

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Sadami Yada Hamamoto

Sadami Yada Hamamoto, tenth of eleven children, was born in 1923 in Kaia‘akea, Hawai‘i, to Japanese immigrants, Riichi and Yoshino Yada. Her father was a sugar plantation worker; her mother, a homemaker who supplemented the family income by selling home-sewn raingear and homemade tofu.

Sadami Hamamoto attended Nīnole and John M. Ross Elementary Schools. From seventh to eleventh grade, she attended Laupāhoehoe Elementary and High School.

In 1941, with the consent of her parents, she left home to live with her older brother, Yutaka Sam Yada, who had a young family and farm in Lodi, California. She helped care for her nephew, assisted her sister-in-law who ran a mess hall for their workers, and started her senior year at Lodi High School.

With the outbreak of war, Sadami Hamamoto and family in Lodi destroyed things Japanese. The family disposed of their other belongings and was moved to the Stockton Assembly Center in May 1942. While at camp, she was handed her high school diploma.

In October 1942, the family was moved to Rohwer War Relocation Center in Arkansas. She applied for and gained release in spring 1944. Samuel and Sarah Carmichael employed her as a live-in maid at their Cleveland home. Later, she worked for the Henry Haserot family.

While employed by the Haserots, she attended part-time the Wilcox College of Commerce where she earned a certificate in stenography.

In August 1946, she returned to Hawai‘i where she held various clerical/administrative positions.

Retired from the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo since 1985, she remains active in the Hilo community.

She and her husband, Takumi Hamamoto, raised four children.

Tape No. 55-43-1-11

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sadami Hamamoto

Hilo, Hawai'i

September 27, 2011

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

- MK: This is an interview with Mrs. Sadami Yada Hamamoto over the telephone. The date is September 27, 2011. The interviewer is Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto, and we will be focusing primarily on your Mainland experiences from August 1941 to August 1946, okay?
- SH: Yes.
- MK: Okay, first of all, just so we know a little background, where were you living in Hawai'i before going to the Mainland?
- SH: I was living in Nīnole, which is a community of Pāpa'aloa—Laupāhoehoe—Pāpa'aloa Plantation.
- MK: Okay. And in . . .
- SH: In Kaia'akea, K-A-I-A-A-K-E-A. Next to Nīnole, which has the smallest post office on the island or even in the state of Hawai'i.
- MK: And if you can just tell me just a little bit about your family up to that point.
- SH: All right. My parents were immigrants from Hiroshima, Japan. My father [Riichi Yada] came as a contract laborer to Laupāhoehoe Sugar Company in 1899. My mother [Yoshino Yada] came a few years later. I'm the tenth of eleven children. I was born in 1923, attended Nīnole Elementary School—Nīnole and John M. Ross schools. Then, from seventh grade to Laupāhoehoe Elementary and High School, until the eleventh grade.
- MK: And you know, at that time, I know that some of your siblings were on the Mainland already. Who are they and what were they doing on the Mainland?
- SH: My two elder brothers, as they got to be adult age [went to the Mainland]. We had an uncle in Stockton, so the first one [Albert Kazuo Yada] moved to Stockton. He didn't want to stay, working in the cane fields. The second one [Yutaka Sam Yada], when he reached of age, he went to Los Angeles to attend National Automotive School. He came back, [but] he didn't want to stay on the island, so he went back to California. He left all the others in care of one brother [Goro Yada]—one of the older [siblings]—the third brother with all the sisters (MK chuckles) in my [family]. . . . My youngest brother is the

eleventh—the baby of the family. So he’s Jūichi. Eleven is *jūichi* [in the Japanese language]. . . . (Chuckles)

MK: Good name. (Chuckles) And you know, I know in the summer of 1941, the decision was made for you to move to the Mainland. Tell me how that decision was made.

SH: Okay, that was, my brother—the second brother—I had the two brothers in the Stockton area. My second brother had a big farm, and they needed help. They needed me or somebody to watch their four-year-old son while my brother and his wife were busy with potato and onions and celery farming. And my sister-in-law had a mess hall—a big mess hall. She cooked Mexican and Japanese foods for the employees who were Mexican and Japanese men every day. They needed someone to watch the baby—the boy, the four-year-old boy—and whenever I could, help her with peeling potatoes and onions (SH and MK chuckle).

MK: Now, what did you think about, you know, their needing your help there?

SH: I thought maybe I could do that. They were going to send me to high school there—senior year in high school at Lodi High. After my senior year, it would be easier for me to go to college, and they were going to finance my college education. So I thought, well, that’s good. I don’t know if I could be able to complete, you know, high school and college—five years, but I took a chance. My parents consented, and I told them I would be back in five years. I promised them I would come back in five years.

MK: And you know, what did your parents feel about you going?

SH: They were old, but they thought about my future and their second son [and the] help that he needed. So with the assistance that I might have been able to render, they finally gave in, I suppose, and they said I could go, so. I wasn’t grown up, so anything would do for me. (MK chuckles.) The adventurous spirit. (Chuckles)

MK: And then, up . . .

SH: I didn’t know that things were going to happen the way it did during the five years—but I was intent on coming back, and nothing would stop me from coming home in five years.

MK: You know, I was wondering, up to that point in time, had you ever been off the island?

SH: No, I was never [away from the island of Hawai‘i]—not even to Honolulu. We were a plantation family—large family. We made do with whatever we had. We were happy, well fed—a close-knit family. We helped our parents. We had no car, no telephone, or those—you know, [it was] in the olden days. We were without the modern conveniences.

MK: In those days, you know, for a girl to think about going to high school and maybe going to college, was that common or uncommon among the people that you knew?

