

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Masao Uchima

" . . . our neighbor in the back had about four, five kids. She came out from the house, and we're calling her to come up the cement [building], but I think one or two was still in the house. So she went back in to get the kids. In the meantime, that's when the third wave was coming. So when the third wave came, she had no chance of coming out again, so she stayed in the house. So we watching her, but when the third wave came, that house just started to float away. And from the window, she was just like saying good-bye, waving. And that's the last we seen or we heard. And the whole family died."

Masao Uchima was born in Honoka'a, Hawai'i on May 22, 1928. When he was an infant, the family moved to 'O'ōkala, Hawai'i, where his father, Katsunoshin Uchima, was an independent sugarcane contractor. When Masao Uchima was five, the family moved to Hilo, where Katsunoshin Uchima began Eagle Laundry. The business was located on Kamehameha Avenue, in the Shinmachi section of Hilo. The family lived in a cottage behind the laundry.

Katsunoshin Uchima was an immigrant from Okinawa. His wife, Chidori Nishimoto Uchima, was born and raised in Honoka'a, Hawai'i.

Masao Uchima, the second of four children, spent much of his childhood helping his parents in the laundry. When not working, he swam and fished in the nearby Wailoa River, and played in organized-sports leagues.

A senior at Hilo High School at the time, Uchima was awakened by his mother on the morning of April 1, 1946. He found his home surrounded by water. As the water subsided, he and his father ran to the laundry, only to find the building badly damaged. They then ran to the nearby Coca-Cola Bottling Company building, a two-story, concrete structure. There they waited out the remaining waves in safety, while witnessing death and destruction around them.

Eagle Laundry, as well as other businesses and residents of Shinmachi, was completely destroyed that day. After staying with relatives for a short while, Uchima and his family moved to converted military housing established for tsunami victims. Katsunoshin Uchima worked for a few years as a carpenter before his death in 1950.

A few months after the tsunami, Masao Uchima graduated from Hilo High School. He worked for the Coca-Cola Bottling Company, Love's Bakery, and, beginning in 1955, was an insurance agent. He retired in 1982.

He lives in Hilo with his wife, Mildred Nakasone Uchima. The couple raised two sons. Each year, the Uchimas plan and attend a Shinmachi remembrance service and reunion held on the site of the once-thriving neighborhood, today the site of Wailoa State Park.

Tape No. 29-3-1-98

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Masao Uchima (MU)

Hilo, Hawai'i

March 4, 1998

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Masao Uchima for the tsunami oral history project on March 4, 1998, and we're in his home in Hilo, Hawai'i. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, let's start. What I want to do today is to have you just talk about growing up in Shinmachi and, you know, have you describe what it was like living in Shinmachi. Then maybe at the end of the interview or beginning of the next interview, you can start talking about the 1946 tsunami. Okay? So, the first question I want to ask you is when and where were you born?

MU: Oh, I was born in Honoka'a. Date of my birth was May 22, 1928. After that, my dad moved to 'O'ōkala and he worked as a contract boss at field 35 in 'O'ōkala. Then after a few years, he moved to Hilo and opened up a laundry in a place called Shinmachi. I went to school in a place called Waiākea Kai School. It's no longer there because the 1960 tidal wave, you know, destroyed that whole area. And I went to Hilo Intermediate School and Hilo High School and graduated in the year 1946, and that's right [before] that April 1 tidal wave.

WN: Okay, so tell me something about your parents' laundry? What was it called?

MU: My dad's laundry was called Eagle Laundry, and that was located on 1010 Kamehameha Avenue. That's where the Shinmachi used to be. When the war started in 1941, my dad had a contract with the Seabees and marines, and you know, did their laundry.

WN: Did you help your father at all?

MU: Oh yes. Actually, since the sixth grade, I used to help my dad in the laundry. When I say "laundry," at that time was a boiler room. I worked in the boiler room and keep the steam, you know, the pressure, at about ninety degrees. And at that time, they didn't have any automatic boiler valves, so you have to watch the water gauge, make sure you get enough water into the boiler. When the steam is up, then you have to put water into the boiler, the steam pressure was greater than the water pressure, so the steam used to back the water up into the water pipes. So I used to run around to all the neighbors and make sure to please turn off their water so we can have enough pressure for the water to go into the boiler. That's where I helped my dad right throughout high school. Since, I think was about eighth grade—eighth, ninth grade—I used to help pressing clothes, you know, do dry cleaning, and

used to press all the uniforms for the servicemen.

WN: So his major clientele, during the war at least, was servicemen?

MU: Yeah, because that was during the Second World War and throughout the time till the military moved out. But like I said, mostly with the Seabees that was stationed at NAS [Naval Air Station], that's the Hilo Lyman Field [i.e., Hilo Airport]. At that time, the whole area was under the navy.

WN: So as far back as you remember---how old were you when you moved from Honoka'a?

MU: Well, actually, from Honoka'a, I was an infant, I don't really remember. I know that I was just about being born there, then a few years later, when we moved to 'O'ōkala, I didn't start school, so that was below the age of five. And when I, moving to Hilo, that's when I started the school in Hilo.

WN: So your earliest recollections is Hilo.

MU: Yeah, when I was about five years old.

WN: And where are your parents from?

MU: My dad [Katsunoshin Uchima] is from Okinawa. An island called Ikejima, and he moved here after he graduated university at that time. He came from a pretty wealthy family, so he was well educated. And he moved to Hawai'i because his brothers were killed in the war and he was nineteen at that time so they figured that he might get pulled in the military, so the family smuggled him out to Hawai'i.

WN: This is which war?

MU: That was the Russian war, I think, if I'm not mistaken.

WN: Russo-Japanese War?

MU: I think that was the war. Not really too sure because we hardly talked about it. What it was, that when the family smuggled him out of Japan, that's like he was already—they accepted him as dead. (Chuckles) So ties was gone with Japan. He never did write letter or return to Japan ever since he came to the islands. The family was concerned about him so in order to keep track about my dad, they sent his two kid sisters. And two of the younger sisters came over, and they're the ones that used to correspond with Japan and said how he was doing and when he got married. All the history. So in Japan, they knew about our family. I mean, they know about my brother. I had an older brother, myself, and two kid sisters. In Japan, they knew that. He was here, and that's the family they had.

WN: So he came here—he was sort of from a wealthy family—but he came here and he had to work in the plantation?

MU: Not really. He was more of a businessman. I mean, he didn't work as a more like laborer, he was always more like business oriented. Even the time we was in Honoka'a---well, prior to

that, he was in Moloka'i. He had a honeybee farm and things like that. When he was in Honolulu, Kam[ehameha] IV Road, he had a lease property. I don't know what happened to it. It was under his name, but when he moved, he gave it to his friend or whatever. In Honoka'a, he had a laundry. Then when he moved from Honoka'a to 'O'ōkala, he had a contract with the 'O'ōkala sugar plantation, got a lease or contract with the plantation for that field, and he had his own laborers. And then he moved to Hilo and started up the laundry until '46 tidal wave.

WN: Did he ever tell you how he learned how to run a laundry?

MU: No, not really. He was well educated. Went through regular schooling, and well, he went to university and all that. That's why, even the sister, the kid sister that came to Hawai'i, they were well educated, too. That's how my aunty used to write letter back to Japan telling the status about the family here. In Japan at the time, men was men, and women is always below, and very seldom you see women being educated, but she had a proper schooling. When the family had dinner and things, they had a maid that used to serve on them. And just as she sat with the men, you know, and they serve her last, but she was part of the family in a sense of the servants used to serve her. So she was kind of, ah, cocky. (Laughs) I mean, she's always thinking she's always better than anybody else, you know, that attitude she had. High and mighty. (Laughs)

My dad used to really love sports. He was a wrestler, and he had even a wrestling name like Okizakura. That's his professional—not professional—but his sumo name.

WN: Is it? Okizakura?

MU: Okizakura. When he retired from sumo, somebody in Maui came to ask my dad for the name, and they had a ceremony for that also. He used to be a pitcher and play baseball. Judo. Kendo, and then karate, but at that time, you don't talk about marital arts or karate, which he was more an expert at the time on that. And the reason why is, he didn't want to teach my brother and I because in case we get into some kind of argument or fight, he said he might regret the day that he taught us because it's a martial art that's supposed to be for self-defense. But he didn't want to pass that knowledge or profession to us.

When the Japanese ships used to come in, he used to be a liaison that used to always work with the naval ship, Japanese ship to have scrimmages for all these different athletic sports [events].

In Shinmachi, I mean, when he had the laundry, with the proper businessmen, the ones that are contractors and the ones who were kind of known, being what you call, leading Japanese in Hilo, he was always with them at that time. Like he had Sanji Abe, [Thomas] Sakakihara. Those people were really well known at that time. And he used to help the courts for be an interpreter because he knew both languages. But what really surprised me: he spoke fluent Hawaiian. He was really good in Hawaiian, so he had Hawaiian friends like Richard Lyman, and all that. He called him "my brother." Aunty Maile Yap, and you know, those prominent Hawaiian families were good friends of his.

WN: Okay, tell me something about your mother.

MU: Well, my mother [Chidori Nishimoto Uchima] was young. (Laughs) I mean between my dad

and my mom, I think, they're about twenty years or so in age apart. My dad got married to a child bride, like, because I think she gave birth to me when she was about sixteen, I think. So my mom and I, we just about sixteen years apart. And I have an older brother. He's about two years older than I am. (Laughs)

WN: Now where is she from?

MU: Oh, she's from (Honoka'a. Her parents came from) Kumamoto, I think. See, my mom's side, the Nishimoto family, my uncles and aunts, see, what happened is, my dad took care of that family, the Nishimoto family. Nishimoto family was a large family, and my dad used to take care all of them. You know, Grampa Nishimoto and my uncles and aunts. And my mother is the oldest in the family, so probably that's why, you know, he got married to her or they got married, or vice-versa because of the circumstances because he was the one taking care of the family. When he moved, they moved with him. (They moved from Honoka'a to 'O'okala, then to Shinmachi.)

WN: Oh, you mean, to Hawai'i?

MU: No, I don't know how---when they were in Honoka'a and all.

WN: I see.

MU: I guess before I was born I mean, you know, they probably used to take care of them, and because of the circumstances, probably my mother fell in love with my dad and they got married anyway. So she got married really young to my dad. Because of her age, she was young, she really worked in the laundry during the war. I know from sunup to sundown, she was the one that really did a lot of things in the laundry. My dad is more, like the way I said, businessman. He's not a laborer. Like I was saying, when I was about in the sixth grade, I was in the boiler room already, and by the time I got in the eighth grade, I used to start doing the press, pressing clothes, and doing dry cleaning and all that. As soon as school was out, I was back home. And from that time, what my dad doing all day, I did 'em in the afternoon. (Laughs) The same amount of work.

WN: How far away was school?

MU: Hilo High School. That was about what? I lived in Shinmachi, about one, two, three miles or so away.

WN: How did you get to school?

MU: Well, I was fortunate enough because the elder boys, you know, the friends of mine, and different families used to own cars so. I was one of the fortunate ones that since they have the car, I used to go to school with them. By the time we got to high school age, my brother and I used to drive already cars. We drive at a very young age. And again, because my dad was more in business, we were fortunate enough to own a car at the time.

WN: How old were you when you first started working in the laundry?

MU: Ho! I say about twelve.

WN: Did your brothers and sisters work there, too? Your brothers and sisters?

MU: No. My kid sister, when get a little older, she did the cooking. My brother, well, he used to work at the service station. Part-time job at the service station. It's easier that way than working in that home.

(Laughter)

WN: And how was it working for your mom and dad?

MU: Oh, I don't know. I felt kind of sorry the way they were working, so I helped in any way I can. Like I said, as soon as school was over, I was back home and helping whatever I can do for them. Unfortunately, all the hard labor they did during the war, and the tidal wave 1946, you know, right after the war, all the equipment they bought went down the drain. They lost the cottage and their business. My dad, all his life he was in business. Self-employed. Being employed and. . . . Fortunately that's the year I graduate, I start working for the Coca-Cola Bottling Company. My mom also started to work for them, the Coca-Cola Bottling Company. And my dad, I guess with all the pressure and all that, all his dreams and everything else wash with the waves, so from there he was kind of slowed down already, and he didn't have too much gump to do much already, so I supported the family at that time.

WN: Before we get into that, I wanted to ask you a little bit more about Shinmachi. Where did you folks live? Near the laundry?

MU: Yeah. We had a cottage in the back of the laundry. Let's see. (Sound of shuffling papers, rubber band.) I get this street names correctly, then more I can. . . . (Sound of shuffling and unrolling papers). See, this is where we used to—yeah. Right here.

