place to take a rest, he said, and told me to stay over and recuperate. Since he's been looking after me all this time, I thought I'd pay a visit at his house and we talked.

He was at Waiolani for a long time and had been through many hardships taking care of his ten children. The people of Waiolani also were saying that he really worked hard. His monthly salary from his congregation was too little, so he also worked at the post office. His family was in Japan. His father was a graduate of Keio University. So, the Reverend had asked his father about studying in the U.S. and he was very excited about it when he had to stop in Paia. But because of this stopover and because of us, he had to cancel his plans. But he never mentioned about having any regrets. He just taught us very hard. I really admired him. I never met such a kind person as he. His dedication to us was incredible.

That's how we gradually learned how wonderful the Christian teachings

were. In the meantime, he taught us that school is not the end of the road to success--it continues until death. He said as long as we are still on this earth, until we die, we must work at whatever we can do. Even if we couldn't go to school, there was still a lot of work. So, he said don't get discouraged, and he told me to just concentrate on improving my health and said he would pray for me. He told me to also pray that I'll get well.

HY: Did he talk about the [Japanese] medicines?

KU: No, medicine came long afterwards.

HY: You worked for a fruit company or somewhere, didn't you? Was that long afterwards?

KU: At Haiku Fruit [and Packing Company]. After I got well at the Reverend Nagamori's place, I worked at Haiku Fruit [and Packing Company] during the summer fruit season. Every summer, many people came from the University of Hawaii [to work], too. After I went to Haiku, we had all gathered in a little dormitory. I met Mr. [Bunzaemon] Aida there, and Mr. [Tetsunosuke] Hata was still working at Hana at that time, so I met him a little later.

While I was at Haiku, during the summer, not only students, but many young people gathered at Haiku Fruit [and Packing Company]. After the season is over, some of the youths always caused troubles. Because of that, we asked the Reverend Nagamori to hold meetings there. After the season was over at Haiku Fruit [and Packing Company], even for those who had no work and who were just loafing around, there was work at least three times a week. It was during those times when people caused troubles, so we thought that's where our meeting was needed. So, I met at least once a week at the dormitory to study the Bible. Then the number of youths increased quite a bit, and we all went regularly to Paia Church, on foot, crossing the Maliko Bridge. It was after those times when those people started to come.

HY: Did you go [to church] every week?

KU: Yes, at that time, yes. At first, even the church didn't have any car. It took a little less than thirty minutes walking briskly. I was not twenty-four yet, maybe twenty-one years old. Nineteen twenty-one [1921] to 1922, I think. [KU was about twenty-three in 1921.]

I worked as a double-seamer man on a packing machine. After the pineapple is packed inside the can, I put the covers on, and so was called double-seamer man.

There were many dormitories, although they've been torn down since then. I stayed in one of them. That time I was paid, oh, I don't remember, but the pay at the pineapple factory was better than at

the [sugar] plantation.

HY: Oh, you don't remember exactly how much?

KU: On the [sugar] plantation, for day work, if they didn't have a contract, for twenty-six days it was about twenty dollars on the average.

HY: For one month, twenty dollars?

KU: Yes, it was a low-paying work. For the cane field kompang, they paid seventeen dollars for living expense, not as a salary, and this was for your daily . . .

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 7-2-1-79; SIDE ONE

HY: Okay, you first worked on the pineapple, right? How much were you paid, do you remember?

KU: At that time, it was . . . . If we worked on a lot of contracts, it was fifty, sixty dollars [a month].

HY: Oh, you got fifty to sixty dollars. Then that was quite big . . .

KU: Yes, so it was more than enough to save for the tuition at the UH [University of Hawaii]. Tuition was inexpensive.

The cannery was open only during the summer. There wasn't any work the rest of the time. After returning to Paia [in 1922], I worked as an office boy on the Paia Plantation because they were looking for a Christian office boy. It was common knowledge that a Christian was morally straight.

Actually, I wanted to go to Honolulu right away. My health was getting much better after staying at Haiku. So I thought, at that rate, maybe I can go to Honolulu and find what I really wanted to do. But since the plantation was looking for a Christian office boy, the Reverend Nagamori would ask me every time I saw him to work on it for a little while, at least until my replacement could be found. So, I worked there for about a year.

There were many young haole office workers who came here from the Mainland, and Mr. Baldwin's daughter was very pretty, [so they would write letters to her.] She would come to get the mail in a cute little car, which were very scarce in those days. She would call me and tell me to ride with her to the post office. She didn't like to send or get the mail herself. So, she made me do it. Harry Baldwin, and daughter's name was . . .

