BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Clara Tobara

Clara Tobara, eldest of six children, was born to the Higa family, in ʻŌlaʻa, Hawaiʻi, in 1916. Her father, Kotatsu Higa, an immigrant from Okinawa-*ken*, Japan, was an independent sugarcane contractor.

The Higa family lived in Pepeʻekeo, Hawaiʻi where Clara Tobara completed eight years of schooling. She attended Hilo Intermediate School for one semester but was unable to continue due to a lack of funds.

She worked in the sugarcane fields and in a Hilo-area restaurant. Later, she worked as a nurses' aide at Hilo Memorial and Pepeʻekeo Plantation Hospitals.

When Sam Tobara, owner of a produce stand in Los Angeles, returned to Pepeʻekeo, his boyhood home, his parents and hers deemed Clara a good match for Sam.

Following marriage, the couple moved to Los Angeles.

During World War II, the Tobaras were incarcerated first, at Santa Anita Assembly Center; followed by incarceration at Amache (Granada) War Relocation Center in Colorado. Their son was born there.

Following their release from camp, they lived in Denver, Colorado for a short while; then they returned to the islands.

Clara Tobara, and her husband, Sam, raised two sons.

Tape Nos. 55-5-1-09 and 55-6-1-09

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Clara Tobara (CT)

Honolulu, Hawai‘i

November 19, 2009

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

WN: This is an interview with Clara Higa Tobara on November 19, 2009, and we're at the University of Hawai‘i. And the interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto.

Clara, good morning.

CT: Nice to see you both.

WN: (Chuckles) Nice to see you. You look very nice this morning. My first question to you is when and where were you born? What year were you born?

CT: Nineteen sixteen.

WN: Nineteen sixteen, okay. So you were born in ‘Ōla‘a, and then you said that you folks moved to Pepe‘ekeo when you were really small.

CT: About two, three years old, I guess.

WN: Okay. When you moved to Pepe‘ekeo, what kind of work did your father do?

CT: It was a family that was using him all around, driving the buggy—the horse and buggy. He used to take him to Hilo commute sometimes—you know, from Pepe‘ekeo to his house. These people later had a big property he used to work, I guess, with the horses and all. Some little things, I guess, helping around. I'm not too sure, though, but I know of the horse and buggy, always. Now and then, they used to take me, too, to Hilo. It's a long ride, but I don't know how they used to ride. Maybe I would sleep in the buggy, too, because Mom didn't go. Dad used to drive this lady and the family.

MK: The family that your father worked for, were they *haole* or Japanese?

CT: He used to work for these ladies, outside mostly. I remember living downstairs. I vaguely remember those days, though.

WN: This is in Pepe‘ekeo?

CT: I don't know what they called that area. It's a sort of homestead area on the property. This lady owned in that area. It was quite a big area, though. I don't know what they're doing now, but that

place look so empty for a real long, long time, but always clear. In this country, she must have a business of some kind in the town, I don't know.

WN: Do you remember what you used to do when you went to Hilo with your father?

CT: No. I guess my father used to keep me in the buggy, oh, just like a dog or something.

(Laughter)

That's why, I don't know those days so I cannot remember how Hilo looked, horse-and-buggy days.

WN: What was your father's name?

CT: Kotatsu.

WN: Kotatsu Higa? Mm-hmm [yes]. Where was your father from, originally?

CT: Okinawa, I think.

WN: Do you remember where in Okinawa?

CT: I was there, too, but I cannot remember. The name doesn't come out.

WN: Was it Tamagusuku?

CT: That area. Tamagusuku.

WN: So what other jobs did your father do besides driving the horse and buggy to Hilo?

CT: After that, he used to like the farming, so he invested in Pepe'ekeo side. When he look around, I guess, and he start to invest in properties.

WN: What did he do with the property?

CT: He raised cane, sugarcane.

WN: So he raised sugarcane and he sold it to the plantation?

CT: Yes.

WN: So what was your house like in Pepe'ekeo?

CT: We had a wooden house, those country house, plantation houses, but I guess my folks had sort of private area.

WN: Were there other people living nearby? Other families?

CT: Big houses—I mean long houses. But very few people, though. In a while, they had one other group, some plantation workers, and another family—Japanese family, Okamuras—used to own the property there.

WN: So, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

CT: Four brothers and one sister.

WN: What number were you?

CT: I was the oldest one, and I had four brothers in a row. I used to cry for one sister. Oh, I cried out for my mother to have one, I want a sister. And by the time I had the sister, I was old enough to go outside and work. So I didn't have much time to fuss around her. Before she came by, I used to make little dresses for my brother, the younger two brothers (laughs) and people used to make fun of me. I wanted a sister.

WN: So you used to dress your brothers up in dresses.

CT: I used to make dresses for them. (Laughs)

WN: Did you know how to sew?

CT: By then, I was old enough to sew. I started sewing little works and all that, started young.

MK: You know, because you had all these brothers—four brothers—what kind of . . .

CT: Four brothers sandwiched between the girls.

MK: Did you have to take care of your brothers?

CT: None of them help in the fields. Sometimes, I used to go out with Dad.

WN: You used to help your father in the fields?

CT: He used to hire people, too, so I used to be waterboy or. . . .

WN: So you were the waterboy for your father and the helpers. Well, what is a waterboy? What does a waterboy do?

CT: Well, during the lunchtime, bring the lunch pails all lined up. If they want water any time, they can just call me and I just give them all the water and they can help themself from the bucket.

WN: You carried the bucket?

CT: (Laughs) All the way up to them, however many wanted. I was so young kid, though. At certain time, I used to go home and Mama cook some refreshments for them. Those days, you cannot go to the store and buy things, the cookies and all that. Mama used to make *tempura* or fix few fruits or vegetables certain ways, and I used to hold them down and spread them out for the workers.

WN: Oh, so your mother made like *bentō* lunch or just food?

CT: Just as recreation time—I mean, special time—in the afternoon, after lunch, recreation time. I used to go home and pick up, and Mama would have them ready and I used to haul it down. Those days, I had to carry things around and spread it out for the workers.

WN: How did you carry things?

CT: We don't hire too many people. Maybe half a dozen people or so. I always remember I was alone, carrying up and down, the distance.

WN: How far was that you had to go?

CT: Field, from the homestead.

WN: So from your house to the field was usually about how far?

CT: I don't know how to measure that area. *Chee,* I used to walk quite a bit, . . .

(Laughter)

. . . the distance.

WN: How did you give the workers their water?

CT: Well, I think I had a ladle and a bucket or something for their water.

WN: So you help your father, and your brothers didn't go out with you?

CT: No, young yet.

WN: Oh, okay.

CT: They hardly worked in the field, though. *Hō hana* [weeding] and stripping the leaves, the dry leaves, on the sugarcane. *Holehole,* they called it.

WN: *Holehole,* yeah.

CT: That's why when time for the harvesting, we used go down and watch them.

WN: Did you do any of that work? Did you do the *holehole* and the harvesting, or anything like that?

