

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Alfreida Kimura Fujita

Alfreida Fujita was born in 1926 in Hōlualoa, North Kona, Hawai'i. Her father, Torao Kimura, was the son of Yoshimatsu Kimura, founder of Y. Kimura Store in Kona. Her mother, Tsuruyo Fujiwara Kimura, was born and raised on the island of O'ahu. Alfreida was the oldest of seven siblings.

Y. Kimura Store, located at the junction of Hualālai Road and Māmalahoa Highway in Hōlualoa, began as a general merchandise store in 1914. Fujita's grandfather leased land nearby and grew coffee and cotton. Her grandmother, Tomo Yamamoto Kimura, sewed *futons* and *zabutons* with the milled cotton and sold them in the store. They also sold kerosene from a pump located in front of the store.

Fujita's parents married in 1926. Her mother, Tsuruyo, took an active role in the business. In addition to tending the store, she learned to weave hats, purses, and baskets out of *lau hala*. With her husband, she sold them to individuals and stores throughout Hawai'i Island. The crafts became so popular that in time the majority of the store's merchandise was devoted to goods made from *lau hala*. In the 1950s, the store's name was changed to Kimura Lauhala Shop.

Alfreida Fujita attended Konawaena School and graduated in 1944. She trained as a teacher's aide and worked at kindergartens at Konawaena, Kohala, and Waiākea-waena schools. In 1949, she began her long career with Hawaiian Airlines as a reservationist.

After her retirement in 1981, Fujita began full-time work in her mother's *lau hala* shop. At the time of the oral history interviews, Kimura Lauhala Shop was still a thriving business in the same Hōlualoa location.

Fujita lived in Kailua, Kona, with her husband, Harold.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Alfreida Kimura Fujita (AF)

Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i

July 7, 2000

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: Okay, let's get started. I'm interviewing Alfreida—what is your middle name?

AF: It's Fumiko.

WN: [Alfreida] Fumiko Kimura Fujita, on July 7, 2000, and we're at her home in Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i.

Alfreida, I want to start by asking you when and where you were born.

AF: I was born at Hōlualoa where that Kimura Lauhala Shop is still standing. According to my mother, I was born right in the back of the store [in] one of the rooms [in] 1926.

WN: With midwife?

AF: Yeah. Everybody asks me how did I get my name, "Alfreida." Because for a Japanese during that time, my name sounded real German, didn't quite fit into the family. Everybody looks at me and says, "How did you get that name?" According to my mother, I was born by a midwife, Mrs. Ashikawa. A German nurse from the health department helped her, and named me. I think the original spelling was really in German because it says, "Elfrieda" [pronounced Al-fry-da] on my birth certificate.

WN: Spelled how?

AF: It's spelled on my birth certificate E-L-F-R-I-E-D-A. However, when I went to school I was taught to write my name with an A. A-L-F-R, and for the longest time I didn't know whether the E came first or the I came first. So sometimes I wrote it with an E, sometimes with an I. In high school I started to write A-L-F-R-E-I-D-A. After I graduated I was sent to get a social security [card] because I began working for the DOE [Department of Education], at that time they asked me to show my birth certificate. I

was so surprised when I saw my birth certificate (chuckles). I guess my mother and father never paid attention to the birth certificate as to how it was written, or never told the first-grade teacher, or whatever. I don't know where the error occurred.

Finally, upon securing my social security [card], my legal advice was that I should change the name on my birth certificate to the way I was writing it, because of my high school records and documents. I went to a lawyer and he legalized—I paid fifty dollars. I cannot forget the first fifty dollars, you know, from my first paycheck (laughs). This was in 1944, right after graduation. So they legalized my name, they changed my birth certificate to the way that I had been writing, A-L-F-R-E-I-D-A. Now it's in my head.

WN: And what did your mother and father call you?

AF: Oh, at home everybody called me Fumiko. Except for my siblings. They were all taught to call [me] *Nē-san* [older sister] from the time that they were small.

WN: Because you were the oldest, huh?

AF: Yeah, because I'm the oldest. It's something just natural. It wasn't something that they had to say it, but I guess in an Oriental family, they were taught to say, "*Nē-san*." At that time I'm quite sure they didn't know what it meant. My grandma and my grandpa would call me Fumiko, not by my English name. And then my siblings used to call me *Nē-san* when they were all growing up. Of course, today they'll address me [as] Freida.

WN: Now, your grandmother and grandfather were living in Hōlualoa, too?

AF: Yes. The house that is still standing today, the Kimura Lauhala Shop. We found some records and it says that it was built in the year 1914. My grandfather built that house. There were one, two, three stories. Down on the flat ground was our bathhouse, the *furo*, and the outhouse. It was the Kimura house and many of us lived there. I grew up with my aunties and uncles.

WN: This is your mother's . . .

AF: My father's . . .

WN: Father's siblings?

AF: Yeah, it's the Kimura siblings. I have a very strong attachment to them, because I lived with them the longest. I used to tag along with my aunties; it may have been *urusai* for them. I had a lot of growing up with my aunties and uncles in that big house.

WN: What number was your father in that . . .

AF: My father was number two.

WN: Out of how many?

AF: Ten, I think.

WN: Oh, okay. Oh, so lot of aunties and uncles.

AF: Yeah. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, yeah, there were ten. I think one died [early]. Traditionally in the Japanese family, the oldest was sent away, to Northwestern University near Chicago. My grandma and grandfather must have had a very difficult time. My first aunty graduated from Mid-Pacific [Institute]. Those days must have been very hard for them. But they must have believed in trying to give whatever education they could to their own children.

One uncle remained in Kona; he had his own farm. The rest of them left for Honolulu. Out of four aunties, I have only one aunty living in Honolulu. I try to see her and talk to her on the telephone. My uncles, the menfolks in the Kimuras, three younger ones are still alive. My grandpa and grandma, they were one year apart, but they both died at the age of ninety-one. My grandmother never went to the doctor like we do today. For every little thing, we go, yeah? For colds, et cetera. She was a very energetic person. And her mind was very sharp till the day she died.

WN: What was her name?

AF: She was Tomo [Yamamoto Kimura].

WN: Where is she and her husband [Yoshimatsu Kimura] from?

AF: They were both from Yamaguchi-*ken*, from the little island called Oshima island.

WN: Oh, okay.

AF: About ten years ago, I took my mother, and we finally visited my grandmother's home on Oshima island. [I was told that] my father's cousin had just passed away in January; we went in May without knowing. I felt real sad; I really wanted to meet my father's cousin because my grandmother used to talk a lot about him.

My mother wanted to *o-mairu* the family altar. As I sat down, I looked up and saw my grandfather's and grandmother's picture with the rest of their ancestors. I thought, oh, how nice they remembered. I told my grandmother in my prayers, "Oh, *Baban*, I finally came to visit your home." Later, they took my mother and I—and it's just walking distance—we went to *haka mairi*. I felt real good about it.

One day, I hope I could take my daughter and some of my nieces and nephew before I get too old, to show them where my grandma and grandpa came from. When I think of my grandparents, I don't think I would be able to do what they did, traveling to a foreign country, leaving your home. Even today, everything is so modern. (Chuckles) You hear somebody say, "Would you like to live in New York?" you have to think for a long time, right? (Chuckles) And here my grandmother and grandfather came to a foreign country. I thought, oh my goodness. They really had—I don't know whether it's foresight, or it's survival. *Gaman shite*, yeah? Maybe they didn't want to leave their home, they must have been very young, twenty, nineteen years old probably.

As I sat on the seawall in front of my grandmother's home, it reminded me of our old Kailua. Not as of today, but the old Kailua with a low seawall and dusty road, a few houses here and there, and with porches. In front of my grandmother's home they were drying agar-agar.

WN: *Kanten?*

AF: *Kanten*, yeah? All of this [agar-agar was] in boxes, so our cousin made some *kanten* for us to enjoy, served with *o-cha*. When my grandmother was young, she used to go out in the ocean and catch *iriko*. As I sat on the wall, I kept thinking of my grandmother's (chuckles) beach right here, leaving this place and coming to Hawai'i.

Here I was after sixty years, visiting for the first time. I wish I could have visited while my grandpa and grandma were alive. It was a very good feeling to visit their birthplace. And I'd like to pass that feeling on to the rest of my family so that they would appreciate what they did for us here. It wasn't easy. Today, with money and technology, you can do whatever. But those days they didn't have any money, they didn't know the language, they didn't know where they were going. They were really brave, I think.

WN: Did they come directly to Kona?

AF: According to my grandfather's record, he was released from the plantation . . .

WN: Oh, which plantation?

AF: Hilo. I think it was Hilo Sugar [Company]. I have the document someplace. It says he was released in 1904 or 1908—that's when he decided to come to Kona. I think he sent for my grandmother, as they were already married in Japan.

I remember asking my grandma, "How did you come from Hilo to Kona?" And she said she and my grandfather walked from Hilo. I said, "You mean you walked all the way?" She said they walked to Honu'apo. You know, Ka'ū? There's a landing, Honu'apo. And I said, "Oh, what did you do for sleeping and for food?" She said they just walked, and

during the evening before it gets real dark, they see a dim light here and there. They'd go up, and many of the Hawaiians were very nice. They gave them a place for them to rest on the porch, and I guess they gave them whatever food. They made it to Honu'apo, rode the boat, and landed at Nāpō'opo'o. In Kona she had an uncle, and the uncle was Mr. Okamura. They had a big Okamura Store in Kainaliu.