HY: Harry Baldwin? He was number one?

KU: She was their only daughter. I didn't do any kind of work that required heavy responsibilities. When payday came, it was always busy, so my knowledge in using the abacus came very handy. I was faster than the adding machine.

HY: Then, for example, while you were working there, there must have been stores for the plantation. When the plantation workers went to the stores to buy things, did you deduct from the salary?

KU: Yes, we had that.

HY: Did you do that kind of thing? Did you help with that kind of work?

KU: No, I didn't take any responsibilities in that area because I didn't plan to stay on that long. There was someone who was already handling that type of work.

HY: Oh, I see. When you were in Paia, to what sort of stores did you go for your shopping?

KU: Right next to the office was the Paia Store, the biggest store in Maui. No other stores were . . .

HY: Plantation store. Where was it?

KU: Right above the office. There's a home now. It was right in front. The home was behind the store.

HY: Oh, there's nothing now.

KU: No, there's nothing left now. It was right at the roadside, below the rail shack, all the way to the office. It was a big store. It was a big store, but there were no other stores like it in Maui for the Paia people. It carried all sorts of things.

HY: You didn't have to go and buy, did you?

KU: When you're on a plantation, almost all . . . . And then, the store purchased in bulk, so no other store could compete. It wasn't as conveniently organized as today's big supermarkets, but as far as the size was concerned, it was very big.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 7-25-2-80 TR

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Kikuji Ujiie (KU)

January 25, 1980

Lower Paia, Maui

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

[NOTE: Interview conducted in Japanese. Translation done by Keiko Tanaka.]

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Kikuji Ujiie. Today is January 25, 1980, and we're at his home in Lower Paia, Maui.

YS: You sold the [Japanese] medicines in 1927?

KU: Since 1927.

YS: Before then, you said you wanted to become a photographer?

KU: Yes, when I was at Yamamoto Studio, I met the father of my late wife, Reverend Nagamori, of the Japanese Christian Church in Paia.

YS: Reverend Nagamori?

KU: Yes. Reverend Shigeru Nagamori. After all, I married his daughter. That medicine business was first started out of his idealism.

YS: Idealism?

KU: Yes, as a Reverend, he wanted to serve the society through the business, too. He wished to use the profits [from the medicine peddling] to employ more ministers. It was not intended for his personal use. As a Reverend, he could not operate the business openly in public; so we, his followers, did instead. One of us used to live here [Maui] and earned one of the top wages among the Japanese in Maui [before becoming a medicine peddler]. He presently lives near the University of Hawaii in Honolulu. He and his father were surveyors, who covered not only the plantations on Maui but also Haleakala. Despite having a secure job [as a surveyor], he chose to work with us [as a medicine peddler], even though we had little to offer [in terms of money]. But he believed in what we were doing. He felt that his younger brother, who would graduate from the university, could take over as a surveyor with his father in his place. So we

started out with quite different goals.

YS: How did you begin?

KU: The medicines were prepared specially for Hawaii in Toyama, Japan-- Reverend Nagamori's hometown. Here in Hawaii we expanded to each island under the name of Taiyōdō.

YS: Taiyōdō?

KU: Hawaii Taiyōdō. We named it Taiyōdō. Back in Toyama, Japan, it was called Nagamori Seieidō.

YS: Seieidō. What does it mean in Japanese?

KU: "Sei" is the character which means "sacred, holy or Bible;" "ei" means "to manage, or to keep." We only dealt with sales in Hawaii; so it was called Hawaii Taiyōdō. "Taiyō" means "the sun." We were based in Honolulu.

YS: Then Nagamori Seieidō in Toyama was . . .

KU: That was the head store, and the one in Hawaii was a branch.

YS: It means the medicines were directly sent from there [Toyama]?

KU: That's right. All of them were made in Nagamori Seieidō back in Japan and sent here. We only sold them.

YS: Were there any other outlets like that?

KU: No, only us in Hawaii.

YS: How many more salesmen were there besides yourself?

KU: All together, four. The one in Hilo passed away last year. I was living in Honolulu. Mr. Tetsunosuke Hata [later] joined us. He was a mechanic who was earning high wages working in a pineapple cannery. And then there was the surveyor, Mr. Eizo Okada, whom we have just talked about. And Mr. Bunzaemon Aida worked with us and eventually became the manager in Hilo. He passed away last month. So two passed away, leaving Mr. Okada in Honolulu and myself.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

YS: So you were paid by Hawaii Taiyōdō? How much were you being paid at that time?