CT: No. Hired people used to do that. Sometimes I want to do it, just for the fun of it. I used to do it, too. *Holehole,* you know, cane leaves would poke you, so I don't like it. Just waterboy, just take the water.

WN: Did your father pay you?

CT: No, I never thought of getting paid. (Laughs)

MK: Did you also work in the house? Did you help your mother with housework?

CT: In those days, my housework was less than now. She only do the laundry. Laundry work. What else did she used to do? I wonder if she had chickens, too? (Chuckles) I know she had a lot of laundry. Every morning, had to do the laundry, and then in the afternoon, had to pick up all the laundry, too. Those were the country life.

WN: How did your mother do the laundry back then?

CT: All handwash. We had the river running near the house, so she goes down to the riverside and do the washing.

WN: Boy, wash clothes in the river. (Chuckles)

MK: How about the cooking?

CT: I look back, boy, what we were doing, so different now. Everything, we have to create our own way of life. And now, everything so easy.

WN: How did your mother cook food?

CT: Well, just like campfire. In the kitchen, they have it so you could put it out on a campfire. That wasn't only our camp—even the big camps, they have it that way, too, a place to cook.

WN: So you remember your mother cooking on open fire?

CT: Well, they have pots and pans like now, and I would watch her, only watching *tempura,* I think. (Chuckles) That's about it. Other times, I hardly watch. I was always busy outside. So that's why even now, I like outdoors, too, but too bad I'm old, I cannot go out there.

WN: What about playtime? What did you do outside to play, to have fun?

CT: I don't know, just look around, and digging, and I don't know.

(Laughter)

Try and see the fruits, the wild fruits, pick them up. That's about it to have fun. Go around looking for wild fruits and all of that.

WN: Oh, like what *kine* [kind of] fruits? Do you remember?

CT: I don't know. We call them *poka, poka,* grows in vine. [CT may be speaking about banana poka, or banana passionfruit.]

WN: Not *liliko'i* [passionfruit]?

CT: I think something *liliko'i,* too, and guavas. Those were the days, the wild fruits that we still have.

WN: Now did you have friends, girlfriends, that you . . .

CT: Hardly any. It was all people from the foreign land, Philippine Islands and all that. Lived one section around where we were. They had a highway, road, and we lived all below there.

WN: So there weren't other children where you folks lived?

CT: So, now and then, Mama used to take me certain times, certain days, she goes shopping, walk the distance, marketing. Two families own shops, stores—Sakai and Maruyama. Maruyama used to carry the meat and stuff. Sakai Store used to carry all the other fancy stuff, too. And Sakais had children. That's why I met some people, but I never made any friends. I just tag along Mama and look around—that's about it.

WN: You talked about an Okamura family?

CT: Okamura, yeah, and I think the mama used to do a lot of sewing, Mrs. Okamura.

MK: Did she have children your age, too?

CT: They had children, but I only meet them. We had no chance to play. Mama always rushing around here, all visiting people in the camp. To me, it was big camp. She goes and buy tofu, from the tofumaker or something. Those days, everything, she had to walk and pick up what she wants.

WN: Your mother went to the tofumaker, and she also went to stores. What other *kine* stores had?

CT: Nothing fancy, just like regular home. Those two stores, country stores, regular country stores.

WN: You know the river that your mother did the laundry in, you know, that river . . .

CT: It's right across our home. The house is here, and oh, quite a ways. It's just like our laundry room. (Chuckles) The distance.

WN: Did you play in that river?

CT: I just wash my feet or something. (Chuckles) See the tadpole or something.

WN: Did you folks have a *furo?*

CT: Yes. I think *furo,* we had to go to a certain place to go. *Furo* was famous, those days. *Furoba*.

WN: Did you share *furoba* [bath house] with other families?

CT: Well, I guess so. We didn't have our own. We had to go somewhere else to do it, or else we have to boil our own hot water (chuckles) and use the tub.

WN: So you had your own *furo* in your house, you folks?

CT: Not exactly, though. For convenient use. Real country life, if I had to think back. I've never thought of it, but now I kinda recalling all that.

WN: What about the outhouse? Where was your outhouse?

CT: Oh, that was quite a ways out. So we had to catch in a bucket or a little pan. Those were the country style.

WN: You had to have your own bucket?

CT: We had to have, at night, we had to have our set.

MK: Because it was so far, yeah, you had a, like a chamber pot in the house for nighttime use.

WN: Oh, for nighttime.

CT: And in the morning, I see Mama take and empty them. Oh, the toilet was really away, sort of hilly, too. Now I recall those days.

(Laughter)

MK: Different, yeah? Different from now.

WN: What about things like. . . . Did you folks have movies? Did you go see movie show?

CT: No, no. I hardly know what those movies do. But when we went to the stores or something, they talk about it then I kinda recall, then, what they were. (Chuckles)

WN: What language did you speak to your mother and father?

CT: Regular Japanese, mixed Hawaiian, or I don't know. Those were the days, a lot of Hawaiian words. Now that I recall, there was—even my father was dealing with the language to buy lands. He deals with the Hawaiians so he used to speak a lot of Hawaiian words. That's why he was able to buy land from the Hawaiians. His language was mostly Hawaiian, and the Hawaiians love to hear their own language, too, just like Japanese, they like to hear their own, too.

WN: Did your father speak Okinawan dialect?

CT: Yes. But I hardly speak their language, though. I didn't care to learn. I always wanted to learn the way it's supposed to be. So just like when I learned my Japanese—and I never liked the Japanese speaking their language in Hawai'i—so rough. But when in school, the language we learned, it was so different. I rather learn the way they were teaching in school.

I went to the Mainland—no, when the war break, I was working in the [camp] mess hall, and when I start to speak Japanese, they say, "*Anata nisei, ka* (Are you a second-generation Japanese American?)?" and they get all excited. "*Anata nisei ga Nihongo dekiru na ne," itte ka.* They was so surprised [CT could speak Japanese]. I always wanted the proper way of speaking Japanese. Even the Japanese language they have, where they came from, *tokoro no* language [dialects] all mix up, so I never cared for that. I wanted the real [standard] Japanese. So I was surprised when I went to the camp, I was in the camp, and start to speak Japanese to the isseis. "*Anata nisei ka? Nisei ka?*"

WN: They were surprised that your Japanese was so good?

CT: I speak like they do. I used to like the people speaking in the camp, the Mainland Japanese. The niseis didn't speak Japanese, so.

WN: So where did you learn to speak the proper Japanese? In Japanese[-language] school? And what Japanese[-language] school did you go to?

CT: Pepe'ekeo. Yamada-*sensei*. My teachers were all good, too.

WN: So the Japanese that you learned in Pepe'ekeo Japanese School was different than the Japanese that you spoke to your father.

CT: Lot of people cannot even. The way I look, I guess, they don't believe. (Chuckles)

WN: So what was. . . . You went to Pepe'ekeo School, regular school.

CT: Yes.

WN: Did you like that? What was that like?

CT: I was happy I was going school. I finished school, till eighth grade. I couldn't go above that. Oh, I used to cry because my father couldn't afford to send me to commute to Hilo. But oh, I used to cry. I went about one semester in the ninth grade, and my father got sick and he couldn't pay his way for me. So I quit.

