MK: This is an interview with Mr. Toso Haseyama at his home in Nu‘uanu, Honolulu, O‘ahu on April 9, 1992. The interviewer is Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

Mr. Haseyama, today, to start the interview, my first question will be when and where were you born?

TH: I was born on February 11, 1905.

MK: Where were you born?

TH: Hiroshima-ken, Saiki-gun. It has since been incorporated so it has become Otake-shi. Is it necessary to say all of that?

MK: Yes.

TH: Okay, Hiroshima-ken, Saiki-gun, Otake-shi. That’s where I grew up. I was left behind there when I was three years old.

MK: What were the names of your father and mother?

TH: Haseyama, Goichiro and my mother’s name was [Haseyama] Tsune.

MK: Can you tell me a little about your father and mother?

TH: There was a war starting in China [Sino-Japanese War, 1894–1895] and he went off to war and after the war was over, he was in Japan for a while; but I guess it was better over here so he came to Hawai‘i. Then, after he was here for two or three years, the Russo-Japanese War [1904–1905] started. Japan is an imperialistic country and because there was a shortage of people there and since there was a record of all the military personnel, they were all recalled. So he went off to war. Two of my uncles died in the Russo-Japanese War.
I grew up in Japan. Military life in Japan was very harsh, so my grandfather and grandmother urged me over and over again to go to Hawai‘i rather than stay in Japan—then I wouldn’t have to go into the military. So I came to here.

But every year I had to send in a deferment request to the Japanese government. It was a nuisance to do this once every year. So while I was [employed] at Okazaki’s [in 1930], I went back to Japan on vacation and, at that time, I took the physical exam for military service and failed it. So I no longer had to send in the deferment request.

MK: When did your father first come to Hawai‘i? The first time?

TH: I’m not sure exactly when that was, but I think it was about 1902. And he worked here for about two or three years. But because the Russo-Japanese War started, he received his draft call from Japan and he had to go back. At that time, my mother was pregnant with me and I was born in Japan on February 11, 1905.

MK: After you were born, about when did your parents return again to Hawai‘i?

TH: When I was three years old. They left me when I was three and came back here.

MK: So you were left behind in Japan when you were three. How did you feel about that?

TH: At three, I can’t say. I was only three, so I don’t have much recollection of it.

MK: Left in Japan at three, who reared you?

TH: My grandfather and grandmother—on my mother’s side—they brought me up.

MK: You were reared just like an only child?

TH: Yes, in Japan—on my mother’s side. My uncle on my mother’s side also went into the military. In Japan the soldiers’ life is very harsh because they are bullied. For one year, they are subjected to great torment. So I was told it was much better for me to come to Hawai‘i than to remain in Japan. I guess it was somewhat better to come to Hawai‘i than to be in Japan. They [soldiers] have a terrible time.

MK: You mean it was better to come to Hawai‘i than to be taken by the military?

TH: Yes, because you don’t have to become a Japanese soldier. So, (laughs) I came here. But even after I came, once every year I had to send in a deferment request. Otherwise, it would be awful if I were to be called up. (Laughs)

Of course, now there’s nothing like that in Japan; it is the same as in America. Those who want to go in, go, and those who don’t want to, don’t. To that extent, it has become much easier now.

But, in Japan, both in the army and in the navy, during the one year after joining up, the soldier’s life was very harsh. Because the old folks knew this, they kept telling me, “Go to Hawai‘i, go to Hawai‘i.” (Laughs) I came to Hawai‘i so that I wouldn’t have to become a
Japanese soldier. (Laughs)

MK: Before you came to Hawai‘i and while you lived in Japan, what was life like there?

TH: Well it was the old days—I can’t compare it with the life here in America in 1921 because I had never been here yet. I was reared in Japan and did not know about anywhere else. At any rate, Japan was a small country and poor—the country, that is—life there probably was not good.

MK: What about when you were a child? Were you poor or slightly better off or what?

TH: I really don’t know which way we were. If I had two things to compare this may be possible, but knowing only one thing and being from the inaka [rural countryside], my own condition was all I knew, so I just accepted it as normal. I really don’t know.

MK: You were brought up in the inaka—were you farmers?

TH: Yes.

MK: What sorts of things did you do there?

TH: Well, I was pretty young so I didn’t do that much, but during the summers, in Japan, we would usually plant rice. We would plant it in paddies—not on dry land—but in water. After planting it, sometimes weeds would come up and they would have to be pulled out. I used to help in this weeding.