SH: No, not common, but my neighbor—our next-door neighbor—they had uncle and aunty in Los Angeles. My neighbor did. She left with her brother to go to school just the year before. I guess, maybe, I had thought about them and—without thinking anything about how my future would be, how smart I could be, whether I would be able to pass the test for college entrance—nothing of that sort entered my mind.

MK: And tell me about the time you left the Big Island. What was it like?

- SH: Oh, yes. I thought I was brave, going from Nīnole to California at age seventeen on the inter-island ship.
- MK: I know that the last time we spoke, you were describing how your family, you know, waved.
- SH: The day of departure at Hilo pier—there was no plane at that time. So on the day of departure, the trouble started. Everybody—my parents, my sisters and brothers, and nephews and nieces—were all at the wharf to see me off on the small, inter-island ship. The name of the ship was *Wai‘ale‘ale*.
- MK: Mm-hmm [yes].
- SH: But trouble started. It developed engine trouble. So our families were unable to see the ship sail because they didn't know when the engine would be repaired. But the following afternoon, seasick as I was—I was really sick—I stayed up on the deck from Hilo to Nīnole, hoping to see my home at a distance. There I was on the deck. I saw a white flag swaying side to side from my neighbor's pasture. The pasture was higher—above on the hill. So [from] there, the flag was waving. You know, I guess they put a rice bag or a big sheet or something, and they were waving side to side. I could see the flag waving, and my parents must have been crying because they would not be seeing me for five years, and I was so sad. That was my departure from Honolulu. And I stayed overnight in Honolulu. The next day, I took the SS *Matsonia*—a five-day trip from Honolulu via Los Angeles area and up to San Francisco. My brother was there to meet me.
- MK: You know, when you first got to California, what were your initial reactions?
- SH: Oh my, I didn't expect it to be so huge a farm. I didn't know they employed about one hundred [laborers]. But my sister-in-law told me that in the peak of the season, during the summer, they had about one hundred Mexican and Japanese men helping with harvesting the potatoes and onions. Part of the San Joaquin Valley, where they lived, the soil was so sandy and black, and it was ideal for potatoes and onions, I guess. The black sand made my skin itch. The water was hard, and soaps wouldn't suds.
- MK: Mm-hmm [yes].
- SH: Shampooing your hair—it did not get sudsy. Even their water—drinking water. So I didn't drink water. My sister-in-law gave me and told me to drink juice. We drank a lot of milk, juice, and the friends brought fruits by the crates—pears and cherries, peaches. During that time, from the time I went to the time I graduated Lodi High, I was one hundred and forty-five pounds. When I left [Hawai'i], I was about one hundred seventeen pounds. One-forty-five [by graduation].
- MK: Whoa. (SH laughs.) I think you got used to the more Americanized diet.
- SH: (Laughs) Oh, goodness. And I was to take the bus to school. This is now September. I took the bus to school. And the first day, I got lost changing classes. I got in late—you know, tardy with classes, in some of them, because the campus was so large. (Chuckles) But that was an experience in itself.
- MK: And you know, going back to your living with your brother's family. How was it, you know, adjusting to living with your brother's family, rather than your own family back on the Big Island?

- SH: Oh, yes, it was quite an adjustment. To me, it was difficult, but we managed somehow. I had another brother living nearby—maybe five minutes or so. They had a farm, too. So, between their family with their children, and this family, I was able to have some leisure time. Riding bicycles, and picking asparagus in the fields, and all that.
- MK: Gee, life really changed for you.
- SH: Yes.
- MK: And you know, what was it like for you at Lodi High School?
- SH: Lodi High School, I don't know what the enrollment was, but it was a huge school. I would only see maybe one Japanese, sometimes none in any of my classes. In my English class, there was only one girl. In chemistry class, I saw one girl. And on campus, I would see some but not too many. But Lodi is supposed to have some Japanese because of grapes—you know, the farms, they have grapes and other crops. Farming.
- MK: You know, being a Japanese American from Hawai'i, you know, moving up there, what did you observe? You know, in terms of similarities or differences between Japanese Americans in Hawai'i and Japanese Americans in the community you moved into?
- SH: Japanese in school—my friends—the Caucasian friends said, “You talk so fast!” (MK chuckles.) I didn't think I was talking fast. I guess, I don't know if I was talking pidgin. (MK laughs.) But they said I talk fast. I still remember that.
- MK: And then how did you feel, you know, coming from Hawai'i, being in this community?
- SH: Drastically different from living at home. No rain at all for weeks! No family. Homesick. I had to study. My sister-in-law gave me some embroidery to do, and I still have that embroidered little scarf, the tablecloth. I kept so many of my keepsakes.
- MK: And . . .
- SH: All the things that I used to receive. I still have them. Booklets that—you know, after we went into the camp—the booklets that we got. I have them all, so I'm not talking only from my memory. You know, when I have interviews like this. Dates of Executive Order [9066] signed on February 19th. It's not that I know when—it's not from my memory that on February 19th, the president signed it. It's because I have kept so many things. Actually, I'm not talking only from my memory of seventy years ago—my memory is not good.
- MK: So that's good, you know, that you have these artifacts and written materials that just kind of helped you, yeah, to remember and to talk about things.
- You know, going back to your experiences back then. You know, so you were in school at Lodi High School in the fall of 1941. Then December 7th happened.
- SH: Mm-hmm [yes].
- MK: How did you hear about Pearl Harbor, and what did you hear?

