MK: This is an interview with Mr. Hideo Kawano on September 1, 1992, at his office in Honolulu, O'ahu. The interviewer is Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

As I was saying, we're going to continue this interview with the time when your father's brother opened up a branch store at 'A'ala Rengo. And maybe you can tell me when it was that he opened up that branch store.

HK: Oh, about 1922. And then, he took over around 1925, I think.

MK: And what was the name of that branch store?

HK: Originally, K. Kawano Store. Then when my dad took over, he changed to I. Kawano. And it was largely just an ice cream parlor, notions, and you know. Because in that area, in those days, all the country people used to come out by train mostly, from Waipahu, 'Ewa, Wai'anae. And all the Japanese movie places were right in the neighborhood, you see. The Nippon Theater [earlier Kōen Gekijō] was in the lane from 'A'ala Street. And there was another one called Honolulu-za. That was also at 'A'ala Street. Those were the only two. Then later on—much later, during the [19]30s, I would say—Consolidated [Amusement Co.] opened up that theater on College Walk. And just maybe before the war, Kokusai Theater [was there], in that newly opened up lane, it would be about back of where St. Louis College used to be. But that was the one big reason why people would, on weekends, come out, you see. At my father's place, we were also dealing with all these seamen coming in who would come around, have a soda or an ice cream, that sort of thing, and pick up souvenirs. That's how it started. But most of the merchants around there were catering to not only the neighbors but to the country people.

MK: And you know you said that the store attracted country people who would come in for the movie shows.

HK: Right. And then they'd stop by for an ice cream. It's one of those real old-style ice cream parlor with all the fancy trimmings and all that. So it was good for a while, let's put it that way, until the depression, which wasn't too many years. But my dad's case, because of the switch to souvenirs, he quit the ice cream parlor in 1932. So it wasn't that long, you see.
MK: And, you know, when you mentioned that they sold ice cream with all the trimmings, what exactly did they sell?

HK: Oh, they had banana splits and everything you can think of in the fancy ice cream concoctions, yeah. And wasn’t cheap, you know. That banana split was around forty cents, and that’s a lot of money in those days. And sundaes, strawberry sundaes like that. So you have a big fountain over there.

MK: And how big was the fountain?

HK: Oh, about ten feet [in length], I guess. From here to there at least, and with about seven or eight chairs. Regular soda fountain.

MK: And in those days, when your uncle still owned it, you know, when it was a branch store, who were the people who actually ran the store?

HK: My dad. It wasn’t long before he took over. We used to live upstairs, that’s why. Before that, we were living someplace around, up in Liliha Street. But that was for a short time too. And so, we practically grew up over there.

MK: And then for the people who worked at the branch store, who were they?

HK: Well, we had the—-in fact, my mother almost never came down to the store. We had a Mrs. Ogata, who passed away not too long ago in Wahiawa, she came to help us when she was about fifteen or sixteen, I think. And somebody from Japan came in, and that kind of help, you see. So didn’t take that many people to run the place anyway. But they worked long hours though.

MK: What were the hours like . . .

HK: Oh, normally from about 7:30, 8:00 in the morning to 10:00, 10:30 at night. So it was long hours. And . . .

MK: And in those days, your mom didn’t come down . . .

HK: Hardly, yeah. [Kawanos had six boys and one girl.] She was taking care of the kids and cooking. All the meals are upstairs, you see.

MK: And then you mentioned that you folks were living upstairs. What were the living quarters like upstairs?

HK: It’s kind of crude, but it was fairly big. It was a big area, you know, actually. And the bathrooms were the toilet and regular bathtubs. We used to have—problem with hot water, so all kinds of heating gadgets. Originally we had some gas ones (chuckles) before the real water heaters. And those would be right in the bathroom. It was kind of scary but they used to have contraptions like that you see, way back. So there was ample room upstairs.

MK: And then, how many rooms were there?
HK: Oh, it was cut up into about, good four, five rooms. And, so looking at it from the people that were living in cottages, the area was just as big or bigger than most cottages. It was just as big as the ground floor. (Chuckles)

MK: And then, was there just an outside entrance to upstairs, or an inside stairs, too?

HK: In the inside. Inside. [You] could come right up through the store, you see. For a very short while it was outside, so you had to come out from the—come up the stairs and there was a back door there. But you know everybody put in stairways after a while, you see. And it was high, so nearly everybody had a little warehouse area, sort of, in the subfloor. 'Cause from the ground to the ceiling was about, oh, another four or five feet above this. Good fifteen feet high. And the back part of the store was—everybody put in the, what we call a chūdan, you see. And then the stair would go there, you can go there, and then another stair to go up, you see. So everybody had warehouse space right in the store.

MK: And then, so you had pretty good storage area and service area?

HK: Yeah. So it was comfortable, let's put it that way.

MK: And, you know, the goods that your father sold there, where did he get them?

HK: Oh, all over the place. Especially souvenirs, we had the craftsmen, you know, two or three Japanese people who specialized in crafting koa wood. They used to bring the stuff wholesale to us. And then when it came to Hawaiian tapa goods, this family—this was in the early [19]30s—maybe the oldest one, the oldest boy, I think started around '29 or '30. He used to come to Punahou School, so every time he shows up in August, he brings back about a 100 or 150 tapa cloths. We buy the whole thing. Made in Samoa, you see. When he graduated, the next brother did that—I think three of 'em. Every summer they'd bring in a batch of that. Once in a while they'd bring in other things, you know, bowls. Then lot of those regular bowls, the Japanese craftsmen were making. You know, that calabash, like this, made out of koa, I think.

MK: Japanese were making it?

HK: Yeah.

MK: Local Japanese.

HK: Local Japanese. In fact, we had one man who was a master craftsman, so we told him, "Don't do it that good because it's too expensive." The other guys was grind, grind, grinding it out, let's put it that way. But this particular old man, he insisted on putting on almost like a lacquer finish. Hand-polished and everything. But it's too expensive, so . . .

'Ukuleles, we were getting Kamaka's 'ukuleles, mostly. There was a [recent newspaper] article on the Kamaka boys, that's the sons of the old man [Samuel K. Kamaka, Sr.] that we used to buy from, see. But gradually we picked up items that way. And then there were a lot of made-in Japan things, souvenirs.

MK: You know, the made-in Japan souvenirs, what kind of souvenirs were they?
HK: Oh, all kind of useless things, you know. The little toy fans and, I guess, that’s what you call notions, I guess. No real use for it. Souvenir like, and pillow cases. You wonder who would use it and but all these military boys [were] sending stuff home. (Chuckles) But there was quite a wide range of junk [i.e., items], you know, so to speak.

MK: And then, in the earlier days, when you folks were serving ice cream and it was an ice cream parlor, where did you folks get the ice cream from?

