BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Susan Minami Miyamoto

Susan Miyamoto was born in 1919 in Pāʻia, Maui, where her father, Jusaku Minami, an immigrant from Kumamoto-ken, Japan, worked at the sugar mill. He also grew and sold watermelons. Her mother, Fujiyo Minami, gave birth to ten children, seven of whom survived beyond early childhood.

The Minami family, composed of mother, father, grandmother, and seven children, were residents of Lānaʻi, beginning in 1924. They lived in Namba Camp, then Crusher Camp, and finally Lānaʻi City.

Jusaku Minami’s first job on Lānaʻi was with a crew of workers building a stone wall at Kaumālapaʻu. Later, he rose from field worker to foreman of women field workers. He also grew and sold vegetables.

Susan Miyamoto attended Lānaʻi High and Elementary School until the tenth grade. In 1938, she completed the eleventh and twelfth grades at McKinley High School on Oʻahu.

Returning to Lānaʻi that same year, she began office work at Lānaʻi Hospital.

In 1972, she retired as office manager.

She and her husband, Sadao, raised five children.
Okay. This is an interview with Susan Tamiko Minami Miyamoto. And we’re in Lāna‘i City in her home. And this is for the Lāna‘i City oral history project. Today is February 27, 2013. And the interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

So Susan, good afternoon. (SM chuckles.) First question I have for you is if you could tell me what year you were born and where you were born.

SM: I was born in 1919 in Pā‘ia, Maui.

WN: And what were you folks doing in Pā‘ia, Maui?

SM: As far as I can recall, my dad used to grow watermelon and (pineapple).

WN: He used to grow watermelon. And then, what did he do with the watermelon?

SM: For the market.

WN: So he used to sell watermelon?

SM: He probably made an arrangement with somebody that buys when he grows it. Not really, really sure about that. But anyway, the market got bad, so he heard about Lāna‘i and decided to come.

WN: And what year did he come to Lāna‘i?

SM: He came in 1924.

WN: Oh, okay. So you were five years old?

SM: (Chuckles) Yeah. You weren’t born yet.

(Laughter)

WN: And can you tell me your father’s name?

SM: Jusaku Minami.
WN: And what part of Japan is he from?
SM: Kumamoto.
WN: Kumamoto-ken?
SM: His family (was a grower of) what they call, mikan. Mandarin orange?
WN: Mm-hmm [yes].
SM: They sold that. That’s the main crop.
WN: In Kumamoto. Do you know when or what year he came to Hawai‘i? Or was he born in Hawai‘i?
SM: No, no. [Jusaku Minami was born in Japan in 1890.] He came from Japan [ca. 1990]. You know, he wrote a history about himself, and I meant to get that out to show you and then I forgot.
WN: He wrote a history?
SM: Yes. You know, just saying when he came to Hawai‘i and what he did here. Everything. Interesting for you.
WN: Was he an educated man?
SM: No. It’s amazing. His formal education was only till fourth grade, but amazingly, he picked up enough English over here that he came to be a wahine luna, you know. Ladies’ luna. He was able to write their name down and, you know, how many hours they worked.
WN: Oh, I see, I see. So by the time you were born, he was living in Pā‘ia, Maui. And he planted and grew watermelon, and he sold the watermelon. Tell me about your mother. What is her name?
SM: Her name is Fujiyo, and she never really worked outside of the family. Just a housewife.
WN: And how many children did she have?
SM: Ten, actually. But you know, in the olden days, they used to die early because those were the days when they didn’t have good medicine. So, three died early. Seven of us [remained].
WN: And what number are you?
SM: I’m number two, actually.
WN: So were you the last one to be born in Pā‘ia? Or were there younger ones born in Pā‘ia?
SM: Two more.
WN: Two more.
SM: Four of us came to Lāna‘i.
WN: I see, I see. And do you know where her family is from originally?
SM: They’re Kumamoto too. My grandma was from Kumamoto. But my dad’s family was mountain and hers was sea. (Chuckles)

WN: Oh, I see. Did they know each other before they came?

SM: Oh, no.

WN: And is your mom—was she, like, long-time Maui—was she from Maui?

SM: No, she was born on the Big Island, some countryside in the Big Island. She was born on Big Island (and moved to Maui after she got married).

WN: Big Island, oh. Okay. So when you were five years old, your father moved the family to Lāna‘i.

SM: Yes.

WN: Do you know why he did that?

SM: Because he wasn’t doing so good in Maui, so he heard about Lāna‘i. They were just going to start a pineapple plantation—Hawaiian Pineapple Company.

WN: Right, right. So right when they were starting [Hawaiian Pineapple Company’s Lāna‘i] Plantation, he moved. And do you know what his first job was when he came to Lāna‘i?

SM: I don’t know about the plantation, but the first recollection I have of his job was wahine luna as I said. Ladies’ luna.