- SH: It was on a Sunday. I was at my older brother's home, playing with the kids—with my nieces and nephews. My brother or somebody told us that Pearl Harbor was bombed. I heard of conversations that we have to be careful because we were Japanese.
- MK: And when you were told things like this, to be careful because you're Japanese and because the attack on Pearl Harbor had happened, how did you feel?
- SH: I didn't think much of it. I was an innocent, stupid girl. (MK chuckles.) I wasn't thinking much or don't even remember. But we heard from my aunty, who had a store in Stockton. Her husband was very active in the community. Alien Japanese. They had a store. So we heard that Uncle was immediately taken away on December 7th by the FBI agents. They ransacked their home for suspicious documents and anything Japanese, including photos of relatives in Japan, records, and Japanese books. These were all confiscated. They even saw a kitchen knife made in Japan. I guess those FBI agents never saw a kitchen knife, you know, that pointed Japanese knife. They confiscated that. We were afraid that because we were relatives, that we might be the next target. So we went through our things in the ensuing days—anything Japanese, including relatives' photos in Japan, music, and Japanese books. My sister-in-law was sent to Japan and educated in her young years—she was a *kibei*. But she did come back to California. I even threw some of my Laupāhoehoe beach scenes from my photo album because you know, they might think of beach scenes—Japanese (chuckles) coming to the beaches and coming ashore.
- MK: Oh, oh.
- SH: Whatever we could burn, we did burn. The rest, we threw it down into the river.
- MK: So the materials were not hidden, but they were actually destroyed.
- SH: Right, destroyed. We couldn't hide it. We threw it into the river. We did nothing wrong. Because of our uncle, we were afraid that we might be the next target. This group—you know, the first group that was taken on December 7th? They were suspected as possible spies. They were sent to special federal detention camps. Some of them didn't even see the husbands being taken away.
- MK: In the case of your family—you know, your aunt and uncle who owned the store—what happened to them?
- SH: I don't know what happened to them. My brother—my oldest brother—would know. Very close to them.
- MK: And I know that once before when we spoke, you told us that the other Asians in the community—the Filipinos and the Chinese—also reacted.
- SH: Oh, yes. Because the Philippine Island was bombed. There was a case of Japanese being murdered. Stockton had a lot of Filipinos. One Chinese, was smart. He had a cardboard hanging with string around the neck, "I'm Chinese." They wanted not to be mistaken as Japanese. They did not want to be targeted. Oh my. . . .
- MK: And then, for you as a schoolgirl, how did the beginning of war affect your schooling?
- SH: Oh, there was nothing—no change, no change at all. They were good to me. Nothing was said about the war. People were friendly, and nothing changed.

MK: Were you able to stay in school all the way through, or were your studies kind of cut off?

SH: We were able to stay in school. But after the war was declared, two months later, on February 19th, 1942, President Roosevelt—[Franklin] Delano Roosevelt . . .

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

SH: President Delano Roosevelt signed the Executive Order 9066, 9-0-6-6.

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

SH: And all Japanese—infants, the sickly, the aged, aliens and citizens alike, living on the West Coast from Washington down to the last point of California—were ordered to evacuate. So we could see signs—the big signs on different buildings, on telephone poles, that we were ordered to evacuate. We had less than three months to settle everything. We didn't know how long we were going to be away. Getting rid of all the belongings in the household was a big, big problem. We could only take whatever we could carry—clothing and maybe some bedding.

MK: How did your family dispose of their belongings? All the items they couldn't take with them.

SH: People sold things at dirt-cheap prices. Some were so disgusted and angry, they would destroy their assets, rather than getting only so many cents and dollars. People went to the home and begged to let them buy these things. You know, some families were so disgusted, so angry about all this, so they would break their things in front of their faces, (laughs) I was told. Not too many people were fortunate, having neighbors look after their homes in their absence.

MK: How about your family? Were there neighbors who tried to help out?

SH: Select few, but not the majority—not us. My brother sold the refrigerator for three dollars and their car for ten dollars. We were ordered to take only what we could carry. You know, they worked hard all their lives, especially the first-generation parents who came to America from Japan. They worked all their lives to save and took care of their families. And now, to cope with the—handling the family affairs—before getting homeless and evacuated. Some were too old, . . .

MK: And . . .

SH: It was pitiful. Everybody was worried—devastated. But everybody obeyed the law, the executive order, or we would be arrested.

MK: You know, for yourself, what did you pack?

SH: I guess some clothes. I don't know what I packed, but I had some clothes, shoes, socks, and things—everyday things. Maybe a sweater or two. But I'm from Hawai'i, so I didn't have too many warm clothes, even in California.

MK: And you know, if you look back on those days, oh, how would you characterize—how would you describe your brother's and sister-in-law's feelings?