WN: Laundry was right on Kamehameha Avenue.

MU: Yeah. It's on Kamehameha Avenue, and we lived right on this street here.

WN: Oh, Ke'elikōlani.

MU: Yeah. Ke'elikōlani Street, and we had a cottage right in the back of it.

WN: I see.

MU: Yeah, so anyway, and the Coca-Cola Bottling Company was right across. It was on Kelekekoa Street right on this corner here. So, you know, right after the tidal wave employmentwise, my mother and I worked for the Coca-Cola Bottling Company, which is right across our cottage at the time. But we didn't live there because after the tidal wave, it was wiped out, but the company itself was still standing, Coca-Cola Bottling Company.

WN: Okay, tell me what was it like growing up in Shinmachi? (MU laughs.) What did you do to have fun as a kid?

MU: Well, actually, it's like the Mississippi River, like Mark Twain I guess, because we had a river right in the back. You know, Wailoa River?

WN: Mm hmm [yes].

MU: Flow right in the back of our homes here, and that river [flowed] right down to Waiākea town and out to the docks. They used to have that scows, they used to call it the sugar scows.

WN: Scow?

MU: Yeah. That's just like barge.

WN: Oh, okay.

MU: They used to load the barges with the sugar, you know, in sugar bags—at that time was bags—and instead of trucking them down to the wharf, they used to bring these scows . . .

WN: I see.

MU: Back and forth. That's the means of [transporting sugar].

WN: Up and down the river?

MU: Yes.

WN: Oh, I see.

MU: And we used to swim in the river and we used to have a lot of fish at that time. The environment was real good so we had lot of mullets, Samoan crab, *āholehole*, and all type of fish. And was plentiful. We used to go and throw cans in the river and about twice a day, we used to go and to dive for the cans because you see the 'o'opu, you know, the fish used to hide in there. We used to go and dive for the cans and we used to collect those fish and put in a *danbe*, we called that, to keep them alive. And like weekends, we used to sell them to the fish market and they used to pay us about fifteen cents per pound at that time.

WN: What kind cans?

MU: Oh, I mean like Carnation cream cans, Triton cans, or any kind of cans, that you can throw them in the river. And the fish used to go in there, and I used to bring. And that many fish used to be in the river.

WN: Yeah I see, when you pick up the can, they don't swim away?

MU: Well, we used to swim in, grab the can like that, and we know which side the opening. So we used to swim with one hand and bring the can up, and throw 'em in the boat. And we don't have enough poundage so what we do, we keep them alive till my weekends. And weekends, we used to get this sugar bag, about ten-pound sugar bag, and put it in there, wrap 'em around with rubber band, and take 'em down to the fish market wrapped up in newspaper, watch for the game wardens, that they not around . . .

WN: That was illegal?

- MU: Well, actually, the game warden don't want---we don't have license to sell the fish to, I guess, the fish peddlers, so when the game warden's around, we not going be around. But when he not around, we sell the fish to the ladies. But the ladies know that we had those 'o'opus, the fish, because it was still alive. So no sooner went there, they buy whatever pound we had, all the fish, and they put it on the ice. And no sooner they put the fish out, the Filipinos just come and buy it out. So no matter how much we had, they used to buy it out. And practically every Saturday they used to do that.
- WN: How deep was the Wailoa River?
- MU: Well, the river itself---it's a sandy bottom so you can more like walk across. So I say, the deepest portion, right about center, might be about six to eight feet. The rest of it, you know, it's just waist-high, and just the center portion was about that deep. At that time, the river was kept clean because the river was quite wide at that time. And used to get this Chinese, and they used to raise mullets and all different type of fish. (They also had lots of ducks which used to swim up and down the river.) They had Kawasaki Pond, and they used to raise carps, *koi*. At that time, was mostly black *koi*, and they used to use that for medicinal purposes. People that were ill, some, they used to come and buy the *koi*, I guess take the blood and make medicinal purpose. They used to use that.
- WN: You said you had a boat?
- MU: Well, when I say "boat," lot of families, they had boats so we always can borrow or use each other's boat. You know, at that time, your boat is just as good as mine. At that time, if you ask, he'll lend you the boat anyway. They used to have a garden, like, my neighbor, Takaki's? I don't know if she told you about the garden. [See interview with Fusae Tanaka Takaki for descriptions of her family's garden along the Wailoa River, across from Shinmachi.]
- WN: [Tape inaudible.]
- MU: Yeah, they had a boat, so just the idea of going across there, and they have a garden, and that's a means of going across the river.
- WN: So, when you say "across," you mean you go across the Wailoa River to [where the Wailoa State Park is located today]?
- MU: On the other bank, opposite bank.
- WN: [Wailoa State Park]?
- MU: Well, yeah. Like this is Shinmachi right? This is where the Wailoa State Park right now is.
- WN: So then you going actually *mauka* . . .
- MU: Yeah, we used to---that's why it's across the river. And we used to be really good swimmers because at that time, we used to get a lot of competition on swimming, you know, swimming meets?
- WN: Yeah.

MU: Used to get different club, used to get different swimming place to swim, used to get Olympic meets. At that time, we have this stadium right now, Olympic swimming pool. Charlie Kawamoto, he was our swimming coach. And then the river itself was our swim pond. We used to get this fifty-five gallon pontoon, you know, and then measure off about twenty-five (yards), so we used to swim back and forth, and that's how we used to get our [training].

WN: In the river?

MU: In the river itself. It's a open river. When you going up, you might be fighting the current, because the current coming down, and then the opposite direction, you go fast, because you flow with the tide, right?

WN: Mm hmm.

MU: So we used to swim like about, oh, a quarter mile down to that Hilo Iron Works. That's going down. That's real fast. But we turn around that buoy, and you know, swim upstream now, so you take much longer because fighting the current.

WN: How many feet or yards was your house to the river?

MU: Oh, we were quite far. I mean, gee. . . . About two blocks. I don't know what kind of block you can call them, but let's say about two blocks away.

WN: And the people that lived in Shinmachi, what kind of occupations did they have mainly? Or was it all kind?

MU: It's really all kind. General. Shinmachi people actually consist of laborers that used to go out for employment and come back home, I guess. Businesswise, they are family business. For instance, like there was a poultry shop, and then blacksmith shop like Kamimura Blacksmith, garage like OK Garage, had sushi shop like Mizuguchi, a general store, a vegetable store, tofu maker, *kamaboko*. In fact, *kamaboko*, I think one of the first *kamaboko* statewide, you know, Kohashi *kamaboko* [Y. Kohashi Fish Cake], they used to sell 'em to different islands at that time. They had potato chip, first potato chip that came out was Atebara potato chip. That was in Shinmachi. So I guess, like, family, individual, small businesses yeah?

WN: And most of the people who had businesses there lived there, too?

MU: Yes. They had business, they lived there. But, like I would say, the others were more like laborers, go out to different places to work. Like, let's see, Hilo Transportation [Company] was Kono family. Kono wasn't living there, but his company was there, so the people working for the company was living in Shinmachi. Okuna family. Higashihara. You know, those families.

WN: So did you ever have to leave Shinmachi? And did you go to like downtown Hilo a lot? Or did Shinmachi have everything you need?

MU: Well, Shinmachi was a home, and we had a theater there, we had, what do you call, Hilo Theatre, we had what they called Waiākea Theatre in Waiākea, we had Royal Theatre. Right in Shinmachi, had Royal Theatre. Downtown was for instance like, Mamo Theatre and Palace

Theatre, and [S.H.] Kress [Company] store was naturally in downtown Hilo.

WN: Okay, so, like ethnic groups, the nationalities, who lived in Shinmachi mainly?

MU: Had lot of Japanese, but again, they had different nationalities, all mixed nationalities really. But when I was growing up, Shinmachi, when I say Shinmachi, the people that lived there, they are so close that it was more like a family. They knew each other, and when they say, "Oh, you from Shinmachi," oh, then they know somebody was living there, and the subject just comes out.

Even like when I was young, I remember that even for take a bath. We used to have *furo-ya* that's right by the river. And this *furo-ya*, the family [would] wash the *furo* down, and they make the hot water. The family used to pay monthly dues for the family to go and take a bath. So what we used to do was just get a basket, with a soap in there with a towel, and we used to go and take a bath and come home.

Lot of the homes at that time was two-bedroom home, outdoor bath, like centralized restroom. The washhouse to wash clothes, it was under one roof. They have several ladies going to wash clothes. It's not near the house or in the house. Everything was outdoors. So even like the bathhouse, they didn't have it in the house, lot of them, so they used to go down to this *furo-ya*.

WN: Did you folks do that? Or did you folks . . .

MU: We had, in the house, we had a bathroom, and in the bathroom, we had a *furo*, that small wooden box with hot water, and we had a tub. A regular bathtub. So we used to wash ourselves in the bathtub and go into the square box to keep warm. But beside that, they had this outdoor—not outdoor—but *furo-ya* that they have a big bathhouse.

WN: You were telling me earlier that you did swimming.

MU: Mm hmm [yes].

WN: What other sports did you folks participate in?

MU: Oh, sports. We had football. We had baseball. (We also had basketball teams.) I mean, all the major sports, Shinmachi was known for it. Very competitive. Right across the bridge was Waiākea and the Waiākea Pirates. And on the Piopio Street side, they had the Piopio Bears. In that small community, we had our so-called Wailoa athletic club. That's Shinmachi. We used to call ourselves "Islanders."

WN: The Shinmachi Islanders or the . . .

MU: Just used to call ourselves Islanders.

WN: Islanders.

MU: When we used to get football games or baseball games and all that, transportationwise, no matter where they play out in the country, can be Ka'ū, Kea'au, Mountain View, 'O'ōkala, or

Honoka'a, we always have transportation because Hilo Transportation used to provide us the truck. It's a stake-body truck that if anybody from Shinmachi want to go see the game, they meet us certain place, they can ride on the stake body truck, and then that's how we used to go to the game, you know, back and forth.

WN: What kind of truck is this?

MU: Stake body. You know, that used a flatbed truck with a stake on the sides?

WN: Oh, stake body.

MU: They call it stake-body trucks, and everybody just pile in. We used to sing on the way, and sing on the way back. (Laughs) In the rain and wind, whatever.

WN: So Gunji Kono was very active in supporting you folks?

MU: I don't know if they were—Gunji Kono?

WN: Yeah, that's what I was reading. Gunji Kono was a old Hilo Transportation . . .

MU: Yeah, yeah. That's the father. That's the old man. Then after that, the son, Hiroaki, took over [the company].

WN: Oh, I see.

MU: Hiroaki. And after Hiroaki, then his son Larry. And Larry went to Africa or something, had a heart attack when he was traveling with the Rotary or something like that. Just one of those unfortunate things.

Yeah that was good of them, but they were 100 percent back of the community, I mean, anything we wanted, you know, they're right there.

WN: Who did you folks challenge in sports? Like Waiākea Pirates and the plantations?

MU: Oh yeah, at that time, the plantations, let's say, Pāpa'ikou, Wainaku, Onomea, wherever the plantations, they have their own teams. And out on the other side like Pāhoa, Mountain View, Pāhala, they also have. So they used to play each other, you know? Well, see, used to play that, they called it barefoot [football] league. One [hundred] twenty-seven [pound] barefoot league. At that time, hardly any shoes so we used to play barefoot. (Chuckles)

WN: You were in 127-pound class?

MU: Yeah. (Laughs) Barefoot league we used to call 'em.

WN: I'm wondering, you know, like Waiākea Pirates were just across the way yeah?

MU: Mm hmm [yes].

WN: Was there a difference in types of families that lived in Waiākea family . . .

MU: No.

WN: Shinmachi family . . .

MU: No. They're about same. At that time, had lot of Japanese families around. Waiākea Houselots is same, that's Waiākea end. And then, they are the same like Shinmachi people, they have their own business, used to go out to work and stuff. The living about the same except the locale they live in. We're from Shinmachi. They're from Waiākea, Piopio or something. Then used to get the Wreckers, right in town, used to get Lincoln Wreckers.

WN: Wreckers?

MU: Yeah, you know, those different—where the locale, that's where the team was made up.

WN: So barefoot football was the main one?

MU: Yeah they had barefoot . . .

WN: Baseball . . .

MU: Yeah, baseball. But baseball wasn't that much of a challenge, because more of a bigger league, just like major league or senior league. And so at that stage, they was kind of playing for each other, you know, lot of teams getting together might play farther away places like Honoka'a, or Kona, or Kohala.

WN: So did the Konos pay for your things like uniforms, too?

