BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Elsie Teruya

“I met all kinds of people [at Columbia Inn]. I know this one lady from Advertiser wears the same style of dress but different colors. Amazing. And one lady from KGU will always bring a book and sits in the same seat over there. No pay attention to nobody. She order the same thing. Just mind her own business. Amazing. And one German guy used to come every morning [to eat, smoke, and read]. We used to call him Sanjikan [three hours]. You know why? He stay three hours over there.”

Elsie Mitsu Teruya was born in 1919 in the plantation community of Hakalau, Hawai‘i. She is one of four children born to Okinawan immigrants, Saburo and Uto Kaneshiro, and half-sister to Gentaro Kaneshiro.

Their father raised her and her three brothers in Hakalau where she attended public and Japanese-language schools. After completing grade school, the family moved to Honolulu. She completed seventh grade at Central Intermediate School. During the summer following seventh grade, she was asked by Gentaro Kaneshiro to work as a waitress at Frankie’s Café. With help needed at Frankie’s, her schooling ended.

Beginning in 1941, Elsie Teruya worked as a waitress at family-run Columbia Inn. She married Walter Masao Teruya in 1942, became pregnant the following year, and stopped working at the restaurant. She then spent her time raising a family and doing some side work.

She resumed work at Columbia Inn on Kapi‘olani Boulevard some fifteen years later, manning the cash register and phone for about twenty years.

Retired, Elsie Teruya now enjoys craftwork at her home in Honolulu.
MK: This is an interview with Mrs. Elsie Teruya at her home in Honolulu, O′ahu on October 8, 2002. The interviewer is Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

So, we’re going to start the interview now.

ET: All right.

MK: First of all, when were you born?

ET: [In the year.] 1919.

MK: And where were you born?

ET: In Hakalau, Hawaiʻi. That’s Big Island.

MK: And what was your father’s name?

ET: Saburo Kaneshiro.

MK: And what was your mother’s name?

ET: Uto Uyehara.

MK: And, if you can, try and tell me whatever you’ve heard about your father’s background going back to Okinawa. What do you know about him and his family?

ET: I really don’t know too much, but I just think that he wanted to come out to Hawaiʻi to make some money and go back. But that didn’t happen. I guess, everybody else the same.

MK: How about your mother’s background?

ET: Nothing. I don’t know nothing about her. I thought she died, so... .

MK: How did your mother and father get together?

ET: That’s all the stories that all the neighbor ladies tells me about it. They said because my mother came as a picture bride, but they claimed that she didn’t like the man, so she was
running around, you know? She didn’t want to get married to that man, and my father felt sorry for her. So he picked her up. In other words, I think they got married, although the age was little difference. That’s what I heard. But, it seems to be okay because she had—how many—four kids with my father. Yeah, four kids with my father.

And all of a sudden, my father’s first son came from Okinawa because my father called him, which we didn’t know about it until he came to our place, our home. And then I figured that he sees us. That’s what the ladies tell me, the neighbors. We had a camp, you know? The ladies tell me that he came over, and then you can imagine because you only fourteen years old, you have a mother in Okinawa, and you come over here, and then you see your father with another person, another wife or another woman, you know? And he thinks—you know when you fourteen years old—“How can my father marry another person when he has a wife in Okinawa?” So that got him mad, I think. He was making plenty trouble, I think. I don’t know what he did. You know, when you live with in-laws, too, sometimes you clash. So like that, I think.

So, I guess, my mother felt really uneasy or, you know, trouble in her heart. So she got the youngest baby that’s about six months or so, somebody was telling me. ’Cause I was about two years, a little over. We are two years apart. My mother took him to the railroad station. I only can remember this much—my mother told me, “I’ll buy you candy.” Say, “Kashi koute kite ageru kara.” And then she went. That’s all I know. I can remember only that part. Had a railroad, and then she’s going. I figured she going come back because a lot of people go Hilo and come back, yeah? So then, that happened, and then that part is erased already. I don’t know nothing after that. I was just suffering. I was crying my head off and this and that.

My father was getting hard time. Now, my big brother was getting hard time, the one that came from Okinawa. Because he had to take care of us because we’re all young. So he had hard time. He went to the aunty’s place. The aunty said, “No, we don’t want.” So we cried on the road or, you know, just like they throwing us away, the aunty. I don’t blame her. Now, I think I don’t blame her because the man [aunt’s husband] was a big shot in Wainaku, where they went. So he was a big shot. They were a rich family. But the mother is my mother’s cousin. So that’s the reason why I think my brother knew about it so they went over there.

And another lady named Mrs. Teruya, I think—was it Teruya? She picked us up, and she treated us really nice. And then another lady, Uyehara, Mrs. Uyehara. What was her first name? I don’t know. They were close to us. But we came back to Hakalau again, we stayed there for long time. My big brother was saying—the second brother—was saying that my father went to here and there, all over Big Island. You know, trying to find a place where he can really settle, and finally they came to Hakalau. So we stayed in Hakalau.

MK: And what was the name of that older brother from Okinawa?

ET: Gentaro. His name—he took the name Frank from Frankie’s Café. So when he took the citizenship, he said, “ Might as well make Frankie because Frankie’s Café.” So he got his name as Frank. Frank Gentaro Kaneshiro.

MK: And then I know that people call you “Elsie,” but what was the name you were given when you were born?
ET: Mitsuko. Mitsuko, so they all call me “Aunty Mitsu.” Few people call me “Elsie.”

MK: And how many siblings did you have?

ET: Gentaro, [and another sister] we call her Osaka-nesan. Gentaro and Osaka-nesan is together from the other mother. And then Floyd, Oscar, me, and Toshi [from the same mother]. Because Gentaro and my Osaka-nesan is half because different mother. They different mother. That’s it.

MK: And, you know, your father, what kind of work was he doing?

ET: Cane field.

MK: And when you say that you folks settled in Hakalau, what camp did you grow up in?

ET: Puerto Rico Camp. [It was actually] Portuguese Camp, but they used to call it Puerto Rico Camp. I don’t know why they called Puerto Rico Camp.

MK: So what kind of people lived in your camp?

ET: Mostly Japanese. Get plenty homes. Plenty homes. We were the last one and then like that, on both sides like that. Plenty homes like this.

MK: So there were homes across each other in a line.

ET: Yeah. This lady, sometimes, she takes a walk to around here because there’s a bridge over here to go to mauka side. She said, “Oh, Kono Kaneshiro no house wa, oya ga orandemo, kirei ni shite oru ne.” I remember that part.

MK: So this lady would come from a house way in the front of the line all the way to your house, and she’d say, “Even if no . . .

ET: No mother, yeah.

MK: . . . at home, this house is really nice.”

ET: Really nice. Because my brother, he’s a very particular guy. He want to trim all the hedges. You know we get hibiscus hedge like that? Trim all the hedge and the grass all clean and nice. And two—matsu is what?—pine tree in the front. Two going up and then hibiscus place like that. Make it really nice. He was really particular.

MK: And you know, when you said that most of the people living in your camp were Japanese, were they Naichi or Uchinanchu?

ET: [ET speaks while pointing to sketch of camp lay-out.] Only this one, and the last one was Naichi. This was Tsuchiyama-san and what was his name? I forgot this lady’s name. Nice lady. Tsuchiyama-san. This man was a Japanese storyteller.

MK: Was he a benshi for the movies?

ET: No. It was just storytelling. We go to his house, all the kids go to his house, and we stay like this [close], and he talk about da kine ghost story or da kine kitsune-no story. Clang-clang he make da kine noise. Everybody comes in the evening, you know. That’s why,
stay dark yeah? We all come near, and we had so much fun with him. He really told us all kind of stories. But his wife, I don’t know how she can talk Okinawa go. She learned that. By the time we grew up, she was sharp in Okinawa go. That amazes me. And she was about the last one to stay here. Now it’s gone. Everything is gone. She says when we went back over here to see what was my house—you know, we came to Honolulu and we came back—she said, every one of them come back to this place after they go to Honolulu. So she was about the last one. She came little bit Alzheimer-like.

MK: And this family, was it Tsuchiyama?
ET: Tsuchiyama, yeah.
MK: So among the maybe twelve or so families here, two of them were Naichi . . .
ET: Yes.
MK: . . . and the rest were Uchinanchu.
ET: Yes.
MK: And among the Uchinanchu families, where did most of them come from? Were they like Oroku-jin or . . .
ET: Yeah.
MK: . . . Itoman, or . . .
ET: Mostly Oroku, yeah? Oroku. The Okinawa people [in the camp were] Matayoshi, and this was Hiyane, Tsuchiyama, and Shimabukuro, Hiyane, Uyehara. Uyehara here, Teruya, Goya was here. Nakazato was someplace, too. And Masayuki . . . The boy’s name was Masayuki Nakayama. And then, Uyehara, Teruya, Akamine. This lady told me a lot of stuff about my mother, Akamine. This was Namihira. And down here had Teruya and over here was Goya.

MK: So only two families were Naichi?
ET: Yeah.
MK: Nakayama-san and this . . .
ET: Tsuchiyama.
MK: And the other Uchinanchu, were they mostly from Oroku, too?
ET: No, not all.
MK: Not all.
ET: Yeah. Goya was somebody else. Teruya was Oroku-chu. So this Namihira lady really took care of me because I heard—I didn’t know until I came back here—that my mother and this Namihira lady was cousins. That’s why she used to make clothes for me. My father would go to Hilo and he was smart in buying clothes, I mean material. And he let the Namihira lady sew for me. And this lady named Teruya sewed for me da kine
kimono, *neru*. Before—maybe you cannot imagine—before, all the boys, they used to wear the kind *neru* kimono. *Neru* means what? You know what *neru*?

MK: Yeah. Oh.

ET: I mean to say flannel. Flannel material, they make kimono. Simple kimono. And this lady used to make for us, and then for my brothers, too. But my brother come taller each time, I wear that. How you say that?

MK: Hand-me-down.

ET: Hand-me-down, but something they tell in Japanese. *Oroshi* or something yeah?

MK: Mm-hmm.

ET: Yeah, hand-me-down. I wear that, the boy’s kimono, too. Doesn’t matter. Was good fun. We had fun.

MK: So the Namihira-san lady and this Teruya lady, they kind of helped out?

ET: Yes.

MK: They did some sewing for you.

ET: Yeah. And Shimabukuro lady had an older daughter than us so she taught all kind of stuff. And there’s another camp up here, we called that Shin Camp, up here. Midori Nakamura. She was Naichi. She really told us a lot of stories, and this and that, and what to do. She was telling me, when I had my menses, she told me, “Go tell one of your brothers to go down to the store and get Kotex.” I don’t know what was Kotex. [But] I cannot tell my brother that. Maybe husband you can tell, “Oh, go buy for me Modess or Kotex.” But, to your brother you cannot say those things, yeah? So I say, “Gee, I get plenty rags. I going use the rags.” Oh, that time I thought she was really nice, tell me that. But she passed away already. We got together one day. We got together at Yagura [Restaurant] down here [in Liliha]. Cannot get hold of everybody because they get married yeah? We don’t know each other. People who know each other, say, “Come up,” so we got together.

MK: The Shin Camp, how far was that from the Puerto Rico Camp?

ET: Not too far. We can cut short from our house, backside. There’s a cane field over here.

MK: In between the camps.

ET: All cane field. Yeah. We used to cut short over here. We used to go back and forth. There was another family named Kaneshiro. They used to treat me good, too. And then another lady named Matayoshi. She used to treat me good, too. Her daughter lives up here. We got together.

MK: Oh. And so, you know, when you look back on your camp, how close were the families in this camp?

ET: We were close. Very close. We help each other and when we play like that. Of course, after my mother passed away, there’s a gap that I don’t know. I know I suffered a lot. I
was crying so they used to call me “hegasa.” That means all blisters, and you know, when you cry you get all red and the skin get funny kind, too. I’m allergic, too, but I didn’t know those things. The yama like that, that’s where we played. The mosquitoes, I guess they bite me and I scratch, eh? I used to get sores, and they used to call me “hegasa,” too. Hegasa, nakimiso, like that. And my father, one time, told me, “If you going to cry every time, I’m going to sell you to the Pākē-san.”

MK: Oh.

ET: I think I could be a Pākē lady if he sold me. But just like I’m the odd one. All the others are boys, yeah? Only me, I’m the girl. So I guess, at that time, it was very odd for me to stay with them. That’s why when I heard about this story later on, I used to hate my mother. I don’t know her yet, but just I used to hate my mother. That’s it. That’s why, living time, everybody gotta be nice to each other. It’s hard.

MK: So those years, from the time you were a two-year-old to the time you were sixth grade in Hakalau, your mother was not there to take care of you.

ET: No, no. My father took care of us.

MK: And how was your father taking care of you folks?

ET: He was a soft guy, but he used to smoke. And he used to say—he used to smoke in the evenings—and he says he get these bone [inlay] kind [of] cigarette case, you call that, I guess. Mukashi, you know? Maybe you don’t understand, but, yeah. They get one place to put the ashes in and the place to put that, he had the Durham. You don’t know what is a Durham?

MK: The Bull Durham?

ET: Yeah, yeah, yeah. They get the paper yeah? And he used to put [tobacco from] the Durham bag in the paper and then he make ’em [roll] like this. Put the spit on it and make ’em [seal] like this. And then he used to smoke.

MK: So he rolled his own cigarettes and smoked in the evenings.

ET: Yeah, everybody used to do that. And then after he smokes he says, “Oh, haya[ku] nenasai. Netara gokuraku yo,” (Oh, go to sleep early. Sleep is heavenly, you know.)” he tell like that. Us guys, we still studying and doing this and that. I remember his word, “Netara gokuraku yo.”

MK: And then in terms of how you folks were doing financially, hard or easy, I know you were only a child but what did you think . . .

ET: That’s all I had. That’s all we had so we don’t feel as though we poor or we rich. We don’t think that way, we don’t know the difference. We have to cook the rice in that kind [of] kama—a kama. My father tell me when you go chorochoro you take one stick . . .

MK: One log.

ET: . . . log out. And something like that he tells us. “Watch now. You gotta watch,” he tells me. “Mite kinasai yo. (Watch it.)” He tell like that.
"Okay, okay, okay." Sometime we koge. But the koge one 'ono, too. (But, the burnt one is delicious, too.)

(Laughter)

MK: And so since you were the only daughter in the house, what kind of chores did you have?

ET: I gotta wash the clothes. You know where we wash clothes? As I said, we had—in between over here get one wash place. All get square—what you call—laundry place, two side.

MK: In between the houses is a clothes-washing area.

ET: Yeah. And then over here is the benjo. The wash place over here and then the benjo over here.

MK: Outhouses were next to the laundry area.

ET: Outhouse, yeah. To the laundry area. We had a place to cook the laundry. Because they go to hanahana in the cane fields, so dirty, yeah, the pants like that. Oh, all the ladies, pack-pack [ET makes hitting sound]. I cannot imagine we did that. (Laughs)

MK: So you used to heat it up, cook the laundry, and then you used to hit it with a stick.

ET: Yeah, with a stick. Good fun, though, we had.

MK: So you used to do the laundry?

ET: Yeah, and then my father will make the nori.

MK: Mm-hmm. The starch.

ET: Yeah, bring it from the other side to down here.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

MK: You were saying that you had to do the laundry.

ET: Yeah, and I get hard time putting the sheet on the line. When you eight years old, see, all those things happen. I didn't think nothing of it. But another girl, [even though] she get mother and father, she get hard time making the sheet, too. So I didn't feel too bad.

MK: So you used to help make the rice, right?

ET: Yeah.

MK: Make the rice, help with the laundry. Were you also doing other types of cooking, too?

ET: No, my brothers all do that. Everybody take turn. Not take turn, but we just do it. We don't even take turn. My brother—sometimes when we get pork okazu with the vegetables, they know I don't like the pork fat. We used to use chopstick. Always chopstick. We never had fork or knife. And then he put [pork fat] in my plate, he says that, "You touch the pork fat, you're gonna eat that!" my brothers tell me. (Laughs) That
was really funny, but oh, to this day I don’t like pork fat or chicken fat or any kind. Any kind [of] fat, I don’t like. That was really funny. They used to tease me like that.

When I was a little one, we had to go to the benjo over here. From this house to [the outhouse], with the lantern, we have to come down here to go benjo.

MK: So you had to pass about four houses and walk all the way down, pass the laundry.

ET: Nighttime, you know. So sometime I get scared so I don’t go down. I go make on the porch, shishi. The boys they can make in the yard, anyplace. So they tell me, “Over there coming stink and funny kind.” So we go wash ’em sometime, and we all go wash. The boys help me, too. All kind stuff. Girls and boys, it’s so hard when you don’t have a mother. It’s very hard.

Anyway, I remember one time I went to school, when I was in kindergarten—no more kindergarten before. First grade. Oh, I had diarrhea in the public school. So just when it was raining, after the rain, certain place the water run, so I went over there to wash myself. And then from there, I still had to go to Japanese[-language] school. And when I had menses, too, we still have to go to Japanese[-language] school. All over here was all raw-like, was really hard for us. Have to walk. Every place, we walk. Walk, walk. And sometimes they see the GMC truck going up, you know that camp? Everybody going to hang on to that truck. Some people get all that gasoline smell. You know, just like they going faint. You can imagine some of the boys, especially my brother, the truck going up, they go hang on, and the smell of that.

MK: Exhaust.

ET: They feel funny, so they stay on the side and rest little while.

And then when we going home, we so hungry we walk from Haole school to Japanese[-language] school and we going home, we walk home, you know. We gotta walk up, not down. Walk up. So we were hungry. So get cane field on both side. We go inside the cane field, get the cane and chew. Our teeth was really good. We chew on the cane and eat the guavas. And somebody’s yard had, I don’t know whose yard was. The Portuguese people had cherries, had something else. And when we go to school like that, even we take carrots and cucumber from other people’s yard. They don’t scold us. We just used to wash it and eat it. We had fun.

MK: And then, what school did you go to?

ET: Hakalau School.

MK: And what did you think of school?

ET: Oh, I liked school. I liked school.

MK: How did the teachers treat you, those days?