- SH: Oh, their---I'm sure they had to *gaman* and *gambaru* [endure, persevere] like all other Japanese. You know, they had to say, "Well, we can't help it. We can't be arrested. We're going to lose everything and be sent away."
- MK: You know, how did all the employees react? You know, they were going to lose their jobs.
- SH: My brother must have made arrangements for them. So many of our problems and worries about being uprooted—I cannot imagine how sad but brave they all were.
- MK: I know that in May 1942, your family and yourself, you were being sent to Stockton. Tell me about your life at the Stockton Assembly Center.
- SH: Let me back-track. Yeah, I remember having a meeting with my counselor in school in early May, reviewing my credits for graduation. And at that time, he said we were not going to graduate with the other students as we would be sent to camp in a couple of weeks.
- Then on May 19th—this was May 19th, 1942—4,271 of us were taken from our homes by trucks and buses to the Stockton county fair grounds. Government contractors had been, from December to May, building army barracks in the assembly centers. There were sixteen of the temporary camps in the seven states.
- I had never seen barracks before. One room per family. We had four in the family. My brother, sister-in-law, my four-year-old nephew, and myself were provided one army cot and blanket each. Maybe we took some sheets, I don't know. We were placed in one room, and everything else was community style. The laundry tubs, the toilets and shower, which had no doors! The mess hall, people lined up for all three meals.
- MK: And how were the meals? What kinds of foods did you folks get to eat?
- SH: I remember having corned beef hash for I don't know how long in the beginning. Corned beef is in my memory. When I think of corned beef hash, I think of Stockton Assembly Center to this day. Corned beef hash, corned beef hash.
- MK: And did your family work there? Did your brother or yourself work at Stockton?
- SH: I worked as a waitress in the Stockton mess hall in our block. We served milk or water in the pitchers after people got seated coming through the food line. Waitresses were paid twelve dollars a month, and professionals—teachers, dentists, pharmacists, doctors—received sixteen dollars a month. We were all together, all Japanese corralled together. Over four thousand of us in that Stockton temporary center.
- MK: And how about your brother? Did he do any work there?
- SH: My brother was—yeah, he worked in the mess hall, in the kitchen as a cook's helper, I think. He found something to do, too.
- MK: You know, as . . .
- SH: At the racetrack, my other brother and family got placed in the center of the racetrack. Barracks littered in between, all over, around, and inside the campgrounds. Even the racetracks were covered with barracks. And talking about racetrack and the grandstand—

I think it was about two weeks after we got in camp, the principals of both high schools, Stockton High School and Lodi High School, came. And we were handed our high school diplomas.

MK: Oh.

SH: Diploma. So you know, who could say you got your high school [diploma] in a grandstand in an assembly center? I still have the diploma with me . . .

MK: My goodness.

SH: . . . as a token, as a memory. My suitcase is full of memorabilia—pack rat. (Chuckles)

MK: You know, you mentioned like, you know, the barracks and the sort of communal living that you experienced at Stockton. I was also wondering, how about the physical conditions—the weather, the climate?

SH: Oh, the . . . Our barrack—we were on Block 1, which was close to some of the trees. So under the trees, luckily, we kept ourselves occupied doing craftwork, such as crocheting, knitting, writing, reading, and studying. There were classes set up by professional evacuees, like music lessons and classes such as those offered in schools—English, et cetera. Children going to classes in makeshift classrooms. We stayed there for four months from May, but one day, it was 110 degrees under the tree.

And I still have the doily—you know, crocheted doily . . .

MK: Uh-huh [yes].

SH: . . . that I finished in Stockton Assembly Center. I have kept that as one of my treasures.

MK: You know, with the temperature being so high, how did you folks deal with it?

SH: I don't know how we did. I guess, I don't know how we did—we survived. I don't remember that part, but there was no shower outside. Probably we were washing, wiping our faces (chuckles), and sweating it out.

MK: And you know, you mentioned that there were like some informal classes that you could participate in, and you were also working as a waitress in a mess hall.

SH: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: What other things did you do to kind of fill in the time?

SH: I remember enrolling in a physiology class. I guess we made friends with other people nearby in the same barracks or in the other barracks. In the blocks. Visiting my other brother inside the racetrack.

MK: And you know, I know that you were there for about—you said about five months?

SH: Yes, five months. In September, we received news that we were going to be sent to Arkansas. Then our camp was going to be joined by about four thousand from the southern California Santa Anita Racetrack. Two racetrack groups were being sent to Rohwer, to Arkansas.

- MK: You know, prior to---before you folks were sent to Rohwer, was that when your father passed away?
- SH: Yes.
- MK: I think your father passed, maybe, away in September or so?
- SH: While Arkansas was bad enough, a telegram came from Hawai‘i that my father passed away on September 25th. Oh, it really, really devastated me because I had promised my parents that I would return home in five years. Oh, it was so sad. So I went—without telling even my brothers—I went strictly on a vegetarian diet—*shōjin* diet, not even meats, or not even eggs—no milk for the entire week. I don’t know whether that was considered a sacrifice or not—I did that to try to find myself and for what my father went through to raise me, you know?
- MK: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [yes].
- SH: And I was unable to thank him when I was home. Age seventeen. My only outlet was to cry, shed tears, and tears, and more tears. Apologize to him and to recite my prayers.
- MK: To go through that, you know, without your mother, and without your sisters, and . . .
- SH: Yeah.
- MK: . . . to do it without—there’s no minister, huh, either.
- SH: Yeah.
- MK: Oh.
- SH: So that’s only one week before we were to be shipped to Arkansas. In that time, in the one year since I left home, I had become aware of my immaturity and shortcomings. But I didn’t even thank my father when I left. Somehow, one week before leaving this temporary camp, there was no time to dwell on the sadness. We could not remain sad and do nothing. I continued to work while making preparations to leave in one week and the long, long 2,000-mile journey to—train ride to Arkansas.
- MK: And how long did that train ride take?
- SH: It took four days and almost four nights. Four nights. On October 7th—my father died on September 25th—on October 7th, on the train to Rohwer, 2,000 miles away, and we were on the Southern Pacific Railway boxcars. We were guarded by armed soldiers. When we entered into the train, the row of soldiers with the guns, all standing by while we were going into the train. And the train, it was a boxcar—two people on the wooden-slatted chair—two each. One basin. And one toilet shared by one boxcar full of people. I don’t believe we even brushed our teeth or wiped ourselves.
- MK: So even the . . .
- SH: Because I only saw one basin and one toilet. I don’t remember getting anything to wash our faces or brush our teeth. So I guess we were just stinky people (chuckles).
- MK: And then, in the boxcars, were there also guards?