MU: Yeah. I mean, the Konos, probably the jerseys and stuff they used to. . . . Because used to get Kohashi, the guy, (we knew him as "Kintuck" only) used to be one of the coach and "Kuma" Higashihara, they used to work for Hilo Transportation, so naturally, being very active in the sports, those are the ones who are trying to ask the boss for make uniform or sponsor or whatever. It wasn't fancy. (Chuckles) Just like a jersey or something, but that was what we want.

WN: And in your memory while you were playing, who were considered the powerhouses? Were you folks considered really tough?

MU: No. I mean—well, when you say "tough," in the sense of who was a better team?

WN: Yes.

MU: Well, your team was always the best. (WN laughs.) See, at that time, rivalry was real, I mean, real rivalry, you know. It's not the kind of sportsmanship that we have now. At that time, rivalry was rivalry. (Laughs) I remember used to have fights on the field, and the referees were kind of crooked because all depends on where the referee came from and blow the whistle on you and things like that.

(Laughter)

WN: I heard so much about the Waiākea Pirates. I don't know why, but everybody talked about Waiākea Pirates. I was just wondering if they were considered the powerhouse.

MU: Yeah. Yeah. Waiākea Pirates were because they have---see Waiākea Pirates was more in a sense of might because of baseball. Like they say, you become good player, they join the Waiākea Pirates because they were the ones who played in just like the major league or you know, it's not just the ordinary community play. When you come a better player, then you get into a bigger team more—it's not professional—but better-playing team, scrimmage and stuff is greater. You might play Honolulu or Maui, you know. It's not the kind they just go around picking the players. Before, in your own community, that's what you did. Picking the players, who the good players were. This and that. And if you a pitcher, you a pitcher. But when you come to a better ballgame, they take the best of the pitchers right? So after a while, they get the best first base, second, whatever, and try to make a better team. And they used to play the outer island teams and all. At that time, baseball was really the key, I think. Football more like seasonal stuff like that.

WN: You said earlier that the community was like family and everybody knew each other. What kind of things did the community do together?

MU: Well, I don't know in a sense of what the community did together, but probably because everybody knew each other, what family you came from. And yet, on the other hand, Shinmachi was known as notorious because that's where all the gangsters or the rough kids come from, dead-end kids or whatever. Because we're a small community, and at that time, used to get such thing as gangs. And we're a small community so when it come to gangs, we got a small group but we not gonna step back for any so-called gang. In other words, from the other gangs or whatever, they start picking on one of our fellow, the group, then naturally, we gonna back that fellow up and then we'll confront them. And they don't like the idea that we have one and one and we start having fights after school. I'm gonna pick one guy up from that gang. Next day another guy will pick another fight with that group with another guy. (Laughs) That's how it used to be, and at the end, we was in the back of the school, so the first day had a fight after school, second day had a fight, third day, the school knew that there was gonna be a fight so someone there to catch them.

(Laughter)

WN: Let me turn the tape.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay, you know, Fusae Takaki, this morning was telling me about *Ik-ku*, *Ni-ku*, *San-ku* [three sections of Shinmachi]. What were you in?

MU: Okay, we were in *Ik-ku*.

WN: *Ik-ku*.

- MU: Yeah. In our camp, we were camp one. See, I was telling you about the Crawford family, and. . . .
- WN: Yeah.
- MU: Okay. That's where they owned the cottages and the buildings and whatever. Yeah, camp one, we call it. We were camp one [*Ik-ku*], the other guys camp two [*Ni-ku*], and Fusae [Takaki] folks, camp three [*San-ku*].
- WN: Did you folks have any rivalries between the three camps?
- MU: No, no. Just one community like.
- WN: Mm hmm. Okay, and I would imagine, New Year's time, you folks would go visit different houses.
- MU: Not. . . . Well, I don't know, I mean, we used to go and visit our friends. But I don't remember really going from house to house. When I got older, yeah I went—not in Shinmachi, but some other place. But I don't know. . . .
- WN: You were telling me, too, that was it Crawford who gave every child something at Christmas?
- MU: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, Christmas presents and stuff. I think below the age of fifteen I think, you know, they have. They go to practically every family that have a child below the age of fifteen, and if they do, they take the name of the child, boy or girl, and what family, and then I guess they have a major list of who they are, how old they are. And then, they buy all kind different type of toy for that different age group. And they used to deliver that wrapped in regular present so you can place 'em under the Christmas tree. If you have four children in your family, he bring four presents for your family. And each child's name is on, so they know which present belongs to who.
- WN: And Crawford was, he was the owner of the land?
- MU: Yeah. It used to be Bradshaw or something.
- WN: Bradshaw. Bradshaw.
- MU: Yeah. Early days. Then after Bradshaw died, then went to Crawford, and Crawford the one that took over the rentals and stuff. (The two were related.)
- WN: So Bradshaw was the one who gave the presents?
- MU: Yeah.
- WN: What did he do? What was his . . .
- MU: I really don't know. At that time, I mean, Bradshaw, actually, I don't know who he was, except when Crawford took over because he was the Hilo High School principal, you know, Clyde Crawford. So that, I knew who he was. But he just continued what Bradshaw used to

do. But for the small kids, a toy is a toy. They kind of look forward to it because those times was a lot of marbles and pocket knife and. . . .

And used to get a lot of mango trees around. Guys used to throw stone at the mango, pick mangoes. And across the river, they had a lot of mango trees also. They used to go across the river with a boat and pick mangoes. They had a lot of gardens. So one night they say "Well, let's eat sweet potatoes," so we used to go across and pick potatoes and come home and boil 'em. And we go across to that beach area and throw 'em in that fire. (Laughs) We used to---actually, what it was, we used to "borrow" the potato, we don't grow it, but. . . .

(Laughter)

MU: I know that once, had this *hatake* fence, eh, and in there had all kind of vegetables so one night, said, "Ah, we go get sweet potatoes," so we went down and we crawled under this chicken-wire fence and then a friend of mine digging the potato. After a while, a clear blue sky, he stop, put all that sand back, this and that. So, what happened? We thought somebody was coming.

Said, "What happened?"

Said, "Eh, this is my house garden."

(Laughter)

MU: He realize that's his own potato! Those are the things you laughed over. We used to go and drink coffee at night and we young so *talking story* and then the guy's sister was around and, "Oh, go make hot water for coffee." So she goes in the kitchen to make coffee. *Talk story*. *Talk story*. She's around talk with us, after a while said, "Eh, where our coffee?"

"Ay, I forgot."

Goes to the kitchen, pick up the pot, the pot no more water already, all evaporated. So we used to tease, "How you expect to get married? Even the hot water, you *koge* the hot water. Who's gonna get married to you?"

WN: Did she get married?

MU: Oh yeah. That time, we're young yet.

(Laughter)

MU: Yeah, like I said, that Wailoa River was really about Mark Twain going fishing and all that. That's when we'd catch 'o'opu with bamboo and catch mullets and *āholehole* and Samoan crab. In fact, used to get these bamboo garden. We used to go dig up that *takenoko*. And we wanna make some money. So we used to go and dig up *takenoko*, and we used to put 'em in the bag and go around house to house trying to sell *takenoko*. I think that time we sell 'em for twenty-five cents or something, one, you know, good-size *takenoko*. But it got difficult to sell because no one want to clean it and boil it and all. I guess because of the labor involved, but we thought, oh, because the stores are selling, you know, *takenoko*. So we used to get the

young *takenoko*, dig 'em up, and we thought we can make easy money. So we used to go out and sell 'em, but you know, difficult because they didn't want to buy it because they didn't want to clean the *takenoko*. So after a while, if we can't sell it all, we used to just throw 'em in the bushes. The one we couldn't sell, we could've given away, you know, [but] we throw 'em away in the bushes. (Laughs)

Yeah, like we used to pick a lot of mangoes. Guavas, you know, the sweet guavas, used to climb tree, all that. Ah, but that time, we didn't have the kind of sweets and candies. And, oh, one thing, we used to go to Dairymen's, that's an ice cream company. And here we get about ten or fifteen cents. And we know the fellow that works in that ice cream factory. So we go to the factory, we said, "Ah, Wong, we like buy ice cream."

Ten or fifteen cents, so he said, "Oh, okay come." So he put ice cream in our two front pocket, put ice cream in our two back pocket, he give us two ice cream to hold, and said, "Okay, go now."

I said, "Oh, here's your ten cents."

Says, "No, no, no. You keep that."

So in other words, he giving us the ice cream, but to give us, he give us two in the hand, the rest all in the pocket because he said he don't want the boss to see us carrying all the ice cream out. He didn't want to get penalty, so "You hold these two in your hand, and stick the ice cream in your front pocket and back pocket." And we used to get out from there. And you know, we used to get free ice cream like that.

And once in a while, when they used to---the salesman used to come back. Okay, at that time, the furnace was just a pile of, you know, wastebasket, and just go outdoors and just burn the rubbish. Well, we used to wait for that late afternoon when the salesman check in and then the janitor take the [trash] out to burn. No sooner they empty the wastebasket, we go with a stick, digging 'em, because always get free stick [i.e, the discarded ice-cream-bar stick]. You know, the Milk Nickels and stuff used to get the stick and it says, "Free."

WN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MU: We used to look for those. On the [ice cream] sandwiches you get that square paper and says, "Free." And we used to go to the stores to use that. (Laughs)

WN: You can only find out after you eat 'em right? The stick?

MU: But the thing is, the salesman, used to go out and sell right?

WN: Mm hmm.

MU: Now, the people that turn in the free stick, the store have 'em. So if you get five, they give the salesman five sticks, the salesman give 'em five extra ice cream right?

WN: Mm hmm.

MU: The sticks come home to that office, and when they check with it after they count the sticks, they going throw 'em in the wastebasket. And that's the stick we find 'em.

(Laughter)

MU: When they burn the rubbish. Before it burn, we try to get it out.

(Laughter)

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

MU: Down the river, we used to get this lumber, and we used to make that, we call this kind, tar boat, you know that piece of lumber about this wide, eh?

WN: What, six inches wide?

MU: Yeah. That's it. Six inches. And we cut 'um about two feet or something.

WN: Six inches wide, two feet long.

MU: Yeah, and then we make a boat. You know that two sticks on both side on the lumber right?

WN: Mm hmm.

MU: At the bottom. And the front portion might, you know, like they used to catch the wave and cover the top, and then used to paddle like this. Okay. So we used to caulk in between the cracks. Used to get rags or something. Kind of caulk it in, and we used to get the road tar, you know the tar they used to paint the road?

WN: Yeah, yeah.

MU: We used to boil that to pour it on top to seal the cracks and we used to put that in to carry our weight and stuff, you know, that it doesn't leak and we used to get race boat, tug boat.

WN: On that small thing?

MU: Yeah I mean, well, smaller than this table. Enough for you to fit in and just. . . . Then you can go.

WN: Like making a surfboard.

MU: Ah, yeah. Surfboard at the time was regular made out of hollow, plywood and all that. But these are the small boat that just to sit inside and one man can carry 'em over the head and walk down just like—it's not a kayak, but it's square.

Oh, and then the river---actually, we didn't realize was real polluted. When I say "polluted," raw sewage was going into the river, you know, at that time, no plumbing system. So the canals and stuff, raw sewage coming out and there was the sewage line.

WN: So lot of people built outhouses right over the river?

MU: Yeah, or river or . . .

WN: So waste goes straight down.

MU: Yeah that's right. And used to empty to the river. All right? That's one. But I think the worst one was when they had that Waiākea Mill [Company] and used to get Canec plant [Hawaiian Cane Products Company, Ltd.], Canec mill. Well, the Canec mill used to discharge their wastewater into the river. But that was not by their mill, but further down. They got a pipe, and then right you know where Fusae Takaki's *hatake* is? The garden? (The pipe went through the *hatake* and wastewater emptied out) right there into the river. And that water was white because it mixed with Canec, and had arsenic in it.

WN: Oh.

MU: So up to today, the river is polluted. Hilo Bay also is polluted because all the discharge used to go in there and I guess with the tidal wave stirring up and whatever. So the Wailoa River and Hilo Bay and all that recreation area is—they say not polluted, it's still, they considered some arsenic traces and all that even till today.

WN: You mean, the area by the state recreation—Wailoa [State Park] recreation area?

MU: Wailoa River and all that. You don't see too many fish. You know, you don't see Samoan crabs and the type of fish that used to be around there.

WN: Yeah. So tell me something about Eagle Laundry. You told me little bit about it, but tell me what was it like prior to the war first of all? What was business like?