HK: By the early [1930s, Dairymen [Dairymen’s Association, Ltd.] was already—in fact, in the late [1920s—so we almost bought practically all ice cream from Dairymen’s. There were some independent—and Ho-Min [Ice Cream] started much later, you see. But there were some places where they made their own. Across from the station, as I heard it, my uncle’s time, they were making their own with rock salt and ice, and you cranking the thing. But by 1922 or ’21, Dairymen’s had started to wholesale, you see.

MK: And they would come and deliver?

HK: Yeah, deliver every other day.

MK: And you know, like nowadays, children frequent ice cream parlors. In those days, with like a sundae being forty cents, were there children too coming in to purchase ice cream?

HK: Generally kids would—ice cream cone is about their speed. Nickel a cone. And if they come with their parents, sometimes they would buy dishes—strawberry sundae or something, or chocolate sundae—but that runs up.

MK: So in the old days . . .

HK: But most of the kids would be buying cones.

MK: . . . when kids were . . .

HK: Then by that time, all this, you know, gadgets, milk nickel type started to come out, you see. And they had ice cream made in baseball form. You know, they’re trying to sell so they come up with all kind of ideas. (Chuckles) And popsicle came out a little bit later. But by ’31, ’32, my father had already decided that it was no go, I mean, it wasn’t profitable so we quit that in 1932.

MK: And then, so he took over---so originally it was a branch store of your uncle’s, then your father took it over when it was still an ice cream parlor. Then by ’31, ’32 . . .

HK: Strictly a curio.

MK: . . . became a curio shop.

HK: The name was changed before that already to Aloha Curio—around ’29, I think. ’Cause more and more we were depending on the souvenir business. Even the traffic from the country was dying out already, by then. See everybody start to buy cars, or they don’t all come on train anymore. The real train traffic just about died out in the early [1930s. Then, of course, later
on, the military started to come in. So, you know, from Pearl Harbor and that Schofield [Barracks]. Although [at] Schofield, within the PX [post exchange] stores, they had a lot of souvenirs. But these boys all just wanted to get out of there as soon as possible, so a lot of them would show up in our area, see. So by the early [19]30s, it was obvious that you gotta go that route, so...

MK: But prior to the time that you shifted to curio, was he carrying curios together with the ice cream?

HK: Yeah, well I wouldn't call it curio, just call it souvenirs and notions. So that had already started, you see. Then in '32, we just—we sold that fountain to somebody else a block away. And the thing, that man had it until after the war (chuckles), World War II.

MK: Oh my goodness.

HK: Right in 'A'ala Rengō.

MK: You know, but then, before you folks sold that fountain, I had heard that like Akahoshi Drugs [Ltd.] had a fountain too.

HK: Also had a fountain, yeah.

MK: Was there competition?

HK: Not really. Both sides decided to quit about the same time. They lasted longer, they hung onto it much longer, because drug store and soda fountain was sort of like hand and glove, you see. So they kept it up until the war, I think. We had quit in '32. So as I remember when I came back in '37, [when] we wanted to have a Coke, we go to Akahoshi's. And Amaguri Taro had a small little refrigerator box where they had all kind of snacks in it too. For fountain service we had to go to Akahoshi's.

MK: And you know, like you were---before we get into the time when the store changed to Aloha Curio, I want you to kind of think back to the real early days, you know, before it became Aloha Curio, and if you can remember some of the other people and businesses at 'A'ala Rengō. That would be when you were like five years old.

HK: Yeah, at that---you see, by mid-[19]20s, I was already about seven. On the corner, the Iwaharas were there already, from the very beginning. Then next to them, there was a Chang family—Clarence Chang is an OB-GYN [obstetrician-gynecologist], and his older brother still has a little store right by that—across the street from that market over there—I'm trying to recall what they called it. They still run a liquor store over there. It was a big family of nine kids. So it was a kind of neighborhood like where I would stay over for lunch, [then] they come over for lunch.

(Laughter)

HK: But, yeah, Dr.—we used to call him Ah Fong, Clarence Chang—he would be about, let's see, five years my senior, I think, four or five years. So when he was in the seventh grade—this is an eight-year grammar school—I was in the second grade. Something like that, about that. But
as I remember, every time the little kids have to go to Ka‘iulani School at that time, the parents talk to the kids [to] take care, [and] here’s the big brother, marching all the kids to school, for about a couple of weeks, and then the kids know how to do it themselves. He [Clarence Chang] would take the whole gang. That’s how close the place was, although, you know, like Okamoto kids [of Hawai‘i Importing Co.] are all much later, but you know, I’m talking about the [19]20s. And in the [19]20s was Iwahara’s family [of Iwahara Shōten], and then Komeiji with Asahi [Furniture Co.], you know. The older sisters are—one sister is my age, see. She’s the oldest, she’s in Hilo now. And then, let’s see, Awamura [of Heiwa-Do] came in much later, around ’28, ’29. And outside of that—so most of the kids were just around that few families.

MK: So you had the Iwahara Shōten family.

HK: Yeah, right.

MK: You had the Changs.

HK: Yeah, and then us.

MK: You had the Kawanos.

HK: And then there was another Chinese family, well-known family here too, the Chows. They quit during the depression. You know, business was bad so they just closed up.

MK: What kind of business did the Chows have and the Changs have?

HK: The Chows had a clothing and dry goods. And then, where the Chows were, Maeda-san moved in, Amaguri [Taro].

MK: Amaguri Taro.

HK: Next to that, the Chinese candies manufacturer. They were making candy upstairs see, they had a fairly large area because there was an alleyway going through and they [were] manufacturing candy upstairs. And Dr. [M.] Uyeda’s mama used to work over there too. He’s the dentist, Gordon’s father—he’s passed away, but mother is still alive.

MK: Oh.

HK: That’s Uyeda family there. Anyway, Dr. Uyeda’s family used to work there, but downstairs was Chinese family. And then all the kids were just playing together so---Kam Fong’s father was a manager there.

MK: Oh.

HK: You know, the actor [featured on television show, “Hawai‘i-Five-O”].

MK: The actor.

HK: So, I knew him from kid days, in other words. [It] was a very tight community, because
everybody opens 'til late, see—I mean, the earliest they close at night was nine, the whole area. So at night the kids were all playing.

MK: Where did you folks play there?

HK: Right on the sidewalk. (Chuckles) Got lights on, so you know. When it's bright, we can go across in the park, but at night, we were using the whole sidewalk as a playground like.

MK: And I heard that there was like a sandlot baseball area . . .

HK: Across the street.

MK: . . . in 'A'ala Park.

HK: You know, at that time, in the [19]20s, even in the early [19]20s, before the [Honolulu] Stadium was made, when the Japanese teams used to come down, there was only the old Mō'ili'i Field and 'A'ala Park. And then, of course, Kaka'ako had a place called Atkinson Park. So the Japan Meiji team, they would stay at Kobayashi Hotel, Yamashiro Hotel, and the games were played right there. And I remember as a kid those days, Meiji would come in, Waseda coming in. This is about the mid-[19]20s. Then little after that, the [Honolulu] Stadium was built around '25 or '26, yeah. The old stadium that was torn down.