But the Japan summers are hot, so after lunch we wouldn’t work until about four o’clock. Because it was so hot, we couldn’t go outside. When four o’clock rolled around, we would go out to do the weeding. In order to weed, we had to bend over and our backs would get very sore. Since I was a child, it didn’t matter much, so—the paddies have water and we would let the water out and forget about the weeds. (Laughs)

But we had to be careful. It was okay when the seedlings were small; but after they grew larger, when we bent over them they would poke us in the eye. Many people lost their eyesight by being poked in the eye.

Later on, [when the weeding was done] with machines, there would be a space between the plants where the machine passed through. But it couldn’t pull weeds which were close to the rice plants—they weeded only in between [the rows]. We would have to bend over and weed; and, in the beginning, our backs ached so badly we could hardly bear it.

On Japan’s farms in the old days, there were no machines. Of course, nowadays, they all use machines. In the old days, it was all done by hand. For example, in processing barley, we used to beat the barley, which was about so long, with long sticks—in the summertime. Today they don’t do such things since machines are used. Even rice is quickly processed by machine—they do it American-style which they’ve learned.

But Japan is not a continent so things are difficult. Everything is small. There are mountains and terraced fields with small areas where [stakes] are pounded here and there so machinery
cannot be used. The land is narrow. America is a continent so it is vast. It has huge acreages. Here there's no problem using machines. In Japan you cannot use them.

MK: How much land did your grandfather have?

TH: I really don't remember. How would you say it? In the old days it was possible to work on the railroads. People came from all over to work. To contract them was okay, but everything was not handled properly like they do today. In Japan it rains a lot and when it rains you cannot work.

Working places were not very high-class and most of the people were thug types. So when it rained, they would drink sake—everyone was in debt. To pay off these debts caused great tragedies. In the end, people had to sell off their lands in order to pay their debts. These yakuza types who came from the outside—drinking and eating (laughs) and accumulating their debts—to pay for these things caused great suffering. In the old days, when railroads were being built, this sort of thing went on. So my grandmother always used to tell me. People may eat and drink, but they have to pay for it afterwards. (Laughs)

My uncle was a carpenter, the older brother. In Hiroshima-ken in Kure-shi at a village called Kagawa-cho, he had a business dealing with lumber. He was pretty bad at business. He went off to Taiwan and did some contracting. He sent letters back saying he was working on some ministry buildings or other. But whenever these letters came, he would tell us over and over how much of a loss he had taken. My grandma used to wonder what he was up to. (Laughs)

When I went there [Taiwan] in 1930, he had hired some of the prisoners and built a temple. At that time my uncle told us that he didn't have much formal education and never studied drafting or anything, but drawing only on his long experience, he drew the plans and built the buildings. He said that's why it was not easy since the others had graduated from proper schools.

I don't know how it was here, they probably didn't do it here. But in Taiwan, the prisoners had to work with two people chained together at their feet so that they would not try to escape. And for each two people working, one policeman had to watch over them. So you can't really earn very much under such conditions. That's how prisoners used to work to build buildings, et cetera. When I went to Taiwan in 1930, I saw this, the prisoners with their chains attached and working. (Laughs)

So that's what my uncle used to tell me. In order to build buildings, he used to have to rely on his long experience. But he had to compete with young people who had gotten their formal education, so it wasn't easy.

MK: So both your father and your uncle went abroad?

TH: Yes, they didn't stay in Japan. He was in Taiwan.

MK: Were there others among your relatives besides your father and uncle who went abroad?

TH: [There was] this uncle's younger brother, who was also a carpenter—actually they didn't get along so they didn't work together. When he was young, [he was] at a place near Tokyo in
Chiba-ken. He was a soldier in a communications outfit in Chiba. Other than him, there weren’t any others.

MK: Which number son was your father?

TH: He was the number two son. But he had sisters. He had two older sisters. So there were two girls and—one, two, three, four boys, although two [already] died. Oh, and my father’s older sister was in America. I think it was America.

MK: Why did your father emigrate to Hawai‘i?

TH: That I really don’t know. I suppose it was just because life in Japan at that time was not easy. That’s probably why he came overseas. That Hiroshima-ken, there are many people here from Hiroshima-ken—in Hawai‘i and in America. Up until now, among the people who came from Japan, the highest number came from Hiroshima-ken, and then Yamaguchi-ken. Besides Yamaguchi-ken, there are many people here from other places bordering Hiroshima-ken such as Kuga-gun and Oshima-gun.

At any rate, after the war [World War II], almost all those who were called by their parents in Kaka‘ako came from places such as Oshima-gun. At that time they sent lots of goods such as sugar, et cetera to Japan. So the Japanese businessmen set up a black market. For this purpose they went to Oshima-gun. They would buy the goods which we sent them from Hawai‘i such as sugar, et cetera and carry out their black market activities in Japan. There’s a huge number of people here from Oshima-gun.