MU: Well, you want to dry clean and press your pants, about twenty-five to thirty cents a pair. A suit might cost you forty cents or fifty cents to dry clean and press. That's more, like the good wear stuff yeah? Olden days, used to get that kimono and belt [obi], you know the kimono belt? My dad used to wash those, and when I say "wash," that means he used to put, I guess, with solvents, you know, they stretch 'em up on these sticks and with the solvents they used to clean the obi, Japanese obi and stuff. So like you were saying, "How did he learn?" I really don't know. I mean, he had all the equipment for it. I guess by reading up of what to do with it. And I remember that we had this washing machine, put in the solvent, and after that we put 'em in the dryer called tumblers. But [because of] the solvent solution, that water is dirty, so we used to throw some kind of chemical in there and we used to stir the whole thing up and leave it there. And all the sediment and all the dirt and rubbish goes down [to the bottom], and the top is clear. So we used to use the solvent on top. But the first time I remember doing dry cleaning, my dad used to use benzene and that's a very flammable and very dangerous chemical to use. Then after a while, he changed to solvent. I remember benzene because I used to take quite a bit of benzene to play around with, because it's just like gasoline, right? I mean, so flammable that we used to go down the river, throw the benzene or shoot benzene on the—and we used to light match and we can see above the water all burning. In the can, we used to squeeze and thing's just like flamethrower. But after a while, that thing was banned from using for laundry purposes because was too flammable I guess. We used to use 'em for lighter fluid, you know, benzene. The other solvent wasn't as flammable as benzene.

- WN: So prior to the war, what kind of people would go to the laundry and get things dry cleaned and so forth?
- MU: Well, we had people working in the [sugar] mill and Hilo Iron Works, and they covered really with grease and they can't wash that off at home. I mean, the housewives and stuff. They really don't have the facilities to wash the clothes so we had steady of these garage people with grease and dirty clothes. They used to bring 'em in, and most of them made of cotton, overalls and all that. So my dad used to get this boiling steam, you know, in this tub, open that steam up, and put kerosene in there, and really boiled the clothes up. The olden days, that's how lot of them used to wash clothes. They used to put in the tub, put firewood at the bottom, and boil, boil, boil the clothes out. 'Cause my dad had this laundry, he used to clean 'em with steam, you know, I guess really hot, hot water to melt the oil out and all that. And after that, he used to put 'em in the regular washer with soap. And after that with soap, it gets clean. And after that, wash it out well, naturally, used to dry and press it, and they can wear it to work again. At that time was lot of that, not khaki, but the overalls, the blue jeans?
- WN: Denim.
- MU: Yeah, denim and stuff like that. Those were the kind of clothes that come in. But the better wear, like the way I said, suit and stuff, just about twenty-five cents, thirty cents for wash and press.
- WN: You did dry cleaning, too?
- MU: Yeah, dry cleaning. Dry cleaning. Regular laundry. Military was mostly khaki and whites. Very seldom get that regular woolen uniform.
- WN: So when the war came, how did that change your father's business?
- MU: Well, one khaki pants was twenty-five cents, and you talking about room full of laundry now, that's the difference, you know. And they used to bring, oh, khaki pants, shirt, underwear, and everything else used to come. And all of their clothing used to get their name, you know indelible ink. And then because the ones that stationed here, bachelors so, once or twice a week, they used to bring their laundry down and just dump 'em down. And my mother used to check whose clothes it was, and whites, whites in the same one, and they used to clean 'em. And had shelves with their name, and then she just stack 'em up there, and when they come, wrap 'em up and they used to come and pick 'em up. The Seabees, they used to come and . . .
- WN: Seabees were the ones stationed at . . .
- MU: NAS. Naval [Air Station]. That's what it was. All the chiefs and so forth, I used to know the ones who used to take care of the ship's service. They call it ship service. I don't know what . . .
- WN: Did you folks deliver at all?
- MU: No. They used to come in. At that time, hard to get certain kind of goods, eh? Like chocolate candies and stuff. They used to bring chocolate candies galore, beer that you can't get, they

used to bring 'em in from. . . . One time, I know gas was shortage, so they used to bring in the five-gallon can, aviation fuel. (Laughs) You can tell it's aviation fuel because when you put in the car, really smoke up, lotta smoke. Well, us kids, we wanna go riding, eh, so we used to put half and half. We used to go to the service station, put in regular gas, and after that, mix 'em with the others.

(Laughter)

MU: So at that time, used to get coupons to go get gas.

WN: Oh. During the war.

MU: A coupon. B, C, and you know, whatever. Ration, gas ration. But we didn't have no problem but . . .

WN: They gave you fuel like that. For payment?

MU: No. Because they knew that it was rationed, so they cannot get like regular fuel. So the five-gallon can they fill 'em up with aviation fuel and bring 'em up. "Hey we need," I said. So they used to give us. And then it's not the purpose of we don't have gas, the thing is you have to pay for it. I think more of that basis we used to use the fuel. Because my dad had a, I think B card. And we can get all the gas we want because had business card or something that fuelwise, you can get, you know. Some were rationed on ten gallons a month, you know. That time gas was really rationed during that war.

WN: What about liquor?

MU: Liquor, see, my dad was a alien. Aliens cannot buy liquor. But my mother was a citizen, she was born here. But my mother lost her citizenship when she got married to my father. So during the war, my dad want to purchase liquor. So my mother had to re-get her citizenship. She had to go to classes and all that. And she got her citizenship. And after that she can buy liquor so she used to buy liquor for my dad. But liquor also was rationed. But in the meantime when this ship service stop, they used to bring beer. They used to smuggle 'em out or whatever. "Eh, here one-two case." (Laughs)

WN: Did businesses change during the war? Like were there more bars and dance halls, things like that?

MU: I think during the war, everybody had money. I mean, because of the war, the prosperity came when the military came. And then, you know, they had the Pacific War right? When they had the Pacific War, they had that Tarawa, Iwo Jima and all—the marines. Okay, the marines went to battle there and they been in the front for so many months. They came back R and R. Recreation. They land right in Shinmachi. You know that LSD [dock landing ship] landing, they call that. You know that beach area here? There's all that LSD landing, (which was used during World War II. The ship landed right on the beach.)

WN: Right on the bayfront?

MU: Yeah. They just land right on the beach.

WN: Oh, oh. Maneuvers?

MU: No, yeah I mean. And then from there, the marines, they get one park down here, right here.

WN: Right in front of Shinmachi?

MU: Yeah. That's where they stay overnight, and from there, they used to take 'em to Waimea or something like that and Waimea used to get camp Tara—what?

WN: Camp Tarawa. Yeah.

MU: Whatever, there. They house about 60,000 marines or something?

WN: I read about 40,000. [A total of 50,000 military personnel camped out in a tent city in Waimea, Hawai'i between 1942 and 1945, named Camp Tarawa.]

MU: Okay. Then, the thing is, they been fighting the Japanese eh? "Japs!" Oh, they were bitter because their comrades fall and all that. They was out to get Japanese, you know. So once, from---they landed here and that railroad track used to take 'em up to Pa'auilo, and from Pa'auilo, they to trek 'em out to Waimea. So when they went to Honoka'a town, they see lot of Japanese. They went to Waimea. Then one convoy was coming back to Honoka'a to [harass] the Japanese, but they heard about it so they put a block by the first gate or something. They block it off. The MPs and stuff, they stop 'em and turn 'em back. But that's how bitter it was. So at that time, "What, you damn Jap!" That's when all the Jap *da kine* hatred, all came out. But when they landed here, there are MPs on the sidewalk going back and forth so they cannot. . . . This is out of bounds already because right across there, get lot of stores.

WN: Oh, they couldn't go across Kamehameha Avenue?

MU: That's right. Because they prohibit. No fence whatsoever. They right on the beach, they get tents, they lying around. But see, the young kids used to run across the street, you know, buying. Errands. The guy say, "Buy this and that," they give 'em money, the kids run back and forth. The kids make big bucks because they [the soldiers] get so many months back pay. Loaded with money. Cashwise, they get.

WN: The soldiers, you mean?

MU: Yeah. So they give this kid, "Okay, twenty dollars, go buy this and that." The kid run across the street, come back. After a while, they used to give 'em tips, big money tips. Hey, big money was, then. And then they used to run across the street, no change, because the store get so much change and that's it. They say, "That's all right," they tell the store. Oh, they tell the kids go across the street, buy---oh, I'm sorry, they had change. This was in Waimea. They went to Fukushima Store, that's right. And at Haina, the Fukushima Store had change for so much. They didn't have bank in Waimea, but in Honoka'a, they had. But they don't have enough cash because the amount of marines in Waimea, they come with twenty-dollar bills, they overflow, no change. They have the merchandise. "I'm sorry, I can't sell nothing. I have

no change.”

They say, “That’s all right. Here’s a twenty,” and they pick up whatever they can. They pick up only ten dollar worth because in the arm, you cannot pick up that much. That time, things were cheap, right? The rest was all tip. Go down there, you see a five-dollar bill on the floor, nobody pick ’em up. They no care. It’s like one dollar rubbish.

WN: Play money.

MU: Yeah, because they get so much they don’t care about money.

WN: You were too old by then?

MU: Well I was graduating. That was before the tidal wave. You know, so much money that money was no object. Coca-Cola Bottling Company used to take Coke up Waimea. How many marines you said? [Fifty] thousand? Well, to supply them Coca-Cola, if [50,000] marines, have to go with 100,000 cases. Because each marine buy two cases, took it back, two cases underneath the bunk. When the Coca-Cola truck used to go up there—in fact, the convoy used to pick up the Coke, bring ’em up there. No sooner they put the Coke down, they pick up two cases and going away. The paymaster only collecting money or whatever. They bring the empty, they put ’em on the side, they only pick up two cases. They have not enough Coca-Cola because everybody buying by the cases. And then nonrefrigerated. Underneath the bunk they throw ’em. Okay, they used to get school kids run around house to house where they can find. They’re shortage of bottles. They go and then the Coca-Cola company pay two cents a bottle for each one. So kids used to pick up bottles, you know, when they can.

So when you talk about money, was no object. Oh, Waimea. They making hamburgers. They kill cow, the whole cow go to make hamburgers, never mind the steak and all that. Because hamburgers was in demand. The whole cow, they grind ’em up for hamburgers. Ah, one guy had a steak house. He only make steak but he charge good price for it because the serviceman want to eat solid steak right? And they used to charge, so the guy make good money. But, like I said, money like that was no object that time. Everybody had money.

WN: And so in your father’s case, was he able to improve his business during the war?

MU: Well, during the war, the money he made, he bought all these new equipments. He bought dryers, presses, dry-clean machines and all that, so all the money he earned from the wartime, he invested that money. So that the war was over, now ’45, 46, tidal wave, beginning of ’46 now, so he lost everything.

WN: Well, I think that’s a good place to stop because what I can do is next time, we can start right at 1946.

MU: All right, then, I can put the thoughts together. I didn’t know what today one. If *da kine* then I can recall things happening, but right off the bat—hey you talk about sixty, seventy years ago, you know. (Laughs)

WN: You doing good.

- MU: But I think when it comes to the other one, from here on, not too bad because then I can put my thoughts together.
- WN: What I wanted to do is get some history of Shinmachi.
- MU: Oh, okay.
- WN: And so now it helps us better understand how the tsunami affected Hilo by looking at the history of a place like Shinmachi.
- MU: Okay. See, to me, like the way my wife said, the uniqueness about Shinmachi is after the tidal wave, when you mention the name Shinmachi, I guess it's like, what that place, like Brigadoon, that no exist, right? I mean, they get the memories, yet it's not there. I mean, Shinmachi was there, now it's no longer there. And the people that lived there, they all scattered. And then they had map primarily. Okay, so I was involved in that reunion stuff. At that time, the closeness of the Shinmachi group got together. But the thing is, they all getting older, they all passing away, so not that many coming. So about the young ones, about---I'd say, we about the youngest, I'd say, there because we were eighteen at that time. The ones below that, my kid sister guys, you talk about Shinmachi, they don't know anything, because she was about four years less, let's say, was thirteen years old, the older one. The one below that was younger so they don't remember anything. They went to school. They know they went to Waiākea Kai School and all that but not more than that.
- WN: Yeah. I think that there are a lot of towns in Hawai'i and elsewhere that no longer exist yeah? But I think with a place like Shinmachi, it—it was there one day . . .
- MU: And gone.
- (Laughter)
- WN: The next day it was gone.
- MU: So this is why, see, the ones living in Shinmachi. You know, we made that monument. We said, "We want a monument." You know that thing was put up by the state? We asked the state, "Eh, put up a monument over there." So this is why they have that Shinmachi memorial. Now, I worked on that, too, you know. And we got it from the legislature. But second thought came after I said, "Why only Shinmachi?" It should have been, to me, right now, I say, "It should have been for [all] the tidal wave victims." Then anybody can go there as a memorial. So this is how, Waiākea, they have their own, but Waiākea one is not really a memorial. It's just a clock.
- WN: Clock.
- MU: To remind them because I don't think the state would put up memorials like that for this. In Laupāhoehoe have one, but I don't know if that was community or state or whatever. But you know what I'm trying to say? So that Shinmachi memorial that the state put so much money in and then it's just for Shinmachi. So to me, the people that go there to worship or something like that, somehow they go to unknown. You know, the kind because they cannot find the body or whatever reasons. But why only Shinmachi? That's the way I look at.