WN: So you went to Pepe‘ekeo School until eighth grade, and then you went one semester ninth grade at Hilo Intermediate [School], and then your father got sick and you couldn’t continue.

CT: All the teachers couldn’t believe that I had to quit. Couldn’t afford that bus fare. Special bus, they had.

WN: Did you have a favorite teacher?

CT: They were all nice.

WN: Were your teachers mostly local people or Mainland people?

CT: Local people, at that time. Early part was outsiders, some were Hawaiian teachers, too.

WN: You know the people in your school, in Pepe‘ekeo School, where did they come from, most of them?

CT: I was living right across or near the school.

WN: You were living near the school?

CT: And all the teachers’ cottages all across.

WN: So your classmates were like plantation . . . ?

CT: Area was homesteads. My father bought the property there, so I don’t have to commute to school long distance.

WN: Oh, I see. So Pepe‘ekeo School was right near your father’s homestead.

CT: So my brothers used to use the schoolyard and all the gang, friends, all go to the schoolyard. Hardly use the schoolyard, though but. They can, but hardly use it.

WN: And the other children that went to Pepe‘ekeo School . . .

CT: They’re all different camps, so they so far away. We were lucky. My father bought property.

WN: So were you able to make friends going to school?

CT: Oh, yes. And the teachers are all nice, too.

MK: What kinds of things do you remember learning at school?

CT: School subjects, but to learn Japanese [at Japanese-language school], I had to learn from the book, so some *kanji* [Chinese characters]. My father was an educated man, so I went to school. I went to my father, I used to bring the word out, ask him what this word, how do you read this. That’s how I used to learn, too.

WN: So when you went to Japanese school, when was that? Was that after English [public] school [hours]?

CT: After English school.

WN: You went to Japanese school. Where was the Japanese school? Was it near the English school?

CT: Yes, close by. Side by side.

WN: Side by side, ah, I see. What did you like better, English school or Japanese school?

CT: Both.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: So after English school, you went to Japanese school.

CT: But I like English more than Japanese. (Chuckles)

WN: Oh yeah? How come?

CT: English, that's my country, too, easy to get along with all the people. The language, you can speak. Japanese, everyone say, "Ah, you Jap." Not Jap, but Japanese.

MK: So how many years of Japanese school did you go?

CT: Eight.

WN: Eighth grade?

CT: But still, I'm not too good with words. *Kanji,* I had to look for help.

MK: Did you learn *shūshin* [ethics]?

CT: What's that, *shūshin?* What's that?

WN: Like moral education. Did you learn about Ninomiya Kinjiro, people like that?

CT: Regular Japanese, I guess, not history. That's why I don't know about some Japanese history, until the TV came out.

WN: So you went up to English school and Japanese school up until eighth grade at Pepe'ekeo, then you had to drop out. You dropped out of Japanese and English school.

CT: Japanese school was only until eighth grade.

WN: Oh, it only went to eighth grade.

CT: English school till eighth grade.

WN: So after you had to drop out of Hilo Intermediate, what did you do?

CT: Work. Oh, that year, we were living in the plantation house. At the same time, Papa had to go and work in his own field close by, Mill Camp.

WN: Mill Camp?

CT: Plantation part-time, and part-time was his own field. Otherwise, you cannot get plantation housing free. But after, Dad bought the house—a homestead—at Kawai Nui. Across the school, the property. Then we moved to that house, out of plantation.

While I was attending school, for a while, we were living in a plantation house, looking for a house close to school.

MK: Oh, we have to stop. We're going to change the [tape].

END OF TAPE NO. 55-5-1-09

TAPE NO. 55-6-1-09

WN: Okay, this is tape two, session one, with Clara Tobara.

You were talking about working after you had to drop out of school. Where did you work?

CT: At first, I didn't work. I was helping in the plantation field. Then one of my cousins from Hilo came to tell my parents that I can have a job in a restaurant because he said, "Oh, kind of related." So I quit the plantation work and started to work in the restaurant, waitress. And lot of things I had to learn from scratch. The people that I had to meet, all kinds of people, my goodness. (Chuckles) Surprising. Some were real nasty, and some were real nice. Especially those people who would eat in the restaurant, some were rough. (Chuckles)

WN: Where was the restaurant?

CT: In Hilo.

WN: Hilo? Do you remember the name of the restaurant?

CT: What was it now? I forget the name now. (Chuckles)

WN: So, you said that you had a lot to learn to be a waitress. Like what did you have to learn?

CT: To serve, and even how to make sushi. The cooks couldn't make a lot of stuff, so I had to start helping. I used to help them make most of the sushi, *maki sushi* and those triangles with that tofu. . . . What's that?

MK: Oh, cone sushi.

WN: Oh, the cone? What do you call that?

MK: *Inari sushi*.

CT: *Inari sushi*. See, I keep on forgetting already. And certain things, I used to fix my way of cooking, serving, and the customers really liked it. One plantation man came over, one of the directors or something, came over and said, "Do you want to come back and work in Pepeʻekeo and work in the hospital?"

I said, "What?" (Laughs)

WN: I wanted to ask you a little more about waitress.

MK: I was wondering what kinds of foods they served, those Japanese foods, yeah?

WN: So you said you made sushi—*maki sushi* and *inari sushi*. What other kinds of foods did the restaurant serve the customers?

CT: Those days, those people eat all those things—soup, Japanese food.

WN: Japanese food?

CT: Sometimes, they make a tray, Japanese food—*sashimi* and all that.

But while I was working in the restaurant, one of my cousins came, you see. That one, at plantation, director, he was working at the office, too, so he came and told me, "You're going back to Pepe'ekeo and work in the hospital." So I was working in the hospital for a while.

WN: So you worked at the hospital at Pepe'ekeo. How did you learn to work in the hospital?

CT: I worked with the doctors and the nurses. Even during the war break, I would work in, eventually, in the Mainland. Put us in the hospital, I would work in a hospital. I would start to work, and they say, "You come and work here and. . . . "

"I'm not a registered nurse." I have to tell them.

But they say, "No, you can do it, so you have to take the job." They all say, "Where did you learn all this? How did you learn?"

I say, "From the doctors and nurses." And I used to do it. And without knowing, I was doing it. The doctors and the nurses caught me doing it.

WN: Well, first was the Hilo restaurant, and then somebody came and said you should work at the Pepe'ekeo Hospital. So you moved back to Pepe'ekeo to work over there? I forgot to ask you, did you live in Hilo while you were working as a waitress?

CT: Yeah, I guess I was. Gave us a room to live, too.

WN: So when the person came in and said, "Move back to Pepe'ekeo and work in the hospital," how did you feel about that?

CT: I didn't mind, because going back to home, and it's near the house, our home. I can walk—almost all walking distance, too. So I took the job and I liked it because the doctors and the nurses were all nice.

WN: What did you do at Pepe'ekeo Hospital, what *kine* work?

CT: Oh, helping in the delivery room and all of that.