SH: Yes. The guards always—even when we were in the “dining room.” One boxcar where we could go in shifts, and there were people—armed soldiers always—everywhere, armed soldiers were present.

The soldiers on troop trains were going to the West Coast. They took priority. Whenever the troop trains came, our train would sidetrack, and each boxcar would bang into each other and jolting ourselves. Luckily, we didn’t get (laughs) neck injuries. Every day, just sitting down, night and day, sitting down, on wooden-slatted chairs. I guess we were like soldiers. I don’t know if we were—[SH doesn’t know if] the soldiers were being transported in that fashion.

MK: You know, like when---at that time, you were like a schoolgirl. You were already a high school graduate, yeah?

SH: November, yeah. I became eighteen in November. Yeah, just eighteen.

MK: But then, like your nephew was very young . . .

SH: Yeah.

MK: . . . and I was wondering, how did families manage with little children and conditions like that?

SH: My nephew and I sat on one [wood-slatted chair]. My sister-in-law, my brother sat on the chair facing us, I guess. They would take turns standing up to let the boy sleep on the chair—wooden-slatted chair. He could take a nap. I don’t know if I was thoughtful enough to offer my seat to them during that journey. I don’t remember that, and I feel so bad. I don’t know if I did or not. I didn’t even ask my sister-in-law if I was thoughtful to them.

MK: And then, when you folks finally reached Rohwer, what did . . .

SH: Oh, on the train, each day, you know, we would stop for fifteen-minute breaks in the morning and afternoon where there’s nothing, all barren land. You know, to get us out from the train, stand around for fifteen minutes, giving us a break from sitting. Armed police were on duty at all times! Where would we run to?

MK: Really, yeah?

SH: Whenever we pulled [aside] to let the troop trains pass, they pulled down the shades. Whenever there was any road station along the way, they pulled it down. Whether we were traveling in disguise to protect us or something, I don’t know. The train ride was so bad that that’s the most traumatic part of my whole relocation story. The four days and four nights from northern California to southern California to the deserts of southern US. It seemed forever. You know, they said, “Oh, pretty soon, pretty soon. Tomorrow. Pretty soon, you won’t. . . .” Believe “pretty soon” was the word. And it never came. But finally, they said, “Pretty soon.” For me, “pretty soon” and going farther away from Hawai‘i—from California, and even from Hawai‘i, was even sadder for me because I’m getting farther away from my home. But for the isseis and the niseis and the mothers with old, sickly parents, babies—they had a special car with infants. The very aged and the sickly people were put in special boxcars. For them, especially, too, what a terrible future.

Finally, the train stopped. Finally arrived in Arkansas. We were tired. We walked to the waiting trucks. Then, there we were. Oh, past the train track and into the gate. Stretching, you know, looking at a distance, you could see only rows and rows of black barracks. Rows and rows, as far as your eye could see. Way in the distance was the forest line. But the camp was surrounded by barbed-wire fences, and watchtowers above, with armed guards. Where could you run to, in a place like that? Feelings, at that time, you know, was overwhelming—beyond description. I was thinking, is this Rohwer—this is Arkansas—so far away from California and Hawai‘i. How long are we going to be behind these barbed wires? But you can’t do anything—helpless, but to stay strong in mind and body.

We were assigned to Block 28, Barrack 10, Room F. About the center section of the center—Rohwer Relocation Center, next to the athletic field. Each block had twelve barracks. Each barrack holding about five or six families, depending on the number of members in the family. We were four, so we had one room. One. The window panes weren’t put in yet. They sent the construction people ahead of us—two weeks, I think—ahead of us to finish up what the outside contractors built. The windowpanes weren’t in—it was getting cold. It was October. The mess hall, I was told, served two hundred fifty people—each block had approximately two hundred fifty people. Men folks eventually developed the land outside of the camp to raise vegetables for all the mess halls. Nobody was allowed to get a second serving of food and milk. People stood in line every meal, stood in line for laundry tubs—hand washing, you know, on the board? Olden days.

MK: Yeah, yeah, the washboard. Uh-huh [yes].

SH: That I grew up with it, so that wasn’t new to me. And there was one electric bulb, hanging from a wire cord. An army cot for each person, with two army blankets each. There was no running water, even outside of the barracks. Not even at the corner of each barrack. No running water. So we had to walk to the center of the block where the laundry was. It was community—all doing things together. Even in the mess hall, we had never seen so many Japanese, but we were here, all Japanese, trying to weather the storm.

MK: And did you, again, work in a mess hall at Rohwer?

SH: No, I was able to get a position as a nurse’s aide in the hospital—camp hospital. That’s where, when I was working, the snow started falling, and we all ran out from our jobs. For the first time, we had seen snowfall. We went crazy. (MK chuckles.) On our barracks, too, we could see icicles hanging. The walkway would be frozen, especially walking to the mess hall and bathroom. We had raised walkways—because of so much rain in Arkansas, we would be flooded. We wouldn’t be walking in the rain in this delta area.

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

SH: The walkways would be slippery, and it was quite dangerous. We weren’t used to walking on ice.

I was able to work as a nurse’s aide, and I was getting sixteen dollars; in Stockton, I got twelve dollars a month.

MK: And as a nurse’s aide, what did you do?

