BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Patricia Kirita Nomura

Patricia Kirita Nomura, fifth of seven children, was born in Hala‘ula, Kohala, Hawai‘i in 1933.

Her parents, Kamekichi and Toka Kirita, were immigrants from Kumamoto-ken, Japan.

Her father was a storeowner and acupuncturist. He was an advocate for Japanese-language schools and a Japanese consular agent, appointed in 1938.

On December 7, 1941, Kamekichi Kirita was detained by federal authorities, first at a jail in Kapa‘au, later at Kiluaea Military Camp, both located on the Big Island of Hawai‘i. Family members were allowed to visit him at Kiluaea Military Camp, prior to his being moved to Sand Island Detention Center on O‘ahu.

In December 1942, the family was again allowed to see him at the Immigration Station in Honolulu, prior to their being incarcerated in various parts of the U.S. Mainland.

Toka Kirita and children were sent to Jerome War Relocation Center in Arkansas; Kamekichi Kirita was sent to various other detention facilities, including ones in New Mexico and Louisiana.

After 1-1/2 years of separation, the Kiritas were reunited in Jerome. With Jerome War Relocation Center closing in 1944, the family spent the remainder of the war at Gila River War Relocation Center in Arizona.

Returning to Hawai‘i in 1945, the Kiritas were without their prewar livelihood and home in Kohala.

The family moved to O‘ahu where Kamekichi Kirita found employment as a janitor at Dole Pineapple Cannery and Toka Kirita operated a saimin stand.

Patricia, a fourth-grader in 1942, continued her elementary school studies in Jerome and Gila River. A seventh-grader when she returned to the islands, she resumed her studies in Kohala and Honolulu, where she received her high school diploma.

A graduate of Hardin-Simmons University, she is now a retired educator, residing on O‘ahu.
This is an interview with Pat Kirita Nomura for the Unspoken Memories oral history project. This is August 2, 2011. The interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto. And we’re at the International Baptist Center in Honolulu, O‘ahu.

Good morning, Pat.

Good morning.

What we’re going to do is to get some background information from you, your upbringing and where you grew up, and things like that. So I want to ask you, first of all, what year you were born and where were you born?

I was born [in] 1933 and in Kohala. Actually, it’s Hala‘ula [on the island of Hawai‘i].

So tell us about your father. What’s his background?

My father [Kamekichi Kirita] was a storekeeper. He also did acupuncture. He worked with the Japanese consulate. Because of that, his name was on the [detainees] list since 1939, and they picked him up on the night of December 7th.

And what kind of store did he have?

It was a (general store with shoes, materials, and candies and doughnuts that Mother [Toka Kirita] made). He had a lot of medicine, you know. Japanese medicine.

And where is your father from originally?

Amakusa[-gun], Kumamoto[-ken], Japan.

And when did he come to Hawai‘i?

I’m not sure how long ago that was, but he had a wife who died of tuberculosis. [Then] he went back to Japan to find a wife.

So your father had come to Hawai‘i. Then his first wife died in Hawai‘i.

Mm-hmm [yes].

I see. So he went back to Japan.

Yes, (to find a wife and he found one who was his neighbor who was just a child when he first left Japan to come to Hawai‘i).
And what about your mother? What kind of background did she have?

She lived on a farm. As I said, they were neighbors. She didn’t like the farm life, and she didn’t want to marry a farmer, so this was a chance for her to get out of Amakusa and come to Hawai‘i. (Chuckles)

So you’re not sure when your father came, but do you know the places that he lived before coming to Hala‘ula?

No, not really. He had a store there and his [first] wife, I believe, was at Kuakini [Hospital, at that time called Japanese Hospital, on O‘ahu], so he did travel, back and forth to visit her. He also was one of the few people in Kohala who had a car, so he was an advocate for Japanese-language schools. He went around the Big Island. And I guess, that was part of his work with the consulate. He learned English and was self-taught. Many of the plantation workers had children who had dual citizenship, so he saw to it that they had just the American citizenship so they could have better chances of going to college. That was one of his jobs.

And you said he was a self-taught man. I mean, he seems to have held some really responsible positions in the community.

He was an advocate for the Japanese language schools. He was also, you know, affiliated with the consulate. Was it because of his personality, or did he have connections? What is it about your father?

Well, I don’t know. I know he was self-taught because he writes his a like a typewriter a. He was a very quiet person, but he was really well respected. He was also a matchmaker. People went to him to arrange marriages for their children. He would study their backgrounds and get them together.

How was his English?

It was pretty good. I don’t remember too much about his English. But I know when he was in [Department of Justice] camp in Santa Fe, he corresponded with us, in English. It was very good.

And you know, you mentioned that your father owned a store. I was wondering who actually did all the work connected with the store?

Well, he did, and he kept his books in a little notebook. When he was taken that night [December 7, 1941], he had so many Filipino workers—plantation workers—who owed him money. He had all of that written in his little book, which we never collected, of course.

And what was your mother’s role with the store, if she had any role with it?

Well, when he was gone, of course, you know, she had to sell. But she made taffy, she made doughnuts to help. I believe she just had an eighth-grade education. She was a very hard worker because after we came back to Hawai‘i, she worked at a bakery, then she opened a saimin stand. She worked very, very hard.

And you know, you mentioned that there were some Filipino plantation workers . . .

Uh-huh [yes].

. . . who patronized the store. Who else patronized the store back then?

Well, of course, there were a lot of Japanese, Okinawans settled in Hala‘ula—that area. I believe there were just three stores besides the big plantation store. But, you know, they
came to him for acupuncture, also. And I think we had the only neon lights on Christmas. It was just a box and had K. Kirita on it, and he had red cellophane taped (between the light and glass). (WN laughs.) But you know, the Cazimeros lived there and the Dulans, and they would come and serenade us.

MK: You know, I’m not familiar with that area, Hala’ula. What kind of place was Hala’ula?

PN: Well, it no longer exists. Every time I go there, I see less and less of the place because they’re just closing up and moving all the houses. All you see now are just cane fields and at a distance, the clump of mango trees. I remember that very well (chuckles) because we used to go there to pick our mangoes. But it’s really sad. I know one day, I want to write about that place because it was a beautiful place. The plantation workers—the lunas and the bosses—all had beautiful houses along the road. Right across it, they had these bougainvillea plants that were made into—sculptured into chairs, et cetera. They had lilies growing on the bottom, and it was really a beautiful place. Today, you can’t even go there anymore. Each time we went, we saw less and less of Hala’ula.

WN: And that was the camp affiliated with the Kohala Plantation?

PN: Yes.

WN: Kohala Mill.

PN: Yes.

WN: I see.

PN: There are actually three mills, I think. One was in Niuli‘i, Hala’ula, and . . . I can’t remember the other.

WN: Union? Was it Union Mill?

PN: Yes, that one.

WN: Okay, so you folks were Kohala? And then Hala’ula was the name of the town that you were in?

PN: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: What was the name of the camp that you lived in?

PN: It was right below the tracks. I don’t think there was a name for it. It was on the main road.

WN: Were there mostly Japanese living in—as neighbors?


MK: And you mentioned that there were some other stores—the big plantation[-run] store, your father’s store. . . .

PN: Goya Store. I think that’s when I first met Santa Claus. (Chuckles) They had a Christmas program. The store was right next to the Japanese[-language] school and the Harada Store (down the road close to the reservoir). When we had to leave abruptly, most of the store items were given to the Harada Store.

MK: And where were your living quarters?
PN: Well, our house was on plantation lease land, but it was my father’s store. But we couldn’t pay the lease when we were in camp [Jerome, Arkansas], so we lost the building. That building was moved to Häwï, I believe.

WN: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

PN: At that time, we had . . . Well, one died before I was born. He was pulling sugarcane off the wagon and he got crushed. But I wasn’t born then. Then we have five girls and two boys.

WN: And what number are you?

PN: I’m the third from the bottom. (Chuckles)

WN: Okay.

PN: Esther is below me. And my kid brother who lives in Mānoa, but he doesn’t remember anything (because he was so young when we left Kohala).

WN: Okay, well what was it like growing up in Hala’ula? What did you do to occupy your time as a child?

PN: Let’s see. We used to blow bubbles with the papaya stems. I don’t know how that’s done. I haven’t tried it—I have a papaya tree. (Chuckles) And of course, we used to make jack-o-lanterns with the papayas. Really, nothing much. Picking guavas and mangoes, playing house, and making those [low, stilt-like toys]—not a stilt, but with those oval, sardine cans.

WN: Oh, those [that go,] “Clop-clop-clop,” with the string.

PN: (Laughs) With the string. And also telephoning, you know, with the string and the cans?

WN: Yeah.

PN: Other than that, I don’t. . . . Oh, dolls, I guess. My father, Christmas time—we used to have a pool table right in a room next to the store. People would—especially the Filipinos—would come to shoot pool there. But Christmas time, he would (clear the pool table and) take out all his Christmas things and sell those embossed Christmas cards and all kinds of toys and dolls and things like that. That’s when he put his sign up.

WN: Did your father also sell foods in there or was it just dry goods?

PN: A lot of material. Japanese have a lot of those medicines. As I said, he did acupuncture, so that’s about it. Oh, shoes—I guess he had shoes.

MK: You know, since your father had a store, and probably, most of the other population were plantation workers, from your perspective, how did you folks compare economically with other families?

PN: Well, we had a car (laughs). But I think we were a little above. We had a mango tree, we had our chicken coop for our chickens, and avocado trees. Of course, during the war, we had to build trenches [bomb shelters]. And my mother planted sweet potatoes on top of the trench. And my father had a vegetable garden.

WN: What about the livestock, poultry . . .

PN: Only chickens.

MK: And you know, with all that going on—the store, the garden, the chickens—what chores did all of you have as children?
PN: Well, I was little, so I don’t remember any chores (chuckles). But I guess my father worked on the garden. He loves flowers. My mother did the washing [using] the washing board and boiling all the sheets and things. Of course, we all went to school.

WN: You mentioned washing clothes with the washboard and so forth, how was that done? How did your mother do laundry?

PN: Well, you have a big tarai, you know, we say. We used old rice—leftover [cooked] rice—in bag and squeeze it. This is how we starched our clothes.

MK: And in your time, how were you folks doing the ironing?

PN: We had an iron, yeah.

WN: Electric iron?

PN: No, it wasn’t. I think—don’t they put charcoal or something in there?

MK: Uh-huh, uh-huh [yes].

PN: I don’t remember too much, but I know it wasn’t electric. I guess other activities, my father was a very strong Buddhist, and we have a big butsudan in our house. We have two bedrooms. One was for the kids, and the other was for my mom and dad, and the butsudan was in that room. Then the store was in the front.

WN: So you know, your mother and father were very busy. No doubt. And they had a store, and there were eight of you. Who took care of you?

PN: I guess we just took care of each other and played with the neighborhood kids. We did have a, I guess, furo. It was really funny because in Kohala, there’s a stream on the bottom, and there are four divisions, and all the toilets are all here. We can talk to our neighbors while we were sitting on the potty because there’s just like a big partition, yeah.

WN: Was the stream like the flush?

PN: Yes.

WN: Oh, okay.

MK: That was very efficient.

PN: Yes.

WN: And so you said you had a furo. Was that in your house? Your own furo?

PN: No, it was right by the toilet, yeah.

WN: So this is a community furo?