WN: You were almost like a nurse.

CT: Yeah, that's right. And when I start to do it, without knowing, I'm doing it.

(Laughter)

WN: You mean, like help deliver babies? Did you do that?

CT: Some. You know, doctors come in to serve the hospital—and delivery, especially—they don't know what to do. Then, "Ah do this, ah do that!" I have to start telling them what to do. (Chuckles)

MK: So who were some of the old-time doctors and nurses there?

WN: Do you remember some doctors' names at the hospital?

CT: Now, I forget. So many, so many years.

WN: Did you work at Hilo Memorial Hospital, too?

CT: Oh, yes.

WN: Was that before Pepe'ekeo or after Pepe'ekeo Hospital?

CT: Before Pepe'ekeo Hospital.

WN: Before Pepe'ekeo, you worked at Hilo Memorial.

CT: Yeah, I was tired of the restaurant, so I start to work in the hospital, Hilo Memorial, and I used to like it. The people were nice, too.

WN: So from the Hilo restaurant, you went to Hilo Memorial Hospital.

CT: I told them it's near my home, so I rather try this new hospital. At the country hospital, I had to do everything.

WN: I see.

CT: So I would help in the surgical room.

WN: So which one did you like better, Hilo Memorial or Pepe'ekeo Hospital? Where did you like better working?

CT: I think it would be Pepe'ekeo, because then I can do whatever, not in one area.

MK: You do all kinds of things.

WN: You do different kind of things at the plantation hospital.

WN: Do you remember anything that scared you when you were working at the hospital? You know, you didn't have any formal training. Were you nervous at all about working at the hospital?

CT: When I cannot do it, I just say I cannot, I don't know how.

WN: So did you do things like dressing wounds, things like that?

CT: Oh, I used to do that, too. The stitches, surgical work, it required that I had to call the doctor to do it. (Chuckles)

WN: Anything else you wanted to ask?

WN: What kind of uniform did you have as a nurse at the hospital, Pepe‘ekeo?

CT: Oh, regular uniform. You mean the uniform?

WN: Yeah.

CT: It was white, but no caps.

WN: How come no caps?

CT: I’m not a registered nurse.

WN: Oh, okay. So they had registered nurses at the hospital, working?

CT: At least one, one during the day and night. I was a helper, day or night, depending on what shift I’m on.

WN: What did your mother and father think of you working in a hospital?

CT: They didn’t think nothing of it, because, of course, certain times, I would go home, I’m tired (chuckles), it’s something special at home.

WN: Did your father miss you because he didn't have you to help out in the fields anymore?

CT: No, no. My dad—my brothers, they were older and they could help. But he used to hire people, so.

WN: I want to ask you now about you getting married.

CT: (Chuckles) My [future] husband came home for vacation from the Mainland, and the people at the camp, Mill Camp, was thinking about looking for wife for him. So had a go-between. I wasn’t too happy about getting married.

WN: Why, how come?

CT: I wasn’t ready to get married to one stranger. (MK chuckles.) Just to please the parents. I made up my mind, I get married and go. He went to the Mainland. Got married. And the people in the hospital didn’t like that idea, too—just stop and go.

WN: So this, your husband, Sam Tobara, was working on the Mainland.

CT: He has his own business, too. I understand he was working for somebody, but he had his own small business. Then I guess he saved enough so he was able to come and visit the folks.

WN: Oh, I see. So he’s a local boy, from—where is he from?

CT: Pepe‘ekeo.

WN: Pepe‘ekeo. Did you know him at all before?

CT: Before that, I knew the family, but not immediately. But anyway, I got married.

WN: (Laughs) When you first saw him, what did you think about him?

CT: Nothing special.

(Laughter)

MK: You know, before the marriage between her and Sam Tobara was arranged, ask if she had any other offers—you know, were there other tries at matchmaking?

WN: Before you got married to Sam, did people try to get you together with other men?

CT: No, I wasn't interested. I guess I was busy with something, nobody else bother me. (MK and WN laugh.) But Sam came from the Mainland, so folks figured, ah, something different. Got all excited, I guess.

WN: So what kind of business did Sam have?

CT: At that time, all the Japanese had the produce.

WN: Produce?

CT: Produce and the vegetable at a store. He had a front—another man had the grocery store, he had a front for the produce.

WN: So it was like a produce stall?

CT: Yeah, just like a show. They would have produce. Any store would have, showing off and all of that. I had to help him in the store. People tease my husband. (Chuckles)

MK: How come they teased your husband?

CT: "You crib stealer," because I looked young with him.

WN: How many years apart were you?

CT: Eight years. To *Hakujin* [Caucasians], I look different. I looked like one school kid yet at the time.

WN: Crib stealer. (Chuckles)

CT: All the customers would say, "Oh, you crib stealer!"

(Laughter)

"What?"

WN: So your marriage was arranged between you and Sam, and you got married, and you went to LA. How did you feel about going from Pepe'ekeo all the way to LA to be Sam's wife?

CT: Sad, kind of lost. Wherever I go, all different. But not bad. I met a classmate there. And this family, to Sam, was very close. Their family kind of big family in Pepe'ekeo. I didn't know that one of them was my classmate. And had all the sisters, and the brother. And the brother was my son's good friend, too—close friend. That's how they were in Los Angeles.

WN: We're almost *pau,* we're almost done for today. You've been talking for a long time, so we have to make sure that you get rest. So I just wanted to ask you what kind of house did you live in in LA?

CT: Well, renting a place. First house was a big house because this owner lost the wife, so he was living in a little, small house and he was renting to us. He was so surprised what I can do. I was even working in the yard—I love the yardwork, too, so I was working in the yard. Things that I would cook or have extras, I used to give it to him, so he was so surprised—never expected that.

WN: So where you lived in LA, were there other Japanese living in that same neighborhood?

CT: No, all *Hakujin*.

WN: All *Hakujin*.

CT: No *Nihonjin* [Japanese].

WN: And how did you get along with the *Hakujin* in your neighborhood?

CT: Ah, it's all right. But I'm always busy, so I cannot visit them. Only say "Hello, hello." I had to catch the bus to work and help my husband.

WN: And what kind of work, what kind of things did you do to help your husband?

CT: Sell the produce, wrap it up. Keep us busy.

WN: So you helped your husband, you sold the produce, wrapped it up, things like that. Were you the one who was like the bookkeeper? Did you handle the money or the books?

CT: No, we just sell, that's all.

WN: Where did he get the vegetables come from?

CT: I don't know, really. My husband used to go to the wholesaler.

MK: She mentioned [in a pre-interview] that a lot of celebrities would come in, yeah?

WN: Oh yeah. Did people like movie stars come to your stall?

CT: Now and then.

MK: Movie stars would come sometimes. Shall we end now, because it's 12:24.

WN: You know what we're going to do? We're going to stop here and then we're going to go one more time later on, and we're going to talk about your Santa Anita [Assembly Center] and your Amache [Colorado] time. Is that okay? (CT chuckles.)