MK: So when there were like big baseball games, how did it affect business for you folks?

HK: Well, not much. And it was an open area, so sometimes the ball would come clear across the street. (MK chuckles.) Or somebody would hit it into the river. You know, the [Nu'uanu] Stream is right there too, so. Very primitive, let's put it that way. (I'.I.K chuckles.) But it was a nice playground neighborhood at that time.

MK: Was there a playground too, besides the baseball field?

HK: Yeah, on Beretania [Street] side, where they have a skating rink now, that was a regular playground. And in those days, the playground had mostly matrons taking care of the equipment, you see, and watching the whole place. I don't know why they quit that system. They had volleyball, basketball, baseball, all the equipment, they had it locked up and this lady would—she's in charge of the park, you see, the playground part. But they quit that, during the war [World War II], I think. And they never brought it back, that system. That's true of Kailua Beach Park too, you know. They had a pavilion. In those places, they had a concession, eating place. The concessionaire took care of all the lockers and everything. They had one in Waikīkī, right by the natatorium. And whoever had the concession all made money. 'Cause I know several---lot of times, one would sell out and go to Japan, go home to Japan, let's put it that way, old folks. The next guy does the same thing.

MK: But at 'A'ala Park, no concession, just the matron.

HK: No, no concession.

MK: And so you children used to play on the sidewalks . . .
HK: At night, yeah.

MK: ... across the street at the park.

HK: All over the place. And behind ['A‘ala Rengō], especially on weekends, on Sundays. Between ['A‘ala Rengō and] the ['A‘ala] Market, there’s a driveway right through. Yeah, we use ‘em, you know, us little kids so baseball, everything, all in the back. So there were---swimming, we would go to Pier 16 or Pier 24. And then, when they feel like it, walk all the way to Kaka‘ako. It was a time when families were close so groups of kids used to play together. Then there’s nobody watching you, so the oldest guys are responsible. Like he’s ten years old and the rest of us, nine, eight, seven, six, he’s responsible, see.

(Laughter)

MK: So in those days, your main friends were like the Changs . .

HK: Yeah.

MK: . . . the Chows?

HK: Chows. Iwaharas.

MK: Iwaharas.

HK: And then us of course. And the Komeijis. They were around the bend, on the corner of Queen and Iwilei [streets], you see.

MK: How about the children that came from the ‘A‘ala neighborhood?

HK: We had enough in the small area, see, so. Once in a while we had friends coming from across, two blocks away, joining us. Outside, there weren’t too many people like that. Just within the group, there were enough kids. The Chang family had five of ‘em, boys, I’m talking about. Well, actually there were six boys, so the youngest one we call him, “Boy,” and they had three girls and six boys. We didn’t have much problem.

MK: So for amusement, on the sidewalk, or in the back of the ‘A‘ala Rengō, what did you folks do?

HK: Oh, every kind of game you can think of. *Pee wee*, baseball, or just playing tag, and marbles. Not to mention playing cards. Everybody knew how to play *hanafuda* and trumps from kid days. The older ones teach ‘em, so.

MK: How about the girls, though, the sisters?

HK: The girls would play among themselves, so you know. It was a very tight community, I would put it that way. Then by the (19)30s, when we were already kind of grown up, there was a new batch of kids, see. Like the Okamoto family and then my kid brothers, next door. (The Awamura girls were there, too.) The mother [Mitsu Awamura] is still healthy yet. Lives in Makiki.
MK: It's like you had two batches of kids, then. You had the older kids . . .

HK: Yeah, right, right.

MK: . . . the younger ones. And they just grouped themselves?

HK: Yeah, so---see, because my second to the youngest brother, we're ten years apart, see. So before I left for Japan, they were only about two to three years old. When I came home they were about seven, eight, nine years old, see.

MK: And you know like I noticed that your playmates were like the Chinese as well as the Japanese kids, how did the parents relate to each other?

HK: That's why most of the ladies around there were pretty good in Chinese cooking, 'cause Mrs. Chang was giving them the recipes. But there was absolutely no problem. There was another Chinese family, you know, next to the candy store, another Chinese dry goods. They quit around 1929, I think. And so initially it was half and half, roughly, Chinese and Japanese. Gradually, by the time the war started, only the Chinese candy store left. The Changs had moved across the river, and they had a market hardware store, next to Musashiya's. And the restaurant had already sold out to our neighbors, the [Kojiro] Takara family. Took over 1939, around that time. Then after the war, Mr. Takara quit the restaurant, turned it into a shoe store [Star Shoe Store]. (Chuckles)

MK: So originally it was a lot of Chinese and Japanese and later on it became primarily . . .

HK: Mostly, practically---I would say by '41, it was only the Chinese candy store left.

MK: You know, in the days when it was Chinese and Japanese, did the merchants ever get together and do things together to help business?

HK: Not really. That came in the [19]30s, 'A'ala Rengō, partly because they had to drum up business, and across the street, they used to call that 'A'ala—what did they call that now? Something Ginza [a popular Japanese shopping area] anyway, across the river [Nu'uanu Stream]. You know, from the corner of Nagao [Shōten], Musashiya [Shōten Ltd.]. Motoshige [Shōten Ltd.] was there too. Motoshige were more wholesalers. And then, this group here was Fuji Furniture [Co. Ltd.] and Fair Department [Store], Fuji Furniture. And had a couple of---and Iida [Shōten]. They had a---they used to call themselves Chūō Rengō [Hyakka-ten] or something.

MK: So 'A'ala Rengō kind of got together, sort of to be able to compete with the other Japanese businesses?

HK: That's right. They wanted to stick together, for advertising, they did it in a kind of loose way, but they still identified as [a group] . . . And then, Christmastime when we decorate the—all the lights in the park were put up by the Japanese stores. They started that in the early [19]30s, you know. But nobody was forced to contribute. So we didn't expect a store that was quitting or the candy store, for instance, retail was nothing to them, you see. So they were never asked to contribute, let's put it that way.
MK: And so, when your dad had changed from the ice cream parlor to the curio shop, Aloha Curio, that would be like ’31, ’32?

HK: Right.

MK: I was wondering, you know, maybe I should find out how come he named it Aloha Curio?

HK: No particular reason I think. Aloha was a common---but at that time wasn’t that common, you know, use of that word “aloha”. So, well, we have to call it a curio store, so I guess it’s. . . . I don’t know exactly how, I can’t remember. But I don’t think there’s any particular deep reason for it.

MK: And then, when he made that shift toward curio, did he have to find more employees or different employees?

HK: No, no.

MK: Same.