MK: In your village in Japan, were there other children like yourself who were left behind [by their parents]?

TH: Yes, there were. Not only from here but also from America. In America it was even worse. There the couples had to go out to work in vast areas, so no one could watch the children. There they would have to put the children into boxes and leave them far behind. At least here they didn’t have to do such things very much because this is a small place.

For example, on the sugar plantation no such things happened. However, if there were children, someone would have to watch them. So, it was better not to have children around in order to be able to work. It would be worrisome to leave the children with outsiders, so they left them in the care of parents or someone and came over here.

MK: After leaving you in your grandparent’s care, did your parents send them some money such as a monthly allowance?

TH: I don’t think so. (Laughs) I don’t think they did. (Laughs)

MK: Did you go to school when you were small?

TH: I went for eight years and came over here as soon as I graduated. Otherwise, I may not have been able to come. So I came right away.

After I came, I realized it wouldn’t do to just stay on the plantation and do such menial work,
and that I had to come out to Honolulu and study. Even before, when I was in Lahaina, I used to go to evening school. But it was very difficult to work all day and [study] in the evening, so I quit and even took private lessons. Nevertheless, to work all day and study in the evening was very difficult.

So I came out to Honolulu to be a yard boy or something [and attend school part-time]. At the beginning I hoped to be a teacher. Coming out here was okay, but—today it may be possible but—then, immediately upon arriving in Honolulu, they didn’t even know my age, it was hard getting started.

There was a tailor from Hiroshima-ken who offered to introduce me to a [tailoring] place. So I thought I’d do it temporarily but that continued to be my work. Actually, I am not really cut out for business. I really wanted to be a teacher or something along that line. But it couldn’t be helped and I had to become a tailor.

MK: I'd like to return to the previous topic about the past. You came to Hawai‘i when you were just sixteen years old. Your father sent for you.

TH: Yes.

MK: When your father sent for you, how did you feel?

TH: Nothing in particular. At that age, in Japan a person has to go into the military anyhow, and I was being pushed to go, so I resigned myself to going. It couldn’t be helped, so I came. (Laughs)

But even though I came—I feel a child shouldn’t be separated from his parents for a long period. You probably feel the same. When a child and his parents are separated a long distance for a long time, the feelings are not close. It is much better for small children to be brought up close to their own parents. That is for sure. But in my case, this was not so, and as a result, our ties were fragile.

Therefore, it turned out that I did not stay long with them, but felt it would be better for me to leave for Honolulu to be on my own. Almost all the kibei nisei’s affection between parents and children are thin. In other words, no matter how difficult it is, parents should not let go of their children.

It’s true even here and now. Putting it briefly, when couples separate and the children go with one parent, that single parent just cannot watch the children. It’s impossible. In particular, you can see in the case of gaijin today, their children all go bad. At any rate, the parents and children should not be split apart. Staying together warms the bonds of affection.

MK: Your mother and father had four more children in Hawai‘i. What was your relationship like with your brothers and sisters?

TH: As expected, my relationship with them was not that close. Feelings were not that warm. It’s not the same because we did not grow up together.

MK: With your growing up in Japan speaking Japanese and your siblings growing up here, how
was it?

TH: Well, I didn’t stay there [with the family] very long and, when I came my siblings were small yet and my stay there was short. In those days, being in the rural area on the plantation, Japanese was understood. I still have a younger sister there in Lahaina. She must be seventy-something now (laughs) and the others have died and are no longer here.

MK: What was the name of the ship you sailed on when you came from Hiroshima?

TH: *Persia Maru.*

MK: How was it when you came?

TH: Oh, I got seasick on boats. . . . I had to sleep most of the way. Food, I didn’t feel like eating. . . . I only went to the toilet when I had to. Except for that I didn’t move. Even today, I hate to ride boats.

Sometimes I had to go to Lahaina on business. I would only feel all right up to about Diamond Head and after that I would start feeling sick and have to go to bed. I hate boats more than anything. Now I go by plane and they are fast so it’s good. I hate boats.

Recently, when my younger sister’s husband, my brother-in-law died—he was a Christian—he wanted his ashes scattered into the sea. So in order to go to Lahaina, they borrowed a boat and had a priest go along to throw [the ashes] into the ocean. They asked me to go along too, but I refused. (Laughs) I didn’t go because I get seasick.

MK: So the *Persia Maru* was the first boat?

TH: Yes, it was a small boat—a 6,000-ton boat with four masts. But it had an engine, although it was small. Later on there were large ships such as *Asama Maru* or *Chichibu Maru* or *Tatsuta Maru*—these three large ships made the trip. I hate even those ships because I get seasick.