WN: Is that Norman's family [i.e., Norman Okamura, another interviewee]?

AF: Yes, Norman's grandfather was my grandma's uncle.

WN: Oh!

AF: He was already in Kona, and he encouraged them come to Kona because Kona was not like a plantation. One can own or [lease] land and be a self-made farmer or whatever. I guess he [Okamura] must have helped all of his relatives.

My grandfather settled in Hōlualoa. I'm sure his intention was not to stay forever, I don't know. I never asked him. My grandfather gave us a lot of wisdom. At that time I thought, hogwash. It's just old folks' tales. But today, the more and more I think about it, they really had their foresight and a lot of wisdom. My grandfather made us go to Japanese-language school. It was a must. There's no such thing that you can play hooky. After school, we'd go to Japanese[-language] school. And he was quite strict about that. He used to help and guide me in my Japanese lessons.

Once, I told my grandfather, "I don't need to go to Japanese school. We live in America, we're Americans. So as long as we know our English, it should be all right."

He scolded me in Japanese, "*Baka!*"

(Laughter)

AF: He used to tell me, "*Nihonjin dakara Nihongo narawanakattara dame.*" (Because you're Japanese, it's not good if you don't learn Japanese language.) And he told me that the world will get small one day. I thought, gee, what does he mean by "the world going get small?" Cannot shrink. You know, at that time I'm young yet, maybe in my fifth grade. He's telling me, "The world is going to get real small one day. You're going to realize that you have to know your language and many other languages." And that stuck in my head. When I started to work for Hawaiian Airlines, I realized what he meant. Today, the world is really small. I mean, you can go [in] one day here and there. But for him to say that, in the late [19]30s, wow. He used to say, "*Kono yo no naka wa komo naru.*" (This world will get smaller.) You have to know as many languages because one day the world is going to get small.

I just put it in the back of my head. But I think the old folks really thought ahead. The old folks had a civic association, a hall. I remember going with my grandfather. He used to tell me, "This is *Nihonjin kai*." *Nihonjin kai* means Japanese association, yeah?

WN: Right.

AF: And that *Nihonjin kai* hall today is Hiroki Morinoue's home today. The old folks used to gather and they used to have their *shibais* or parties. Later on we used that as part of our Girl Scouts' meetings and other club meetings. I think many of those things were possible because of Dr. Saburo Hayashi. The old folks really did a lot for the community. They didn't have money, but they pulled their strength together for the community. They also built the Japanese[-language] school.

WN: Was that near the . . .

AF: The Japanese school?

WN: Yeah.

AF: It's our Imin Center today. That property was bought by all of the Japanese immigrants of the Hōlualoa community, from Wai'aha, Hōlualoa, Kamalumu, and Kahalu'u. I think Dr. Saburo Hayashi was the organizer. I understand Mrs. Hayashi was the first Japanese[-language] school teacher. Then after that they started to bring in [teachers from Japan].

You know, the issei didn't rely on (the government) like we do today. They did it on their own. When World War II started all of the Japanese buildings, temples were closed. The Japanese[-language] school no longer operated. The community just held on to the building, the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts were having their meetings. Everything was done at no charge, everything was goodwill. Finally the community got together and decided to turn it over to the county with the understanding that they build a recreation center for the whole community, and to dedicate the building to the *imin*. That's why it's called the Imin Center. Lot of people don't understand that. One day, I hope the community could probably put all the *imin*'s names on that building. It would be nice, so that the younger generation will understand that it was through the hardships of the *imin* that it was given to the county.

WN: So in your household it was your grandparents, and all your aunts and uncles, your mom and your dad, and you and your siblings.

AF: That's right.

WN: That's a lot of people. (Chuckles)

AF: There was a period of time that some of our cousins lived with us, too.

WN: Oh, wow.

AF: Yeah, it was a full house. You know the movie . . .

WN: How many stories had?

AF: We had three stories. So every time when I see that movie [i.e., television series] "Full House," (WN chuckles) I think about us, because we had cousins, aunties. But somehow it wasn't a lot of fighting or bickering, you know what I mean? When coffee season, everybody had to work. Grandpa and Grandma must have been happy because everybody is out on the coffee field. (Laughs) Talking about my grandmother, she was a person that really used psychology on all of us so that we don't feel as if we're being overworked.

WN: (Chuckles) Yeah.

AF: The old folks, yeah? There were about seven of us going to the coffee field. Because I'm the oldest, I had to pick from morning to sundown. The little ones, in the middle of the day, they get tired and play in the coffee fields. My grandmother used to put strips of rags in her pants pocket, and some rope. In the beginning, I wondered why my grandmother was doing that. In the morning when you go to the coffee field, you see all the red [i.e., coffee-laden], low branches. So the kids are all happy picking. Comes toward the afternoon, only the high branches are left with ripe berries. My grandmother, she was so clever. When she sees a ripe, ripe, high tall tree, you know what she used to do? She used to tie the rope [onto a branch], she'd let us pull it down to the next tree, tie it, and the whole tree is [bent] down for the children to pick. That's how she used her head to get the children, all of us, to pick coffee when we were little.

Coming home from the fields, she tied all the dried coffee wood in bundles. The small one takes a small bundle, the older one would carry a bigger one. We have to carry it all home for the *furo*, and the *kudo*, to cook rice. She never missed a trick, my grandmother. She really thought of everything, how to be useful. If we're going from one place to another, she'd always tell, "You never go empty-handed. You pick up the rubbish and you take it. You're walking there." She made us think that way.

Even recycling. I remember Kona Bakery used to deliver their bread about one or two o'clock in the afternoon. They were wrapped in this colorful wax paper. Those days, it's not like today; no Ziploc. We would snatch the bread for our snack. She would wipe that wax paper nicely, fold it, and put it in the drawer. She'd say, "Before you throw it away, you use it about three times, and then it's ready to be thrown away." (Chuckles) Today

we use the Ziploc so freely (laughs). If my grandmother saw all this, she would say that we were wasteful.

Today we talk about recycling and mulching, she used to take everything and she mulches in the yard, too. Dug a hole for mulching. And I remember tin cans. I often used to wonder why the tin cans were laid around the orange trees in the coffee field? Did you know that rust can is good for the soil? Today, we have to buy fertilizer. These old folks, I don't know where they learn all these tricks, but they had it in them. They really used their own mind and they survived that way.

If we have to take *o-bentō* anywhere, we used the bread paper. Yeah, she made us wrap with the bread paper. Those days, we'd think, oh, it's used paper and somebody's going to make fun of us. But no, it didn't bother her. The outhouses were something. Apples used to come in crates. My grandmother used to take all the apple papers and strung it up. They were the best because it smelled so good, apple wrappers. (Chuckles) Not like newspaper.

WN: Well, what about toilet paper?

AF: That's what we used.

WN: Oh, you used that.

AF: The apple papers, if we could get it, was high class because it smelled nice. Otherwise, it was magazines or newspaper. I don't think we had lot of ink on our hands from the newspaper. Because you could crumble it. Today, you do that, you know, all that black ink gets all over your hand. But those days I think they had good ink.

WN: Yeah.

AF: Sometimes we even used the Sears Roebuck order book [i.e., Sears Roebuck catalog]. But that wasn't enough, because Sears Roebuck order book came once a year. The newspaper was plentiful. Our job was to cut the paper, put it on the holder. (Chuckles)

WN: And outhouse was separate?

AF: Yes, outhouse was separate. I had seen a movie not too long ago, and I forgot the title. It was about Ireland. There were no outhouses. They did it in the street. It was during those years when. . . .

WN: The famine?

AF: I'm not sure. But at least we had outhouses. When I compare it with other countries, our immigrants were pretty good with their health. I'm quite sure they had lot of illness, too, but healthwise, I think they were clean. They took good care of us.

WN: So you had a big household, and your grandparents had a store. Was that not typical, or was that—were you folks unusual for that area?

AF: No, we never thought of being unusual. We thought, gee, we had to work so hard. We had the store, we had the coffee land, and we had a cotton field. You know, my grandfather must have been one of the very few in Kona that planted cotton.

WN: Where? Among the coffee fields or you had a separate field?

AF: Separate. We had coffee on the top level [i.e., *mauka* lands], and cotton on the lower level closer to [where] the Sunset subdivision [is located today]. We used to get up early in the morning before the sun rises, and then walked down to the field and waited until the sun rises to see all the white puffs. My brother and I used to recite the poem, "In Flanders Field." (WN chuckles.) I hated cotton. Cotton was very hard work compared to coffee. I'd rather pick coffee. Even with macadamia nuts, I'd rather pick coffee. My grandmother made us use a long bag for the cotton; a coffee-picking basket did not work.

WN: Too shallow, huh?

AF: Too shallow. So we had to stuff it in this long bag, and you walk from one tree to another. And by that time you're so tired. And if you didn't have a long sleeve [shirt], you get all the scratches from where it blossom out, the pods. Because it scratches you.

WN: You picked the whole pod? Or you picked . . .

AF: No, we only picked the white. We just picked the cotton. And usually cotton season was during the Christmas holiday.

WN: But that's during coffee picking [season], too, huh?