WN: You told me last time that he worked, helping build a stone wall down at Kaumālapa‘u [Harbor].

SM: Yes. Mr. [Tokumatsu] Murayama was the foreman of the job, and my dad folks did the actual stone walling. Amazingly, it’s still holding. (WN laughs.)

WN: Well, I’ve seen Murayama’s name on the stone wall.

SM: Yes. I had a picture of him, sitting right by his sign, but I think I gave it to the [Lāna‘i Culture and Heritage Center] museum. I’m not sure.

WN: Oh, okay. So the job that you remember him doing most was being wahine luna.

SM: You know, I think I got that backwards. Maybe he did the stone wall first. (Chuckles)

WN: Okay. Yeah, I think you told me last time that he did the stone wall first.

SM: Yes.

WN: So when he first came in 1924, he was helping to build the harbor area.

SM: Yes.

WN: So [later] as a wahine luna, what did he have to do? What was his job?
SM: Well, if he’s supervising pineapple picking, they used to carry the pineapple out to the road. Then, some of them would box it.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, sorry. Okay, so then you were saying that your father was a wahine luna. So when you say wahine luna, that means these are the women who work in the pineapple fields?

SM: (No. wahine means ladies, and luna means overseer, so my dad was an overseer for the ladies.)

WN: And what kinds of jobs did they do?

SM: (Sometimes they picked pineapples, carried them out to the roadside, the tops cut off and the fruits boxed to be sent to the cannery in Honolulu.)

And then, I told you about that in the olden days, they used to trim the top of the pineapple—what do you call that?—tops.

WN: Crown, yeah.

SM: Then, they would stand it up by hundreds. They have to trim the top of the crown and then stand it up by hundreds. At the end of the day, the luna would figure out how much the ladies trimmed.

WN: I see.

SM: Then, they would get paid by the amount they did.

WN: Oh, so they would pick the pineapple off the plant and then take the crown off.

SM: (Yes, the crowns were removed before boxing the pineapple.)

WN: I see. So your father would be the one to count the crowns?

SM: (The crowns were stacked by the hundreds so that it would be easy for the lunas to figure how much the ladies made.)

WN: So the ladies would cut the top off and stand the pineapple up by the hundreds?

SM: Cut the top off and trim about that much all around the top.

WN: Oh, I see. Oh, they would trim the skin off at the top part?

SM: Oh, you know the pineapple is shaped like that, yeah?

WN: Yeah.

SM: Trim about that much around so that it gets like a root coming out.

WN: Oh.

SM: But they stopped doing that. Later on, the company used to just plant [the crowns] without trimming, and I guess it was okay that way too.
WN: I see. So you’re talking about using the tops for planting [material].

SM: Yes.

WN: I see. So that’s what many of the wahine did. Take the top off, and then leave it there?

SM: Trim the top off and stand it up by the hundreds. Then, when it came time for the men to pack [the crowns in boxes], they would pick that and put them on there.

WN: What about the fruit itself? What did they do with the pineapple fruit?

SM: Well, they would go down the line with this burlap bag on their back, and then they would get a whole lot [of pineapples]. Then they would come out of the line and dump it outside of the line so that they can trim the top off and [the men] just box the fruit and put it on the truck.

WN: Oh, okay. So they had to worry about the fruit and the top.

SM: Yes. (Chuckles)

WN: Okay. And besides being wahine luna, what else did your father do for work?

SM: I think I mentioned to you that he had a large garden (below the city where he grew) vegetables. And he had an old jalopy Ford, (which he would use to sell his vegetables).

WN: Ford.

SM: Ford truck. This is after he’s pau hana now. After he put in a full eight hours or whatever in the company, then he used to grow this. So he would go around the camp, ring the bell, and people would come and buy the vegetables from him.

WN: Oh. This is his own vegetables that he grew?

SM: Yes. This was on his own.

WN: And what kinds of vegetables did he grow in his garden?

SM: Well, he had bananas all around the garden and he used to grow lettuce, cabbage—you know, head cabbage—and daikon. He used to also sell small potatoes that he grew. (Chuckles)

WN: Oh. How big was his garden?

SM: It was really big. About the size of this whole block.

WN: Oh, okay. Wow. And so, he used to harvest the vegetables and fruits, put it on his truck, and go around the camp and sell.

SM: Yes. He would park his little truck, you know, by the camp.

WN: So he would go to the different camps.

SM: Yes.
WN: Where did you folks live?

SM: We lived (in the camp above where) the Buddhist church [Lāna‘i Hongwanji Mission] (is now). There was a flat (area below the road where my dad had his garden). Later on when he moved his garden below Lāna‘i High and Elementary School, we moved right across from the school.

WN: You said you had lived in Namba Camp?

SM: That’s when we first came to [Lāna‘i].

WN: Was that near the [Kaumālapa‘u] Harbor?

SM: No. (Namba Camp was below the hill just as you leave the city to go to Mānele Bay.)