WN: Yeah, yeah.

MU: You know? But it's still the state put that up, but because of their power. But that is they way they unite to get that thing there: through the legislature. To appropriate this kind of money for a structure right there.

WN: Yeah, I never heard of that structure, you know, I have to go see it.

MU: Mm hmm. It's right at the back of . . .

WN: Let me turn off the tape recorder.

MU: Yeah.

WN: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 29-10-2-98

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Masao Uchima (MU)

Hilo, Hawai'i

May 20, 1998

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: Okay, Let's begin our second session with Masao Uchima on May 20, 1998. We're at his home in Hilo, Hawai'i. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Masa, why don't we start the second session talking about the 1946 tsunami. You were still in high school at that time.

MU: Yes. Mm hmm.

WN: Okay. So tell me what happened that day, that morning.

MU: Well. (Pause) Oh that morning. That's April 1, 1946. I was still in bed, and my mother just was yelling, "Tsunami! Tsunami!" And she came to wake me up. I really didn't know what is tsunami. We heard about it, but not experience that. So right away, I changed my clothes, I came to the living room, and looked out the window. And the whole area was underwater. And my reaction was, no matter where I looked, it's all water all around. So I thought, oh, the island was sinking, you know. I first thought that the island just sinking 'cause the water was all around us. And I hear the cracking sound. And the cracking sound was all that debris, you know that rubbish and everything else from the ocean, and I guess was sweeping under the house, so you can hear that wood, and all things was kind of cracking under the house. And when I looked out the window, I saw my neighbor, Kishi man and his son was trying to save the father because they were in the water itself, and he was trying to help the father to safety.

Then, the water subsided—I guess that's the first wave—then my dad and I went in front to Kamehameha [Avenue] because that's where he had his laundry [business], to see what kind of damage it was. Went there, the doors was flinged open, and I guess the wave itself went into the building, and I guess the back wall was all open because the water just ran right through the building. And normally, you see, they know that another wave is coming, you know, later on. So my dad said to at least close the front door, which didn't really help. And the front door had all this California grass wrapped around the door. So as I was pulling out the California grass to close the door, I turned around and my dad wasn't there. Nobody was around there, so I just left everything, and was running back to the cottage because our cottage was in back of the building. And at that time, when my dad was at the Coca-Cola [Bottling Company] building—because that was the only building, structure at that time was made out of concrete. And he's from Okinawa, Japan. They experience a lot of tidal wave, and he knew

that that's the only building can sustain that force of that kind of tidal wave and [subsequent] waves. So he went on top of the Coca-Cola building on the roof, and started to yell at all the people around the neighbor[hood], you know, to come up to the building, because that was the only safest building. So he was yelling to them to come up that building, so lot of them started to run toward the building to get upstairs of that second floor. And we went into the building. We saw a lot of people and all that, but [we were] in the building, so we cannot see anything. There were no windows so we can't see anything. So what we did was, from the window, we crawled up onto the roof of the building, and we saw the activities up from the second floor. And another wave came, the second wave. And we saw people was in the river going up and down.

WN: Wailoa River?

MU: Yeah, Wailoa River. But they were on [top of] the building. I mean, you know, just on the roof of the building. The building itself was already washed into the river.

WN: This is which building?

MU: I mean, the cottages that were in that area. That building was washed into the river, and I guess, they climbed onto the roof of the buildings, but with the wave action, the building was going up and down, the cottages.

WN: Yeah.

MU: And you trying to help them go for rescue but you can't because the river itself—the current—was strong. And there were no way that actually can help them. And lot of families, like I said, were in the river being swept away and all that. You hear people screaming for help, and it was really an eerie feeling. You know, more like—really hard to explain. You hear people, adults are yelling for help, and some people just screaming, and you can hear screams and cries. And I mean, really, you [want] to help them, but there's no way that you can help them because you weren't prepared. There were no ropes, no boat, you know, things like that. And you can see the cottage floating down the river. In the meantime, the third wave was coming. That's the hugest wave so far—was coming again, and we're on the roof [of the Coca-Cola building], and we saw this. So huge the wave that we were afraid that the wave was gonna come onto the roof. So we started to rush toward the window to get into the building again, and . . .

WN: The Coca-Cola building?

MU: Yeah, Coca-Cola building because it was two-story. As we trying to get back into the building—and it's just narrow—so we break all the side of the wall to get in. You know, the force. And the wave splashed onto the roof, but the building was saved because of concrete.

The people that was floating up and down the river—you don't see anything except debris, just rubbish and stuff. That thing [the cottages] just deteriorated like a matchbox, you know, and just floating debris. You can see the building next to me was just floating. Lumber and wood and all that. The intervals between waves—it's not waves that just came one, two, three. You get about fifteen [minutes] to half an hour or so in between the waves. In fact, that day, had so many waves, I'd say about two dozen waves or something, but it's just that ripple

action of the water itself.

When the third wave was coming in, like I said, that's one of the hugest waves, you know, it came over the breakwater and came about halfway into the Hilo Bay, and just like it stopped there. And what happened was, because all the water was receding and building up the momentum, just like the water just rolling, and all the water that was in front of this huge wave kept on rushing out. And as that wave didn't have any more water to collect, I guess, it come just like rumbling in like a bulldozer. You know, crashing. It's all that muddy, dirty water.

And when the first time tidal wave hit Shinmachi area, there was this railroad track that used to be [Hawaii] Consolidated Railway, Ltd.]. That was about seven, seven fifteen in the morning. Even they didn't know if there was a tidal wave. As they were passing that area, the first wave hit. At that time, the crew was on the train, but [by] the second wave, they all abandoned the train. Some went off toward Piopio Street, and the others ran back to Waiākea town over that Wailoa River bridge for safety. And these so-called boxcars with the locomotives was stranded on the rail. And with the second wave, we saw that—I guess the water or something went into the boiler when the wave came, and exploded. And the train caught on fire. When the next wave came, that fire just went out. But all those boxcars were on the rail, they all floated like matchsticks right across the river. And those boxcars were the ones that might hit the buildings and so forth, and break the buildings.

WN: So actually a lot of the damage occurred not only the force of the water, but also the force of the lumber.

MU: Yeah. Well, with the water and I guess the buildings cannot sustain—it's just like a wall, it cannot sustain, hold the water with the power of the water, so they just break apart. The boxcars floated like matchboxes, went over and kind of hit the buildings, and that kind of broke the buildings apart. Had this building—used to be the Royal Theatre actually, long ago, but by 1946 it became Universal [Sales]. The Kai family had that distributing liquor [business].

WN: Which family?

MU: Kai family. Kai. Yes. And by the way, they were living in Keaukaha area, and the whole family passed away in that wave also. But all of the whole building was demolished, and they had a shipment of all the liquor and all. Everything ended up in Wailoa River. Well, that's during the tidal wave and all that. And oh, what else. . . .

WN: So all that time, from the time you woke up to the time your father called you to go up the Coca-Cola building, you were watching everything from up there, the second floor?

MU: Yes. Yes.

WN: I see. Was there like a balcony or something, or . . .

MU: No, it's not. It's a concrete building, square, just a office and the production area, and it's about—it's two story, but actually three [stories high], because the ceiling is very high, the first floor, because of production. And then there's the office up there. It's a flat floor. That's

a whole concrete. And on the other end, they had just a warehouse structure, with a roof like that. But the other ends was also concrete. And that building sustained all that wave. And the Coca-Cola bottles, they used to stack 'em up eight cases high, about ten on a row. And then they'd have so many bottles. Those withstood all the force of the wave. Even the cases didn't fall down. (Chuckles)

WN: Wooden cases.

MU: Yeah. Because in between the bottles, there's space, and the water went right through. It's not a solid wall, eh?

WN: I see.

MU: So the water just seeped right through. The wave did go through, but the force [was diffused] because it's not a solid wall, you know. So those Coca-Cola bottles in the cases just stayed like that, you know.

WN: So from that second story, what could you—you were facing the ocean?

MU: Yeah. We can overlook the whole area, the ocean area. The wave activities in the bay itself was helter-skelter. In other words, it's not only coming toward shore, it was going sideways, wave hitting wave, because some waves come [from different directions and] hit each other. But they had so many different waves, and that thing lasted all day, the wave itself and the action of the wave and the very rough water.

After everything calmed down, my neighbor that helped his father to safety, he and I, we walked around all that area where the damage was, but all the buildings were down. So the civil defense and [American] Red Cross came in actually to look for survivors or bodies. And they had lot of bodies because you don't know where the bodies going to be. They [were] wrapped up in debris and under buildings and California grass and all that, weeds. And because we were living in that area, they want us to identify the so-called corpse or dead bodies. And they had it all lined up, and even [though] you knew the person real good, hard to recognize them because of the facial expression or the terror in the face or whatever, and the hair is not combed, helter-skelter, the face is discolored, you know, bluish and white, and you know all that different. . . . So, even if you know the person, it's kind of hard to identify because of the condition they're in. We saw so many of them, and say, "Eh, Masa, come, can you recognize this person?" We look at 'em, but at the end, we don't even want to look at the body because get so many of the same thing, you know. Like what I was saying, it's kind of hard to identify the person. But they want us to try to help them identify because . . .

WN: This was at the icehouse [which was used as a temporary morgue]?

MU: Yeah, I mean, this was the earlier part, when they had. . . . See, what they had is just a stretcher and bodies and they just put it on the flatbed truck. So when we see a body, they didn't come and pick it up, we just put a stick, cut a stick and stick 'em in the ground telling them that, oh, there might be a body here. That's the way they did it. Yes, they pick up a lot of bodies, take 'em to the icehouse, because discolored and all that.

I kind of felt sorry for my dad because at that time, he lost everything. And I guess with

fatigue and all that, he was so tired, he was sitting on the sidewalk at the place that have to all be evacuated. They want everybody out of that area. So my dad was kind of sitting down, and this National Guard guy with a jeep, one guy driving and one guy with that rifle sitting on the hood, and my father didn't want to move, so they come with the jeep with the bumper to edge him on, for him to stand up and go. So my dad got angry and said, "*Baka ni shioru*," you know, [they're not treating him with respect] in Japanese. But he have to stand up and start walking, and they right on his tail all the way from Shinmachi area till he walked out of Piopio Street, because he was kind of the last one coming out of that area. I was thinking, gee, at least they could put him in the jeep. But no, I mean, they just edge him on.

WN: This is what? The military?

MU: Yeah. National Guard. And we were kind of beating the National Guard down [i.e., complaining about the National Guard] because the way they acted authorit[arian] and whatever. [If] household goods belong to [you], say, "Oh, this belongs to us." So you put 'em in the pile. But next day we came, was all gone and we heard a lot of stories after that [about looting]. Next day, we want to get in, but you cannot get into the area because you have to get clearance. [Re-entry was on a] permit basis, so since my dad had a laundry [business] and he had this equipment there, the equipment going get rust [because of the salt water], so we got permit to get into that area. But it took about two days later before we can get into that area. So in the meantime, we got fresh water and washed the equipment down and put oil on it so it doesn't rust. But by that time, [because of the] salt [water], right away it rust. But anyway, that's the only way we salvaged some of the equipment.

WN: So how much of the building was actually—was the whole building destroyed and only the equipment left?

MU: Yeah. Because of the weight [of the equipment] and the plumbing things [holding them] down, some of the equipment was left behind. Like the steam presser, the drier—they called it tumbler. But salvage was very small and hardly anything. But internally all the inside things was all washed away.

The Red Cross came with blankets and clothing and stuff, but we went to my aunty's because we had relatives. We stayed with them and all.

WN: So was the entire building of the laundry gone?

MU: Yeah. The building itself was still standing, but the interior—because the back wall was all open, it's—see, what happened, the building's here. The wave came in, and the wave went to the building, get no place to go. With the pressure against the wall, the wall give way, then everything in there just washed away. So the building still there, but the interior's all gone.

WN: And what about your house? Your cottage?

MU: It floated away, and then same thing. It rested against one pear tree or something and then the inside, you know, the wall is gone.