- SH: Oh, we helped care for patients. The hospital had all the different types of wards—psychiatrist ward, women’s ward, obstetrics, pediatrics, outpatients, pharmacy, the dentists, surgeons. . . . I remember, my friend—a nurse’s aide friend—had her tonsils removed. She sat on the chair—sitting on the chair—and the doctor taking her tonsils off, and I saw that. Her tears just rolling down her cheek.
- MK: Oh! Oh my goodness.
- SH: But she’s the girl that, eventually, I made good friends with her. She was from southern California. When I left for Cleveland—this was the girl that I lived with, becoming maids in a rich home later.
- MK: You know, were you ever treated for any ailment or condition while you were in camp?
- SH: No, the only ailment, I had my tooth done. I didn’t know what that was, but they killed the nerves on my front tooth (root canal). Other than that, I had no [ailments]—not even colds—I didn’t rest [from] work at all. I was healthy.
- MK: You know, how would you describe your feelings or spirits while in camp at Rohwer?
- SH: Everybody had the same feelings. *Shikata ga nai*, we can’t help it. We got to do the best we can. So they set up a council—a center council—block managers. Everything else spun about like it is in a town. The schools and churches—Buddhist churches, Christian churches—schools, athletics, doctors and pharmacists. All the lumberjacks would be going out into the field to cut the trees down for our—that one heater that we had—pot-belly stove. After a while, everything was functioning well. Only the top administrators were Caucasians. Some of the RNs [registered nurses] were Caucasians. Other than that, evacuee RNs. They’re all professionals. So the American and Japanese culture flourished, and people kept themselves occupied in various sports and clubs. Japanese dances. They had woodcrafts. They’d go out into the muddy water to collect the *kobu*, they called it the knob from the trees, and they made beautiful woodcrafts [with the *kobu*]. I even went to the tapestry weaving class and *ikebana* [flower arrangement]. We went through the forest area—not forest, but you know, grassy area—getting branches and grasses to make *ikebana*. There was an *ikebana* show in one of the barracks. (Chuckles)
- MK: You know, when you folks were collecting items for your *ikebana* arrangements, were you free to move about? Or was there a guard?
- SH: No, not—only within the center—within the camp.
- MK: Ah, I see, I see.
- SH: Stayed within the barbed-wire fences. We couldn’t go out.
- MK: And you know, you were saying that, you know, you could have *ikebana*, Japanese dancing—so Japanese cultural practices . . .
- SH: Yeah.
- MK: These were okay?
- SH: I don’t know how they got their costumes. Through friends, from maybe the inland cities—like Chicago, where there were many Japanese. Christmas parties, too. The 442nd

[Regimental Combat Team] boys would come. Well, my friend came from Camp Shelby, Mississippi. Senator Daniel Inouye came to Rowher. There were reports that the Mainland boys and the Hawai'i boys didn't get along in Camp Shelby. But when the Hawai'i boys came to visit the camp and witnessed the massive barbed wire camp and what the Japanese were going through and learned that the boys from camp even volunteered for service, that's when the Hawai'i boys, "Budda-heads," had a lot of respect for the "*kotonks*," Mainland Japanese Americans.

MK: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [yes].

SH: My friend [Shiroku "Whitey" Yamamoto]—my childhood neighborhood friend, came to visit me with his buddies. I was working in the hospital, so there's a picture of me in my nurse's uniform with his friends and my two nurse's aide friends. We weren't allowed to have cameras in camp. There were no phones. No radio. But he was able to take some pictures of us.

MK: That must've been kind of heartwarming, yeah?

SH: Yeah. I was surprised to see my friend from home. And he now lives in Honolulu. We still talk about the old days. He lost his wife, so he's on his own now. But he was with the Anti-tank Company, 442nd.

MK: Is this Whitey Yamamoto?

SH: That's Whitey Yamamoto! (Chuckles) Shiroku?

MK: (Laughs) Oh, I thought so! He's a really, really nice man, yeah.

SH: Yes. He even went for the reunion. The "Life-Interrupted Conference" in Arkansas in 2004. So he now knows my family well in Arkansas. The 442nd held their reunion at Camp Shelby, Mississippi before or after our reunion.

MK: So you were at Rohwer from about October 1942 . . .

SH: To '44.

MK: . . . to about 1944, yeah?

SH: In the spring of 1944, the tide of war was getting into America's favor, so the Japanese were allowed to leave the camp. They would check, you know, check our records. And if we were okay, we were allowed to leave. The government paid for our train ride to wherever we wanted to go.

MK: And how was this arranged?

SH: There was a job—housemaid job—in Cleveland in the camp bulletin. So I applied for a housemaid job, and I got accepted. I never had housemaid experience, nor had any cooking experience, or house cleaning experience. For me to go by myself into Cleveland and look for an apartment and surviving the cold winters by myself, I was afraid. A housemaid job would guarantee me with meals and shelter. And they would pay me thirty dollars a month.

MK: And so . . .

SH: So I dug up my new Mainland-born confidence. (MK chuckles.) It was Mainland born. (Chuckles)

MK: And so, you . . .

SH: I was afraid leaving Hawai'i on the ship, yes, but this one, from the camp to someplace where there's no relatives, nobody I knew—I went alone bravely, bravely, by myself, as a free person out of the camp. I didn't know what the future was going to bring, but—so I went on the train, and the train stopped in Tennessee, then onto Chicago. It stopped for so many hours in Chicago, and at that time, the soot in Chicago was very bad. So my nostrils got all black with the soot. (Chuckles) Then onward to Cleveland. Mr. [Samuel] Carmichael had sent me a cablegram, "Get ready to come," and he wrote he'll meet me at the station.

So I got there, from Chicago to Cleveland—when I reached Cleveland, there was no town. There was nobody. We had to walk up this wide, wide stairway, way up to the street level of Cleveland, Ohio. There, I saw nobody—only two Japanese girls, way at a distance. Two Japanese-looking girls. I was looking for some man to come for me, but I saw one man going to them. So I walked to them, and that was Mr. Carmichael. (MK chuckles.) Ah. And so, he said, "This is Cleveland." On the way home, driving home to the outskirts of Cleveland—Brecksville, he said, "My wife [Sarah Carmichael] is very particular with her housecleaning, and she even scolds me when I don't put my socks inside out when I put it down to the chute for the laundry." He warned me.