ET: I don’t know, Miss Chun Hoon used to—I don’t know how she got to know that I didn’t have a mother. I don’t know. She wasn’t my teacher, but I guess teachers talk together. So she told me to clean her room, not her school room. They had a dormitory for teachers on the side of the school. So she told me to go and clean her room like that. So I used to—I don’t know what I did, but I did something. She used to give me nice
handkerchiefs, silk handkerchief like that. Silk material, voile material. That’s really rare for me. So I kept that quite long. I don’t know what I did during school. We had fun though. Went to Japanese[-language] school.

Every Sunday, we used to go to the Hakalau Jōdō Mission Church. I used to love to go over there. I used to pick up all the flowers. Any kind [of] flowers, and clean up the butsudan and put flowers over there. And we so happy that Nakayama-sensei going come and tell us, especially the woman, the missus, going come and tell us a story. And she make it so she have continuation. So naturally, all the kids going to look forward to [the next session]. In Japanese, you know. That’s how we learn our Japanese. Oh, we used to have fun. She tell us all kind [of] story that mukashi no story. Da kine, what that, the ohime-sama or something like that going to the desert like that. She can play piano, too. We didn’t have piano at the church, but at the school, Japanese[-language] school had piano. She sing song, too, and make it so interesting. So everybody go and all the camp people—all the Shin Camp people, Stable Camp, the Puerto Rico Camp—all go and listen to her. Mostly Sunday. When the kōchō sensei come, not too many come. He just tell ordinary story. But the missus come—Okusan we used to call—Okusan come, oh, we so happy.

MK: And how was the Nihongo-gakkō?

ET: Yeah, was good, Nihon-gakkō. But I was compared with my brothers. That’s why wasn’t so good. But I just went to Japanese[-language] school.

MK: What was hard, or what was easy about Japanese[-language] school?

ET: See, Japanese[-language] school, this sensei, Adachi-sensei go compare me and my brother, my big brother. He was so good in writing his Japanese word. You know what is kanji, yeah?

MK: Mm-hmm.

ET: Kanji, you know, get the sheet of paper that we supposed to practice. That kanji, and his kanji is identical. Same. So my brother’s kanji word . . .

MK: Kakikata.

ET: Yeah, kakikata, goes on the bulletin board every time. So Adachi-sensei always scold me, “Oh, mite goran. Your nii-san no ji wa, ei ga . . . (Oh, look. Your older brother’s calligraphy is good, but . . .)’” This and that. You come lazy, yeah? Because they compare. That’s no good, you know. Don’t compare like that. The person is born like that, cannot help. One time I didn’t go to sotsugyōshiki. Not for my sotsugyōshiki, but for everybody, sotsugyōshiki supposed to go. The sensei asked me, “Why you didn’t come?”

I said, “I didn’t have any shoes.”

That was my reason. I remember saying that. “I didn’t have any shoes.” So one day, my father took me to Hilo to buy us shoes. And then those days, you buy shoes, big or small, same price. So he say, “Oh, take the big one because you growing up.” And he put paper inside there to—and then I wore that so many times. I think I get in my album. That’s the only picture I had when I was young. That’s all I have.

MK: And then I know in those days, they used to do shūshin, morals teaching.
ET: Yeah, that was good.

MK: How did they do that? How did they teach morals, shūshin?

ET: Every Saturday—no, is it Monday or Saturday? I think Saturday, we used to line up in the front of the school. So we make each other all line up. I don’t know, what is it that—maybe the story they talk to us, or how they teach us. You know, oyakōkō and da kine stuff. That’s atarimae. We thought that was atarimae. But I don’t know. Is it in you, yourself? Or this is a thinking?

MK: So they used to tell you folks stories?

ET: Yes. Stories of—all kind of stories. Scary story, a good story, da kine history story that they still talk about it now. All those stories was really interesting. Only when we have to walk, walk, walk, walk. Especially when you have your menses. That’s when I really had problem.

And you know when I used to walk up from the Japanese[-language] school, Japanese school here, Haole school here, from here in between we gotta go up, see? When I was going up here, I always kick my toes and so I get blood like that. That’s why my toes are all crooked. So I tell myself, “When I grow up, I going to put all futon, all over the road.”

(Laughter)
I remember that. Telling myself and telling to all the girls. And when we coming home late, hoo, I don’t know who told us this, “Kimo tori ga kuru. (A soul snatcher will come.)” I don’t know where those people give us the idea. We young yeah? And those guys are old, the father and mother is older. They tell us, “Kimo tori ga kuru yo. Hayo kaeran nara. (A soul snatcher will come, you know. You must go home quickly.)” Oh my goodness. That was really scary stuff for us. And had one big da kine, rusted tank along the route. “Ako watari abunai kara. (The crossing there is dangerous.)” They tell me all kind [of] stuff. Tell us, all these kids, going home. Oh boy, we had scary time, too. After we went we say, “Oh what a story they used to tell us.” That was all fictional, yeah?

MK: Those days, were you willingly going to Japanese[-language] school?

ET: Oh yeah. We loved to go. Even my big brother. Not Gentaro, but the second one. He graduated Haole school already, but he didn’t finish Japanese[-language] school, so he went to work in the cane field, he took a bath, come running down by three o’clock. Come running down by three o’clock just to go to the Japanese[-language] school. Amazing.

MK: And then your Japanese school’s name was what?

ET: Hakalau Nippon Gakkō. Oh, the kids we used to have. The whole yard was filled with children because we get first bell and second bell. And the school was really big. And now it’s so small. We went back again, look so small, and the dogs barking. One time I went in there, I give—I say I give five dollar. You know, ogamu. That’s all I did, and nobody came out. It was scary. It looked scary around there.

MK: And so those days, how many sensei were there at this Nippon Gakkō?
ET: Oh, plenty. Adachi-sensei, Yamamoto-sensei, the couple. Mostly Adachi-sensei, I remember, he used to scold me that’s why I remember, I guess.

MK: And then your English school, what kind of teachers were there? You mentioned Miss Chun Hoon.

ET: Miss Chun Hoon, and Mr. Ignacio, and Mrs.—what was her Japanese name? I forgot. Mr. [Eugene] Capellas was the principal. We had fun at Hakalau School, though. I used to like the hot chocolate. When they get left over they give us, poor people. You have to bring five cents, I think. Something like that. It would be interesting, if my brother was here. My brothers all gone, I’m the only one left already. So they would know all the stories because they were older.

MK: What subjects did you like at Hakalau? Or what subjects did you not like at Hakalau?

ET: Arithmetic. They used to call it arithmetic before, not mathematics. I was bad in math. I was bad. Even I came to Central School, Central Intermediate, I was bad, but you know how they say the kids make plenty noise in the school, in the room? At that time, too, the boys was terrible. The boys was making plenty noise. Mrs. Soares didn’t know what to do. She’s a big Haole lady like this. So us guys, we be quiet. The girls be quiet. The lousy girls, they talk any kind [of] stuff, but we the shy type, so we be quiet. So she gave us B even though my math was bad. And I used to look outside [the classroom window] because when you change school, it’s bad, too. See, we were in Hakalau and we change school [after moving] over here, I always used to think I want to go back to Hakalau again. So I was looking outside [the] window, so the teacher would scold me. “Why are you looking outside,” she said.

I said, “I don’t know. It’s just Honolulu to me is very new.” So like that. I tell my daughter-in-law, too, “Don’t change school when they in between [i.e., during the school year]. If they come to sixth grade and then they going [to a new school anyway], it’s okay. But try not to change schools because you feel really missing what you came through.” It’s really sad, and you don’t want to study. That was bad.

MK: Before we get into the Central Intermediate grade, you know, back in Hakalau, I was wondering if there were like special events at Hakalau School that you remember. What events do you remember?

ET: Yeah. Christmas, Thanksgiving was really good. Christmas, that John Ross, the plantation big boss, gave us the brown package. Inside the brown package, all the kids—they gave us, all the children—some hard candy. And you know the raisins?

MK: Mm-hmm.

ET: The raisins that had in the stems. Maybe you don’t remember that.

MK: Oh.

ET: Not in a little box or like that. In the stem, we used to pick that and eat it. That was really good to us, you know, country kids. And the candy, and apple, and orange. Oh, smell so good, the apple and orange. Even the paper used to smell good. Even the paper like that, we used to only have New Year, that kind of apple and soda. We called “soda water” in a bottle. Only on New Year’s, and when we have some kind of party, da kine, you call that nazuke, seven days when the child is born. And they make da kine big pot of lemonade
with lemon squeezed in and coloring in there. And the lemon, they throw 'em inside there with the sugar, so it taste good. So, I used to pick the lemon and suck on it. (MK chuckles.) I used to really love that. (Laughs) That was a treat to us. It was good.

MK: And then like you mentioned in the schools, you celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas, how about . . .


MK: What did you do *Tenchōsetsu*?

ET: Oh, we used to go picnic, and we used to have food and all. And then, they used to have a program. Oh, I forgot that song. We used to dance that song, and we used to get exercise. We get red-and-white stick with the flag. "*Ichi, ni, san, shi,*" like that. That was really . . .

MK: Calisthenics.

ET: I used to like that. I thought that was beautiful.

MK: Did you folks have *undōkai*, too?

ET: Yeah, that's what I mean.

MK: Oh.

ET: You know, Thanksgiving was just like a play, too, and then *undōkai*, too.

MK: Oh, *Tenchōsetsu*?

ET: That's the emperor no April 29th, I remember that. And Fourth of July, we ate watermelon like that. We had picnic and watermelon, so every time we get Fourth of July, even to Beatrice [Kaneshiro, ET’s sister-in-law] I tell, “You got to have watermelon, you know. Never mind the hot dog.” (MK laughs.) She tells me, “Why?”

I say, “We used to have watermelon every Fourth of July.” (Laughs) I don’t know why.

MK: Fourth of July was camp celebration or school or community celebration?

ET: Outside, community. Because it was summertime.

MK: And then how about *Oshōgatsu*? What did you folks do?

ET: *Oshōgatsu*, we used to—we were young, see. So we used to go to all the—you know the families, when we go over there, they like the boy come first. Isn’t that strange? They like the boy come first.

MK: When you visit the house the boy goes first.

ET: We go to visit them, they want the boy first. And afternoon, the girls come. So they give you five cents. Maybe five cents, or they tell you eat something. They get *gochisō*. My house never used to have that. And then sometimes, the kids go sing like that, the parents going to give five cents. Never ten cents, though. Five cents, or sometimes apple or orange. You know, soda water, like that. We get to eat.
MK: That was Oshōgatsu?

ET: Yeah, Shōgatsu.

MK: Oh. What kind of gochisō did people make?

ET: I don’t remember too much. I know my father used to buy that kind. Before, when he goes to Hilo, he used to buy that can. Can you imagine, kamaboko came in cans.

MK: Yeah?

ET: Yeah, and he used to buy anpan. Omiyage was two loaf of bread and one bottle of jelly. That was our omiyage. And he used to buy for me slippers. Slippers or geta. And my brother says, “Oh, Otōsan always buy for you something.” Because he doesn’t know what to buy for the boys. For the girls he knows, maybe material, geta, or zori, or something. Mostly geta, we used to wear.

MK: So he used to go all the way to Hilo for . . .

ET: Yeah, ten miles away. I remember ten miles away. As I grew up, then I remember one bus used to come. Not really a big bus, you know da kine Hilo banana bus or what do you call that kind?

MK: Yeah, jitney.

ET: Yeah. That kind of. And whatever to fix, you had to bring it at that time, you know, in Hilo to fix. The hinoshi like that.

MK: Yeah, iron.

ET: Hinoshi, yeah, that kind, to fix, or clock or something. We didn’t have too many things, electrical stuff.

MK: So in those days, what was in Hakalau town then?

ET: Yeah, plantation store.

MK: Plantation store.

ET: Post office.

MK: Post office.

ET: Movie theater. Those things. Plenty homes over there, full with homes.

MK: And then what kind of things did the plantation stores have that you folks used to get from there?

ET: Tomato sardines. And iriko, that was our daily food. Iriko dashi. We make kaukau with iriko, mostly. We didn’t have too much ebi. I don’t remember ebi. Must be expensive. Even now expensive, yeah?

MK: Yeah.
ET: *Iriko,* we used to eat plenty *iri*ko.

MK: So *iri*ko and *gohan*? Or *iri*ko *udon*?

ET: No, *iri*ko with *yasai*.

MK: With *yasai*?

ET: Yeah, *udon,* my father used to buy a big box of *udon.* And big box of crackers. He put the cracker on top. So one time I went on a chair, and then tried to get the cracker to eat with my friends. And we get the Carnation—what do you call—the sweet kind.

MK: Oh, sweetened condensed milk.

ET: Put 'em on the bread sometimes. Put them on the cracker. But as is, we used to eat the cracker as is. But the bread, sometimes we used to put that on. All kinds, all families different. But we no more mother so . . . .

You know I was telling you about the Tsuchiyama-sensei, I don't know what he used to do. He used to work in the camp, sugarcane, too. I think he went teach someplace way back. I don't know. He used to tell us stories Saturday night or Sundays. When he come, and somebody comes from Hakalau or someplace, Hilo, come and talk story to us. He invited us, and we have to bring something as *omiyage.* Since we don't have nothing, my father would tell me go and cook cabbage. *Tamana* and . . . . We call that *tamana,* we call cabbage now. *Tamana* and *kamaboko,* make *okazu.* And that was our *omiyage* to that place. That's how we used to do that. Some people, the one who get mothers, they get bananas and papayas and like that, they bring. My house, no more that kind. We didn't have any. We had little bit chicken. But every time the mongoose get 'em before we eat 'em.

(Laughter)

We had a small *hatake,* but nobody take care. Only little bit. Only make cabbage like that, small stuff.

MK: So what else were you growing in your *hatake?* Cabbage . . . .

ET: Not too much.

MK: Not too much.

ET: I don't remember too much. My father used to make those plain *yasai.* And one time he bought—I don't know where he got the *gobō* from. I didn't know what was *gobō.* He put on the cement, he rub the *gobō* like that. He himself didn't know, I guess, no?

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: This is side two of session one.
So you were just telling me that your father used to rub gobō on the concrete trying to remove the skin. Yeah?

ET: Yeah.

MK: So, in those days then, you celebrated like Oshōgatsu, Tenchōsetsu, Thanksgiving, Christmas, yeah? And that, you did either with the Japanese[-language] school or with English school, with the community, with people. And you know, you mentioned that like Hakalau town had a movie theater.

ET: Yeah.

MK: Did you folks go to the movie theater?

ET: What my father was telling me, "Movies is just like people moving around." You call that katsudō shashin. But real on-the-stage kind, he used to like.

MK: Shibai.

ET: Yeah. He had to get that kind shibai, but he knows maybe the old-fashioned movies going around, but no more talking, see? No more talking. Itte nai talking. So the benshi stay over there, and he get the fan, and oh, I used to like that. Naniwabushi like that, too. I used to love those things. Ho! And then we used to go, and my father used to tell me, "Konohō ga ii yo. Katsudō shashin nan ka, only igoite, igoite, igoite." Something like that he tells. Hey, is it all right if I talk Japanese?

MK: Yeah.

ET: Oh, the Japanese come out because we were brought up as Japanese.

MK: Mm-hmm. So you went to Japanese movies with the benshi?

ET: Yeah. Some people tell, "Oh, that's old-fashioned stuff." Well, we didn't know anything else. So I tell benshi. "What is benshi?" they tell me. Well, if we didn't get [movie with benshi] that time they did that naniwabushi stuff, oh, you don't know what that is then. Forget it.

MK: So in those days, when you had like shibai, where was the shibai held?


MK: And who would be in the shibai? Were they like touring actors or local people?

ET: I don't know. They come from somewhere, which I don't know because I was just a little girl. So many things I don't remember. There's so many things happened over there.

MK: How about bon odori?

ET: We didn't have bon odori. I don't remember that. I don't know. I don't remember bon odori at that time. Isn't that strange? After I came here, I see them all going when I was teenager. They all go. Say, "What is bon odori?" Then the thing coming back to me.
MK: And then you know when you were growing up in Hakalau, what were your like your dad's feelings about education? Did he tell you folks study hard?

ET: No, he never tell us that.

MK: What did he do?

ET: He never tell us. He leave us alone. Just like we grow up by ourself. Our thinking was growing up by ourself. But same time, we were suffering because we didn't have any mother. Because we got to do the ironing, doing the laundry. My brother go iron the nice clothes. I iron the simple ones because he was really particular.

And in the meantime, Gentaro moved to Honolulu. And he was looking around, working at American Café. They get some kind of [word-of-mouth contact] or something. They get each other, talk to each other [spread the word], they get over there to American Café [to work], and that's where a lot of people started over there. He's just like a father to all this restaurant people.

MK: That's Ushi Takara of American Café?

ET: Yes.

MK: So before you get into that, I was just wondering, you know you mentioned your older brother. How much difference in age was there? I know Tosh was younger than you.

ET: Yeah, younger than me.

MK: Then you, then your older brothers were how much older than you?

ET: All two years apart. I think, mostly two years apart. Gentaro, Floyd, Oscar, and me, then Toshi.

MK: So they all grew up without mothers, too, then?

ET: Yeah. So Gentaro is mad with my father because he had another wife, yeah?

MK: Mm-hmm.

ET: Then number three didn't know too much, but he still never liked to see my mother. These two never saw my mother. Never met my mother. But when I came, somebody took me to see my mother.

So I said, "What? I have a mother here?" You know, it was shocking to me. But if they're going to take me, I have to go and see. So I went to see. And she just took a look at me and said, "Oh, kita ka." That's all. That's all. Not another word, because she was already married. I figured, at that time, you're kind of disappointed, but now, as you grow up, you figure, oh she has a husband so she cannot say anything. Conflict with the other kids, too. She get her own kids.

So Toshi was young, so she took him. So when Toshi came about six years old—see, my big brother was in Honolulu.
MK: Gentaro.

ET: Gentaro. So he kind of found out where the mother was, so he really took care of this Toshi. Getting together at Honolulu. But when he became six years old, I think it was six years old, the mother sent him back to us in Puerto Rico Camp.