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape Nos. 55-9-2-09 and 55-10-2-09

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Clara Tobara (CT)

Honolulu, Hawai‘i

December 20, 2009

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

WN: Today is December 10, 2010—2009, I'm sorry—and we're interviewing Clara Tobara—Clara Higa Tobara—and the interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto.

Last time we were talking, you said that you moved with your husband, Sam, from Hawai‘i to Los Angeles, yeah? Can you tell me what you did? Your husband had a business, yeah? What kind of business did your husband have?

CT: Produce.

WN: Produce, mm-hmm [yes]. Like what did he sell?

CT: Vegetables and fruits, part of the store. That's about it. When I went in to help him, the customers used to tease him and say, "Oh, you're a cradle snatcher."

(Laughter)

The age difference. I think they figured the age difference.

WN: Can you tell me how did you feel when your husband said, "Oh, let's go to Los Angeles." Did you feel sad, or happy, or what?

CT: I wasn't excited or anything, because it was a forced marriage to please our parents. It was all right, it worked out all right, I guess.

WN: What kind of a man was Sam?

CT: He was a soft-spoken man, sort of a likeable person, too, I guess.

WN: You know the people that came to buy things at the store, at the produce store, what kind of people were they? Were they *Hakujin,* Japanese?

CT: Oh, *Hakujin, Hakujin,* all *Hakujin.* Some actors, some actresses, too, once in a while because there was a studio in the back, I guess.

WN: Do you remember some of the actors and actresses? No?

CT: No. I waited on them, and I don't know who was what.

(Laughter)

Sometimes they all laugh at me. They say, "You know who she was," or "who he was?" That's why, I don't know. (Chuckles) Even in Hollywood or when I go to near Beverly Hills to see the area, some of the actors or actresses come to us. My husband would tease me, "You know who he was? Tarzan."

WN: So you didn't see too many movies when you were growing up in Hawai'i?

CT: Oh, no, hardly. Always busy working.

WN: I was wondering, how did people treat you, being Japanese in Los Angeles just before the war?

CT: They were nice to me. They would ask me where I was from.

"We're from Hawai'i." They couldn't believe that I was from Hawai'i.

WN: Did they ask you questions about Hawai'i?

CT: No, not that time.

WN: Were you able to meet or make friends while you were in LA, helping your husband?

CT: Oh yeah. One of them was my classmate. The whole family, most of them I knew. I used to see them in Hawai'i. Then they moved to Los Angeles, the family.

MK: What's the names?

CT: Yabuta family.

WN: Do you know why they moved to Los Angeles?

CT: I don't know what's the reason. I guess better chances, because they lost their parents, too, so they decided they'd start something different. Or maybe the big sister got involved with the people in Los Angeles side, I don't know.

WN: Where was your house in LA?

CT: Near Hollywood—now, I forgot.

WN: Near Hollywood?

CT: Yes.

WN: And how far away from the grocery stand was your house?

CT: Oh, that was quite far. I forgot the name of the street. I know my son said was Pico Boulevard. We had the store at Pico Boulevard.

WN: How did you get from your house to the stand every day? How did you go? Do you remember?

CT: Oh, take the streetcar. It was a long ride.

MK: You know your home, was it near a place where lots of other Japanese lived?

CT: Mixed people, *ne?* Hardly see Japanese, too, in certain areas.

WN: You know the day of Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, do you remember what you were doing when you found out about Pearl Harbor?

CT: All of a sudden, it happened. I don't know how I felt, I don't know. I forgot.

WN: Well, when Pearl Harbor was bombed by the Japanese, I was just wondering, how did they treat you after Pearl Harbor was attacked? You know, you're Japanese, living in Los Angeles. Any different?

CT: I didn't feel any difference. Even when I go shopping, they didn't treat me any different. In fact, they ask me, "Oh, where you from?"

I say, "Hawai'i." They're so surprised now, they couldn't even believe. That's about it.

WN: They didn't ask you anything like, "Are you Japanese," or anything like that?

CT: No. They said, "You don't look like Hawaiian," or something like that.

WN: Okay. You know, a few months after the war broke out, you went to Santa Anita Assembly Center, yeah? Do you remember that day going to Santa Anita, what that was like for you?

MK: How you were notified, told to go to Santa Anita?

WN: Did someone tell you, "Oh, you have to go," or anything like that? Do you remember?

CT: I think my husband must have heard the news. "Japanese all have to stay in certain places," or "stay home and don't go out," because they were afraid some might throw rocks or something at us. To be safe, be in the house, or to stay in certain places.

WN: So after Pearl Harbor was bombed, you folks didn't go to your business, you didn't go to work?

CT: I guess not. No, we were working, because I was on the bus—streetcar—taking a seat or given a seat. I was treated nicely, too, so I remember that. I was surprised.

WN: Oh, you mean when you found out that Pearl Harbor was attacked?

CT: I had to commute to work.

WN: Do you remember the day after Pearl Harbor? Did you go to work?

CT: Yes. We were working. But we were treated nicely. I guess everybody, eventually, decided to stay away from work. Then the order came out that we have to evacuate to Santa Anita. I don't know how we went to Santa Anita. I guess we had to meet certain place and then we went on a bus or something.

MK: What did you take to Santa Anita? What did you take with you?

CT: Two handbags and one duffle bag. Two handbags—suitcase, I mean.

MK: Two suitcases, and . . .

CT: And the rest, we either had to ask friends to keep it or hold it until everything settles down. Most of the things, we gave away.

WN: Do you remember what kinds of things you had to leave behind, to give away, or to have your friends watch?

CT: I don't know, because we didn't have much at that time, anyway. So easy to give up.

MK: How did you feel about being moved to Santa Anita? How did you feel?

CT: I don't know. I couldn't believe what they were doing to us. But we just have to follow the law, what they said.

WN: So you took mostly your clothing, your clothes, in your suitcases?

CT: And luckily, we had a friend, Keye Luke.

WN: Keye Luke [actor]?

CT: The brother was our neighbor. Some of the things, I don't know, we gave it up to them. Whatever we needed from in the camp, I asked them—I forget their names now. The wife was from Hawai'i, this couple.

WN: This is Keye Luke's brother? Oh. So Keye Luke's brother's wife was from Hawai'i? Oh.

CT: So we used to get along very good. When I was in the camp, I want *crack seed* [Chinese preserved fruit], and they got it, *crack seed.* Those days, *crack seed,* not the whole seed, you know. *Crack seed* was popular. Whole seed was expensive, I guess. They used to get it for me so I don't have to order from Hawai'i.

WN: Oh, so Keye Luke's brother and his wife would get some things for you that you wanted—get it and bring it to you?

CT: I would either call them or write them to get certain-certain things.

WN: So besides *crack seed,* what other things did you have to ask them for to bring to you?

CT: Oh, not much, only those rare things that we hardly find in the camp or Los Angeles, only from Hawai'i. But not much.

WN: So what did Santa Anita look like? What did your barracks or wherever you stayed look like? Where did you stay in Santa Anita?

CT: I cannot remember, though. I felt so bad. For the building, that's the part I cannot remember. They make me work, too. So I don't spend too much in the area, only in the hospital. I was lucky.