KU: In the plantation, I worked as an office boy . . . . But I worked mostly outdoors for the first six or seven years. We called it kompang. They paid us \$200 to \$300 after each harvest which took about one year and eight months. Monthly, we were paid seventeen

dollars for twenty-six work days. For ordinary men's daywork, it was seventy-five cents a day. That's about twenty dollars for twenty-six work days. For kompang, it was only seventeen dollars [a month] just to survive.

YS: What about [wages] from the medicine business peddling for Taiyōdō?

KU: Oh, in the beginning it was very low.

YS: Was it?

KU: At first, I worked free for a few months, only the cost of food was given.

YS: From Hawaii Taiyōdō?

KU: As we started without enough capital, the Reverend also lost some money. Since he was a Reverend, he didn't have much money. Knowing this--even Mr. Okada who had a large family and used to earn a good salary as a surveyor--received only the cost of his food for about a year and a half. After a while, when the business started to pick up, our first salary was about thirty dollars.

YS: For the month?

KU: Yes, for the month.

YS: At that time, didn't you get something like a commission selling this amount or that?

KU: Even though we did our best and it [medicines] sold very well, we did not get much profit because we sold the medicine so cheap. When our business started doing all right--Mr. Okada was the only married man with wife and children to support and so he was paid first. I forgot which month he was first paid but he was paid about seventy-five dollars. The other three were all single.

YS: During that tough time?

KU: Yes, but at first, Mr. Okada also worked for free. He even offered his own money to [help] carry on the business. Reverend Nagamori had no money. We borrowed money from Mr. Okada's father. He had some money. With the Okadas' support, we could go on. Otherwise, it was absolutely impossible. It was three or four years later when the rest of us began to earn seventy-five dollars.

YS: Three years later! At that time, besides Taiyōdō, were there any other medicine merchants?

KU: Yes, Kikuchi Kyuseidō.

YS: Kikuchi Kyuseidō. Any other?

KU: Someone was covering Maui, but only the small areas like Wailuku and Kahului. By the way, that was not Toyama medicine.

YS: So, all together, three?

KU: Two of which covered all the Hawaiian Islands. Kikuchi Kyuseidō and Hawaii Taiyōdō.

YS: Was Kikuchi Kyuseidō also sending for the medicines from Toyama?

KU: Yes, there were many medicine makers in Toyama. They were buying from a few makers.

YS: After the years on the plantation, did you come across any new experiences going into the medicine business?

KU: Oh yes. We, as well as Reverend Nagamori, went through hard times. I didn't think I could make it as a medicine peddler right away. I was very young without any kind of experiences outside the plantation. I was not sure if I could make it in the business. The Reverend gave us tremendous encouragement. Every time we were in Honolulu, we would go to Punchbowl and pray before starting out for the day. We did that for many years.

YS: How did you sell the medicine?

KU: We left a bag filled with medicines at each home; for example, roku-shingan [heart medicine], haragusuri [stomach medicine], kumanoī [stomach medicine], and kazefuru-san [cold medicine].

YS: Kazefuru-san?

KU: Yes, kazefuru-san was made in Japan and was very popular whenever the flu went around.

YS: Was it made in Toyama?

KU: Yes. All were made in Toyama. As we were not pharmacists, we were not allowed to make any here.

YS: You said you had a medicine bag?

KU: We stuffed a bag with our medicines and left it at each family [home]. After they used some, they paid for whatever amount they used. If they didn't use [a certain medicine], they didn't have to pay for it. That's how it went in our business. Back in Japan the medicine peddlers delivered the bags filled with medicine free to each house. They probably returned once or twice a year. In Hawaii we returned every three months.

YS: Every three months?

KU: Yes, even so, sometimes they [customers] could hardly wait. For

example, medicine for the cold, they used to say, "Rush back." We started early in the morning . . . mainly we were busy during the day until the evening, but not so much in the morning.

YS: So you moved from Paia to Honolulu, then you were based in Honolulu to cover all areas?

KU: Yes, Honolulu was our base. We went around to only the countryside of Honolulu, omitting the city area at first. However, we got to travel in the city a lot later on.

YS: You returned to Paia every three months?