WN: So Namba Camp was the first place you folks lived [on Lāna‘i].

SM: Yes. The stores would come and take orders once a week. I forget the name of the store [Okamoto Store]. The next week, they delivered and take a new delivery—I mean, they bring what you ordered and then take a new order for the next week.

WN: So this is the days before telephone?

SM: Oh yes.

(Laughter)

Even when I first started (working for the plantation hospital, they were using the crank-type telephone).

WN: Crank.

SM: So that it’d ring.

WN: Oh. (Laughs) I’ll ask you about that later on. But you lived in Namba Camp. And you lived in Crozier?

SM: Crusher.

WN: Oh, Crusher Camp. Okay.

SM: Stone crusher.

WN: Oh, and that’s when your father was working with Maruyama?

SM: Yes.

WN: Oh, Crusher Camp.

SM: [Tokumatsu] Murayama.

WN: Murayama. And where was Crusher Camp?
SM: Crusher Camp was—what is now the runway?
WN: Yeah, the [Lānaʻi] Airport?
SM: (Not at the runway, but where the runway now is.)
WN: Oh, you mean this is the current airport?
SM: Yes.
WN: Oh. And you said that at age ten, you folks moved to Lānaʻi City. And how was that? How did you like moving into the city?
SM: The city? Well, it was nice—of course we had to walk to school then. You know where the school was in the beginning? It was up where the golf course is—what golf course is that?
WN: Cavendish.
SM: Yes, Cavendish [Golf Course]. That’s where the school was.

I remember that the road was filled with earthworms [on rainy days]. We had to run between them.

(Laughter)

And we had outhouses those days.

WN: You mean, did your [family] have your own outhouse or did you have to share?
SM: The houses [were organized] by blocks, you used to call it. In the center of the block, there’s an outhouse with a girls’ side and boys’ side.
WN: And it was just a hole in the ground?
SM: Cesspool with [built-in seat with a] hole. Then, we used to have laundry [facilities] outside there with, what you call that? Not basin, but . . .
WN: The board. Washing board?
SM: Oh, no. Made with cement. So you can wash in there. What do you call that?
WN: Sort of a deep concrete sink kind of thing?
SM: Yes. About that deep.
WN: About two-feet deep?
SM: About that, (with three sinks on one side and another three sinks across from that).
WN: And that was for the whole block to use?
SM: Yes.
WN: And how many houses would—you know, how many families would use that same outhouse and the same laundry room?

SM: We always went by blocks, so I wouldn’t know how many. They also had the bathhouses out there, girls’ side and boys’ side. (Chuckles)

WN: And then, the bathhouse, was it like showers or furo?

SM: Big furo with the bench inside. Then, we would sit down and talk story.

(Laughter)

WN: So you would bathe—you know, scrub with the soap outside [of the furo]?

SM: Yes, you’d wash and then you’d go in and sit on the bench and talk story. (Laughs) Boy, you can tell how long I lived.

WN: How many people could fit in the furo at one time? How big was it?

SM: Oh, it was big. I would say about this room. I mean, one side.

WN: Oh, okay. So this is about fifteen feet by twenty feet. Something like that.

SM: Maybe now I think it’s big but actually it wasn’t.

WN: (Chuckles) And the bench was along the sides?

SM: Yes. I would say the tub was about this.

WN: Oh, so half this. Seven feet, seven-feet wide?

SM: It was big, you know.

WN: So you would do that every day to go furo?

SM: Yes. A woman would be hired (by the company to heat up the water and) scrub the cement floor.

WN: So the community furo was made out of cement? The tub?

SM: No, the tub was made out of wood. But the [bathhouse] floor was cement.

WN: I see. And how many people could scrub at one time?

SM: In the furo?

WN: No, outside the furo. You know, you had to bathe outside. Did you sit down on the stool and . . .

SM: I would say the maximum amount—about eight people? Because not everybody—not all eight will come [at once] but I think if you had a full capacity.

Yeah, the washhouse, the furo, and the outhouse were all laid out in one area.
WN: And how far was the bathhouse from your house?

SM: We lived right by the school, and then there’s a dirt road and then all this block.

WN: Was it a long walk?

SM: No, it wasn’t a long walk, but sometimes (when the water in our bathhouse was lukewarm, we would go to the furo behind the theater, carrying) our tarai, (wash basin filled with) our soap and towel. (Chuckles)

WN: Oh, you had to bring your own tarai?

SM: Yes.

WN: Oh, the small tarai?

SM: Flat ones with soap basket. Those are neat, that soap basket. I wish I had that now.

WN: Soap basket. What did you put inside a soap basket? Just soap or anything else?

SM: Just soap and the scrub brush. You know, the round one.

WN: Oh, yeah. I know what you mean.

SM: They still have that.

WN: The brown one.

SM: I think they still have that, yeah?

WN: Yeah, they do.