In 1930 when I came home from Japan, it was on the *Siberia Maru.* That was a German ship which Japan took. It was rebuilt and traveled from San Francisco to Japan. It was foreign-made and not Japan-made so it was different. When it left for the open seas from Japan, there was stormy weather. Even if you closed the window, the waves would come in, pitching and rolling. I hated riding that boat.

MK: After boarding the *Persia Maru*, departing Japan and reaching Honolulu, what were your thoughts?

TH: I didn’t think anything in particular. After the ship landed, I went to the immigration office. My parents came to get me, and finally we went home. I did not know anything about this place, so I certainly didn’t feel particularly happy or anything like that.

MK: Before coming to Hawai‘i, what sort of place did you think it was?

TH: I didn’t have any idea. I did think Hawai‘i would be a better place to live than Japan. I didn’t know any details, however. After I reached Honolulu, Hawai‘i and disembarked, the first
The place I stayed was at the Kobayashi Hotel.

In those days, there were no automobiles. We just clopped along in the wagon pulled by a horse. On the neighbor islands, there were no automobiles. There were only horse and buggies. Those [may be] better because you cannot have an accident. (laughs) Automobiles can speed and crash.

MK: From the Kobayashi Hotel, you [eventually] went to Lahaina.

TH: Yes. I stayed in Lahaina for three years until I couldn’t take it there anymore. So I came out here.

MK: What sort of work did your father do in Lahaina?

TH: He worked on a plantation [Pioneer Mill Company]. Sugarcane.

MK: When you went to Lahaina, what did you do?

TH: I went there and my mother’s younger sister also lived in Lahaina. Her husband had a job at the mill [Pioneer Mill]. He was an engineer. So I became an oiler. It wasn’t hard work—I just had to oil the engines used [to process] the sugarcane. It was that kind of work.

MK: How much did you earn each day? In those days.

TH: At that time, probably $1.20 [a day]. In those days, everything was cheap, not expensive like today. When I quit Okazaki’s [a tailor shop] and went to Lāna‘i to take orders, the Lāna‘i pineapple plantation [Hawaiian Pineapple Company] paid $1.25. They [workers] said the plantation which paid even five cents more in wages was better.

MK: Which camp did you live at in Lahaina?

TH: In Lahaina at a place called Kīlauea Camp. It’s not far from the mill. It’s nearby.

MK: Did you live with your mother and father and . . .

TH: Yes, with my brothers and sisters. We all lived together. But, as I mentioned before, because we weren’t reared together since infancy, we were not close.

MK: And you worked at the mill for about three years?

TH: Yes, just about three years. Then I quit and came out here. So almost my whole life I’ve lived in Honolulu.

MK: What did your father and mother think about your coming to Honolulu?

TH: Actually, I sneaked out. I secretly took my suitcase to my friend’s place and planned to go to Honolulu. But they found out about it, (laughs) even though I tried to do it without telling them.
MK: When you were discovered, what happened?

TH: Well, I had to take my suitcase back and (laughing) then I did it without keeping it a secret. (Laughs) Such things did happen didn’t they.

MK: So you came out to Honolulu without doing it secretly.

TH: Yes.

MK: What happened after you came out to Honolulu?

TH: As I was saying, I stayed at Yoshikawa’s who had a motorcycle and bicycle shop [in ‘A‘ala]. But I couldn’t stay there too long, could I? There was a clothier who frequented Okazaki’s [tailor shop] who said he would introduce me to [Otoji] Okazaki. And he is the person who did it.

MK: Did you agree immediately?

TH: It wasn’t a matter of agreeing. My purpose was to do yard work for a gaijin or something along that line. This is what I had always thought about, but this did not happen. Before I knew it, a half year, a year, more years passed [as a tailor]. But, actually, if I stayed here a long time and knew what the situation here was, I would have sought work properly. But this happened immediately after I came to Hawai‘i, so I wasn’t aware of being able to do anything else.

MK: Where was this Okazaki Tailor located?

TH: On Hotel Street near River [Street]. On the makai side of Hotel Street. So between King and Hotel streets. Between Kekaulike and River [streets].

MK: And Yoshikawa’s motorcycle shop where you stayed . . .

TH: Yes, they sold and repaired new motorcycles and bicycles.

MK: Where was this Yoshikawa Motorcycle located?

TH: On King Street where there was a gasoline station on this side of the [O‘ahu Railway and Land Company] railroad [terminal]. Next to that was a two-story building. That is still standing, having since been renovated and looks great now. On this side was this two-story building. That’s where he used to sell and repair bicycles and motorcycles.

MK: You mentioned that you stayed there. Did you also work there?