HK: See, at that time, in the [19]30s, this lady that I mentioned that passed away not too long ago, she was with us. At one time, her sister was with us. And then, my aunt was with us. There’s three right there. And then, in between we had a lot of people who stayed for a while and found jobs elsewhere, you see. You know, the way they used to run things way back in the [19]20s and [19]30s, somebody that pulled up stake and went back to Japan, let’s say—or from the same village—would write a letter saying they’d like to have their son come back. So we had people come in and stay with us, young people. In our case we had one lady who was only about seventeen when she came. She stayed with us for about two years, and then she went to work as a domestic. She done real well after that. And there were two men, young fellows, that came, stayed on. One became a Japanese[-language] schoolteacher. The other one went to work for Seiseido [Shōten]. Then after a rough marriage he pulled up stake and went to the Mainland. He’s doing well up there now. But they were from the same village as my mother’s side, [from a village in] Yamaguchi-ken, you see.

MK: So they would come, they would live with you?

HK: Yeah.

MK: Live in your place?

HK: And they would actually, you know, became part of the family. Although they couldn’t get paid real well, kozukai, that’s it. So almost immediately they were looking for jobs, in other words.

MK: So basically when they came, they would . . .

HK: Although they would . . .

MK: . . . work for room and board?
HK: Yeah. One of them stayed quite a while, you know, about three years. He was paid regularly. Then the lady that stayed with us also for about, maybe year and a half, she had to get used to the islands, let's say, before she went to look for what they used to call hōkōnin, you see, domestic. And we had a lot of connections, because these people all come out on Sundays. So always, we go to a Japanese show, come back. So we had a lot of friends that used to work for these [well-to-do] Makiki and Mānoa families, and some Diamond Head [families]. That's the only chance, you know, on Sundays to see Japanese movies.

MK: From the hōkō.

HK: Yeah. So they would come---because they would come by practically every week, next thing you know, they're more friends than anything else.

MK: And then when your dad changed from that . . .

HK: So when we quit that ice cream business, they dropped by but we had nothing to sell them any more.

(Laughter)

MK: They weren't interested in the goods.

HK: So they come around to chat with us.

MK: And then, in those days, when you changed from an ice cream parlor, you got rid of the fountain, what else did you do to change the inside so that it becomes . . .

HK: Oh, practically nothing. We put in new showcases and we put the wall cases. And then, that's all carpentry work, but that's all, you know, hired jobs. So it was no problem to change, shift over, you see.

MK: And you know like nowadays, we go into a store and it's basically self-service. We have to reach and we get the items ourselves. In those days, in your dad's old store how were they served?

HK: Well mostly you have to dig it out from someplace, see, so it wasn't laid out openly, most cases. That five-and-ten thing came later, you see. Kress was the first one that started that over here. But that didn't catch on until much later. Kodomoya [Department Store], Omochaya [Toy Shop], all went that route by early [19]30s. But we were stuck with all the showcases and most of the stuff was not---ours was not knickknacks where, you know, if they want to touch it, we just take it out and show. I think, Iida used to have it all open, you know. They had racks and then they would browse around and pick what they want, you see.

MK: But in store it was all showcase?

HK: Mostly. Oh, we had stuff out to, but we had the showcases, so might as well use it. And certain item, we don't want them handling too much, you see. Maybe it's fragile, you know.

MK: And then your mother was mostly upstairs at that time, taking care of the family. Your father
HK: Yeah, downstairs practically all the time.

MK: And he was basically . . .

HK: And then everybody eats lunch.

MK: You mean the whole family and the employees?

HK: Yeah, yeah. The help and all eat together—breakfast, lunch and dinner. Breakfast, I get up early—I used to get up early so I fix my own. Go to Love's Bakery or that ['A'ala] Market in the back. And then my brother below me and my sister, they didn't like cereals, I'm the only one eating cereal. I'm the kind type I can go to the grocery store and pick it up myself see, so I had allowance to buy bread, jelly and breakfast things.

MK: And then, lunchtime, your mother would cook for everybody?

HK: Yeah. Because, you know, my mother is from Yamaguchi, so she's a—chagai is something that Hiroshima people don't know. So we had all kind of friends coming in. Come over for lunch, have chagai.

MK: They'd all come. And then, your father, he would be downstairs in the store, what was his job?

HK: He was doing everything. Keep the books, deal—he had some help. Like I told you about the fellow that stayed couple of years. That fellow used to—see, we used to sweep and mop the place about five times a day, the whole gang of 'em. So with all that dust coming in, every floor, the store, was slick, because they're sweeping or mopping. The sidewalk too you know.

MK: So then with cleaning to do, your father did the books, the bookkeeping.

HK: Yeah, he used to do his own.

MK: He did the buying of the . . .

HK: Everything, yeah.

MK: Everything. The pricing.

HK: Right, right.

MK: And how about advertising, was there advertising . . .

HK: He used to go on the radio. He used to go on the Japanese[-language] radio. And that was about it. Newspaper advertising practically nil.

MK: So he didn't do a kōkoku in the Japanese[-language] newspaper.
HK: No. Very seldom. It was mostly radio. By the early [19]30s, they had Japanese---KGU, I think, was already running that. So he took advantage of that very early. There was not much point in advertising in the English papers because our so-called Haole customers, they either knew us or they were soldiers and sailors or merchant marines. They weren't local.

MK: But how did the soldiers and military men know where your shop was located?

HK: As they come out, there's a line of stores so they, you know, they just have to pass and look at the sign and that's it, you see.

MK: So if you folks were catering to a lot of the military, would you have a repeat customer trade then, or was it one time?

HK: Mostly one time. I mean, because they're not here long. The merchant marines, not them, they would keep on coming back, see. So we, lot of them became personal friends, as long as they working on the ships. Just like the domestics become friends.

MK: And so, what, so you became friends with these people. Was there a place in the store where they could just kind of sit down and gather?

HK: Right, in the back we had chairs and stuff so they come in, sit down and chat. So it was never that busy, you know, let's put it that way. Especially during the so-called regular hours. There weren't that many people around. Half the time the store guys are at each other's store talking stories.

(Laughter)

MK: And so, what, so you became friends with these people. Was there a place in the store where they could just kind of sit down and gather?

HK: Right, in the back we had chairs and stuff so they come in, sit down and chat. So it was never that busy, you know, let's put it that way. Especially during the so-called regular hours. There weren't that many people around. Half the time the store guys are at each other's store talking stories.

(Laughter)

HK: That's right. Oh yeah.

MK: So in those days, who were your dad's good friends.

HK: The whole gang, right down the line. The only one that was kind of aloof from the bunch was Akahoshi, because the man who was originally running it ran into some financial problem, and he never came out of it. He lived in Pālama. And the pharmacist took over, but this was just before the war. So and the people working there were good friends, in fact, I still see one of them. But in their cases, it was because they were the only fountain left, see, before the war. So everybody stopped by for a soda or something. Otherwise, it was a pretty close-knit group of store owners.

MK: And it wasn't so busy that you weren't constantly working. You could go . . .

HK: That's right. Oh yeah.

MK: . . . and visit the other stores. And, you know, I heard from Mrs. [Sumiko] Yanagisako [of I. Matsuda, Ltd.] that sometimes when Aloha Curio would be kind of busy, she would go help, or other girls in 'A'ala Rengō used to come and help. What did they do and how often would it occur?