SM: I always wondered whether Shirokiya would have the soap basket.

WN: (Chuckles) I don’t know. So when you say your house was near the school, this is the school that was where the golf course is now? That’s where you folks lived?

SM: Oh, no. I’m talking about this school [i.e., present location on Fraser Avenue] here now.

WN: Oh, okay. Right here, then. Yeah. I see.

SM: The golf course one was before the [present] school was built because I went to the tenth grade [at the old school location]. That was—I graduated—graduating class was 1935. So the school as it is now—where it is now—must’ve been 1936, they started. [According to its website, Lāna‘i High and Elementary School was established in 1938.]

WN: The present—the new school. So you remember only the old school.

SM: I never went to this school.

WN: The new one.
(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: So we’re talking about the new school was built after you finished school. Okay.

SM: Yes, I guess it was being built then. They were ready to go for the next year.

WN: And so, your house was not far from here.

SM: Yes, you know where the [Lānaʻi] senior center is now?

WN: Yeah.

SM: Just around there.

WN: Oh, okay. And you know, there were like several of you—about seven children and your mother and your father [SM was the second oldest of seven siblings].

SM: My grandma was living with us too.

WN: Oh, your grandma, too. So how was that, growing up in that house?

SM: It’s okay. The olden days, the houses were pretty big. They used to have it in two sections. You know, they have one side and kitchen and the bedroom and the parlor, as we used to call it. Then, this wall in between. There’s another whole set—same. We had seven, so four of us, my dad and mom, and then my grandma.

WN: So you and your brothers and sisters had to stay in—how many of you were in one bedroom?

SM: About three. Yes. Talk about olden days. (Chuckles)

WN: So how did all of you have a meal together with such a big family?

SM: Well, the company supplied each family with a kitchen table about the size of what I have. A little bit bigger, maybe. It’s a table and then a bench on two sides. The company supplied that to each family. Then, we used the kerosene stove and the company would supply us with kerosene, so—about two weeks in between, we’d carry this gallon can and leave it where they’re [i.e., company employees] going to come and fill it up. It was a good deal. It was free.

WN: Did you have kerosene lamp too?

SM: Yes. (Chuckles) Yes. What we call, “sage ranpu.”

WN: So did you have to clean the . . .

SM: Chimney?

WN: . . . chimney?

SM: Yes. (WN chuckles.) We had those [lamps] for going out. They had that—you know the kind that has like this, and then there’s a round thing like that for the kerosene, and then they’d have a chimney on top. Some of them were pretty well decorated and people used to collect that
afterwards because they were so pretty—the top chimney part was so pretty. They used to collect for collector’s item.

WN: Yes, I wish I had one. Those were really nice.

SM: Yes, stuff we throw away. Afterwards, you think, oh my, they’re selling for pretty expensive, you know.

WN: Right, right, right. So you said that one of the things you did around the house was to clean the chimney on the kerosene lamp. What other kinds of chores did you folks have to do around the house?

SM: Sweep and mop. (Chuckles)

WN: Sweep and mop.

SM: We slept on futons, so we’d fold up futons and pile it up in our closet.

WN: Every day?

SM: Every day. So during the day, the whole room would be empty. I don’t remember having a sofa, even. Used to sit on the floor with zabuton—you know, the cushions.

WN: What else? Did you have to help cook?

SM: Well, maybe help chop but not really cook. In fact, I don’t remember what we used to eat because they didn’t have all those canned goods and stuff. Well, I guess we did have some canned goods. You know, in the olden days, we’d all go to the store and buy stuff, and we never paid cash. Every employee had what you call a bangō, number. Then, when you go to the store, you give your number and then buy whatever, and they charge it. Then payday, we’d all go to the store and pay for the whole month. It was really sometime later that they did away with that, and you had to pay when you buy. (Chuckles)

WN: Yeah, with cash. So what stores did you go to in the early days? What stores do you remember?

SM: Well, you know the Richard store [i.e., Richard’s Market]?

WN: Mm-hmm [yes].

SM: That used to be Okamoto Store. Then, this side, you know where the art building [Mike Carroll Gallery] is, next to the senior center?

WN: Right.

SM: They used to have a Yet Lung Store.

WN: Yet Lung, yeah. So that’s where the art gallery is now?

SM: I don’t know whether it’s the art gallery now or—in that area anyway. The Yet Lung Store was in two buildings. One was grocery kind of merchandise and one was like a butcher shop.

WN: Do you remember some things that you used to do to have good fun as a child growing up here?
SM: The usual kinds of activities that kids did our whole life. We used to play marble. They used to go by blocks, you know, when had Korean Camp and Stable Camp. Then, that bunch would get together and challenge the next block. (Chuckles) They had a big area where they had this building and had benches and they play baseball. People would sit on the benches and watch the game.

WN: This is at the Dole Park?