AF: Well, you may have some coffee, but coffee used to be in August, September, October, and November. Then we go into cotton picking in December and January. And I hated that. When Christmas came, I thought, oh no, we have to pick cotton. You know, we didn't have any Christmas vacation. We went into the fields.

WN: And how long did it take you to fill up one bag?

AF: Oh my god. Oh, I don't know. But for the whole day, if you really picked diligently, about two bags. You know, you have to stuff it.

WN: Did you carry the bags with you around on your body?

AF: Yeah. First, my grandmother made us this [bag] that goes around our shoulder. And it's open like this, and we put it in like this. And then they used to have us *utsusu*, or you empty it into a bigger bag. That was a job. When our picking bag filled up, then we'd take it over to the big bag, just like the way you do with coffee picking. But coffee [is heavy], so it goes right in. But cotton, it's all soft and light. You put it in and you shove it in. It takes quite a lot of time and energy.

WN: Was the cotton clean at that time? Or was there—did you folks pick seeds and things like that, rubbish, too?

AF: No, we picked the white puffs. My grandfather used to have a cotton gin to take the seeds off. Then they rolled the cotton in layers to sell. My grandmother made *zabutons* and *futons*. You see those black *zabutons* there? That was made by my grandmother, and I still enjoy them. I cherish that. She made one *futon* for me; I still have it. I don't use it because my grandmother made it special for me. She made *zabutons* and *futons* and sold to stores in Kohala, Honoka'a, and Waimea. My dad had a big covered truck. He and my grandmother used to get up in the morning, like 3:30, and drive to Waimea, Kohala, and Honoka'a to sell the *futon* and *zabuton*. That's how they used to bring the cash home during the [Great] Depression. I didn't understand what depression was those days. But according to my mother and my grandmother, they had no money and the only way to get some money was to take these items to Waimea, Honoka'a, and Kohala to the plantation stores to sell for cash.

When my mother married into the family, she became friendly with the Hawaiian ladies. And I think one of the Hawaiian ladies got her interested in *lau hala* and taught her as much as she could. My mother was very artistic, and she started making *lau hala* coffee baskets and *lau hala* hats. The hats were for the plantation workers that my grandmother could sell it cheaply, and the baskets were for the coffee pickers here. Gradually she started to make purses and [place]mats for the table. And that's how the *lau hala* business came into our general store.

WN: So that was more your mother.

AF: The *lau hala* is my mother. It came about because of the depression when my grandfather and grandmother had to take things out [to sell] and bring the cash home. So they took *lau hala* hats, besides the *futons* and *zabutons*, so that they could bring cash home from the sugar mill stores. Gradually, my grandfather and grandmother gave up the store and left it up to my mother. Later my mother and father phased out the groceries—I think it was in the late [19]50s, when the first supermarket appeared in Kona.

WN: Which market was that?

AF: If I'm not mistaken, it was KTA, down at the American Factors building in Kailua. Slowly my mother encouraged the Hawaiian and other ladies to weave. When the war [World War II] broke out, the *lau hala* clutches and slippers and other items were in demand by the soldiers in Honolulu as gifts from Hawai'i.

WN: I see. Let me just turn the . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay. I want to get into your *lau hala* a little bit later on. I still have some questions about the cotton. When you said that they went to Waimea, did they sell in the store or did they go around and sell out of their truck?

AF: I've been on the trip only once or twice as a child. I remember going with my grandmother and my father. Mostly they delivered orders in Waimea and Kohala. In Waimea I believe it was one or two prominent families who would order the *zabutons* or *futons* and then made other contacts. At times Grandmother would pick up vegetables in exchange with the goods. Then in Honoka'a, I think there was a plantation store. That's where they took the hats, to the plantation stores. And in Kohala, too. In Waimea they had few friends that she knew, like where they came from Japan. So I remember going to one or two of their homes where Grandmother would already have their orders ready and would deliver it to them.

So it wasn't only cotton. It was *lau hala*. Funny, those days none of them thought about taking coffee. I often wondered, now, as we were coffee country, why didn't they promote coffee? Today everybody wants Kona coffee. But then I realized that our coffee was contracted to American Factors in those days, or to Captain Cook [Coffee Company]. They couldn't sell coffee to anyone [else]. I think that's the reason.

WN: They had to sell everything to . . .

AF: Yes. Our coffee was all kept under the *hoshidana* all by bags. Then everything goes to American Factors. They would either come up and get it, or we would haul it down.

One year, I think this was in the early 1950s, when I started working for Hawaiian Air[lines]. I got a call, and my mother was so frantic. She didn't know what to do because they found that the coffee parchment was stolen from our *hoshidana*.

I understand my grandfather went out that morning, just strolling down his coffee field. He saw a track of parchment leading the way and over the stone wall. When he came by

the stone wall he saw one bag broken. The parchment was all loose. He got so excited, he tracked back and went down to his coffee mill, down to the *hoshidana* and sure enough in his *hoshidana* bags of coffee parchment were missing. I felt so sad to think that we worked so hard, and the coffee was to pay his debts to American Factors. I cannot remember how many bags; it could have been like ten bags or more. Those days, nobody will compensate for your loss.

So I often used to wonder, how come we come from coffee country, how come they didn't take coffee over to Waimea, Honoka'a, and Kohala to sell? They could have made more money, I think. You know, sell Kona coffee. But no, Kona coffee was not sold like that. Even in our stores, we never sold Kona coffee.

WN: Is that right?

AF: Grandmother in the morning would be roasting coffee on the frying pan.

WN: That was for your home use?

AF: Home use.

WN: The roasting.

AF: Yes, everything was for home use.

WN: So American Factors was mostly parchment?

AF: Yes, everything was parchment. We took everything down as parchment.

WN: When you said, "Pay off his debts," that means that, what, Amfac supplied the store with the goods?

AF: Yes. Because my grandfather was a general merchandiser, he would go and buy canned goods or dry goods from American Factors. And then at the end of the year, they [customers] would pay him back with coffee.

WN: I see.

AF: I remember this story as one of my uncles would say, "Oh, you better order it from here." I guess he's looking through all these order books. But my grandfather would not. His loyalty is with American Factors, so he won't. Even if it's cheap [elsewhere], he has to buy from American Factors, unless they don't have the goods. I remember my grandfather and my uncle having a big argument.

The old folks built their respect and loyalty in the community. I remember saying, "Oh, Grandpa, I heard that certain-certain person giving so much for the coffee. So maybe you should sell some coffee to him. We can get more cash." Oh no. He wouldn't do that. I think many of them had great respect for American Factors. I think the *imin* could have made a little more money, made life a little easier if they were able to sell their coffee freely.

Today, if one company is [buying at] ten cents higher, even five cents higher [per pound], everybody's going there, right? (Chuckles) You don't care. I think that's a difference with this generation. To a certain degree we should have some respect, but also we should have some leverage.

WN: Now, did customers pay your grandfather with coffee at the store?

AF: Yes, some of them did. We have a ledger that we didn't throw away. And my grandfather put everything in the ledger so neatly: ten cents, five cents, even three cents. If it's Kimura, they write "Kimura," and the date. Maybe "cracker, ten cents." And I think they had a real honor system where it wasn't said, "You got to pay me by thirty days," or sixty days. Whenever they could, and with coffee at the end of the year. I don't think there were any restrictions. They carried them on, an honor system, and whenever they could pay. At the end of the year they usually paid off with coffee, or cash if they had money. I'm surprised. Very neat bookkeeping. I've kept that hoping that the termites won't eat it. (WN chuckles.)

My grandfather had a big acreage of coffee and cotton, he used a lot of working people. So he built many little houses. I would say like coffee shacks. But every house had a water tank, an outhouse, and even a *furo*. One kitchen, one bedroom. When my aunts were growing up, our dinner table was like, oh, maybe from that wall to here.

WN: About, what, ten feet?

AF: Yeah! Long dinner table and benches. And my grandmother used to cook for all the single workingmen. Two, three of them. They had their place. They come to have [dinner]. My grandma used to brew sake under the *hoshidana*. At dinner she served sake. (Chuckles) My mother was sent down to get some sake (chuckles). She said one of the workingmen was missing. He was in that warehouse all drunk. (Laughs) Was so funny when she told us the story.

(Laughter)

AF: Grandma was an energetic person. Both she and Grandpa really had a heart for people, today we would say, "homeless." I guess they're from their *tokoro*, yeah? You know, where they came from [in Japan]. So she takes care of them, finds a place. I don't think

my grandparents had money. But they provided a place to stay, so they can live in and they can work. And in exchange she'd feed them until they were able to move out on their own. I've often wondered as a little girl, oh, all these young Japanese men working. So my aunts really had to clean, cook, do a lot of housework with my grandmother in the big house.

WN: You said there was a warehouse on the property?

AF: Oh, we had a big warehouse on the north side of the present building. Finally, we knocked it down because it was so old and we never used it, and we were afraid it might fall. Mother used to have *lau hala* classes in one of those old warehouses during the wartime. She held a *lau hala* weaving class where ladies of all nationalities came to learn. We had an *udon* grinder and they learned how to clean the *lau hala*. Then after a while the ladies became their own craftsmen, they could do their own at home.

Then in the late [19]50s, when the supermarket came in, we tore off that top story and we expanded the length of the store, which is [how it is] today.