PN: No, but they did have a community furo before. I think my sisters went, the older ones. As a result, I think they were playing and got water in their ears. Two of them are kind of hard-of-hearing because of that.

WN: And was the furo partitioned?

PN: I don’t know about their furo, but our furo, we had our own.

WN: Oh, okay.
PN: Of course, we like to put sweet potatoes in the burning wood.

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: Oh, you mean underneath the furo?

PN: Underneath. (Chuckles)

WN: Oh, okay. So there’s a wood fire underneath the furo? And you put sweet potatoes in there? (Chuckles)

PN: Yes.

MK: And you know, you mentioned that your father and mother had a butsudan in their room. They were Buddhists. So in your community, what temple did you folks go to, if any?

PN: I’m trying to think. I don’t remember. There was one in Kapa‘au. I know the Kitajimas—I think they were taken during the war, too. I remember going there. I’m trying to think. I know we had a Japanese[-language] school (and a church next to it). Father used to provide the dahlias from our garden for the services.) You know, my father was a Honpa Hongwanji [member] over here. He was a very strong Buddhist.

WN: So I know that you grew up, you were living in Hala‘ula until about age eight or nine, before the war broke out, but try to remember what was your school like up until age eight or nine?

PN: Oh, it was fine. I believe that I was in the fourth grade when they took me out of class. My sister was in the second grade. We both went home not knowing why we were taken [i.e., interned]. When we got home, everybody was stuffing all the duffle bags with all our belongings. So we didn’t get to say goodbye to our friends. I remember this one girl that I met at one of the reunions, said that she wondered what happened to me because at that time, at that age, you don’t know what’s going on. There was a war. That’s it. So she often wondered: why our store was closed. People couldn’t go there. I mean, it was locked up. Of course, after my father left, very few people came to the store because they were afraid they might be under suspect. It was difficult. I think we ate what we planted.

MK: You know, going back to your school days, I was wondering, what was the name of the school you attended?

PN: Hala‘ula School. It’s still there. It looks exactly the same (chuckles). It’s now a middle school. I went to Kohala recently and took pictures. It looks exactly the same (laughs).

WN: Oh, really?

MK: How big was Hala‘ula School?

PN: Well, they had up to seventh grade. But now, it’s a middle school so most of them go to Kohala High School.

MK: And at Hala‘ula School, what memories do you have of your time there?

PN: Well, I remember being a flower girl for May Day. We had Christmas programs. There was a little stage. We ate lunch in a cafeteria, which is downstairs. [In later years,] I took a group of youth from our church. We had our Vacation Bible School at that school. It was really nice to go back. When we went back after the war, I went to Kohala High School. I was in the seventh grade. When I was there, I met some people who were from Hala‘ula School but I didn’t remember too many of them because we were in a different class.

We just had a reunion several months ago. They always invite me to their class reunions, even if I was there only one semester of my seventh grade. But then I knew some people,
as I said, from Hala'ula, but very few. It’s amazing how much they remember. Some of them said, “Oh, I remember, you used to sit right in front of me in English class.” One guy said, “Oh, I remember you singing this song,” and he even sang it to me, and I don’t even remember the song (chuckles). I don’t remember him in the seventh grade, but I remember him in the fourth grade at Hala'ula. I knew exactly where he lived. He lives in Kamuela now. He’s kind of like a cowboy. He had a cowboy hat and everything. He sang to me. He said, “Don’t you remember?” (Chuckles)

MK: And I know that earlier, you mentioned that Hala’ula had a Japanese-language school.

PN: My father was—I don’t think he was a principal. I never came in first [best student in the class], which was a disappointment to him.

(Laughter)

Then [after World War II,] (we returned to Kohala and lived in Kapa'au for six months before we relocated to Honolulu). In Honolulu, I went to McKinley [High School] and Pälama Gakuen [a Japanese-language school]. And you know, four dollars a month [tuition] was a lot of money at that time for us. Finally, because I was the editor of the yearbook at McKinley, I just couldn’t go [to Japanese-language school] after [public school] [hours]. So I told my father, “You’re just wasting your money.” So I quit. And I wish I didn’t.

WN: What was it like going to Japanese-language school in Hala'ula?

PN: Well, you always have to try your best (laughs).

WN: Did you feel pressure?

PN: I guess so. But I don’t remember. That’s too way back. But when we were in camp [in Arkansas], we—my younger sister and I took odori. I think this lady is—I don’t know if she’s still living, but I did see her in Los Angeles. She used to help the dancers who appeared in Sayonara and some of these Hollywood Japanese movie stars. She played the shamisen. Of course, I would have liked to [own a shamisen], but we didn’t have the money to buy one. But there were some people who did have so we took odori.

MK: So back in Hala’ula, besides going to Japanese-language school, were there other activities that you participated in that were Japanese?

PN: No, I don’t think so. No. We went picnicking a lot. Not too much, (went to a gulch to pick) the mango patch and. . . . (Chuckles)

WN: What about things that like the whole community did? Were there traditions celebrated? You said that you met Santa Claus at one of the stores.

PN: At the Goya Store, yes.

WN: Were things like that for the whole—for everyone to come out?

PN: Uh-huh [yes].


PN: Christmas.

WN: What was Christmas like?

PN: Well, Christmastime, we did go to this theater. And of course, we also had Christmas plays at Hala’ula School. I remember not attending so much a Buddhist church—but I did go to a Congregational church in Hälawa, I believe. They didn’t have one in Hala’ula.
And New Year’s, this person whose bathroom was catty-corner to ours, used to kill pigs. So we used to have, New Year’s. Christmas. We had oranges and raisins, (some candy) in our stockings. That’s about it. And as I said, I don’t know if it was Christmas or New Year’s that the Cazimeros—I guess it must be their parents—used to come with the guitars and sing. We used to have fireworks. I remember Roman candles.

WN: And you think the oranges and the candy were provided by the plantation?
PN: No, I think my parents did. But I remember they selling ice cream at the plantation store, and we all had to stand in line for it.

WN: What was it like being a child in a plantation? I mean, were they strict?
PN: No, not that I recall. We were just kids, just playing mamagoto.

WN: At home, did you speak mostly Japanese?
PN: No, because my sisters all spoke English. My mom spoke pidgin. We understood some Japanese.

MK: And I was wondering, you know, your mom was quite young, and she had a family, and she was from Japan. How about Japanese things like Boys’ Day or Girls’ Day or the Emperor’s birthday—Tenchōsetsu. Were those occasions celebrated by your family?
PN: Yes, because we had those carps flying. I know my father gave us a lot of dolls. I guess it was for my kids because I had three girls. I don’t remember too much about that.

MK: How about the Emperor’s birthday? Tenchōsetsu?
PN: Well, I don’t remember. It’s Tenchōsetsu?

WN: What about church-related activities? Buddhist? Anything you remember?
PN: No, I don’t remember anything. I don’t know why. Well, except in camp [during World War II]. We went because they’re all Buddhist ministers [interned] there, too.

WN: Okay, we’ll get to the camp next time. Is that okay?
PN: Okay.

WN: We just wanted to wrap up just your Kohala days. Okay, let’s see. Anything else you want to say about Kohala, growing up?
PN: Well, my dad was gone a lot. You know, because he had the car, and he was an advocate for the language schools. I guess he did a lot of acupuncture and stuff like that all over the island so he’s very busy.

MK: When he did the acupuncture, it was not that people were coming to him, but he would go out to homes?
PN: Well, they would come to him in Hala’ula. Of course, we used to have the yaito. We all got yaito in our backs when we were bad (chuckles).

WN: Oh, yaito is like you getting a match and . . .
MK: Moxa.
PN: Ash or something that they brought, and they light it, and then it hurts.
WN: Oh, that was for punishment?

PN: (Laughs) Yes.

WN: Or for good health?

PN: It was for punishment (laughs).

WN: Punishment? Oh my goodness, I thought it was just for—good for you.

PN: No, it was punishment. I think my sister Marian had more than we did. I think I only had one, I remember. (Laughs) Well, you know, that was the punishment. I don’t think they did anything else other than giving us yaito. So I think I was a pretty good kid.

WN: Well, let’s end here.

PN: Okay, all right.

WN: And then the next time we come, if we can just get started on the war years. Will that be all right?

PN: That’d be fine.

WN: Oh, okay, good.

END OF INTERVIEW
Okay, we’re going to begin. Today is August 9, 2011. We’re interviewing Pat Kirita Nomura. Session number two. The interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto. We’re at the International Student House [International Baptist Center] in Honolulu, O‘ahu.

Okay, so this is session number two. We got you right up to the start of World War II. We wanted to ask you—could you talk about that day? What do you remember about December 7, 1941?

PN: That night, they came to get my father. (He was appointed in 1938 as a consular agent.) And I remember I was in the bedroom—and I heard my mom crying outside. Of course, she didn’t understand what was going on. Then they just took my dad away.

MK: At that time, did you know that war had started?

PN: I’m not sure. I’m sure we must’ve heard about it, but I didn’t think that my father would be connected in any way.

MK: And you know, at the time that the people came to your house to get your father, how did your siblings react to the situation? What were they doing?

PN: We were all sleeping. We just had two bedrooms. One had the butsudan, and that’s where my mom and dad slept. We were all sleeping in that other room. The sheriff, and I guess some federal agents, came to get him. Later, we wondered how in the world they’re able to get him that night—the night of December 7th because to get to Kohala (they had to drive on) the winding roads from Waimea. They didn’t have those straight roads like they do today. But according to the list [of potential detainees] that I saw [in recent years] at the cultural center [Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai‘i], his name was on the list in 1939. They already had his name down.

MK: And after your father was taken away, had you heard about any other people in the community taken just like your dad?

PN: No, because we were the only ones in Hala‘ula. But there were some in Kapa‘au, which is not that far, but it’s another little town. The bon-san and his family were taken, but we didn’t know about that because at that time, you know, we didn’t drive. We were just isolated in Hala‘ula. (Chuckles)

But my mom had to run the store, and it was difficult for her because she only went through the eighth grade.

WN: As far as the store was concerned, what did your mom do and what did your father do before he was picked up? What were their roles in the store?
PN: Well, my mom took care of the family because she had so many kids. But she did make taffy, and she also made doughnuts. That’s all I can remember.

WN: And who took care of the books?

PN: My dad did. He had a little book with all the names of the plantation workers who owed him money. Of course, we never did get any of it back. (Chuckles)

WN: So your mom had to take over that role?

PN: Yes.

WN: It must’ve been difficult.

PN: Yes. (Chuckles)

MK: You know, going back to the time when your father was taken—what do you remember about your father’s reactions that night?

PN: It was very quiet. I didn’t hear him at all. All I heard was my mom crying. That’s all I remember.

MK: And as he left the house, was he allowed to take anything with him?

PN: No. The sheriff called—called us—and said to bring clothes for three days, so we were able to do that. But then after that, they took him to the Kilauea Military Camp on the Big Island in Hilo.

WN: So the sheriff called after . . .

PN: Yes.

WN: . . . he left?

PN: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: Oh, okay.

MK: And where was your father being held? You know, before he was taken to Kilauea Military Camp?

PN: I guess at the jail.

WN: And the sheriff was a local guy?

PN: Yes.

WN: Did you know him?

PN: Yes.

WN: Oh, okay. And the FBI man was not a local man?