HK: That was very rare, when the fleet's in. Then thousands would come pouring into town, see. So that's the kind of time, you can't have thirty, forty sailors all over the store, you know. But that happened oh, once a year, for a week or so see. During the short period---now, '31, '32,
they didn’t come in because we had that crazy Massie incident [which began with Thalia Massie accusing five local men of rape]. And so the Navy went to Lahaina, the whole fleet went to Lahaina. So my dad and my aunt and the other lady like that was working. The three of ’em packed up all the stuff and opened up a shop in Nakamura Hotel in Lahaina, and stayed for a week over there. They did that two or three years, I think, because the maneuvers, 100,000 men coming in on the ships. So instead of going to Pearl Harbor, they all went to Lahaina. They didn’t want to have any problems with the local crowds, see so. But it was kind of a—what’s the word for it now—windfall for my, you know, our store, because all we had to do is pack everything and take it to Lahaina by boat. I was still only about eighth grade or ninth grade at the time.

MK: And, you know, when you had so many military and all these men coming in to buy things, I heard that you had a specialty, a certain type of lei that Aloha Curio used to sell.

HK: Yeah. The silk lei was the one that we really sold a lot, you know. ’Cause we were making most of it ourselves.

MK: So who was making it?

HK: That lady I was talking about.

MK: Mrs. [Chiyono] Ogata?

HK: Yeah. So she taught them and one year she was just making that for one year. (Chuckles)

MK: So like all year long?

HK: And much later, we farmed it out finally. In fact, at the very end, the last time I purchased it, it was Wahiāwā. The other lady that used to—went from us to domestic, when she got married—she used to live at Kuakini, you see—she used to make it. This is just before the war [World War II], during the war. So we had two sources at the time. Then when it got real busy, I used to go to Wahiāwā, pick it up from—there was a curio store in Wahiawā where the man would—the couple, they have nothing to do in the daytime because unless the boys come home, there’s no business. You know where that Kemo’o Farm is? Just near that place, there were two stores, curio shops. And they were making leis, so I would drive over and see that, you know, and let’s say, be willing to wholesale some. But oddly, that thing was very popular before the war for people traveling to Japan, and again after the war, for a short time. But mostly before the war and during the war.

MK: Who first started making and selling those leis?

HK: I don’t really know. But we were one of the first. And the yardage we were buying wholesale from—a—rayon, single-color fabrics—mostly from Wakefield [Sons and Co.]. There was a wholesaler named Wakefield, and also from American Factors [Ltd.].

MK: How much did one of those silk leis cost?

HK: Those days was about, originally about dollar. Dollar, could have gone to dollar and a quarter [$1.25], I think.
MK: And who were the people that used to buy those leis?

HK: Mostly Japanese, or people traveling buy, too. The only odd one was Moncado [i.e., Filipino Federation of America]. Moncado is a local group [i.e., Filipino religious movement], they would come in and say, no they don’t want that skimpy one, they want one that fat and five feet long. I said, “What are you gonna do put ’em on the horse?”

They say, “No, the great master [Hilario Camino Moncado] coming.” (MK laughs.)

That cost thirty-five dollars.

(Laughter)

HK: That was about almost three inches thick. Oh, the guy was six-footer, around six-two, I think. The famous [Hilario Camino] Moncado. You know, the one they have the bearded vegetarians. So I used to kid this guy, “Gee, all you people are vegetarians and then your head man, he look—he stays at Royal Hawaiian [Hotel], he’s eating steak all the time.”

He said, “No, no. He’s different. He’s just like god, so he can do anything.”

(Laughter)

HK: But it was funny. Used to get one headquarters right here in that Watumull Building. And I used to stop by and deliver stuff, you know. Very nice people, the group, and like most religious people, you know. (Chuckles)

MK: So you had the Moncados ordering a special lei.

HK: The real odd one, that’s about it.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: You know, you were mentioning that the Japanese would buy some of those leis. Was that primarily for their relatives going back to Japan or . . .

HK: Yeah, when traveling. And even during the war, they were giving it to boys [i.e., soldiers] shipping out. So you watch those old pictures, you see lot of ’em with silk leis on.

MK: How many other shops in town were there where . . .

HK: Selling it?

MK: . . . they could get silk leis?

HK: During the war, quite a number. Most of the curio shops had it already. I don’t know, maybe we sold the most but, because we had manufactured our own, see. But there were other people
making it and selling it to the stores, and then when we’re short, we used to buy also from. . . .

MK: Was there a tradition of giving that type of lei . . .

HK: Any kind of lei.

MK: . . . at graduations, too?

HK: Oh yeah, graduation, schools, you know. And I guess they figure, well, it’s a little bit more permanent than flower leis, so you know.

MK: Were there other things that Aloha Curio was noted for and manufactured?

HK: Outside of that, not too many things. The woodwork that I talked about, ours was almost as extensive as Koa House over here. They were the famous one, Koa House. There was a shop called the Koa House in town. The same supplier, see so. (Chuckles) And then, the [local family that used to go to Sāmoa] I don’t know how we had a [exclusive] on them, but maybe because we took all, you know, whole stack of tapa cloth. So we were never short of it. Like, I remember talking to, I think was the oldest one, I said, “You bring all this here.”

He says, “Well, we gotta get the tuition somehow.” Although he probably had a sports scholarship too. But very funny, you know, one would graduate, next one would come in. For about ten years we had that.

MK: You had a constant supply of those tapa mats.

HK: Tapa mats.

MK: And then what happened when the last one graduated?

HK: And then we didn’t get any after that. It’s expensive today, you know, tapa. And once in a while they would bring in kava bowls, hand-carved, huge bowls. But that, they cannot bring in too many, you see so. They coming by boat. But tapa cloth, they have the big roll, about that thick, couple of hundred of ‘em at a time, see.

MK: And who would buy the tapa cloth?

HK: All the people that are looking for souvenirs. We had it hanging all over the store.

MK: You mean they were huge?

HK: About four feet by four feet. The real ones are bigger, and we used to use it for mats on the floor, see so. But these were very few, you know, four by five, I think about. It’s a good size. ‘Ukuleles, we used to sell a lot of Kamaka ‘ukuleles. In fact, one time, old man Kamaka had a hard time, and he got overloaded with inventory, so one day he comes in he says—this was, I think was in ('40 or) '41—he says, “Eh, I got about 200 ‘ukuleles, I gotta get rid of ‘em.”

So I said, “Well, what do you want to sell it for?”
Regular price, [three dollars], wholesale. He said, “Well, how about dollar-half [$1.50]?"

I said, “Bring ’em on.”

For about a year and a half, the place was loaded with ‘ukulele.

(Laughter)

HK: That was a time when Martin ‘ukuleles was about eighteen, twenty dollars. And Kamaka ‘ukuleles were four or five dollars. Today a Martin ‘ukulele goes for about $700. And Kamaka sells for $150, $200. Japan ‘ukulele, about forty dollars. But talking about crazy items, that’s about it, I think.