KU: Yes, first Oahu, then Maui, then Hawaii, then I returned to Kauai. Four of us traveled together. Eventually, one after another, we began to get married and raise families. After three to five years, each one became the head of an island. It wasn't fair for the family to be left alone for months and months while we went away to the outer islands. Mr. Okada for Honolulu, Mr. Aida for Hawaii, Mr. Hata for this island [Maui]. Since Kauai was so small, the one for Oahu managed it. I myself spent a year in Japan, another in Hawaii. I helped the manufacturer and gave reports on Hawaii. I informed them of the differences between the weather of Japan and of Hawaii; what kind of medicines changed quality; how many years it took before certain medicines went wrong; and so on. We sent back the old medicines [to Japan] and had them examined to see whether they were still safe or not. Since they were medicines and might do harm to the body--without the careful examination--they didn't allow us to handle them, not even in Japan. Hawaii was then a territory of the United States and rules were rather strict. Because we left medicines at each home, where there were small children, we had to check up very thoroughly with the manufacturer. Our Reverend was such a strict and brilliant man. People were surprised to find that he was so skillful at business even though he was a Reverend. This business wouldn't have turned out all right without him.

YS: Did you yourself travel around each house, too?

KU: Yes, I didn't take any break during the first three or four years.

YS: After the three years, you began to return to Japan every other year?

KU: It was after the first seven or eight years.

YS: When you peddled the medicines, did you carry them all?

KU: Yes, we put everything in a carrying case, but left a huge trunk in a hotel. We took along two fully packed trunks and left them in a hotel. Early in the morning before we started for the day, we packed the medicines out of the trunks into the carrying case. We had to come back to the hotel before noon in order to pack the emptiest carrying case again. Not all medicines were the same. For instance,

some of them changed fast because of the dampness. Each one was different. The Department of Health was very strict, so we only handled what they approved.

YS: When you were traveling around, were there automobiles?

KU: Oh, yes.

YS: What is the size of the trunk?

KU: The carrying case used for peddling the medicines to each house was not that heavy, a little bigger than this [KU points to a briefcase seventeen inches by eighteen inches]. But it was kind of thick. Even when it was fully packed, it wasn't too heavy. The paper sacks containing each medicine took a lot of room. It was less heavy than this [KU points to the briefcase again].

YS: About how many pounds?

KU: Let's see . . . . I can recall Kona was the toughest area. It's very hilly, and the houses were far away from each other. We would leave the car on the main road and carried the packed carrying case not by hand, but on our backs in order to walk up and down the slopes. We got so sweaty there.

YS: You told us the names of medicines before. Well, how many kinds were there in your carrying case?

KU: They were rokushingan, tennyōtō, kazefuru-san, kumanoi, haragusuri, and hangontan [stomach medicine] . . .

YS: What was the last one?

KU: Hangontan. So-called dokukeshi [anti-toxic remedy]. That was miraculously effective for upset stomachs.

YS: Hangontan?

KU: "Han" means "against," "kon" means "spirit or soul." It cost only ten cents [a bag]. There was no side effect at all. Because they [Board of Health] were strict on the matter, we hardly handled any [medicine] which had [side effects].

YS: Any other?

KU: There was what we now call Kōyaku, which is similar to Tokuhon [brand name of menthol plaster, used to treat muscle aches], made of the same material. We had all of those samples until six years ago or so. Even the medicine bags. We unfortunately burned them.

YS: So, more or less six kinds?

KU: No, as many as twenty.

YS: Did the Board of Health give you the permission to peddle those medicines?

KU: Yes. They examined them all first. Without that, we couldn't sell. Otherwise they would reprimand us and take our business away. We wouldn't take such a risk since we dealt with something that affected people's lives. We were very careful not to lose our business. When they were making new medicine--kazefuru-san in Toyama, for instance--they really took a long time. Its ingredients were first produced in the United States.

Because we were not pharmacists, we couldn't explain the ingredients in detail. We only sold what was sent over. We just told the customers that we only knew what was on the description on each medicine bag, nothing more.

YS: In that case, did you turn in the medicine to the Board of Health?

KU: They had to check them themselves, we could peddle only what they permitted.

YS: You peddled around in Paia and Puunene. What kind of customers did you have, only Japanese?

KU: On the plantation, we went from door to door, and told them, "We are now in Hawaii and have medicines from Toyama. Let us leave some for your family. It is good to be prepared and have them on hand. Although you need a doctor for serious illness, these Toyama medicines are inexpensive and good enough for things like upset stomachs or over-eating. If you don't use them, you can return them any time. Unless you use them, there is no need to pay at all. Just leave some in the house only to use when needed. When we return next time, you pay according to the amount you used."

YS: Were they all Japanese?

KU: Yes, only Japanese.

YS: You never sold to other ethnic groups?