TH: No, I did not. Not at all. As I said before, because this person named Nojiri introduced me to Okazaki, (laughs) I went over there.

MK: What happened when you went to Okazaki Tailor?

TH: I went there as an apprentice so I lived there.
MK: What sort of work did you do as an apprentice?

TH: Apprentice work was—well it used to be much rougher before than it was at that time, because we already had electricity then. But, prior to that, they used to have to use charcoal to heat the iron. During my time, though, that wasn't necessary because we already had electricity.

I would wake up in the morning and clean the shop; then when it was time, I would start work. I would finish about five P.M. The hours were fairly short—actually, those are usual hours. It was different from what it is now. We would work from about eight A.M. to five P.M. That would be the end of one day. On Sundays, we would have to clean the machines.

We had to take care of our own personal things. And, in those days, as opposed to today, the fabric was not Sanforized. They would shrink. So you had to pre-soak it in water.

For example, all fabrics today such as 'āhina [denim] or khaki or pocket material are all Sanforized so they don't have to be soaked. But [before] we had to soak tens of yards of this material in tubs of water and hang them up. So, on the second floor, a rope was strung across, and we would hang [the fabric] up there.

After they were dry, they would have to be brought in to be wound up. The single sheet would be doubled and wound like fabric. This sort of work had to be done. But, in contrast to the old days, the work was relatively easy. But it all had to be done.

MK: So at the beginning you had to clean up and hang up the fabric, et cetera.

TH: Yes, but each year, new apprentices would come. They had to be taken care of. But this type of work required that the person concentrate and stay still and thread needles, et cetera as compared to, for example, carpenters who work outside, so it did not suit the young people and the turnover was high. They just quit. Even if they had two- or three-year contracts, they still would quit.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: In your case, what was the length of your contract?

TH: I believe it was about two years. After that was over, the salary went up. Up until then it must have been about five dollars a month. About that.

MK: So you received about five dollars per month, but that included room and board, didn’t it?

TH: Yes, they provided room and board—but that was all. And after two years, it [salary] went up a little. The monthly salary, of course, it was a Japanese place—it would have been lower at a gaijin’s place.

At Kukui [Street] near Nu’uanu [Street], there was a two-story apartment where three people
[could stay]—it had two bedrooms. Three of us rented it and it cost about thirty dollars a month. (Laughs) That’s right. Cheap, wasn’t it? That was for three people, so one person paid ten dollars. It was two stories.

There was a Chinese person below us. The three of us were on top. We had friends who would come to visit us and we made so much noise up there that the Chinese person would shake a broom at us from below. (Laughs) Then we would be quiet for a little while and then we would start up again. (Laughs) That sort of thing happened—with young people gathering—there were that many people from Japan who would come around and cause a ruckus. (Laughs)

MK: You stayed at Okazaki’s for about four years, didn’t you? And after that you moved in with the three [two] others.

TH: Yes, that’s right. The three of us. One of them worked at a restaurant. The other one worked at Seiseido located on the corner of River and Hotel [Streets] where they sold medicines and things. That was his job. The three of us roomed together. (Laughs) One of them—on Hotel Street there is a new building going up now—Honolulu Federal [a savings and loan institution]—on this side. There was a restaurant there. He was a cook there.

After the shop closed, he and his friends with a car—we would all pile in and go for a ride. (Laughs) He would take along a pie or two from there. . . . Those are things we would do.

MK: Did the person who was a cook, cook for the three of you?

TH: No, he never cooked at home. Never. He only slept there. The one who worked at Seiseido, for lunch [he ate out]. I also [ate out] for lunch. Breakfast I ate at Okazaki’s but not lunch or dinner. So I used to go to a restaurant, a Japanese eatery, for lunch. In those days, it was cheap.

On the corner of River and Hotel [streets] there was a Fukuju-tei [run by a person] who was from Hiroshima-ken. He was a good cook. Before the war, Japan’s ships would come in—they would go to Japan and on their way back to America they would stop off—the taxis would take these guests to this restaurant, Fukuju-tei. When the ships landed, it would be very busy there. The drivers would get free food in return. The Americans would stop there on their way back [to America].

The shrimp tempura there was fantastic. I can’t eat tempura like that nowadays. Those made now are all no good. They claim it’s from Japan or Tokyo or wherever, but it’s nothing like before. But they were very skillful there. Their tempura was great. So, as I said before, when the ship came in, the drivers would take their customers there. If they took them there, the drivers themselves would get to eat for free.

Their boy became a dentist, although he has already retired. Their boy went through school and graduated and became a dentist. They gave up the hotel business and—do you know the Kokusai Theatre?

