

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Gloria Asako Higashi Okamura

Gloria Higashi Okamura was born in 1949 in Kealahou, Kona, Hawai'i. Her parents, Ichiro Higashi and Kaneyo Hino Higashi, ran Higashi Poi Factory in Kēōkea, a family business that included a *poi* factory, general store, and coffee farm. The business began in 1916 by Okamura's paternal grandparents Torazo and Yao Higashi.

After attending Ho'okena School, Okamura graduated from Konawaena School in 1967. She attended the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, then the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, receiving a bachelor's degree from Mānoa in 1971. She worked for Honolulu CPA firms between 1970 and 1975, before marrying Lance Okamura.

In 1977, the couple, along with their young son, moved in with Gloria Okamura's parents to help them with the store. Okamura, along with her sister, eventually took over the day-to-day operation of the store.

At the time of the interview, Higashi Store was one of the few South Kona stores still operated by the family of the founders.

Tape Nos. 35-6-1-00 and 35-7-1-00

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Gloria Asako Higashi Okamura (GH)

Kēōkea, Kona, Hawai'i

May 4, 2000

BY: Nancy Piianaia (NP)

NP: It is May 4, 2000. This is Nancy Piianaia and I'm with Gloria Asako Higashi Okamura in Kēōkea at the Higashi Store. And Gloria, thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed.

GH: Oh, you're welcome.

NP: This is going to be a good rounding out of your family since we also interviewed your mom [Kaneyo Higashi] a few weeks ago. I wonder if you could start the interview by telling me when and where you were born?

GH: I was born [in] 1949 in Kealakekua at the Kona Hospital.

NP: Okay. And your parents, the name of your parents?

GH: My parents are Ichiro Higashi and Kaneyo Hino Higashi.

NP: And do you have brothers and sisters?

GH: I have an older sister, Frances. She's eight years older than I am, and a brother, Gary, who's five years older than I am. I'm the youngest.

NP: All right. We're going to be talking about the Higashi Store today and one of the most important parts for me is that you are actually working the store now.

GH: Yes.

NP: And we will eventually get to talking about that but I wondered if you could tell me from your perspective, since I know you've done a lot of research on it, a little bit of the

history of the store and something perhaps about your grandparents, whom you told me actually started the store way back in 1916.

GH: Right. I've done some oral history with my oldest aunt, Midori. And she's told me that my great-grandparents were wholesalers and they had a business over on O'ahu in Lā'ie called Shimamoto Shōten. And I guess my grandparents met [there] because my grandfather was a salesman for that company. They were married in Lā'ie and they had their first child there. After their second child was born they decided to move to Kona, and they lived in Kalāhiki with my grandmother's aunt and uncle's family, the Fujimoris.

NP: Kalāhiki is where?

GH: Kalāhiki is approximately two miles south of here around the area of Ho'okena School, McCandless Ranch. And they lived with them and—if I'm not mistaken—they had a small store and a coffee farm. She [Midori] used to call her Uncle Fujimori, grandpa. He would work the coffee farm and the grandma would do the business. And she [Midori's mother] would help and she did a lot of tailor works—sewing shirts and pants and things. So she'd be, you know, learning to be a seamstress. Even in the later years when I remember living with my grandparents—my grandparents lived with us—I remember her being a tailor that people would come to get their clothes done or she'd make *futons* or *zabutons* and patchwork quilts. So up until she became ill, she was a seamstress and tailor.

NP: Do you still have any of her *futons* or . . .

GH: We have some that we used and she used to use for our *hotoke-sama*. And I remember she getting boxes of fabric scraps, and she sewing all those. But according to my aunt, when she used to sew shirts and things, my grandfather actually was the fastidious type and he would do all the fine handwork. And he would do the fine buttonholing and . . .

NP: This is all by hand?

GH: All by hand.

NP: Not machine.

GH: Yes. And they lived there and my grandfather helped my grandmother's uncle on the farm. But according to my aunt, my grandfather was not one for outside labor. He wanted to do something else. But he saw an opportunity and he leased a farm Ki'ilae, which is about half a mile south of Kēōkea. He would go every day to his farm in Ki'ilae, coffee farm, and try to earn his own money. And my grandmother still helped her aunt in the store and the Fujimori coffee fields.

NP: So they were gradually branching out on their own at the time.

GH: Right, right.

NP: Okay.

GH: Then in 1916 he found this business in Kēōkea. She [i.e., Aunt Midori] said that an old Chinese man [once] owned the store. She couldn't remember what his name was. But he [grandfather] purchased the store, and so the family moved to this present site. And it was a store, and they had like a living quarters just to the south end of the building. It was attached—it's, I guess, our warehouse now, and that was their living quarters. And my grandmother had the store and she would also still do her seamstress work. So she had her sewing machine. She would do that, and raised her children.

NP: How many children did they have?

GH: Ten. One died, so nine that were living. But at the time that they moved here there were three of them, at the time that they acquired the store. My father would have been about a year old, and the two older sisters.

NP: One of whom was the one that you've interviewed.

GH: Yes, she was the one who helped my grandmother in the store with her seamstress work, taking care of the younger children. So she did a lot of work.

NP: She's been a valuable resource for you.

GH: Yes she has. She has a very sharp memory, sharp mind. So if I wanted to know anything about the family or the business I started going to her and asking her things I wish I had asked my dad now.

When we were growing up my dad would tell us stories about his growing up but we were only half listening.

NP: Do you remember any of those stories?

GH: Some of them. How he---I remember when he started at Konawaena [School]. He never finished. He'd drive the school bus to Konawaena, he'd pick up the children and then he'd attend classes and then drive the school bus home.

NP: He must have been really young to be doing that.

GH: I guess there were no laws back then (laughs) on how old.

(Laughter)

GH: But I think we still have his chauffeur's badge in our belongings. You know, all these stories that he had—that he'd worked the *poi* factory, he'd worked in the store, he'd go to . . .

NP: Now did the *poi* factory come with the store?

GH: According to my aunt, it wasn't. The *poi* factory was owned by a separate family, and it was near the premises. But at the time, it was just the store and the coffee farm. And the man who owned the *poi* factory—I think his name was Mr. Yamamoto—when he moved back to Japan, my grandfather purchased the *poi* factory from him. And that's how they acquired the *poi* factory.

NP: Was that soon after 1916?

GH: No, I think by then it was several years later, because the children were quite older. But my aunt would say that some people in the area owed them money. And they had coffee fields in the south area in the Ho'okena-Keālia area. Sometimes they owed so much money that they couldn't afford to pay, and they'd leave during the night and just run away. So my grandfather would send the children, my aunt and my dad, to go and pick the coffee off of their farm and sell the coffee to kind of offset the debts that that family owed them. So that's how they tried to make ends meet.

NP: How sad for everybody.

GH: Right. And running away, you're just running in that same district but it wasn't very far. But I guess in those days with transportation so scarce that, you know. . . .

NP: You could kind of escape.

GH: Right, exactly.

NP: Nowadays you would be found within twenty-four hours.

GH: Right, exactly.

So she said that there were people living with them. People would come. There were like schoolteachers in the area or other Japanese immigrants, who worked in the area who had affiliations with them. They'd come and did all kind of work together or play together. They kind of stuck out together.

NP: Now would these people be boarders in the house or . . .

GH: No. they just came. I remember even when we were growing up, the salesmen would come. Back then when the salesmen would come to take our orders, they'd come from Hilo, and my dad would invite them to lunch, so Mom always made lunch for them. So they'd go downstairs and have lunch with my dad, and after they had their lunch they'd go and continue on their business. So it was a very different lifestyle than it is now.

NP: Yeah, I imagine it was the natural thing to do when you're so far away from another place. You can't go to McDonald's or somewhere down the road.

GH: Right.

NP: And it's hospitable to do, too, when someone's come that far. Your mom did mention in her interview that she was always cooking.