KU: Since all of us were from Japan, we couldn't speak English, even now. We couldn't explain to them in English. When we started, there were very few second generation families. But they remembered that some of our medicines were very effective, since they were brought up with those medicines. (Laughs) Even among the younger generation, if they had a family, they let us leave some with them.

YS: Well then, if the medicines were so effective among Japanese, didn't other ethnic groups want them, too?

KU: Oh yes, but they would often get medicines from Japanese families in their neighborhood.

YS: When you checked the medicine bags on your next trip, you charged the customer only for whatever was used?

KU: That's right. We went around to each house and checked the bags. All the names and numbers of the medicines were written on it. First we thought it would take a long time, but after we got used to it, we could manage as many as a hundred [homes] a day in the camp.

YS: Did they pay you in cash?

KU: Of course in cash.

YS: Didn't they buy on credit?

KU: In the country areas, people sometimes didn't have enough money. In such cases, we would wait for them to pay the next time around since we were returning every three months. We didn't leave any [medicine] at irresponsible people's homes. The neighbors used to warn us about those troublemakers. Once in a while even the hard-working people couldn't pay for three to four years. As long as our business was doing all right, we waited until things turned up good enough for them to pay back. Then all of them paid it off. But before it got too bad, we stopped dealing with irresponsible customers. The neighbors would warn us, "Don't go to that house." They were so nice to us like that. We were very grateful.

YS: So when you came to Paia and Puunene, do you remember anything in particular about the customers?

KU: All of the [plantation] camps had really good customers. They remember me even now. They say, "It was you who brought us the medicines." (Laughs) Young ones also remember us and say, "I had to take the medicines you brought us!" (Laughs) They all remember us. When our church choir went to Hawaii [Big Island] for three days last year, people there came up to me and asked, "Weren't you the medicine peddler?" I felt very sentimental. (Laughs)

YS: They are all healthy?

KU: Yes, they are.

YS: Was there any difference between customers in Paia and Puunene and ones in Kahului and other areas, like which medicine was more popular than another in so and so area?

KU: No, more or less the same. If a customer caught a slight cold, he preferred not to spend a whole day going to the doctor. He couldn't afford not to work. Unless a person lived right in town, it was convenient for him to keep the medicines on hand. Customers would say, "We can go to work without worrying too much." When we went around to the homes, we would often be offered a meal. That was rather too much. Reverend Nagamori had already advised us not to accept it, saying it would eventually spoil our business. If we

were offered water, that was no problem. But we tried not to enter the house as much as possible.

YS: What kind of clothes would you wear?

KU: We wore leggings and riding pants.

YS: What pants?

KU: Horse riding pants.

YS: Oh.

KU: And the leather gaiters. Since it would slow down our business if we took off our shoes and entered the house, we only stayed at the door. Most of the time.

YS: Why couldn't you go into the house to accept their offer?

KU: If we took too much time at each house, the business would slow down. We had to impress people that medicine peddlers wouldn't do such a thing.

YS: Business was at all times business?

KU: Yes. Although I did this for almost twenty years--going around to a hundred houses a day--I never stayed at a customer's house to accept their invitation.

YS: Even though you turned down invitations for a meal, didn't you chat with them?

KU: Oh yes, we could handle that all right while we were working, as long as we kept them short. We were able to shorten our visits after we got used to our routine and we memorized the names of the medicines. As the same peddler went around the same area, each got to know which medicines were more needed and which weren't. Only the popular ones we would leave at the homes, and if certain kinds have never been touched, we would stop leaving those kinds. At first, twice or three times, we just left the same amount of each kind since we didn't know to what extent each one would be used. Gradually we began to know which house needed one kind and which another.

Some medicines didn't spoil for a year or two, but others went bad faster. We didn't handle those kinds too often. Because we were well-trained, we could easily cover many homes per day. If the camp was a big one, we took a day and a half. After we were doing it for a long time, we all knew which part was whose responsibility. Each peddler covered his own area. However, when a new peddler joined us, we accompanied him and worked together. Whenever someone became the head of an island, we worked together and it slowed

our business down a little. But later on it always picked up very well.

YS: Was salesmanship very difficult?

KU: I am honestly grateful to my colleagues. I was the least skilled. They all backed me up and let me do the job. Only with their support, could I go through all that. Honestly. For example, Mr. Hata was the top mechanic for a pineapple cannery. Nobody could beat him. He quit such a position and joined us. Mr. Okada, too, quitting a surveyor's career to become a medicine peddler! People couldn't figure that out. Besides that they even worked free for the first year.

YS: When you went around to each house, based on how your medicines were selling, you knew about their health conditions, didn't you?