WN: Well, tell us about the hospital. What was that like, and how did you get the job?

CT: Oh, I worked in the plantation hospital here, back home in the islands—Big Island. I worked in the hospital, doing things. I wasn't a registered nurse or anything, and somebody said, "That's not your job!" But I'm eventually doing it. I didn't feel that I was doing somebody else's job. I was

used to it already. The plantation hospital, I used to work with the doctors, so—delivery and all that. Some doctors—new doctors—I had to tell them how to deliver in the room, what to do.

WN: And at Santa Anita, what kind of illnesses did you work on? What did people come into the hospital for?

CT: Almost anything. Regular hospital. Just like a regular hospital. It's all mixed, anyway.

MK: How big was the hospital?

CT: Reminds me of the plantation hospital, so it was like I was at home doing it. Felt like at home during my job.

WN: Do you remember some of the doctors' names that you worked with?

CT: No.

MK: What do you remember about the other nurses that worked with you?

CT: I cannot remember any of them. For a short while, so. The main doctor wanted me to go with them to Arizona or someplace with them, but I rejected that. They all tease me, saying, "You have to write to the main office saying that you don't want to go with us." We were released from that group, so I went with the group that went to Amache, Colorado. Colorado is a better state. Our friends were there, too.

WN: When you worked at the hospital in Santa Anita, yeah? What did your husband do? Did he work at all?

CT: I don't know, I cannot remember what he was doing. I know he was doing something to help. I hated to stay in the barrack.

WN: You know at Santa Anita, what was the mess hall like?

CT: I cannot remember. Sometimes, the hospital group and regular people are different, too, the place to eat. So, I cannot remember those things.

WN: Well, I want to move over to Amache, you were in Amache, Colorado. How do you compare Amache with Santa Anita? Was it a better place for you or. . . ?

CT: Oh, yes. It was wide open and we were free to visit our friends in the barrack.

WN: So Amache was wide open, whereas Santa Anita was. . . .

CT: Certain area was limited. Cannot go out in town. We were just like prisoners.

WN: In Santa Anita? What about at Amache? Could you go into the town in Amache?

CT: Close by, we used to shopping there, too.

WN: Yeah, in Amache?

CT: In the stores nearby. I forget the name. I forgot. (Chuckles)

WN: Were the stores outside of the camp?

CT: Yes. In town, in town. We used to walk or take a ride. But most of the time, we used to walk with a group of friends and go shopping. Then bigger things or some better things that we wanted or we cannot find, we would order from the bigger town. I forget the names all around that area. Sometimes it pops out and I forget.

WN: When you went into the town, how did the people in the town treat you folks?

CT: Oh, they were nice, because maybe we were spending so different. Everywhere we go, the way we spend is so different so they were surprised, and the things we want.

MK: What kinds of things did you folks buy in town?

CT: Oh, mostly to eat. (Laughs)

WN: Oh, food.

CT: Mess hall food was just like military. But when the supplies come in, the way they cook is different, too, according to our tastes—not strictly a military way of cooking.

WN: When you say "your tastes," more like Japanese *kine* taste?

CT: Oriental tastes, yes.

WN: Oh, with *shōyu?*

CT: I guess so. So we never complained.

WN: So this is the mess hall food that was more like to your tastes.

CT: Mess hall.

WN: What about the food in [town]?

CT: Oh, we buy something different—fruits and all that. Something different. Fruits and some goodies that we don't find in—what was that called, that store? We used to have a place where we could go shopping in our area. The supplies limited, too. (Chuckles)

WN: How did the guards treat you folks? Did you get along with the guards at Amache?

CT: Yes. Nobody asked questions or anything, unless you looked different or doing something different. But nobody complained about me.

WN: Were the guards armed? Did they carry weapons with them?

CT: I don't know. I never noticed that. In the morning from my barrack, I used to stand by the window and I see them all marching, walking to the place to watch us, the tower. I used to say, "*Heitai-san ga aruku. Bostu-botsu aruku.*" I used to sing all the time. (Chuckles)

WN: Oh, that's a World War II song?

MK: You're singing about the soldiers marching, yeah? Oh.

CT: There's a tower—what do you call that? But I never watched them closer, I just watched them from my window while they're passing by.

MK: What did your barracks at Amache look like? You had a window in your dorm?

CT: It's just like a regular military camp. Each unit has a stove to heat the room up—not to cook, though, to heat the room up. We used to use it to heat up something on the top of the stove. (Chuckles)

WN: Is that like the pot-bellied stove?

CT: The long one and flat on the top, so we could put something on top to keep it warm. So, it's nothing to complain about. (Chuckles)

WN: So besides that stove, what else was in your barracks that they provide you with?

MK: How about furniture?

CT: Furniture? The bed—regular bed, army bed. Just like army. Maybe we had covers, too.

WN: Was it one big room or was it separate bedrooms?

CT: No, one room, just like this. One square room. Just like the army, military.

WN: Do you remember, did you have to share anything with your neighbors? Were your neighbors in the same building?

CT: No, we don't share anything. Only we would have to go pick our coal, fuel for the stove. We had to go pick up at certain places.

MK: How about laundry and toilet area?

WN: How did you do laundry?

CT: Oh, we had laundry room open. It reminds me of my [plantation] camp life—a big laundry room.

MK: What about toilets?

CT: One building we had to go to. So we would have to have our own—what they call that?

MK: Commode?

WN: Toilet? Commode? You had your own toilet in the barracks?

CT: You have to buy that. For our own convenience, we had to buy that. On certain days, we would have to go empty that and wash it, bring it home.

WN: What about taking a bath?

CT: Oh, it's just like the [plantation] camp. One building. Shower and bathroom are all about the same. Bathroom and restroom are all about one building.

WN: Just like on the plantation, then. (Chuckles)

MK: But Amache was cold, huh, sometimes?

WN: How did you stay warm? Must've been cold sometimes.

CT: Oh yeah, it's cold. Winter, we have snow. So when we come out and saw the snow, everybody say "Oh, it's snowing!"

(Laughter)

Los Angeles never had snow unless we go to the mountainside. When we felt the first snow, oh, everybody goes out. Everybody say, "Oh, it's snowing!" Everybody had their hands out and feeling the snow.

WN: Did you have hot water?

CT: We had to go to the bathroom to get it, I think.

WN: Oh, so for shower, you had hot shower?

CT: Hot and cold.

MK: How did you folks manage with the cold, with your clothes and everything? When it was wintertime, how did you folks manage with the cold?

CT: All depends how you wanted.

WN: But you had winter coat on, you had a winter coat?

CT: Oh, yes, regular outside style. No limit. It's all our own. If you have money, you could get a heavy coat.

WN: Now when you were out in the camp, did you go to church at all?

CT: No, I didn't go. I wasn't that religious. (Chuckles) I guess some people used to come in and pray for them, too, the outsiders—the priests and all that. Later, they formed a church group. Certain ones go to Buddhist or Christian or something. Then they have a place—recreation area—in another building—what they call that? Some places I don't go, so I cannot remember too well.