GH: She was always cooking. She cooked for our *poi* factory workers, too. It was either lunch or dinner.

There was a time earlier when they used to work at night, so they'd start work like about four or five o'clock in the afternoon. So she'd cook dinner and she'd serve them dinner, and they'd go back to work. They do it in shifts so somebody would always be working. So she provided meals for them, too. And later on when they started working during the day, she'd serve lunch. So it was a very different kind of a life than it is now.

NP: Yes. Okay, so going back to the early period, your grandparents began the store in 1916 and during the early period they had ten children.

GH: Yes.

NP: Okay, and they all lived here in this house.

GH: Yes. This house wasn't built until either the late 1930s or the 1940s, because my oldest aunt says that she never lived in this house. They were still living in the store. They had quarters on the side of the store, and later on under the store. So they always lived in the store. And then after she had gotten married and left, then this house was built. So the younger children remember living in this house.

NP: Did she describe what those old quarters were like?

GH: Yeah, a little bit. She said that they slept on the floor. I guess back in the olden days it was like that—they slept on the floor. They didn't have much furniture, but just my grandmother's sewing machine and a few pieces.

NP: *Futons* and . . .

GH: *Futons*, yes yes. And I think their *furo* used to be under the store. The kitchen used to be under the store. I remember she saying once, one of the people who came to visit, they thought he had some kind of disease back then. So they were quarantined. Nobody could leave, nobody could come. So the store was closed. It was very, very difficult, and they had to take care of that gentleman until he recovered. And people would, I guess, come and leave food for them outside so that they'd have groceries for the family. They couldn't go to school. They couldn't go out and play with their friends.

NP: Did she say how long they were quarantined?

GH: About—I would think about—like two weeks to a month until that man recovered. And they were quarantined by the—I guess it was public health, back then. Yeah, so she said the man came and shut them down. It was really—I never knew all those things.

NP: Yeah. Does she have any other memories that shared with you about living with the store and those days?

GH: She said that they had to do *poi* factory when they acquired the *poi* factory. And that's how they worked—they did the taro. And my grandfather would buy taro from the farmers in the area. It's not in the same location. It was in a different part of the property, but eventually he built the *poi* factory where it is now.

NP: Your grandfather.

GH: My grandfather. My father improved it and built it. I think my grandfather was more instrumental in the coffee mill. They had a processing mill on the property, too. So they'd buy coffee from the local farmers, and then he'd sell the coffee. That's how he got paid. He'd carry them on credit until he received the money for their coffee.

NP: And do you happen to know whom you sold the coffee to?

GH: I think it was Amfac at that time. I'm not really positive, but I remember the trucks coming in for the parchment. At that time, it was milled down to parchment. And he sold the parchment.

NP: Do you know if those were hard times for them?

GH: Those weren't too bad at that time, but then the price on coffee really dropped, bottomed out, and people started moving away. I think those were harder times. I don't remember our early days being hard. But I remember, maybe in the early '50s, I remember him leasing the property across the street, and he had it planted all in coffee, as well as the area around the house. But when the price bottomed out—we even had a family that he hired to take care of the coffee after my grandparents got older and his

brothers and sisters all went on their own. He hired the Kittaka family. It was the father and the mother, and they had about six children. The dad and the mom would come and they'd do all the pruning, and the poisoning, and the rat control. And their children would come and help with the picking, processing. But my brother and my dad were the ones who did the processing of the coffee.

NP: It was quite an operation then. In addition to the store.

GH: In addition to the store. My mom took care of the store when we were younger, and my dad did the coffee. He did the *poi* factory. He did the deliveries. For a little man he really worked hard. And we all sort of had to chip in. We were all expected to work in the store. Back then the customers were just local people.

NP: From the neighborhood area.

GH: From the neighborhood area. And we were all familiar with them, so they'd come in to shop. And I'd record all their purchases. And my dad would come in the evening, and he'd record it onto the charge books with the prices 'cause I just wrote down how much of what they took. And he'd figure out all the prices according to that.

NP: So most everybody charged.

GH: Most everybody charged back then.

NP: Would you say it was really rare for someone to pay cash?

GH: (Chuckles) Yes, it was back then. So people would come in and pick up their things. So it's like—my mom was in the store from in the morning till . . .

NP: In the morning—do you remember what time she would open generally?

GH: I think they opened about seven. I think we always opened about seven o'clock. 'Cause she'd make breakfast—actually she'd make breakfast and get us kids ready for school. My dad would open the store. After she was done with that then she'd go up to the store, and he'd go off on his deliveries. And she'd do the store—my grandmother would help with lunch. So she'd be in the store all day and then at five o'clock she'd be going down to cook dinner—Mom was. So it was my job to go up to the store at five o'clock and watch the store until closing time or until my dad came home.

NP: And closing was at?

GH: Six o'clock.

NP: You still close at six. Wow, all these years.

GH: All these years.

(Laughter)

GH: So, it was like—I could go and play after school. My cousin used to live next to the post office here. So I could go there and play after school, but I had to be home by five o'clock. If I wasn't, my mom would be calling that I had to come home to watch the store because she had to go down to cook dinner. So that cut into my (chuckles) playing time.

NP: Your social life.

GH: Yes. And it was like that—even went into high school.

NP: Now what about your brother and sister? Wouldn't they be able to watch it at five o'clock, or did they have other jobs to do?

GH: They had other responsibilities. I remember my sister helping to take care of my grandmother. My grandmother died in 1959, and I was ten at the time. But up until my sister went away to Mid-Pacific [Institute, in Honolulu] when she was fourteen, she would help and take care of my grandmother or help in the store. My brother, his job was more to help with the processing of the coffee, and to help in the *poi* factory. He learned to be a mechanic and he did those things. Or he'd go in the coffee land to pick up the coffee bags and things. But, he didn't enjoy working in the store, so that was my job. So I did the store. I wanted to go in the coffee land, or I wanted (laughs) to go work in the *poi* factory.

NP: And they said, "No."

GH: "No." (Laughs) To me that was more exciting than staying in the store.

(Laughter)

NP: Do remember any kind of problems that you had when you were real little and you were minding the store? If your mom went downstairs and . . .

GH: Things were very calm back then. Maybe the men, the single men, they were drinking a little bit. They'll get a little bit boisterous, that I used to be a little bit afraid. But . . .

NP: 'Cause you were so little.

GH: Yeah. But it was never—not to the point that they threaten you. It was more like they were joking around, but I didn't know. And it was just like I didn't know how to deal with a person who was drinking. So, you know, it's like—my dad drank or my uncles

drank, but they never behaved like that. So that was a little scary, but other than that—I'd just run downstairs and tell my mom, "Oh so-and-so was here. Can you come up and help?" And she'd come up and then . . .

NP: She knew you--if you came down, she probably could see the expression on your face.

GH: It was like, you know, I couldn't handle something, like somebody wanted something that I didn't know how to do, and she'd come up and she'd do that. And my grandfather, in his later years, even though he never worked, he'd come up into the store and he'd sit at the store and kind of be a presence there. So that helped, too.

NP: When did he die?

GH: He died in 1976. He was ninety-eight years old.

NP: Ninety-eight?

GH: Yes.

NP: Wow.

GH: And he liked to say he retired at thirty-five.

(Laughter)

GH: Which he did. 'Cause my dad worked most of the time.

NP: Yeah. But he still would spend time in the store and . . .

GH: He still would come and sit in the store and socialize with the customers, and kind of keep an eye on things.

NP: During that earlier period, what kind of customers, what nationalities would you have?

GH: Most of them were Hawaiian and Japanese. Very few Filipinos, some Portuguese, but predominantly Hawaiian and Japanese people. But the Japanese were starting to move away when the coffee—unless they worked the ranch, McCandless Ranch, or they had their own coffee farms. Or other than coffee, they worked outside that they could supplement their income. Yeah, but it was mostly Japanese and Hawaiian people. Filipinos were very few back then, that I knew of.