MK: Oh.


MK: That was Toshi.

ET: Yeah.

MK: So Toshi came back to Hakalau when he was six.

ET: About six. Just before six or something like that. I remember, the camp kids used to call him Honolulu boy that can swim. We used to go swimming. There’s a swimming place up mauka side. Get small pond, middle pond, and big pond. He used to swim in the big pond. So they say, “Honolulu swimming boy.” So I don’t know how we got to get around together, though.

MK: So you folks were all together in Hakalau, and then Gentaro was in . . .

ET: Came out first.

MK: Uh-huh. Came out to Honolulu first.

ET: To look for job.

MK: Working at American Café.

ET: Yeah.

MK: What was he doing at American Café?

ET: He was a waiter.

MK: Waiter.

ET: Yeah. Because I remember he had a long apron on. Those days they get long apron, not now. Funny yeah? (Laughs) At that time, they do anything. If the boss tell you go sweep the floor, you gotta sweep. Nobody tell you, “Don’t do that.” Used to do anything.

MK: In those days, when Gentaro was working at American Café, was that for pay?

ET: Yes. Kaukau and pay. Small pay, but it’s pay.

MK: So kaukau and pay.
ET: So kaukau, too. It goes together. That’s the reason why, I think, they went inside the restaurant, you know. Because they get food. Otherwise you got to have food, and such a small pay. You gotta pay for the rent, too. They say they stayed in a small room.

MK: And so when you were in about sixth grade, is that about when you came to Honolulu?

ET: Yeah.

MK: Did you finish sixth grade?

ET: Yeah, sixth grade.

MK: In Hakalau?

ET: In summer, in June we came out.

MK: So how did that happen? How come that happened, that you folks came to Honolulu?

ET: Yeah, because Gentaro told us you cannot make money down there at Hakalau. Cannot make money in Hakalau so everybody come up. So I think, we were about the first one to go out from that camp? Yeah. That’s right. And they were all sad for me. But I didn’t know what I was doing. You know, in Hakalau, I mean, in the Puerto Rico Camp, where we come—I don’t know if this Okinawa style or Japanese style. The Jewish style like. You know, when you come thirteen—we were twelve and thirteen. We make a big party, especially for girls. So, I was so damned worried what my father was going to make because I was twelve years old going on thirteen. But about February, they get—everybody get the same time. I think that Okinawan—what do you call that? Month or time? In February, everybody gotta make all the same time. And all the girls that I know, all the same age, they all get parents to make big party. So I was telling to myself, “I wonder what my father gonna bring for me?” He went to Hilo. Going buy me something. Oh, as I said, he brought the kamaboko in the can, and the two loaf of bread with jelly, and anpan, and something else he bought. Some other stuff, too. Those things that I like, I remember. (Laughs)

MK: Mm-hmm. He brought back.

ET: And sometimes he used to fry the anpan. Sometimes, he used to fry the noodle, too. You know, the udon, he go make into—I don’t know how he did it. He used to tie, so in other words he boil and pull ’em out before he put ’em in the oil, yeah? He used fry it. He used to musubu and throw ’em in the oil.

MK: Sounds good.

ET: I don’t know, but we used to eat ’em. And anpan, maybe old, that’s why he used to fry ’em, I think. That was good, too.

MK: That’s almost like malassadas.

ET: Yeah.

MK: So, he came back with some goodies for you.

ET: Yeah, for my—you call that jūsan oiwai.
MK:  *Jūsan oiwai*. Yeah, celebration, thirteen, celebration.

ET:  Just like the Jewish people they make big celebration. Bat mitzvah. They get black tie. Because my girl, my daughter worked in LA [Los Angeles] for a Jewish boss. She get invited, too.

MK:  So when you were thirteen, you folks participated in this big party?

ET:  No, in your own home.

MK:  In your own home. Oh.

ET:  And if you wanna go certain house, you can go around. Was really exciting, but kind of worrisome for me because I don’t have a mother. So I don’t know what they had. I know they had plenty *kaukau*. They were talking about it. Plenty *gochisō*.

MK:  But it was good that your dad brought back something for you.

ET:  Yeah, that was good. Not ordinary stuff, you know?

MK:  Yeah. And then so Gentaro felt that at about that age that better for the whole family to go to Honolulu?

ET:  Yeah, come to Honolulu.

MK:  So your father, too?

ET:  Yeah.

MK:  So the whole family moved to Honolulu.

ET:  Before that, he [Gentaro] was married. He got married. It’s a very funny story. His wife is across of us. This house is mine, and this Takara family. They got married together, but *yome-san* never got to Honolulu because they working. They cannot get off. How terrible, no?

MK:  Yeah.

ET:  So they married *betsu betsu* in other words.

MK:  [Inaudible]?

ET:  We had a big party.

MK:  Yeah.

ET:  My father got drunk, and he drink little bit, he just go to sleep. He bring the *makura* over there and go sleep right there. (MK laughs.) And everybody making plenty noise, dancing up, and this and that. Yeah, was so funny. She’d get all dressed up in that kind [of] Japanese [bridal] kimono with all that stuff.

MK:  Yeah.
ET: Oh boy, was good fun at those time.

MK: So your father got married again?

ET: No. My big brother.

MK: Your big brother.

ET: Yeah, he was in American Café working.

MK: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ET: And then they got married, but they didn't get married together. I don't know how they did it.

MK: Oh, so Gentaro-san got married to this Takara family . . .

ET: . . . lady. Yeah.

MK: . . . lady. Oh, so he was married.

ET: Yeah, when we came.

MK: And when you came to Honolulu, they were together by that time.

ET: Yeah, they were together. Somehow they got together.

MK: But the marriage ceremony was separate.

ET: Yeah.

MK: He wasn't there because he couldn't get off.

ET: I don't know how they did it. That part I don't know. I was just a little girl.

MK: Oh, I see. And then the family came to Honolulu.

ET: Yeah, we stayed with them.

MK: What did you think in the beginning, though, when you heard you gonna move to Honolulu. How did you feel?

ET: I feel really sad, but at that time, when we were going to move to Honolulu, I couldn't believe, but one of these ladies, this Akamine lady told me, "You lucky, no? You go to Honolulu. You can see your mother." What? I couldn't believe that. It's just the words in my head. That's all. I didn't think nothing of it. But that words, that's all I heard. Cannot be. My father told me she died. So when I came Honolulu, I didn't think nothing. It's just erased. But later on, after we settled, you get to know all the Oroku ladies. The ladies told me, "I take you to your mother's place." That was Kapahulu. So they took me, and then I see her. And she say, "Oh, kita ka? (Oh, did you come?)" That's all. That's all. And I saw three ladies over there. You know how like ladies get together and talk story. I guess they were talking story like that. When I went over there, I knew which one was my mother
right away. She looked something like me. So I knew right away. "Oh, that must be my mother." We didn't stay long. Just stayed a little while.

But, you know when I got married to my husband? My husband said, "I have to take you to your mother with the gown." Of course, wartime, so cannot do elaborate, but we got married at Harris Memorial [United Methodist Church], and then he took me down to see my mother. I said, "How you know my mother?"

He say, "We were at Kailua." They were at Kailua, they know each other.

MK: Oh.

ET: Strange story.

MK: Yeah. Your husband was very kindhearted yeah?

ET: Yeah, but he let his brother drive us down there. (MK laughs.) That's the brother over there. He died already.

MK: So your mother got to see you in your gown?

ET: Yeah. "Oh, kirei natta no." That's all. That's all, nothing else. Nothing that, "I'll see you again," or, "Come again," or something like that. Maybe the husband was standing right there, that's why. You cannot say those things. Those days, you cannot say those things. Right now you can say anything, yeah? "You don't want to come, no need come. But you guys want to come, come any time," like that you can say. But not those days.

MK: So when you folks moved from Hakalau to Honolulu, you knew you were going to be in a place where your mother was on the same island, yeah?

ET: I didn't think that way yet, until way late. Maybe a couple of years later when one of the ladies told me, "I take you to your mother's place."

MK: I see.

ET: Gentaro never say nothing, too. He didn't say nothing.

MK: And then, because you coming from countryside, Hakalau, you coming from Puerto Rico Camp to Honolulu, what did you think about Honolulu when you first came?

ET: Warm. Hot. Hakalau was cool. You can see Mauna Kea mountain when you open the window. But over here was hot to me. And I was thinking, "Why does everybody have ice water in their refrigerator?" Because the water was nurui. We don't have refrigerator. We have just plain water, but it was cool. And I had rosy cheeks because, I guess, it's colder than here, so they thought I came from Japan, some people. And I no more shoes, so I wear geta, I mean zori. I was really poor. But I didn't show it.

MK: And then like, where did you folks live when you first came to Honolulu?

ET: Beretania Street. You know where the municipal building on Beretania Street?

MK: Yeah.
ET: Get that state home and the parking lot for the city hall.

MK: Okay.

ET: You know, Beretania side. Around there. All the homes that we lived in came down. After this, we went to Miller Lane. We were in the back of the governor’s home over there. And now there’s a Lili‘uokalani building or something like that. The whole place.

MK: Oh. And then like you know, when you come to Honolulu, it’s not a camp you’re living in, it’s different.

ET: Yeah.

MK: What did you think?

ET: No more much friends until you went to school. But still, the neighbors were really good. All the neighbors. The store people was Shikiya. Shikiya people was the store people. The two girls were really nice, we went to school together. And another girl way on that side—that’s the rich girl. (Laughs) That’s the rich girl. We used to wear zori and go to school.

MK: And then what school did you go to?

ET: Central Intermediate.

MK: How was that for you, going from Hakalau School, now you’re in a city school.

ET: Big school. And you gotta change classes! I was all mixed up. Oh boy. Those days, wow.

MK: Big change, yeah?

ET: Yeah. Such a change. That’s why I tell everybody, young mothers. If you gonna change school for the children, up to sixth grade and then you change. And then, you know, go on to high school, like that.

MK: And then what did you, after you moved, you started school. What did you think about school at Central?

ET: Central, I thought the boys was noisy. We cannot study. We get homeroom, cannot study. The boys was so loud. I thought—now days, they telling, some of my grandchildren tell, “Oh, the boys are so noisy,” this and that.

I said, “At my time, too. They were noisy, too.”

MK: Were they different from like the Hakalau boys back in Hakalau School?

ET: Yeah. They different. I don’t know. Because of Japanese[-language] school, I think, we behave. That’s what I think. Because over here had Japanese[-language] school, too, but we go after school, after English school had a sensei used to come to that class, certain class, and teach little bit Japanese. I forgot his name. Fujita-sensei? I forgot.

MK: And then, where you folks were living in Hakalau, you had mostly Naichi and Uchinanchu, yeah?
ET: Yeah, mostly *Uchinanchu*.

MK: When you moved to Honolulu, when you lived Beretania Street and later Miller, what kind of people lived on your neighborhood?

ET: My neighbor was Mr. and Mrs. Tokunaga. They were really nice. It’s so funny, you know. There’s a long story, but they a really nice couple. This side was Diaz, Portuguese couple. Because I was working for almost fourteen hours, at least ten hours every day, I didn’t see too many people around, the neighbors. Gentaro kids knew all the neighbors because they were growing up. But the Tokunaga family, the lady was so nice. She used to work *Haole* house. She used to wear kimono sometimes. *Yukata*. I used to like that lady.

Then, as I grew up, I heard the man was really bad. He always pick on the wife. But that’s a long story. I go way ahead.

(Laughter)

MK: But she was nice to you when you were growing up.

ET: Yeah, she was nice to everybody. I used to like that lady. The daughter’s name was Rosaline. I think she married that Hallmark man, Ichi-something [Yoshimasa Ishihara]. Forgot. Hallmark Jewelry.

MK: Hallmark Jewelry.

ET: In Ala Moana. They were on Hotel Street before.

MK: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Hallmark Jewelers. They still have it at Ala Moana.

ET: Ala Moana, yeah. She married that person. That used to be in Hotel Street somewhere.

MK: So when you came to Honolulu and you got different neighbors. You have Tokunagas and the Diaz family. Seventh grade you went Central, and then when it came eighth grade time, what happened?

ET: I didn’t go eighth grade.

MK: How come?

ET: Because my brother, as I said—okay, I went to seventh grade until June right? There’s a vacation time. Summer vacation time. One of these workers, one of the waitress [Agnes] at Frankie’s Café where my brother own the place with Mr. Uyehara. And then Agnes’s husband got into an accident, and he died. So my brother told me, mourning for forty-nine days. How much is forty-nine days? Month and a half, yeah? About that, yeah?

MK: Yeah.

ET: Okay. He told me, “Only until forty-nine days,” because in Buddhist style before, you have to really be . . .

MK: Be in mourning, yeah.
ET: ... mourning till forty-nine days. Seven days, seven days. Oh my, that was really hard. So he told me, “Only forty-nine days, you help me. Okay?”

I said, “Okay, it’s vacation so I’ll help you.” And then I went over there, I don’t know nothing about this kind of waitress job. Especially the food, I come from country. And they said veal cutlet, ulua. It’s all about the same, but ulua get a little bit lighter nani [breading]—they go put the gravy on top. Like now, in the fish they get tartar sauce and lemon like that. No more veal cutlet, no, nowadays. I don’t see on the menu.

MK: Sometimes beef cutlet but not so much veal cutlet.

ET: Veal cutlet had gravy on it.

MK: Yeah.

ET: And I don’t know the difference. The cook scold me, “You don’t know the difference lah-lah-lah-lah. This is more like the—” this and that. Scold me like that. Oh, I used to get so angry. But then yet, I gotta learn. I gotta learn. And one time, one customer told me he wants Bromo Seltzer. Bromo Seltzer is just like Alka-Seltzer before. Get a container, and then you spin something, and the Bromo Seltzer comes out in the glass, you know. But I didn’t know what it was. So I went to the kitchen, and I said, “Bromo Seltzer.” They all laugh up, laugh, you know. And then my cousin was working over, then he laugh, too, and he no teach me. They said, “The Bromo Seltzer is on the counter.” “What on the counter?”

Then somebody told me, “This is Bromo Seltzer.” The kind round kind. You put ’em in the glass. People who get stomachache like that. But now there’s no more. Now, it’s Alka-Seltzer. Something like that. People get stomachache, they like that. Oh, boy, all kind stuff, which I didn’t know so many things when I was growing up.

MK: So you were supposed to work for forty-nine days?

ET: Yeah.

MK: And then what happened, though?

ET: He don’t tell me go to school, my big brother. He used me from then on, to the time I got married. Even after I got married, he told me, “I bring you a stool, so you be cashier.”

MK: Oh. So how did you feel in the beginning when they asked you work forty-nine days?

ET: Yeah. No, I didn’t feel anything too much because I wanted to learn something. And yet, only forty-nine days. I supposed to go to a sewing class during the summer. You know, Japanese sewing class, or Singer machine or something like that. Well, better than playing. After all, it’s my brother, he’s taking care of [us].

And we have da kine, when you come out from country, we don’t know what is toast. Before a toaster was, you could put in the toast, and you could open like this, and then you put in the toast. And when the toast [is] toasted, you open and you eat it. And then I used to eat the toast, I used to like that. And they get the butter, we never had butter before. They get the butter so I go put the butter on, plenty butter on, and then I eat. My brother tell me you not supposed to put too much butter. But I like the butter.
(Laughter)

I put the butter on the toast, I make like this and eat so you don’t see.

MK: He doesn’t see the butter. (Laughs)

ET: He doesn’t see eating the butter. I going make believe he don’t see that. I only put a little bit. We never used to have jelly though. Later on had jelly. Before, butter was five cents, you know? Bread was ten cents. You go buy half a bread, you get five cents. But at least we get money so we buy ten cents. The whole bread. But I saw the Hawaiian kids, they only five cents and the lady at the store go half and give. Even the butter, too, half. Five cents. So many things happened, all those things.

MK: So you know this . . .

ET: Because our pay was small.

MK: Yeah, I was just going to ask you, how much did you get paid in the beginning?

ET: At the beginning I didn’t get paid. I remember I had fifty cents. My brother gave me fifty cents. I said, “Ho, fifty cents.” I don’t know how long I kept it, but I spent it somehow. I think I buy yabure manjū. Either I used to buy yabure manjū or a dark red rose, one. I don’t know why. That was my luxury. Dark red rose and yabure manjū.

MK: Oh.

ET: My friend used to always tell me, the one in nursing home, “Oh, you used to like.” And she like, too. When I buy, she eat, too.

MK: So where did you get your yabure manjū and your rose from?

ET: From Downtown. That—I don’t know what—I forgot the name. Yoshida-ya.

MK: Yoshida-ya?

ET: Yeah. Long time ago. Yoshida-ya, Maunakea Street. No? Anyway, Downtown. And had a flower shop, too. I used to buy one red rose and manjū. It didn’t come in a package. I mean, used to put them in a package, not in the container. And I could hardly wait until I go home. I go eat one walking home. (Laughs.)

MK: And then you know this Frankie’s, what was your job? Waitressing?

ET: Yeah, waitress. I never went into the kitchen.

MK: So what did you do for waitress?

ET: Wait.

MK: Take the order, you wrote it down or you . . .

ET: No, you just yell because it’s a small place. It’s not a big restaurant. It’s small, about this much long place, this much, and then we just yell. So when we yell, I look at the—not the menu—the food that come out in the small window. Get a window, see. We don’t
go into the kitchen. We yell from the small window, like this kind hole or whatever you
call it. Oh, we used to have fun.

MK: So in those days, you took the place of the woman . . .

ET: Yeah, she never came back.

MK: That never came back. And then, who else was working there?

ET: I remember—what’s her name now? We used to call her Mu-chan. Agnes went away, she
never came back. And then we started to work over there for long time. I don’t know how
many years. That’s the part I don’t remember. And then they bought the space next door,
and they make it a little bigger. That’s when Toshi’s wife, Beatrice them, all came in.

MK: Oh, so in the beginning it was just Mu-chan and you?

ET: Just a small nook. Yeah. And then . . .

MK: The cook?

ET: The cooks, yeah.

MK: Who was cooking?