KU: I knew, I knew.

YS: It was very important that you protect each household's health history and privacy, right?

KU: Yes, that's so. And, nevertheless, dare to say this, but for example, the medicine for women, I used to wonder how effective it really would be. You see, especially fujintō [medicine given to women after giving birth]--that was some kind of mixture of strange smashed nuts and seeds. Women poured the boiling water over it and drank it. It was all that, you know. I don't know how many persons were cured of this chronic problem. In medicines, I thought that there was this wonderful power . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

KU: There were dogs that barked, right? It was good in that way. Whenever I went to a house for the first time, I used to go in clothing prepared for [the dog's] snarls and the dog would come. Only the leggings were bitten so . . .

YS: So that was why you wore leggings?

KU: And not only that, on rainy days with just regular pants, you couldn't do it.

YS: What kind of shoes did you use?

KU: A pair of laced shoes and gaiters, or what you call leggings.

YS: The gaiters like the ones in Japan? We roll them up.

KU: The ones in Hawaii were made of leather.

YS: What did you wear on top?

KU: Something warm and casual like a short-sleeved aloha shirt. When we were going to wet areas, we carried a raincoat.

YS: Since you had to walk a long way, did you also take a hat?

KU: Yes, the woolen cloth ones were the best, even for the rain.

YS: So you would return after three months?

KU: Yes, it took exactly three months to go around all the islands.

YS: In case people were out, what did you do?

KU: Then, we skipped them. But people usually borrowed [medicines] from their neighbors. They shared with one another. Even though we did not sell to other ethnic groups, they got the medicines from the neighboring Japanese. The customers themselves advertised for us. So quite a few non-Japanese used our medicine.

YS: Didn't you advertise for Taiyōdō?

KU: We only had the New Year's advertisement. We had a New Year's advertisement--small one--which was only twenty or thirty dollars. People from Japan had already known about these medicines [before arriving in Hawaii]. They would say, "Oh, you have hangontan here!" Kazefuru-san was born when the flu was going around. That was the most popular.

YS: When new people arrived, how did you find out about them?

KU: The neighbors always let us know. Even before we went to them, the neighbors had already introduced our medicines to them. It was easy to expand. The new people would say, "You have this in Hawaii!" (Laughs)

YS: While you were peddling like that, weren't there any health facilities on the plantations? Any hospitals?

KU: Yes, there was a hospital. But they would have to take off work just to go and get some medicine from the hospital. That was quite a loss for them. On the other hand, even the most expensive medicine like rokushingan or fujintō cost only forty-five cents [a bag]. Nothing was higher than that price. Most were ten cents or twenty cents.

The lowest daily earnings [for a plantation worker] was something like seventy-five cents to one dollar. They would lose that if they took off work.

- YS: Did you have any pressure [to stop selling medicines] from the hospital or the health facilities on the plantation itself?
- KU: After the war [World War II], the doctors pushed and we had a new law.
- YS: The doctors?
- KU: Yes, the new law said that we were not allowed to deal with such medicines unless we were doctors. That's why we had to close [the business].
- YS: It wasn't because you couldn't get the medicines when Hawaii went into World War II against Japan?
- KU: Well, the medicines were allowed to be sold in stores [after the war]. Recently I saw a few medicines like ours, but there wasn't as much variety like before. There might be additional regulations, I am not sure.
- YS: Did the plantation stores sell some [Japanese] medicines, too?
- KU: I believe they had fujintō and probably rokushingan, too. They handled a few in the plantation store.
- YS: Was there any competition?
- KU: Not really. If people found our medicines handy and useful, it was all right, since they were not selling exactly the same kinds as ours in their store.
- YS: Weren't there other Japanese grocery stores besides the plantation store in Paia and Puunene?
- KU: Yes, there were.
- YS: Didn't they sell any, too?
- KU: Although they were selling some medicines, they were not always the same kind as ours. The store owners themselves used ours at home. (Laughs) So there was no pressure from those stores.
- YS: Weren't there any other medicine peddlers besides Hawaii Taiyōdō? Any competitor?
- KU: Not really a competition but there was one in Kahului, Maui . . . oh no, not Kahului, perhaps Waikapu or a small area around there. Someone was peddling i-san [stomach medicine] packed in a small sack. We never handled i-san any way.
- YS: I-san? The medicine for the stomach and the intestines? You didn't handle them?