MK: Were there any other local craftsmen that . . .

HK: Made ‘ukuleles?

MK: . . . you bought from?

HK: Not that many. The steady suppliers was like the ‘ukuleles, and then the tapa cloth comes in one time. And then the two koa craftsmen.

MK: And you know, you mentioned that the fleet really helped out the business.

HK: During the depression, because ’30, ’31, ’32, ’33, every year they came in [to the islands]. They weren’t doing that well. Dad used to say that we were preparing for war. That’s a whole fleet, you know. Talking about 100,000 men. So for us was a real—I mean, you know, I’m looking at the cash register, I said, “We cannot keep this up too long. We’re going broke.”

When the fleet comes in, well, for two weeks we clean up for the whole year, see. Between that and Christmas kept us alive, you know.

MK: Did you know, every year, about when the fleet would come?

HK: They would come in February, March. Oh yeah, they would announce way ahead of time. And as long as they come here, we know that we get part of the business, you know.

MK: Did you folks ever have any ties with higher-ups in the military . . .

HK: No, no.

MK: . . . who could tell you?

HK: No. Because in our case, the higher-ups had no control over anything. The ones that made money on that is the food suppliers. They have connection with the commissary, they got it made, like Chun Hoon [Limited], the large food supplier. All they need is one or two military purchases. So with us, it was just the men, yeah. And largely, ordinary sailors, not officers. Officers were going directly to Waikīkī those days. And then, Waikīkī tourists, there weren’t that many in those days. But they used to drop by once in a while. And that Kahanamoku,
Sargent Kahanamoku [brother of Duke Kahanamoku, Olympic swimmer] and his younger brothers, they would escort a couple of actresses, go to Iwilei, look at the pineapple factory, stop by on their way back. But they weren't big purchasers, let's put it that way, you know.

MK: Did you folks have, you know, friendships with beach boys who could bring Waikiki tourists over to your place?

HK: They never had to do that. And when you think of it, tourism in those days was just the Matson liners, you know. They come in Monday, bring in a batch, and afternoon they take home the one that came in the previous Friday, one-week stay. So tourism was really nothing those days.

MK: So you really relied on the military then.

HK: Yeah, yeah.

MK: Military and the merchant marines.

HK: Military was the main, let's say, source. Although everyone had PXs, but like I told you, these boys are so anxious to get out of there, you see. I told 'em, "We got the same stuff."

But they say, "Never mind back there." (Chuckles) They want out. They want to head for the bars.

MK: How about Japanese military, in those days, did they come in and . . .

HK: The Japanese training squadrons used to come in, but they didn't have any money. But in their case, we used to do business sometimes with the higher-ups, especially if Prince so-and-so comes in, he wanted something fancy. And we have it made, canoes made of koa. It would cost him $75, $100, or model car. They're the only ones who would buy those things. And all this just before the war, in the 1930s, at least three or four sets of Japanese princes on the ships, as students.

MK: And so you would get the order, say, from the Japanese consulate?

HK: I don't know who the contact really was, but I think it was the consulate. They would come in and think of---but the souvenir became standard, the koa canoe, about this big anyway, which we can get a pretty good price.

MK: And that same man would make it?

HK: Yeah. Just say, "One more," and then he would put it together. We always had a sample in the store, the one that we don't sell to anybody. Normally the ordinary customer, not going to sell them that—just name the price and they say, "Forget it." (Chuckles)

But we always have it there. And it doesn't take the man that long to make one, see. One-week notice and he comes through. That connection, I always thought it was—we knew who was making it, so, you know.
MK: In those days, I noticed with some of the other Japanese families at ‘A’ala Rengō, the fathers were very active in the Japanese Chamber of Commerce, and . . .

HK: Like [Taketo] Iwahara [of Iwahara Shōten]. Awamura-san [Tokuyoshi Awamura of Heiwa-Do] was young at that time, see so. And then, Mr. [Kanji] Maeda [of Amaguri Taro], I don’t think put too much time. But anybody that did that and go to ryōjikan all got pulled in.

MK: But how about your dad?

HK: He didn’t. He didn’t go.

MK: Was he active in any . . .

HK: He never got active. Partly, he didn’t have the time for it, let’s put it that way. And Mr. [Risuke] Komeiji never did too. He just avoided. He’s the kind—he wasn’t outgoing type anyway, so. So he didn’t get pulled in. Mr. Iwahara got pulled in. Mr. Morikubo got pulled in. No, Mr. Morikubo did not get pulled in, he’s a World War I veteran. He had that soldier’s bonus. You know, they sign up for World War I. In fact, I think he got his citizenship that way, as a veteran. But he did get that $3,000 bonus though. (MK chuckles.)

HK: And the next block were people from Japan, so most of ‘em got pulled in. I don’t know, it’s. . . .

MK: But your dad was not too active . . .

HK: No, wasn’t that active.

MK: . . . in the merchants’ association. And I know that from---let’s see, you attended local elementary schools, yeah. Which ones did you go to?

HK: Ka’iulani [School].

MK: Ka’iulani.

HK: And then, well, one year I spent at He’eia, you know, going back around early [19]20s. And I guess, at that time, the old man felt, ahh, the little kids hanging around this kind of place. And somebody, the Japanese teacher over there, school, says, “How about sending the kids over?” So we spent a year over there, three of us, my cousin, my brother, and myself spent one year at that He’eia School. So my brother went one year to—I forget the name of that. Gad, it was a---in Kane‘ohe town there’s an elementary school there, so he went over there. We stayed at the Japanese school which had one grade of so-called English school, first grade. Then after that, Central [Intermediate School].

MK: So, He’eia—you went one year in He’eia. You went to Ka’iulani.

HK: Ka’iulani for five years.

MK: Five years, then Central.
HK: Central. Then Japanese school was, you know, same. I was at Pālama [Gakuen] until third grade. Then fourth grade, I moved to Fort [Gakuen]. And then at Hawai‘i Chūgakkō after that.

MK: And then you went to Chuo Gakuen.

HK: No, I went Chūgakkō, Hongwanji one. I went to Hawai‘i Chūgakkō.

MK: And how many years of Japanese-language school did you go to?

HK: Three years.

MK: Three years over there.

HK: Yeah, I started off ichi no ichi, ni no ni, san no san. The best kids are in the first one, ichi no ichi. Then ni no ni, that's the second group. San no san is the real lousy students.

(Laughter)

MK: Then you were in the san no san.

HK: Yeah, the final year I went into the bottom. I tell, "Eh—" and they put this rank. They said, "What's your number?"

I said, "I think I'm number seventy-nine out of eighty-two guys."

(Laughter)

MK: But then, you're the one that went to Japan?

HK: Yeah, right after that I went to Japan.

MK: You were in Japan from 1933 to...

HK: To '37.

MK: ... 1937. Now, why is it that you went to Japan?