ET: Mr. Uyehara. I don’t know what Gentaro was doing.

MK: I was going to ask you that.

ET: I think he was a waiter, too, I think. Or in the kitchen. I don’t remember him cooking or
anything.

MK: And later on, when they expanded, Beatrice came in and who else came in?

ET: A lot of ladies came in. Plenty ladies.

MK: And then how long was the restaurant open every day?

ET: Twenty-four hours that restaurant.

MK: Huh?

ET: Not the small one, you know.

MK: Frankie’s was . . .

ET: Twenty-four hours.

MK: When you started working, Frankie’s was open how long?

ET: No, the other small place was closed at certain time. Eight o’clock or nine o’clock. But
when they opened the big one, the door was never closed.

MK: Oh.
ET: So we didn't know how to close the door. (MK laughs.) And you know what? And then I used to work day shift. But they give me all kind of hours, but from six [A.M.] to two [P.M.]; you go home, rest; and you come back at five [P.M.], or four o'clock or five o'clock. And they let me work to ten o'clock like that if somebody don't show up. Usually eight o'clock we supposed to go home. From there, we with the stinky butter clothes, we used to go to movies, too. I didn't even notice that. Somebody else will notice, yeah? But the butter smell, you know. Isn't that strange?

MK: Butter smell?

ET: Yeah.

MK: And then what kind of clothes did you wear when you were waitress?

ET: White clothes. White blouse and white skirt.

MK: White skirt, too?

ET: Yeah. I have some pictures over there.

MK: Oh, how did you keep clean working in a restaurant all white?

ET: I don't know. I remember we wear white. Everybody wore white. White blouse or one uniform style. I used to wear shirt and blouse. I was skinny at that time. More skinny than you. Only ninety-two pounds, ninety-three. When I got married, I was only ninety-three pounds. And I get big bones, you know when you skinny, big bone and skinny around just like something walking around.

(Laughter)

Because the boys used to tease me. Oh, just like one boy that used to work over there used to tell me, "Your legs is just like the pillar at the library." You know, main library get the stiff kind, no more shape. Oh boy, I used to get angry with him. But he talk to us any kind [of] stuff. We used to joke around inside there.

MK: Oh, so most of the workers, were they like your age?

ET: Yeah.

MK: Young.

ET: Maybe the man folks was little older, that's all.

MK: How did Gentaro find the other workers? How did he get them?

ET: By mouth, I think. All by mouth. One guy came from the island. Sometimes, when I think about it, how did he find this place? Through the mouth.

MK: And then were they all Orokon-chu or . . . ?

ET: Most of them, but no, not all. This couple was working over there, they're different people. From Pepe‘ekeo. They came from Pepe‘ekeo because they knew Mr. Uyehara. And then one Nagasawa girl, I don't know how she came in. And one more girl, Sue—
she’s married to Miller—but Sue, what was her name? Sue something. Naichi no hito. Nagasawa we used to call her “Big Helen.” And Sue Takeshita or something like that. She married Miller, one of the [Honolulu] Advertiser guys.

MK: Oh. So you folks wore uniforms. You folks get the order, you shout the orders to the cook, go pick up your order, and . . .

ET: Serve.

MK: Yeah. What did you have to learn about serving? You know, coming from Hakalau, what did you have to learn?

ET: I guess you gotta go by your thinking and by looking. No more such thing as what to do, what not to do.

MK: Gentaro didn’t instruct you first?

ET: Maybe at the beginning he did. But after that, we just go by thinking and looking. I think we didn’t go to school that’s why we read. Like now, we get TV like that, and before only radio. Before used to have “The Shadow” every Sunday night at seven o’clock or something, we all go to the radio. The radio was very important to us before.

MK: So like in the restaurant, was there entertainment like radio or jukebox at Frankie’s?

ET: No more. Oh Frankie’s had jukebox.

MK: Jukebox.

ET: Yeah. Not the small Frankie, the big one. When we rented the next door, they made ’em big. They had a jukebox. You know that Artie Shaw?

MK: Mm-hmm.

ET: Oh, that was really good. And then Glenn Miller, all those songs. Every day somebody was putting—how much was it? Nickel or quarter? Gotta be nickel, yeah?

MK: So people, they would come in, and they would eat and listen to the music?

ET: Yeah. You gotta put nickel or dime like that inside.

MK: And then those days, what kind of customers did Gentaro have at Frankie’s?

ET: If you ask me, all kind of customers. From the city hall to Kaka‘ako side. From the Advertiser, KGU, [Honolulu] Star-Bulletin was little bit away on Hotel Street side, and the [Honolulu] Rapid Transit.

MK: Ohyeah.

ET: City hall, Rapid Transit. That place was full with people around. I remember Kaka‘ako boys—they used to call the Kaka‘ako boys, you know. I don’t know what happened, but one of the waiters, he’s older than us, had a fight with them. And they were fighting outside. I told them, “Go outside and fight if you like fight.” And then instead of
watching the cash register or anything, I go outside and tell, "Come on Tony. Hurry up, get 'em, get 'em."

(Laughter)

MK: Oh, my goodness!

ET: The Kaka'ako boys, all Japanese you know. They had the Kaka'ako gang, they used to call them. Oh, my goodness, they used to come.

I don't know, before people, they rough, but they not too nice, too, but I don't know why they used to throw their napkin on the floor. When they go, we have to sweep all that. So much napkins on the floor. I don't see how they did that. And the tips were very small.

MK: Was it a custom to give tips back then?

ET: Yeah, but lot of people didn't. Only few did. And then came that defense. When the defense workers came, then we used to get plenty tips. You know, just before the war. I work from '34, '35, to '41. Forty-three, I work till '43. After I got married, for about three months or so.

MK: So the civilian defense workers gave a lot of tips?

ET: Yeah.

MK: Like how much was considered a lot?

ET: Quarters.

MK: Quarter.

ET: Yeah.

MK: How much was the meal those days?

ET: Thirty-five cents.

MK: So quarter is a lot.

ET: Yeah. To give quarter is big money. One sailor gave me fifty cents, and he told me, "I gave you fifty cents, you know." He want to take me out.

I said, "Oh no, I don't go out with sailors." I guess my bringing up is different. I said, "I don't go out with sailors." I thought it was just a customer. So you be nice to all customers yeah? I was that type to be nice to all customers. One Filipino guy followed me and was amefuri, see. Was little drizzling so I had my kasa. So I said, "Why you following me?"

"I love you, I like you." Oh boy, I took down my kasa, fold my kasa, and hit 'em, and then ran home.

(Laughter)
MK: Oh.

ET: Every place we walk, see? All those things happened you know. And sometimes you go by palace—I'm going home, to the governor's home, I'm walking home. You know by that 'Iolani Palace? Had that kind of bushes. That kind of bush, they hide over there, and they go whistle. You think, "Oh, who's that whistling?" And then you go look, they go take out their privates. That's why I told them, "You better cut all those bushes." They didn't do it for long time you know. Now, no more bushes. Maybe you wouldn't notice that. Never happened to you folks.

MK: So like because you're a young girl working as a waitress, did you have a lot experiences like that?

ET: Yeah, plenty. One time I was with my boyfriend in the palace grounds just talking story, and the guard came. And he said, "What are you folks doing here?"

"Oh, we just talking story."

Then he said, "You cannot talk story in here so you gotta kiss me." You know, a big Hawaiian guy. If it goes inside there, I'm sorry. The big Hawaiian guy. You know, I'm skinny and small and I looking him up. "You have to kiss me you know." And then I had to kiss him. I don't know how I went kiss him. Not really kiss but smack, you know? So my boyfriend and I ran from here. All those things, a lot of those things happened.

MK: How about in the restaurant though?

ET: In the restaurant, too. One Portuguese guy, he drinking Primo beer. Remember the Primo beer—we only serve only Primo beer and just only a few wines. Maybe Tokay and one more light wine—what was that? The other kind of wine, only about two, or three wines, and beer. He was drinking beer and then he go take out his privates. And when you're young, you cannot say those things. I go tell the other guys, the waiter and waitress, "The guy doing something." They don't believe me. Those days, they don't believe what you saw. They think we making it up. Or else we cannot say it, with our mouth. The story or the words don't come out. Only we old now, so we can say those things.

But those days—oh one time I was coming to work in the morning about five-thirty. That was summertime so was light at five-thirty. I gotta be there by six o'clock. So I was reading one letter that came from Japan. And then I was reading that and walking, walking, and one guy was on the sidewalk place, just on the ground with a bicycle. He dropped the bicycle, I guess, and then I said, "Oh, did you get hurt?" I tell like that. And he's sticking out his private stuff. Oh, you gotta see how I ran to the restaurant. And I go to the restaurant, I'm going like that. I cannot say nothing. They say, "What's the matter with you?"

[ET breathes heavily] like that. That's all. "Look at the guy over there."

"Why? He wen chase you?"

I cannot say nothing else. Never say those things. But the Hawaiian guy, was scary. So when I used to go around there, I used to get scared, you know.

MK: And then you mentioned like you used to have beer and a few wines being sold. Was this at the small Frankie's or the big Frankie's?
ET: Big Frankie’s.

MK: Big Frankie’s . .

ET: Small one no more.

MK: . . . had a bar then.

ET: Not a bar. Just a refrigerator.

MK: Oh, okay.

ET: Just a refrigerator, put the beer inside there. And the wine. No more such thing as bartender.

MK: Okay. So at Frankie’s then, it was basically restaurant.

ET: Food. Yeah, food.

MK: And I wanted to know like what—you were a waitress. Your brother used to be like a waiter. You folks had waitresses and waiters at Frankie’s.

ET: Yeah. ’Cause the waiter can be manager, too, see. We didn’t call him a manager. We just call by his first name like that. Tony, or Shorty, or Peter, or something like that.

MK: And then what were the specialties at Frankie’s? What was it known for?

ET: Veal cutlet.

MK: Veal cutlet.

ET: Ulua.

MK: How was the ulua prepared?

ET: Breaded.

MK: Breaded and fried?


MK: Hamburger steak.

ET: With onions. Was cheap at that time, but we couldn’t afford it. One waitress came to work with us, and you know what she did? She ordered a complete meal after we pau work. We supposed to eat the kind the cook make for us, they call the boy kaukau or family kaukau in a big pot like a yasai. You know like chop steak like that, yasai yeah? This girl, she order from the fruit to main dish, to the dessert. I was shocked at her. I couldn’t say a word. I never told anybody. She just ordered and she ate. She and her friend. I can’t forget that.
MK: And then those days, when you say, “fruit to the entrée to the dessert,” what did they have then? If you had a complete meal, can you tell me what did you get? The fruit cocktail?

ET: Fruit cocktail or soup. No salad. And the main dish, and a drink—coffee or tea or iced tea like that—and you get the dessert.

MK: What kind of dessert?

ET: Pie. Oh, Mr. Uyehara was good at making those desserts. But he don’t have one menu. Everybody was telling him, “Where’s your menu?” You know, they want the recipe. He says it’s all in his head.

MK: Oh.

ET: Even the wife don’t know. He used to make good desserts.

MK: So he would bake what kind pies?

ET: Oh the pies were lined up. He even used to make pineapple pie, apple pie, custard pie. And he used to make rice pudding and floating island pudding. That was good.

MK: What was that? Floating island pudding?

ET: I never seen that anymore.

MK: Is that a gelatin?

ET: No, it’s a pudding.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 40-10-1-02; SIDE ONE

MK: You were just telling me about the floating island pudding. Try describe to me, what is that?

ET: To me, it was custard underneath, and then he make egg white. And then he—I don’t know how he did it—he put it all on top like that. And then each time we serve it with a big spoon, you gotta get the egg white as the floating island. You call that “floating island pudding.”

MK: Oh.

ET: Rice pudding, he used to put raisin inside. He used to make good muffins and biscuits and things, but he don’t have a recipe. He goes by his feeling.

MK: Oh. And then how about his entrées? Were they as good as his desserts?

ET: Yeah.
MK: And he was the main cook?

ET: Yeah.

MK: At Frankie’s?

ET: Yeah. But the cook, I mean the soup man, is another person. My brother Toshi, he used to be fry cook. He was the neatest fry cook I ever saw.

MK: So what did he cook? Fry cook does what?

ET: The pantry person. They didn’t use to call pantry or fry cook or anything. You just have to go in and learn, and do your job. That’s how you get paid. They start with peeling onion and potatoes at the beginning and wash the dishes. And each time you come up. You look what other people doing. That’s how you come up.

MK: And so Toshi used to do that?

ET: Yeah, he’s the fry cook.

MK: Fry cook, when I think about fry cook, I think of the guy who does the stuff at the grill.

ET: Yeah, yeah.

MK: Did he do that?

ET: Yeah, yeah, in a grill.

MK: And I was wondering if you know where did this Uyehara-san learn how to make all of these baked goods?

ET: I don’t know.

MK: Where did he work before?

ET: That, I don’t know. All I know, when we came to Honolulu, I started to stay at Frankie’s Café. That’s the part my big brother would know a lot of stuff. His wife . . .

MK: Otome-san.

ET: . . . Otome-san, she’s Alzheimer’s already. She cannot remember before.

MK: So at this place then, veal cutlet was one of the specialties?

ET: Yeah, and then we used to call that ulua, the fish. Now is mahimahi, yeah?

MK: Yeah. Ulua was the fish in those days.

ET: Yeah, and then hamburger steak.

MK: Hamburger steak.
ET: That’s why people think, how in the world does Uchinanchus, Okinawa people, know all this American meatloaf and turkey and da kine pudding? You know hard pudding, plum pudding? We used to have plum pudding and turkey, turkey time. Mince pie. Mr. Uyehara used to make mince pie, too.

MK: But you folks don’t know where he learned about it or how he knew this baking stuff?

ET: No, I think we were really crazy. One time I asked him, “How you make your muffins? You have a recipe?” He says he don’t have.

So I asked his wife, and his wife says no. She talk Japanese, “Ano hito, recipe nai yo. Kono feeling de, touch de, wakaru.” Of course, when he put in the flour like that, put in one, two, three like that. He knows that part. But if we tell him, “What’s the recipe?” he wouldn’t know.

MK: And then those days, who would make up the menu? Who would decide?

ET: The chef. We call him the chef, Mr. Uyehara.

MK: Mr. Uyehara decided.

ET: Yeah.

MK: So Gentaro-san took care of the front then.

ET: Front, mostly front.

MK: Uyehara’s territory was the kitchen?

ET: Back, yeah. He never came in the front. But we know him as the big boss, and we used to call him “chief.” I remember one time we were working, and then two o’clock he goes home. About one-thirty or two o’clock he goes home. And then when he came back, but we didn’t know he was going to come back. He don’t come back until four or five o’clock, usually. That’s the normal. . . . I started to eat orange. Orange is very rare to us at that time. And then somebody was eating ice cream. I said, “Oh, cannot help?” So he going look at my orange already. I’m eating already. So I said, “Oh Chief, I’m eating orange.” He say—he just nod the head like that. And the other guys eating ice cream, they put the ice cream in the soap water.

MK: Oh.

ET: You know, to dissolve it. Of course, he wouldn’t come down there. They all kind of guilty so they go put it. (Laughs) All kind stuff happen, you know.

MK: Like this Uyehara-san, what was his first name?

ET: Kamado.

MK: Kamado, yeah?

ET: Yeah.

MK: And what happened to him afterwards? After Frankie’s ended? Where did he go?
ET: I don't know when they ended, but he had a store. You see, from there, was war already. I mean, just before the war, we went to Beretania Street. My two brothers wanted to make—in fact, three brothers—wanted to make Beretania Street Columbia Inn. That's where they started over there. So I have to go over there. So I told Mr. Uyehara, "I have to go with my brothers."

He said, "Oh, I go raise your pay to seventy dollars. So stay with me, stay here."

I said, "No, I gotta help my brother." So I went over there. I don't know how much I had. I didn't have too much money with my brothers.

MK: So after that, you don't know what happened to Uyehara-san?

ET: I don't know when they closed up Frankie's, but he had a store at Liliha Street. He had a store.

MK: Oh, so he didn't continue in the restaurant business?

ET: No.

MK: He went into the store.

ET: I don't know when—that's the part I'm kind of. . . . Because of the war, all the people that worked together, they got all separated.

MK: Okay.

ET: They all got separated.

MK: And then you know Frankie's [at 619 S. King Street], I was wondering, what was in the neighborhood around Frankie's?

ET: Had the Ka'iulani Girls' Dormitory that—what do you call that? Hawaiian—Kam[ehameha] School?

MK: Yeah [Ka'iulani Home at 597 S. King Street].

ET: Kai'ulani or Ka'iulani. It was a dormitory next door.

MK: Next door?

ET: Yeah.

MK: Do they come and eat at Frankie's, too?

ET: Not too much.

MK: And what else was there?

ET: They were young, yeah?

MK: Yeah.
ET: And next door had that empty lot, had rental cars or something, something to do with cars. And the Advertiser building, yeah. In the back had car sales. All those things are all down already.

MK: Anything else like across from him? What was across from Frankie’s?

ET: Was a kindergarten or Dr. [Kiyoshi] Inouye’s place. Kindergarten over there. What that school name? Kindergarten. You know that school way up in Mo‘ili‘ili now?

MK: Oh, is that KCAA [Kindergarten Children’s Aid Association]?

ET: KKK or something like that?

MK: KCAA.

ET: That kind of school. Kindergarten school was there. Something was around there. And then the city hall. All the other side is all city hall. Because we used to walk around city hall many times, by the library, city hall, palace grounds. Used to walk around there because I lived in Miller Lane. Used to have the armory. You know armory?

MK: Yeah. The armory.

ET: The dance place.

MK: They had dances over there.

ET: Yeah. I never went in there because I’m always working, but I pass there every time.

MK: So like the armory, since they had dances and stuff . . .

ET: Yeah, and they come down.

MK: . . . would people come to eat?

ET: Come down, all the noisy guys. Hoo, terrible. I don’t know. How do you say that?

MK: Rowdy?

ET: Yeah, rowdy people. Oh boy, those kids was really rowdy.