WN: So why did you have to—why did you get rid of the second story?

AF: At that time my mother and the rest of us felt that the *nikai* [second floor] was so dangerous. It was old, yeah? But today, anything could be done. I keep thinking, oh, we should have kept that because it was so nice. The day we tore the *nikai*, my grandfather went across to the garage, and I think he was very sad. My poor grandfather built this house and he saw his empire coming down in just one day. It must have took him months to build. In one day the top coming down, flying down. We were so afraid because of the upstairs, we didn't use it that much. It used to be a bedroom for my aunts and uncles. Then as we grew up, after the war, my grandmother used to have her religious group for services, because they had no place to go. The *o-tera* was shut down [because of World War II] and they had no place to worship. It was a big hall so we could have meetings or parties. I guess we all felt that it was dangerous for people to be walking up there.

WN: This is late [19]50s, you said?

AF: Yeah, I think was the [19]50s. Because that's when the supermarket came in.

WN: So tell me, before these changes what was sold in the store in your grandfather's time?

AF: Canned goods, dry goods, and Japanese food like *ame*, *iriko*, etc. I love the Japanese *ame* and I would put chopstick in there. My brother and I would eat the *ame*.

WN: This is candy?

AF: It's syrup. It's in a can. Today you don't have it. We used to put the chopstick, yeah? It's like honey, but different. It was a thick syrup.

Used to have corned beef, Vienna sausage. Maybe it's not the same label it used to be. Sardines. Sardines was popular. Codfish came in boxes. We used to wrap [individually] in newspaper and sell it. Today you did that (chuckles) the Board of Health would get after you, right?

(Laughter)

WN: So it came in long boxes?

AF: Yeah, in crate.

WN: Oh. And how many fish in one?

AF: Oh, there were quite a bit. And big codfish, all flat.

WN: Already salted and everything.

AF: Yeah. And I don't know if flies came or what. (WN chuckles.) Really. Today, my goodness, everything's packaged. Codfish was so cheap those days. I swear it was wrapped in newspaper. Potatoes, Irish potato, onions. Grandfather used to have rafters hanging all kinds of stuff, like lanterns and umbrellas. He used to sell men's undershirts, overcoats. The kind of overcoats that they were selling, it's just like you were living in Alaska. I remember they had black overcoats. And I think those days must have been cold. As a child, getting up early in the morning, going to Waimea, my grandmother made me wear those overcoats.

They carried everything, from dishes, clothing, soaps. I used to pump kerosene outside. They'd come with a one-gallon [can]. The kerosene pump was outside. Salt salmon came in big barrels. My grandfather had a nail on a slab of wood, and I'd go in and I'd just pick it up with the nail, poke the salmon, pick it up, and wrap it in the newspaper. It wasn't pieces, it was a whole slab. Today, if we can afford to buy a whole slab that's something. But those days everybody bought the whole slab [of salmon], whole slab of codfish.

(Someone calls. Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay. You were talking about the kerosene. You folks also sold gasoline, too?

AF: I understand across from the present store, right at the turn where you make your turn to go to Hōlualoa, right there there's a piece of a concrete slab left. That used to be part of the gasoline station that my grandfather had owned. Very, very early days. I have a

picture of my brother Morris and I, we were only about three and maybe two years old. He's on this little choo-choo—those horse. We used to call that choo-choo horse or whatever. He's on that and I'm right beside. That's the only picture taken by the service station.

WN: So that was really early, then.

AF: Yeah. Then the Hualālai Garage was built across from us, so our little gas pump station must have been demolished in the early 1930s. Most of the stores in Kona had a little kerosene pump outside of their store. I think the kerosene companies used to come and fill it up, and then we would just pump the kerosene into individual gallons for the customers for their home use.

WN: That they would bring? They would supply [the container]?

AF: Yeah. After the wood stove, the kerosene stove came into Kona. There was no electricity, no gas. We didn't have gas or electricity till, what, late [19]40s. Late [19]40s or [19]50s. So many of them started to buy kerosene stove, whether it's from Sears Roebuck, or I don't know where, and they had to put kerosene in their little tanks, and then use it. So that was the reason why we sold kerosene.

WN: You had kerosene lamp, too, right?

AF: Oh yes, and kerosene lamp, too. That's right, yes. Because we had *sage ranpu*, the ones that you carry instead of flashlight. You know, flashlight came later. But early days, I understand they used *sage ranpu* and you walk with it.

WN: *Sage ranpu*, what is that?

AF: That's the way they told us, that's *sage ranpu* ["hanging lamp"], but it's—*sageru*, yeah? [To hang.] The lantern.

WN: Yeah.

AF: I think that's their pidgin word [*ranpu* = lamp] of the old folks. You go *sageru* [i.e., hang] the lamp.

WN: So carry?

AF: You carry. It's a lamp that has a handle. They would use a lot of that. It's a lantern. And we used a lot of that in later years to go fishing, camping. But during our days, before the flashlight came in, my aunties used to say, "*sage ranpu*." When you say, "*sage ranpu*" you knew it was the lantern that you carry.

WN: Right, right. Oh, okay. Did your grandmother sell any of the *zabutons* and *futons* in the store?

AF: Yes, she did that, too. *Zabuton, futons*, and she had the ladies around her area come and help her. I used to help her thread it and she used to tell me, "Put the needle here and take it out."

WN: So the store sold not just foodstuffs . . .

AF: No, all kinds.

WN: . . . but all kinds of things. It was a general store.

AF: It was a general store. Everything, from candies, because I'm quite sure when we were growing up we must have snatched a lot of candies, you know, when they're not looking. (Laughs) So they had those red *ichigo* candy.

WN: Oh, the coconut?

AF: Yeah, today it's called coconut balls. But we used to call it *ichigo* candies. And we used to have this long licorice. "Shoestring," we used to call it when we were kids. In later years I remember Baby Ruth, Milky Way. I think they still have it today. But those were some of the old brands.

WN: Anything refrigerated kind?

AF: No, I cannot remember anything refrigerated. One of my aunts bought a little icebox where you have to buy ice and put it in. Those were the only times that the icebox was used so you could chill something to eat. I remember my aunts making ice cream for us, and we have to eat it up. Of course, we don't mind, you know, eating it all up. [They made it] with a lot of Hawaiian salt. When one of my aunts came home from Honolulu on one of her first trips, as little kids, we'd wait for her *o-miyage* of those link sausages; today we call it wieners. But it was all in links. Also, a big slab of ham. Oh my god, so *mezurashii* and it's such a treat for us. We would ravish it. And I don't remember my grandmother putting them in the icebox. I think these things were all in the safe. Of course, you don't keep it for weeks. Maybe couple days, but even couple days I don't think it was in the icebox. I don't think it got spoiled. Bacon, we slice it, even if it gets moldy you wipe the mold (chuckles) and then . . .

WN: Bacon you didn't refrigerate either?

AF: I don't think so. I remember those things were kept in the safe, or hung in a cool area. You just slice and cook. The icebox, when it first started, was to put the ice on the top. They have a box, yeah? And you put the ice and then your food all went under there.

WN: And that's only home-use things?

AF: For home use. Not in the store. The store I don't think carried anything chilled. Not while I was growing [up]. Later, I remember Mother having those Coca-Cola chill box in the store where you plug it in and they chilled the water.

WN: Yeah, yeah.

AF: I think that was in the store after growing up, going to high school.

WN: Coca-Cola bottles.

AF: Yeah, yeah (chuckles) the Coca-Cola bottles all sitting in the water.

WN: In the water. I remember that.

AF: Yeah. (Laughs) Then later, we got a refrigerator for home use. Never in the store. The only thing I remember is that Coca-Cola chill box. We never sold ice cream. So ice cream was a treat to us. I remember the early, early days, ice cream was only sold at Kailua at one of the stores near American Factors. So when my dad and grandfather went to Kailua, we jumped on the truck to get our ice cream cone. Sit in front of the old Akona Store. Of course, it's no longer there. Once a month maybe when they go down to Kailua, we have a treat.

WN: I think Oshima's sold ice cream, huh?

AF: By the time that we were in the middle grades we were able to buy ice cream in Hōlualoa. Near the Japanese school there was this Ota Store, and this man used to bake the best *anpan*. And they used to make ice cake. Boy, we used to save all our pennies.

WN: This is in a paper cup?

AF: No, he would just pick it up and give it to us in a little paper or whatever.

WN: There was no stick or anything?

AF: No! (WN chuckles.) Oh, it was so good. I think it was three cents. You know, for one small cube. So we used to save all our pennies.

WN: So actually, then, your folks' store wasn't a place that kids would hang out too much because you folks didn't sell—well, you folks sold candy, though.

AF: When we were growing up, this is like in the [19]40s already, early [19]40s that we would be teenagers or late [19]40s. It wasn't a place where just kids would hang around

to drink and eat. But it was a place for my younger brothers, all their friends would come on the weekends. We had a big truck; my dad used to take them to the beach on the weekends. Or if they'd have a basketball game they would ask my dad to drive them to Waimea or Kealahou. He used to drive the truck and the boys used to all pile in. During my kid brother days his friends would come and help with their chores. They had to finish their chores first, so they all helped before going to the games or to the beach.