MK: Yes.
TH: That's where Fukuju-tei used to be. The shrimp tempura was Number One. There's nothing like it anymore.

MK: In those days, you worked at Okazaki Tailor as an apprentice and for your meals you ate at an eatery.

TH: Yes, in those days, I received a monthly salary so... I ate breakfast [at Okazaki’s], but for lunch and dinner I ate at a restaurant.

MK: Were there other restaurants besides Fukuju-tei?

TH: Yes, there were, but not as good. There was one on Beretania [Street], but not as good.

MK: How much did you pay in those days?

TH: Let's see, I don't remember very well. That Fukuju-tei was fantastic. So the salesmen of the other stores in the vicinity around King and River [streets] such as Nagao-ya [Nagao Shōten] or Marumiya or Musashiya all went there. Almost all of them.

MK: Musashiya, Marumiya, et cetera were Ginza...

TH: Yes, they were [part of] the Honolulu Ginza [shopping area]—those three stores.

MK: Only three stores?

TH: Yes, three. The most numerous one was ‘A’ala Rengo because it had eleven [businesses]. In those days, they [Ginza] didn’t do anything [special as a group]. There was nothing even at the end of the year or at New Year’s. The Chūō Rengō [near Nu’uanu Avenue and Beretania Street] was the same. They didn’t do anything. Only ‘A’ala Rengō did.

MK: Which stores were associated with Chūō Rengō?

TH: There were B.K. Yamamoto and Iida Suisandō and Fuji Furniture and Fair Department Store. That’s all I think. There were only four or five stores. The biggest one by numbers was ‘A’ala Rengō since it had eleven companies. And they were all in one building.

The others were all scattered. Of course, Honolulu Ginza only had three stores. There was also Motoshige, but that wasn’t a store. They handled things like insurance, et cetera. Also Kawahara [Co.] which was a pet shop. But those are not open at night. Only Musashiya, Marumiya, and Nagao-ya were open.

MK: What was the location of Chūō Rengō?

TH: That was the corner of Nu’uanu and Beretania [streets]. On the Kalihi side was B.K. Yamamoto [Hardware Store] and the corner on this side was Iida Suisando. And next to that was vacant for a while. Next to that was Fuji Furniture [Co. Ltd.]. Then Fair Department Store. That’s all.

MK: And the ‘A’ala Rengō at that time was on King Street and...
Iwilei. This side was River [Street]. And on the back side there were markets ['A'ala Market].

Getting back to Okazaki Tailor, you started with Okazaki Tailor as an apprentice and you cleaned the shop and washed and hung out the fabric, et cetera. When did you move on to more difficult tasks?

At the place, I used to take orders for navy uniforms.

American navy?

Yes, at Pearl Harbor—for the officers and sailors. They used to come to make orders. But most of the customers were local. When I was there, there was a ship named Dickinson bound for Midway. The cook on board this ship was a Japanese. He left Japan when he was sixteen and went throughout the world as its cook. During the recent war [World War I] in Europe, as the ship he was riding was entering a French port, it was hit by a German sub and exploded. He swam putting his shoes and pants on his head and was saved. During the European war—by a German submarine. (Laughs)

He was a Japanese?

Yes. He was the very first person I met [on my own] after I came to Hawai'i. Before the war, he used to—there used to be a Honolulu Ironworks in Kaka’ako—on this side—on Bishop [Estate] land—lease—handed down from the person who had it before—he was a steward on Dickinson—he was from Fukuoka-ken. His name was Okada.

I don’t know why but his younger brother’s name was Abe. But his name was Okada. Abe was with Von Hamm-Young [Co. Ltd.] working on iceboxes and things. His older brother was the steward of Dickinson. He would cook. He was my friend. I would go on Dickinson to take orders. So he and I became friends. He’s dead and no longer around.

His children were in America but they are here now. He had two. The older one went to America but she’s returned. She later married Kondo. The younger one is somewhere above St. Francis Hospital. I’ve known her since she was young. Even now she comes over sometimes—saying we were nice to her parents.

So, the cook on Dickinson was this Japanese person, and the officers on Dickinson went to Okazaki Tailor?

Yes, we made uniforms and—their cleaning—cleaning was at Fujieki—the owner of the present Star Market used to go to get the laundry. And Okazaki made the new ones. From long ago. So before Christmas, Okazaki’s made shirts and things as presents for the harbor masters. (Laughs) I remember those things.

So Okazaki Tailor went there to take orders?

Yes. We went to the ships, the Matson [Navigation Company ships], when they came in. We would know when the ships came into port and when they left. We would take orders from the officers for uniforms and Fujieki would take orders for their laundry. Before, the Fujieki
Cleaning Shop was located about two houses from the corner of Alakea and Beretania [streets]. I remember that, although it was a long time ago.