MK: And then because you had city hall nearby, the Advertiser nearby, did newspaper people and politicians come to Frankie’s?

ET: Yeah. They come. And one time I scold that man named Mr. Singer. I tell him, “You know, when you get money, you go to Waikiki . . .” Oh sorry, I’m talking loud, yeah.

MK: No, that’s okay.

ET: “. . . and then you don’t have money, you come over here and you charge. You better pay, you know.”

(Laughter)
MK: So like your place at Frankie's, you could charge?

ET: Yeah. Plenty of them, they used to charge.

MK: They had running bill?

ET: Yeah.

MK: So how did Gentaro make a decision that who can charge, who cannot charge?

ET: You can tell by when they come every day, and they nice person. You know Mr. Uyehara, he's good in that. You know when you write that kind American, I mean, Haole name, yeah?

MK: Yeah.

ET: He doesn't know, yeah?

MK: Yeah.

ET: So he go—just like my son, went to Yokosuka, Yokohama yeah? He can tell Yokosuka get three words. Yokohama get two words. Like that, you can tell who's who, Mr. Uyehara. I found that out. "How do you know which one is which one?"

"I know, like this one, this one, this one." So he put all the bills all together. And then let them pay at the end of the month.

MK: In terms of collecting from people who charged, was it easy to collect?

ET: Yeah, in a way, but some people, they no pay. Every place was like that. Even stores, too, they used to charge. Because before, was monthly payment. You know when you work, you don't have two-weeks or one-week pay. Monthly payment.

MK: And then those days, who were the competitors to Frankie's?

ET: What was around there? Was Times, or Kapi'olani Grill. Times Grill.

MK: Times Grill.

ET: Something like that. Not too much. I don't remember. Only small places yeah? They didn't have okazuya like that.

MK: So like Frankie's, how did he get business? How did people know to come to Frankie's?


MK: So you didn't have to worry about parking then.

ET: No. Nothing. Yeah, come to think of it, no parking around there. Only on the street. Who came with a car? Only those big shots at the KGU or Advertiser. They all walk, even from the Advertiser, just nearby yeah? They used to walk. Mr. [L.P.] Thurston, Mr.—the big guy. What's his name, the other guy. You know who's Red McQueen?
MK: Yeah, the writer, sportswriter [Vernon “Red” McQueen]. Yeah.

ET: Yeah. He used to come, and he used to order T-bone steak. But he want the T-bone steak cut into pieces and cooked with the chop steak like. He goes into the kitchen, “I’m going to order T-bone steak, but I want you to cook with the vegetable like green pepper and onion like that.” He used to tell the cook, and he used to order that, and used to make. And in the meantime, he go put in the bowl, hot sauce, and ketchup, and Worcestershire sauce. Make the sauce ready. That was his specialty. (Laughs) But we don’t eat too much meat now.

MK: And then so like here’s this young girl from Hakalau working at a Honolulu restaurant. You have Haole customers . . .

ET: Yeah, any kind, yeah.

MK: How did you feel? You were okay?

ET: Yeah. I was okay, but sometimes they give me bad time. We weren’t discriminated at that time. Nothing bothered us. Everybody just like that same. We can scold them, and used to get a whole bunch of dummies. Should I call that or handicapped [i.e., deaf patrons]?

MK: Yeah, okay.

ET: They couldn’t talk, see. About five or six of them used to come, and we got to be friends.

MK: Oh.

ET: And one time, the boy came in without anybody else, only himself, and he asked for me. And you know how he asked for me? He asked like that, my ear like that. Now, it’s hanging down. Before it used to be like this. That’s how he look at me. “Where’s the waitress?”

MK: With the ears.

ET: And Tony them will laugh, and they told me about it. “You know, the guy was looking for you, you know?” (Chuckles) He cannot talk so we don’t know, and we don’t know the sign language. You can tell when the person is a talkative person, his hands go back and forth. Da-da-da-da-da. But a quiet person will just still over there and listen. Not listening, but according to what he’s saying. You can tell, you know, even if they don’t talk. Good fun.

MK: So from being waitress there, you met a lot of people, yeah?

ET: Oh, yeah, a lot of people. All kinds of people. I know this one lady from Advertiser wears the same style of dress but different colors. Amazing. And one lady from KGU will always bring a book and sits in the same seat over there. No pay attention to nobody. She order the same thing. Just mind her own business. Amazing. And one German guy used to come every morning. We used to call him Sanjikan. (Laughs) You know why “Sanjikan”?

MK: Three hours?
ET: He stay three hours over there. You know why he stay three hours? He eat the whole meal. Breakfast meal, you know. He smoke pipe and he waiting because we used to have one newspaper, free newspaper, that goes around.

MK: Oh.

ET: And then he’s waiting for that person to finish so he can get the newspaper to read. And we call him “Sanjikan” because he stay about sanji kan.

(Laughter)

We get all the names, you know. We used to have fun. We know their style. And that man never left. And one more German guy. He used to be a fire station chief. Kaka‘ako Fire Station get over there. Chief, he used to come every morning. He used to eat the same thing over and over on the counter. I say, “Why don’t you change sometime. Don’t you want to eat hotcakes sometimes?”

And he said, “When you get married,” he say, “Elsie, you get married and you going get the same wife, you know? Same person.” Oh, that one, I remembered that. Forever, I can remember him saying that. So that day, he ate hotcake.

(Laughter)

And Sanjikan, he eat from papaya, to ham and eggs, to coffee and toast. Every day the same thing.

MK: How about like politicians? Did they come, too?

ET: Not too much. I don’t remember too much. Only Mr. [David L.] Conklin because he gave ten cents. Later on, when we had Columbia Inn, all those politicians used to come.

MK: You know, I’m going to end over here. And then the next time I come, we’re going to continue with Columbia Inn.

ET: Okay.

MK: Because I made you talk so long.

ET: What time? Oh yeah. (Laughs)

END OF INTERVIEW
Tape Nos. 40-12-2-02 and 40-13-2-02

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Elsie Teruya (ET)

Honolulu, O'ahu

October 17, 2002

BY: Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

MK: This is an interview with Mrs. Elsie Teruya at her home in Honolulu, O'ahu on October 17, 2002. The interviewer is Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

Okay, so Mrs. Teruya, we're going to start today's interview with a question about your father. You were saying that your father used to sort of treat people who came to him when they were sick. Kind of tell me about that.

ET: Not really sick, but mostly some kind of itchy [condition] or when they get mumps or some kind of simple things. Now you think nothing of it, but at that time, he would—we used to call it powder toothpaste. *Hamigakiko.*

MK: Yeah.

ET: Had in a box. He do something with that and then treat the lady with the itch or something. Used to come from the other side, not in Hakalau, someplace else. I guess they learn about who wants to do those treatment. And when they get mumps or something, you know what my father did? In a frying pan he burn the *tamago,* the eggs, real koge. I guess it's cooled off and then I think he used to put it over here or something. He used to do a lot of stuff that I don't remember too well. Yet, I don't know if he got well or what. But once in a while, the Matayoshi *byōin* in Hilo, I don't know how they called him. Maybe through the jitney taxi, I think, or something like that. I don't know because we don't have telephone, only the plantation get telephone. They call, and I used to follow him, and we used to go the Matayoshi *byōin* and he do something with the doctor, with a patient. And me, I just trail along, you know. I never slept on the bed, I used to fall from the bed many times. (Laughs) Because we used to sleep on the floor before, you know with everybody else. So that was really funny. My father said, "You didn't get hurt?"

I said, "No, nothing."

When he's in the office with the doctor, I go take five cents from his pocket, long kind wallet, I took five cents and go and buy plum at the store. Hilo get stores, eh. I don't know what is that, look so good to me—oh, it's sour yeah! That's how I found out a lot of stuff.

And then my father, during the lunch like that, he took me to a Chinese restaurant. I know it's Chinese restaurant because had that, what do you call that fan? Chop suey. That's
why we call it chop suey fan. We used to call that chop suey fan, get the fan over there. And he drink coffee, I don't know how he's drinking the coffee, but cream and sugar in there. I said, "I like try, too." I put plenty sugar inside, plenty cream inside, don't taste good to me. I was about eight years old, not even ten, so that was fun I used to have every time he get called to Hilo. I had fun following him around. While he's in the office, nearby get plenty stores, Hilo, in the front, so I look around over there. I remember that part and I fall down from the bed so many times.

MK: Did the other kids in the family get to go with you and your dad?

ET: No. The boys are older, [and] Toshi [ET's younger brother] was with the mother. The boys were older, so they got to go work or go to school. Maybe weekend I went, yeah. Because I had to go school, too.

MK: Would you remember what illnesses he kind of helped out with besides mumps?

ET: That's the two I remember. Itchy stuff. Mumps [treatment] was tamago, make 'em koge. And then itchy stuff [treatment] was that powdered toothpaste. I remember now that—I guess nobody remember that, I think, powdered toothpaste. We didn't have regular toothpaste.

Sometimes as I'm talking about manjū, the peddler comes from Honomū to Hakalau and they sell us all kind stuff, and the goodies from the bakery. When the bakery comes to us, I like manjū. So I get the tamago, my father's one. I take the tamago and I go exchange. All the kids was doing that, too. And when the fisherman come, fisherman comes daytime—the manjū, the bakery man comes in the evening time—the fisherman comes we don't buy fish, but the mothers buy fish, but we get the [leftover] ice. We suck on the ice. I don't know where he come from, I can't remember his name. Last [thing left over after the fish is all sold,] so he throw away some ice, so we go wash 'em and then we suck on it.

(Laughter)

That was really fun.

MK: That bakery man that would come, what bakery was that or manjū shop?

ET: Higashi is in Honomū. That's where Gentaro's wife used to work a long time ago after she came back from Okinawa. What was the name? Not Higashi. What was his name? Still get you know. Still there. The time we went to see Big Island, it was still there. I was amazed. Almost a hundred years, yeah. Honomū, Higashi ja nai, no.

MK: Was it Okutsu?

ET: No, something else. The name don't come out.

MK: But that's a good memory, yeah?

ET: Yeah. We used to buy with eggs.

MK: So kōkan, then?

ET: Yeah.
MK: Exchange.

ET: Right. Was good fun.

MK: To get one manjū, how many eggs would it be?

ET: I don't remember. Maybe two, yeah? We had small chicken coop with a few chickens, but every time the mongoose get the eggs. I don't know how they carry, though. The ladies tell me they carry on their head, I say, "Nah!" Then they carry like this, with their paws and run, run, run away. Must be.

MK: So the mongoose would come and they would actually take the egg and take it with them, not eat it . . .

ET: No, take it away.

MK: They took it away.

ET: Yeah. That was really fun. Oh, we went to the mountains like that. Look for all kinds of hōzuki, you know hōzuki? You remember hōzuki with the fruit inside. We used to eat that and we had ichigo, we used to call it ichigo, wild strawberry. Now when I think about it, we go out wild in the mountain. Not mountain, valleys, you know.

MK: So, hōzuki, wild strawberry.

ET: Yeah, guava. Sugarcane. Sometimes we so hungry we jump inside somebody's hatake and get the cucumber and the ninjin (chuckles). And all the ladies used to say, we so healthy, what does your papa give you folks? Udon, we tell, udon. We used to have udon all the time with tomato sardine or iriko. I told you that, no? Something like that.

MK: Where you lived, did you folks play in the streams or go fishing?

ET: Oh yeah. Not fishing mostly, mostly 'opīhi. [It was kihiwai but ET and others called it 'opīhi.] You catching the 'opīhi, grab the 'opīhi, dangerous, you know. We used to have small pond, medium pond, and big pond. I was telling you about that. Big pond, get on the side. I don't like 'opīhi too much, so other guys was picking up all the 'opīhi from there. The maidenhair just growing wild. Watercress. All kind [of] stuff.

MK: How about fish?

ET: I don't know nothing about fishing. I think the older people used to go to the ocean. Hakalau by the mill get the ocean. You went to Big Island?

MK: I know where it is.

ET: Oh yeah. We went to see and looks closed, so kind of sad already. Everything was so sad.

MK: Yeah, it's closed down.

ET: All run-down, yeah.

MK: Yeah. But anyway, I'm going to move you from the Big Island to Honolulu. And last time we were finishing up our section on Gentaro's restaurant, Frankie's. One time
before the taping, you told me that Gentaro came down with TB [tuberculosis]. What happened with Gentaro when he came down with TB?

ET: I don't know how he got sick because I was in Okinawa at that time, visiting my father. Why I'm visiting my father is, Gentaro told me, “You save $5.25 every month,” because my older brothers not going go over there. My father is telling my brothers to come over because he wants to show off his boy children, otoko children to the relatives that he has sons. They don't know about Hawai‘i too much, so he wants them to go. But, my brothers don't have enough money to go yet. He tell, “Bumbai bumbai.” So my brother, Gentaro told me, “You save $5.25 every month, then maybe one year later you can go to see your father.” So, I went to see my father.

MK: And you saved up all the money to go.

ET: Yeah, about two months I stayed with him. He was happy, but he was thinking to himself, why the boys didn't come. Later on they went, but was too late, was after the war. [ET's father died during the war.] Before the war? After the war, I think. But after I came back, that’s why I didn’t know that Gentaro was in the Le‘ahi Hospital. So, I was shocked, they didn’t tell me anything. They didn’t write to me or anything. His TB was just—he used to smoke before, so I think he got hurt somewhere. That’s what somebody was telling me. He stayed there, I don't know how long he stayed there. He was there. When I went in, he was okay, when I went—we sailed in the Taiyo Maru and then came back on the Tatsuta Maru. All by boat.

MK: What did you think about Okinawa when you went?

ET: Was way behind. I thought Hawai‘i was behind, but [Okinawa] was more way behind. In the streets, they chopping the chicken. And the place was all just like, I don’t know how you say. In fact, Hakalau was better, to me. And then, now you go, ho, the streets are so nice. I went about four times after the war. The streets are so nice and big, that’s the American, what do you call, government made that, you know.

MK: But when you went, you thought it was not as . . .

ET: Oh, was terrible, yeah, terrible. You go to the store, in front of the store—this is the store. Over here, this is the front. Had a flume and all the dirty stuff went in and this thing smells. This is the nice store, good-looking store around here and all these places had a small little flume, flume-like. Now it’s all covered. All nice and covered now. Oh boy, I say, gee. And then you go to the market someplace, oh, they cutting the chicken right in front of dirt place. Get the manaita and chopping, chopping all that. Oh, my. At that time, that’s the first time I went to Okinawa.

MK: How were you treated by the people in Okinawa since you came from Hawai‘i.

ET: They’re really nice. My relative, old lady—I’m old now, but she must have been old like me, but she look more old. She boiled eggs. They wear kimono, short kind kimono. She put inside, two tamago inside her futokoro in her kimono place, and she brought it to me. “Go eat this,” yutte.

And then, a lot of stuff, nothing to it. Just like nothing, you know. No discrimination, nothing. Only one time the young girls, all the mura no young girls will go down and then Naha people will come up. The boys will come up to get together, they call that moasobi. The young kids come out and play like that. I was wearing my haori. I had one
haori, so I was wearing. Nighttime, you know this, moonlight. The boy like to grab me, but he said, “Oh!” This Hawai‘i-jin means the person from Hawai‘i. Oh, narasan means “not so good.” So let [me] go. But one more girl, same camp, she go tell, “Oh, the boy wen touch my chichi.” She was mad. She was about twenty-four, I think. Twenty-three, twenty-four kind ladies, I mean, girls. We used to have fun like that. One time I went out with them. That was really funny.

I never thought about snake. When my brother told me, “Get snake over here in Okinawa.” I didn’t want to go. But they said, “You have to go and see your father.” It’s a good thing I went.

MK: Your father, when did he pass away?

ET: The Okinawa war [World War II]. If he knew, if the soldiers told him, “Give up,” he would [understand] that, but they tell him, “Surrender.” So when you say surrender, they don’t know. Just like the boy [Japanese student] got killed [confused in the United States and was shot “Please” and “freeze.” You remember the Haole guy killed the Japanese boy? He said, “Freeze,” but to Japanese it’s “Please.” Please, yeah. So he thought was “please,” so he keep on coming. That’s how he got killed, I heard. Just like my father. If they said, “Give up,” then he would know what is “give up.” But he don’t know what is “surrender.” That’s why they put that, what you call that kind, flame torch inside the cave—not cave, but where they were hiding. So everybody got all killed inside there, civilians.

MK: So your father died during the war.

ET: During the war, yeah.

MK: And back home when you came back from Okinawa, the Tatsuta Maru, you found out that Gentaro had TB and was in Lē‘ahi Hospital.

ET: Yeah was sick.

MK: So what happened to Frankie’s restaurant during that time?

ET: Mr. Uyehara was running. He was the big boss in that Frankie’s Café. He used to do everything. Cooking, mostly he was pastry man, and the front guy, too, but he don’t go around talking the customers, he just check the cash and the bills to pay. They trusted us so much, nobody do anything wrong. The money just in the drawer, this kind drawer. Get cash register, but the extra money, they used to put it in a drawer, that’s all. Real honor system. Only once in a while we like to eat some ice cream or something like that. And the cooks, the other cooks all they know what to do, they make the soup and the rolls. And one person was making fruit cocktail all the time. Fruit cocktail, big pan.

MK: So it was fresh fruit cocktail in those days, not canned?

ET: Yeah, not canned. Fresh kind. That was the beginning of their meal. But you know, one thing I forgot to tell you. When I came back from Japan, I came back in May, I think, and about August I got burned in the restaurant, in the Frankie’s Café. Like now, coffee making is automatic, right? You don’t have to do nothing, you just put in the coffee. Before, we used to have a big tank and you put the coffee in and you got to bring the hot water from the kitchen. Big kettle of water to the coffee tank. That’s how we used to make. That was about ten o’clock in the morning, ten-thirty gurai. And then, the cooks
telling me, “Hey, Mitsu, go tell the guy to bring this hot water. Just boiling.” So change and bring ’em. And Peter, the one that was talking to another customer, not serving, just talking. He’s supposed to come down, and get the hot water, and put it in the coffee tank. I tell him, “Peter, come on!” The cook’s telling me to hurry up because they got to clean up for lunch. The cook gave me the hot water, so I grab that and I was bringing to Peter to put in. And then, I went flop down. On the linoleum had a puka, so I fall down and the thing went—my chichi all over here burned. I used to wear a skirt, so up to the skirt. So around here and around here funny kind. Didn’t show before because I was young, after it all cured. But when I coming old, now I notice all kind stuff coming out. I stayed in the hospital about two months.