WN: Oh. But the structure was still . . .

MU: Yeah. The structure itself, wooden building, floated away, and what you call, hit against a pear tree. I guess the wave runs up, and then the bottom kind of gave way. So had that *butsudan* [Buddhist altar].

WN: Yeah.

MU: It was on the wall, but the wall is gone but that thing just laid right in the bed.

WN: Okay, so tell me that story now, about the *butsudan*.

MU: The *butsudan* is on this wall, you know, but they have platform on . . .

WN: On the back wall?

MU: Yeah. On the back wall. And in the bedroom, my dad folks' bed was there. Okay? That wall is gone . . .

WN: That the *butsudan* was against? That wall was gone?

MU: Yeah. I guess because of the force, the *butsudan* flew and landed right in the center of the bed, okay?

WN: Yeah. (Chuckles)

MU: And the wall was gone, but the bed was still there.

WN: So, when you came to see your house . . .

MU: Yeah, we got in from that area because no more wall.

WN: The bed was still there.

MU: Yeah. The bed is still there.

WN: And the *butsudan* was . . .

MU: Right on the bed.

WN: Upright?

MU: No. Not upright, but kind of laying down. But the front is [facing] up, you know. Not just sideways. Just like somebody just put it there on the bed. So that's the first thing we kind of noticed, you know. Kind of unusual.

Now, our neighbor in the back had about four, five kids. She came out from the house, and we're calling her to come up the cement [building], but I think one or two was still in the house. So she went back in to get the kids. In the meantime, that's when the third wave was coming. So when the third wave came, she had no chance of coming out again, so she stayed in the house. So we watching her, but when the third wave came, that house just started to

float away. And from the window, she was just like saying good-bye, waving. And that's the last we seen or we heard. And the whole family died.

I told this to the policeman, Bob [Robert] Chow, okay. And he said, "I remember that, Masa," he told me. The husband, early in the morning, went to work—Kobayashi—he went to work. Then his wife, at the time, stayed home, and that's when the wave came. So he [Robert Chow] said, from that day, he [Kobayashi] came to the police station [asking] if he found any member of the family. For several days, he sitting there on the police station front steps, if any word or—they trying to find. But he [Robert Chow] say he remember the person every single day was sitting there worried about the family. But they all died, though. They couldn't find 'em.

WN: This is a Shinmachi family?

MU: Yeah. Shinmachi—well, it's rental unit, so they were in there, but the guy Kobayashi was our neighbor. I think about four or five toddlers and his wife. He went to work, and he's the only survivor. So he was really in a daze. The guy, Bob Chow, was telling me that [Kobayashi] used to come down [to the police station] and ask all kinds of questions and stuff, you know. But they couldn't find. [See interviews with Robert Chow and Ronald and May Goya for other accounts of this incident.]

WN: So try to remember when you were on the Coca-Cola building, and seeing the third wave, what kind of sounds did you hear?

MU: Like the way I said, eerie sounds, screaming, crackling, really so many things, that "ooohhh," you know, and crackling and people yelling here and there. They like help, and [they're] crying and not everything was at ease. Was just that constantly, you hear this screaming and disastrous sound like, you know? People that ran up there, they left lot of things and came to Coca-Cola building. We saw blood on the floor of the building, this and that. Then we said, "Oh, somebody's hurt. Somebody's hurt." So everybody looking at their foot and all that. And had this, I think, was Hamamoto man. He look and he get big gash. Cut from the glass or something because I guess he ran. But he did not know that he had that cut. I guess shock and stuff. And after they find out that he had a cut, then they start to tend to him, then he felt the pain, and he couldn't walk because of loss of blood or couldn't put pressure on the feet. But up to that time, he didn't even know he had a big gash or cut.

I don't know if true or what, but I guess he was telling his story. But this is all hearsay. He had a store, Hamamoto Store. He said with the wave, somehow, his foot was stuck in this wood or something. His foot was stuck. And he couldn't get his foot out. There was a wave coming. So he said, well, if I going die, I going die like a man. So he brace himself, facing that wave or whatever. I mean, I don't know if can see the wave, but you know, *suck wind* kind attitude. And then after that, when he was in that position, I guess with that tide or something, his foot was loose, you know, the thing was out, because I guess with the movement of the wood or board or whatever. So he said he fear for his life again, you know, *inochi ga oshigatte mata*, then that's when he say he ran to the [Coca-Cola] building. I don't know if Mrs. [Fusae] Takaki might know the story, but they say something like that about this Hamamoto man.

WN: And was your father at home at the time?

MU: Yes. We all home.

WN: So was you, your father, and your mother.

MU: Yeah. And my two kid sisters.

WN: Your kid sisters. You folks all went to Coca-Cola?

MU: Yeah. They were all up there. And right in the back of our home, my uncle and the family was living there, Nishimoto. Same name as you. And my mother folks ran out there and said, "Tsunami, tsunami!" too, at that time that she was yelling for me to get up, she went to the back window telling them that there was tidal wave. After the first wave, we were on Coca[-Cola] building, we saw the Kamimura man. He had a blacksmith shop down the street on the other way. He was walking on Kamehameha Avenue. They said, "Kamimura! Eh!" We wave him to come up the building.

He look at us, and he said, "Ah." Just like *daijōbu*. He wave, he keep on going. I guess, after he walk few ways, then he saw the other end where the wave hit, you know, the Piopio Street area. Okay? So he cannot go to his shop, so he start running back, but he couldn't make 'em to the Coca-Cola building because the wave was right on his tail. We say, "Climb up the telephone pole!" So he start to climb up the telephone pole, the wave was right on his tail, he was on the telephone pole, so the wave was right under him. But the telephone pole did not break. It still stood so then he was all right. We saw him just like a monkey climbing up and he shaking in the pole. That's one

Another one, is this police officer. This was 1946, right after the war. You can't get cars at that time, new cars. The first car that came out was Nash, if you remember. This police officer, I forgot his name. But anyway, he got a brand-new Nash. After first wave, he came in his car in that area. We told him, you better get away from that area because we can see on the outside, breakwater side, and we know some more wave coming. So we say to get out of that area. Because Shinmachi area, Wailoa Bridge and Waiākea town, after that you can go to safety.

The other end is Piopio Street, the rest is all river in the back, right? No way of escape if you in that area. And that's where Shinmachi was. So he was by the Coca-Cola building. Coca-Cola building's in the center of the Shinmachi area. So we told him the wave coming so get out of there. So he took the back road, came to the road and was going back toward Piopio Street. No sooner he made the bend, Piopio Street side, all the wave was there already. Just like that Kamimura man. So he have to leave his car, get up on the car, and climb one building or whatever. But his car end up right in the river. Brand-new Nash. So get all kind things that did happen.

WN: Well, your mother was working for Coca-Cola at that time . . .

MU: No.

WN: Oh, not yet?

MU: No, because that was '46. I was a senior in high school. My mom and dad folks, they

had a laundry. After the '46 tidal wave, my dad lost everything. So my mom worked for Coca-Cola Bottling Company, as bottle checker, you know, when they watch the bottle to see that make sure the bottle's all clean. So she was a checker for—sitting in front of those bottles. And when I graduated from high school, they gave me a job to be salesman. So I worked for Coca-Cola Bottling Company, too, you know, for employment. Coca-Cola Bottling Company withstood that wave.

Right after the tidal wave, we went around, looking for bodies. They found this man, his body was wrapped up in wire, I guess, with the wave and stuff. Either that or I don't know if he tied himself to the post or something, but the post, I guess, broke.

WN: How long were you in the Coca-Cola building? When did you feel safe to come down?

MU: Oh. Let's see. They stayed up there about good two or three hours, no?

WN: And the third wave was the biggest.

MU: Yeah. Mm hmm.

WN: But that wasn't the last one though?

MU: No. They had lot of waves after that, I guess, the [wave] train or whatever. But they have wave activities till late afternoon. You can see the wave activities, yeah?

WN: But you folks came down before that?

MU: Yeah.

WN: So after you came down, do you remember where you went?

MU: Well, we went around there looking for your personal properties and all that, help people, you know, whatever. I don't know. We just kind of roamed around. We looked for bodies. In fact, after that day, they asked for volunteers to get in that area, and they gave us a blue patch, that was, I guess, a civil defense volunteer to help or something. And we found several bodies. And they're bloated already because [bodies were there for a] few days already. Because of the wave, you know, like men [wear] pants, but the pants is way down, with the force of the wave. Men, at least, even the pants is down. Women, and stuff, no clothing. Entirely. You know, it's bare. And the hair is helter-skelter. Funny, I mean, like the way I said. You look at the corpse. Even you know that person, hard to recognize. Because they not maked-up or whatever. They're just---see the hair all wet, and the facial expression, well, tragic, yeah?

WN: Yeah.

MU: Yeah.

WN: So try to describe—what did Shinmachi look like after the wave?

MU: Flat. (Laughs) Yeah. The first thing they did is the street have to be cleared. So just like bulldozers they come and just clear the roadway first, all different roadways. So these are just

bunch of lumbers stacked here, stacked there, rubbish or whatever. Boulders piled together and buildings, whatever rubbish put 'em together for the wrecker to take it away. The place our building was, I think that's the only building was standing and the interior was out. From there on, was all flat. They all flat. No buildings [from Shinmachi down] to Hilo Iron Works building. And they had all buildings before that.

WN: All the way up to the back to the river?

MU: Yeah. Kind of all flat.

WN: What about beyond the river? The other side?

MU: The other side didn't have buildings. Just open, not forest, just vegetation. Just like pasture land and bushes and grasses and they didn't have any—had mango trees and all kind of stuff, but hardly anybody was living across the river.

WN: So what kinds of things were you able to save or to salvage?

MU: Really, nothing. (Chuckles) I mean, really nothing. I guess the only thing might be of value is *da kine*, pictures, or keepsake, but the rest, like that, I mean. . . .

WN: Were there problems with people going around and maybe taking things that didn't belong to them?

MU: Anything. I mean, like the way I was saying, you might get valuables, [but] you get no car, no nothing [to transport it], so all you can do is stack it up one area. Next day you come back, it's gone, so if anything valuable, they took it or whatever. Good example is Keaukaha area. Lot of homes didn't get even touched by the water, but they had to be evacuated in case there's future wave. So they were reluctant to leave their homes, but when they leave, the National Guard went in to protect the area and all that. But when they came back, vandals [broke in]. The homes were break into, and theft was on, and so here you have nothing damaged from the wave, but when you went home, your home was ransacked. They had those cases. And it's good, and yet bad when get guardsmen come in like that sometimes. They don't know [if] you're living there or not. What I trying to say is, who can get in there and who cannot get in there? If they have somebody that live in that area, "Oh yeah, that person used to live in here," he have the right to go in and out. Keaukaha area, Kalapana area, before, because of the lava flow, people living there, they get animals so they can just go in and out. But you get people that don't have no authority, but they have some kind of pull, they get passes, they go for sight-seeing and that kind of stuff. A good one is 1960 tidal wave. May 21 . . .

WN: [Twenty-]three.

MU: Twenty-third. Okay, yeah. Okay, well this is going from '46 to 1960 one. But that day I was up May's Fountain [owned by the] Goyas. They lived in Shinmachi. So we were there, drinking, eating something. And I talking to May, and her birthday is May 21. I'm May 22. Tidal wave is May 23. So that was Saturday, May 21, we talking, and said, "Oh, that's her birthday."

"I thought I'm gonna retire before I come this old," she said.

[I] said, "Oh, your birthday today? My birthday is tomorrow." And we talked about it, you know, *talk story*. Then tidal wave. Next day I went. Nothing. That place was flat. I mean, the whole building, the gas pump, her business, all gone. Just concrete on the floor. And I went to see her, she said, "Oh Masa, you remember Saturday we were in here talking about, we're talking about retirement? I didn't think I was gonna retire this way, with nothing. Complete washout." That's how I really remember that day.

WN: Yeah.

MU: Yeah. Because of that subject matter. That's why I'm [May] 22, she's [May] 21. I know her birthday is [May] 21. And tidal wave is [May] 23, see. But then [s]he and I, like now we said, "What valuables you can save?" May's Fountain and Service Station, the wave came. And the only thing the guy, the husband, Square, saved was the nozzle of the gas pump. And he picked that up. The nozzle, you know where you press it. And he said, "This is real expensive." Because that's the automatic one. You know, when come full the automatic one shut off, right?

WN: Yeah.

MU: That's when that thing started to come up. So I guess he had that automatic one. So he kept that because this expensive. So that's the only thing he can pick up, or something around there. But something of value, that's it, you know, that nozzle. So he and I, we had nothing to look at, so "Oh, let's go try walk to Waiākea." You know, see the damage. Because at that time, Waiākea town was really damaged.