MK: So, the bulk of Okazaki Tailor’s business was handling uniforms?

TH: Most of it was with civilian suits. That was the bulk of it. Only a small part was for ships and the officers, after all, there were only a few officers. In those days, Matson’s was running and there were cargo ships. We did do some work for the officers, but most of it was for the local folks.

MK: When you say local folks, what sort of local people placed orders with you in those days?

TH: Well, the boss was from Fukushima-ken and he knew a lot of people from the northeastern area of Japan. This person named [Tomizo] Katsunuma, he was an animal doctor. He was an interpreter at the immigration office, he would board the ship and interpret. So [our customers were] mainly people from Fukushima-ken and Niigata-ken and other northern [areas].

Katsunuma was from Fukushima-ken. He would go to Japan and be the middleman for the immigrants. So there were many people from Miyagi-ken, Niigata-ken, et cetera and they used to come often. There were many of them in Wahiawā doing pineapple work.

MK: While you were working for Okazaki Tailor, did you go to the camps to get orders?

TH: No, I did not. Only for customers who came in.

MK: Did Okazaki-san hire anyone to go and get orders?

TH: No, people only came into the shop. Only in the case of Dickinson, I was told to go there and I went.

MK: Did Okazaki Tailor get work from others beside Japanese, except for the officers?

TH: No, I don’t think so. That person was a Christian. But whenever a new priest for the Sōtō sect came from Japan, we at Okazaki’s would sew for him—such things as morning coats, et cetera. Whenever a new priest came, as a rule, we would make clothes for him at Okazaki’s.

MK: Did Okazaki Tailor make only western clothes?

TH: What?

MK: Did Okazaki Tailor make Japanese clothing as well? Or only western clothes?

TH: Westerns were rather few in number. Not like today. So, we made the usual local things.

MK: Everyone ordered suits and pants and shirts?

TH: Yes, usually coat and pants. The Fukushima people were in the inaka, in ‘Ewa or on the fields in Waipahu, although they were scattered, and they worked with pineapple in Wahiawā.
MK: The Fukushima people who worked on the plantations, did you make their work clothes?

TH: No, we didn’t make those—only the usual coats and suits. Those were the main things.

MK: Then, Okazaki Tailor did not make such things as ‘āhina pants?

TH: Well, even if they did, it was only khaki pants for Honolulu people and not for the inaka people. After I moved my shop to Iwilei [in 1937] and during and after the war, unless you order immediately after graduation, they would not be ready for the following September. So people would order by phone right after graduation was over. We would count out how many [we could make], but if old customers came, we would be forced to take their orders and be over the limit. They wouldn’t be ready by September. There’s July, August... There were only three months. Orders would be taken throughout those three months.

In contrast to today, there was no wash-and-wear [materials]—just all cotton. They had to be washed, starched, and ironed. It was quite a task for the parents. So for each child they had to have three or four pairs. We had to tell them to make do with one or two pairs and the rest we would make after school started. Sometimes, when we couldn’t make them, we would get scolded by them on the phone. In those days, it was quite a chore to make the children’s pants—as opposed to now when there are plenty of ready-made ones. In the old days, they didn’t wear ready-made.

MK: When you worked there, did Okazaki Tailor sell ready-made things?

TH: No, not at all. They were all made-to-order.

MK: How many people did Okazaki Tailor employ?

TH: There were, let’s see, one, two, three—about five people, I think.

MK: All five worked at the shop?

TH: Yes, at the shop.

MK: Other than these, were there some who sewed at home?

TH: Yes, there was one Korean who sewed pants. Only that one person.

MK: While you were at Okazaki Tailor, how did you learn to sew?

TH: When I first started, in the beginning there were no motor machines. You step on it with your foot. I had never used a machine before, so it was awkward at first. I gradually became used to it. I had to practice stepping on [the treadle]. If there’s a motor, you just turn it on and it is easy, but when you do it by foot, it runs opposite. (Laughs) I had to practice sewing.

Then I had to learn buttonhole making. Not by machine, but by hand. It is stronger when done by hand. If you do it by machine, once the thread comes undone, the whole thing unravels. There’s nothing like that if you do it by hand. It’s stronger.
Then gradually I was taught how to sew pants. Gradually, over a half or full year, you can learn to make pants. In those days, at Okazaki Tailor, we would make uniforms for hotel bellboys. Also uniforms for the navy. We sewed those white suits.

MK: So, you learned gradually. How about cutting fabrics, did you do that sort of work?

TH: No, I didn’t do that. Only sewing.

MK: Who did the cutting then?