HK: Oh, yeah, my father almost keel over when I told him I'm going. He didn't know that I was reading a lot, you see. So I told him, oh, you know, my uncle finished at Boeing Air School, he couldn't get any job, Mainland or over here, in aviation side. They just won't hire. He had a mechanic's license, you know. Pilot, is just only—what they call? They used to call that transport pilot. Yeah, he spent a lot of money in two-and-a-half years, but no jobs. And partly because of—and our gang was interested in flying, see so. So I told my father, "I think I better go Japan." That was the only chance to be pilot is in Japan, yeah. And then he almost fainted. (Chuckles)

MK: So because you wanted to become a pilot?

HK: Yeah. And my aunt just sold the store and pulled out, so I went with them, my cousin and
MK: So where in Japan did you go?

HK: Hiroshima.

MK: Hiroshima-ken?

HK: Yeah. And then, to get into school, they were going to put me in the second year of chūgakkō over there. But then, the guy said, “Wait, try do this.” And the darndest thing is, those days, at for instance, at Central, in the seventh grade, it was already elective, you didn’t have to take math, you know. So naturally, if you ask a lazy kid, he going say, “Oh, music, art, physical ed,” all the kind don’t-have-to-do-anything kind of courses. You know, all the math is out. Eighth grade and ninth grade, I took mechanical drawing, but no math. So naturally, the guy ask me a simple, you know, arithmetic question, I couldn’t make heads or tails out of the darn thing.

So the Japan teacher said, “I think you better start from first grade [year of junior high].” (Chuckles)

But I learned a lesson in Japan. The Japan kids—and this is a second-rate private school now. Little more than half of the time was studying English, which they never learned the right way. So I was thinking, gee whiz, these kids put all the time in English and if they’re willing to go that far, might as well study like hell too.

(Laughter)

HK: Since I don’t have to study their kind of English, you know. So from san-no-san, at that school, Japan school, I hit the top within eight months for almost four years.

In the meantime, my father, he sends a telegram saying come home. That’s why I came home.

MK: How come he wanted you to come home, though, instead of going through with your plans?

HK: Well, they made it sound like some kind of emergency, see so. Didn’t say why, said something to discuss so come home. And my uncle said, “You gotta---let’s go school today and tell ’em you better go already.”

I was on the boat within four days. I went to school, the term wasn’t over yet. So by July 2, July 1, I was in Tokyo. July—no, June 30, and July 2 I was on the boat.

MK: Why is it that your dad wanted you to come back so soon?

HK: My father is anti-military, see. Was, I mean. He just didn’t like military, period. But I didn’t know what was the reason, you see.

MK: Was he worried about the Japanese military building up more and more . . .

HK: Yeah, partly that.
MK: ... and worried about war?

HK: Yeah, partly that. Yeah, he didn’t think that I should be involved in flying, which always comes back to, you never turn out the way you wanted. But anyway.

MK: You know, in those days, you had dual citizenship, right?

HK: Yeah.

MK: Were you also kind of a possible draft?

HK: Over here or in Japan?

MK: Yeah, in Japan.

HK: Yeah, if I’d stayed there, yeah. In fact, lot of our nisei rushed home to avoid that, see, when they hit—they were calling ’em in about nineteen and a half, twenty, you see. So they would come home before that.

(Chuckles) Then over here, I flunk all the exams. I couldn’t get in. I flunked all the physicals.

MK: So when you came back, what happened to you? You came back from Japan.

HK: Yeah, so I was drifting for a couple of years and then ...

MK: Did you go back to school?

HK: No, no. Well, that was a mistake I made. I should have asked the guys, “Is there a scholarship where I can get in by exam?” But all I asked them was, at ‘Iolani [School], I used to go every morning for one semester. I told ’em, “Look, I’ve had all this already. Why can’t you let me take the exam and then give me the credit for it so I can move up?”

They said, “We don’t have that system.” That’s the only answer they gave me. But later on I found out that the University of Chicago was taking people by exams, the German kids, eh.

So like at ‘Iolani, the reason I quit was I was sleeping over there, three hours every day. One guy told me, “Go to sleep, you can take a nap. I’ll wake you up from time to time.”

And so from time to time, he wakes me up, he says, “Explain that,” he says. Real crazy.

And then, algebra, geometry—I had this four years ago, and you’re telling me go take this. This is real silly, I think. Japan is way ahead, see, on that. When I left Japan, we were doing what they call college analytical geometry, that kind of stuff, see. Trigonometry we had the year before that. So, here, the guy just showing me the first year algebra (chuckles).

But that was a mistake, I should have asked whether any school on the Mainland would take my exam. The only thing, I would have to catch up—even English, on the reading side I had no problem. I was reading all the books my cousin had. The only one I didn’t like was Shakespeare because it’s written in play styles. But all the others, Arabian Nights, Boccaccio’s
*Decameron*, and then one more well-known, *Casanova*, he had all those ones. Plus Harvard—not Harvard, but that British school. English usage. He had a pretty good library, and I was going through the whole darn thing, see, in Japan. So I figured, if I take an exam here, no problem. But they just didn’t have the system.

MK: So you came back, went to ‘Iolani for a while.

HK: And I went to MPI [Mid-Pacific Institute] for a while.

MK: Mid-Pac [i.e., Mid-Pacific Institute].

HK: Same thing over there. But they were nice, they tell, “You can sleep.”

So every day, I was sleeping three, four hours in the room. You know, the math, chemistry. MPI didn’t have physics. And then we have one hour of reading. Lot of this—-I was sleeping five hours a day over there, about five hours. (Chuckles) Big comedy anyway. So nighttime I was going to Galusha [School of Business Training], bookkeeping school. That was duck soup too. Anybody with algebra background can do bookkeeping easy, you see. But it’s . . .

MK: So when you came back . . .

HK: Well, that’s the thing about missed opportunities or. . . .

MK: A lack of counseling, maybe, on the part of the schools, you know.

HK: Yeah, they never bothered to check out, you know, besides saying it can’t be done. But what I couldn’t understand, they agree, say, “Yeah, no point in staying up, sleep.”

So the guy in the back poking me, say, “Eh, the teacher calling you.” (Chuckles)

That happened at ‘Iolani. The guy tapping me from the back, so told ’em, “What happened?”

[The guy] said, “Go up there and do the problem.” (Chuckles) Geometry.

So I go up and see, you know, our system is different. You gotta put down the theorems right next to it. They said, “Oh yeah,” and they just scribble all that. (Chuckles)

That kind of translation easy for me, so. You know, that’s a real comedy, yeah, that.

MK: So after that, when, you know, your school career kind of ended with ‘Iolani and Mid-Pac, what did you do?

HK: Then after that, I drifted around. I was on Maui for about nine months, working plantation, working what they call fiberboard plant. And then I came home in ’39. And then, back to the store.

MK: And by ’39, was the store very different from before?

HK: Not much different. You know, it was strictly curio shop at that time, so you know.
MK: And your dad was still running it?