It was not every day where kids would hang around eating or drinking or loafing around. It was only when they had something in mind to do. They would help my brothers finish their chores and would all go together. Because I was the eldest in the family, I had no time for that. I was always busy. As soon as I was able to cook, I was helping in the kitchen, cooking and washing. After high school I got very much interested in helping with Girl Scouts. When they had summer workshops or whatever, I'd go and help. I didn't have much time to play around.

WN: Being the oldest girl you must have had a lot of chores to do.

AF: Yes, I did. But I don't regret it, you know, all the hard work and whatever, living with my aunties, uncles, my grandparents. I think it made me appreciate more things today. All the wisdoms, I used to think, hogwash to their old stories. But it made a lot of sense now. I'm grateful for that. I think it helped me. It's just that age creeps up faster than you think, that's the thing that slows you down today.

My sister and I did not realize what aging is until seeing my mother, who is ninety-four years old. We never had that experience, of people getting old. Grandmother never made us feel that she was old. She walked up many flights of stairs until she died. She had to come upstairs to have her meals. When we were kids the kitchen and most of our living quarters were downstairs, and then the bathhouse and outhouse was closer down to the ground. But later on when we got flushing toilet and refrigerator, everything was moved up to the store [level]. So Grandmother had to come up all the time. She never complained, and she never had that kind of problem that we're going through with my mother. These old folks, I give them a lot of credit.

WN: When did your grandma die?

AF: My grandma died at the age of ninety-one, and she must have passed away maybe thirty-one years ago. I must have been fifty—I was still working for Hawaiian [Airlines], my grandfather passed away two years before Grandma at age ninety-one, too.

WN: In the [19]70s, then actually. Because you were born '26, right?

AF: Nineteen twenty-six.

- WN: So if you're in your fifties, then that would be in the mid-[19]70s.
- AF: In the [19]70s, wait now, '50 the house came down, '60, '70, if it's '70, '80, '90, that's forty years—no, thirty-something, no?
- WN: Thirty.
- AF: Thirty years.
- WN: Yeah.
- AF: Yeah, it's over thirty years ago, she must have passed away. I remember she was ninety-one. My grandfather went first, and then my grandmother.
- WN: Okay, because your dad passed away not too long . . .
- AF: My dad passed . . .
- WN: . . . pretty early.
- AF: My dad and my grandmother was only about one or two years apart.
- WN: Okay, so your dad passed away in '72.
- AF: Okay. Then my grandmother passed away in '70.
- WN: [Nineteen] seventy.
- AF: Yeah.
- WN: Good, we got it.
- AF: Two years. I think was about two years apart if I'm not mistaken.
- WN: Okay. And everything in the store was—you folks had to help them? The customers?
- AF: Oh yes.
- WN: They couldn't take anything off the shelves?
- AF: No, no. It was mostly helping, I remember. If they say they want one pound of potatoes or two pounds of potatoes, we had to weigh it. Grandfather had a long table where we'd put everything on it, and they had this kind of cash register go, "Ping!" and it opens up. Makes lot of noise. (AF imitates sound of the register.) "Kara!" So people cannot steal because if you hit the cash register, it makes noise and everybody hears it.

WN: (Chuckles) Was this like a big cast-iron kind, you know, the iron kind?

AF: Yeah, it was all like this, yeah? With the glass on the top and like that, and it has numbers, and when you press it the drawer underneath with the money comes out. I don't know what we did with the cash register. But you know the scale? I kept it, an old one. And about a year ago HPA [Hawaii Preparatory Academy] or one of the schools borrowed it for their play. They said that's exactly what they wanted, where you put the weights and you balance it.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 35-14-1-00; SIDE ONE

WN: Okay. So you said it was mostly helping.

AF: Yeah. If they said they want one bubble gum candy. (Chuckles) Funny, yeah? I keep thinking, today you cannot use your [bare] hands. But those days I swear we must have used our hands, just our fingers and just give it to them or put it in a paper bag. Not like you have to use clips to pick it up. Many things were wrapped with the plain manila paper. Bags were very scarce. Today we put everything [in] bags. But I don't think bags were plentiful that time.

WN: So did you tie with string? Wrap around and tie with string?

AF: Some things we tie with string. There was no Scotch tape; it was string and wrapping [paper], whether it be codfish, we wrap it, you would tie it or whatever.

WN: What kind? The kind red butcher paper?

AF: It was something like butcher paper, but it was plain like manila brown paper that came in rolls. We would have a spool of string to tie it. That's what we did.

WN: When you say "us," who actually worked in the store?

AF: My grandfather was the boss, then my mother. But when my mother was raising all of us, my oldest aunty in the Kimura family was the manager; she ran the store. When my mother was able to run the store, she left and she opened her own shop in Hilo. My mother told me that my grandfather had a way of pricing. She taught me how to do that but I cannot use it. It's all done in Japanese. He had his own method.

WN: By "pricing" you mean get the wholesale price and put in the markup.

AF: Yeah. He has the wholesale price.

WN: Oh, you mean zero to—I mean, one to nine?

AF: I think so.

WN: Oh, I see what you mean.

AF: That was my grandfather. She said when she first came here my grandfather taught her, and that's how he priced everything. You look at it, then you know the [wholesale] cost and how much you can sell it for. I have it written down. But I cannot use it. I tried, but it's too complicated for me.

WN: You mean number one is a certain character, number two is a certain character.

AF: Yeah.

WN: Is it *katakana*?

AF: In *katakana* she taught me.

WN: Right. And you don't want the customer to know what the [wholesale] cost was.

AF: Yeah, right. But he had his own way of doing it. Maybe if they had taught me in my early years, it would probably stick in my head. (WN chuckles.) He must have been quite a self-taught man. I admired him. I remember, he would never come to the dinner table without taking his bath. He'd come home from the store or the coffee field, he takes a bath, and then he'd always read the newspaper.

WN: This is what, *Kona Echo*?

AF: Whether it was *Kona Echo* or *Hawaii Hochi* or *Nippu Jiji*, whatever. He read the paper, and then at the dinner table he was always clean, ready to enjoy his glass of sake; he always had sake. Never rushed. And he would daydream. I guess this is what we say today, "cocktailing." He would cocktail by himself. Poor guy. And all us kids making lot of noise. (WN chuckles.) He would drink his sake. If we were lucky to have fish he would have *sashimi*, or he would just *tsumamu* whatever. I was always cleaning up the table, wash the dishes. I used to tell my grandfather, "Hurry up!" because I want to clean up. Then he's having his *o-chazuke* leisurely. I think this was the good part of his life. He made sure that by the end of the day, he wasn't going to rush around. He just relaxed and enjoyed his sake and his meal. I must say that my grandfather lived differently from our lives today, yeah? We're always rushing around. He would daydream just like he's going to build his empire, you know. And I always tell my grandfather, "Too late to build your empire already."

(Laughter)

AF: In Japanese I used to tease him. But hey, that's good for the health. He came from Japan and he did a lot. We have to give him credit. We never gave him enough credit for that. We've never done anything, you know, I always think about that. We have to take our hat off to him. He acquired about sixty acres of coffee and cotton land.

WN: All adjoining?

AF: All adjoining.

WN: What were the store hours?

AF: Well, I think the store hours were never set like today. As soon as they got up they must have opened the store until late in the night, with the last customer, whether it was seven o'clock or eight o'clock, I remember working late hours, people coming to the store. There was no electricity, in the beginning, but they had lamps from the ceiling.

WN: Kerosene lamps?

AF: Kerosene lamps they just [hung from the] ceiling. They tried to accommodate all the farmers because during the day many of them are working in the coffee field. If the store was closed, they would holler and we would go and open the store. I think most of the stores were like that. Of course, in later years, we have our store hours. But during those days I think their hours were never set. There was no such thing like, "We're closed." I don't think they ever said that. It's anytime they would open and help them.

WN: Was it seven days a week that it was open?

AF: Yes, I'm quite sure it was seven days a week. It was no "Sundays" like today. Even on Sundays we all had to pick coffee or go in the cotton field. And the only time that I remember getting cleaned up and dressed up is like on *o-shōgatsu*. My grandmother and grandfather used to take us to the temple on the first day.

WN: New Year's?

AF: New Year's Day blessing or something. But that kind of petered away, too. I remember as a little one, going with my grandmother and grandfather, New Year's Day, all dressed up.

WN: To [Kona] Daifukuji [Soto Mission]?

AF: We used to go to Daifukuji in later years when we had a vehicle. But the early days they used to walk up to O-daisan. That was only walking distance. So Grandma used to walk

us up. Then during wartime, all the [Buddhist] temples got closed. I remember Daifukuji, the hall was all dirt floor when we first went for some kind of a gathering. We all sat on the dirt floor with *goza*.

WN: Now, the hall is where the hall is now?

AF: Yeah. That section was all dirt floor, packed down. And they used to have a plank to go up on the stage when we had to do some dances or to perform. Those were the good old days. You kind of cherish those moments. It was a special event for us. We'd all get dressed up and we'd look forward, and that's when we'd see all of our new friends from Honalo, Keauhou, and Kainaliu. I remember the Kaneko and the Deguchi families. The girls were about my age.

WN: So how often would you go to Daifukuji?