PN: No. I don’t remember because I don’t remember seeing them. All I remember was hearing them, and they were outside. We have a kitchen and a little hallway (between the main house). And so they came this way. Our bedrooms—my bedroom was here, and my mom and dad slept here. So when they went out, we didn’t even remember even seeing them leave.
WN: So you said your mom was crying. Do you remember her saying anything afterwards to you folks or anything like that?

PN: No. Maybe my older sisters would know, but we were just curious and in our bedrooms, wondering what was happening.

MK: Until the family got word from the sheriff to bring clothes, what kinds of discussions or thoughts ran through your head or your siblings’ heads?

PN: I don’t know. You might have to ask my older sister about that because I was only nine at that time.

WN: Well, the fact that you remember all of this, that’s pretty good. (WN and PN laugh.)

PN: Well, besides speaking at the [Japanese] Cultural Center [of Hawai‘i in recent years], I did speak at different places. Because of that, maybe I remember more.

MK: And you know, you mentioned that your father was held at the jail. I’m wondering if you would know—even—what did the jail look like? Even the outside? I have no conception of what a jail is like back then.

PN: I don’t know either. I don’t know if it was a jail or a police station, but I remember, I think the senior center is right there—back of the Kamehameha statue in Kapa’au. I think it was around there, yeah.

WN: Do you remember saying anything to your siblings? Talking about what happened or what might’ve happened to your father?

PN: No, I don’t remember. (Chuckles) Too young.

WN: Mm-hmm [yes]. Okay.

MK: And so three days later, you get word from—the family gets word from the sheriff to bring clothes. Who took over—what items were taken, and who took them over?

PN: I think my sister Marian did. Yeah, she’s older. She’s the one who was married to Douglas Takagi. I think you met her.

WN: Mm-hmm [yes].

PN: She remembers a lot—a lot more than I do. Even the three days, I’m not quite sure it was three days, but I know it was after then. I think she was the one that took his clothes.

WN: Okay. Now, you said that later on, you were able to visit your father at KMC [Kīlauea Military Camp]?

PN: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: Do you remember—what do you remember about that visit?

PN: All I remember was the bars, and we got to talk to him through a window (with bars).

WN: Mm-hmm [yes].

PN: And we were able to talk to him that way.

MK: And who went to visit him?
PN: Our family. I don’t know how we got there because we didn’t have busses at that time. But they did have a taxi—Sugiyama [ran one]. I don’t know if they were the ones that took us. But my dad also did that [ran a taxi] too because he had a car, but a Model-T (chuckles).

WN: Did your mom drive, too?

PN: No, no. So none of my sisters drove either. So we must’ve caught a cab.

WN: Do you remember what your feelings were at that time, visiting your father as a nine-year-old?

PN: No, it was kind of sad to see. You know, we couldn’t touch him or anything like that. Just to see him behind bars.

MK: And when you folks went for that visit, were any items taken to him?

PN: I don’t remember.

MK: Or, as you folks stood across from him, what did you folks talk about?

PN: We had to stand because it was like a cashier window. We had to stand to talk to him.

MK: And as you folks met with him, were there any officials around? Guards or officials?

PN: No, because he was in an enclosed area. I wonder if it’s still there because we’re going to go there next month. Our seniors are going.

WN: Oh, KMC?

PN: Yes. (Chuckles)

WN: Oh, and they have sort of like a hotel now.

PN: Yes, it’s pretty good. I’ve been there before, but I don’t know if that building is still there.

WN: That would be a good thing to look for.

PN: Yes, And I want to go into the immigration station here because we stayed there a while, waiting for the boat to take us.

WN: Right, right, right.

MK: And then one more question about the time you saw your dad at KMC—how did he look, in your mind’s eye? What comes to mind?

PN: Well, he was a very quiet person. I don’t remember him saying much. If he did communicate with my mother, I probably didn’t understand what they were saying (in Japanese). I went to Japanese-language school but (my speaking the language was) very limited.

WN: And in the interim before you left for, you know, Hilo and Jerome—did you remember any kind of letters that he may have written or anything like that? Did he write letters to you folks?

PN: Yes, and I think my sister Marian may have some letters. There was an article about a letter that he sent to my sister—younger sister, the one that lives in Hilo—I can’t remember exactly what was in those letters. But I know he wrote a few, and of course, many of them were censored.
MK: And these were letters sent while he was at KMC?

PN: No, this was when he was in camp.

MK: When he was on the Mainland camp?

PN: I don’t think we communicated with him while he was at KMC.

WN: Okay. Okay, well your dad went from Kohala jail, to KMC, to Sand Island, to Jerome . . .

PN: And we got to see him then.

WN: Oh, you got to see him at Sand Island?

PN: Yes, when we were in the immigration station here [in Honolulu]—it looks exactly. I don’t know if the inside is the same, but we were able to see him then before they shipped him out.

WN: Oh, okay. And do you know when this was? I mean, after how many months?

PN: Well, it must’ve been after a year because we followed him after a year.

MK: So it’d be about December 1942 when you folks had left the Big Island?

PN: Yes.

MK: And had stopped off in Honolulu . . .

PN: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: . . . prior to your going to the Mainland.

WN: Oh, you spent Christmas at the immigration station. Christmas of ’42?

PN: Station. Yes.

WN: Okay.

MK: You know, at that time, how did your father look at Sand Island?

PN: I didn’t notice too much of a change, but I did see a drastic change when he met us in Jerome before we went to Arizona.

WN: Okay, we’ll talk about that shortly. I wanted to ask you about December of ’42 when you were in Miss Luke’s fourth grade class at the Hala’ula School.

PN: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: Tell us about that time.

PN: The principal, Mr. [H.R.] Gouveia, got my younger sister, who was in the second grade, and got me out of class, and said we had to go home. We didn’t know what was happening and we both went home. When we got home, we saw my sisters and the rest of the family packing everything in duffel bags and giving away whatever goods that we had at the store to another store, the Harada Store.

All my friends wondered what happened to me because I just left the classroom, and they never saw me again. There’s one girl who [later became] a nun. She wondered because our store was closed, and it had a sign that [said] they couldn’t go in there.
MK: And, you know, prior to your family leaving Hala‘ula, how was your family treated by the community after your father had been taken?

PN: Well, they didn’t patronize our store because they were afraid they might be under suspicion so we had a difficult time. However, we had a vegetable garden, a mango tree, an avocado tree, and we had sweet potatoes growing on top of the trench. I don’t know who helped us dig that trench.

WN: Oh, you mean the bomb shelter.

PN: Mm-hmm, yes.

MK: And so people were afraid to associate with you folks or patronize the store?

PN: Yes.

WN: What about your friends? Were there people who asked you questions or teased you or anything about your father?

PN: I don’t remember that part, and I don’t think they knew any better than I did, too. You know, we were just kids. I mean, they played with me. We weren’t ostracized or anything because we’re young. We didn’t know what’s happening.

MK: So even during that year that your father was away—that initial year—as a nine-year-old, you still didn’t know what was going on?

PN: But we knew that we had to darken our windows, with tarpaper so that the light won’t [show]—I guess everybody did that. But we knew there was a war. We had a radio, so boy, that was way back (laughs).

WN: So you remember going from Hala‘ula to Hilo.

PN: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: How did you get from Hala‘ula to Hilo?

PN: In an army truck.

WN: Was it just your family or anybody else?

PN: I think—I’m not sure, but I think the Kitajima family. He was a Buddhist priest who lived in Kapa‘au, (near the Kamehameha statue). If you go further up, there is a Buddhist temple there.

MK: So the Kitajimas, your family... . . .

PN: And I think they were the only ones that I recall, in Kohala area. When we got to Hilo, we stayed at the Okino Hotel. It was a really dark, dingy hotel, I remember. But it was a happy time for me because I got to meet a lot of other people my age. They were picked up from the different places on the Big Island, and all the families met there before we were taken on a boat, and they went to the different islands to pick up the other families before we went to the immigration station in Honolulu.

So by then, it was exciting, meeting new people.

WN: Uh-huh [yes]. How long were you at Okino Hotel—about?

PN: I’m not sure. I remember we had to go and take a bath somewhere else. I remember looking out the window, and it was really dark. (MK and PN chuckle.) I don’t think it was more than a week. I’m not sure.
MK: I was wondering—I don’t know if you’d remember, but what did you, as a nine-year-old, take with you from your home?

PN: (Chuckles) I don’t think I took anything.

WN: Probably, your mother took it.

MK: So no favorite toys or belongings that you stuffed into a bag?

PN: No, didn’t have any dolls. Any toys. Yeah, we just played mamagoto! (Laughs)

MK: Played “house.”

PN: (Chuckles) Yes. We played with those sardine cans (walking sticks), marbles. But I don’t remember taking anything.

MK: So you were at Okino Hotel for a while, and you remember taking a bath elsewhere. But how about like eating and other things?

PN: I’m not sure. I’m sure we must have eaten at the hotel, but I don’t recall any of that.

MK: And when you folks were at the Okino Hotel, would you remember if there were any escorts or official people around you folks?

PN: No, I don’t remember.

WN: Were there like military personnel around you folks? Do you remember?

PN: No, I don’t remember. But I know when we were in the administration building over here—immigration station—we were pretty enclosed there. I don’t think we could leave there. Except I remember my sister—my oldest sister—somehow, she was not taken. I really don’t know why she wasn’t. She was working for a military officer and was going to Cannon’s School [of Business] or some business school. I don’t know why she didn’t go. But she came to see us. We had ice cream out on the lawn, and she gave me and my younger sister avocado-green pants. Sharkskin pants. I don’t know why, but I know I lost it in camp when we were taking a bath when we first got there. I must have worn that for a long time, I don’t know. (Laughs)

WN: So your sister was living in Honolulu? Your oldest sister?

PN: Uh-huh [yes].

WN: I see. So from the Okino Hotel, Hilo, you took a boat to Honolulu, and you stayed at the immigration station. And your father was at Sand Island Detention [Camp].

PN: At that time, yes.

WN: At that time.

PN: And then, before they shipped him off, we got to see him.

WN: So you were still at the immigration station when they shipped him off?

PN: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: I see. Do you remember anything about that time?

PN: No, I don’t remember anything about it, really.
MK: And then while you folks were at the immigration station, what do you remember about that stay at the immigration station?

PN: There was a building on (the right) side (behind) the main building that you can see from the street. On the very bottom floor was where we ate. On the top floor were bunk beds all the kids slept in bunk beds. I don’t know where my mother was. There was a little (play) area right (next to the building where the children played while) the parents with their babies would be watching the kids. I’d like to see if it’s still there. I’d like to go and visit. I don’t know if they’ll let me.

WN: What about the bathrooms? Did you share bathrooms?

PN: I remember it was being upstairs where we were sleeping. We all shared toilets and showers.

MK: And you mentioned that you’d go to another part of the area to have your meals.

PN: Yes.

MK: What kind of meals did you folks have?

PN: (Laughs) I don’t know. I really don’t. I remember what we ate in camp, but I don’t remember too much about . . .

WN: You know, you said you met some new friends at Okino Hotel. Were those same friends—went over with you to the immigration station?

PN: Yes, yes.

WN: So that must’ve been kind of good, huh?

PN: Yeah, one of them that I met there lives in California now. On the way home [from camp to Hawai‘i], she was on the same boat, and I believe there was a picture of us on the Shawnee (the ship that brought us home).

MK: Oh, so you made some friends at—were friends for a long time.

PN: Yes, and when I went to California, I did visit her.