HK: Yeah. So—but military spending was really moving, you see. See, we had the USCD [United States Civilian Defense] so we got, oh, thousands of Mainland boys—what we call war workers, working in the navy yard. So they were the souvenir buyers, you see. So business started to pick up in '39, '40 already. And by '40 was busy. We had thousands of 'em here. And then, of course, our local boys were all doing well too. But they weren’t, they’re not souvenir buyers, you know. I hear stories where the Japanese[-language] schoolteacher quit and became carpenter.

(Laughter)

HK: So Iwahara [Shōten] was booming. You know that Iwahara hardware store. See, say, “How much one kit cost?”

He say, “Oh, sixty bucks for the contents.”

“You know how to use this?”

“No, I’m going to learn from now.”

And they were selling hundreds of kits like that. They were so busy, it wasn’t even funny. And we were getting the war workers’ trade, not to mention increasing military personnel too. This is just before the war, '40, '41. It was a tremendous build-up, see, at that point of time.

MK: So Iwahara was doing well because of that build-up?

HK: Yeah.

MK: You folks were doing well.

HK: Yeah, from selling souvenirs.

MK: How about the other businesses?

HK: And then, because the total local business was up, everybody was doing well at that point. The shoe store, you know, jewelry store, of course, you know. They buy better and better things when they get married like that, see. Because the general prosperity was up, see. Like Hawai‘i Importing [Company], Okamoto’s place, when they have sale, that place was jam-packed with people, meaning there was a lot of money at home for these people to buy. And you know how they are, females are. They get the whole tansu full of material and you wonder when they’re gonna use it. Just like, to them, it’s like collecting things. Those days I used to kid them, I said, “Why they need so much material for?”

Said, “Partly, they want to look at it, so they keep 'em in the drawers.”

MK: So in '40, business is good, living ...

HK: Yeah. From around 1940 on, largely because of the military build-up, business was, I would
say it was booming already at that point, you know.

MK: And then, when did you start taking over the store?

HK: By '41 I was doing practically everything.

MK: Before the war started?

HK: Yeah. And then, my brother got drafted in '40. They missed me by mistake, until late '41, see, the draft. Nothing but comedy of errors, you know. All of my friends get called, and I think, what's going on? Everybody in my group got called already. Finally I went to the draft board. They had me misfiled. There was another guy, same name, and they had me under 3-A. Three-A is married with children. So the girl over there tell, "Naturally, you're married with kids. We don't need you."

I said, "Wait a minute, I'm not married."

They double check, they say, "Oh, that's the wrong Kawano." The guy is living in Waipahu.

So two weeks after that, then I got called, you know. And then I flunked—also by mistake again. The x-ray was so bad, they couldn't find my x-ray. So on the way home, with my gang, you know, the Palama boys. I says, "Where you guys going?"

They said, oh, they gotta go back for retaking. I said, "Oh yeah, they didn't tell me to do that."

But I was already classified 1-A. The other two guys, both of 'em died. They were reclassified 1-A, because the picture came out all right, the x-ray. That was the third draft already, see. Then I got a call—I thought I was going in too—I got a call saying recheck. I go down, they say, "We found your x-ray and, no, it's no good."

If they found it on the day that they were supposed to find it, I would have gone recheck with those boys—I mean retake. I look at the thing, I say, "Oh, chee, maybe I should see the doctors."

He says, "Well, if you careful, no need put it on," he tells me. And they changed it to 4-F, that's how I flunked that.

And 442[nd Regimental Combat Team] time, the other one, the guy says, "You look all right, but you had operation one year ago, we don't need you."

I said, "What do you mean you don't need me?"

"We get too many guys already," he says. (Chuckles)

They got double of their quota. He says, "Why should we take a guy with one-year operation." You know, operation within a year. They said, "You out already." So they throw me back into 4-F again.
MK: You know, with your knowledge of Japanese, being in Japan and . . .

HK: Yeah, they called me for . . .

MK: . . . did they call you for anything?

HK: The navy called me. We got called at [Alexander] Young Hotel. So first---the guy is talking to me in Japanese, you know, in excellent Japanese. I can tell he was either a missionary or a teacher in Japan. He's not foreign-learned Japanese, Japan-learned Japanese. So I told him, "Yeah, this is good. I'm more than willing to join the navy."

He tells me, "No, you're not going to join the navy," he tells me.

So I look at him, I said, "Oh, you're looking for Indian scouts, or what."

He caught on one time, you know. You know, he'd say I can't get in, I really couldn't get into the navy. You know what happened after that, they picked up from [Fort] Snelling [Minnesota], you know. They pick out boys in the army, interpreters, borrow them in the navy. Because Japanese-Americans couldn't become navy personnel, see, at that time. But, you know, I was kind of peeved, so, I mean, even in 1943, you make a crack like that, you get good chance of being hauled away, you see.

(Laughter)

HK: But I was just kidding, "You looking for Indian scouts?" (Chuckles)

He change color one time. I guess he felt bad, you know. 'Cause we were called on false pretenses. They were looking for volunteers. And I gotta assume it's navy, because it's the navy calling us. They said, "You'll get the equal treatment of . . . ."

(Laughter)

MK: And that was the end of that, then.

HK: Yes. Completely out of the military. Our family, only my brother went and he died early. And he's the one that was anti-military. He got flunked, thrown out of the Japan school one week before graduation because he cut class one time, so-called kyōren, which is Japanese military training. For cutting class, they bumped him.

MK: And he was the one that was taken.

HK: See in the Japanese school in those days, military training, satisfactory/unsatisfactory, that's all they have. If they put down unsatisfactory, you can never get into a first-class college. In fact, you can't even graduate if you pull a trick like cutting class. (Chuckles) So then, he got caught, he got in the first draft and he didn't last too long.

MK: And that was the American draft.

HK: No, in Japan he got fired from school for cutting class over there, just a week or so before
graduation too. So much for . . .

MK: So you took over from '41, then, yeah?

HK: Yeah.

MK: You know, I’m going to . . .

HK: Actually, see, already, immediately after the war, the whole area deteriorated, mainly because everybody was buying cars and moving away, eh. So the business just went—started to go downhill. So by '46, I made up my mind that I better get out of there and do something else.

I think Sato [Clothiers] was one of the first ones to leave the area. They went to Bethel and King Street. There used to be a market over there, yeah. They converted it to a clothing store. Then of course they opened up another branch here, Pauahi and Fort Street. But I think the best move they made was to move to Ala Moana [Center]. Although even that now, you know—the clothing business is a tough game, you know. The inventory is something fierce. I don’t know whether the next generation wants to take that kind of risks.

MK: It’s hard, yeah.

HK: Tie up so much money, and the danger of going wrong. And Bob doesn’t have any boys. Barney has. Barney’s son was supposed to take over, but apparently—he left, I think. He’s in the clothing business, but I guess he figured too much responsibility, you know.

MK: I think what I’ll do today is, you know, I’ll stop here and then I want to come back one more time and ask you about '41 on, you know, your taking over the business, the wartime situation, and then, what eventually happened to your store.

END OF INTERVIEW