NP: And they were mostly coffee farmers in this area?

GH: Coffee farmers, ranch workers. Or they worked for us.

- NP: Okay. And was it only McCandless Ranch or would they work for some of the other ranches?
- GH: There were some. There was Magoon Ranch, C.Q. Yee Hop Ranch more in this area. We hardly knew people that lived in Hōnaunau. My dad did 'cause when he was younger he was very involved with softball and all the different kind of activities, fishing. And he knew more of the people in the Hōnaunau area. But because we hardly socialized outside of the people we went to school with, or the people who came to the store, I knew most of people that lived in the Ho'okena, or maybe the Hōnaunau beach area, that would come up to the store, the customers. And there were family friends, too. A lot of our customers were the family friends or the people that my father grew up with and became our customers. So now a lot of their children or grandchildren are my customers.
- NP: It's wonderful that there's still a continuity.
- GH: Yes. If they went away, they went away because they joined the service. Back then after high school they joined the military. And if they were away for any length of time it was because they were in the military.
- NP: But they managed to come here?
- GH: A lot of them managed to come back. Some continued working for the ranch and jobs that their parents did, or some worked elsewhere but still lived in the family home. So a lot of the second- and third-generation people lived in the family homes here. So they lived in the same areas that I remember their parents living in.
- NP: So this is jumping ahead and I want to go back again to the earlier period, but nowadays it sounds as though you still have some old customers.
- GH: Uh huh [yes].
- NP: Second, third generation.
- GH: Right.
- NP: Are those the predominant customers or do you have other groups of people?
- GH: I have other groups of people come in now. A lot of businesses or farmers or ranchers, who purchased land in the area and are ranching or farming, and they have workers working their property for them. So a lot of them are my customers. I still have a few of the old-timers, but a lot of them—some moved away, and I have new customers come in. So now my customer base is more—ethnically they're more diverse. I hardly have

any Japanese customers anymore. There are a lot of Filipino, *haoles*. I still have a lot of Hawaiian customers. Still very loyal to us.

NP: Do you have tourists sometimes who stop?

GH: We have tourists stop in, but that's not the primary focus of our business. My dad always used to say that the tourist business was the cream and not . . .

NP: Milk.

GH: Right. Right. So I kind of still look at it that way because we're not exactly a tourist stop. They come in more for the convenience. So whatever we get from the tourists is extra. It's like he said, the cream.

NP: Do you ever have people who come in who love your store because it's like, it's a little general store?

GH: We have a lot of people who come in and say it reminded them of a little store that they used to go to when they were children. And we always ask them, "Where was this?" And they would say—we had one last week that said that was Pennsylvania. Or sometimes it would be in Iowa or Tennessee. And it would be, you know—I found out that there are a lot of these stores that were all over the United States. And I always thought it was unique to . . .

NP: To Kona.

GH: To Hawai'i, yes. To the rural islands in Hawai'i.

NP: Yeah, I remember in Massachusetts growing up with the general store on the corner. After school we'd go by and pick up candy and you know things we weren't supposed to eat but tasted good.

(Laughter)

NP: So it still happens.

GH: I remember as a child once in a while we used to—there was no school buses back then for us. They were for the students who came from Miloli'i or 'Ala'ē. But from Ho'okena to here, we either walked or—like we were very fortunate 'cause a lot of the schoolteachers were friends of my parents. So they'd pick us up in the morning to take us to school and bring us home after school.

NP: Otherwise how far would you have had to walk?

GH: Two miles.

NP: Oh.

GH: Well, my parents walked. (Chuckles) But traffic was increasing. But they had made arrangements with the teachers to pick us up 'cause a lot of them lived north of us and it was on their way. So there was always someone who picked us up or dropped us off after school. And every once in a while we wanted to be brave and we'd walk home. And it was such a thrill for me to walk home and go to Fujihara Store and get a drink, to buy a soda from somewhere else and walk home. People would stop, the customers, or people in the area would stop and ask if we wanted a ride and we go, "No. We want to walk."

(Laughter)

GH: Or it was neat too when I could get some spare change. Then I would go to Morihara [Store] and buy *crack seed* from them.

NP: Morihara's is . . .

GH: Morihara's is right around the corner to the north of us. We never got to go anywhere to shop, so it was always such a big thrill to walk into another store to buy a soda or *crack seed* or candy. (Laughs) Even though I had it here.

NP: Was it the same *crack seed*?

GH: Basically the same. My dad, for convenience sake, he used to buy *crack seed* already packaged from Sun Sun Lau. Or if he had it loose, he would package it in a container and sell it in the container. But Morihara used to have it in the jar, and they'd just scoop it up in the paper bag. Because we had the gas pumps, he [father] couldn't be running in and out to ladle out *crack seed* or ice cream. So we always had ours prepackaged. But I remember the days when we had to scoop ice cream, and the sushi would be delivered and put in a plastic container. And there would be a tong there, and if you wanted sushi I'd get a paper bag and put it with the tongs in the paper bag. Codfish was just sold like that. It wasn't even wrapped up, just in the box. So people would come and buy a slab of codfish, and they'd be walking home—a lot of people didn't have cars—or they'd be in a jeep. So we'd wrap it up in a newspaper for them to take home. And we had like . . .

NP: Did you weigh it then?

GH: Yes. You sold it buy the pound.

NP: What about salt salmon, was that anything . . .

GH: Salt salmon was in the brine in the wooden kegs with the covers on it. Or I think it was the salt salmon that used to come in this brown ceramic crock, all in the salt and the brine. And then we'd have to go and take it out from there and put it in the bags, and that's how we sold those things.

NP: Do you know where it came from?

GH: No, I have no idea, but I remember the codfish used to be very good. You could just peel it off of that slab with the salt crust on it. Probably all came from the Mainland, probably from where you lived—Massachusetts. But people would come with salted duck eggs, and it'd be in the basket and you'd buy the duck eggs like that. I remember the pickles in the wax that we used to sell.

NP: Pickles in wax?

GH: They were little pickles, midget pickles, dill pickles, and they'd be encased in wax. I guess instead of plastic, and you'd buy the pickles in the wax. And we used to eat that like candy.

NP: Would you pop the wax and the pickle would come out, kind of?

GH: You kind of peel the wax off and then you suck on the wax and you get the (chuckles) pickle juice all over you.

(Laughter)

NP: Oh, those are good memories.

GH: I remember—it wasn't Meadow Gold ice cream back then, it was something called Blue Bonnet. And the ice cream truck would go by and we go, "Oh, there's the Blue Bonnet man." And they had bonbons, and I never knew what they were. I just knew that they used to come in this brown and yellow box and they were vanilla ice cream with chocolate around. And I just never knew what it was but I always remember what that tasted like—it was so good.

NP: So good.

GH: And when Meadow Gold took over there was no bonbons anymore, until Nestle Company started putting it out.

NP: Do you have it now in your store?

GH: Once in a while we get it in.

NP: Who brought your milk, do you remember?

GH: My dad used to bring milk from Nā'ālehu. He'd deliver *poi* to K'aū twice a week, and on his way home he'd stop at Nā'ālehu Dairy and he'd load up his station wagon with the milk and he'd deliver milk on his way home. There was also the [Hawaii] *Tribune-Herald* truck which would meet him at the Nā'ālehu Dairy and transfer the newspapers to his truck and he'd bring it. And the carrier from Kona would meet him here and pick up the newspapers. But he delivered newspapers and milk until he came home, and he'd unload the car, but he'd still deliver milk at least until Honalo. He had home deliveries on the milk back then.

NP: And that would be twice a week?

GH: Twice a week. Yes.

There was a Mauna Loa Dairy in Captain Cook but he had already had this contract with Nā'ālehu. So that was his thing.

NP: Really different from now where we just go to store whenever we need milk.