WN: But she’s originally from Hawai‘i?

PN: Yes.

WN: Oh, okay. You know, you were there right about Christmastime.

PN: Uh-huh [yes].

WN: What was Christmas like in the immigration station?

(Telephone rings. Taping stops then resumes.)

Okay, I was asking you about Christmas. What was that like at the immigration station?

PN: I’m trying to think. I don’t remember much, but it seemed like on the ship, we celebrated Christmas.

WN: Oh, on the ship?
PN: I’m not sure. Did I say something there [in a paper PN presented at the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai‘i]?

WN: Yes, you said you spent it at the immigration station.

PN: But I don’t remember anything about it. (Chuckles)

WN: Okay, well let’s talk about traveling to the Mainland from O‘ahu—from Honolulu. What was the name of the ship that you went on?

PN: It was the Matson liner [SS] Lurline.

WN: Oh, wow.

PN: But we were—all the children slept in the bottom floor. It was very hot. Because my little brother was still a baby, I think my mother shared a room with another mother and child. But we all were way on the bottom. It was hot. (Chuckles)

WN: I was wondering, you know, when we look at it from a historical point of view and we say, “Wow, how traumatic,” and everything, but I’m just wondering, as a nine-year-old, was it exciting or scary or . . . What do you remember?

PN: I think it was exciting because you know, in Kohala, there’s nothing there. (WN and MK laugh.) You know, for a nine-year-old, to experience going on a boat and a ship (was very awesome). We’d never been before.

You see, (PN shows a photo) this is—she was my friend.

WN: Oh, what was her name?

PN: Oh, this is Anise and—Takako is not here. Takako was my friend. Anise was my sister’s friend. Yes, and she lives here in Honolulu. I don’t know what her last name is now.

MK: So for you, as a nine-year-old, leaving Hala‘ula, going to Honolulu, and then taking this journey to the Mainland, it was . . .

PN: Exciting. (Chuckles) And meeting friends—new friends. But as an adult, now I can see how difficult it must’ve been for my mother to have to handle all seven of us and always having to keep us in line. I mean, in a line, really (laughs). When we had to go from the immigration station to the pier, then we had to be in line again, onto the ship, getting off the ship, on the train. You know, trying to keep us all together must have been difficult.

MK: You know, since you had some older siblings, what were their responsibilities during that time?

PN: Well, I think my sister Marian—who married Douglas Takagi—said she used to make milk or deliver the milk to the babies while they were on the ship. But she was—let’s see, how old was she?—she must’ve been fifteen.

WN: And it was an adventure for you, but I was just wondering if you knew, at the time, why you were going. You know, that you were going to go live with your father . . .

PN: Well, we thought we were going to (see him when we got to our destination). We couldn’t (survive) in Kohala because, you know, we had to live. The government was going to take us to see my dad and be with my dad. But we didn’t get to see him until about a year—more than a year before we moved to [Gila River Relocation Center] Arizona.

WN: Oh, I see.
PN: So we were already in Jerome [Relocation Center in Arkansas] for a year and a half [when PN’s father was re-united with family].

WN: So your father wasn’t at Jerome?

PN: No.

WN: Oh, I see. Okay, okay. Well---so anyway, you went to—you’re on the Lurline, and you said that the Red Cross . . .

PN: Provided . . .

WN: . . . helped out?

PN: Yes. Scarves and mittens. You know, because people from Hawai‘i didn’t have any warm clothing. They provided us with that. We landed in San Francisco on New Year’s Day, and (chuckles) ho, it was really cold. You know, we wanted to go outside and see, so the scarves came in handy, I guess. (Laughs) I think they were maroon. I remember, for some reason (laughs).

WN: Maroon? (Chuckles) Mm-hmm [yes]. So you were in San Francisco?

PN: Yes.

WN: And then what?

PN: We got on the ferry and caught a train. I guess we had to cross the bay to get to the train station. Then we caught the train, and we didn’t know where they were taking us. So for five days, we were on the train, not knowing where we were going (laughs).

WN: And where were you going? Where did you end up?

PN: Went to Jerome [Relocation Center in Arkansas].

WN: You went straight—oh, from San Francisco . . .

PN: Yeah.

WN: . . . straight to Jerome.

PN: To Jerome.

MK: And then how was that train trip like for you? When you look back and think about that train trip?

PN: Well, it still was very exciting. At nights, of course, we always had to draw the shades, so we couldn’t see out. But it was nice to see, you know, America. United States.

MK: How did you pass your time on the train for five days?

PN: We just sat and looked at the scenery.

WN: The weather must’ve been really cold, though, going as you’re heading East.

PN: I remember getting off the train. I thought it was somewhere in Kansas, and I just remembered the snow and the evergreen trees on the mountain. We took a break there. There was a—you know, during the olden days, they used to have those real tiny train stations? That’s the only time, I think, we got off the train before we went on to Jerome.
WN: And you know, those friends that you met at Okino Hotel and then the immigration station—were they still with you on this whole trip?

PN: Yes, but [at Jerome,] they were not in the same block [of barracks in the camp]. We lived on Block 39, and they were in Block 38. There were three blocks: 38, 39, and 40—were all the people from Hawai‘i. There weren‘t that many in Block 40. Block 39 is where we were. Grace Hawley’s father [Saburo Sugita] was the block manager. Her sister [Lillian] married Bert Nakano in LA. We lived on Block—our address was Block 39, and Room 10 E and F. It’s 10 A and B, C and D, E and F. So E and F were together. So that’s where we were. Grace folks were across from us. They were in 9 C and D. The Hoshidas lived across from us 9 E and F. Mr. [George Y.] Hoshida is the one that did all the drawings of camp. And his daughter is Carol . . .

MK: Oh, okay. Carol Hoshida.

PN: She’s a lawyer now. Mr. Hoshida, he even drew a picture of me. I don’t know why. Because, I guess, we lived right across the street from (the elevated walkway). (Chuckles) I don’t know how come I got curly hair [in the sketch], but I remember this hat. He has “Setsuko Kirita” over here.

MK: (Looking at the sketch.) Oh, wow. He’s a good artist.

PN: Yes.

WN: You know, you said 10 E and F, or A and B, C and D, E and F—what was—were they part of the same building but different apartment, so to speak . . .

PN: It’s a barrack, yes.

WN: You know, you said 10 E and F, or A and B, C and D, E and F—what was—were they part of the same building but different apartment, so to speak . . .

PN: Like a duplex kind of . . .

WN: And the mess hall . . .

PN: Is in the middle.

WN: So as block members or members of that block, the twelve . . .

PN: All ate there.

WN: You shared the mess hall and the latrines?

PN: Yes. This is the washroom. I mean, this is where we washed our clothes. Everything was done in blocks. Like the men went out to get the firewood, and we all did it in blocks. And . . .

WN: What was the firewood for?

PN: For---to keep us warm.

WN: I mean, was there like a pothellied stove or . . .

PN: Yes, there it is [in a photo]. (MK chuckles.)

WN: Did it work? Did it keep you warm?
PN: Yes (chuckles). We slept in cots and army blankets. But most of the workers [who chopped the wood] were kibei.

MK: Mm-hmm [yes]. So in the beginning, these unrelated men would help by providing wood for the block?

PN: Uh-huh [yes], for the block. Each block had their own. So everything was done in blocks. We ate together in blocks. And the bathrooms, you know.

MK: You know, when you first arrived at Jerome, what were your thoughts?

PN: Well, this was kind of the scene. (PN points to a photo.) This is the first snow . . .

MK: The snowfall.

PN: In spite of snow, people from California came out to see us to see whether we looked like natives (laughs).

WN: Oh, you mean Californian internees wanted to see you folks?

PN: Yes (laughs).

WN: Oh.

PN: See, this is in the snow, so it was very [cold]—and it was very muddy, I remember. They found out we didn’t wear grass skirts. (PN and MK laugh.)

WN: You said once that it was good to get hot showers?

PN: Yes.

WN: Was this your first hot shower in a long time?

PN: Yes, because we were on the train for five days.

(Telephone rings.)

WN: Pause it [the tape recording].

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: You had hot showers, you’re showering—it was like a group shower?

PN: Yes. You see, even the mess hall workers—they’re by blocks. Block 38, Block 39, and 40. My mom worked in Block 39.

MK: So when you folks were living in your block, you just mentioned that that’s where your mom worked.

PN: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: What did she do for work there?

PN: Well, she cooked and washed pots. (Chuckles) You know, sometimes it was so cold and even in blizzard conditions, she would bring our breakfast to us. But it was difficult because we couldn’t eat together as a family. So you know, we would just eat with our friends or maybe with one of my sisters. But we didn’t have a family unit, sitting together, to eat.
MK: And how about your older siblings? Were they ever working in the block?

PN: No, because they went to school and graduated from high school. Then they were able to go out. Maybe you can get that story from my sister (chuckles).

WN: Now, did you go to school?

PN: Yes.

WN: You went to an elementary school in Jerome?

PN: Yes. Jerome. We had a reunion of sorts in Arkansas. It was through one of the (Rockefeller’s grants). I know, I got this bag from there (chuckles). But anyway, there was a conference there.

WN: You went to a conference. It was like a reunion.

PN: It’s a Rockefeller grant—I believe it was. Oh, I was in that elevator with this very elderly lady and a middle-aged woman. And she said, “Oh, I’m here looking for some of my students.” You know, she’s a haole lady.

I said, “Oh, what grade did you teach?”

She said, “Second grade.”

I thought my sister was in the third grade, but she was in the second because I was in the fourth grade then. So when they had the banquet, she passed by, and I said, “Oh, that’s the lady that was looking for her second-grade students.”

So, my sister said, “Oh, I was in the second grade.” And she looked at—and they somehow knew each other. Miss [Florriedeen] Wakenight was her name.

MK: Oh.

PN: My sister wrote about her. I think the Japanese [American National] Museum had a banquet, and they invited my sister and the teacher. The teacher always wanted to put her feet in the Pacific Ocean. She [the teacher] got—you know, that little girl that I showed you on the boat? She got her, and both of them and, I think, maybe another person—classmate—they went to the Pacific Ocean to put her feet in the water. My sister went to her 90th birthday. But that was, really, just by chance (chuckles) we just saw her. She just passed by our table, and I said, “Oh, that’s the lady. . . .” (Chuckles)

MK: Maybe we’ll stop here and then the next time we meet, we’ll continue asking you about Jerome, school, and the community there, and the families.

PN: Okay.

WN: Then we’ll move on to Gila River [Relocation Center].

END OF INTERVIEW
WN: Okay, so this is an interview with Pat Kirita Nomura. Session number three. And today is August 22, 2011. Interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto. We’re at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

Good morning, Pat.

PN: Good morning.

WN: We wanted to continue with our talk about Jerome [Relocation Center]. In fact, the last interview, we just got you to Jerome. So we wanted to ask you, what blocks were you in?

PN: I was in Block 39, and the barrack number was 10 E and F, which was the end barrack.

WN: When you say a “block,” what does that mean?

PN: In our block—or most of the blocks in Jerome—I believe there were twelve barracks. They are barracks. Each barrack had six rooms. Two, two, two.

MK: You know, you mentioned that you were in barrack number 10, and you were in units E and F.

PN: F.

MK: How come you were in E and F and not in a single-letter unit?

PN: Because our family was bigger than some others, we had two rooms.

MK: And at that time, how many were in your family?