MK: Oh my goodness.

ET: And I used to wear like this every time, kerchief or some kind of high-neck kind clothes, even when I worked. I think I stayed in the hospital two months, and one month I stayed home. Then I went back to work again. I used to get scared of hot water. Long time, I was scared of hot water. Even now, I’ll be very careful.

MK: That wasn’t an ordinary burn. That was a severe burn.

ET: Yeah, severe burn because Dr. Inouye, Kiyoshi Inouye, was my doctor. He says, it’s fifty-fifty chance. When you get any kind of burn, first, second day no problem. The third day is very important. Third day I had fever already, I was out. They tie my hand over here because this part kind of stick over there, so they had tied my hand up there. The doctor went tell, “Let her drink, drink, drink water and juice, water and juice.” That time they didn’t have all kind juice. I only had water and grape juice. So after that I used to hate grape juice, and now I start to drink it. Didn’t have too much juice like now. So we got to be really thankful for what we have now.

MK: But one month, you were hospitalized with the burn; one month, you were at home recuperating.

ET: Altogether, I think, took about three months. Finally, I went back to work. But I had compensation. Not too much because they were saying, maybe she cannot wear that kind sleeveless gown or short-sleeve dresses like that, so I had little bit. Not too much. At that time, not too much. Somebody was saying, “You folks should fight for more.” I was just a working person, I didn’t get any other extra stuff.

MK: After the burn, how did you feel about going back to work at the restaurant?

ET: I couldn’t help because that’s my brother’s restaurant, he tells me go to work. I said, “No, I don’t want to go work now.” He said, “Oh, you got to go back.”

And then, by then, 1938, ’39 already, defense workers all coming in. They went make a fast move. All the workers are coming in and the place was getting busy. One time, I was working day shift, and then one time night shift, one of the girls, Doris, she was working and she got robbed. They got robbed in that Frankie’s Café. So, they tell me, “Mitsu, you go to night shift and Doris come day shift,” because she’s scared already. She’s afraid to work.
MK: How did you feel?

ET: Cannot help, my brother tell me that, I got to go. What they say. Mr. Uyehara, too. Mr. Uyehara was a good guy. He's not a rowdy guy, soft guy.

MK: So, how was it when you worked night shift?

ET: Was okay. (Chuckles) You know something? You work night shift, you don't know what you doing sometime. Certain time of the night, you go blank. I don't know how I served the person the coffee. You got to get the saucer, put the cup on the saucer, and get the coffee and serve. When I woke up, I don't know how I did that. It's very funny. It just come out. You never work night shift, eh? That's how it is you know. Your body is different. Anyway, we pau at six o'clock, we go down to Ala Moana. You know that beach was clean, not like that now, was clear. That beach, clear, you know, the water. You can see through.

MK: This is six A.M. in the morning that you'd go.

ET: Yeah, by the time we pau six-thirty like that, all those guys, you know, the boys and girls used to go down. We used to have fun. Then we go home all knocked out and sleep up.

MK: When you say "night shift," from what time to what time was the shift?

ET: From about eight [P.M.] to six [A.M.]. Sometimes a little late, but most times eight to six because eight o'clock the other shift going pau, change shift.

MK: So from eight to six? What kind of foods were you folks serving?

ET: Any kind. You know the police officers, even John [A.] Burns [governor 1962–1974] came to that place, too. All the police officers, da kine top [brass], they used to come around. And the KGU and the announcers, [Honolulu] Advertiser people, plenty people around there.

MK: So those hours are you still serving dinner-type foods, breakfast-type foods, or any kine foods?

ET: Any kine food. Breakfast, I think, till eleven or something like that, ten-thirty or something, and then next going be lunch already, eleven o'clock lunch. Plenty people used to come for lunch. Nighttime, eight o'clock, the dinner. After that you can order anything à la carte. You didn't go see that [exhibit at] cultural center [Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii]?

MK: I saw parts of it, but I didn't look at it real carefully.

ET: Had all that menu over there, too.

MK: And then nighttime, like you were saying policemen would come, KGU announcers would come, John Burns even came.

ET: Yes.

MK: What other people used to come between eight o'clock at night and six o'clock in the morning?
ET: 'Advertiser' people and [Honolulu] Star-Bulletin was little away, not too far away on Hotel Street.

MK: This is Frankie's, yeah?

ET: Yeah. Star-Bulletin was [Merchant] Street. Advertiser was on same place. So, the car salesman—next door had car sales and then was an empty lot. That's Kawaiaha'a Plaza now. Ka'iulani guys, Ka'iulani Home. Not the girls, but the people that work there [Ka'iulani Home]. All those people. It's amazing how people came in. But sometime we have slack time, that's when we play around 'cause no more boss.

MK: When you folks say you folks play around, what did you folks do? You folks were kind of young and . . .

ET: Yeah, and the guy named Tony, he liked to show off that he can carry—you know before the rice bag used to be hundred pounds. He can carry the hundred-pound bag, one arm like that. He practice with the cooks. At that time it's slow already. (MK chuckles.) Oh boy, we used to have fun. So much pictures, too. I gave away all those pictures, too. One time, one guy from the Advertiser came with a motorcycle and then he said, okay—I don't know, the boss—not the boss, the manager like, they didn't scold us. Look like we all same, what do you call that, category. We're not higher or lower on the part, we all same. (Chuckles) So, the person named Chocolate, we call him "Chocolate" because he's dark-skinned. I don't know his real name. Then, one waitress went on it, and then he drove around up to the post office, and came up to King Street, and to Frankie's Café. Each time we take turn. My turn came, I said, "Hey Chocolate, I scared, no go too fast." So, he go by post office place, and then I tell him, "Chocolate, is that all you can do? I like you go fast."

(Laughter)

It's the first time in my whole life I rode a motorcycle. Ey, that's fun. That's why the girls go with all this motorcycle guys. That's real fun. Middle of the night we doing that, no more cars. We had fun. All those days, a lot of stuff we did. I forgot all the other stuff.

MK: Every night, were there times when it got slow?

ET: Slow, yeah. You can go around. But in the meantime, slow time we got to fill up the sugar container. Before we used to have sugar container and napkin holder, so you got to fill up the napkin. The salt and pepper got to be—we never used to have shoyu, only salt and pepper. Only now get shoyu all over the place.

MK: How about things like Tabasco?

ET: Yeah, later on the Tabasco came and the Worcestershire sauce. Later on, not right away.

MK: But in the beginning, just salt and pepper.

ET: Didn't have [other condiments], only salt and pepper. Sugar stand. Later on we had to clean the Tabasco sauce, the top, you know when come funny kind, so you got to clean that. Worcestershire sauce, first we put the—before used to come in the paper. I mean the cover was paper. The new one is covered with paper, but it says "Worcestershire sauce." The name is on it. After this come dirty, the paper come dirty, then we take that off, and
the bottle as is. We never used to fill up that. Hot sauce and this Worcestershire, never fill up. Only salt, sugar, and pepper.

MK: And then, in addition to refilling things that go on the tables, what else did you folks do slow time? The waitresses's job.

ET: Clean the shelf like that.

MK: And then, would you folks have to help in the kitchen?

ET: No. We don't help.

MK: No kitchen.

ET: The kitchen get dishwasher and cook, the one who get ready for tomorrow, pantry like, that kind [of worker]. But them, too, they used to do everything. Only the dishwasher was the dishwasher.

MK: Among the waitresses, did you folks have like the regular waitress and then like head waitress?

ET: No, we didn't have any head waitress at that time.

MK: Everybody was the same.

ET: Yeah, when I went back to Columbia Inn, they said they get one head waitress, go talk to her. Somebody tell me. "Oh, what do you call her?"

"She's the head waitress."

"Oh."

"Any kind of problem you tell her."

So I was surprised because I never worked restaurant long time, and had a charge card. Say, "How do you make this charge card?" (Chuckles) All those things.

MK: They changed.

ET: Yeah, small restaurant they just cash, cash, cash, eh?

MK: When you were working at Frankie's, did you folks—as a waitress—did you handle the cash, too?

ET: Yeah, most times I handled. We didn't have no problem. Only the Haole guys, they charge sometimes. They charge when they don't have any money, but they paid though. Once a month before, pay. Not like now, once a week, or two weeks a month, like that.

MK: When it's like once-a-month payment, if they happen to come by at the end of the month, you ask them for payment or you bill them?

ET: No, we ask. No such thing as bill in that. I guess Mr. Uyehara, he get them all. As I say, he cannot read the name too good, but he compare same kind. If this is the same kind, he
put all same kind like that. Even Gentaro, too. Sometimes they don’t know, they come to me say, “Kore nani ka? (What is this?)” you know. “Kore to kore, all same, ka? (This and this, are they all the same?)” Tell like that. We had fun. They did a good job, though.

MK: And then like, you were saying all young people kind of working at Frankie’s. When you look back, you look at their ethnicity, were they Japanese, Okinawan, others?

ET: Mixed. Sue Terashita and Helen Nagasawa. Because you know when you work together and you want somebody to come in, naturally your friend going to be one Okinawan person. See, it comes like that. I don’t know how Big Helen came in. We call her “Big Helen” because had “Small Helen,” too.

(Laughter)

Friend to friend, or relative to relative, they come here. Today, sometime I think why in the world that boy was over there and he’s from Pepe’keo. I don’t know how. Contact with Mr. Uyehara, I think. Somebody know Mr. Uyehara or somebody know Gentaro, that’s how they get contact. That’s why the same kind of people come in. Just like the Filipino. You know now, the restaurant and the hospital like that, even now they say, “This is my cousin, can you hire him, too?” They bring all their cousins.

MK: So relatives and friends.

ET: So I say, “How many cousins you get?”

At the Columbia Inn, they say, “This is my cousin,” the busboys like that. You got to hire plenty people. Funny, you know, but now I know. Because you know your friend, they wen looking for job, they bring them in.

MK: And then like at Frankie’s, you have the kitchen workers, you have waitresses, did you folks have busboys, too, those days?

ET: No. We didn’t have busboys.

MK: So waitresses . . .

ET: Yeah, we do everything.

MK: How about waiters?

ET: Waiters, too. Had plenty waiters. I don’t know why they would waiter. I remember because Gentaro was a waiter all the time. He never went in the kitchen. When he was at American Caféé, I think, they started from dishwasher and then they come up to waiter. I wonder why they had waiter. I don’t understand. Just to look after everything, I think, in a way. In their mind or their boss tell, especially nighttime.

MK: Were the waiters a little bit higher than the waitress, then?

ET: They’re older.

MK: Older.

ET: Yeah.
MK: And then like, you said you used to wear white blouse, skirt. How about the waiters? What did they wear in those days?

ET: White shirt and any kind of pants. They used to have a long apron half, half an apron, but long. Amazing yeah, you don’t see that kind now. They get necktie and all that. Just white shirt and any kind [of] pants.

MK: I don’t know if you know, but how did you think business was going at Frankie’s?

ET: Kind of slow, but was good, pretty good. Because no more restaurant around there. Didn’t have too much restaurants. Only Kapi’olani Grill, Times Grill. I don’t know when Times Grill started. Get in that Ethel and Wallace [Teruya] one, yeah?

MK: Mm-hmm. When you look back, your food at Frankie’s, how was it different from the food at, say, Kapi’olani or Times Grill?

ET: I don’t know because we don’t go to a restaurant. You know before, hey, from the Japanese school they tell you you go in the restaurant, you not so good. You naughty girl or something like that, they used to teach us. So, sometimes the girls used to come. Japanese girls used to come and say, “I know the sensei don’t like us to go in the restaurant, but we curious, too, so we come in the restaurant.” That’s what they used to tell us, that’s how they started to know. Hey, you folks are lucky, eh, can go anywhere.

MK: So the Japanese sensei didn’t think it was proper to go to restaurants . . .

ET: Yeah. I wonder if Japan was like that, too. They come from Japan, all the sensei come from Japan. Not from Hawai‘i.

MK: So when you look at your customers back then, were there more men than women then?

ET: Yeah, more men. When couple comes in, they bring all the kids, too. I know one family, Yuen family, he was a nice guy. He had plenty kids. He used to bring all of them. He always used to wear suit, and he bring all the kids to the restaurant. It was really nice. I was amazed.

MK: You mentioned that this Mr. Yuen would come dressed up in a suit to Frankie’s?

ET: No, I mean he’s the type. He always wear a coat. He always wear a coat. I don’t know if he was skinny or what. He was skinny guy. I notice that.

MK: But what did most people wear to come to Frankie’s?

ET: Just any old thing, but not special. Only the officers at city hall comes in suit.

MK: So Frankie’s was like a casual place.

ET: Yeah, casual. Family restaurant.

MK: But more men came to that restaurant?

ET: Yeah. If woman come in, it’s from the Advertiser or the KGU, they come in by themselves. Eat quick and go. They get only half an hour. No more such thing as one hour before.
MK: Yeah. (Chuckles) I know that 1941, Columbia Inn in Chinatown started.

ET: Yeah. They were going to start at December. They build up the place, make ’em all nice. Downstairs, Toshi was making all the shelves for canned goods. We were upstairs, he was downstairs. We were upstairs cleaning up, 1941, December 7. Because maybe tomorrow or so, we were supposed to open. Either December 8, or 9, or 10, around there, we were supposed to open so we used to clean the mirrors and get everything all set up. We talking story and you know, laughing up. And they said, “Hey you guys, what you folks doing? Get home.” Hoo! The bomb came down, you know. I was surprised. That’s the end already, all black out. When we go by the governor’s place, they tell, “Halt! Who goes there?” We had to get the ID. We had a black, something black stamped on, because we Japanese. We had to bring gas mask, too, but I never bring gas mask. You know, with the nose kind.

MK: So, you folks were getting ready for the opening of Columbia Inn when December 7 came. So, what happened? Because the war came, how soon were you folks able to open?

ET: We couldn’t open because my brother was still in the hospital. He was still sick. I think he came out already, but he was still sick, so he couldn’t come in. But, he was making all that business arrangement. I only work there. Because of the war, the Sumitomo Bank closed, so they cannot get the money out. I don’t know from who they borrowed the money. They borrowed the money to put in the cash register. You got to get change, something like that. That’s what Toshi was saying, I don’t know very well.

MK: This Columbia Inn in Chinatown, what did it look like? You folks got it all ready.

ET: It was a long Columbia Inn. Not the wide kind. Frankie’s Café was wide. First was small, and then came wide. Plenty tables and chairs, but Columbia Inn at Beretania was long one, and the counter was a long one.

MK: So you had a long counter, and then how were the seats? Booths or regular chairs?

ET: Booth. The defense workers, they come, even if the other person wen throw up over there, they sit down, you know. I say, “Oh, I got to clean up.” Say, “That’s okay.”

They just cover with napkin or something. The sidewalks were full with people, like this. One time one guy wen eat a big steak, that was about ten o’clock. He ate a big steak and he forgot to pay. So I went out, plenty people. He was a soldier, so I can see him. So I run after him and then grab him, and he’s a big guy so I got to grab like that. I was skinny little girl, and then I jump on him, and I tell, “You didn’t pay your check.”

He say, “Oh yeah, I forgot.”

His mind was someplace else. So he came back and he paid and he gave me a tip. (MK laughs.) Everybody used to give us tip at that time, defense workers. You know how we used to pick the tips, ten cents, quarter like that. The counter ga aru, eh, koko. We used to grab the tip and drop it down here. Had something, ice cream boxes like that over here. We used to grab ’em, put ’em down.

MK: So just sweeping the tips off the table.
ET: Yeah. No, the counter one. Table one, we put it in our pocket.

MK: But the tips on the counter, you would just sweep off the counter.

ET: Yeah, but was busy time. So when I got married, then I told my brother, “I cannot work, I think I’m pregnant,” after I got married.

And he said, “That’s okay. I’ll bring you a stool, so you sit over there and just cash.”

(Chuckles)

MK: Wait now. Before we get into that part, I was wondering, because you folks are Okinawan Japanese during World War II and you’re having this business, a lot of civilian defense workers and military, were there any worries or bad experiences you had?

ET: No. The only thing is when we go to the—going home, they always tell us stop. I didn’t have any problem. Maybe I was working, working, working. Some people say they call you Japs and this and that, but we didn’t have problem because they want to eat. ’Cause a lot of places closed.

MK: When you say you “working, working, working,” how many hours a day did you work during those war years?

ET: War years, six [A.M.] to six [P.M.], we used to work. As I said, six to six we working, and then Beretania Street is here and the restaurant is past Fair Department [Store], Princess Theatre, past… Really Maunakea [Street] around there, okay. Our home is right way down to the governor’s home, and then over here we go inside here and then in the back is our home. From here to here, when you work from six to six, you so darn knocked out already because blackout, you cannot work, blackout. And across from here, get one taxi stand, this Beretania Street. Taxi stand here, we could easily call the taxi stand and we go home on the taxi, but we walked home. Ho, by the time we get home, we take a bath, pau already. Nothing, just sleep. I used to do that, 1941, ’42, ’43. But when I got married, then I didn’t work that long, only in the morning.

MK: So, in those days and Columbia Inn was opening six in the morning to six at night, because of blackout.

ET: Blackout, yeah.

MK: And, you mentioned like they had Fair Department Store, Princess Theatre. What else was near the old Columbia Inn in Chinatown?

ET: The burlesque. You call that “burlesque” or…

MK: Yeah, burlesque.

ET: What do you call that kind...

MK: That Beretania Follies.

ET: Yeah, Beretania Follies. That’s what. You know Toshi so nice, you know the ladies all that used to work over there, that used to dance and all those things, they used to go upstairs get that upstairs. This is in the lane. Tin Can Alley (Kamanuwai Lane), I think
they call that. Get a theatre, yeah. But, upstairs get the—what do you call that—whorehouse.