SM: No, not Dole Park. You know across from the service station, there’s—across that apartment buildings. I think it was over there. They had a real big building [i.e., grandstand] with benches so you can watch the game.

WN: Now, as a girl growing up here, what kinds of things did you folks do? Did you play like—did you have dolls? Did you play house, like mamagoto?

SM: (Chuckles) Oh yes, did mamagoto and beanbag.

WN: Beanbag.

SM: (Pause) People used to do a lot of hiking those days. You know where the [Cavendish] Golf Course is now? [There’s] just this flat area where they used to have a big area where they had the water. Up on the hill. Then, they used to have these three tunnels going in.

WN: Oh, reservoir.

SM: Oh, yes, reservoir. I forgot that. They used to have three tunnels actually. We used to go hiking. We used to do a lot of hiking. We would go through the first, second, and third tunnel. If you go all the way to the third tunnel, then you reach the top of the gulch. Then you hike down.

WN: So you went inside the tunnel?

SM: Yes. And walk all the way across. They had these big pipes on the ground, and then you’d walk alongside. Used to be kind of damp, too. So you go through one tunnel, go to the gulch, come up and go through another tunnel. I wonder if they’re still there. Must be.

WN: And while you were on these hikes, were there like fruit trees?

SM: No, Lāna‘i, they didn’t have fruit trees. About the only thing we had was guava. We’re not like other islands that have mangoes and items like that. I wish I had mango. But they said we’re too high up [i.e., altitude], and the only place they had some mango was down Kaumālapa‘u. Kaumālapa‘u would have papaya, too. That’s one thing with Lāna‘i, not many fruits.

WN: What about swimming—did you do swimming?

SM: How can you go swimming? Nobody had cars.

(Laughter)

WN: Oh, you didn’t go in the reservoir?

SM: Oh, no, no. That reservoir must’ve been drinking water.
WN: So did you—do you remember going down to the beach sometimes?

SM: A long time afterwards when we had a car. Very few cars on the island in those days.

WN: So when your father had the Ford truck, did you ride in that truck?

SM: Oh, yes. We were lucky we had that Ford truck.

WN: So did you ever learn to swim?

SM: I would have because we used to go to Maui for Girl Scout camp. But then I had an ear infection just around that time the kids were learning how to swim, so I never did learn.

WN: And then, who were your good friends?

SM: You know, when you say “good friends,” the whole camp was so small that you know everybody. (Chuckles)

WN: So tell me about school. What was your favorite subject in school?

SM: Reading and writing, I guess. I wasn’t good at math. But I had to read a lot. Those days, we used to work in the cafeteria.

WN: Oh, you mean like one day a month or something?

SM: Yes, not more often than that because our class was so small. I used to have to clean the room, clean the blackboard, mop the floor. Kids don’t do that anymore.

WN: No. (Laughs)

SM: I don’t think the teachers do it either.

(Laughter)

WN: So you went to Lāna‘i [High and Elementary] School until tenth grade. Oh, I forgot to ask. Did you go to Japanese[-language] school?

SM: Yes. Don’t ask me if I learned anything.

(Laughter)

Yes, we used to go to Japanese[-language] school.

WN: And where was the Japanese[-language] school?

SM: Right—you know where the [Lāna‘i] Union Church is now [on Fraser Avenue]? Behind that were some buildings. It was a good Japanese[-language] school.

WN: And who was in charge of the Japanese[-language] school?

SM: It’s usually the Japanese minister. His wife would teach some.
WN: Was this a Christian minister?
SM: Pardon?
WN: Christian or Buddhist?
SM: Buddhist.
WN: Oh, Buddhist, I see. And while you were going school, you worked part-time in the pineapple field? Summers?
SM: Summertime. As soon as school is over, the next day, we sign up for work.
WN: And what did you do?
SM: Oh, lots of jobs. Picking pineapple. Some days, the men would pick and we’d bring the pineapple out to the end of the line, you know where the road is?
WN: The road. Mm-hmm [yes].
SM: They put there, and then they cut off the top [i.e., crown] and box it [the fruit]. And then, we would hō hana.
WN: Do you remember how much you got paid?
SM: If you take this [microphone] off, I’ll show you. I have a paper showing how much I earned.
WN: Oh, okay, later on. Afterwards, yeah. So you would go work with your friends.
SM: Yes, everybody worked. (WN chuckles.) Which was lucky, you know. When my kids were going school, they all worked. My youngest, when he went to college, he made enough to pay for his tuition. Then, I remember his coming home for Christmas vacation a couple of weeks—they were offered jobs. They would be truck drivers, you know, because they were old enough for those things. He was truck driver one year, he was luna one year. Yeah, we were lucky they had jobs.
WN: So you went to Lānaʻi [High and Elementary] School through tenth grade. And then, what happened after that? Where did you go for eleventh grade?
SM: Eleventh and twelfth, I went to McKinley.
WN: McKinley High School in Honolulu. How come you had to do that?
SM: Because the [Lānaʻi High and Elementary] School ended at tenth grade. If you wanted to finish high school, you had to go off the island. But the majority of the boys, they went to Lahainaluna [High School on Maui].
WN: So going to McKinley, is that something you wanted to do? Or did your parents tell you to do it?
SM: Oh, I wanted to go finish high school.
WN: Was your father supportive of you going to high school . . .
SM: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: . . . in Honolulu? So when you went to McKinley in Honolulu, where did you live?