WN: Right, this is 1960 yeah?

MU: [Nineteen sixty], that's right. So he and I, we walk all the way. Because Shinmachi on the other side didn't have anything. We *wen* walk by Suisan fish market. Walk all around by Naniloa [i.e., Hawaii Naniloa Resort], wasn't damaged, round by the ice pond, and we came by Ken's Pancake House [i.e., Ken's House of Pancakes] . . .

WN: Where it is now?

MU: Where it is now. Same place. Walk around that area. And we was gonna come in. What happened? The National Guard, the policemen [are] down there. We can't get in. They said, "Oh, you have to get permit. You get no authority to get into that area."

We said, "What do you mean, we were in that area. We went around the other way, came back. Now to get back to where we were, we have to go all around the other way."

So the people that were there guarding that place, they didn't know who this guy Goya was that had a business there. He wouldn't let them in, so he [Goya] got kind of angry, and he said, "You telling us, we can't get in going through. Now what is that tour bus going into that area?" You know [where Ken's House of Pancakes is today]? Get a road, and here's a tour car or bus going into that devastated area, into Waiākea town. And he said, "What business they got going in that area?" You know. So priorities kind of mixed up.

So that's what happened. But 1946, at that time, there were no warning, tidal wave warning. People did not really know what tidal wave was all about. They hear about tidal wave, tsunami. What is it? Because they didn't experience until 1946, then loss of life and all that changed. Then they started this siren system. Prior to that, they get no warning. All right. Now going back another one, is my uncle at Kaūmana. He had a piggery. He's up Kaūmana, but early in the morning, he'd come to Suisan fish market to pick up the swills, you know, for the pigs. So early in the morning, he's down there, before seven o'clock. We were living in Shinmachi, and he saw [the wave receding] and Wailoa river is empty. At that time, they said, "Tsunami." So he wanted to warn us that there is a tidal wave, to get up or get out there or whatever. So he got into his car, his truck, to warn us, but by the time he jump on his car, he made the bend, the wave hit them already.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay, he hit the bend.

MU: As soon as he made the bend, the wave hit them. If he went little further, then he'll cross the bridge, and that's the river's start, the river mouth. And he'll be swept right into the river and got loss of his life, and he had these two daughters in there.

Right now, both of them live in Honolulu. They were Arakaki girls at that time. When they made the bend, the wave hit them. And when the wave hit 'em, the thing went over the bend, and the wave was going over them. The water was coming to the cab, so the father kept on pushing them up for air, and when the wave went over, that's when they came out from the car and went for help.

So after when I heard that they were involved in the tidal wave, I said, "How can the wave go way up Kaūmana?" (Chuckles) My first remark was, how can they be involved in the tidal wave when they living up Kaūmana? But they were down Suisan [fishmarket].

WN: How old were the daughters?

MU: Oh, gee, I think they were in grammar school at that time. [Nineteen] forty-six, yeah.

WN: Yeah.

MU: So they're really afraid of water, about swimming, or—they fear water.

WN: So after that, you folks went to live with relatives?

MU: Yeah. For a while, we stayed with Arakaki, my uncle folks, Arakaki family.

WN: Oh, Kaūmana?

MU: At Kaūmana.

WN: I see.

MU: Then they had this army barracks, you know that military barracks that the servicemen used to be in.

WN: Naval Air Station?

MU: No. That wasn't. Was Camp Powell, we called it. Right across Waiānuenu Avenue above Hilo High School. They had a camp up there, they called it Camp Powell. Military. It was a plain building with Canec walls. Then after that, they opened up—they converted this army barracks by that Ho'olulu Park where that [Afook-Chinen] Civic Auditorium and all that is right now. They had barracks out there. So they converted those barracks into living quarters [for tsunami victims]. They put a kitchen in there with plumbing and toilet facilities. And in the meantime, because housing was so short at that time, they open up NAS, Naval Air [Station], and that's when NAS came up. And that's more wooden buildings. See, the other one was more made out of Canec board.

WN: The Naval Air Station was by the airport?

MU: Yeah. By the airport. That's the one, they were more duplex and all that stuff, buildings.

WN: So where did you folks actually stay?

MU: Ho'olulu Park.

WN: And then how long did you stay over there?

MU: Not that long. Few years though.

WN: Oh yeah? That long? And then was is mostly other Shinmachi people?

MU: Oh, yes, yes, yes. All was tidal wave victims. They were living all in that area, because they had no homes [after the tsunami]. At first, yes, you know, Mike Lau them stayed with relatives, this and that, and when these homes became available [to tsunami victims], they started to move in. So, like Takakis and stuff, we're in that Ho'olulu Park area, you know. Hamamotos. I mean, so far, the ones that we know lived [in the military housing], they all in the tidal wave. And at that time, coordination wasn't as good, and your Red Cross wasn't really—I mean they helped, but the coordination wasn't that good in the sense of distribution [of resources]. The ones that deserved don't get [help], the ones that don't deserve [recieved help], or the ones that [should be] entitled to, they not entitled to. Then 1960 [tidal wave] came up. Then the state came in with land.

WN: HRA [Hawai'i Redevelopment Agency], yeah?

MU: Oh, I don't know. The tidal wave this and that. Now the thing is, regardless if you own your home and your property and all that, when the land was available, everybody have equal [claim]. In other words, [whether] they own or rent, doesn't make no difference. You a victim. And that's the way they did it. But I know a lot of them, they had nothing [before the tidal wave], and after a while, they end up having land . . .

WN: This is after 1960?

MU: Yeah, 1960.

WN: The HRA-designated land. This is 'Iwalani Street?

MU: Yes. 'Iwalani and all that. Prior to that didn't have [i.e., lands were made available to 1960 tsunami victims on which to build new homes away from tsunami inundation zones.] But thing is, what I'm trying to say is, prior to that, if you own your own property and all, you [should] have first priority if your loss is greater than theirs [nonproperty owners], right? Well, these victims pushed because they [relief agencies] didn't have enough [land to go around] so [it was awarded on a] lottery basis. So the ones that didn't have anything [before the tsunami], might now have everything. Way back then a lot of people didn't have [a lot] of furniture. [They had] like *goza*, and that kind of stuff. Even bed was *da kine shikibuton*. Not every family all get beds, you know what I trying to say? Yeah. [MU saw some inequities in the system of compensation and distribution of lands, furniture and other items.]

My dad was always businessman. He always had those things. So even like the time when we had nothing, when it comes to help, yeah, they said, "You want clothing, shoes?" But we not in the position that go and look if this shoes fit me or clothing. Whatever few bucks we had, we go and buy our clothing or shoes. I mean, not *da kine* hand-me-down or just go and choose whatever. The only thing that I know my mom and dad received was blanket. And had that army woolen blanket, you know, the brown one, and navy, the white woolen blanket. That's the only ones we received. I mean, for any help.

WN: [Nineteen] forty-six one [i.e., 1946 tidal wave]?

MU: Yeah, 1946. And we didn't ask for any help. You can't get any [assistance] because you're in business, you have [money in] some account, or you know, whatever. Never mind what you lost or you owe this and that. Cannot. The burn is that you have something to live on. So the others had nothing. They said, "Oh, I need furniture," and stuff. They'll get it. Like now, it's different. They consider all those things.

WN: So who was getting it? Like, who was supplying the blankets and the furnishings and stuff?

MU: Well, like the state government, Red Cross, surplus from military. Just like right now, food—what do you call that? They give the distribution of food. That kind of stuff, yeah?

WN: So because your father was in business, they considered him well-off?

MU: Yeah, at least, yeah.

WN: And not eligible for certain things. I see. So now your father—so what happened, what became of—I know he lost his business, so what did he do?

MU: Well, after that, I started to work just part-time, so I was more like sole supporter for the family. I had two kid sisters still going school, so where my mother worked, I worked. My dad was not used to working for anybody. I mean, he was always on his own, so after a while, when this NAS—they were converting these homes. I think Glover or somebody hired him to

be carpenter, carpenter help or whatever. So he did that. But, with his weight and his build, he stepped on the wood and the wood broke and he fell down and broke his ribs. So ever since that, I think he's downhill. Then after a while, as time went by, he got a stroke. The way I think, it was because of worry and all that *da kine* stuff, yeah.

I have an older brother, but he was in the service. So, by that time—'45, he went to the service—so he was out. So he really didn't know what's going on.

WN: So your father died when?

MU: [Nineteen fifty.]

WN: [Nineteen] fifty, yeah?

MU: Yeah.

WN: So this is four years after the tsunami?

MU: Yeah. Mm hmm. So he did die early.

WN: Did he ever tell you how he felt after the tsunami, losing his business and so forth?

MU: Well, you know, he was depressed. But he was a proud man, the olden days, that kind. Yeah. (Pause) That's the way life goes, but yet, we survive, you know what I mean? Mm hmm.

WN: So you know, you talking about a community that was here one day and gone the next, and then you folks—essentially, the old community was dispersed to different places.

MU: Yes. The basis is 1946. After the tidal wave, like the way I said, where did they go? They go to their relatives, they went out of town. See, they just went all over. Then when this housing was available, like the ones down here living with relatives, they came back, live on their own in this barracks kind of places. They had like NAS came up, Ho'olulu Park was there, had Chongville, had Camp Powell, had Kimiville. You know, so many different—and these are more like military homes, barracks-type homes. So in other words, people of Shinmachi, they went all around. The only way you might meet 'em—"Oh, hi! Where you staying now?" And that's the only information. So after time went by, we decided to get a reunion, Shinmachi reunion. And we publicized, you know, the article I gave you, the publicized event. And we had the first Shinmachi reunion.

WN: When was this?

MU: Oh, I kind of forgot. I had that article. At that time, we trying to compile the people living in Shinmachi. "Oh, do you know where they live?" So we didn't know how successful it was going to be because we don't know how to get in touch with the people. Oh, just by word of mouth, publicized it. And yet, we had good turnout on the first reunion.

We held it at Hilo Lagoon [Hotel], and we had that plaque, you know that Shinmachi tidal wave [memorial] plaque there. So we had the service there. It was such a success that people said, "Oh, when you [going] get another one?"

Then we made a second one, it was just as successful, but we realized that the people who were living in Shinmachi that remember Shinmachi, they all old. And so this is the only reason why we make it into who want to come, come to the picnic. Just like potluck and stuff, they come out just to meet each other, talk about old times. But to me, I doubt they going get reunion on Shinmachi because the group getting smaller. My children wouldn't be interested in Shinmachi. They don't know what Shinmachi is. And the people that were in Shinmachi, if you were ten at that time, you sixty-something years old [now]. So they don't remember. Like right now, I'm seventy. I was a [high school] senior. That's why I remember. But if I was younger---my kid sister folks don't remember. They don't remember Shinmachi. The only thing that if you come together with the Shinmachi people, I said, "Oh, this is my kid sister."

The older ones said, "Oh yeah, I remember you," because they were younger kids. But the younger kids themselves don't remember, you know, the older people. So when they see me they ask about my kid sisters. But my kid sisters don't remember them because they were too young to remember them. But the older people, they knew that I had kid sisters. So I say that getting together like this Shinmachi group, they have a potluck and stuff, which is nice. But who are they? They all old-timers. And the ones that come to the reunion, they remember Shinmachi, but they don't remember the tidal wave because they weren't around [at that time]. Might be in the [military] service or something like that. In '46, World War [II] end, they were just coming back from the service or something like that. So you talk about '46 tidal wave, the ones at the reunion, the menfolks, don't kind of remember 'cause that's the age they were in the service, unless they already came back in '46.

WN: So what was left of Shinmachi after the tsunami was the Coca-Cola building?

MU: Yes.

WN: Anything else?

MU: Well, right in the back of the Coca-Cola building had Eddie Fujita guys was living there. Because the house was in the back [of the Coca-Cola building], so that house got saved. From Goya on the other side, they had buildings. You know where Goya's Service Station was. That's why 1946 tidal wave, they got, 1960 tidal wave, they got that.

WN: I see. So they survived in 1946] mainly because of the Coca-Cola building?

MU: No. They survived because they had [Hawai'i] Planing Mill, lumberyard in front there.

WN: Oh. Hawai'i Planing Mill.

MU: Yeah. I guess with the lumber floating, kind of break the water force and all that.

WN: I see. The planing mill, though, was on the ocean . . .

MU: On the ocean side. That's right. See, and that same thing happened to downtown Hilo. All the buildings on the ocean side [on Kamehameha Avenue] got damaged, except Kuwahara Store.

WN: [G.] Kuwahara Store, yeah.