WN: So they had a recreation area. What was in the recreation area?

CT: I don't know.

WN: Was it like a playground, I mean a field?

CT: They must've arranged it so the children can go in, too, to do something because the wintertime, you couldn't go out and play.

WN: So you had wintertime, but what about summertime? Was it hot?

CT: Summertime was hot, extra hot, because the camp, they outcast, us, so we had to go to a place where the weather condition wasn't too pleasant compared to the other area. But lately, eventually, Japanese took part of it, too, in that area—bought some property.

WN: When you were in Amache, you didn't work at all, or did you work?

CT: Amache, I worked in the mess hall instead of the hospital. Hospital wanted me, but, "No," I said, "I'm going to go work in the mess hall and get to know the people in the block," because in the whole block, most of them were strangers to me. So it was good. And a lot of people—isseis—surprised when I spoke Japanese. Where did I learn my Japanese and all that, how to speak?

I said, "Hawai'i."

"Oh!" (Chuckles)

Issei ga, "Nisei ga Nihongo hanasu," itte ne. Issei ga, "Ho, ho!"

MK: They were so surprised.

WN: That a nisei could speak Japanese so well. That's what they were saying.

CT: Mainland Japanese, the nisei doesn't speak that much, but Hawai'i niseis, we speak more Japanese. Luckily, I learned the proper way of speaking the Japanese. When we were in school one day and people spoke certain ways, I never cared for it. So even when you would write *tsuzuri kata* [cursive Japanese script], I liked real Japanese. So that's why they say, "*Anata nisei ka? Nisei ka?*" when I spoke Japanese.

MK: Was it okay to speak Japanese in camp?

CT: Yeah, yeah, we speak all the own language in the camp.

MK: What was your job in the mess hall? What kind of work did you do?

CT: Oh, I was guiding them where to sit, what to do and all that. Instead of working in the hospital, good to know all the people that come in, and I get to know them. Surprised the isseis when I spoke Japanese. Luckily, I learned the proper Japanese, the way they speaking Mainland, too. And my husband used to say, "They don't speak that way, they don't say this way."

WN: So you were able to speak to the issei in camp?

CT: Yes.

WN: I see. Did you help with the food, too, prepare food?

CT: No. The cooks are cooks, the dishwashers, dishwashers. The dishwashers are the ones who were making all the noise when the dishes—we're late or slow.

WN: So your job was to tell people where to sit and things like that?

CT: What not to do, where to go, and sometimes I go, help them and walk with them.

MK: Those days, did the people sit with their families in the mess hall to eat?

CT: Yeah. Just a family life, already.

WN: I was just wondering, were there really old people in camp—people like in wheelchairs or they needed cane or needed help walking?

CT: Not too many, not too many. I hardly see them. Only a few, though. But they were all nice. The family treat them, so those who can take care of them were family. They all so close to them.

MK: How much pay did you get?

CT: Oh, not too much. So you have to go outside and look for a job. Later on, relocate and get the job.

WN: But the mess hall pay, was it better than the hospital pay, you think?

CT: No, no. I guess about the same.

WN: What kind of rules did they have in the camp? What kinds of things did they tell you you cannot do, not allowed? Do you remember?

CT: I cannot remember.

MK: Did they tell you you cannot have certain things?

CT: We used to mail order a lot of stuff.

WN: Mail order? Like from where, Sears?

CT: Yeah. Sears and some other stores. Had some from the big stores, they would bring it in. So they tried to build just like a family home.

WN: You know, you were telling us one time that there were some wooden crates that you would get from the mess hall, and you would use the wood, the wooden crates for things.

CT: The box for the drawers. We make our own furniture. My husband made it so that the thing would open just like this, and the drawer is underneath. I open it like this and then pull. And everyone all like this, "Save all the boxes. Tell them save the pull box, so they all have drawers, too." They all create something different from whatever they could get. That's the best part of it, too. A lot of things we used to say, "Oh, if I get this, I can do this."

Everybody say, "Oh yeah, oh yeah!" (Laughs)

WN: So your husband made drawers from the wood that he got from the crates. Do you remember anything else that people would make?

CT: No. I don't know. I cannot remember, though.

WN: I was wondering, did you folks have a yard in front of your barracks? Did people take care of the . . . ?

CT: All depends. In my area by the entrance, I have a little piece by the window side and the back. The front, I bought those ready-made fence stakes, and we made a little garden there. People used to come and take pictures there, too.

WN: Okay, we're going to change tapes right now.

END OF TAPE NO. 55-9-2-09

TAPE NO. 55-10-2-09

WN: Tape number two, session number two, with Clara Higa Tobara.

Clara, we were talking about your garden that you had right outside your barracks. What was in your garden?

CT: Oh, little plants. I don't know.

MK: Flowers or vegetables?

CT: Plants, greens, and all that. So something to keep through the year, I guess. Winter, they'd shed the leaves.

WN: Like what *kine* flowers? Do you remember?

CT: I cannot remember. Things that we used to want, we would get it from the catalog. And the area, that area plants are all different. Certain states or area that we lived, can grow certain things. Certain things not so good.

WN: Did you do any sewing?

CT: Oh, yes. I see something new, I like to learn, so I would be doing crochet, knitting, and embroidery, all those handwork. I used to have spare time, I used to do that. And this morning, I was looking at this huge sweatshirt. I opened it up, "Ho, oh my goodness, did I make this?" (Laughs) So many things. I learned how to do it, then I see the pattern, then I used to make them, too. I used to love that, too, from childhood. Needleworks, keep me busy.

MK: What else did you do to keep busy?

CT: Oh, the tin cans, sometimes I used to grow plants. I wonder, I don't know, so many things that we shared with some friends and neighbors.

WN: Were there times where you folks get together, your friends and neighbors?

CT: Usually we go out shopping, that's about it. Get another town. And rest—what they call that place, the one store in the camp?

MK: Commissary?

CT: Yeah, commissary.

WN: You know, when you went to Granada town, could you just go by yourselves or your friends or did you have to have like a guard with you or anything like that?

CT: No, we go ourselves. Nobody to watch us. Usually, we go with our friends together in a group or with a couple, so it wasn't any trouble. No trouble.

WN: How come they trusted you folks to go out on your own? They weren't afraid that you weren't going to come back?

CT: No, I guess not.

(Laughter)

Well, they know we're Japanese.

WN: Where you gonna go, yeah? And when you went shopping to buy things, did they search you or tell you, "Well, you cannot buy."

CT: No, no, no, no.

WN: What if you bought a knife or a gun or something?

CT: I don't know. (WN chuckles.) They don't sell to us, I guess.

WN: Oh, I guess so.

CT: I guess they would call if they get suspicious and they'd call the department. They won't let us know.

WN: You know, you said that Sam worked as a lumberjack in Wyoming. You told us that earlier. Did a lot of the men do that?

CT: I don't know. Quite a few of them, they liked to go outside, so they worked together. At that time, I guess it was hard to find men outside, so a lot of people from outside used to come and get [workers] from the camp.