AF: Once a month. When the Sunday school first started at Daifukuji, I remember Rev. Nakayama—because many didn't have cars—he would come out to Hōlualoa to hold Sunday school. We used to go up to one of the *o-miya* halls. Today, we don't have that building. But there used to be a hall next to the *o-miya*. As cars were provided, we would go to Daifukuji for special events, like my first *chigo*. My brother and I marched from Kainaliu town, from Oshima Store. We all got ready at the old Kimura Store.

WN: From Kainaliu to where?

AF: Daifukuji.

WN: Daifukuji.

AF: We all marched. Of course, those days didn't have many cars so you could take up the whole road to walk. I think that was my first big event at Daifukuji, the first *chigo*. So my mother dressed us up, my brother wore kimono, too. We marched over to the temple, got our blessings. Those days we don't know what it was, but we were just happy to (chuckles) march.

WN: I think I'll ask you a little bit more about Daifukuji maybe the next time. I just want to finish up with your grandfather's time. Who came into the store? Who were the clientele in the early days?

AF: I'm quite sure many of the farmers. You know, farmers that lived around [the area], and many of the old Hawaiian families. According to my mother, the sugar mill, the Kona Development [Company], before it closed down in 1926. Many of the sugar mill workers and their families were patronizing him. During my mother's days, because of the *lau hala*, she dealt with a lot of Hawaiians. I remember going up with her and my dad,

driving up the road, visiting the Hawaiian families, picking up the *lau hala* and taking their canned goods and orders for them. They didn't have cars, so we would deliver it.

WN: Did you do that your grandfather's time, too?

AF: Yeah, I think he did. My dad did a lot of delivering. He went all the way to Kalaoa. One of them was the Mahi family, to pick up the hats, take whatever. Sometimes they want cash, sometimes exchange of goods.

WN: So the Hawaiian ladies would make the hats?

AF: Yeah.

WN: So it wasn't for raw *lau hala*? I mean, you know, *lau hala* rolled up?

AF: No, no. They actually wove their *lau hala* items. One lady used to weave *lau hala* floor mats. She used to have a pile like that in her house. She used to tell my mother, "Take whatever you want from there," you know, in Hawaiian. She used to talk a lot of Hawaiian. "*Kelakēla*." Then Mama says, "No, this much this time." But today, nobody weaves *lau hala* floor mats. These Hawaiian ladies were very gentle and warm. And I enjoyed them, too, because they treated us like their own children. I think one lady wanted to adopt my sister. My mother said, "No, no, no. You cannot." One couple didn't have any children. So they wanted to adopt my kid sister. I told my mother, "Thank lord, you didn't do that." (Chuckles) But she says they were very warm. They were very nice, too. They were good Hawaiians. We had very good relationship.

(Telephone rings.)

WN: Why don't we stop here?

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 35-17-2-00

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Alfreida Kimura Fujita (AF)

Kailua, Kona, Hawai'i

July 28, 2000

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Alfreida Fujita on July 28, 2000 and we're at her home in Kailua, Kona, Hawai'i. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay Alfreida, let's start today. I want to start by asking you what it was like growing up in the Hōlualoa community. This is the good fun part (chuckles).

AF: I grew up with my aunts and uncles living in a big house with my grandparents and my parents. We walked to school, and we would chit-chat. In the morning, we never played on the roadside because we had to get to school on time. But coming home after school from Japanese[-language] school, it was different. We'd look around the roadside for thimbleberries, rose apple or mountain apple, or guavas. We didn't encounter too much animosity growing up together with other nationalities.

The holidays meant a lot to us. New Year's was a special day. Hōlualoa was a real multicultural community. We lived among many different races, and we did many things together in the neighborhood. I remember the boys playing the knife games. Today you don't dare do that. You make a big round circle with a string. The boys would do their certain skill with the knife. Some showed off.

I grew up doing things with my aunties and uncles. It was more family togetherness. We didn't have anything like television; we couldn't afford to buy things. We picked seeds on the roadside, and we'd save them to do some craft things.

As a teenager, going to movies at the Hōlualoa Theater was a treat. I never went alone; always as a group. We enjoyed visiting our neighbors to sing songs and exchange stories. My childhood days was very simple. It wasn't like, oh we have to go someplace to have fun. It was a joy to visit my girlfriends' home and do some embroidery or stitchery; picking guavas and mountain apples from the fields. We would just go in the

coffee field and we'd play with simple things, like getting a guava branch for sticks, or whatever. As a child I enjoyed pretending to play like a family, you know they used to call it *mamagoto*.

If we had free time besides picking coffee, we'd go to the beach. We'd all pile in—if it's a truck or whatever. Just like sardines, four or five of us would all pile in and we'd go and swim. I grew up with many different nationalities because of my grandfather having the store and the coffee farm. Grandpa had Filipinos and Puerto Ricans working on our coffee fields. Also, many Portuguese lived in Hōlualoa. We'd visit their homes. Their Portuguese bread was the best; they also grew grapes. There were many grapevines in Hōlualoa.

WN: And did they have kids?

AF: Yeah, so we'd go and we'd snatch the grapes. Hōlualoa was very much like what it is today, except today we've lost all the old people. But the town itself is quite as it was. I enjoyed the Filipino doughnuts made by my Filipino girlfriend's mom, and the bananas cooked in codfish by the Puerto Rican families.

WN: Did the Puerto Rican and Portuguese families have coffee fields, too?

AF: Yes, and they struggled like the rest of us, too. They all worked hard to survive with their families. They had quite a number of children, too. The Japanese families were very close. Every once a month on the twentieth, we all looked forward to going to O-daisan. We'd all go with the neighborhood children or we'd walk with our parents and our grandparents about a quarter mile up to O-daisan. My grandmother was a very religious person and enjoyed taking us to O-daisan.

WN: Where was that?

AF: This was in the back of Mrs. Kurashige's home at Kamalumu. All the Kamalumu families would gather. It was once a month. Besides being religious, it was also a social gathering for us. The kids would play, and I think it taught us something: a little bit of discipline and behavior. The refreshments were just plain *musubi*, *kōkō*, tofu or whatever. Once in a while, we'd have something special like *o-senbei*, oh it was such a big treat. It was the twentieth [of each month].

WN: Once a month?

AF: Once a month. It's just like Kannon-*sama*, it's on the seventeenth, right?

WN: Right.

AF: O-daisan was situated in every little district, so people could walk; you didn't have to travel miles. It was within a three-mile radius so everybody walked.

It was a little community and we all knew the families in Hōlualoa. We knew everyone and we trusted everyone, so if we were invited to go to the beach or just for a ride, we'd hop on and go. Coming home from school, we'd browse around the road, we'd pick thimbleberries, put it all in this long little grassy thing and we'd show off that we found so many thimbleberries (laughs).

WN: They don't have thimbleberries anymore?

AF: I don't think so. Maybe there's one or two bushes, but not as plentiful. Thimbleberries, rose apples, mountain apples, were plentiful. Today it's hard to find guavas along the roadside. We'd remember the sweet guava tree, everybody would keep an eye on it all year round (laughs).

Our life was very simple. I don't think there was much peer pressure like today. We sort of all blended in together and then tried to take care and help each other. Yes, sometimes there may be one person that may have a little jealousy of someone.

WN: Even because your family had a store, you still felt equal to everybody?

AF: I didn't think that I was better off because we had the store. If I could share something I would do that. I think we all grew up doing that. Of course Grandpa and Grandma made us understand that we're not any better off than anybody else. We all have to work for whatever. So in that sense I think I'm real fortunate that I've had the upbringing, not only by my parents, but my grandparents, aunties, and uncles. I remember my first day of school my mother wasn't able to take me to school because I guess she had other children to take care of, and the store. My aunt took me. I was so worried and I must have cried the first day (laughs). My aunt took me and she came for me. I have these real precious moments and memories of my aunties. I feel very close to my aunties because we all lived together until they left after their high school graduation. I was fortunate that they took me to some of the events and explained to me about high school: the yearbook, school yells, and school songs. While picking coffee as a little girl, six, seven years old, my aunties in the coffee fields teaching me their school yells and the alma mater (laughs). I guess they tried to groom me for my high school days.

WN: Were you involved in that? Cheerleading?

AF: No (laughs), I wasn't that aggressive in high school.

(Laughter)

WN: What was it like? You know, you went from Hōlualoa School and then seventh grade you went to Konawaena. How did you get to Konawaena? Isn't that kind of far?

AF: Bus transportation was provided for us. Attending Konawaena was exciting for me. I got to wear shoes; at Hōlualoa School I was barefooted. I made sure I was dressed properly for Konawaena.

So that was quite a change and quite an adjustment for me during the first year. It wasn't like Hōlualoa School, where you knew practically everybody. Konawaena included elementary to high school. You'd see upper classmates. It was quite an experience. I think I may have been half-scared, but I sort of enjoyed it. You met other students from all over Kona. I knew a few because during my Hōlualoa School days, May Day programs were held once a year with all the North Kona schools. All schools gathered at Hōlualoa; students came from Kailua, Keauhou, and Honokōhau Schools. During this time we got to know some of the children. I kept in touch with a few. We would write letters—today it's out of this world to think of writing a letter to someone that lives in Keauhou, but we would write letters to keep our friendship. Knowing some of them gave me a little confidence at Konawaena. Changing classes was new to us, but, you kind of think, you're growing up in this world and you're getting somewhere.

(Laughter)

WN: I wonder, okay, you grow up in Hōlualoa and then you went to this place where different children from different areas of Kona, were there differences in the areas like for example, how you speak? Was one area considered more country than another area?