- MU: That's the only building [on the ocean side of Kamehameha Avenue in downtown Hilo which remained standing]. They had buildings right through [along Kamehameha Avenue].
- WN: All the way to the Wailuku [River] bridge?
- MU: Yes. All the way to the bridge. And the wave, '46 one, picked up all the buildings on the ocean side, crashed 'em against the other buildings on the opposite side.
- WN: On Kamehameha [Avenue]?
- MU: Yes. And that's how the Kamehameha [Avenue] buildings stayed. 'Cause the other buildings protect them.
- WN: I see. Yeah. Did you go down that side afterwards to see the damage?
- MU: [Nineteen] forty-six?
- WN: Mm hmm.
- MU: Yes.
- WN: How did it compare to the damage in Shinmachi area?
- MU: Well, the Shinmachi area had families living. Downtown area, mostly business sector, so [mostly] the businesses was destroyed. So the buildings that were on the ocean side got damaged, broken and all that. But not very many families lived upstairs [from their businesses]—they had some families, but not as much as Shinmachi. Shinmachi more residential and all that, yeah?
- WN: Mm hmm.
- MU: Yeah. That's why. It's just like Waiākea town. Waiākea itself had a lot of residents.
- WN: Shinmachi though, was on the *mauka* side of Kamehameha [Avenue], right?
- MU: Yes.
- WN: And they got it because there were no buildings . . .
- MU: No buildings [on the ocean side of Kamehameha Avenue which could have deflected the force of the waves], just an [open] park. That's right.
- WN: So if there were buildings on the ocean side, Shinmachi might have been saved?
- MU: Probably. But again, see, this Hilo Bay is crescent, right? So when the wave came, hit against this wall, the wall is on one curve.
- WN: Oh, you mean hit like [Coconut] Island side?

MU: No. The opposite side, against the wall. Wainaku side.

WN: Oh, Wainaku side.

MU: This is the breakwater, right?

WN: Yeah.

MU: This is the opening. If the wave come this way, going hit against the wall.

WN: I see.

MU: Right up on the wall, and with the curvature, wash out this side.

WN: Okay. So, fourteen years later, 1960, where were you living at the time?

MU: Um, '60, yeah, I guess so we were living here.

WN: And you were working where?

MU: I had the insurance agency by that time.

WN: I see. Okay.

MU: My office was right above Hata. Hata building. I didn't get no damage because the downstairs was damaged. But the upstairs. . . .

WN: So that was a little different, right? 'Cause there was warning, no?

MU: Yes. Mm hmm. Well, again, with all the warning, people still died. And the fault of that is the alarm was too early, too long. In other words, I told you about May[']s Fountain, all day the siren was blowing. On the twenty-second, my birthday, we were there. And we were there, the alarm, from morning time, it was going. So we know there's a tidal wave coming, this and that. But the tidal wave did not come until [between] one o'clock or one-thirty in the morning. Now, my mother folks was living in Waiākea. At that time, said, "Hey, tidal wave." So they came up here. We stayed here and all and *talk stories*. Said, "Ah, not going get wave and all. So, I think it's false alarm." So they left. They went back. You know, they went back to their house.

WN: Ah.

MU: So when they were sitting up, they hear this crackling and funny kind smell. I guess all the ocean again. So in the meantime, they came out, the wave was there. He was in the water, my stepfather. Yeah. And he was untying his dog from the chain. All that, and then after helping him, they came up here, they all wet. You get caught in the tidal wave, you get caught again. Once not enough. But the thing was, the alarm was going all day, and at night it didn't go. The siren wasn't constantly going so people, "Ah, I don't think it going come." And one o'clock, one-thirty in the morning, one-fifteen. A lot of people went back to their homes. And another false *da kine* is that people were listening to the radio. Okay. The tidal wave this and

that. This was in Chile, Chilean earthquake. So there is a tidal wave. So they monitor, and Tahiti and Samoa side, only get two foot of water. The wave action was two feet. But what they didn't realize was that area, the reef and stuff is shallow. Then the water bottom is shallow. But when come in the Pacific area, it's deep, right?

WN: Uh huh.

MU: So what happens, down here, no matter how much the wave, it builds up, cannot build up that much. Now when the wave come to the deeper depth, it stirs the bottom up. Okay, so that wave is how many times greater than Samoa and Tahiti side. And that's how Hilo got—by the time the wave reach Japan or something, what kind of wave they had? You know? Because the Pacific is deep, I think, in the ocean.

WN: Yeah. I see. So is that probably why they stopped blowing the sirens at night?

MU: They didn't expect was going to be. They didn't realize. Because I know, another guy, Manju Masutani, same thing happened. He went home. He was out, then he went home. The wave came and he lost his daughter. You know, so he blamed himself. They tell, "Oh, had all the warning and all that." You know, but like I said, it's just one of those things, eh? Nobody to blame.

WN: So you were at work that day? You were in the office?

MU: Nighttime.

WN: Oh yeah.

MU: [Nineteen] sixty.

WN: So all day was . . .

MU: Something . . .

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, so, it was nighttime, and so you were home, then?

MU: Yeah, yeah.

WN: When the '60 one came?

MU: (Chuckles) Well, I was home, by one o'clock. But that evening—see, because of that tidal wave, we know it's coming, this and that, so I went down to Wailoa River. And there was a sampan there. And that sampan there is my uncle's sampan. Nishimoto. He bought that sampan from a guy in Waiākea town. It's a fishing sampan. He had it there. And all the other boats went out to ride the wave out. Okay? His one is still there. Right in front of Cafe 100, in fact. So I call my aunty.

WN: This is after the wave or before?

MU: Before the wave.

WN: Before the wave.

MU: About ten o'clock or so. I said, "Eh, how come uncle don't take the boat out?"

She said, "Oh, he's in Kona." See, my uncle went Kona each month.

So I said, "How come somebody don't take [the boat out]?" But the guy that he bought the boat from, he was in Honolulu that day. If not, he could have taken the boat out for him. But he was in Honolulu. So the son, young son, wanted to take 'em. My uncle said, "no no." He didn't want him to take it. Leave it. That's all right. It's only the boat. If going, *da kine*, hammer, whatever. So leave 'em. So, everybody went down there trying to tie the boat down or whatever. So the boat stayed there. That sampan. Okay, in a way, blessing by disguise. Good thing the guy that he bought the boat from wasn't around, because he was in Honolulu. But his family live in Waiākea. The whole family died. So what if he was in [Hilo], and he went out [with the sampan], and the whole family died? Just like, blamewise, it's like, "Gee, because I left my family," right?

WN: Yeah.

MU: But this Waiākea town, the whole Waiākea—even the buildings [in] Waiākea went down, and the family was there, so [they] died. The boat didn't get saved, but that's all right. It's only a boat, right?

That night, to use the phone, I went right across the street. This guy Richard, Cafe 100, he was in his house. The wife was [at] the table, like this. Writing thank you letter for, you know, *da kine*, [people] sent congratulatory flowers [for their grand opening]. And she's writing thank you, and all. Richard's watching television in his chair. He tell, "Drink coffee, Masa."

"No, no. I came to use your phone, so I can call my uncle." So I talk to him, and we *talk story* for a while. And I left there. Okay, the boat is gone. Richard[']s restaurant is gone, totally gone. The cottage he was living in, he and his wife, floated away, hit against a mango tree. And he said one car that I think was on the road got caught by the wave. The light was on, shine right into their house. He said, "At least we had light." Because they don't know where they are. I guess, you know, at night, stay one o'clock. So he said, till morning there, that car battery, the light was on, so they stayed in the home. So that was Waiākea for 1960 one.

Then my friend, Daniel Ichijo, he had Kīlauea Bakery in Waiākea town. He was going to get married. So he had this marriage ring and all that in his safe in Waiākea town. But that day, he was in Kona. Right? Tidal wave. So he came back from Kona late, he picked up the ring and all that, clean the safe, brought 'em home. And he have to come down to the Wailoa River to see that, you know, tidal wave came or whatever. He died. After all that had taken place. So, like the way I said, you know . . .

WN: So the two tidal waves, you know, it's different. I'm finding, you know, one was no warning, was in the morning.

MU: Mm hmm. Yeah.

WN: [Nineteen] sixty, there was warning, but there was such a long gap between the warning and the wave.

MU: Yeah. Long gap. And then misinformation on the wave activity. But yeah, I think because [people heard the tsunamil] was only about two foot [in other places].

WN: Nineteen sixty, the people were actually sleeping then?

MU: Yeah.

WN: It was one in the morning.

MU: Yeah.

WN: So people had thought about the wave, but then . . .

MU: They went home. Because one o'clock, "Ah, might as well sleep already. I don't think the wave going come. Even if come, not going be big." You know, that type, you know. Had this place called Kimiville. That's by Kumu Street. That's all the barracks kind of homes. That area, tidal wave, they can't do anything because no more electricity, no nothing. You can hear people screaming, "Help!" What can you do? You cannot get into that area because you don't know where you going. You know, the buildings all wrecked into each other. So from Kilauea Military Camp, I think they came with search light, and shine and trying to rescue, but that's in the night.

WN: If Shinmachi were there, you think it would have been destroyed in the '60 [tsunami]?

MU: Well, like the way it says, it's coming sooner or later. We know it's coming. And yet, I think the thing is to be alert and knowledge, no? About people to know more about it. Even like, I give you a good example about Waikiki when they test the tidal wave [warning system]. We get all the jamming. After that, came all right, right?

WN: Yeah.

MU: But they have to get that kind experience. But now, at least, because of the educational program in Waikiki, nobody around, right?

WN: Yeah.

MU: Except for the hotel folks. So many stories with concrete, you know, the thing can hold 'em. But below that, cannot.

WN: So you think Hilo will be ready for the next one?

MU: I don't think so. I mean, lifewise, yes. Property, you can't do anything.

WN: Right. Right.

- MU: Property, you can't do anything. And I think more and more people, they not really—nobody thought about it, because when the last one? Thirty-five years? Thirty-eight years. Ever since '60.
- WN: Oh, sixty.
- MU: Sixty, seventy, no? That's thirty-eight years. Now, you talk about tidal wave, thirty-eight years old, you don't even know what is tidal wave already, so . . .
- WN: New generation already.
- MU: Yeah, new generation. And beach property, beach area, they build, you know.
- WN: Yeah.
- MU: They forget because they weren't around thirty something years [ago]. So I think they still being human. Except for the educational system about being warned, compulsory—you have to move them, you know.
- WN: Bob Chow was telling me that you know, because it's been so long, that people want—when they hear tsunami, they want to go see it . . .
- MU: Go and see, that's right. Because they haven't seen 'em. They thought something, they can see the wave coming. The time when Suisan one, the wave, they down there, the water down here, that tide, right? They didn't know the tidal wave was right there. Why? The whole time the water just rise. It's not a wave that come. Eh, the thing coming up. In other words, the tide or whatever come up, and that's the whole body of water coming in.
- WN: So it's not like it's a surf?
- MU: No. It's not a surf. See, you think that going come [but] it come like a bulldozer. Okay, now this thing, it hit. Normally, [a] wave go (MU makes wave sound) and [curls] over or whatever. But that [tsunami] wave [is] about half a mile long, [and looks like it's being plowed] up. So the thing *wen* hit, with the pressure on like that, sooner or later, the thing going break, eh? That's how destructive it is. The force of the water. It's not a big wave. It's just a [rising] body of water. Like the way I said, when I saw, wow, the whole area is water! And that's the wave, body of water. What's going through. And I look, wow! I thought the whole island was sinking because no matter where I look, all water. It's not, one wave, and the thing pass through, you know what I mean? Then after a while, the water goes down because the whole body of water went through. Wow! You see the door, like that, you see water seeping in because the water is that high. Ah, where you going? No place except stay in the house. Yeah. It's something. And you get so many things that happen at once. You know, so it's hard to believe this thing is going on right in front of your eyes.
- WN: It's amazing that your mother, because of her background, you know, they knew what tsunami was, eh?
- MU: My mother didn't know. My dad . . .

WN: Your dad knew.

MU: My dad, he came from Okinawa, this and that, and they been in tidal wave, and, yeah.

WN: So they knew right away to go to the concrete building?

MU: Yeah. He's the first one that—he said, that's the only safe building around here. The rest, you know, it can't hold. That's why Okinawa is made to withstand hurricane and all, the way they—it's the buildings, because it's like concrete or rocks, the way they build it, yeah?

WN: Mm hmm. Well, okay, let's end it right here, then. Thank you very much.

MU: Oh, you're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

**TSUNAMIS REMEMBERED:
Oral Histories of Survivors
and Observers in Hawai'i**

Volume I

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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