SM: Well, for the first few months, I lived with my aunty and uncle and their family. They lived right on King Street. You know where the big electricity building [i.e., Hawaiian Electric Company] is?

WN: King Street?

SM: Across there were apartments and they lived there. I remember walking to McKinley. There were taro patches around there back then. We used to walk to McKinley from there.

WN: So you said that in the beginning, you stayed with your aunty and uncle. And then where did you live? Did you move someplace else?

SM: The school had a good work program where you could sign up if you wanted job. So I stayed with a couple of teachers and used to clean their house, and they let me sleep on the ground floor—you know, next to the garage. I stayed with them. Then, the following year, I think, I worked for a Chinese family, and I lived in a—right next to the garage was the maid’s quarters. So I used to work there. I used to get three dollars a week, I think. Enough for my (streetcar) fare and my lunch. (Chuckles)

WN: (Chuckles) Plus, you were—they gave you free room.

SM: Yes, free room and, after they finished [eating], I eat in the kitchen. So that was pretty cheap.

WN: So you cleaned the house—what else did you do?

SM: Do the laundry. By then, they had washing machine. This Chinese family had two kids.

WN: Did you take care of the kids too?

SM: No. I just did the house cleaning. I’m not a very good housekeeper. (WN laughs.) I kept in touch with them for a while. They used to live in Kaimukī. I think it was 11th Avenue. So it was a pretty long ride to McKinley. Those days, we used the streetcar. I don’t think you remember. I don’t think they had that by the time you grew up. It used to be an open bus with railing, and then you’d sit down and then pulled your cord if you want to get off the next stop.

WN: So what was it like for you to come from Lāna‘i to go to Honolulu and go to McKinley High School? What was it like for you? Did you like that?

SM: I would rather stay home.

(Laughter)

WN: Were there others besides you from Lāna‘i that did the same thing—went to McKinley?

SM: I was the only girl at that time, because the boys all went to . . .

WN: Lahainaluna.
SM: Lahainaluna. But there were two boys above me that went to McKinley the time I went. Of course, a lot of them would quit [Lānaʻi High and Elementary School] after tenth grade anyway and go to work in the [pineapple] fields.

WN: And how often would you come home?

SM: Christmas holidays. Just on long holidays because we had to come home by boat. The plane wasn’t running then.

WN: So summertime you [also] came home?

SM: Yes.

WN: When you were a maid, when you were working as a house girl, did you cook too?

SM: No.

(Laughter)

It was easy life, but for three dollars a week, that’s enough job.

WN: What about when they had parties? Did they have parties—the Chinese family?

SM: Oh yes. I’d help maybe wash the vegetables or something.

WN: So you graduated from McKinley in 1938. And then you came back to Lānaʻi in 1938, yeah?

SM: Yes. I started working at the [Lānaʻi] Hospital that year.

WN: In 1938.

SM: I graduated, and December 1938, I started working at the hospital.

WN: Okay. And how did you get the job at the hospital here?

SM: Well, they didn’t have what they call “organized office” at that time. You know, people would just come in, and the nurse would take the name and then treat them and then write down whatever they did. So when I started working, my first job was to make a card for each employee of the company.

WN: And what was on the card?

SM: The name and the bangō number. When they come in, you write down on their card and then, they’re all filed by their name.

WN: I see, I see. Oh, when you say employee, you mean [Hawaiian Pineapple] Company employees . . .

SM: Yeah.

WN: Because it was a company hospital. I see. I got it. Okay.
SM: My first job every morning would be to make a list of the employees that were sick and came to the hospital. So I’d take it down to the office so they’d know who was actually sick. You know, those days, they keep track. If you didn’t show up for work, then you better have a hospital record, showing that you were sick.

WN: Right.

SM: You don’t just stay home.

WN: Right. So like a doctor’s slip. Excuse slip.

SM: Yes. So every morning, I’d go down with the name and show his luna that he was actually sick. (Chuckles)

WN: So you were in the office then?

SM: Yes.

WN: The plantation hospital office. So that was your first job? And what kinds of jobs did you have?

SM: After that, I used to do medical records. I remember the olden days. They had that wax kind of disc. The doctor would talk in that and then I would transcribe from that.

WN: Oh. So it’s like a wax cylinder.

SM: Yes, yes.

WN: Tape recorder. Taping system. The doctor would talk about a patient in the recording.

SM: Yes.