AF: Yes. The students from Hōnaunau spoke Japanese language better than any of us. We all went to Japanese school until the war broke out, but I noticed that the Hōnaunau girls spoke fluent Japanese. The Central Kona area: Captain Cook, Kealakekua, they were the big-town students. So, I think they had the best shoes and the best dresses. Most of us understood each other and respected each other's lifestyle.

WN: So the girls that you said were better in Japanese, did you know if they went to Japan?

AF: No, but maybe an older brother or older sister were educated in Japan, because they were very good [in Japanese language].

WN: Maybe they had a good teacher down there or something.

AF: It may be.

WN: Yeah.

- AF: In Hōlualoa, because my grandparents had the store, we spoke chop suey language, you know, pidgin language. Portuguese, Puerto Rican or Hawaiian, all mixed up.
- WN: You were saying, you know like doing things like walking to school and having some time to play, but you said coffee season you couldn't. Was it really different during coffee season?
- AF: Oh yes. Coffee season, we'd never go anywhere. From early in the morning we'd go out to pick coffee; it was like we had to do it. We never say, "Oh, we don't want to pick coffee." We'd get up and it's our responsibility, it's part of our life. We'd pick every day; there's no Sundays. If it rained, there were other chores, like bagging all the coffee underneath the *hoshidana* to take it to American Factors. When we were done with our coffee picking, we'd help families in Kainaliu. I remember going to my relative, the Takeguchis, near Konawaena School. The whole crew, my brothers and even my grandmother, we'd all go and help pick their coffee.
- WN: You'd live over there?
- AF: No, no, fortunately we had a station wagon, so we'd all pile in six or seven of us.
- WN: So Hōlualoa [coffee] would ripen first?
- AF: During those days, yes.
- WN: Because of what? Altitude or. . . .
- AF: I don't know whether it's the altitude or the type of coffee. The type of coffee was quite different [depending on the region]. It was more Hawaiian coffee on the north side, and when they ripen it's easier to pick. And back then the trees were trees [with many branches].
- WN: How tall?
- AF: Tall! We'd have to use six-foot ladders to get up. And even going up, I have to use my hoop to pull it [a branch] down. Yeah, it was tall. My grandpa believed in making the coffee tree big for more production. That was his idea, so if the tree was loaded with coffee, sometimes you had to move your ladder four times or more around the tree to pick the red cherries clean, you cannot just pick it a little here and jump to the next tree. You pick all the red out, and then you move. So if you had a tree with about twenty branches, it was hard work.
- WN: It's the first time I heard the term "Hawaiian coffee." Is that a different strain of coffee, a different type of coffee?

AF: I think it's called the Arabic . . .

WN: The Arabic.

AF: The Hawaiian coffee is easier to pick because the coffee comes loosely in bunches. The other type, my grandpa used to call that American coffee or Brazilian. They're all tight in clumps, clustered and it's harder to pick.

WN: So Hawaiian coffee would be more spread out on the branch.

AF: Yes, it's like this, but it's not fully clustered like that.

WN: I see.

AF: You know, it's more loosely.

WN: Easier to pick.

AF: Easier to pick.

WN: Quality wise, which is better?

AF: Quality, I think it's okay.

WN: Both the same?

AF: I think so.

(Taping stops, then resumes)

WN: Okay, you know you grew up during the depression time. I don't know if we talked about this last time, but did you notice it being very difficult? That's probably all you knew though, that was your little girl time.

AF: I think it was in 1930s, yeah?

WN: Yeah.

AF: I know money was very scarce. They never gave children money to spend like what we do today. During the depression days my grandparents and my parents must have worked hard. My grandmother and my father would take all the *lau hala* hats, wove by local families, to all the sugar plantation stores in Kohala, Honoka'a, and Pa'auilo. They would drop off the hats and they'd get cash in return. They'd take maybe two, three, four dozen hats to the plantation store because they needed those hats for their cane workers on the plantation. Those days, hats were very cheap. Today, they're so precious.

Coffee-picking baskets were exchanged for groceries by our local weavers. The coffee baskets were for the coffee pickers here in Kona. Many stores must have carried charge accounts. I found a ledger that my grandfather kept and it's so interesting because he'd have [entries] for ten cents, five cents, three cents. He hardly had five dollars or ten dollars on the charge. Their charges [were for] fifty cents, ten cents, [buying] salt, or cracker, or salmon. They had it all down in charges, and I realize now that it was hard times for all.

We were young so we didn't need much, but my aunts and uncles were just beginning to graduate from high school and they were all leaving for Honolulu to go to school. All of us really helped a lot around the store and in the field. We had a big acreage of coffee and we had a big acreage in cotton. And cotton is something that I didn't enjoy at all. I did it because we had to, we'd get up at four o'clock in the morning and walk down the field and just as the sun was rising we began picking as it gets so hot in the middle of the day. My grandfather used to gin the cotton, too. My grandmother made *futon*, *zabuton* to sell.

WN: Did people give your mother folks *lau hala* in payment for store goods?

AF: Yes. And this is how it [the *lau hala* business] started.

WN: When did they start *lau hala*, do you remember?

AF: During the depression. At first, *lau hala* items were basic: hats, baskets, and mats. The Hawaiians used to have mats in their houses all piled up; we'd bring two or three home for the store.

WN: You'd sell the *lau hala* in the store that you got from the Hawaiian families, which they exchanged for groceries. Oh, I see.

AF: Right. They'd order five-pound flour, cornstarch, onions, codfish, etc. My mother would pack it all up and Dad would deliver to the Hawaiian family homes and exchange the groceries for the *lau hala* items.

WN: I see.

AF: That's the way it was.

WN: So it was bartering, it wasn't cash then.

AF: Yes.

WN: Who bought the *lau hala* from your mother folks?

AF: Many of the hats were taken to the plantation stores. You know, Dad and Mom, or Grandma, would go to Kohala, Honoka'a, and as far as 'O'okala. They had big stores there. *Lau hala* hats were in such demand by the plantation workers. My grandmother would take all her *zabutons*, and *futons* and sold to families in Waimea. Especially Waimea because it was very cold those days.

WN: Right. Did they ever sell *lau hala* in the store?

AF: Yes, a few items. Especially the baskets. Everybody wanted baskets to pick coffee. My mother was very good with her hands. I don't think any of us can do what she did. When she married into the Kimuras, an elderly Hawaiian lady talked to her about *lau hala* and taught her. As the years went by, she created many *lau hala* items: handbags, slippers, etc. She started to create her hats, like the "Poncie Ponce" hat, or the beachcomber hat for the famous detective show . . .

WN: "Hawai'i Five-O?"

AF: She made that *lau hala* hat for him, you know, like the beachcomber style.

WN: For Jack Lord?

AF: Jack Lord.

WN: No kidding (laughs)?

AF: Yes. My mother was very creative, and she knew how to do it, and she could shape it the way that they wanted it. It was nothing to her. She enjoyed doing it and she made people happy. So every once in a while, people would come up and say, "Is your mother still living? I don't know if she remembers me, but twenty or thirty years ago she did this." Mother was that way. Her lifestyle, she took things as it came, and she pleased her customers. She made them happy, and fortunately the *lau hala* business is still going on today because of her. I don't think any of us are like her (laughs). The workmanship changes, because you can't have the same people, you can't have my mother's work anymore, too.

During the 1950s, with the supermarkets coming in, mother slowly phased out the groceries and just carried Kimura Lauhala Shop. She also challenged herself when the first airport got built. She opened her Kimura Lauhala Shop in the Kona Inn area. We were fortunate that people really took care of her. The Kona Inn rented her a place and they had extended a lot of *aloha* to her.

WN: When was this that she came down to Kailua?

AF: I think, let's see, when was that old airport built? Nineteen fifties [1949].

WN: So when it first opened she went in.

AF: Yes.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

AF: That's when our *lau hala* products were exposed a lot. Today, people would drive up the hill [to the original Kimura Lauhala Shop] in Hōlualoa. During those days, transportation was not that simple, so Mother decided to open a shop in Kailua. I think she worked every day, seven days a week, down in Kailua right next to the tennis court. Today there's no more tennis court. She, and Hawai'i Visitors Bureau, and Orchids Hawai'i were located next to each other. When my father died, Mother returned to Hōlualoa.

WN: Who was watching the store up at Hōlualoa?

AF: My father and some of us until he passed away

WN: When was that?

AF: I'm trying to think, when Dad passed away. About twenty-eight years ago, I think.

WN: Nineteen seventy-two?

AF: I think so. When he passed away, Mother's lease was going to expire at Kailua. Fortunately, everything worked out well.

WN: Down in Kailua, you mean?

AF: Yeah, she had a lease. So she decided to move back to Hōlualoa. That was the best thing she did because shortly after that, with the new airport, Kailua became too hectic. Many people, the old-timers, all knew her and we had many repeat customers looking for her up in Hōlualoa.

WN: People living here or these are like tourists?

AF: Well, local *kama'āinas* from Honolulu, Kaua'i, Maui, Mainland tourists, that stayed at Kona Inn. You know, they'd come looking for her, and I think she made a wise choice to be back at Hōlualoa.

WN: Plus, you didn't have to pay rent.