PN: Besides my mom [Toka Kirita], there were four girls and two boys.

MK: And you know, when you first got there, what was your initial reaction to Jerome? If you can remember, you know, as a little kid, what did you think?

PN: Well, it snowed, and it was very cold. And people—the kotonks were there to greet us. Because it was snowing, our shoes got all muddy. We had to go to Block 38 because the bathrooms and showers were not ready for us on Block 39. So that’s the first thing we did, I believe, go and take a shower, because we had been on the train for five days.

MK: And how prepared were you folks for that type of condition?

PN: Clothing-wise—of course, I think I mentioned before that the Red Cross had supplied scarves and mittens. But I’m not sure about sweaters. But it was cold.
MK: And as you look back on that time, how would you describe your mom’s reaction, you know?

PN: I don’t remember. If she had any reaction, I don’t think she would have showed it. But you know, everyone was very busy. I mean, we were— I guess, my mother was getting our blankets and things like that for the barracks.

MK: And when you folks first arrived at Jerome, where was your father at that time?

PN: He was in—I’m not sure—I think it was in Lordsburg [U.S. Army Internment Camp in New Mexico] before he went on to Santa Fe [Department of Justice Internment Camp] because I remember my older sisters [Marian and Sally] visiting him in Lordsburg.

MK: Did your sisters share with you anything about that visit?

PN: Not really, and I don’t know if they were the ones who brought a cake, but you know, they really inspected it and cut the cake and made sure that there weren’t knives in there (chuckles). I don’t know, maybe my sister Marian can relay that story, but I don’t know.

MK: So there was a cake that was given from your sisters to . . .

PN: Yes, I don’t know how they got the cake either.

MK: And then going back to Jerome, how would you describe your barrack and the unit that you lived in?

PN: Well, it was— they had tarpaper. I think it covered the walls. It wasn’t just tarpaper. Of course, there was that big, potbellied stove. We were in cots. We also had— each family had a bedpan. It was like a big bucket (chuckles). I guess, for my sisters, who were teenagers, they didn’t want to take it to the bathroom because we all shared the bathroom in the middle of the block. So on cold winter nights, I was the one who had to take the chimba, we say, and empty it.

MK: How far a distance was that?

PN: I have no idea. It’s . . .

WN: I mean, was it like a long hike or was it . . .

PN: No, it was level. I noticed that there was sort of like an (elevated) pathway. In case it flooded, you know, you’d have water on both sides. But sometimes, when Mississippi overflowed (chuckled), it would be covered. So you know, you’d have to kind of work your way to the bathroom.

WN: What was the landscape like? Were there trees? Was it green?

PN: Yes. Contrary to [Gila River Relocation Center] Arizona, it was just—they cleared a forest. So we were surrounded by trees. So we couldn’t really escape. (Chuckles) That’s where the men went to get the wood.

MK: You know, you were saying that you folks were kind of surrounded by a forest and that you really couldn’t escape. In terms of security, as a child, what did you notice about security there?

PN: Well, they had a watchtower, and a barbed-wire fence, but it didn’t bother me, as a child, I don’t think.

You see, (PN points to a map of camp,) this is a common area. See, the bathroom is over here, and this is almost like a playground. Each block, you know, had a mess hall and bathroom facilities. You see, these are the barracks that would be on the side.
MK: And that would be at Jerome?

PN: Yes.

MK: You had an open, common area.

PN: Yes, I think in Gila, too, in Arizona, they had a common area. So it was very similar, as far as the layout of the blocks.

MK: You know, back on the Big Island, where you lived, you had like a garden. And I was wondering, here at Jerome, did you have anything like that?

PN: We didn’t, but you know, because there were many Californians living—farmers—living in Jerome, they did have gardens. I think there was one story about this—I think it’s a family from Hilo, where—there were some gourds.

MK: So there were some people who did plant but not your family, in particular? And I know that like in Hilo, you folks were living in pretty close quarters. Your house was not a real big house.

PN: Kohala, you mean?

MK: Yes.

PN: Well, it was a typical plantation house. Our kitchen was separated from the rest of the house, and there’s just two bedrooms. There’s no living room. Further up in the front, I guess we could’ve had a living room, but that became a billiard—our pool table. Christmastime, my dad would put all the toys and Christmas things (on the pool table). The store was on the other side where we sold candy and dry goods. He did have some medicine—Japanese medicine.

MK: So living in the barrack was quite different . . .

PN: Yes.

MK: . . . from what you had been accustomed to.

PN: We slept in cots. Of course, in Hala‘ula, we slept on the floor—on a futon.

WN: In terms of furnishing the place—I mean, you know, when you probably walked in, it was probably all bare, you know.

PN: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: Well, what did your mom and everyone do to make the place look, you know, more like home?

PN: I don’t remember. However, in Arizona, I remember they did have some sort of partition. But I don’t remember too much about Jerome. All I know, the stove was here, and the chimba was on the other end. (Chuckles)

WN: What about things like, you know, tables, chairs. Do you remember—were there?

PN: No, because we ate in the mess hall.

WN: Okay. So like in the evening, when you were in the barracks, what did you folks do?

PN: We usually stayed out in the little veranda that they had.

WN: Oh, you had a veranda?
PN: I think we have a picture of this. But there was really nothing. I can’t remember playing anything at night. We just went to sleep.

But you see, this is where we brushed our teeth, and this is where we did our laundry.

MK: So there was a communal bathroom . . .

PN: Yes, uh-huh [yes].

MK: . . . and communal washroom . . .

PN: Yes, it’s all in one building. Right next to the mess hall.

MK: And what do you remember about the food served at the mess hall?

PN: I thought it was pretty good. But I remember, in [Gila River Relocation Center] Arizona, we had a lot of fruits because they had farmers, you know, who went on the outskirts of the camp and cultivated land. And someone said that the pima cotton comes from that area. I think it was the Japanese farmers who cultivated it. Because, you know, in Arizona, it’s pretty dry. But we had cantaloupes and watermelons and things like that, yeah.

MK: But that wasn’t the case at Jerome?

PN: No, I don’t remember anything like that.

MK: And then when it came to the basic fare there—the food served to you at Jerome—were they more American-style, local-style. . . .

PN: It was more American-style. I think we had pancakes. Cereal, maybe? Eggs on Sunday. But that’s all I remember. (Chuckles)

WN: For Jerome, what do you remember about insects or things like chiggers . . .

PN: Chiggers.

WN: Do you remember that?

PN: Yes. The only kind of medicine that we had were purple, so we’re running around with purple legs. I mean, all purple. (Laughs)

WN: Oh yeah, I remember that medicine. (PN laughs.)

MK: Gentian Violet.

PN: Is that what it’s called?

MK: Gentian Violet.

WN: We put that on chicken pox sores. Yeah, it’s anti-itch.

PN: Oh.

MK: So if chiggers got onto you, where would they get onto you and . . .

PN: Especially on the waist, I think, right here. And the legs. It was hard to get out. I don’t know how you’d get those things out. They get embedded in your skin.

MK: Were there other living things there that . . .
PN: Well, snakes that came out in the spring. You’d find them under the barracks. You see, there is a space underneath.

MK: So the snakes would be under the barracks, and they would come out in the spring?

PN: Yes.

MK: You know, you mentioned that sometimes the river would overflow—the Mississippi River.

PN: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: Were there occasions when you folks would actually go to the river?

PN: No, we don’t know what the river looks like. (Chuckles) It just overflowed into the camp. I think we had pictures of it with my mother standing in the water. You know, going to school, that was something else. (Chuckles)

MK: Tell us about school in camp. What was it like?

PN: We had teachers in camp, you know? I believe my teacher was from California. Mrs. Yamane. I had one other teacher who was haole, and when we went to the Jerome conference several years ago—many years ago—we heard that the teachers in Arkansas were very upset because the teachers inside the camp were getting paid a lot more. You know, Arkansas, the teachers weren’t highly paid—they’re still not paid very well.

WN: Oh, interesting.

PN: So I never thought of that until it was brought up at this conference. There was some jealousy.

MK: And what was the name of the school?

PN: I know my sisters graduated from—it’s called Denson High School. So ours must’ve been elementary school. (Chuckles) I don’t know.

WN: So the school itself was in the camp?

PN: It was in the camp, in the barracks.

WN: In the barracks. And all the students in that school were in the camp?

PN: Yes.

WN: They weren’t outsiders coming in?

PN: No.

MK: And what grades did you have there?

PN: Up to twelve. This is my sister’s second grade. (PN points to photo.) She’s here.

MK: And which grades did you attend there?

PN: I was in the fourth and fifth. You see this teacher, Miss [Florriedeen] Wakenight? Did I tell you about her? That we met her at the conference?

MK: Uh-huh [yes], I think in that last interview.
PN: That was my sister’s teacher (chuckles), and she’s still living. She’s ninety-something. My sister went to her (ninety-second) birthday party. I think it was last year.

MK: And then, you know, when you kind of think about your fourth and fifth grades at Jerome, what it like in terms of the materials, lessons—what was it like at the school?

PN: I don’t know (chuckles). I don’t remember. But, you know, we said our pledge of allegiance. And this is our typical classroom.

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

PN: That’s about it. I don’t remember too much.

MK: And then while the kids were off to school, what was your mom doing?

PN: Working in the mess hall, preparing for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

WN: Did she get paid for that?

PN: Sixteen dollars a month. So when we had to get overcoats and things like that, we depended on that money. We ordered through the catalog. It was Sears and Montgomery Ward.

MK: And was there also a store at the camp . . .

PN: Yes.

MK: . . . that you could go to?

PN: Yes. Let’s see, there was a picture of a store where we would stand in line on Sunday for ice cream.

MK: Oh. And . . .

PN: (Baton twirling) was an after-school activity. My mom had to buy a baton for me. And we had to wear hats made of Quaker Oat containers.

MK: Uh-huh [yes].

PN: And we colored it blue, with a white star. If you’re a higher level, then you get a red star in between. (MK chuckles.) So I didn’t get to the very top, but I did get to that, where I had a red star. I think there were about seven who were really, really good. But then the others, I think they wore beanies or . . .

MK: Yeah, I noticed some of them have very flat headwear . . .

WN: There’s a lot . . .

PN: Yes, yes (chuckles).

WN: Interesting. There’s a lot of children.

PN: Here I am. See, right there (chuckles).

MK: So you were among the elementary school students who did baton twirling as an activity after school?

PN: After school, uh-huh [yes]. I remember hearing John Philip Sousa’s March [“The Stars and Stripes Forever”] (chuckles) . . .
MK: Uh-huh [yes].

PN: . . . and marching to that. There was a man, he taught us how to twirl the baton.

MK: I notice, across from the picture you just showed us of the baton twirlers, there’s a photo of hula girls from Hawai‘i.

PN: Yes.

MK: What is this?

PN: I don’t know. I don’t remember some of these people.

MK: Did they perform?

PN: Uh-huh [yes]. We had the older girls also perform. They used to go to Camp Shelby to entertain the soldiers there.

WN: Four-four-two [442 Regimental Combat Team].

PN: Yes.

WN: Four-four-two boys.

PN: Four-four-two and 100th Battalion. My sister was one of the USO [United Service Organizations] girls. I think there’s a picture of them somewhere.

MK: You know, you mentioned that . . .

PN: Here’s the USO, see?

MK: Oh, okay.

PN: I think . . .