- KU: No, that kind of medicine was being sold in stores before our business began, so we omitted it. There were many kinds of fujintō. Fujintō made by the different manufacturers had different ingredients in them. After trying some of them, each person would choose whatever type she liked best. They had their own likes and dislikes in medicines just like you have in food. So there wasn't much competition between the stores and us.
- YS: Did you need some license to peddle the medicine?
- KU: Yes, we all had to carry the peddling license.
- YS: From where were they issued?
- KU: The Territorial Tax Office. There was a license section in each island. If you got one from Honolulu, it was valid for all islands.
- YS: Did the tax office issue all licenses for other goods besides medicine.
- KU: The medicines had to go through another special examination, too. Otherwise we couldn't peddle them.
- YS: The examination . . .
- KU: The examination of the samples [of the medicines]. I'm not sure whether it was done at the Department of Health here or on the mainland. It took a long time.
- YS: So you needed two kinds, the license to peddle and another to sell particular medicines?
- KU: That's right. Once we got them, there was no problem afterward.
- YS: You were the only medicine peddlers in Paia and Puunene?
- KU: No, others were Kikuchi Kyuseidō and someone from [the] Wailuku [area]--but he was peddling only in certain areas.
- YS: In certain areas?
- KU: While we went around [peddling], we happened to see some medicines here and there. I believe he was selling only to his close friends.
- YS: Kikuchi Kyuseidō and someone from Wailuku?
- KU: Yes, he [Kikuchi] was the first one--before Reverend Nagamori [started his business]--he was already peddling. There were two Etchu Toyama medicine [peddling companies], Kikuchi Kyuseidō and Hawaii Taiyōdō.
- YS: Was it very hard to cover all the areas of Paia and Puunene since the plantations were rather large?

KU: Yes, it had a larger population then.

YS: About how many homes were there?

KU: The biggest in Puunene was the McGerrow Camp where there was a mill nearby. There were about eighty [Japanese] families whom we peddled to in McGerrow Camp. The single people went to families living nearby and got the medicines from them. We didn't leave any medicines at single people's homes.

YS: Approximately how long did it take to go around Paia and Puunene?

KU: After we got used to it, we could finish in a day.

YS: In a day, in Paia?

KU: Paia only. In Puunene, the big camps--like McGerrow Camp and Mill Camp--were next to each other. When we went around together, one went to one camp, another to the other. If one peddler finished earlier, he always helped the other.

YS: When you covered Paia and Puunene, did you take a helper?

KU: When we--three to four peddlers--went around together by car, we sent one to each camp and the driver would cover the remote area. We tried to finish up in a day. There was no time to sit around.

YS: You mean you traveled with Mr. Hata, Mr. Okada, and Mr. Aida?

KU: Yes, until we got used to it, we all traveled together. After we were experienced enough, we went separately to each island because we started to have families . . . .

YS: After you separated, did you have any help to go around?

KU: No, each did it alone--for example--one peddler for all of Maui. That way business went faster. When we traveled together, we sometimes wasted time. We got to learn that some families weren't at home during the day. Both parents worked, leaving children at the nursery. In such cases, we had to go back in the evening where we missed during the day.

YS: You said you returned every three months. Did it take that long to cover one island like Maui?

KU: Yes, it did. It took much longer at first. Five or six months. After we were used to it, it took three months. When we hired a new employee, he would accompany us as a helper. To cover Paia and Puunene, it took about three to four days. Since some people were out during the day, we went in the afternoon and evening. We packed the medicines in the case in the morning, and went around the available houses in the afternoon. Then we went in the evening again for the rest of the camp.

YS: After you checked the medicine bag in each family, what else did you do?

KU: Besides replenishing the supply of each medicine, we checked each medicine to see that it was still fresh. If not, we replaced the old medicine with a fresh supply and brought back the old ones.

YS: Plantation people must have cut themselves and gotten hurt now and then?

KU: Really. They were very grateful to us. And that made us happy and proud, especially for the people in Hawaii [Big Island]. In such a remote area, it was a big thing to go to the doctor. It cost them a fortune if they had to order a cab to get to the doctor while only earning so little. However, if they kept our medicines on hand, they could cure, for example, an upset stomach or something for as little as ten cents or twenty cents. When the flu went around, they were glad to have kazefuru-san on hand. It was very effective.

YS: About how much did you collect each day?

KU: Each peddler collected less than \$100--about sixty dollars or seventy dollars. When we had to drive around the houses that were far apart from each other, we couldn't collect too much at all. We couldn't cover enough houses, but in the big camps we could walk and stop from door to door.

YS: How much did each household spend on the average?

KU: A large family spent about five or six dollars every three months. Otherwise, on the average, two or three dollars.