MK: Yeah, yeah.

ET: You know, before, I didn’t even know what was whore. W-H-O-R-E. I reading a book, I reading, “whore,” what is whore? I don’t know when I was young. It’s so funny now. They used to have a whorehouse up there, and that burlesque people. All these guys used to come eat. Oh, plenty ladies come in eat. And these Filipino guys, all the Filipinos are hungry for sex, I think. They bring any kind of ladies or girls to the restaurant, got to make order T-bone steak like that. Big meal, pay for her. I guess I don’t know what they do after that. But, a lot of Filipino men used to bring them . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: This is side two of the interview with Mrs. Teruya.

So, you were just saying that there was a whorehouse upstairs of Columbia Inn.

ET: This is burlesque show, Follies.

MK: Burlesque show was the main . . .

ET: And you know after everything pau, when we went to Columbia Inn—when Toshi went to Columbia Inn—he became the manager. He called this—so many years ago—he called these ladies that used to work over here. I don’t know how many came in, but quite a bit. They came in and he gave them a free dinner.

MK: From the Follies show?

ET: Yeah, but you know they’re all older already. They’re not doing those shows anymore. Then Toshi wen treat them to dinner. That was nice, but I didn’t see because I worked daytime. I worked morning, I’m always morning shift. So, Beatrice was telling me about it.

MK: And then, when you’re working at Columbia Inn-Chinatown, did you make friends with the people that came in?

ET: No. I saw one boy but I told him, “My brother and his friend getting ready for me to meet somebody, so I cannot go with you,” all that kind. He gave me a locket, but I had to return it. I returned it. And then, something else was happening. As I said, my brother told me, Gentaro told me, “If you marry this boy, I’m happier than you.” So I told myself, oh, he must be really something great, yeah, special.

I said, “Okay, then, I’ll meet him.”

So we met, and then we fell in love, but at the beginning he even forgot my name. So, as I was going to work every day, by Princess Theatre he was waiting. And then, before, I was skinny and I used to walk fast. He forgot my name, so I said, “Hey!” I said, “My
name Mitsu. Elsie Mitsu.” Nobody used to call me “Elsie,” only my sister-in-law used to call me “Elsie.” Only when they go among the Haole people, they called me “Elsie” (chuckles) because they cannot say “Mitsu.” So funny, you know. And then he tells me, “Oh, I got to go work. I got to go on time.” Ten o’clock or eleven o’clock like that. He says after work he’ll meet me like that. That’s how it started to happen.

MK: What was your husband’s name?

ET: Walter Masao Teruya.

MK: And how was that first meeting arranged between you and Walter?

ET: Yeah, at home, at my brother’s home. We met together.

MK: Was there any sort of—how did your brother Gentaro know about Walter?

ET: Oh, because they know, Gentaro knows Walter’s family. We call him “Masa,” too. Nobody call him “Walter.” Only the Haoles call him “Walter.” Only Masa and Mitsu. The family, the parents, know each other. His parents know Gentaro, because Gentaro’s name was all over the place. If you say, even now, I go to the senior citizen place and somebody will say, “Oh, she’s Gentaro’s imōto, sister.”

“Oh, yeah?”

I say, “You used to know my brother?”

Because he used to play samisen, too. He used to learn samisen. My sister-in-law used to play okoto. All the bunch get together, to the home, wherever they learn. So everybody used to know Gentaro.

MK: And then your husband’s family, Walter Masao Teruya’s family...

ET: From Kailua.

MK: ... were they involved in any restaurant business?

ET: No, nothing. You know the Teruya family, nobody is in restaurant business. When the Columbia Inn opening like that, I tell my husband I think I better go and—at this time I had babies already.

MK: Oh, that’s the Kapi‘olani one?

ET: Yeah, opening. “I’m going down.”

He say, “No, don’t go. You leave them alone. You leave the Kaneshiros alone.” I never even went down. I think we sent only a bag of rice, I think. You know before used to weigh hundred pound or something like that.

MK: So the Teruyas had no connection with the restaurant?

ET: No, my husband was a butcher. Why the butcher? Because, as I said, the Hale Nani Hospital, the nēsan, the husband was a butcher. So, he said, “You better come in because
the other partner is going to retire." He used to work at a pineapple company, and I don't know what company, the kind they dig the coral all around Ala Moana.

MK: Oh, Hawaiian Dredging Company.

ET: Yeah, that's it. Hawaiian Dredging. You know about it? Oh, yeah, that company, he used to work. So my brother-in-law told him, he don't know nothing about butcher job. He went in and he learned. Amazing part, he can really pick off the skin from the pig head real fast. Was very smart.

MK: So, his work all through life was in the butchering . . .

ET: Yeah, at Chinatown. Twenty-five years he work over there. So he said, "That's enough," and then he retired. That's when started to go on traveling. Every year we used to go traveling.

MK: When did you folks get married?

ET: [Nineteen] forty-two.

MK: And then by 1943, you were pregnant, and so you wanted to stop working because you were pregnant, but your brother said . . .

ET: Yeah, he'll bring the stool, "So you just stay over there and cash." (Chuckles)

MK: So how long did you do that?

ET: Only about three or four months. Four months, I think, until my stomach start to show. Four, five months, I think.

MK: And then after that, you know when your baby came, what did you do for the next so many years?

ET: Just stay home. We have to get the ice, we didn't have refrigerator. You know when you get married at '42, '43, even you go to Kress, you cannot get spoon or forks or anything. We used to have Kress Company down Fort Street Mall. And to get pots and pans, only one small pot and pan we can get from Kress. Only few utensils. We had a icebox, I don't know from where he found the icebox. The kind you have to put the ice inside. I have to get the ice from the store. You don't call it supermarket before, from the store. I get the buggy, put the ice in there, and then bring it to the refrigerator and cover the ice with the burlap bag so it won't melt too fast. We used to get hard time get milk when the baby was growing, after I had the baby. I got to get milk, yeah. In fact, before pregnancy, you got to get milk. So we called two company and my husband got it from one, Meadow Gold, I think.Yeah, Meadow Gold. During the war you get hard time and they'll tell you, okay, they'll deliver, you don't take from nobody else, you only get from Meadow Gold, he tells me. Before was Dairymen's [Association, Ltd.]. Dairymen's or something like that. You oboeteru, no?

MK: Yeah. Yeah, Dairymen's, yeah.

ET: Yeah, something like that.

MK: Where were you folks living?
ET: Waikīkī.

MK: Oh.

ET: John 'Ena Road. But you know, as I was telling you before, that was a Magoon Estate. Small duplex, but a long kind duplex, yo. Had pukas on the wall, and my two brother-in-laws, they come in and stick da kite kamaboko-style board. Any kite board, from outside, they make the pukas, all patch them up. Patch the house. See how we were? We don't even complain to the boss. Of course, it was only thirteen dollars a month (laughs).

MK: And then, who else was living around there?

ET: All Japanese. Smile Café, Mr. Sam [Uyehara], was living inside. All the place was plenty homes. I don't know if that whole estate was for Magoon.

MK: Were there many other Okinawans living . . .

ET: No, next door was Kimura, Kimoto-san. He had a laundry service. Because of the servicemen and the restaurants, he did plenty towels and all kinds hanging all over there. All stretched. And the lady used to iron, iron, and the first daughter used to iron, iron, iron all the time. They had a handicapped boy, was only sleeping all the time so they couldn't go out to work.

MK: So that's the Kimotos?

ET: Yeah. And then this side was Kitagawa. Kitagawa, and next to me was, the duplex, was Takara. That's something to do with my husband, I didn't know about it. That's how they found the place, I think. Somebody else supposed to live and rent over there, but somehow the thing come all take over like.

MK: How long did you folks live at 'Ena Road.

ET: I wonder. We came up here when Stella was born, so 1945, '46. We stayed until '46.

MK: You folks moved . . .

ET: No, not here, we moved to McCully. McCully, Wiliwili Street. After that we stayed only about—not even ten months, close to Christmas. So in the meantime, my in-laws from Kailua moved in with us. Even with the daughters, too. The two daughters and the brother. So, I think they were telling themselves that they got to buy a home. So, they found this one. I don't know how they found this one, because I was too busy with the kids.

And you know, I used to get headache all the time. You know what it was? I needed glasses. My glasses. My husband called me, "You get moloa headache." So I was thinking, chee, just like I'm going to fall down you know. I have to sleep for about three hours. The thing no go away. We never used to drink aspirin or medication or anything before. I don't remember at all drinking any medication. Isn't that strange?

MK: And it was more a problem with your eyes that caused that?

ET: Yeah. My brother-in-law went to Minatoya, Dr. Minatoya, so he said he fixed his eyes, better with the glasses. So I think I have that problem, too, so I went. I have astigmatism.
That's why every time after I help with the party like that, you know in the party people are going like this.

MK: Yeah, going down . . .

ET: We used to help a lot. The Okinawan people, when they get party, no more catering before. So we used to go—all the people, the relatives and the friends—all used to go and help. Prepare the food and serve.

MK: So what kind of occasions did the Okinawan families had party for?

ET: Weddings. Da kine, baby born, or toshi oiwai. Everybody coming old. The parents coming older, yeah. We used to go and help. So every time I go and help, I come home with a headache. Because now I know, the thing moving, the astigmatism, so now I cannot read on the bus, anything. I cannot read on the bus, I get dizzy. When I'm on tour, too, I cannot read. So I tell my husband to read what it says or my sister-in-law to read.

MK: So when you folks eventually moved here, that was when your in-laws just purchased this property. When you folks were in this house in the beginning, how many people?

ET: We had about ten because over there my brother-in-law and my sister-in-law. They weren't married yet, so they were over there. But, over here we had my four children, Ojichan, Obāba, my four children, and Masa and me. Four, eight, nine, ten. Usually we had ten, at the beginning we had ten. But, each time somebody go out, then came to eight. Then, because came eight because my sister-in-law got divorced. One of my sister-in-laws get divorced and came home with a baby. That's why we had plenty people. That's why we extended that place. I told my father-in-law—they were looking for a home for her up there, but if they go up there, the parents have to go over there and watch the baby. The baby just came out from the hospital.

MK: It would be easier to just live there.

ET: So I told my father-in-law, "Why don't you make extension over there?" I told my husband, better make extension, go let Fumi go inside there. My father-in-law was so happy that time. They get together and then they made.

MK: So, very nigiyaka, yeah?

ET: Yeah. And then when she was there, my sons are growing up.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

ET: My sons were growing up, they want the room themselves, yeah, because the girls over there. The girls each time go out. Lorraine go out, Stella go out, the two boys are here. They were saying, "When Aunty Fumi going to get married? We like that place over there." It didn't happen, so now when he's married he give every child their own room.

MK: So you had a full house.

ET: Yeah.

MK: Your husband was working as a butcher.
ET: Yeah, he worked from six [A.M.] to six [P.M.].

MK: And then, you were saying that when you’re home, besides taking care of the children, you started doing side work? You wanted . . .

ET: I want to escape. After the kids came a little older, Aunty Fumi can watch. I said, “You can watch the boys?” I used to go catering every Saturday.

MK: Where did you work?

ET: Nishi Catering.

MK: What did you have to do for Nishi Catering?

ET: Oh, they make the gochisō. In the evening we come in all nice white clothes and then we go to the church like that, get party, that’s the catering business, yo. That’s how the catering business came real good at that time.

MK: So you went as a server?

ET: Yeah, as a server. Then sometimes we used to get that kind tourist party. Tourist picnic at Punalu‘u like that, way out there. Kailua Beach like that, we used to follow Mr. Nishi. He did a lot of stuff.

MK: Where else did you work?

ET: That’s all.

MK: Nishi Catering . . .

ET: Restaurant and Nishi Catering.

MK: You were saying, you did babysitting or ironing?

ET: Yeah, because I want to escape. You cannot stay with the in-laws all day long. They wash clothes every other day. They wash clothes today, next day is ironing. That thing went round, and round, and round. And you know, you can clean house and do something, they work around the yard, so I don’t take care the yard at all. I didn’t know nothing about plants. Like that, see. So I said, “Gee, I cannot be”—the youngest boy was about two years old or something. This Iwasaki lady, and Sakata lady used to take us, she’s the driver. So she takes us marketing. I said, “You folks going down there? Take me, too.” Everyone get one child. We used to go down to Kalihi, the Yamane Store around there had. And what else over there?

MK: Kalihi Shopping Center.

ET: Shopping center around there, Foodland like that. We used to go and buy lot of stuff, and come home. That’s why we still friends. Not too long ago, we met. Mrs. Iwasaki moved from Seattle. She had two times divorce, I think. Now, she live together with somebody. She’s not married, but they together, but they’re not married. He’s a nice guy. Japanese guy.
MK: So those days, it’s sort of like as an escape, then you work Nishi Catering, and you said you did some ironing.

ET: Before, I started babysitting, and then I went ironing. And, the Haole lady down there, and the Chinese lady up there, they had a store, so the lady was all backed up with her ironing. So, she told somebody to come and iron, so somebody told me. I don’t know who told me to go up there and go iron because the lady all backed up with all the job. Okay, I went. You know, Chinese home, good fun. Somebody calls her, and she says, “Hello?” and she talks all in Chinese and I don’t know not one word she’s saying. And then at the end she says, “Goodbye.” And then she make for me da kine, she get manapua and hot tea when I finish, she serve me.

And the lady down there, Kay Johnson, she used to be a photographer. They don’t have children, but they had a big German dog. What the name was now? Gosh. Amazing. I say, “How do you treat that dog?” She says you just treat the dog like a child. Say, okay, and he sits right by me when I’m ironing. Big dog, you know, I get scared of that big German dog. What was his name? And one time the dog ran away, ho, the lady went crazy. The big dog go run away, you cannot find ‘em. She got me crazy going all around the place, big lady, eh (chuckles). Big lady, so when I iron her mu‘umu‘u, before mu‘umu‘u was cotton. Ho, boy, you got to iron all that, you know (laughs).

MK: Oh, the full mu‘umu‘u. And then you did ironing, you did babysitting. You mentioned you babysat two . . .

ET: Yeah, the two Haole kids. And then I look in the newspaper, I look at it, it says, “Eleven [A.M.] to two [P.M.]” That’s good because my kids are all in school. By then I come home, the kids going come home. So I say, that’s the right time. So I said, “Oh, I’m going to get that. Maybe I should try.” But I no tell my husband. I just call up and I say, “I’m old you know”—I was about fifty-five, fifty-six—“I’m old you know.”

She said, “We all old. Come down.” Without even—just by telephone. (Chuckles). She was nice lady. I just cashier, not waitress, just cashier.

MK: Where was this Taira’s Beretania Café?

ET: You know where Garden House?

MK: Yeah.

ET: Is that Pi‘ikoi [Street]? Pi‘ikoi and Beretania, the corner, they still have. Next door had one small restaurant, they cater to all these Occidental Insurance people and all the Schuman Carriage guys, all come over there.

MK: What kind of food did they serve over there?

ET: American food. The man used to make one good apricot pie, but apricot cream pie. Was so delicious. Mr. Taira, he’s a soft guy. The lady, she’s fat, every time she drop—I was skinny at that time—every time she drop something she get hard time pick ‘em up. She tells me, “Mitsu, can you pick that up for me?” The nice thing about her was, I went in about August, I think was—no, my father-in-law passed away, so I went in about June or July, I only worked till about close to December, Christmas. She gave me thirty-dollar bonus. Cash, you know. Nobody did that to me, so I was surprised. That was really nice, but the lady passed away, too.
MK: And then this Taira family, were they Okinawan?

ET: Yeah, they were Okinawan.

MK: Were they from Oroku, too?

ET: No, I don’t know who they are. I didn’t know nothing about them, I just went in. Nothing. And you know what? To save money or something, they had that telephone, the public phone. When they order something, the public phone rings. They didn’t want any telephone because too many calls. Isn’t that strange? I thought that was really strange. And then when they want to call somebody, used to be only dime before. So they put in dime and they tell, “Mitsu, give me one dime (chuckles) from the cash register.” That was very unusual for me. I guess they go home, see. They don’t stay till late, just breakfast and lunch. They said they don’t need that, I guess so.

MK: How did this place compare with the time when you worked at Columbia Inn and Frankie’s, was it different?

ET: Because my age is different. My age is, but I had fun. I used to like to go over there. Somehow when you want to go to work, and you having fun, it’s not a chore. It’s not work. Just like I’m escaping, too, see. I finish all my stuff and I go, so not so bad.

MK: I know that after that, you started working at Columbia Inn-Kapi‘olani.

ET: You know why? Because I was cashing at Beretania Café, and my sister-in-law heard about it.

MK: Beatrice Kaneshiro.

ET: Yeah, Beatrice heard about it. And she said to Toshi, “You know, Mitsu working at Beretania Café, she’s cashing over there. Why don’t you tell her to come and cash for you?” As I was telling you, somebody was taking money from the cashier because Columbia Inn was busy, busy, busy. See, we didn’t even—relative couldn’t go in there. We have to go someplace else or buy just take-out order. Not from there, someplace else. We never used to go to a restaurant. My husband never used to take me out on birthday like that, too, anniversary. As I was telling you, when my in-laws all passed away and nobody was here, only my youngest son, and Masa and me, I told, “Since I’m free now, my Mother’s Day and my birthday, I don’t cook.” So Michael, he went down to Jack in the Box and got the take-out food. At that time, I didn’t know anything about take-out food, I mean, fast food. And that thing was pretty good. He bought about three plates.

“Oh, they such . . .”

“Yeah, Jack in the Box,” he said, “right down here.”

That was fun. After that I never cooked for my Mother’s Day. Either we go out or we bring in something. You got to do something like that, you know, if the husband is not the kind of person that don’t take you out. One time I asked him, “When are you going to take me out to dinner?”

“When we travel I take you out to dinner all the time.”

I said, “That’s different, we don’t have icebox or anything so we have to eat out,” yeah?
MK: So, going back to Columbia Inn, Beatrice suggested to Toshi that he bring you in as a cashier. What hours did you work?