MK: She was part of the Denson USO girls.

WN: Is that Marian?

PN: No, this is Sally. The one on the Mainland.

MK: And there’s a Marian Kirita Takagi . . .

PN: Yes.

MK: . . . at Camp Shelby?

PN: Yes. That’s her.

MK: In the photo, she’s chatting with her hometown GIs.

PN: Yes. Sewaki.

MK: Max Sewaki?

PN: Yeah.

MK: Oh. You know, you mentioned that sometimes, there were occasions for the youngsters to perform? Like the little ones that we saw in that other picture.
PN: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: On what occasions would people do performances?

PN: I’m not sure as far as Jerome is concerned, but I remember performing in [Gila River Relocation Center] Arizona. On the bottom of a hill, there was a stage. We took odori, and we used to dance there.

MK: Japanese dance?

PN: Japanese dance, yes.

MK: You know, at Jerome, though, to what extent did you folks do Japanese things like odori or . . .

PN: I didn’t do. But they did have kabuki shows. I think the people from Hawai‘i built an auditorium. I think there was a picture of one somewhere.

MK: You remember seeing people in kimono, and they’re in a kabuki performance . . .

PN: Yes, and Boys’ Day. They observed Boys’ Day. Girls’ Day, I guess, (chuckles) but I don’t remember. But you know, the Boys’ Day, because they had the carps flying, yeah?

MK: And that’s at Jerome?

PN: Yes, see, they have—first, Hanamatsuri [Buddha’s birthday festival]. And here is the auditorium that they built.

MK: And like Hanamatsuri is a Buddhist festival?

PN: Mm-hmm [yes]. Yes, because there are so many Buddhist priests there. I think there was—I was not a Christian then. So my parents were very strong Buddhists. So we attended the Buddhist church.

MK: So were there, like, regular services put on by . . .

PN: Mm-hmm [yes], Sunday.

MK: At camp, you know, how freely could the Japanese language be used? I know, issei, of course, speak Japanese. But were there any restrictions placed on, say, the second generation?

PN: No, I don’t think so. Most of them spoke English because they’re raised, you know, in schools in California and in Hawai‘i.

MK: And in Jerome, what was your father doing when he finally was reunited with the family?

PN: I don’t remember. He was not—he was there right before we left Jerome to go to Arizona.

MK: Yeah, so it was a short while?

PN: Yes.

WN: So he came to Jerome when you folks were getting ready to leave for Arizona.

PN: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: So what—where did he go?
PN: He went with us.

WN: Oh.

PN: Yes, he was released to go with us.

MK: Now that we've come to the part where we're talking about the family leaving Jerome, what would you know about the decision? Because different families made different . . .

PN: Decisions.

MK: . . . choices, yeah?

PN: Mm-hmm [yes]. Well, they first asked my father whether he wanted to go back to Japan. He said he didn't. He wanted the family to eventually move to Hawai‘i. But the ones who wanted to go back [to Japan]—especially the parents—went to Tule Lake in California. And a lot of kids didn’t want to go, and I think that’s why they had a lot of problems there in Tule Lake. I think they had clashes with the kotonks. I heard about things like that in Tule Lake, but we chose—we had a choice of different ones. Some went to Heart Mountain in Wyoming, and we went to—we decided to go to Arizona.

MK: Would you know why they opted for that?

PN: No, except for the weather that—you know, it won’t be very cold. It seemed more pleasant, for some reason (chuckles). I don’t know what made them decide that.

WN: Did you have to leave behind some friends? Did some friends go to other camps? How did you feel about that?

PN: I don’t remember as much as I did when I left Kohala.

MK: And so when you moved to Gila River, what did you folks take with you folks? What did you take along?

PN: Just our bare necessities. You know, I don’t remember going on the train, but we must’ve gone on the train. I just remember the train ride from San Francisco to Jerome. Did we go by truck? I don’t think so.

MK: And when you folks got to Gila River, what was your reaction?

PN: I thought it looked pretty nice because the barracks were not of tarpaper. It was white. I don’t know if there was a picture of it here. You can barely see it. It’s white.

MK: So this time, the barracks were not of tarpaper. They were painted white.

PN: White, uh-huh [yes]. And I don’t think there is a picture here.

MK: And then at Jerome, it happened that the Hawai‘i people were sort of clustered in certain blocks.

PN: Uh-huh [yes].

MK: What was the situation for Hawai‘i people at Gila River?

PN: I’m not too sure. I think we were all scattered. I remember some of them living next to Block 65. Ours was Block 65. There’s some people in 64, but they were kind of scattered, I think.

You see how they farmed the daikon?
MK: They farmed *daikon* at Gila River?

PN: Yes.

MK: So with this farming going on at Gila River, were members of your family involved in any of the farming?

PN: No, no. They were all in school. I’m trying to think—I think my father was sort of like a guard. I mean, he used to make sure people were in line when we went to get ice cream or . . . Well, I don’t know if you’d call him a security guard (laughs). My mom, of course, worked in the mess hall.

MK: And when you say your mom worked in the mess hall, what kind of work did she do there?

PN: The same thing. Cooking and washing big pots and serving, mm-hmm [yes]. Where we went—and I did go to Arizona—on top of the hill, they had names of (soldiers) who died in the war.

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

PN: What was left was just a shell. You would think, how in the world did people go and ransack a monument like that in the middle of a desert—because there’s hardly anything there now. But they kind of rebuilt, the structure, but not the inside.

MK: So you’re speaking of the war memorial that was put up, following the war, in tribute to . . .

PN: I believe it was during the war because we were able to see it there.

MK: And you know, when you think back to your Gila River living situation, how would you compare with what you experienced at Jerome?

PN: Well, we didn’t have floods. But we did have dust storms. They were terrible. You see, we would go to the movies, like on a hill like this, with our army blankets, and then we had a stage. When we’d go to the movies, there would be a dust storm. You could hardly—this here is the monument—you could hardly see. All the barracks all look alike, so you can easily get lost. I remember, one time, I found a bunch of boys from our block, so I just followed them. I’m trying to think who else was with me. But it was—that was the worst thing, I think (laughs).

MK: So the dust storms were so bad . . .

PN: So bad.

MK: . . . that visibility would be affected . . .

PN: You can’t even see from one barrack to the other. It was really bad.

MK: How regularly would these dust storms occur?

PN: I don’t know. But they did—you know, certain seasons, probably.

MK: That’s something you don’t experience in Hawai’i (chuckles).

PN: No (laughs).

MK: Wow. And I know that earlier, you mentioned that you did some *odori*, or Japanese dancing at Gila River.
PN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, yes.

MK: Tell us about how you learned it and what you did.

PN: We had a Japanese teacher, and she came from another—we had Camp 1 and Camp 2. We were in Camp 2, and she lived in Camp 1. So she used to get on the army truck to take her to our camp. There, we learned the odori. My father, of course, wanted us to take odori. I would've loved to have taken okoto or shamisen, but of course, we didn’t have things like that. But there were a few from California who had those things, so they’re able to take lessons. I know she is—I don’t know if she’s still living, but she was pretty young. I did see her when I went to LA, and she still looked young. (MK and WN chuckle.) Amazingly young. I tried calling her, but I’m sure she’s not living anymore. There are two or three of the people who were in that same group still living in California. I should try and contact them because when I went, we did go and visit her.

MK: In the group that you were with, like how many young girls were taking lessons?

PN: I’m not sure, but probably about maybe twenty? Because we all did different dances, and I remember my sister doing one with four girls, and they wore black. Kappore, I think you call it. I did one with a sailor hat, and there were about four of us. But we used to also have the whole group dance, you know, in kimonos. And I’m trying to think—some of them I still know. They’re alive, (chuckles) and I do have contact with one other person who lives in California.

MK: How did you folks get kimono, you know, at that time period?

PN: I really don’t know, unless our parents had it or. . . . Because we couldn’t buy it, yeah. Or we borrowed it? I have no idea.

WN: And the music to—you know, to dance with—how was that provided?

PN: Well, our teacher played the shamisen, and she sang. We must’ve had recordings.

WN: Records.

PN: Records. I remember because in Jerome, I remember going to Bon dance. I remember dancing to “You Got to Accentuate the Positive.” You know that song?

MK: (Chuckles) Uh-huh [yes].

PN: (PN sings part of the song.) (Laughs) I don’t know. I remember especially that particular song we danced to.

WN: You danced Japanese Bon dance to American songs?

(Laughter)

PN: This was in Jerome.

MK: No yagura?

PN: I don’t think so. I don’t remember.

MK: But it was a Bon dance and . . .

PN: Uh-huh [yes].

MK: . . . you had Bon dance steps or gestures . . .

PN: Uh-huh [yes].
MK: . . . to the American . . .

PN: Music. Yes. (MK chuckles.) “Don’t Fence Me In,” I think, was another one. (WN chuckles.) I don’t remember the Japanese ones. I’m sure there must’ve been. But . . .

MK: Who participated in those Bon dances at Jerome?

PN: Usually, you know, the kids, and parents, too. Because there are a lot of Buddhists, you know, because of the—all of the bon-sans were there.

MK: And then at Gila River, you did odori.

PN: Yes.

MK: How about Bon dancing . . .

PN: I don’t remember having a Bon dance in Arizona.

MK: Were there other cultural activities that you could’ve participated in? Like, you said some girls maybe had access to koto or shamisen. . .

PN: That’s about it, I think.

MK: So dance, music. . .

PN: Of course, the boys, I mean, they have—well, the older boys had baseball in Jerome, I know, because they competed against some of the Camp Shelby boys. Yeah. I think that’s how we got our pictures—a lot of the pictures. Because I don’t think we’re supposed to have cameras. But yeah, we had a lot of the 442 boys and 100th come and visit. Then our USO girls would dance with them.

MK: And I know, like at Jerome, you attended school, how about Gila River?

PN: Yes. Fifth—no, sixth grade, I believe. I had a teacher from Tulia, Texas. And I drove by her—where she lived. She kept in touch with a lot of her students—Christmastime. She lived in Upland, California. The last time I visited, no one lived there, but I noticed that—I know she liked cats. There was a cat rug there.

MK: Welcome mat?

PN: Yes, welcome mat. So I thought, well, maybe she’s still living. But I did see her, though, once before—after camp. She was also our Girl Scout leader. I remember in camp, we were divided according to levels. Like in the sixth grade, we had an A class and a B class. I was in the A class with Miss Barks, but my friend—who became very close to me, she recently died, and I used to see her in California—she was in the B class. But the people in the A class, we were pretty—not arrogant, but there was a distinction. (Chuckles)

And there was a girl from Hilo that was in the B class. I remember, oh, I was terrible to her. After the [1946] tidal wave, I wanted to look her up to tell her how sorry I was (laughs). We became friends because she met me at one of the reunions. Her family was different. Their hair was lighter, and I thought they didn’t look very smart. But I found out, later, that, I think it was because she was a Christian and we all were Buddhist. You know, we weren’t very nice to her. But now that I’m a Christian and she—I think we met at one of the reunions. I apologized to her, and we became good friends. I think her daughter is in some kind of a ministry.

MK: You know, you mentioned that you folks had Girl Scouts. What sorts of Girl Scout activities did you have in camp at Gila River?
I don’t really remember. But I remember going to her house. The teachers lived in the barracks, but they were nicely furnished. I’m trying to think. I remember going there to clean her apartment. I don’t know if I got paid, but I was very attached to her. But she was mean (chuckles). And she has a mouth like a bulldog (laughs).