WN: So did he tell you what kinds of work he did as a lumberjack in Wyoming?

CT: Cutting and sorting, I guess. I don't know what. I never been to Wyoming to see the job out in the open. Must be a big area, wooded area.

WN: Did they just go for the day, or did they go and stay in Wyoming for several days?

CT: Oh, they had to stay. Just a camp-like, you go outside and work.

WN: So sometimes he was gone for several days.

CT: Months.

WN: Oh, for months?

CT: Yeah.

WN: Wow.

CT: So in the meantime, I was alone. The neighbor used to help me, too.

WN: Did you do any work outside the camp?

CT: No. Just stay in my area.

WN: And then while you were in camp at Amache, you were pregnant.

CT: I got pregnant, too, while working in the mess hall. When Sam comes back. . . . He used to come back now and then, they get their time out, too, I guess.

WN: What was it like being pregnant? Did you get good medical care?

CT: Oh, yes. It's just like outside.

WN: So you would go to the camp hospital for checkups?

CT: Oh, yes. Like the neighbor used to take care of me because I couldn't eat well. I was so particular about eating. Lots of stuff I would have to order from Hawai'i and Los Angeles—my friend, the Luke family.

MK: So how did you communicate with your family back in Hawai'i?

WN: Did you write letters back and forth?

CT: Oh, yes.

WN: To Hawai'i?

CT: That's the only way.

WN: And they wrote back to you?

CT: Yes.

WN: Do you remember what the letters were like? Did they have the censorship, did they cut out words or anything like that? No?

CT: I never noticed anything like that. I guess they trust us.

(Laughter)

WN: You folks were trustworthy. (Laughs)

CT: Because 100th [Infantry] Battalion served good, that's why. They found out that they were good soldiers, so they got the reputation.

WN: Do you remember some of the men joining the army?

CT: My brother was in the army, 100th Battalion.

WN: Oh, from Hawai'i, but what about from the camp, from Amache? Do you remember some of the men joining the army from camp?

CT: I guess there were. No, cannot remember who.

(Taping stops, then continues.)

WN: Okay, we wanted to ask you about your delivery of your child. Where did you go to have your child?

CT: The camp hospital. It was just like a regular hospital, a military hospital. (Chuckles) My neighbors helped me, because my husband working the timber camp.

WN: What kind of help did they give you? How did they help you?

CT: Oh, my neighbors? Oh, if I cannot go to the mess hall, they'll bring the food for me, or whatever I want. My husband send me some stuff, or I have whatever I wanted—I go and do it myself. My neighbor would cook for me sometimes. My neighbor was just like my mother. (Chuckles)

WN: How did you manage to feed the baby?

CT: Oh, by breastfeeding.

WN: Did you need formula, too?

CT: Now and then, I guess. But it's just like life outside. It's not a prison life in the camp.

WN: Were you able to get things like diapers?

CT: Oh, yes. Mail order, or go to the store, buy, and pick it up. So, things get better and better, and eventually they let us all out—closed the camp.

WN: Okay, well, let's talk about the closing of the camp. Do you remember how you felt when they said, "Oh, we're going to close the camp?" Were you happy?

CT: I guess so. In a way, it's all right—everybody free, especially those with no place to go, they're free.

WN: When they closed the camp, where did you and your husband and your baby go?

CT: Denver. We lived in Denver for a while.

WN: How come you folks went to Denver?

CT: I think my husband found a job and had to look for a place to live. So we got it. The family that rented the house, I found out wasn't too good about renting to us. But eventually, when time to leave, they hate to let us go.

WN: Oh. So you said that, okay, they didn't really want to rent to you folks. How come?

CT: We're Japanese. They heard all about the Japanese stories and outside news, I guess. Not the good news, but all the dirty news about us, I guess, so the people had ideas that we went away, they cannot trust us. Even before the war, too.

WN: But eventually, they rented to you folks?

CT: At first they say, "Oh, Japanese?" But after they rented, they hate to let us go.

MK: Oh, you folks were good renters.

WN: You know, your neighbors and friends in Amache, where did they go after the camp closed?

CT: It was all scattered—mostly Denver and back to Los Angeles.

WN: Did you want to go back to Los Angeles?

CT: I wanted to come back to Hawai‘i.

WN: And what kind of job did Sam get in Denver?

CT: Upholstery.

WN: Furniture upholstery.

CT: So when we came back, he got the job in upholstery, too.

WN: So eventually came back to Hawai‘i.

CT: Plus, the weather didn't agree with me. The sun gets me. Oh, always sunburned. Without knowing, I go out in the sun and go shopping downtown. Walk back, and then you're all sunburned. I was supposed to put cover on. Even now, same thing.

MK: Too strong.

WN: But Denver, the air is kind of dry.

CT: Somehow, I always had trouble with the sun. When I say I'm going back to Hawai‘i, the doctor said, "What? It's worse in Hawai‘i!"

(Laughter)

CT: Oh, I used to have, oh, sunburn.

WN: Can I ask you, where did you like living better—did you like living in Denver better, or did you like living in the camp?

CT: Denver was all right. Living in the camp, well, I always thought we were prisoners-like. (Chuckles) Living in the camp after the war, when I went to visit, see the place where we used to live in the camp, ho, the place is so sad-looking place.

WN: Why was it sad-looking?

CT: Oh, lot of things. No barracks, the foundation was left over. Certain areas, all with weeds. Was open. It's like the Big Island. When I went there some time ago to the Big Island, the plantation camp was all open already. Closed, no cane field—just open field. Ho, the sad. Just like the camp, too.

WN: I'm wondering, what made you go back to Amache to visit after the war to see where you lived?

CT: I think we had some kind of meeting or something in Denver—all the people in Colorado who were in the camp. I don't know.

WN: Like reunion or something?

CT: Good thing my husband and my son, together, went down. Seems like everything long, long ago. I keep forgetting already, my age, too. (Chuckles)

WN: That's okay, you remember a lot, though. So after the war ended, and after you lived in Denver for a little while, you folks came back to Hawai'i, yeah? Where did you folks live when you first moved back to Hawai'i?

CT: Honolulu. Only place to live and get a job and all that was Honolulu.

MK: Where did Sam work in the beginning?

WN: Where did he work? Did he work for upholstery business in Hawai'i?

CT: The building that was next to the waterworks.

MK: Oh, next to the Board of Water Supply.

CT: They used to have a furniture store of some kind, so he did the upholstery for that company.

WN: Oh, next to Board of Water Supply. What is that? Now it's CS Wo.

CT: It was nearby.

MK: So in the beginning, he worked for a different company.

CT: Then he opened his own business, upholstery.

MK: So he was in the upholstery business until he retired.

WN: So how many children do you have?

CT: Two.

WN: Two boys.

MK: So you have two sons.

WN: So Ron was born in 1952 . . .

CT: That was the youngest one.

WN: . . . in Honolulu. Patrick was the one born in the camp.

Okay, I think we're done, so thank you very much.

CT: A lot of stories. (Laughs)

WN: Thank you.

MK: You remembered a lot.

END OF INTERVIEW

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