WN: And you would transcribe it.

SM: Yes. I quit working [in 1973]. My Medicare came in. (Chuckles) [The hospital] used to be owned by Hawaiian Pineapple Company plantation, then it became a community hospital, and then they built this new hospital with—I think was state funds. When they made the [Lāna‘i] Community Hospital, all the people donated to build the hospital.

WN: So did you have training to do this kind of typing and . . .

SM: Just typing.

WN: . . . anything like that? (SM laughs.) Did you take typing at McKinley?

SM: Yes.

WN: Oh, you did. Oh, okay. So you have that training, yeah?

SM: I took only simple business course like how to write a check and stuff like that. It’s a wonder I lasted that long. (Chuckles)

WN: Well, yeah, you were there from 1938 to 1973.
SM: Yes.

WN: And by the time you retired, what was your title at the hospital?

SM: Office manager. I don’t know how I did that. I’m so stupid in math. (Chuckles)

WN: (Chuckles) Well, you weren’t that bad. I mean, you worked in the office. Did you have to do things like billing? Billing patients.

SM: Yes. Of course, the earlier days, everything was free. Plantation.

WN: Plantation paid for the medical.

SM: Then, later on, the high-paid [workers] used to have to pay for medical.

WN: Okay, almost pau. When did you get married and who was your husband?

SM: Oh, I got married here because we got married during [World War II], and there was no Buddhist church [the Lānaʻi Hongwanji Mission was forced to shut down during World War II]. There was a Korean church because, I guess, Korea wasn’t in war, (chuckles) unlike us Japanese. So we got married by a Korean minister. My husband’s name was Sadao. He worked for the company. He went through—what you call those?—correspondence course. So he used to do all the field layouts.

WN: You mean surveying?

SM: Surveying. You know, they [surveyed] by the blocks. He even surveyed the road clear across Lānaʻi Hale. He was good in math.

WN: So you said you got married during the war. And then, you couldn’t get married in the Japanese church. What happened to the Japanese church during the war?

SM: I think it just was empty because we didn’t have church [services]. When the war ended, the company gave the building to the Christian church. And it became the Christian church [i.e., Lānaʻi Union Church].

WN: So before the war, it was a Buddhist church.

SM: Yes.

WN: And then, they closed it down, so nobody was using it during the war. And when the war ended, the company gave the building to the Christian church.

SM: (Laughs) Yes. They gave us that building—you know the present [Buddhist church], where that church is now . . .

WN: Across the street. Yeah.

SM: That used to be the—you know, there were—so many blocks would have boarding houses for the single men. Well, that was one of the boarding houses.
WN: Oh, used to be a boarding house, then they turned it into a church. So today, it’s the Buddhist [Lāna‘i] Hongwanji [Mission] church.

SM: Yes.

WN: Oh, okay.

SM: Actually, we were kind of lucky to have that because, like the [Lāna‘i] Union Church, they had to put in elevator for the elderly.

WN: Oh, you mean the old Buddhist church building?

SM: Yes, the old Buddhist church building.

WN: Oh, that became . . .

SM: Higher—two-story.

WN: Oh, I see.

SM: So they recently put in an elevator.

WN: This is the—it became the [Lāna‘i] Union Church.

SM: Yes.

WN: I see. Oh, they put in an elevator. That’s expensive. (Chuckles)

SM: Yes. But this is long after, that they had it because the membership was young then. But they don’t have too many elderly.

WN: About how big is the congregation today?

SM: Our [Buddhist] church?

WN: Mm-hmm [yes].

SM: I would think—off the record, I would think about seventy. But very few go to church now. We don’t even have a minister. Our minister comes from Maui once a month. They come on the ferry, and stay for the service, have lunch, and go back. So he comes on the first boat and goes back. I don’t go to church anymore. (Chuckles)

WN: And you got married in 1942. And how long have you been living in this house?

SM: From about 1945?

WN: Okay. And how many children do you have?

SM: Five.

WN: How many grandchildren? Oh, no, I asked you that before, yeah.
SM: Yes, and I said I had to count. (Chuckles)

WN: Well, that’s okay. (Laughs) So I guess my last question is, you know, Lānaʻi is going through a lot of change now. What are your thoughts and feelings about Lānaʻi and its future?

SM: I guess there will be quite a few changes. Mr. [Larry] Ellison, even today, the newspaper says he [bought] Island Air.

WN: What would you like to see in terms of the future of Lānaʻi? Your children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, what kind of Lānaʻi do you want them to experience or have?

SM: Well, I don’t have any grandchildren. Debbie [Miyamoto de la Cruz] is the only one [living] on the island now because my oldest lives in California. I have one daughter in Mililani, one right in Honolulu, and my son lives in Mānoa. So yeah, it’s pretty hard for me to predict at this time, because Mr. Ellison’s going to make quite a few changes, I think.