MK: The teacher?

PN: Yes.

MK: Oh. But you were attached to her?

PN: And her name was Miss Barks.

(Laughter)

WN: Was she mean or was she strict?

PN: Well, I think it was strict. That’s what it was.

Yes, and I remember playing volleyball. I was terrible because I would be one of the last ones to get picked (chuckles) when they would divide teams. I’m still very terrible. I want to make sure my kids like sports. (MK chuckles.) Well, we never had any opportunities to get into any sport activities.

MK: You know, you had mentioned also, earlier, that when you went to Gila River, you noticed that the barracks were white.

PN: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: They weren’t just covered with tarpaper. When you think about the conditions that Gila River, compared to Jerome, how would you compare them? You know, like the chimba, you had to take care of a chimba at Jerome. How about Gila River?

PN: I don’t remember the chimba in Gila. But it seemed like I had more fun there. Of course, we had, you know, a basketball court. Then I had the odori, too. Of course, we didn’t have baton twirling, but the odori practices gave us, at least, some time to do other things. We were able to—you know, because the weather was always hot and nice; it wasn’t rainy—we could play outdoors a lot. They had snakes there, too. I’m trying to think.

I hate to go back, again, to Jerome, but there was an empty field—not the one that I mentioned where the hospital was. There were barns. We used to play in the feed, you know, that was stored in the barns. We used to pick berries. I’m not sure what kind of berries they were, but. But I remember my brother saying, “Don’t go in the barn, don’t go in the barn!” Later we found that there was a man who hung himself—a young man—who hung himself in the barn. I think he didn’t want to go to war. They said, “Oh, there are snakes, there are snakes!” So we just ran home. But that was sad.

MK: And were there anything like barns at Gila River?

PN: Not that I recall, no.

MK: Also, if you could share with us how you fared as an odori student. I know in your writing, you wrote how you fared, but if you could just share that with us. . . .

PN: Well, I wasn’t the best dancer (laughs). I remember being put in the corner for misbehaving or doing something wrong. Sometimes, we got hit by her [teacher’s] fan. (WN and PN laugh.) But I would say, I was average. I think the people from California, they were a lot better. Maybe they had a lot more experience than we had.

MK: And then you also mentioned that at Gila River, you would see movies.
PN: Uh-huh [yes].

MK: And they would be outdoors?

PN: It was on a hill, you know. That’s where we performed, too. There’s a stage at the bottom of the hill. We bring our army blankets and sit on the rocky mountain. There’s this one boy—he used to throw rocks at us. He has a lot of his shirts in the (Japanese) museum now. He’s an artist. (MK laughs.) I think he used to like me. As a matter of fact, he invited me to his home when I was in school [college] in Texas. I went to Fresno to visit him. But he’s still alive. I still see him occasionally. My niece bought some of his paintings, so she showed me. But he’s really an artist, you know. He has his hair in a ponytail. (WN and MK chuckle.)

WN: You know, you mentioned that the California girls were, you know, maybe a little better at *odori* and things like that, was that generally the case? Were the California girls—how different were they from you folks?

PN: Well, I think that they probably had some experience, you know, with dancing and stuff like that. But you know, when we were in Hawai‘i—I mean, I have a niece who took *odori* over here at Mānoa, and she won some—she had some kind of a degree in dancing. It was because my mother forced her, I guess (chuckles). Like we were forced to go to Japanese[-language] school. I’m glad I went, you know, here. But I wish I finished.

MK: And then, you know, by the time you folks went to Gila River, it may have been a number of years of being confined, yeah?

PN: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: Especially for your dad. What did you notice about your parents and how they were holding up under all this?

PN: Well, it’s hard to tell because my dad was always very quiet, and I wish I was able to ask him more questions. But you know, at that age—my age, at that time—I wasn’t really interested. Even my kids, until they went to UH [University of Hawai‘i], then they started asking me questions because they’re in American Studies.

MK: And then—shall we go on to the return home?

PN: Okay.

MK: What was your family’s reaction when, you know, they received word that, okay, now it’s time to go back to Hawai‘i?

PN: Well, I imagine they must’ve been happy and relieved. They took us—they shipped us to California. I think it was El Toro. It’s a Marine camp. We stayed there—I’m not sure—maybe a month? We were able to go to LA on the bus because that’s kind of like, Santa Ana area. I think, there, then we boarded the ship, *Shawnee*, which was an Army transport. So there’s some soldiers there with us.

WN: This is to go to Hawai‘i?

PN: Hawai‘i.

WN: On the *Shawnee*?
PN: Yes.

MK: I was wondering, leaving Gila River, again, what did your family bring back? What did you folks have to bring back?

PN: (Chuckles) Nothing except our clothes.

MK: So your family came back on the Shawnee?

PN: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: And it arrived here in Honolulu.

PN: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: And what was it like? Was there a homecoming of any sort?

PN: (Laughs) No. I don’t remember so much being here. But you know, we got to Kohala. Of course, our house was no longer there. It was moved. So, we had to find a place. We lived in the back of—well, close to the Holy Bakery in that area. I just went to the second half—I missed school. I think they closed during the spring semester at Gila. So I had to start the second semester in Kohala High School. I was in the seventh grade. I was able—I made new friends. But you know, the people—elementary schools students from Hala‘ula—you know, they transferred to Kohala High School. So, I remember seeing some of them after not seeing them for three years. That’s when I heard that some of them said, “Oh, you just left the classroom, and we never knew where you went.”

So we never had a chance to say goodbye, but—so I was there only for the second semester. I had a hard time with math because I missed the whole semester. I was in this algebra class, and it was hard. But my real good friends are from that class, and just two months ago—two or three months ago—we had a reunion in Kohala. They always invite me because one of the officers is a very good friend, and whenever they have a reunion here, she always asks me to help plan the reunion. I’ve gotten very close to the rest of them. I did go to the reunion in Waikoloa.

I was amazed at some of them. I mean, I was there only for six months, and you know, I haven’t seen them since. They said, “Oh, I remember you. You used to sit—I was sitting in back of you in English class.” (MK chuckles.) Oh, I don’t remember that. Then when someone said, “Oh, I remember you had a pretty voice and you sang this song.” I don’t remember the song (chuckles). He even sang that song to me. (Laughs) He lives in Kamuela, and he’s really like a cowboy. You know, he had a cowboy hat and boots, and he came to the reunion like that. So. One of them lived, I believe, lives in Ohio. He’s coming in September. He treated us last time. This time, we’re going to be on our own, and we’re going to Tsukiji’s.

MK: Oh, sounds good.

PN: So calls all the time from Ohio (chuckles).

MK: You know, you mentioned that when you folks returned to Kohala, your house was moved.

PN: Mm-hmm [yes]. And of course we didn’t . . .

MK: What happened?

PN: That whole plantation—Kohala Plantation area—all the houses were moved. They consolidated to other areas. Every time I go, I see less and less of the town. Sometimes, I say, I’m going to write about it because it’s so sad. First, you see the mill, and you see the theater where I remember they having reserved seats. All the bosses, you know, of the plantations, they would sit in these nice, red velvet seats. Of course, it took us just ten
cents to go to the movie. To see that place just dilapidated, falling apart (was sad). Then, the plantation store finally became some kind of a store that some hippies ran. The last time I went, there was nothing. You couldn’t even see it. They had these beautiful homes where the plantation bosses lived. They had a paved road. Across, they had these bougainvilleas carved, you know, chairs and animals, lined with lilies. Beautiful lilies. I thought, “Oh, that was so nice.” We can’t even go there anymore. I don’t know if they moved the houses. There are just trees. The only thing I could see there is a clump of mango trees. You see the sugarcane fields and then you see a clump of mango trees. I think that’s the only thing that’s left of Hala’ula. That’s kind of sad, you know? It’s just—because we had a lot of good memories there.

MK: And you know, that six-month period when you were back in Kohala, how did your family manage? Because the home is gone, and you’re living near Holy’s Bakery now. The store is gone, and that was what supported your family. So how did your family manage?

PN: Well, my mom worked at the Sakamoto Store. I think that’s the largest building in Kapa’au. They have little shops now. You know, yogurt shops. You can tell it’s a hippy-run place. (MK chuckles.) And so, she worked. I don’t think my dad worked. But I didn’t realize until much later, in my adult years, that we were actually on welfare. But they never told us. I think if they did, I would feel like a second-class citizen (chuckles). But they never revealed that until much later.

MK: And then having, you know, been—well, having your father taken from your home, and then the family being moved to the Mainland, living in camps. And you folks come back, how did people treat you folks?

PN: Well, we were in another area, you know. We were in Kapa’au. So, and the people in (Hala’ula) were all scattered. So I don’t, you know—the Cazimeros were living in Hala’ula. The Cacholas. Many of them moved to Honolulu. The Dulans. They were (with the Cazimeros) the ones that used to come and sing.

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

PN: You know, on New Year’s.

WN: Oh, the Cacholas?

PN: Yes.

WN: Okay.

PN: And Henrietta. So I talked to the Cazimero brothers one time. I said, “I think, it must’ve been your father, or you know, that used to come and sing with their guitars.

WN: So you’re talking about Robert and Roland. You talked to them?

PN: Yes.

WN: And it was their father?

PN: I talked to one of them. Yes. I think we were on a plane or something.

MK: So when you came back to Kohala, it was kind of a different place?

PN: Uh-huh [yes]. Different friends because, you know. All my Hala’ula friends—well, they went to Kohala High School, but it’s only the people who were living in Kapa’au that, you know, I became playmates with. The library is still there. I think they finally moved the library. It used to be right across the Kamehameha statue, and the librarian was there for many, many years. They were family friends. Actually, they lived in Hala’ula, too.
MK: You know, I was wondering, too. Having spent X number of years, going to school on the Mainland as a young, young girl, how was your speech affected? Was it not as local sounding . . .

PN: Yes.

MK: . . . as before?

PN: Yes, and this boy who used to sit in back of me, he said, “Oh. . . .” He remembered I was very fair-skinned compared to the other girls. (Chuckles) I don’t know why he said that. It wasn’t as bad. But maybe that’s why I got put in the better class because I spoke better than they did (laughs). But then, when I came back from Texas after going to school [college] and I had that southern drawl, oh, they made fun of me.

WN: Oh, you had a southern drawl?

PN: I did. I was there for four years, and I worked with a lot of the—in the summers, I worked in Vacation Bible School and worked with colored kids. You know, Black kids.

WN: Oh, this is after the war?

MK: This is afterwards, in college?

PN: Yes, yes. So came back with a drawl.

MK: But getting back to your coming-back-to-Kohala time, you folks were in Kohala for about six months. Then what happened?

PN: My sisters came out. One worked at Kapi‘olani Hospital. The other was a beautician. Marian was the one who had a scholarship to go to college. But my father said, “When we come back, you have to work. So you have to take up something—a profession that you can make money and support us.” So, but then her legs gave out. You know, it was very tiring, so she went into business, and she worked for Finance Factors. Very close to that family still. Even New Year’s, they go there—New Year’s Eve. But yes, Marian. So they kind of supported us. We were living where Old Wai‘alae Road is. You know, they have that restaurant there, right on the corner before you get onto the freeway.

WN: Oh, near [Hawaiian] Humane Society?

PN: Yes. Right across, catty-corner, they have—I know they bake. I know my daughter ordered her cake—wedding cake—from there.