Oh, they were warm to welcome me. I was given maid's quarters on the same floor—room for one maid. She said if I could make egg soufflé with bacon for her husband the next morning. I didn't know what a soufflé should look like. So I studied the recipe book. I worried, and I worried all night. In the morning, I followed the instructions. I put it into the oven. So, I took it out and made the bacon and the toast. Nothing was said, so I guess it must've been all right.

(Laughter)

But—there's a "but." My fingerprints were on the toaster. So she said, "Sadie," my name—they called me "Sadie"—"take the fingerprints off the toaster." Then, I would put the sterling silver knives and forks together, grabbed it and put it on the drainboard—the sink. "Oh, put it singularly so the tines of the fork don't scratch the spoons and the knives."

MK: Oh. (Chuckles)

SH: Tines of the fork, I have to put it separately then. The goblets would be so fancy, I never had handled goblets. You know, the real heavy cups were my speed. Oh, so many things I chipped then. But I don't remember being scolded. Not scolded, but taught me. She dusted the house every day with me. Every single day, it was dusting the house. Wiping here, wiping there. One day was laundry day, on a nice, clear, cold winter day. So Mr. Carmichael—before going to work—put the clothes lines from one tree to the other trees. She'd do the laundry, and I would hang it up. I put all the little, little handkerchiefs—the embroidered handkerchiefs—the fine linen, and his handkerchiefs all by the corner. And she says, "Oh, stretch it out so the breeze would go through the fabrics." (MK chuckles.) They used those beautiful handkerchiefs every day. So I stretched them out. Then the

sheets, I hung it up like I do at home. Put it together. I did. No, I had to take it down and put as much of the fabric so that the wind would . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: Okay, this is tape number two with Sadami Yada Hamamoto.

We were just speaking about your experiences working for the Carmichaels in Ohio. You were telling me about your weekly schedule there.

SH: Mm-hmm [yes]. Okay, I hope I don't duplicate or miss anything.

MK: That's okay. We can always fill in, so you know, don't worry.

SH: My weekly schedule was, on Wednesday, I would polish the silverware. Then, on Thursday, I would have a day off. Saturday, I would polish the kitchen floor—[on] hands and knees. Weekends, when they had guests, she did all the cooking and baking. I would be in a black uniform with white organdy headband, white organdy apron—the maid serving—like the kind you see. For everyday wear, I would have a pink uniform. It had white collar and white cuffs on the sleeves. Every Thursday was my day off. Mr. Carmichael would take me to the city (Cleveland). He told me on the first day—I didn't know what to do on a day off. I didn't have any friends. I didn't know where to go. So I just walked the streets up into the different department stores. They were fabulous stores because every floor had a specialty department—like the kind you see nowadays?

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

SH: Like bedroom items, girls' dresses, or babies' clothes—all separate floors. So I went from store to store, studying the town. Then, at four o'clock, I was to meet Mr. Carmichael at the place where he dropped me off. Then, I couldn't find that place. I didn't know where to go. I couldn't ask anybody. I didn't see any Oriental faces. Down and up, side to side, I couldn't find it. Finally, I got so desperate, I had to ask somebody, and they showed me where to go. The next few times, he dropped me off along the way, and I would stop by along—midway—then, I was to catch the streetcar. I had never ridden a streetcar, so I did not know.

MK: Yeah. (Chuckles)

SH: (Laughs) So [SH told] the driver—conductor or whatever you called that—to drop me off at a certain street. Mr. Carmichael told me to get off at a certain place. So I waited for him [the conductor]. I was close by to him [the conductor] so he could notify me. I waited and waited and waited, no. . . . Then, you know where we landed? At the end of a streetcar line with four men only. They were taking a break. So I said—I asked them—I was waiting for him to tell me to get off—“Oh, you need to pull the cord,” he tells me. Never rode one in my life.

MK: Oh. (Chuckles)

SH: That's a lesson learned. (Chuckles) But those are the experiences.

MK: Everything was an adventure, yeah. So many new things for you to learn.

SH: And I didn't want to eat too much of their food. Save on food bills. They had apple trees, white apples. When they were gone, I would cook apple sauce for myself. (Chuckles) And my sister-in-law sent *takuan* [pickled turnips] (MK laughs) from Arkansas.

MK: Uh-huh [yes].

SH: Put in the refrigerator, and one day, I was looking for it, I couldn't find it. She [Mrs. Carmichael] must've thrown it away. But she didn't tell me that she did. She didn't even ask me what that was. So I never asked.

MK: (Chuckles) They probably didn't know what it was.

SH: She didn't know what it was. She thought maybe it was something spoiled. (MK chuckles.) The rhubarb pie was so delicious, and the leg of lamb, and all what she cooked. I didn't learn all that, but I have the recipe for that rhubarb pie. But to this day, sixty-seven years later, we still—I have lifelong friendships with Carmichael's daughter and her family. I have admiration for them, much gratitude, because to have hired somebody from the concentration camps, when people were prejudiced about Japanese. So we had good relationships and lasting friendships to this present day.

Anyway, oh, Mr. Carmichael died, you know. Mr. Carmichael died only after nine months with them. He died, and I cried and I cried as if he were my father because they were special to me. Mrs. Carmichael bought me a black and another chartreuse coat for the cold winters. I brought them home to Hawai'i to show my mother and my sister folks.