YS: Two or three dollars every three months . . .

KU: That's why we had to go around to as many homes as possible.

YS: What sort of things did you sell at which houses and, of course, you left a record, didn't you?

KU: Properly, we even made cards [of the medicines] we left, you know? At one household, for example, rokushingan, fujintō--all the medicines' names are written on [the cards], right? There we [would write in] the number [of packets], "rokushingan, one" if one, "ten" if ten, and "fujintō, one packet" if one packet--that we would write down. That we would check and if they didn't have that [medicine], that was the amount consumed. So if there was one [packet] less, that means just one was used. That [i.e., keeping track of what was consumed], in the beginning, I thought was troublesome but as you get used to it, it's nothing. I learned right away. Just zip, zip, zip . . .

YS: Were they cards?

KU: Yes, cards, cards that I carried around myself. For example, camp--one camp--Paia Camp and Kailua. "Whose what, that." All the people's names are written. Later on, "what medicine," what amount of medicine there is--what medicines and how many [packets of medicines]--I count and it is written down. I carried those cards and always did my house calls. So if I went to a house I would take the card out and look at it. Then the customers would bring out the medicine package so right away I would open up my carrying case and on the carrying case cover I would spread the medicines out. Then I would check. It wasn't troublesome, you know. The reason is that you just glance [at the customer's package] and know right away. The ones [i.e., medicine packets] that aren't there, were used, you see? And that household knows, too. They say, "Ujii-san, nowadays we use it a lot, so this time can you put in a lot [of that medicine]." In that manner, when you get used to it, it was nothing.

YS: Did you report what was sold to Honolulu?

KU: Yes, we collected for each month and sent them to Japan.

YS: Not to Honolulu?

KU: To Honolulu, then to Japan to order.

YS: Did you have a big office in Honolulu?

KU: No, it was an ordinary residence in Liliha. However, there were many rooms. They said it previously was a Chinese temple, some famous person used to live there, we heard. We stored the medicines from Japan there.

YS: I understand that you went through hardship in the beginning, but wasn't Taiyōdō fairly successful by the time you retired?

KU: Yes, it was. They could afford to send me to Japan to stay a year, and pay almost the average wages, even though not quite the highest. All of us were encouraging each other and happy about it. When everything was turning out as we had hoped, the war [World War II] broke out. It was such a pity. By the way, we never made easy money, though.

YS: When things were going pretty good, were you paid by salary? Did you get any commission?

KU: There wasn't any commission.

YS: How much was your salary when you were doing well?

KU: That was before the war. It wasn't very much. As Mr. Okada had a

large family and had offered some capital, he got paid \$200. My pay was the lowest.

YS: How much?

KU: A little more than the half of Mr. Okada's. However, they paid for my trips to and from Japan.

YS: Were you paid monthly?

KU: Yes, monthly.

YS: Was the pay sent from Honolulu?

KU: No, we subtracted that amount here before we sent money to Japan.

YS: When you traveled, where did you stay?

KU: When we traveled in Hawaii [Big Island], we stayed at Mr. Hata's relatives' home, which had many rooms. So we accepted the Nagashimas' offer for us to stay there whenever we went around Hilo. For the Kona area, we used Okimoto Hotel. For the Ka'uarea we stayed at a customer's home for two nights or so since there wasn't any hotel.

YS: At a customer's house?

KU: Yes, they would say, "Stay at our house, stay at our house, don't worry about paying!"

YS: What about in Paia and Puunene?

KU: For the Paia area, we stayed at Mr. Hata's house, and I had my brother in Kaheka Camp. We stayed there, too.

YS: You had a brother there?

KU: Yes, four of us brothers came to Hawaii. The eldest one immigrated first. At that time parents and children could send for each other. So the eldest brother sent for mother, then the rest of us three brothers afterward. We stayed in Kaheka Camp for a while.

YS: Although you said you turned down the customer's invitation for a meal, did you stay overnight at a customer's house?

KU: It seldom happened. We most of the time used a hotel. The hotel was very cheap then. It was only \$2.50 a night, around there. They let us stay in spite of that huge trunk we had to carry around.

YS: You mentioned earlier that after the war started you could not import the medicines from Japan.

KU: It was by law then. They said we could peddle Toyama medicines only if we had been qualified doctors. But we were too old to go back to

school to earn a doctor's certificate. (Laughs) So we all had to  
quit. (Laughs)

END OF INTERVIEW

**STORES and  
STOREKEEPERS of  
Paia & Puunene, Maui**

**Volume I**

**ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

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