MK: Oh, Catherine’s Bakery.

PN: Yes, yes.

MK: Okay, okay.

PN: It’s in the back there. There are some houses, and they had a community bath over there. And we stayed. The house was sort of built on a hill, and so we were down in the cellar. So there was just dirt for one wall, and there was our stove. Then there were one, two rooms, I believe. We stayed there. Then we moved to above Club Garage, which was where Hosoi is now. There was Hamada Store downstairs. I think now, they’re somewhere in Kaka’ako. Right above it was an apartment, and Club Garage was on the back. It’s all tōtan roof, so we had to hang our clothes, going on the roof. Again, we didn’t have one wall, and rain came in. You know, we had—the bedrooms were here, and we had our dining room, living room—whatever you call it—here. There was no window here, so rains would come in. The bathroom was at the top of the stairs, and it was so embarrassing to be in there when I had boys coming to date me, and I would be in there. We call it, “the termite mansion,” you know. If they didn’t hold hands, it would fall apart (laughs). But---and then, right—catty-corner to us—our bedroom—my sister and I used
to always look at this place where they filmed *Hell’s Half Acre* with John Wayne. They would have sailors going up and down, yeah, it was a prostitute place.

Then there’s a Filipino billiard—pool hall. So, when I worked in the cannery late at night, I would come home, and they’d give me that Filipino, “Psst! Psst!” (Laughs) Call, we say it. But yeah, I’d come home eleven o’clock, and you know, it was hard. I think, it was.

To take a shower, my sister and I would sing so we won’t be afraid. It’s right under the toilet—here’s the steps. It’s just made of *totan*. No lock or anything, just dim light, and we would take a shower there. Then we moved. We stayed there a while, during my—I think, during my high school years. My mom worked at ‘A‘ala Park—‘A‘ala Bakery, which was right there at ‘A‘ala Park. They had a new Kokusai Theater right next to it, and I remember dancing there once. Then she opened a restaurant right where School Street and Fort, I believe. There was a playground—a big playground, kind of close to Foster Gardens. I think, there were—probably now, though, it’s where the freeway is.

WN: Right, right, right.

PN: And I remember having—that restaurant is right next to this Chinese building. It was on the right. The boys in the Hongwanji dormitory would come and eat. We had a *saimin* stand.

MK: So your mom opened up a *saimin* stand?

PN: I thought it was so funny when she made simple things like corned beef cabbage, and you know, corned beef onion, chop suey. . . . Well, she made sweet-sour spareribs one time, and this Chinese man came and told her awful it was. He taught her how to make it. (MK chuckles.) So, when—I wanted her recipe, and then that’s when she told me that this Chinese man taught her how to make it. (Laughs)

She worked hard, and you know—and she used to get upset because people would put so much *shōyu* in the *dashi*. (MK laughs.) You know, she’d boil the pork bones and you know, do all these kind of stuff to flavor her *dashi*, and she’s like, “Eww.” (Laughs)

WN: (Laughs) And they would add *shōyu* in it?

PN: (Laughs) Yes.

MK: Did she make her own noodles, too?

PN: No, she didn’t make her own noodles. I don’t know where she got her noodles.

MK: Oh, but she made her own *dashi* from pork bones and everything?

PN: Yes. *Konbu*, and you know.

WN: How many tables were there?

PN: There was a counter. Maybe about four to six, maybe? I remember spilling *saimin* on that lady, and boy, did I get bawled out. (Chuckles) Because the table was kind of warped, it wasn’t leveled, and it was very smooth. And the *saimin*—hot *saimin*—fell on this lady (chuckles). My mother really scolded me.

MK: Who provided the help in the *saimin* stand? You. . . .

PN: Mostly me. I think my sister was too young, maybe. Well, I was a senior, and junior year. . . . Well, she must’ve been in—it seemed like, I just remember being the only one. But maybe my other—well, my sister who worked at the hospital stayed at the dorm over there at Kapi‘olani. Maybe my sister, Marian. And my dad.
MK: So what was your life like, you know, as a high school student and also helping your mom? What was your routine like?

PN: Well, I did a lot of homework, you know. There was a little counter there, right next to the kitchen. Well, it was—I still had a good social life. I was a sponsor in ROTC [Reserve Officers’ Training Corps], so we get to go to all the ROTC dances with all the different schools. My husband played in an orchestra. So, well, I went to most of the high school dances. I was involved in working on the annuals, since I was the editor for the Black and Gold annual. And the MCC club—that was the [McKinley] Citizenship Club. But I never joined a social club. I didn’t have time, for one thing. But it was kind of thrilling to be in the service club because we got to usher, and we get to see—at concerts,—we get to see movie stars. I remember seeing Tyrone Power and—I’m trying to think who else I saw. . . .

WN: This is ushering where?

PN: You know, when McKinley—when they had concerts.

WN: At McKinley Auditorium?

PN: Yes, yes.

WN: Oh, I see.

PN: They didn’t have [Neal] Blaisdell [Center] then. So I guess . . .

WN: So you know, you actually went from a country area—rural area—growing up to a rural—more or less, a country area in camp, and then you moved to the big city to go to McKinley High School, which is the biggest high school, living right in downtown. What was that like for you?

PN: Well, you know, I wasn’t used to Filipinos. Psst! Psst-ing me. (MK and PN laugh.) So I would try to walk across the street. But I think that my school life kept me busy from really participating in activities surrounding our community. It seemed like I was always busy. I did go to Makiki Christian Church at that time, and we had a youth group there. That kept me busy.

MK: And then at that time, your mom has the saimin stand. How about your dad?

PN: He helped my mom. Oh, he worked at the Dole Pineapple Cannery. He retired from there. But you know, to think that he was regarded so highly in a community and to end up being a janitor at the cannery. It must’ve been difficult for him, but you know, he never expressed that. He was never bitter like—a lot of people who went to camp, they don’t even want to talk about it because they’re so bitter and they felt like they want to just not talk about unpleasant memories.

WN: Do you find—was your father—did you notice any differences—changes in him from before he went to camp to after?

PN: Yes, you know, very humble and very tired-looking. He really aged when he was in camp.

MK: And how about your mother?

PN: I don’t know, she was always pretty perky.

(Telephone rings.)

Oh, that’s my husband.
WN: Oh, break.

(Taping stops then resumes.)

Okay.

MK: You know, we’re nearing the close of the interview, and we know that during that time, you went through a lot of moves and a lot of changes. Your family was affected in a dramatic way. So when you look back on those years, what do you think in terms of how those years affected your life?

PN: I think I have more patience. And I try to look for—be more positive in how I live. I feel like whatever hardships that come my way, I’m able to endure it. When I was in college—I mean, I had a scholarship, but I had to depend, a lot of times—my parents couldn’t support me. I had to look for a job, and even then, sometimes I don’t have enough to eat, but somehow, you know, I feel like God took care of me. I wasn’t bitter, and I was grateful that I got the scholarship. It’s amazing because a lot of times when my finances were really low, I would speak at other churches and talk about my conversion experience, and I would get a dollar or two in the mail from some woman. It would come in handy, just when I needed it. But my college experience, I would not trade for anything. I go back to the reunions in Texas and I have still many friends there.

MK: What college did you go to?

PN: It’s a Baptist school. It’s not Baylor. That’s the largest. Hardin-Simmons is the next. It’s not that large, maybe two thousand. But for me, it was the right school.

WN: What was the name of the school?

PN: It’s Hardin-Simmons . . .

WN: Oh, Hardin-Simmons.

PN: . . . University.

WN: Oh, okay.

PN: I notice that they’re connected with the UH school of astronomy.

MK: And you mentioned that they had . . .

PN: And it was one of the best schools in the West—according to the Princeton Review—one of the best schools in the West.

MK: And you mentioned you had received a scholarship. What kind of scholarship was it?

PN: Well, at that time, we were considered foreigners (chuckles). So I had a foreign student scholarship. And you know how God worked. I think it is a miracle because here, my sister Marian, who did, you know, beautician work—gave the director of the Baptist Student Center, her permanents and set her hair. Miss Harris [the director] didn’t have too much money at that time. They didn’t pay them very much and so she would say, “Oh, I could give you voice lessons or piano lessons.”

So she said, “Oh, give it to my sister,” which is me. So that’s how I got interested in singing.

Because I had to help support our family. So, Ms. Harris got me a scholarship there and my sister, Esther, who is in Hilo—she taught at KCC [Kapi‘olani Community College]—she went to Louisiana College, which is a Baptist school also. My brother was going to support me. He was in the Air Force. But he got engaged, and you know, he said he
couldn’t help me anymore. My parents couldn’t either. So I was singing in the choir—a church choir—and this person who is the director, after rehearsal, kind of looked at me and said he’s looking for a secretary for the music department. So I thought, well, maybe this is kind of an answer to prayer (chuckles). So I went and I talked to him. I said, “Oh…”

He said he had two positions. And he said, “You know, being a secretary…”

I said, “You know, I don’t take shorthand.”

He said, “You don’t have to take shorthand. I’ll speak on the Dictaphone.” At that time, that’s what they had (chuckles). So you know, that’s what he would do. And so, that’s what I did most of the years I was there.

I couldn’t come home in the summer. I sang—and you had to audition to be in the state Baptist student—college student choir. They traveled all over. I met this fellow at Baylor, and he was the director. He said, “Oh, why don’t you come and sing with us?” And I didn’t have to audition, so I got to travel with them.

Then, I also—before that, they wanted sixty young college students to work in Vacation Bible Schools in all the different counties in Texas. I don’t know, I must’ve applied. So, they said, “Well, we pay you thirty dollars a week.”

I said, “Oh, that’s good. It’ll pay for my room, at least.”

But what I had to do was go and talk about the missions in Hawai‘i. You know, what the Baptists were doing in Hawai‘i. I got that information. They wanted to know about Hawai‘i. Sometimes I spoke at Rotary clubs and stuff. That was when I was in school. But in the summer, when I worked in the Vacation Bible Schools, I did the mission stories. So when they—they always have graduation night, after five days of Vacation Bible School. And so, I would speak during the week, maybe Wednesday meetings and even on Sundays, at churches. They would give me what you call a love offering. You know, they just take offerings, and whatever—so I made a lot more than the students did. That was an experience, especially because we would go into small counties and where they had—and they had everything arranged for us. We’d speak—we would work with the black kids. And I remember going into their homes and eating their wonderful chicken. (Chuckles) Southern-fried chicken. But one experience I guess I will never forget is when they had—like we had a commencement for Vacation Bible School. It was a big church and there are all, you know, black kids there. But the community did not like for white people to be working with the, you know, African Americans. So, they came, and we heard about, that they were going to try to create problems.

MK: Disrupt it.

PN: They came in about eight truckloads. But we were prepared. We called and we got the parents informed, so they were waiting for them, and they surrounded the church while we were having our meeting inside. And so, they came, and they wanted to know what we were doing there. I guess the parents stood up for us, and they finally moved. They went away, but it was kind of a tense time. But that was, you know, during the late ’50s, yeah? There was still a lot of prejudice.

I wouldn’t have had all of these experiences had it not been that I would be poor (laughs) and I would be able to get the scholarships.

MK: So we thank you for the interview today and for all your time and your help.

PN: You’re welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW
Unspoken Memories:
Oral Histories of Hawaiʻi Internees at Jerome, Arkansas

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