WN: You know, you spent most of your life here. And you had a certain kind of way of living here. Do you want that way that you experienced and grew up with—do you want that to continue?

SM: I don’t know. It was kind of exciting having the two hotels come up.

WN: So the hotels—you know, it’s a good thing for you, do you think?

SM: Yes, unless they kept the pineapple going. But since Mr. [David] Murdock did away with that, you have to have something to replace.

WN: Do you want Lānaʻi to stay, like a friendly country place—small place—or do you want it to, you know, be more like Honolulu? (Laughs)

SM: (Chuckles) I don’t think I want it too citified. It would be interesting when Mr. Ellison—well, today’s paper says he bought Island Air, so I don’t know. I like to say it should be interesting what comes up. (Chuckles)

WN: Okay, we’re done. So I want to thank you very much. Thank you. I’m going to turn it off. Okay. Let me turn this off.

END OF INTERVIEW
Camps of Lānaʻi (Notes by Susan Minami Miyamoto)

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There were several camps when I was growing up on Lānaʻi. Three of my siblings were born on Lānaʻi, the first in Namba Camp in 1926, next in Crusher Camp in 1929, and the last in Lānaʻi City in 1932.

Namba Camp was situated at the foot of the hill to the right as you leave the city to go to Mānele. The camp was named after Mr. Namba, who was in charge of construction workers. Workers were mostly Japanese, with a few Koreans who spoke fluent Japanese.

Workers lived rent free in simple cottages, the only furniture being a simple dining table with long benches at each side. The single men lived in one long building with no furniture. Each man had a designated area in the room marked by a single length of mat, with a large trunk or basket at the foot of the mat holding his worldly goods. There were nails pounded at the head of the mat to hang their clothes.

Company trucks picked up the men each morning to go to their work site, and returned at pau hana. School children were picked up by a van which first picked up children from Kaumālapaʻu Camp. We dubbed this van the “Black Maria.” The van was driven by Mr. Okamoto, Roy Okamoto’s grandfather. It was all-purpose, used as a hearse or ambulance and for other transportation as needed.

The company had many cattle on the island. There was wire fencing strung along Kaumālapaʻu Highway at the top of the hill, and we children ran amongst the cattle to return home from the pathway at the top of the hill.

It was Prohibition Era and my grandma, who lived with us, brewed sake, a Japanese drink made from special rice, brewed in large crocks. Somehow word would get out to the camp that the inspector was coming, and the crocks would be hidden in the thick pānini (cactus) bushes until it was safe to bring them home. These crocks would sometimes be stolen from their hiding places.

There were no cars in the camp. An employee of Okamoto Store would come every week or so to take orders for whatever we needed, and delivery was made on his next visit. Goods were charged to the employee’s bangō number (employment number) and payment made to the store on payday.

The “medicine man,” as we called him, would come from one of the pharmaceutical houses in Honolulu to fill a large bag for each family with medicine for all kinds of illness. On his next visit, he would note whatever was used since his last visit and collect money for the used drugs. The bag would then be refilled for his next visit. This practice went on for a long time, even after the company built a hospital in 1924.

There were outhouses for our use. We had no toilet paper. Sears Roebuck catalogs were the most coveted for use, newspapers were also put to use. There was a bathhouse tended by one of the women. She would fill the tubs with water. Firewood was used to heat the water. This bathhouse was a good social gathering place. We would sit around on the bench built inside the tub and talk story.
Crusher Camp came into being in the late 1920s when men who worked on stones were moved to this camp, which had a large stone crusher. Stones were plentiful when fields were cleared for pineapple fields. The camp was situated in what is now the end of the airplane runway. It was under the care of Mr. Murayama, and it was men from this camp who worked on the stone wall along Kaumālapaʻu Harbor. It will attest to the good workmanship of these men as it is still standing, having weathered many storms.

Miki Camp was the last and most well known of these camps. It was a large camp built on the hill behind what is now the electric plant. There were two stables cared for by Matahei Oyama and Shiro Mitsunaga. They were used to house the mules used for plowing the pineapple fields. The Mitsunaga family was the last to leave this camp. Mrs. Hisako Mitsunaga remembers coming to Miki Camp as a bride from Maui. She says their family was the last to leave Miki Camp in 1938. All of the houses were moved to the city.

By this time Filipino workers were starting to come in, and there were Japanese and Filipino workers in camp, and even one Mexican [worker].

Life in the camps was simple. A favorite sport for the boys was climbing the water tanks and lining the rim of these tanks with what was called “tori mochi,” a gluey substance. The birds would get stuck and were gathered for food.

There was also Kaumālapaʻu Camp. There are a few families still living there. There were mostly Japanese and Hawaiian dock workers, and also independent fishermen. By 1935, most of the families had moved to the city.

Life in the camps was simple and fun, and remembered by most with fond nostalgia.
Lānaʻi: Reflecting on the Past; Bracing for the Future

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