GH: Right. And the funny part was he'd go to the dairy, load up the milk—he'd have this canvas that he covered the milk with—bring it all the way home, and we'd stop at people's houses on the way home or at mailboxes, leave the milk on the mailboxes, or in people's homes or on their doorstep. It never spoiled! And now we have all these refrigerated trucks and you still get milk that go bad. I don't understand what the process is.

NP: Would he pick up the old bottles, too?

GH: Yes. And drop off the . . .

NP: As he finally arrived back here at the store, he would have a station wagon full of empty milk bottles and . . .

GH: Along with his *poi*, and he'd take it back. I remember also he'd—because transportation, not everyone had cars, for people that live in 'Opihiale, 'Ala'ē, or even Ho'okena, whenever he'd go out to deliver, they'd call in their order in the morning. We'd box up the groceries, he'd put all the groceries in his car and as he's going out to Ka'ū he'd make all these home deliveries and deliver all their groceries. Deliver their *poi*, their groceries, and then milk on the way home, newspaper on the way home. And sometimes he even had passengers, people who wanted to go from Ho'okena or 'Ala'ē, they had family in Kalaoa or Kailua they'd catch a ride with him. They'd have to go through all his stops with all his deliveries but he dropped them off and made

arrangements for when they wanted to come back. So they'd have to schedule it for a day that he was driving that area, and then he'd bring them home.

NP: So he was a taxi service too, on top of everything else.

GH: Yes. (Laughs) He was everything.

NP: That's incredible. Those must have been very long days.

GH: It was. He'd leave early in the morning, like I think he'd leave here about seven, eight o'clock in the morning and he wouldn't come home until like four or five. Then he'd close up the store at six o'clock.

NP: And do all his paperwork at night.

GH: Do all his paperwork at night.

NP: And you said that you enjoyed going with him, so you did a lot of this traveling.

GH: Yes. Over the summer vacations or school vacations I would go with him. That would save him the trip of having to stop the car, get out of the car, take the groceries. For those stops that just had *poi* and things, the house deliveries, he'd stop and I'd run out with the *poi* deliveries, put it wherever he told me to put it and come back out. And lot of places, it's like you go into their homes—leave the *poi* in the calabash bowl on the table in the kitchen, or put the milk in the icebox in the kitchen and leave.

NP: And nobody was there?

GH: Nobody was there. And the money—at the end of the month, the money would be on the table. So you pick up the money, sign the receipt, leave the receipt, and . . .

NP: Wow.

GH: It was such different way of life.

NP: Yeah, so trusting.

GH: So trusting. And people---the houses were very modest but they were always clean. And sometimes there'd be a bunch of bananas or a cake or something, and there'd be a note—oh, take this home.

NP: Oh, how sweet.

GH: And I remember people who couldn't pay him. Sometimes they couldn't pay him; they'd give him their products, like *lau hala* hats—like maybe a lady would be a weaver.

She would give him so many *lau hala* hats. He would take it to wherever and he'd sell it, and the money he gets for that goes towards the lady's grocery bill. So it was . . .

NP: Real barter system.

GH: Barter system.

NP: Would there be other kinds of things people would barter for or exchange, that you can remember?

GH: The *lau hala* was the one that I remember the most, the *lau hala* hats. But I'm sure there were other things that he used to barter for but . . .

NP: Food, sounds like.

GH: Food, yeah, fish and things. He was very patient, and even to this day he ingrained in us that sometimes they don't pay you on time, but if you wait long enough, they will come and pay you when they can afford to pay you. So it wasn't a matter of pushing too hard. He said if you could afford to carry them, you carry them. And when they have money, they will pay you. And most of the time it was true.

NP: Were there some people who simply . . .

GH: Left.

NP: As you say, left in the night or they just couldn't work within the system very well?

GH: Right. There were. There were. But he never made any effort to track them down or, you know. . . .

NP: Had a bill collector to run around or . . .

GH: Right, right, right. He tried to get a bill collector but I don't think it was in him to send a bill collector (chuckles) on someone. And after that he stopped doing that. I guess he tried doing it, thinking he could but a lot of his customers were people he knew for so long that he just didn't have the heart to send a bill collector after them. So even to this day, I have a hard time doing that too. I think I adopted a lot of his ways.

NP: Do you still have charge customers?

GH: I do. People who had charges with us from long time ago, from his time, their families. Or like the businesses, the farms, or the fishermen who—it's easier for their record keeping, or the way they got paid for their products. If I carried them for a month, and

whenever they got paid they came to me and it's for their income tax purposes too. It was easier to keep . . .

NP: Now what kind, for example, what kind of products would that be?

GH: Mostly gasoline. For like the fishermen it would be gasoline, it would be some bait, fishing equipment, things like that.

NP: Do you sell bait, too?

GH: Mostly like squid, or sometimes they use oatmeal and mackerel to make *palu*. And that's all considered deductible for the fishermen.

NP: It's like a—well, it's a work expense.

GH: Yes, yes, exactly.

NP: And it's easier for them to have that on . . .

GH: On their monthly invoice. So when they do their taxes, they explain those kinds of things, too. If I think that they're trustworthy, then I'll do it. It would be nice they paid cash all the time, but then I would have to keep giving them a receipt every time they came in. And for that kind of purposes they would want a written receipt. So it works out both ways. And a lot of them are very good about it. And if they don't get their checks on time then they'll come and they'll tell me, "Oh, you know, so-and-so didn't pay me on time, so if I could wait a few days." In that sense, it's been okay. We still have a few that take a lot longer than we would like, but eventually they do pay. We just kind of work with them and let them know that it's okay for them to come in and pay us what they can instead of just staying away and, you know, hiding. I would rather they come out and see me and tell me straight, because Kona is such a small community, that you will see them somewhere. And, you know, rather than they be uncomfortable, it's easier. A lot of them I've known most of my life, so I tell them straight out that I would rather they come to me and explain their circumstances to me and I'll be more than willing to work with them. If they're having a hard time I don't expect them to pay me all at once, but if they can make me a monthly payment to help me pay my bills that it would help. And when you explain it to them like that they're very good about it.

NP: And kind of negotiate.

GH: Yeah, right.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

NP: Can you tell me something about the kinds of things your family did when they weren't busy working in the *poi* factory, and the coffee fields, and the store? Do you have memories of family holidays, or good times together?

GH: Well, when we were growing up when we were children, my dad never used to be open seven days a week. That came after when we were grown. But I remember he had Saturdays off and I have memories of going to the beach, down to the City of Refuge before it was a national park. And we'd have picnics there or family . . .

NP: Just your family or . . .

GH: Sometimes just our family and sometimes when my aunts or my uncles would come from O'ahu or just with friends, my parents' friends. They'd have some kind of picnic and we'd go. And a lot of times it was down at Hōnaunau beach, sometimes down at Ho'okena. And I remember my father taking us to Puna. I have no idea how we got there or why we were there, but I remember going and he being friends with the Lyman family. And they used to have a house on what I thought was a lake, but I guess it was the beach.

NP: Was that like at Kapoho?

GH: Kapoho, yes.

NP: Wow.

GH: And I remember I was very young and my sister and my brother and I think some of their friends came with us. And we went and spent some time, like maybe a weekend or . . .

NP: Wonder if that was before the . . .

GH: Before the eruption, way before. I remember being very, very young, maybe about five or six back then.

NP: And they had all the beautiful fish ponds, and tidal ponds, and everything.

GH: Queen's Bath was . . .

NP: Still there.

GH: Yeah. And there was a place called Warm Springs.

NP: Mm-hmm. That's still there.

GH: And I remember going there. And I remember thinking it was a lake.

NP: Kind of a long drive, too.

GH: Yeah, and the roads were really bad. And I was always the one who got carsick. So it wasn't fun to go on those trips. But I remember that, and I remember whenever the volcano would erupt. Back then it would erupt in the crater. So I remember going to see the eruption, to Halema'uma'u and being so scared because I was one of those who were scared of the fire. And I kept thinking that it was going to come on us. (Laughs) And I remember going down to the old pier to see the fireworks when Young Brothers was still at Kailua pier, and even that used to scare me 'cause the fireworks in the sky and it's going to fall. So I always had to be under the shade because I didn't want it falling on me.

And going out to—we used to go on picnics at Kahalu'u. But it was more that. And he'd take us to the district fair. The Lions Club would have the fair and we'd go to that. And I remember—I think I was about seven or eight—my parents were going to Moloka'i for the day. They had friends in Moloka'i, and they were just flying out that morning and . . .

NP: The whole day?

GH: Yes.

NP: Just for a day?

GH: Yes. And my sister and brother was—we were all supposed to stay home, but I remember my sister begging my parents to take me with them because they didn't want me staying home with them. They could stay home with my grandparents but they didn't want me staying home. So I got to go to Moloka'i (laughs).

NP: You did. Oh, neat.

GH: And my parents went clamming in the mud pond there. We were there for the day, and I remember them going out on the lake. I didn't want to go out on the lake because I didn't trust that little boat. (NP chuckles.) But I remember their going clamming and they cooking the clam on the barbecue grill and eating that. Things like that we did. There were far and few between but we did some things as family.

NP: And what about holidays? Were there special holidays that you would celebrate?

GH: Was mostly Christmas, New Year's. Fourth of July wasn't such a big deal. Easter wasn't such a big deal. But Christmas and New Year's were really special for us, and those were the only two days that we closed the store and we still close the store only on Christmas and New Year's (chuckles).

NP: No wonder it was special.

GH: We had---you know, it was just our immediate family. And I remember these boxes coming from the airlines. There were Christmas presents coming from my uncles and my aunts over on O'ahu. My two aunts used to work at Paradise Sportswear so we'd always get new *mu'umu'us* and clothes and things like that, the latest things that they were putting out. It was, you know, those were things that we looked forward to.

NP: Would you decorate for Christmas? Would you have like a Christmas tree?

GH: We would just have a Christmas tree. And after a while, I think when we were like about eleven or twelve my father stopped buying Christmas trees. He said, "We had so much nice trees out there you could use, why don't you be inventive. And if you want a Christmas tree, you gotta learn to make your own Christmas tree." So one year it would be a macadamia nut branch that was sprayed silver, and he'd put blue lights on. Or one year he would be on his way home from Ka'ū and he'd go and dig up an *'ohelo* berry bush, and that would be our Christmas tree one year. (Laughs) It wasn't fun back then because we wanted a traditional Christmas tree.

NP: Would you sell trees here ever?

GH: We did. We did. I remember we used to sell—we had a porch back then, where the cash register is now, and we had Christmas trees out there.

NP: What kind would you sell?

GH: The Douglas firs. And he used to sell fireworks back then, too. He used to sell all kinds of—we used to sell clothing and a lot more automotive things, hardware things, you know, for the farm.

NP: When you say automotive, parts for cars?

GH: Parts for cars—spark plugs, fuses, carburetor kits, lot of fluids, lot of hurricane lanterns, and kerosene lamps, chimneys, mantels. That kind of thing—generators for that. And he used to sell lot of farm equipment, like hacksaws, cane knife, pruning saws, and things like that—sickles.

NP: So you had farm—kind of a farming section, automotive . . .

GH: Fishing. Dry goods, like he'd sell tee shirts and little baby clothes in those gift sets, or aloha shirts, jeans, shorts.

NP: Shoes?

GH: Some work shoes, Keds and things, socks, belts.

NP: Big inventory.

GH: Yeah, yeah.

NP: And would there be a lot of salesmen who would come?

GH: There would be, like I remember there was the salesman for Hoffschlaeger [Company, Ltd.] used to come in to do the hardware kind of stuff—the knives, the German knives, pocket knives, kitchen knives, all that kind of stuff. And [Hawaii] Planing Mill would be the ropes, manila ropes. We used to sell manila ropes by the lengths. You'd pull out how much you need and they'd throw it on the scale, sell it by the pound. Nails.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

NP: When you were little, do you have memories of really special foods that you sold in the store also that might be different from now?

GH: It was more like the codfish and sushi, you know the cone and the roll sushi.

NP: Now would someone make that and bring it to the store?

GH: There used to be a Koyanagi family up in Kealahou. There used to be the Kona Sushi Shop, and they would make it and bring it down, deliver. And other than the *poi* and French bread in the . . .

NP: French bread in the bags.

GH: Yes, in the bag with the open end from Kona Bakery.

NP: And pies and cakes.

GH: Pies and cakes.

NP: And would Kona Bakery deliver also?

GH: All of the goods were delivered: bakery goods, milk products, ice cream. Our freight used to come from Hilo. There used to be a Sonomura Trucking and a Take Trans. They take turns and bring our freight in from Hilo, for many, many years. So all the salesmen

would come out from Hilo and take orders and then the following week the freight man—freight delivery—would come.

The candies were all—we used to buy from Hilo Candies. Still to this day, we still buy from them.

NP: There's another question: Have you always been giving calendars? Is that a . . .

GH: Yes.

NP: You know, I see Teshima's there and then I saw yours out front.

GH: In the store. Yes.

NP: As long as you remember. Can you remember?

GH: As long as I remember we've been giving out calendars. And people still come and ask for the calendars. It's not a pretty calendar. It's more like a functional kind of calendar. But you can tell when the people are getting older because they say, "We like your calendar. We can see it across the room."

(Laughter)

GH: But I have people who'll come especially for a calendar. Or they'd say, "Oh, my friend on the Mainland wants a calendar again this year." (Chuckles) So we have them all over the United States.

NP: Yeah. And yours doesn't have pictures in it but says "Higashi Store" on it.

GH: Yes, yes.

NP: Do you still have any that said maybe "Higashi Store and Poi Factory" from the old, old days?

GH: I don't know if we kept any of those. I know we still had invoices that said "Higashi Store and Poi Factory."

NP: Keep it.

GH: My brother kept the *poi* bags. Back when we were really little, dad used to buy the plastic bags, the plain plastic bags, and there used to be the labels on a roll like scotch tape. So you put it in the dispenser and then you'd have to tear off the section that says Higashi *poi*, the weight and things like that. So that was my mom and my job as—like we'd have to put the labels on all these bags and we'd have to fold the bags half down

and put them in these cardboard boxes for the *poi* day. So when they bag the *poi* it's easier for them to grab it and just . . .

NP: Open.

GH: Open. Because we had already folded it back.

NP: Okay, I see. Yeah. Inside to outside.

GH: Right. About halfway or three quarters of the way down so that the person who's holding it just grabs it out of the box and it's already open so the person who's putting the *poi* into the bags has an easier time. So it's none of this fumbling, and you know when the plastic bags come out of the machines they're sometimes sticky.

NP: They're stuck together, yeah.

GH: So that was our job. We'd be watching television at night and we'd have to—we say, "make bags." Make bags mean fold it in half and then, you know, so like you'd count out, he'd tell you, "Oh, I need so many—couple of hundred of one-dollar bags, a couple of hundred of half-a-dollar bags." So we'd have to fold it and put it in these clean cardboard boxes and then have in the *poi* factory ready when they're bagging *poi*.

NP: The dollar was how many pounds?

GH: Dollar used to be three-and-a-half pounds before.

NP: Oh my gosh.

GH: Now it's one pound for three dollars.

(Laughter)

GH: And when I was really little, they even had a quarter-size bag. And like there were people who would just want a quarter-size bag for maybe a baby, or maybe only one person.

NP: Of course your *poi* was thick so it could go a lot further.

GH: Right, exactly. And we've always eaten *poi*.

NP: Do you still eat *poi* now?

GH: Oh yes.

NP: Where do you get your *poi* from now?

GH: Well, this *poi* that we sell in the store is delivered from Honolulu Poi Company. Someone brings it in and delivers to the store. But my husband works construction and he met this man who also works construction who happens to make *poi* in Waipi'o who's a relative of the man who used to grow taro for my father.

NP: Oh how neat.

GH: And he gave my husband a bag of *poi* and said, "Try this. This is about the closest thing to your father-in-law's *poi* that we have nowadays 'cause we use the same type of taro that he used to use." And it is. And he makes it that thick way. So whenever my husband works at the airport or works on the same construction site as them, he brings home that *poi* 'cause my mom still likes to eat *poi* on a weekly basis.

NP: What's the name of the family in Waipi'o?

GH: The family that my dad used to buy from was Mock Chew. He used to be the one who would go and gather the taro from the different farmers down there and have it bagged and brought up to the top to Kukuihaele. And my dad would have it picked up from there and brought here. So he was like his manager down there who would—the purchaser—who would go in and buy all the taro. And then he had that wetland taro, and then there were people—farmers—in this area who would have dryland taro. And my dad would mix the two to get that blend and the color that he wanted. So we always grew up eating good *poi*, so sometimes when we eat *poi* now . . .

NP: Yeah, it's disappointing.

GH: Yes. (Chuckles) It's very disappointing. So I think this man's taro—*poi*—is the closest thing that we've eaten to our own.

NP: I wonder if he sells it in Waimea.

GH: I think he does.

NP: I have to find now where it is. So how about New Year's, was that a big celebration for you?

GH: New Year's was a very special time that we still try to follow some of the traditions. My mom would make New Year's breakfast. That was our big deal. She'd get up early and she'd do the fish and the *o-zōni*, the *mochi* soup. And she'd have the fish eggs, the *suzuko* and the *kazunoko*, and the black beans. All traditional Japanese foods that she used to make. That was our---that was at least one breakfast that everybody would get up and have breakfast together. And it would be this huge big meal. And when we were younger my dad used to have parties and he used to invite his friends over, and they'd

do the whole *kālua* pig and *poi* and things. And his friends would come here. Christmas we would go to someone else's house. But New Year's they would come here. As he got older he kind of tapered off on that.

NP: That's a big job—he would do the *imu* and everything?

GH: He would get his friends, his Hawaiian friends, to do it. In the beginning he would—you know, we had pigs. We always had some kind of animals. I remember when we were very young, he had a chicken coop in the back. So we'd go and gather eggs. And we've always had pigpens up until recently. We had pigs and he'd raise pig for New Year's. And he'd kill the pig and maybe—before he used to *kalua* it here but then it got to be too much for him. So he'd ask his friends to do it and so they'd *kalua* the pigs for him.

NP: And bring it back down.

GH: And bring it back. Yeah.

NP: So New Year's was a full day.

GH: Yeah. So even to this day my mom still does breakfast, and the grandchildren, like my son—my nephew especially loves Grandma's *o-zōni*. And he's trying to figure out a way to make it so that it tastes exactly like the same (chuckles) as Grandma's.

NP: Does he watch her each time so he learns?

GH: Well, he tries but nobody can get up early enough to watch her make it.

(Laughter)

GH: But they know what goes into it. It's just trying to . . .

NP: It's the blend of things.

GH: Yes. And she doesn't follow a recipe. Everything she does is just by feel and taste.

NP: So she's been doing it for I wonder how many years?

GH: Ever since I can remember, so I think ever since she married into this family she's been doing it, because even when my grandparents were alive she was cooking.

NP: Does she cook now?

GH: Yes. She still cooks all our meals.

NP: She's amazing.

GH: She is. She is. She still cooks all our meals. She still takes care of us so I can do my thing. She tells me, "I'll do the laundry." If I do the laundry, she doesn't like the way I do the laundry so she does it (NP chuckles). And she cooks the meals. She still helps in the store. She still stocks shelves. She gets a little confused about prices because prices change a lot, so that sometimes she doesn't care to do the register too much because it changes too fast. And every time there's a new thingamajig we have coming in like the credit card machines or the EBT cards for food stamps now. The process is getting harder and harder for her to remember. Like I would try to—to do the credit cards, I would write it down what the process she would have to follow step by step. But with all these phones messages or phone instructions now, it's harder. So she doesn't do the EBT cards, EBT sales. So if I have to be away and there's nobody to do that and just she's doing that with maybe my husband helping her doing the gas, I'll just tell them to don't take EBT sales. Just say that I'm not here and you don't know how to do it. As things get more modern, it gets harder and harder for her to try to be in the store, but she tries to help us out by stocking shelves. She likes to do that. It keeps her busy.

NP: And still cooking dinner for you.

GH: And still cooking dinner.

NP: Oh fantastic.

GH: And still doing our laundry. (Laughs) So I'm not a very good cook because Mom does most of the cooking.

NP: But it's good because it gives her a sense of purpose.

GH: Yes.

NP: Of being part of the family still.

GH: Yes. I've always thought that when we took over that it would be her time to do what she wanted to, that she didn't have to come into the store. But my sister-in-law, her mom got ill after the grandchildren went to high school and she deteriorated quite fast. And she kind of told me, she said, "You know, as long as your mom wants to do it, and is able to do it, you should let her do it because when there's nothing for her to do, I think she'll age faster." So we've gone on that. I thought that was good advice. So as long as she wanted to—so it's not like she had to do anything on any certain day, by a certain time, she just did what she wanted to in her own good time. If she didn't want to stock the shelves today, she didn't. But if she wanted to do it tomorrow, she'll do it

tomorrow. Or she likes to putter around in the garden, she goes and putters around in the garden. So she just does whatever she feels she wants to, or she's up to.

NP: Yeah. And yet she knows there's parameters. She has responsibilities in the evening/late afternoon to help out.

GH: And if she doesn't want to cook, she just tells us let's order out. So (laughs).

NP: Good, good. I want to talk about more of your growing up, but I want to be sure—since we've kind of touched on it—how did you come to decide to take over the store and why?

GH: We were living in Honolulu at that time. My son was just about to turn two. And it's hard to raise a child in the city after you've been raised in the country. My husband had just been laid off from work so he was unemployed. And my dad called and he asked if we would consider moving home to help. He said that—I don't think he really needed help at the time, but maybe he was thinking something long term, that he wanted me to work with him to learn the business in the event something happened to him I would be able to do it. But at the time, it was a perfect opportunity. He wanted us to come home and work here. My husband wasn't working and I wanted to bring my son out of the city.

NP: Is your son—I mean, is your husband from Honolulu or . . .

GH: My husband is from Honolulu. He was born and raised in Honolulu, but he was more than willing to come—to move here.

NP: He was a wise man.

(Laughter)

GH: He liked the lifestyle. He liked to go fishing, and the slower pace. So we moved back in '97—no, '77. I'm sorry, 1977. So we've been here ever since.

NP: You've been here twenty—about twenty-three years, twenty-two years.

GH: Yeah, yeah. I was gone for about ten years after I graduated from high school. It was almost exactly ten years. So I came back.

NP: Had you thought about coming back before then?

GH: I had eventually thought of moving home, but not at that time. At that time his work was in Honolulu and I had hoped to go back to work in Honolulu. But I was home with my son and he wasn't—jobs was very scarce that time in construction. It was here too,

and he was kind of floating for a while trying to establish something here. And he had to work in Hilo for several years and on O'ahu for several years. But . . .

NP: Commuting home.

GH: Commuting home all the time. But it gave me the chance to work with my dad, and it was perfect for me 'cause we lived here and worked here and my son—I didn't have to send him to a sitter. I could still watch him as well as work in the store. So it was a perfect situation.

NP: Kind of the way Preston is taken care of also.

GH: Yes, yes, yes. Our grandnephew.

NP: Grandnephew.

GH: Yes.

(Laughter)

GH: So it's been good. He [son] had the extended family. He had his grandparents around; he had his cousins. Frances, my sister, used to come down every day to help my dad after the children were out of school. So they'd be down here a lot. So my son never lacked for playmates. Shelley and his cousins are more like his brothers and sisters, but when they tired of each other they all went home to separate homes. So my son---we've always asked him if he wanted brothers or sisters or if we had more children if he, you know, would look forward to being an older brother. He said no; he was perfectly happy the way he was because it's like he had the best of both worlds. He had playmates and he had—you know, like a brother or a sister or sisters and brothers. And yet when they were tired of each other they could go home to their separate houses and have their own times together. So it worked out fine. And my sister's family and my brother's family and my family we're all very close. So we celebrate all our occasions together, and yet we all have our separate lives. And my sister is a partner in the store so she comes down to help.

NP: How do you and she work this out as far as . . .

GH: Well, right now because she has a regular full-time job, she comes down every other weekend. And she comes down Thursday evenings so that I can go bowling on Thursdays. So that gives me a time off. So she comes down every other weekend, so I get every other weekend off. In the beginning when my dad and I used to work together, he would take time off and go off to play cards with his friends or do his Lions Club thing and not have to be here all the time. But there was always someone here

'cause we were working the seven days a week thing. And after he was gone, I was kind of doing it myself but then I was kind of missing out on my—like my dad was still alive when my son was younger and so I could leave in afternoons to go to his ball games. So I could still be there for him and attend his athletic functions or his school functions. It was a very flexible schedule.

But then when my dad died, unless we had a worker working, my mom would take over for me when she was younger. But as she got older and then we didn't have that hired help, my sister would help out whenever she could. But then it was like I was working every weekend, so we worked out this schedule where we would work every other weekend so we'd get some time with our families. So now Shelley has come back home and she wanted to raise her children here and she needed a job. So if she was willing to work with me, it would have worked out fine and then Grandma got a chance to spend time with her great-grandchildren. So it worked out fine for all of us.

NP: It's---yeah, that's really neat.

GH: And so far we all have been able to get along and we're all kind of learning from each other. Everybody helps.

NP: When you have conflicts where you have to decide what to do about something, how do you handle that?

GH: We discuss it and my sister kind of defers to me because I'm here most of the time. I'll use her as a sounding board and I'll put it past her if, you know, see how she feels about it. If I'm really indecisive about something I really don't know about, we'll discuss it and I'll ask her opinion and I kind bounce it off how I feel. If I'm not really sure, I give her a chance to kind of go over it. And then sometimes she doesn't agree with me and then she'll say, "Oh, it won't work." And then she'll come up with something.

NP: As an alternative.

GH: Yes, yes. And then it's always good hearing somebody else's point of view. It's a very loose relationship because my brother-in-law, her husband, and my husband will be involved in the decision-making process, because indirectly it affects them. And sometimes they have input that we never really thought about. And when we kind of take that all into consideration, basically she lets me make the final decision. But I kind of run it past her before I go through with it. So she kind of trusts me on that. If I'm really confused about something, I'll talk to her about it and we kind of work it out between us.

NP: It sounds like you have a really good relationship to be able to do that.

- GH: Yeah, I guess because of our ages—she’s so much older than I am and she knows certain things that sometimes I’m not aware of and she’s aware of. Like she’s out in the community a little bit more than I am and so she has a sense of some things that I don’t. So if I can pick her brain on that. And then I know my customers or my distributors or things that work with the actual running of business. But other outside factors she helps me with.
- NP: What kind of changes have you had to make in order to—I wouldn’t just say survive—well, to keep the store going?
- GH: Well, we’ve had to follow a lot of different federal and state and county guidelines, especially in relationship to the gasoline. We started feeling it with the Board of Health. Before when we sold eggs you could leave eggs out. But with all this salmonella thing, now eggs have to be refrigerated. So then we had to find extra refrigeration space for the eggs, and they would come and check on your eggs—Board of Health would come. And they’d even come and check on—like we were able to sell *bentōs* before, packaged *bentōs*. Or there was this other distributor that packaged *bentōs* and things, and they’d come and we’d sell it here. But because of the new Board of Health guidelines, we had to stop doing that. So it was mostly cold sandwiches that are refrigerated. They didn’t want anything out for any period of time because of the bacteria and things.
- NP: If you had *bentō* and refrigeration could you have done it, or is it just non-category?
- GH: Well, it’s hard to sell *bentō* refrigerated ’cause people don’t want the rice cold. You know, like even sushi in the refrigerator for long is not a good idea.
- NP: Yeah, and even if you microwave it just a little bit it doesn’t—it’s not the same.
- GH: It’s not quite the same, yeah. So we’ve decided to just stick with the cold sandwiches. If we had a kitchen, maybe you know how Kamigaki does it. They put it out; they put the time on it when it has to be pulled off the shelf, ’cause it can be out only for so long. So I guess if we did it like that, we could, but with the gas it’s very difficult because you’re handling fuel and then you’d have to come in . . .
- NP: And handle food . . .
- GH: Hand--either that or you would have to hire more people. And for us this works right now that with two of us, one being inside and one being outside and not having to handle too much of the food thing, it works pretty good. Maybe once when everybody’s retired and spending more time here, we can expand on other areas, but for right now this is what works.

Our gasoline is our draw so we concentrated on that. The EPA required that you have double-walled tanks and containment.

NP: Are those down buried below the surface . . .

GH: Below the surface, yes.

NP: . . . up here in the parking lot?

GH: So they had the deadline to comply with that. So we were deciding what our options were. Did we want to close down our gas station and just do merchandise, or go in a different direction? Or did we want to continue it and make the investment? So we looked at all the different factors in the neighborhood saying that we were the last station going south for another twenty-five miles. And people already traveled distances to come to fuel, so we thought that for us it would be okay to redo our tanks. So that's why we went . . .

NP: And with the last-chance place that people have.

GH: Right. It's an investment that you'll never going to be able to make back, but it's like an investment in your business that you have to make.

NP: What's different between you and the store that's right by—it's really close by?

GH: He sells more grocery type of items and it's a new owner now. The old owner retired. [Formerly known as U. Morihara Store, it is now Merv's Place.]

NP: 'Cause you're really less than a block away.

GH: Right, right.

NP: It's amazing you can both survive.

GH: There's another store about a mile down the road, Fujihara Store. Well, the thing was that we sold gasoline. Fujihara at one time did have gasoline when they were across the street, the original place. But they have liquor and we don't sell liquor. And Morihara's—that's the closest to us—had groceries strictly. They carry groceries that we don't carry. Like we try not to deal with too much perishables or too many refrigerated items where the losses are great.

NP: And that's true even now?

GH: Well, maybe he's gone more into canned goods and that type of groceries. But he's gone into hot dogs and *manapua* and, you know, food items. And because that's the only thing

he has, he can do that. If I did that, I would have to have another person that stays strictly inside.

NP: And does he have liquor also?

GH: No he doesn't. So we've always been able to refer. Or we've always managed to work well with our competitors. We compete in certain areas, and yet we complement in others.

NP: Did you ever think about liquor?

GH: We thought about it, but the profits didn't balance the peace of mind. We, even with the gasoline, at one time when we were closed, people [would] knock at our door and ask us to open for fuel and things like that. And it was really hard to refuse that kind.

NP: This would be after hours?

GH: After hours. And we knew stores like Kamigaki, when they used to live in the back of their small store, where people would knock on their door to ask for liquor. Like they're having a party and they're running out of liquor.

NP: It's eleven or twelve at night.

GH: Right, exactly.

NP: Great (chuckles).

GH: And you wouldn't want to deal with someone who's inebriated. My dad had said a long time ago if he sold liquor, we wouldn't have been able to help out in the store and he would have to hire. And back then hiring wasn't an option. So he never sold liquor for that reason. And for us, because we're women running the store, I didn't want—for safety reasons—I didn't want liquor on the premises. So that's why we never sold liquor. We have a lot of people who stop by who want to buy liquor. But for safety reasons and you would have to have more refrigeration and space is limited. I like the fact that in my store I can see all corners of my store, and I can see every aspect of it.