ET: I worked morning. From five-thirty I come in, open the—what you call—it was twenty-four hours. So, Monday morning, that’s the only time we have to come from the back and open the door at six o’clock. But in the meantime, I got to get my cash ready. Everything all ready, the candy stand get all ready, cigar stand all check up, and see if the surrounding is clean. Because they clean it up, the crew clean ‘em up, and then the kitchen guys all clean up, too. So, at six o’clock, I put the flag out, and we open. And then they all come in. From about six-thirty to at least about ten o’clock, you just picking up money. Just collecting money, no can do nothing else. Once in a while, I answer the phone. I used to work from six [A.M.] to two [P.M.], he told me work from six to two, and I used to wear dress, before, with stocking. Six to two. And then I used to collect all the money from six to ten, about ten the lunch menu come in. The other cashier-typist make the lunch menu upstairs. So, she comes in and put the lunch menu, and then I go home. Two o’clock, I didn’t go home at that time. What I’m telling you is till two o’clock I used to work before, at twelve o’clock, one o’clock, people call in. I told you about it, yeah? [Some customers] want to be popular going to Columbia Inn.

MK: So calls coming for them.

ET: I told Toshi, I cannot stand that. If take-out order, I don’t mind because the other lady going help, too. But when the calls come in so much for Toshi, for Eugene, for Toshi, for the customer. One guy named Larry, ho boy, every time he used to get calls. Every day he used to get called. Finally Toshi found out that somebody’s calling him purposely. I don’t know how he found out, so he told me when somebody call for Larry—I forgot his last name—you go and tell him, “You have a telephone call.” He liked to be paged.

MK: To let people know that he’s here.

ET: Let people know that he’s there. Sometimes I call for Mrs. Abe and one Haole lady comes.

I say, “Are you Mrs. Abe?”

Say, “Yes.”

So was good fun. But I said I not going work till two o’clock, that’s too much for me, so I only work till eleven o’clock. Just collecting money. I couldn’t punch it. So we have a drawer over here, not drawer, but that kind of tana.

MK: Shelf.

ET: Yeah, extra shelf, we pull that out and we collect the money. Later on I punch all. Some other cashier they don’t punch it. They throw the check away and they steal the money. So you got to get somebody that trusted, that’s what happening.

MK: So, how many years did you do this, cashiering?

ET: I think about eighteen years—I mean, the new Columbia Inn—eighteen years to twenty years I think.

MK: And always the same hours?
ET: Yes. I didn’t like lunch hour anymore. I work lunch hour about six months or so. Because, I told Toshi that my husband don’t want—he know my husband, he’s strict—my husband don’t want me to work. “So, if you want me to work, you don’t have to pay me plenty, but just give me cash because I need for my stocking.”

MK: Because you had to wear stockings all the time.

ET: Yeah. I had to wear stocking and dress. Stay neat, got to take perm. I used to get perm all the time, every three months I used to take perm. And then, in the meantime my husband used to take me every year for traveling. We used to wear slacks. We started to wear pants, and I see the pants hanging in my closet. I said, “Gee, I cannot wear pants to work.” And one day I wen wear the pants. He didn’t realize that I never see Toshi, so I used to wear. Couple of times I used to wear pants and go in. And then, he said, “You wearing pants now.” The other cashier knew that I was wearing pants, so she started to wear pants, too, because we bend down like that, you know. I said, “No sense I just hang the pants. We only go once a year traveling.” So we started to wear pants from then on, but he never scold us. He didn’t like at the beginning. He was strict you know, that manager. The waitress go take the order, he don’t want the waitress standing [casually] “Yes, may I take your order?” like that. He want the waitress to stand together like this and nicely.

MK: Oh, very strict.

ET: Yeah, very strict. They voted that they don’t wear white skirt, they like wear black skirt because when they get the menses, they was young yeah, at that time. So they voted for black skirt and white top. He was really strict, you know, so the girls learn a lot from him.

MK: And then, you were saying, you were just collecting money. It was that busy.

ET: Yeah. Cashing, cashing yeah, busy.

MK: So morning time was always busy then?

ET: Yeah, busy, busy. The minute we opened, busy.

MK: Since you were taking the cash, would you know what were the real popular dishes in the morning? What was real popular? What were people ordering?

ET: I guess if you don’t work in a restaurant, you wouldn’t understand. All kind. Morning food: French toast, hotcakes, ham and eggs, waffles.

MK: So just a whole variety of breakfast food.

ET: Papaya, orange juice—frozen orange juice.

MK: And then you were mentioning that you . . .

ET: Hash and egg was very popular over there.

MK: Their corned beef hash, did they make it fresh or was it the canned?
ET: No, canned corned beef, but fresh. Canned corned beef, but potato is fresh, like that. I used to let them make crispy. I told the lady, "Make 'em crispy." The customer tell the waitress to make it crispy, really nice. Taste good.

MK: You were mentioning that there were some people who liked to get paged, probably some well-known people. Who were some of the well-known people that used to come all the time?

ET: All the Advertiser people. Because, by then the Star-Bulletin came in with the Advertiser. Oh, the newspaper guys used to like Toshi. Toshi used to like them, too. When he had the funeral, when he died, that Dave Donnelly you know him? He gave the eulogy for Toshi. To this day, every year he goes to the grave, that guy, to Toshi's cemetery at Nu'uanu. He goes over there, every year he goes. He writes about him again. Okay, my granddaughter is twenty-one, so it's been almost twenty-one years.

MK: So a lot of news people used to come.

ET: Oh, plenty of them. If Toshi was here, you hear all kind of story. I guess Eugene [Kaneshiro] told you folks about it. All kind stories. One couple, after work the couple comes over there, they'll have cocktail, take their time, and then they order the food and you know, talk story with Toshi, or talk story with other people. Just like a real dining out, not just eat and run. Real dining out. He used to like that couple, too. A lot of people used to come over there, oh my. He made so much friends. At his funeral, over 2,000 came.

MK: That's what Eugene was saying, yeah.

ET: And Danny Kaleikini like that, all the Hawaiians. I think he helped plenty Hawaiian people. Danny Kaleikini at the funeral time, he come inside the Hosoi [Mortuary] and then he say, "Let me sing too, let me sing too." They all volunteer. Nobody have to say anything, everybody volunteer. A lot of people, no more parking. My daughter-in-law's mother, said she had to park way down by Izumo Taisha place. I don't know what you call it. Was it Izumo Taisha? Is that the one? Past River Street? Is that still Izumo Taisha, yeah?

MK: Yeah.

ET: Over there, she said no more parking. So just happen that Longs Drugs had closed or something, it was a holiday or something. So the Hosoi asked the Longs Drugs to help them out, so plenty people wen park over there, I heard, too.

MK: What made Toshi that way? That people would like him so much?

ET: You know, you go tell your boys go take [Dale] Carnegie course. Take Carnegie course. Over here get, too, now?

MK: Yeah, I think so.

ET: They go according to different name or something.

MK: Yeah, something like that.

ET: I was telling my children to take that Carnegie course, but they didn't take, my kids.
MK: So Tosh took a Carnegie course.

ET: Yeah. After he got married. I think while he was doing business, I think. All my brothers never go to university, they took all night class like that on their own. Because we didn't have a father and mother, we didn't go to school too much. But we pick it up here and there.

MK: But Tosh went to a Carnegie course.

ET: Course. I told my husband to go. He said, "What? What for?" You know, that kind of person he is, but Toshi's different. When Toshi took that and he came real good, I told my children, "When you folks grown up, I'll pay for it so you folks all go to take Carnegie course." Nobody took.

MK: So you think that made a difference for Toshi.

ET: Yeah, it made a difference. I think, ochitsuku no yo. How you say ochitsuku?

MK: More confidence.

ET: Yeah, confidence and . . .

MK: More calm, more secure.

ET: Secure-like? Yeah, something like that. He [i.e., Toshi] was the best—he never gave me money, but his encouragement and do things to me was perfect.

MK: So, when you look back, what do you think made Columbia Inn so special?

ET: I think it's Toshi.

MK: Toshi?

ET: Yeah, it's Toshi. His style is—maybe Eugene will like the big shots, but Toshi like the small shots, the common people, especially da kine bachelor, no more no place to go. They had a bar, see. I don't know nothing about the bar because I only stay by the restaurant side. He gather all that kind [of] people, no more family, no more wives. Plenty people used to come over there all the time because that's the people got to eat. He kawaigaru them. The Eagle Scout, and then all that people. And the couple that comes in every time with the kids like that, he gave them ice cream. Why he gave ice cream, did Eugene tell you about that story?

MK: No.

ET: You know in the fountain, you don't need ice cream cone in a restaurant. In the stores you need ice cream cone. He had a big box of ice cream cone comes in a big huge box. I wonder why he had ice cream cone. I thought he was going to put ho'omalimali to the kids, with the parents, eh? But the story is, according to Beatrice, Toshi told Beatrice about it. He said, when he was with the mother and then the mother got married and they get step-sons, I mean step-brothers, yeah. The father won't give him the ice cream, but he would buy for his children. I guess that time, when you're young, you get hurt. So, when he made this restaurant, anybody who comes in with a kid, give 'em ice cream cone. That's what was his, you know, just like payback. That's the story of that ice cream cone.
So, I heard even when he traveled—Beatrice was telling me—when he travel, he would have been a good tour director. He was really good, you know. Even our clan, he used to get everybody ready and get everything down to the picnic. Every summer we got to go picnic because it’s summer. Okay, August, for the last time we got to go picnic, Ala Moana. Everybody go. Nobody had to say anything, but now nobody make arrangement.

MK: Toshi used to do that?

ET: Toshi used to do that, even though he’s tired. Every Sunday we used to go down picnic, you know. In January, February when it’s cold, “Hey, we got to go picnic Sunday. Everybody come out.” All the clan, you know. We used to go. That’s how we used to know a lot of people, even the outside people. Like my lady-friend, they used to go, too, the lady down there used to go, too, the couple with the kids.

MK: He used to really bring people together.

EK: He liked to bring outside people. You know the marine or the navy guy? He used to come and cut his hedge because he got friendly with him at the restaurant. He don’t have family here, but he have family someplace else. So, he used to come get friends with Toshi, and he used to come and cut the hedge for Toshi when Toshi used to live down Liliha Street. We used to go picnic to the beach with him, too, all the outside people.

MK: So he included outside people.

ET: But Gentaro’s wife, she don’t like that. Busboy, you know. Nice busboy working over there for ages. Years and years, they work, they don’t quit. Just happened to see him during the New Year or something, so he tell, “We go, we go my big brother Gentaro house.” So every year he comes Gentaro’s house and my house like that, so he bring that Filipino guy, and take him to Kaneshiro. And Ne-san tell, “Toshi Philippine boy made.” Tell like that. (Laughs) I lose fight.

MK: So Toshi was real friendly. Bring . . .

ET: Yeah. And they come with him, you know.

MK: Yeah. So you think that’s what . . .

ET: Those days, you got to have that. And even all the Advertiser guys, all around the surrounding place, they really good. He was good to them, they were good to him business-wise. And then they start to buy liquor for him. Before, you know what Toshi used to do, he used to have a glass with iced tea inside, make believe that’s liquor. He was so good that people start to buy for him, and he started to drink.

MK: Oh no.

ET: Of course he used to treat them, too. But in the meantime, they used to buy for him, too. That’s where the problem came, I think. He drink, he smoke cigar. All my brothers smoke cigar, except one brother, cigarette. They all died of something, cancer, or something. That was their pride to smoke cigar.

MK: But affected their health.
ET: Yeah. Even when Toshi went—I heard he went to Mainland and all people he meet, he get to be friends. And they used to have plenty cars from outside of Hawai‘i. I heard one time, Beatrice was saying—my brother Gentaro went with Toshi, they used to go baseball every time. Baseball.

MK: The Dodgers.

ET: Dodgers game, so they used to go. And my big brother tell me, “Toshi he treat everybody.” And then when he’s telephoning to somebody to Columbia Inn from San Francisco or something like that, one lady comes around and says, “I don’t have any change, not enough change.” Overseas call or whatever call, long distance, got to get four quarters or something, plenty. But Toshi always used to have plenty coins over here and then used to call, “How’s the business is doing,” like that. When he would go to restaurant convention, the baseball, like that. So the lady said she don’t have any coin. “You pick up from me, pick up from me,” and they come friends. Good friends they come, and they come to the restaurant. That’s why he got plenty pictures. All those pictures. The O.J. Simpson, all those guys. You heard about from Eugene, yeah? So many friends he had.

MK: I’m going to switch the tape.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 40-13-2-02; SIDE ONE

MK: This is tape two of interview with Mrs. Elsie Teruya.

Now, we were just talking about Toshi and how he was really good at making friends and how that helped the success of Columbia Inn.

ET: Yeah, one time I saw him, I was going to work. I don’t know why he was on that bus and everybody tell him, “Hey, Toshi. Hey, Columbia Inn.” And he say he got to get off pretty soon so he say, “Hey, everybody remember, bring kālā when you come our restaurant.” Money yeah, kālā. I remember he saying that, and I was going someplace else on the same bus. Jokingly, he tells like that, a lot of stuff he tells like that.

MK: I was wondering, how did Toshi’s death affect the business and the family? When Toshi passed away.

ET: Still was good. Still was good.

MK: I was also wondering, because this was a family business, you have Gentaro, you have Toshi, Beatrice.

ET: Columbia Inn, that Kapi‘olani one, Gentaro and the wife got nothing to do with it. They never worked over there, but still Toshi was giving them income. So, that was nice of Toshi. He figured, he’s just like our father because our father went to Okinawa so early. My father was telling after his brother passed away, he’s going to come back, then the war broke out and everybody wipe out. That was the sad part. He never see all us growing up.
Because Columbia Inn was a family business, what do you think family running a business? Is it good? Hard? What do you think about a family running a business?

If it’s a small business, family is all right. But big business like that, oh, hard work. I just work certain hour and come home because I have my family. But people, a manager like that, Toshi them, always used to work, work. But that’s the reason why he started to go out to baseball games and restaurant convention like that. That’s why Beatrice was lucky, too, not only work, work, work. You have to make up your mind, like the okazuya I go, you folks have to take off once in a while. And you come back, you feel good, and you want to work. That’s why, take time, take time off sometimes. Don’t just work, work, work, then you’re going to get tired of that work. You won’t appreciate anything. Like me, I used to be happy to go over there because I can come home and I have my family. That’s the reason why, from this home, he cannot take care this home already. That’s why they bought that condo, that’s the best thing he did.

And then, one last question. Now that we’ve spent two sessions talking about your life and the restaurant business, your family, overall, what do you think about your life?

Right now, I’m very happy. You have to go through all that to be happy at the end. But if you give up in between, you the loser. You got to go straight. Go straight. Of course, we had plenty boyfriends and girlfriends and this and that, but you get married, I almost gave up. If I had a mother or a sister, I think I would run away with one suitcase. My husband was good in providing, but he wasn’t too nice, in nature. He’s a very strict person. But, after he retired, he came good. A little bit better. Money-wise he used to give me plenty money to run the place, run the home, because so I got to get lunch money, and pay the bills, and all that. Four kids going to school, yeah. But, as I said, you have to go through all that to be happy at the end. But if you give up, you the loser.

One more question, I just thought of it, because you had four children and the family had Columbia Inn, did your children ever go into the restaurant business or even work part-time in a restaurant?

Nothing. No, my kids, they never worked even part-time. My first girl, part-time, she was working pineapple—at that time pineapple cannery was in season. Every summer she used to go. When she went to university, she went to work the flower shop, florist, or plant place down Judd Street. What was their name?

Oh, a nursery, yeah. There’s a nursery there, yeah.

Yeah, she went to keep the books. [If] she couldn’t get the one penny, one cent, somewhere, missing, she worked till late. They used to like her. Where else did she work now? Over there... The second girl worked from high school till the time she graduated to Kuakini Hospital in the kitchen side. From four to six, you know, when they delivered the meals, that’s where she learned lots of things about food. She get hard time with yōkan, kanten, namasu, nishime, ozōni like that. That she had hard time, she get all mixed up. You got to think how you can say, kanten, stay clear. Yōkan, little dark, was sweet. You have to think that way. Nishime, you think Japanese stew, have to have konbu inside, like that, you know. When you teenager you don’t know those things. Now, every place get okazu, yeah? All those things she learned from there.

And then your other children, they...
ET: My son work with the father. The first son worked with the father, and the second son worked with the father little while while he was going to university. That boy, the last boy, he's in LA now. When he was going university he was working at a hotel that Waikiki hotel. That Chinese-looking hotel, what was that now? The name don't come out, anyway Park Shore Hotel, used to call Park Shore Hotel. Over there, too, and then Miramar, Miramar Hotel, and from there he goes to Park Shore Hotel and work. One time he quit the Miramar, he went to Park Shore. And Park Shore, he's supposed to work from eleven o'clock, eleven [P.M.] And the person in the hotel calls me, "How come Michael don't come to work?"

I said, "Why? You don't like Michael?"

He said, "No, but we got to go home and he's not here."

He's still sleeping. So I tell, "Go tell the manager go fire him." But they don't fire him. So I told Michael like that and Michael said, "The boss like me." First he was doing a— what do they do at the beginning of the hotel?

MK: Oh, the reception desk?

ET: Yeah, reception desk. First, reception desk, and later on he came to be an accountant like. Make the books. And then, one time he told me—before, didn't have too many hotels. So the Japanese tourist come and they wear just underwear or come running down from the upstairs and coming down. He asked me, "How you supposed to tell the people don't just wear underwear and come down." Then one time, he said, "How you say to be quiet in Japanese?" Shizuka ni shite kudasai. (Please be quiet,) he tell. Because noisy guys, you know. I guess, all the men guys, coming down. Shizuka ni shite kudasai. They so noisy, 'cause he's doing the books nighttime, and it's nighttime, they're making noise. Those two places he worked.

MK: So your children didn't go into . . .


MK: Curio shop?


MK: Gift shop sales.

ET: She made good money over there.

MK: Anyway, I'm going to end the interview here.

ET: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW
The Oroku, Okinawa Connection: Local-style Restaurants in Hawai‘i

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

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