AF: Yes, of course. (Laughs) We're still in the old, rambly house; it's still standing. Some day, hopefully, one of our younger generation will take over. But for now, we'll just keep on going until my mother---my mother is ninety-two now, so we don't want to do much changes. I remember the day when we took the top story off, my grandfather was alive yet, and I often think about that. I feel so sad because he must have felt so sad seeing his structure on the top coming down. It must have been hard for him to build it, and here in one day, everything came down; his empire falling down. At that time it didn't bother me. Today, as I'm growing older, I realize the hardship that he went through, it must have been painful for him.

WN: So, in the 1950s, it was sort of like when your mother took over. She was the one who sort of went more into *lau hala*. Why is it that your father didn't . . .

AF: My father did help; he had Parkinson's disease, but Parkinson's disease was not known until much later. So he was not well and seeing the doctor often. My father was sharp in math and many times when my brother and I used to do our homework and we couldn't catch on, his hands came down faster on us than anything. You know, we were too slow for him.

WN: So seems like your mother had a lot of pressure on her.

AF: Yeah, my mother did. She had a very hard life as a young child. Her father brought her from Honolulu. She was born in Waipahu. She tells me that she was only about four years old, and she didn't know what was happening. My grandfather sent her to sewing school, and groomed her. She was at the [Kona] Hongwanji dormitory, while her father was working on a sugar plantation or someplace, he had to *azukeru* her. My mother is very musical but never had the opportunity. In her senior years she joined the senior citizen group and learned to play the *'ukulele*, and dance the *hula*; she loved it.

WN: So your mother in the [19]50s, went down to Kailua and were they selling the same kinds of things up at Hōlualoa?

AF: No, at Hōlualoa we still had some groceries and dry goods. The bulk of the *lau hala* would stay in the store, and Mother would take it as needed. Most of the one-of-a-kind things were in the Kailua shop.

WN: You stored a lot of things over there.

AF: The Hōlualoa store was the main shop.

WN: She was the one making the *lau hala* things or were you folks?

AF: She did a few. My mother also bleached *lau hala*. Every Friday night, they'd deliver thousands of green *lau hala* leaves from Puna or wherever. Mr. Matsuyama used to deliver it on the porch, so early Saturday morning, like three, four o'clock, we'd all get up, all the kids. We'd start taking off the thorns and then my mother would have this bleaching solution boiling. We dipped it in this hot bleaching solution. Take it out, put it in cold water again. And then at the *hoshidana*—the [coffee-drying] platform, the *lau hala* is dried. We had to sit and roll it while it's soft. Put it all in a pile. The sun would bleach it. Then in the afternoon, we'd turn it around in a different position. After one or two days when it's nice and white, we bundled it in fifty leaves and put it into a big sulfur box. The sulfur bleaches [the *lau hala*], so the bugs won't come. Then she'd pass them on to the weavers.

WN: Who were the weavers?

AF: Many Japanese and Hawaiians. The old-time weavers were like Mrs. Iwanaga, Mrs. Kinro, Mrs. Tanaka, Mrs. Mahi, Mrs. Keanaaina, and many others.

WN: When you say "bleach," it means you're bleaching it from green to the [brown] color that you see now?

AF: No, to white.

WN: Oh, to white. And when would it turn brown again?

AF: No, the brown is the natural.

WN: Oh, okay.

AF: The bleaching is the white. From green, we bleach it, and it gets white, and it stays that way unless in later years it might turn a little yellow or brown. But the natural *lau hala* will stay its natural color, whether it's natural light, brown, dark brown, or red.

WN: So this is not bleached, this coaster here?

AF: No, that's natural.

WN: Oh, this is natural. So, your mother would pay cash to the weavers?

AF: During those days, I don't know whether Mother paid everybody in cash. I think there were some in exchange for groceries.

WN: Oh really?

- AF: I'm sure. Today, the weavers are paid in cash, and nothing on consignment, too. I'm quite sure during my mother's days, cash wasn't easy for her. She had to be very selective, because she wanted to make sure it sells.
- WN: So would she tell the weavers what to make?
- AF: Yes. During those days, many of the weavers were creative like her. They took pride in their work. At times they would make one-of-a-kind. Today it's quite different.
- WN: So after she decided to go out of groceries, it became more cash.
- AF: Yes. Today there are no charges for any items in *lau hala*. At times she may have had some very good clients and they would order things from her and she would do everything to get that item for them. This is what Mother has been known for, so sometimes it's difficult for us [today]. But times are changing and I say, "Yes, if Mother was doing it, it's fine, but Mother cannot do that now." So we take responsibility only on what we can do now, and today everything is on cash and there is no charging, too. We still have not accepted charge cards. I'll just go along with Mother's usual way of business. You know, keep it like a cottage-type business. I like to keep the personal level more than anything else. Our *lau hala* items are not machine-made; it's all hand-woven.
- WN: So you special-make things for people.
- AF: Yeah, if we are able to.
- WN: They order it.
- AF: Well, if we can do it.
- WN: So all the *lau hala* [products] that you sell in the store today is made by you folks?
- AF: Some, yes.
- WN: You get it here locally, or is it made somewhere else?
- AF: Most of the *lau hala* items are done locally by our weavers. Few items are made elsewhere.
- WN: And you still process the [raw] *lau hala* and then get it out to the weavers or do the weavers just bring . . .
- AF: Most of the weavers have their own supply, and then whenever we have our own *lau hala* we will provide it to the weavers who need the *lau hala*.

WN: Okay, so I know you had a career in Hawaiian Airlines and when you retired from Hawaiian Airlines you decided to take over . . .

AF: Not really . . .

WN: What were the circumstances? What happened?

AF: When Hawaiian offered our incentive retirement program, I couldn't believe it.

WN: How old were you?

AF: I was going to be fifty-five that year in November. In May the team came over and spoke to all the managers, especially to those who had over thirty years of service. This was a one-time deal, an incentive retirement, not our regular retirement program. One must have thirty years of service and must be the age of fifty-five. I couldn't believe it, I said, "Wow. I'm going to be fifty-five in November."

It wasn't mandatory; they made it optional for us. We could take it or leave it, we could work or retire, whatever we wanted. I thought about it, and I couldn't believe it. I talked with my accountant and he said, "Take it. If you can't survive on it, you can always go to work." I thank Hawaiian Airlines for the retirement. I gave thirty-two years of my life to Hawaiian. In December I told my mother that I was retiring. She said, "Oh, you're going to come up and help me, yeah?"

I said, "Okay." But I should have taken six months to take care of my personal life (chuckles). Clean up my paperwork. I still have a pile. I helped my mother for the first three years; I got involved with marketing and trade shows.

Mother had a bookkeeper, so I had no pressure. I didn't care whether I got paid. But after two years, I was on the payroll. And as the years went by, [the bookkeeper] said, "You run the store. I'll take care of everything, so don't worry. You run the store, okay Freida?"

I said, "Okay." So you know, it was no pressure, and Mother was in good health.

Kenji the bookkeeper took care of us, but sadly, Kenji passed away. It was such a devastating experience for me. My worries began.

WN: So when you took over around in the '80s or so, I know you said you wanted to keep it the way that she ran it, but were there any changes that you made?

AF: Not really, but I slowly tried to increase our *lau hala* items. Today we have more items of different types. I try to compensate the weavers and liners fairly for their work.

My mother was very particular, and this is why some of her children don't do the lining because she was very critical. It's better to have somebody else do it so she can't criticize us. My daughter Renee seems to take after my mom's meticulousness. My two sisters are very hand-crafty, too.

I hope to continue the store to fit into the atmosphere of the old Hōlualoa community. Keep it like the way everybody remembers old Hōlualoa. I get so embarrassed because I want to fix the floors and other areas of the store, but I just don't know when that will happen.

And then of course I try to supplement by putting in other Hawaiiana things that will fit well, like woodwork.

WN: I noticed you have a lot of that, yeah.

AF: We have some *koa* woodwork done in Kona. There are other things that I get from an outlet, from the factories, like monkey-pod items, the Panama hats, and some straw hats.

WN: So today, who is your clientele?

AF: Many *kama'āina* families from the Islands who grew up with *lau hala*. Visitors from Japan and the Mainland. I try to have a little nostalgic feeling when they come into the store looking for hand-done items in Kona. You may find it somewhere else, but I think if they're really looking for local products, we try to carry them.

WN: I still have the hats, Michiko and I still have the hats your mom made for us.

AF: You save it, I mean use it. She had it lined, too, yeah?

WN: Yeah.

AF: Yeah.

WN: I think she measured our heads (laughs).

AF: If she has it lined, that hat will last you forever. You know, a long time, thirty years.

WN: We still have the doorstep, too.

AF: *Lau hala*, if you really took good care of it, they last a long time. I have a *lau hala* wastebasket in my bedroom since the day I was married.

WN: Okay, I think we're done.

AF: Thank you, I talk too much.

WN: Thank you so much, that was very, very, interesting.

AF: No.

WN: You know what I'd like to do? When we interviewed your mother twenty years ago, I'd like to put her interview next to your interview.

AF: Oh sure.

WN: Wouldn't that be something?

AF: Try it (laughs). Really, I would like to know what Mother has said about her early days, especially when she married into the Kimura family.

(Laughter)

WN: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW



# **Kona Heritage Stores Oral History Project**

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

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