NP: Do you ever have instances where you have people who steal things or who are [shoplifters]?

GH: Very few, very few.

NP: That's good.

GH: We've been fortunate in that case—situation. If we did, it was like juveniles. Small items, nothing major. So it has been really good.

NP: In the time that we have left, Gloria, what I'd like to do is just to talk a little bit about the reasons for your really being here and the feelings that you have about this store and why you continue to keep it running.

GH: Well, the more I learn about my family, I really like the tradition of it. My grandparents started the business and my father built it up, and my whole life has been here and I'd like to see it continue. When I see progress come in and things change and places close up, it keeps me rooted a little bit in the past as well as to look into the future. And I'd like to think that other people, or other generations coming up, would have a feeling of this little mom-and-pop store where they could come. As children, they went to this one place, and even as adults they came there.

NP: Do you have people who come back?

GH: Yes, yes.

NP: And say, "Oh my gosh, you're still here."

GH: "You're still here." And it's a nice feeling, and a lot times they remember me more or my father or my grandfather more than I remember them. But every once in a while, I'll go, "Oh yes, I remember that you lived certain-certain place." And it's funny little things.

There was a man that comes from DLNR [Department of Land and Natural Resources] and he was trying to quit smoking and he bought sunflower seeds on his way out to work. And he came back a couple of months later or a year later and I said, "Are you back for more sunflower seeds?"

And he goes, "How did you remember that?" And I don't know how I remembered, but there was something about him that I did remember that he had sunflower seeds that day. But there's little things about people that I remember. And I may not be very good with names now. But just the traditions that my grandparents—I'm very interested in how things were—I see family values now are different, how things really have changed where people have to work more and there's not the closeness. And I really cherish the fact that my family—we had to work hard and a lot of our growing up or being together was working. But I think that my father was successful because he was able to keep all of us together and keep all of us involved.

And this business has put me through school and educated my brother and my sister and myself. And my uncles and aunts all were successful people. I'd like to think that our children, my children and my nieces and nephews, were all educated starting from

this business. I'd like to see that continue and hope that there's somebody in the future generations who'd want to be interested in keeping the family histories.

And it all started because my nephew had a genealogy project and he wanted to know more about his grandfather's brothers and sisters, and he asked me to help him. And from that, finding out about my grandfather and the names of my great-grandparents and then just people asking me, "When was this store started? How long have you been here?" made me curious. How long were we here? When do we celebrate our centennial or our fiftieth anniversary?

NP: It's coming up soon.

GH: Our centennial will be in about fourteen years. I'm just so proud to be a part of something that my grandparents had started. And I'd like to keep the tradition going as long as possible.

NP: Oh, I hope so. It's so rare. It's so amazing because it started with your grandparents.

GH: Actually if you go back a lot, it actually started with my great-grandparents being retailers and wholesale merchants.

NP: So, that's---your great-grandparents, your grandparents, your parents . . .

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 35-7-1-00; SIDE ONE

NP: . . . it's the basis of this store and of the continuity.

GH: Yes, it is. My mom wasn't educated formally; her education was mostly experience. I had formal education, but she helps me in the areas where through her knowledge, her personal experiences fills in my gaps, so that I have a more rounded way in dealing with people. And this is a way of life, I think, because I've known other people or other families who have had stores like this, and their spouses cannot see how much of our lives is involved in it. I've come to the realization that you have to be born into this kind of life to continue doing it. That's why Shelley can do it because she grew up here, and she's worked with me and she has the same feel for people that my father had, and that I hope I do. And yet she's smart enough to know the other aspects of the business and what might work. And she's also more adventurous than I am. There are times when I wouldn't try something new, or I'm thinking more in what my customers would like. And I want to go with more something that would be here for a long haul rather than a

trendy kind of thing where it'll be here now but then it won't sell later on and I'd be stuck with. But Shelley has this feel where she'd little bit more adventurous . . .

NP: Risk-taking, kind of, yeah?

GH: Then I think it's because of her youth, too, and her experience. She goes, "You know, I tried this and my friends tried this and this might work here." I think about it and sometimes it would, and sometimes it wouldn't. If I explain to her why I think it would or it wouldn't, and she'd think about, and she'd say, "Oh, okay." Or she goes, "No, but I really think it would work." Then when she feels that strongly about something, then I have to take a second look and say, "Okay, we'll try it." And if you take into consideration the investment that's going to be involved, too, what . . .

NP: What kind of things have worked, for example, that she's suggested?

GH: Things that appeal to the children, to the younger—to the teenager or even the younger children that influence their parents. Food items, or even things like the Pokemon things that she knows her children would like. So it's not like a major investment. You recognize it as a fad kind of thing, and you purchase it likewise. Then when you see the trend stopping or slowing down, you pull back. But she can kind of tell, and she goes, "Now they're going into this area, so maybe we shouldn't. . . ." But because she's a mother of young children, she can see those things. I could see that when my son was younger, but as he grew up and went away, I kind of lost touch with that. When I see my customers, they were babies when I first knew them, and they're driving now. I feel like they're my nieces and nephews, also, some of my customers' children. And they call me "Aunty," and it's a nice feeling. Just talking story with them, that they feel comfortable enough to talk to me and tell me things that helps my business. They say, "Aunty, have you tried or have you heard of this thing? It's really good. You really should carry this. We'd buy it from you." Then it makes me think about something. But Shelley brings that new freshness and she brings a different point of view.

So I'm very fortunate. I have Shelley's point of view, which is a fresher one, and I have my mom's which is a more conventional one, a traditional one. So in that sense . . .

NP: Your different generations are really, really working together.

GH: We have our differences, we have our periods of conflict. But Shelley's a very up-front kind of a person. I've learned that when something bothers me, I have to come out and say it, too. Before, I wouldn't have said anything. But for us to be able to work together. . . . And we do a lot of things together, I feel like her children are almost like my grandchildren instead of my grandnephews. It's a nice feeling. I like that closeness that we all share, that our spouses and our nieces' and nephews' spouses have been able to all integrate into the family. And the fact that this is our family home, the home base for

not only our family, but for my cousins and my uncles and my aunts, it gives me a different kind of feeling. The house is an old house, it's termite-infested, it's very inconvenient in terms of modern standards. But for me, it's home. And when I look at it, it's my grandparents' home. I had the benefit of living with my grandparents and growing up and knowing my grandparents. A lot of my cousins never really knew my grandparents. That's why when I talk to them or I keep the family history, it's more for them to share what I shared, and for them to know my grandparents or to know about the family business like how I did firsthand. We tried to do that, you know, a family reunion or—our new thing is Thanksgiving. My uncle brings his whole family over. We've been doing this for about two years now. And spending Thanksgiving together here so the cousins would get to know each other, that our children will start to know their family.

NP: So they won't grow apart.

GH: Right. And it's a really nice feeling. It's just so much fun to have cousins that I grew up with, that we get together now and we have those, "Do you remember when we used to do this?" Or, "So-and-so was such a terror that he used to do this?" But it's just so much fun. My husband says that just watching us talking and laughing and the expressions on our faces, he says it's more fun watching us than listening to our stories. (NP chuckles.) But it's really a nice feeling. I'd really like to keep that going as long as possible.

NP: The store in this area is like the nucleus of where it is happening.

GH: Yes. So whenever my cousins or their children or their grandchildren come, and they go, "Wow, the store has my name on it."

And I go, "Yeah. This is where your grandfather grew up and your grandfather lived." It's a point of reference for them. They never knew that there was a store with their name on it, or their grandmother's name or their grandfather's name. And it's neat. It's really neat to see their faces.

NP: Well, I think this is the perfect place to end this wonderful interview. Thank you so much, Gloria.

GH: No, thank you.

NP: This is really a wonderful interview. I really appreciate the time you've given me.

GH: Oh, you're very welcome. And thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

Kona Heritage Stores Oral History Project

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