The next job was with Mr. and Mrs. [Henry] Haserot. They wanted me to come to work for them while I was with the Carmichaels, but I said, "I have an obligation." I couldn't. So when they found out that he died, and after we relocated Mrs. Carmichael to a town near Cleveland, Mr. Haserot came for me.

The job was with the [Haserot] couple who found out that I was from Hawai'i. They had a summer home in the same place that I was—where the Carmichaels were living. They were directors of Hawaiian Pineapple canneries and having other Mainland outlets for tuna, Haserot Senora coffee, and cherry orchards in Michigan.

But this Haserot knew that I wanted to come back in five years. They took good care of me; they had a beautiful mansion—everything Hawaiian. They wanted Hawaiian music every day. My girlfriend from the Arkansas Relocation Camp—she was from the Santa Anita Racetrack. When I went to Haserot, they had a black cook—a man. A black maid. But they put me on the same floor as the Haserots, so they were very upset. They [Haserots] said, "If you don't like it, you may leave." So they left. So Mrs. Haserot asked me to find somebody—asked a girlfriend of mine to come to work with me. So I called Yoshi Higashi, and she was originally from the Santa Anita racetrack camp. I became the "cook," and she and I did the duties together. She made popcorn every day for their before-dinner cocktail hour over Hawaiian music. They allowed us to go to school half time. I went to the Wilcox College of Commerce in Cleveland part-time, and she was able to go somewhere part-time. I was able to earn a certificate in stenography and things like that, which allowed me to earn a living until retirement. If there was no way of coming home within the five years after I got the certificate, I was going to be hired at their Haserot Company in Cleveland.

MK: Oh.

SH: And Mrs. Haserot was so nice to us, you know. Both of them were so nice to us. We were like real personal maids, waiting on them with hands and foot, with fingerbowls, breakfast in bed, et cetera.

MK: Oh, my goodness.

SH: Oh, all kinds. They would buy swimming suits for us. We would go swimming to their Lake Erie private beach. The people in that area had a private, small beach. We would rub down sun lotion for her. (Laughs) We were her personal maids. When the April 1st, 1946 tsunami struck the Big Island, they were in Kaua'i on business. They were worried about my mother, so they flew from Kaua'i to the Big Island, hired a taxi, and went to the winding roads—you know the Big Island?

MK: Uh-huh [yes].

SH: All the winding roads to Kaia'akea, to her home. She wasn't home. They went up to the camp area, and there, my mother was preparing food. They were having this memorial—funeral service that day, you know, for the boys who lost their lives in the April 1st, 1946 Laupāhoehoe tsunami. She couldn't talk in English, so they went to Pāpa'aloa Hospital where my sister and my brother-in-law worked. They came home to our Kaia'akea home, stayed a little while. They went to all the way to Volcano House to stay for the night. You heard about Volcano House?

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

SH: So they went there, but it was so cold, they couldn't stand it. They hired a taxi and came back to Hilo Hotel to stay the night. Just like that.

Then, when Mr. Haserot was in San Francisco, he found out that there was a first passenger ship that was scheduled to leave. You know, the passenger ships were all painted black, and they were being changed from military to passenger service. So he called his wife, and she asked me if I wanted to go home. So I said, "Yes."

"Okay, we'll make the arrangements, and we'll pay for the entire fare. You go and visit your brothers on the way home, and Yoshi along the way." Yoshi Higashi. That's how they were so nice to me.

But that's how my five years all started and ended.

MK: And then, you returned to the islands. . . .

SH: Returned to the islands via Arkansas, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Stockton—and back to San Francisco and boarded the ship. And came back in five years, exactly in August.

MK: You kept your promise to your parents.

SH: I would like to say that I am very grateful that even if my father weren't here, when I came home, I kept that promise. My mother lived to a hundred and two years old, so I was able to, you know, do my part.

But I would like to say that the reasons that I'm speaking about my wartime experiences are, first, about racial hatred and making false judgments on the hundred and twenty thousand Japanese American citizens and Japanese aliens, and sending them to American

concentration camps, and the federal detention camps that the aliens were put in. That was very bad. So the present and future generations should know and remember that it never happens again to any race, whatsoever. That they should remember what happened.

So the second—why I’m speaking—is to remember and honor the loyalty of and the sacrifices made by the Japanese Americans in the 100th Infantry Battalion, the 442nd RCT, the Military Intelligence Service, and others, including the families that sacrificed a lot too. They made life easier for all Japanese. And we owe so much gratitude.

And the third is to acknowledge—honoring—the first-generation Japanese who emigrated from Japan, like my parents. Their values influenced me with my attitude in life. You know, they went through so much hardship themselves but were able to work through because of such admirable values, like *gaman*, *shikata ga nai*, *gambaru*, *arigatai*, *okage same de*, and *sumimasen* [like perseverance; acceptance of a difficult, unchangeable situation; determination; being thankful; recognizing others who came before us; et cetera]. It unconsciously filtered into me. I was able to boost myself bravely and forge ahead, especially in my five years on the Mainland. They were very eventful, indeed. I would also like to recognize my other siblings for all the worries that they had. They worried about me while I was gone the five years.

But thinking about the WWII events now, we can’t have bitter feelings. We must make the best of—making the United States the best country in the world. Thank you for listening.

MK: Oh, Sadami, thank you for talking with us.

SH: Thank you very much.

MK: Thank you. Today, I made you remember some really hard times. And you know, we really appreciate your sharing your stories.

SH: It was very lengthy, and I’m sorry for keeping you too long.

MK: No, no, no. This is perfect. Thank you very much.

SH: Dr. and Mrs. Nishimoto, thank you very much.

WN: Thank you, bye.

SH: Bye.

END OF INTERVIEW

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

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