TH: There was a cutter. One person. He only did the cutting.

MK: Was there someone who did the measuring?

TH: The cutter did the measuring when he took the order. In 1949 I went to America [U.S. Mainland], at that time I went to New York for two weeks. Up until noon—there’s a school for cutting which I attended. In the afternoon I went sightseeing. So until noon, I went to this school by myself—nobody else. It was run by Jews. Nearly all the people who handle fabrics are Jews.

MK: What about Okazaki Tailor?

TH: This was after I quit there.

MK: So, while you were at Okazaki Tailor, someone measured, chose the fabric with the customer, cut it, and . . .

TH: Yes, and prepared it for sewing. That’s what I would sew. Up until then, someone else took the measurements, cut the pattern, placed the pattern on the fabric, marked it, cut it and then it had to be fitted. The fitting was done by us sewers. After fitting and pinning, it was adjusted where it was wrong, and then sewn for real. It takes a lot of time. If the fit were off, there would be yet another fitting.

MK: Was that your responsibility?

TH: No, that was during the time when I was working there, so I didn’t have such [responsibility]. There were others who had been working there longer. Orders were taken, measurements taken, the pattern cut, the fabric cut so that it would fit—then I would sew it for fitting. Then it would be fitted and pinned and adjusted and then sewn for real. It was quite complicated.

MK: So, you worked for Okazaki Tailor for six years?

TH: Yes.

MK: During those six years, you learned to sew.

TH: Yes, I learned.

MK: You learned cutting afterwards?
TH: I already knew how to cut. I had observed how it was done.

MK: Weren't you taught how?

TH: Not particularly—I wasn't taught. You just have to watch and learn. They didn't do such things.

MK: Did you learn the business end of it?

TH: No, I didn't. They didn't teach that. At any rate, people from Fukushima-ken are poor at business. They are really poor at it. People from that area are not suited for business.

MK: At Okazaki Tailor did they charge or use cash?

TH: In those days, it turned out to be charge and that's why business was hard. Accounts aren't settled.

MK: After working for Okazaki Tailor, in 1930 you went to Japan?

TH: Yes, I went to Japan and took the military physical exam and then returned here and worked for a short while. But I thought I wasn't getting anywhere, so I quit and went on my own. Starting my own business was fine, but I had no shop or anything but—in my cottage—samples—everyone ordered via samples. I had thirty dollars in my pocket. (Laughs) That's how I started my business (in my cottage). I wonder how I ever did it.

But it was because Von Hamm-Young [Co. Ltd.] helped me out. They had trust in me. They would give me sixty days credit. So I would take the order, sew it, get the money, and then pay them back. It was quite simple. This would be impossible today.

MK: That was about 1931, wasn't it?

TH: Yes. Times were hard then.

MK: So when you started out, you worked out of your own cottage—your own home?

TH: Yes, I started by going out to get the order, coming home and making it and then delivering it or sending it. Afterwards, I hired an order taker to get orders on the island of Hawai‘i by leaving an automobile there. But doing those things was not good. It might have been kind-hearted, but it required hard work, and everything just collapsed during the war [World War II].

MK: 1931 was during the depression . . .

TH: Yes, 1931, '32, '33—oh my, those were hard times!

MK: You went to Lāna‘i to take orders.

TH: Yes, I took orders. I was so happy when I got my first order. (Laughs) Such things happened, didn't they. Times were real hard. On the plantations, Saturday was a day off. Five days a
week [or work]. But it was $1.25. On the sugar plantation, $1.20. Usually. Sounds incredible today.

MK: So it was $1.25 a day?

TH: On Lāna‘i, it was $1.25.

MK: For one day?

TH: One day.

MK: Even with such low wages, something like a suit . . .

TH: Even with low wages, we got along. But everything was cheap. But one week before the war started, because Christmas was coming, I had the inside of the Iwilei shop painted. I talked with that [T.] Yoshikawa-san about it. He said his boys were working at Pearl Harbor and that he would send four or five of them over to paint it on Sunday. So they painted it for me.

At that time, at Pearl Harbor, for one day they got five dollars. Five dollars was a good wage. Especially compared with other places like the plantation's one or two dollars. So if they received five dollars at Pearl Harbor that was great. They came for one day and painted the inside of my shop. Then the next thing I knew the war started. (Laughs)

MK: Before you moved to Iwilei, you were at the corner of King and McCully.

TH: Yes. Then in '37 I moved over there [to Iwilei].

MK: Before '37, in 1931, you got married and in 1934 your wife died. Today, we will stop here and I will come again, and we will pick up in 1937 when you moved to Iwilei.

TH: Yes. All right—before the war started.

MK: Thank you very much.

TH: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW