ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Richard Kosaki (RK)

Mānoa, O'ahu

June 20, 2000

BY: Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Dr. Richard Kosaki on June 20, 2000 and we're at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. The interviewers are Michi Kodama-Nishimoto and Warren Nishimoto.

MK: ... Waikīkī School, then we'll go on to Washington [Intermediate School], then McKinley [High School]. And when we get to McKinley, we'll be talking about the core programs, teachers, your classmates, your extracurricular activities, the start of World War II, the war's impact on students there. Then we'll also get into Japanese-language school that you attended. And then your thoughts on your education up to that point. So, we'll start from Waikīkī School and we'll see how far we can get.

RK: Okay.

MK: And, because you went to McKinley and you were there when Miles Cary was there, I thought we really wanted to take that opportunity to ask a lot of questions about your high school years.

RK: Okay.

MK: So anyway, shall we start then?

WN: Yeah, it's on.

MK: Okay, what elementary school did you attend?

RK: I attended Waikīkī School, which was then located on [Hamohamo Road] the other side of the block from where we lived. It's now called Kūhiō Avenue. It [bordered what] was then called Monsarrat, now I think it's called Kapahulu Avenue, it's been extended. So it's almost on the corner of Kūhiō and Kapahulu. It was a school in the middle of the block.

MK: And physically, what did the school look like?

RK: Oh, it was, as I said, in the middle of the block. It occupied about half the block. It was, typically in those days, I guess, you had classrooms on the borders, open space in the middle, a big flagpole on one side. We had a principal, Mrs. [Mabel] King, who loved
flowers, so we had a lot of flowers, especially pansies growing. And she'd spank us if we had to chase the ball and you had to go into her garden to get it, you might get spanked.

MK: (Chuckles) And I've heard stories about students in those days, having some sort of ceremony at the flagpole at Waikīkī School?

RK: Yeah. I don't know if it was daily but at least once a week, I think it was on Fridays. We had a drummer. We all assembled outside of our classroom and scattered about this middle field and, the drummer was under the shower tree. It was usually Keahi, who had good sense of rhythm, and he would play his marching drum beat, and we would all march around the flagpole. Each class would, as I recall, form sort of a triangle, so you know you had sort of a star shape around the flagpole. Must have looked nice from a helicopter.

(Laughter)

WN: But you never knew.

RK: I don't think there were helicopters then.

WN: This is every day?

RK: No, I think it was only on Fridays that we had the so-called assembly. They made announcements and we sang songs. We sang all kinds of songs. One of the interesting songs was, in the third grade or the fourth grade, we had to learn "Oh, Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean." And we never understood what it meant.

(Laughter)

Oh the flagpole, too, what I remember about the flagpole, Waikīkī (has) 95 percent sunny days, and when the cafeteria had this delicious poi lunch, we had pipi kaula. That's the real pipi kaula dried in the sun. And the best duty you could get—and we all did kitchen duty in the fifth and sixth grades in those days—and the best job you could get was when the pipi kaula was being sun dried around the flagpole. The flagpole had this huge circular concrete platform and they would lay the trays on the platform. The best job was to wave this coconut frond and you chase the flies away, and occasionally when no one is looking you slip a piece in your mouth.

(Laughter)

WN: So that was part of cafeteria duty?

RK: Yes.

MK: And then in those days, who were the students that attended Waikīkī School?

RK: You know we weren't conscious of it. I wasn't that conscious of race at that time, especially as I said, I lived in Waikīkī which is a very mixed neighborhood to begin with. The kids were very mixed. Someone showed me our sixth-grade picture the other day, and they were the Orientals, the Japanese and the Chinese, but there were quite a bit of Hawaiians, like the Kanekoa brothers, and there were the Portuguese. There were others, so it was mixed group.
Our teachers were interesting. I thought I had a good education. I loved going to school. I had Mrs. Holt in the first grade, Mrs. Apo in the second grade. Mrs. Holt was mostly Hawaiian. Mrs. Apo was Chinese-Hawaiian. I had Miss Rodenhurst in the third grade. She was *Haole*. She taught me fractions. In a sense Miss Rodenhurst saved my life. That time we could go home for lunch on occasion and after lunch you had to sleep on your mat and rest. I came walking in limping very badly, so Miss Rodenhurst said, “What’s wrong?” She looked at what I had in my foot and she said, “My goodness, this is bad, you’re getting blood poisoning,” she saw this streak running up my vein, so immediately sent me home, sent me to the doctor and the doctor operated on it, so I still remember that incident. We ran barefoot all over so it wasn’t unusual to get all kinds of things, *kiawe* tree or whatever, we get all these what we called pokes, and most of them heal on their own, but this one didn’t. That was Miss Rodenhurst. In the fourth grade I had Mrs. Grote. I think she was---yeah, she’s *Haole*.

WN: Grote?

RK: Grote, Mrs. Grote, G-R-O-T-E. I think she had her husband or some of her family had this restaurant or something in Kailua, Kāneʻohe, where Don Ho got started.

WN: Oh yeah. Well, there’s a Grote Road right there.

RK: Okay, Mrs. Grote, we remember her, we used to all watch when her husband dropped her off because they always kissed.

(Laughter)

Then I had Mrs. [Emma] Kaawakauo, a Hawaiian for the fifth grade. She was a very kind person, beautiful singing voice, we sang a lot in her class. And the sixth grade, I had Mrs. Lam, Chinese, she was the wife of Lam who owned a series of service stations, gas stations, Eddie Lam.

WN: Eddie Lam.

RK: Eddie Lam, very nice person. She emphasized math. So every Friday when the cafeteria had desserts, you could buy a candy bar or ice cream for five cents. Just before lunch she would give a quiz, a math quiz and anyone who got a 100 got a nickel from her. We looked forward to that. She was very generous, very nice. In fact, years and years later, Mrs. Lam also owned Golden Duck Restaurant, used to be in McCully. So years later, I don’t know, I was already teaching at the university but I’d go there occasionally to pick up food. Lo and behold, once when I went, she was there. She looked at me and recognized me, even then, ‘cause I recognized her. So we had a nice chat, and also she said, “He doesn’t pay.”

(Laughter)

So as you can see, I enjoyed my grammar school and I had good teachers.

MK: And all through those years, you never had a Japanese teacher though? They were either part-Hawaiian, Chinese or *Haole*.

RK: Yes. A year or two after I left, Miss or Mrs. Akahoshi came and there was sort of significant. Everyone say, “Hey, they got a Japanese teacher now.” She was the first that
I know of. But she came after I left Waikiki School. When was I? I guess I was there from 1930 to ’36, I guess.

MK: And in those days what was the style of teaching of these teachers?

RK: I think most of them—we didn’t know, we didn’t care then—I guess they were the so-called normal school graduates. But I found them all to be competent enough and they had their different strengths, some in math and some in English. But I found them all to be compassionate, caring. I had good teachers. I think we had two or three levels for each class so I don’t know how the other teachers were, but the teachers I had were very good.

WN: What about in terms of discipline? Did they vary?

RK: Yes, they varied. In those days they allowed spanking. Some were more likely to. Although the reputation was held by somebody else, another teacher I never had, who constantly carried a yardstick with her. But on the whole, I think we look back, we think we were well behaved. On the whole, I don’t think we caused any problems.

WN: I was remembering too, you grew up in Waikiki and the beach was right there and it’s near the school, was there a temptation for you at times?

RK: Not at all. We knew that when we’re going to school, we go to school. Summertime we could go to the beach. So not really. Especially as, you know, we went to English school from whatever it was, eight o’clock to one thirty or two, and then from about three to five, we went to [Japanese-]language school. I went to Waikiki [Japanese-]Language School, which was located in Kapahulu. It’s still there.

WN: Right, Campbell Avenue?

RK: On Campbell Avenue, yeah. It was run by Mr. [Shichiro] Watanabe.

MK: In those days, a lot of nisei interviewees that we’ve talked to would tell us about the emphasis placed on learning English and learning American history. What was it like for you at Waikiki?

RK: I don’t know if there was any special emphasis. It’s an English school. So you devoted yourself to whatever they were teaching, of course, which is in English. When I look back, it had a lot of Hawaiiana in it. One of the things, nostalgia, but I look back, I said, “I wish I could get a copy of that green songbook that we had,” with all these songs about Hawai’i. I think must have been published or produced—anyway the contents were produced locally. I don’t think we have that now. Singing about the pineapple fields, about the lazy mullet, and all that sort of thing. And of course Lei Day was big in those days, too.

MK: How was Lei Day celebrated at Waikiki?

RK: The usual. That tradition it used to be continued, as I understand it, mostly in the elementary schools today. But we had the usual. Everybody was required to wear flower leis, and we boys didn’t care for it. So, our favorite lei was what we call that bozu plant, that little hard flower that doesn’t smell.

WN: What do you call them?
RK: *Bozu.*

WN: *Bozu?*

RK: You know which one? What do you call it?

MK: It's purple.

RK: Yeah.

MK: And it's shaped like a ball, and it dries well.

WN: Is that a Hawaiian word or a Japanese word?

RK: Japanese word.

WN: *Bozu?*

MK: Here's a *bozu.* (MK points to a dried *bozu lei.*)

RK: Yeah, that's a *bozu.* It comes in different shades of purple, and it's small, it doesn't smell. That's what we boys like to wear. We didn't want to wear plumeria especially. It smelled and it looked so feminine. But we were all required to wear *leis.* Crown flower would be the other possibility for boys. Something that's not so flowery and doesn't smell as much.

But in Waikiki School because even then we had tourists in the hotels, although we only had the Moana, the Royal Hawaiian, the Halekulani, the three major hotels, and the Seaside bungalows and so on, (and) Niumalu. I think the schools sent out invitations for the tourists to come, too. So we occasionally had crowds of tourists or small groups of tourists come to see our program, which was, as I recall, mainly singing songs and some girls dancing the *hula.*

MK: And in those days, did you enjoy performing?

RK: Well, boys on the whole, didn't have to perform in those days. We were just a backdrop. We had to sing some songs.

(Laughter)

MK: And then you mentioned Waikīkī Japanese-language school. From what years did you attend that school?

RK: From first grade to sixth grade.

MK: And who were the teachers there? I know you had Shichiro Watanabe.

RK: He was the principal. I don't remember the teachers at that school. I can see some of their faces now. The women teachers usually were pretty docile and nice. Some of the men teachers tried to be very macho. The problem is, I don't think most of us took it seriously. What we enjoyed most was going there and playing games. There was always a baseball game going on in the front. When I look, I say, "Gee, the place is so small, how could we have played?" But we were small, too. It served the Waikīkī-Kapahulu Japanese community. It wasn't large, it was good.
We gave our Japanese-school teachers, I’m sorry I can’t remember their real names, we
gave them bad nicknames. Like we called one of the female teachers, “Pie face,” because
she was so white and sort of round, always well powdered. (Chuckles) And we called
another guy, who was a burly guy, we called him, “Ape man.”

(Laughter)

RK:  But I don’t think we were malicious about it. In fact in our neighborhood, almost
everyone had a nickname. Mine never stuck to me but we had awful nicknames for
people. In fact even today when I see some of them, sometimes I blurt out their, you
know. His name is Robert now, but sometimes I call him “Mango.”

(Laughter)

WN:  Now what type of a man was Mr. Watanabe?

RK:  We really didn’t get to know him too well, because he was the principal and he was sort
of the father figure. I don’t know if he taught any classes, but he had a presence. He was
in charge. We knew he was in charge. Although later on after the war, I think, he sold
insurance. I didn’t know his sons too well, but one of his sons, Saburo, was the closest in
age to me, I think. Later became a pretty well-known band teacher at, I think, Baldwin
High School. I’m surprised that the house they lived in, which was in the corner of the
school, is still there. The school, the basic structure, is still there. And even the bathroom
seems to be still there.

WN:  (Chuckles) I’m wondering what route did you take to get to the school?

RK:  Yeah, that was an interesting routine, especially in the early days. One of my pals was
Rusty Kawamura, who is now a contractor. And Rusty lived in Kapahulu on George
Street I think. Anyway, as soon as we were let out of Waikiki School, Rusty and I would
walk to our house which was only a block away, where I’d pick up my Japanese school
books, and whatever my Mom could feed us, usually crackers or buttered crackers or
something, doughnut or whatever, and we’d go over to his house which was about two,
three blocks from Waikiki School, and he’d pick up his Japanese school bag and
whatever his parents.... probably we needed a drink by that time, and then we’d go to
school.

On the way home, there were so many people I could walk home with. And we went up
which is now Kapahulu Avenue, I think it was called Monsarrat then, or Makee, we went
up and passed the Waikiki Fire Station, which is still there, and up that street. I don’t
know what it was called.

WN:  Le‘ahi?

RK:  It’s perpendicular to Le‘ahi. [Kaunaoa] or some Hawaiian name, then another, up to
Kapahulu Avenue. There were stores on several corners where you could buy crackseed
or whatever.

WN:  And what was Kapahulu like?

RK:  It wasn’t quite as busy as Waikiki, but there were few stores along the way. But it wasn’t
a busy place. There was a dairy there—what dairy was it? [Newfair Dairy at 467
Kapahulu Avenue.] There was a dairy there and a market. Oh, I remember a bakery because later on I bought something there and I got awfully sick.

(Laughter)

MK: Yeah, I think that area in Kapahulu, they did have a dairy.

RK: It was Hind-Clarke Dairy or something. We used to go there. When the season came to play milk covers, the game. Some of our friends were able to steal some new ones from the dairy.

WN: Now how would you compare Kapahulu with Waikiki in terms of population and socio-economic status or anything like that?

RK: I don’t know. Waikiki was more, even at that time, touristy. They didn’t go to Kapahulu, they stayed on Kalākaua Avenue pretty much and the hotels, and that made a difference and there were more stores. Kalākaua was a busier street. Kapahulu wasn’t that busy at all. It was like old Mānoa, I guess, with a few stores, without the shopping center. Of course, in my day later they built Kapahulu Theater, which really made it nice for us because we couldn’t always afford to go to Waikiki Theater, which was also built when I was growing. We used to watch the construction of Waikiki Theater.

MK: Going back to the Japanese-language school, what did you learn there?

RK: Well, they tried to teach us Japanese, so some of the. . . Of course we learned the A-I-U-E-O, some basic kanji, and so forth. And of course, we got a lot of the stories about Japan, Momotaro, Kintaro and all that. When I was in the first grade, they put on a play, Momotaro. I was Momotaro, which is okay except in the climax where we’re fighting the oni, the bad guys, we almost got licked. I think Frank Goto, my classmate, he was a head of the oni, and he was trying to trash us. I said, “Ey Kuni, you supposed to lose.”

(Laughter)

And the other thing, I remember, they had a lot of shūshin, which made an impression and that’s where you got stories of Ninomiya Kinjiro and so forth.

MK: What did you learn in shūshin? I’m curious, people always mention, “Oh, we had shūshin in the Japanese school.”

RK: Well, it was all these stories of faith and perseverance, all the Japanese so-called virtues, oyakōkō and all that sort of thing would be emphasized. Honesty, and that kind of thing.

MK: How did you react to that?

RK: I don’t know, we thought some of the stories were interesting. And, of course, our parents are constantly telling us, “You should study hard like Ninomiya Kinjiro.” He worked hard. They were poor and they didn’t have any lights. He had to study in winter by the reflection of the moon on the snow and catching fireflies in the summer.” (Chuckles) My recent visit to Los Angeles, Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, I was struck by the fact they have a huge statue of Ninomiya Kinjiro on one of the corners.

WN: Oh, is that right?
RK: Yeah. On some trips to Japan, I consciously tried to find—we had a little statue or
statuette of Ninomiya Kinjiro, I had a hard time locating one in Japan now, but you can
find it in Little Tokyo.

MK: It's interesting, when I've talked to nisei about shūshin, oftentimes they mention the same
story. "Oh, stories of Ninomiya Kinjiro," so I wanted to find out, did you, too, experience
that?

RK: Yeah, I sure did. But the shūshin books, by the way, were interesting in that, because they
had number of stories of our Japanese people like Nogi Taisho and so on, later on, but
they also had George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and other people. About a year ago,
in an old bookstore in Kona, I came across a locally published shūshin book. For the
grand sum of twenty-five cents. I bought it, because I have a friend from Japan who's
interested in this phase. I gave it to him, but I noticed that one-third of the stories were
about non-Japanese. And there was something by Benjamin Harrison, I don't know why
he's in there. Abraham Lincoln, of course, was there, Washington. That was a shūshin
book developed in Hawai‘i.

MK: And then in your time, were you students still celebrating, say, the emperor's birthday?

RK: Not that I know of. I mean they said it was the emperor's birthday but I don't recall any
special celebration for it.

MK: And, people always talk about the discipline at Japanese-language schools, what was it
like at Waikiki?

RK: It depended on the instructors. Some were much more strict than others. But generally
speaking, as I said, most of the kids were well behaved so there was no problem. If
anything, some of the kids were falling asleep in the afternoon, not being raucous or
anything. And it wasn't a long period, it's about an hour, we sit in our seats. I guess there
were two fifty-minute classes, something like that.

MK: And then, people also talk about the Japanese style of teaching being dependent on rote
memorization and repetition, how was it like for you?

RK: Yeah, they had a lot of that. Reading the textbooks together or something like that.

MK: Was it effective for you or?

RK: I don't know. Of course, you hear if the teacher—and most teachers were from Japan or
had been trained in Japan. Their Japanese was more the so-called pure Japanese because
we were told that the Hawai‘i Japanese became corrupted. It wasn't quite. . . . Of course,
it depends on—at that time, especially depends on where you came from because the
different prefectures had different [dialects]—especially from Kumamoto, you have a
different rhythm, and, you know, Kumamoto battan, which is different. Kyoto has a more
refined language, I'm told, and so forth. So you learn so-called standard Japanese.


RK: It was so-called standard which, I think, all Japan is becoming more of that because
although the language evolves so rapidly with television and everything now, things have
become more standard(ized).
MK: And then from your parents’ perspective, how important was Japanese-language school?

RK: All schools were important so, every night we did English homework and Japanese homework. Our parents could help us with our Japanese homework, not so much on English. We helped each other. I had an older sister who was very good and smart and she would help because she had some of the same classes before us.

MK: So was it your mother or father or both of them who helped?

RK: It was mainly my mother because my father worked at night. He was a waiter at the hotel, so he didn’t get home till maybe eight or nine o’clock, ten o’clock, at which time we’d go to bed.

MK: And, just before we leave your elementary school years, were there any things that were difficult for you, in terms of schooling?

RK: No, not especially. On the whole, as I said, I enjoyed going to school and seeing my friends.

MK: And then when you went to Washington Intermediate, how did you feel about changing school and becoming a junior high school student?

RK: Well, it was a change because I couldn’t walk to school, I had to take the bus or the streetcar at that time. Take the streetcar, later the trolley, to Washington so it’s a different ritual. And then you meet different people. That’s where I met a big person like Danny Inouye from McCully and [Fujio] “Fudge” Matsuda from Kaka‘ako. They were my classmates. We met at Washington Intermediate School. So here again, I made good friends. It was fun to see they had not really different lifestyles but I was amazed how Mō‘ili‘ili and McCully, to some extent, were so predominantly Japanese, which was not in Waikīkī.

MK: And, how were the teachers there at Washington?

RK: As I recall, we had a mixed bag, but we had some very good teachers. My seventh-grade teacher, homeroom teacher, was Mrs. Kauaihilo, a very pretty, beautiful woman, she was a beauty queen—McNamara, I think—married to Norman Kauaihilo, the celebrated football star at the University of Hawai‘i. One of the interesting things she did, I remember it vividly. One of the early sessions, she said, “Well, we have extra time. Oh, you know what? I’m going to teach you girls what football is about.” So she drew a football field. She says, “Now, boys, where do we kick off?” At that time was the forty-yard line. I thought this was good. She was saying to the girls, “Later on, you’ll have boyfriends, you’re going to get married and they’re going to watch football”—this is before football is on TV—“but it’d be interesting if you understood the game more.” She was a very good, kind teacher.

The curriculum was interesting, Washington Intermediate School, in those days. There was a lot of emphasis on the practical arts. The girls had to take homemaking. The boys, I took woodworking shop, which I don’t regret. I learned some use of power tools, which I didn’t acquire till much later, and how to use a T-square and the other instruments.

And then we had class in they call it agriculture, horticulture? We’re to collect butterflies, and the prize was the Kamemameha butterfly which we had to go up on Tantalus to catch. And then I have all these cigar boxes full of butterflies. Mr. Yoshioka was
agriculture. He was very good. We also learned how to do some grafting on trees and stuff, very practical but very good. And there was also a course on electricity, a class to which I seldom went, because the secretary at Washington Intermediate liked me and wanted me to work in her office. And she knew this shop teacher so she told Mr. Ney, "He doesn't have to go to class, does he?"

(Laughter)

MK: So you were doing student monitor work?

RK: Yeah, I was student help at Washington Intermediate. In the summer they gave me a job, my second year or third year, they gave me a summer job helping mimeograph things or whatever. It was a mimeograph, a hand-cranked machine, I did some typing, sorting of things, office help. So that was nice. I think Washington to me was very nice because I knew the office staff, the secretary, and the—gee, what was it? There were two people there, Mrs. Kidani and Mrs. Leong. But Mrs. Leong had a box of chocolates and she said, "Anytime you want, help yourself." So I had the run of the office, helping them out.

And in fact, I could read the principal, Mr. [F.A.] Clowes' writing better than they could. So they'd call me out of class, they'd pull this stunt. Oh, Mrs. Leong or something was also the disciplinary officer like a vice-principal, I guess, today. So she'd send a note to the class I'm in that I have to report. Sometimes as a joke she'd send a sort of a delinquency sort of thing. So the teacher, "What did you do?"

I'd go there and they said, "What's this word?"

I said, "Oh, let me see now. Oh that’s antique," or whatever the word was, then I go back to class.

(Laughter)

So, as you can see, I was really part of the... That's why I enjoyed school, too, because I felt so much a part of the school.

I must say, at Washington, I had some very poor math teachers. There was one person, she shouldn't have been assigned to our algebra class, she didn't know it at all. She was a physical education major. So she'd give us the book and walk out of class, so we had to teach ourselves, which some people did very well.

And we had a brilliant math teacher but he was not quite there most of the time. But I also had to take mechanical drawing. I think this was helpful to me, too, in terms of understanding architectural drawings now and you have to learn to print, which was helpful. Of course, we took typing, which was, of course, very helpful.

MK: How was, say, the science teaching?

RK: I was never heavily into science and, it was so-so, I think. I guess Mr. Yoshioka in agriculture, chasing butterflies, and looking at plants and all that sort of thing, was really applied science, in a sense. Besides that, we had quite a bit of English. One of the interesting things when I look back at Washington Intermediate School is, we had huge classes in physical ed. Everybody had to have phys ed. And, the phys ed instructor was not very compassionate, anyway.
But we could out-fox him most of the time.

(Laughter)

I still remember once, he was in a bad mood and we were going, rushing to the class. The class before had been disciplined for something. Our ring leader was Shigeto Kamemoto, I don't know if you know him, but he was clerk of the [state] house later. This guy says, "Shigeto, he’s going to ask you who’s the leader of Communism in Russia. Tell him Lenin."

Shigeto said, "What?"

I said, "Lenin!"

"Okay, okay." Sure enough we got a stern lecture about how we have to be more on time, disciplined. As I said, the phys ed instructor was in a bad mood. "So okay, I'll let you boys play if you can answer this question. Shigeto, who is the . . ."

(Laughter)

WN: He got it?

RK: He got it. Anyway, those are some of the things you remember. We had homerooms, English teaching, I thought, on the whole, very good.

MK: Was the emphasis say on the basics of reading and writing?

RK: Yeah, pretty much the basics. Literature as such, Shakespeare and things, I didn’t get until I got to high school. Although we did read short stories and things, in intermediate school.

MK: And then for social studies and history, what did you get at Washington?

RK: I don’t remember too much what we had. But one or the other, besides this large phys ed classes, that’s how you took care of lack of classrooms or teacher-people ratio. We had this other . . . The cafeteria with all those long benches and the spaces were used, one period a week, we were assigned to reading. What that amounted to was going to the cafeteria so I don’t know how many of us, several classes could fit in. We sat at the tables and magazines were distributed. I think the favorite was Photo Play or some kind of movie magazine that people want to get to. But the Readers Digest and other magazines I enjoyed because most of us didn’t have these magazines at home. We didn’t go to the library regularly and this gave us time to browse through different magazines. That was fun. That was continued at McKinley where the homerooms had subscriptions, too. Besides Readers Digest, I remember Coronet, Amerasia, some of these rather sophisticated magazines.

One of the interesting things in intermediate school is, I joined the band and I played the clarinet. That was quite an adventure because we had a very colorful band teacher, Mrs. Robbins, who was female. Mrs. Robbins never cared about her personal appearance. She was sort of a dumpy, cheerful person but she was a great lady. I don’t know how she could teach all the different instruments. When the trombone player couldn’t get it right, she’d go over there and grab the trombone, take off the mouthpiece, wipe it on her dress, blow, wipe it on her dress, give it back to him.
And for one parade she said, "My goodness, we have to walk over a mile, I don’t think you boys should do that," because in those days, I don’t think there were any girls in the band. So she hired a truck, a huge, flatbed. We were seated on that and we were a laughingstock because while the rest of the bands were marching, we sat in place.

We had fun but another place, we made groups. Danny Inouye was especially good in music. He played the saxophone. For a while we thought we’d have a jazz band. So on weekends we used to go to one of the churches there, the basement right across the school and we would try to form a band. The leader was this Kiyoshi Kimura, who was a great athlete. He was the best track man. But he played the tuba. Now I said, to this day, I don’t know how we got a tuba in a jazz band.

MK: How did you end up with the clarinet?
RK: It’s because this older person in our camp, at Sasaki Camp, Komori, Hisashi Komori, he played the clarinet and with a vengeance. Later on he was this Kunio Fujimoto’s best friend, they were always together. I don’t think Kuni took up music, but Hisashi did with a vengeance. And, he played for (the ‘Aiea (Plantation) Band) which was very good. I remember getting a ride to watch the rehearsals on Friday nights. So, he played the clarinet and I guess he didn’t annoy his neighbors enough because my mom said, “Why don’t you play the clarinet, too?” So he could teach me, too. So I played the clarinet, and I wasn’t good at it frankly. Although I got to be first chair in the intermediate school band, it was all hard work. I didn’t have the talent that people like, say, Danny Inouye. He’s got a musical ear. And, I didn’t have that. In fact later on, I got to the varsity band when I was first year at McKinley, but I decided it was all hard work. Sure enough, I took a test, which supposed to test your music—and I flunked it. So I gave up my band because I was active in student government. That took too much time, anyway.

But being in the band, I didn’t have to take ROTC [Reserve Officers’ Training Corps] at McKinley. In those days, everybody, high school, took ROTC. You had to march around. I thought about my friend at Farrington who was in the band. And Farrington High School then had probably the best band, high school band. The leader was [Earle] Christoph. And my friends say, “Hey, Christoph said, ‘Join the band. Then when the war comes, you play. They charge, you pick ’em up. You don’t get hurt.’”

Anyway, I didn’t have to do the marching around and so forth. The joke is that I tell my friends, “You took two or three years of ROTC at McKinley and we get in the army together and in two weeks I learned all that you learned.”

WN: I’m wondering, to jump from elementary to intermediate, did all your friends follow?
RK: I think most of us from Waikiki School went, too. The feeder schools, was Lunalilo, Kūhiō, Pohukaina, I don’t know the schools. Washington was quite a large intermediate
school. There was Kaimuki [Intermediate School], and there was Lili'uokalani [Intermediate School]. I guess the students who were on the upper region of Kapahulu may have gone to Lili'uokalani, but most of us from Waikiki went to Washington Intermediate.

WN: Among your group, it was sort of a natural thing to just go to intermediate or in those days, was it still sort of a bonus to go to . . .

RK: It was natural. It was pretty much natural through high school even in those days.

MK: And then when you were at Washington, I was wondering, what sorts of extracurricular activities you had?

RK: I took part in some of the—that's where they had this homeroom stuff and student government. Ninth-grade year, my homeroom ran me for student body president, but I lost the election that year.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay.

RK: Well, I really wasn't that active, somewhat active in student government, but not that active. Washington Intermediate didn't have a very active student government or student activities program. Most of the activities were homeroom-centered. We planned picnics and stuff. I like to do a lot of fishing. I lived in Waikiki and [fishing was] one of the things we did at night or whatever, so we had to know the tides and whether the moon was out or not. For certain kinds of fishing, you don't want the moon. For certain kinds, you want the moon, and so on.

I still remember in the ninth grade we were arguing about when we should go on a moonlight picnic. And in all innocence I stood up and I said, "According the tide chart," whipped that out of my pocket, I always carry the tide chart. I clipped it out of the [Honolulu] Advertiser. I said, "It's not the full moon until a certain date." Everybody laughed at me, I thought, "Why?" They were laughing. "What are you doing carrying that thing around?" For many years I did that.

(Laughter)

Because that was my chief recreation. Low tide, you can do certain kinds of fishing, spear fishing, whatever. High tide, you throw a line or whatever.

MK: But did you ever get to explain yourself?

RK: Oh yeah. I said, "Because when you go fishing, you have to know the tides and moon."

MK: And the city kids probably thought, "Huh?" (Chuckles) And then I've met some former students of Washington who enjoyed the drama there. They talked about having plays and for some of them, it was like a big thing in their lives.
RK: Yeah, there were certain teachers who stressed that. They had to enact Julius Caesar or whatever, I didn’t have that. And, in those days, too, we were shy. I was shy. I didn’t want to get into anything like that.

MK: And so in those days, it was primarily, say, a little bit of student government in terms of extracurricular activities?

RK: Yeah. As far as I know, most of our activities centered around what we call the homeroom.

MK: And then, once you were done with Washington, you went on to McKinley High School. When you entered McKinley, what sort of course of study did you start off in?

RK: In those days, I think, you didn’t have much. Well, I guess they didn’t have you make some choices. McKinley was interesting because when we got there it was a huge school. That would mean, I think we were almost 4,000 students. On the first day, I think it was September 3, 1939, something like that, but the headline says, “Hitler Invades Poland.” We didn’t know how much of that would affect our lives. That was the headline, I remember that day because Mrs. King, our homeroom teacher, mentioned it. Mrs. King is the teacher that Danny Inouye praises for helping him.

Mrs. King was very nice. She was not only the homeroom teacher but she was adviser to the class government. I was elected freshman class president. I remember one of the interesting things, she took us for dinner at the Elk’s Club. Of course, most of us never dined formally, so that was very good experience for us. (Chuckles) We had fried chicken (and), she said, “You may use your hands.” And then they brought us the fingerbowls and we all thought, “What kind of soup is this?” (Chuckles)

WN: Was she related at all to the governor?

RK: I don’t think so. Mrs. Ruth King.

MK: So in terms of your own schooling, you were going through to the college prep[atory] course?

RK: Oh yeah. College prep. Of course, McKinley High had, as you know, the core studies programs, Miles Cary’s baby, which dealt a great deal with contemporary issues: local, national, international. He emphasized student government. McKinley student government, had quite a bit of authority. When I was there, very active, all my years at McKinley. When I look back, it’s astonishing.

Not all the teachers supported the core program and we knew it. In fact one teacher told me, after I graduated from McKinley, I remember a teacher saying to me, “The trouble with you people at McKinley is, you were given too much authority.”

I said, “That’s the best way to learn discipline, it’s self-discipline.” And when I look back, I think, this is where in many ways the key to responsibility, to be treated as an adult or as an equal, that’s what democracy depends on—a responsible citizenry. We had a lot of say regarding what we do with the money—the dues, what kind of activities we want to engage in. We had our own court system. You know, if anyone did something major—got into a brawl, or somebody got hurt or something, well, you faced the student court of your peers. Even my wife, who taught there many years—she taught at Kawānanakoa, Farrington, Kaua‘i High School—said that [McKinley] was the first
school that she went to where they did not have hall duty, as teachers. Those days, they had hall duty to keep the kids out of the hallways. She said at McKinley, the kids just didn’t go in. They had the discipline. She was amazed at the difference in the climate.

MK: You mentioned that in the core program, there was discussion centered around current events. Can you give us an example of what was discussed and how did that go?

RK: We dealt with a lot of international problems, you know. Hitler invading Poland. What is a dictatorship? Is Russia under Stalin a dictatorship? And so on. I remember doing a paper on Stalin. We had to participate in discussions in the classroom. We did several group projects where you were assigned a problem.

MK: Were there textbooks at all?

RK: They had basic textbooks in American History. Especially, I got to learn to use periodicals, because a lot of the current events were discussed in periodicals. So we got to rely on that.

MK: And what would happen in, say, the English classes?

RK: Well, social studies included English. It was a combination of social studies and English. I took Latin. Latin was a lot of memorizing of conjugations. A lot of homework. And we had math; I didn’t do too much in math. And science—chemistry. I had biology. But those subjects were pretty much taught conventionally, I thought, as I look back.

And, as I mentioned, I was active in student government. I was freshman class president. Sophomore year, I couldn’t—that was a good rule—you can’t run for the second (year). I got to be student body president my senior year. We had all-school meetings, and you had executive council which was comprised of the class presidents and other officers. We met every Friday, I think. Miles Cary would preside over some of these meetings, posing some questions—policy questions—to the group, and we’d discuss these.

MK: What areas did students actually have control over?

RK: I’m trying to look back. It would be fun to look at the minutes.

MK: So for example, a student dress code . . .

RK: I don’t remember so much a student dress code. Usually the issues would relate to disciplinary problems, behavior, and that sort. I’m trying to recall if we had any . . . A lot of time was spent planning activities. We’d have a bonfire, or a celebration before football games.

(remainder of tape is garbled.)

END OF TAPE ONE
MK: Yeah.

WN: Okay.

MK: So, we're just talking about students who may not have been as motivated as yourself. How did they fare? Would you know how they fared?

RK: No, I really don't know. I think we have that problem today, we always had it. But I think in the core program, there was a better chance of getting motivated. I think the best compliment that I've seen paid to Miles Cary appeared in, I think, the Hawai‘i Herald several years ago, where a student said—I've forgotten his name too—but he said, “I went to McKinley, I was a nobody, average student, but you know the principal Miles Cary made me feel like I was important. He walked around the campus and he said hello to everybody and he made me feel that he respected me as an individual.” I have to find that because I thought that was the biggest compliment you could pay a person. Here was a student who really was not active, as he said, so called an average student, and in the school of close to 4,000 students to feel that about a principal, I think, is remarkable. The spirit was there that he tried to foster.

MK: I was wondering, as you look back, how do you think the teachers in the core program motivated students? How did they get you excited about the topics? How did they make learning an interesting thing for you?

RK: Well, here again, it would depend, I think, on the teachers. Each teacher has a different style. So what I thought the core program did was to give each teacher a chance to—it wasn’t uniformity they were seeking. So each teacher had freedom to present the topic, whatever the topic was that he or she chose, in what they considered to be the most effective way. So there were different teaching styles as there were different personalities. I think that’s good because I don’t think you can impose uniformity in teaching styles.

MK: We were talking about student government. You’ve already mentioned, say, like a Dan Inouye, you talked about Fudge Matsuda back at Washington [Intermediate School]. As you look at the leaders of, say, the '50s, '60s and onwards, how many of them were active in student government back at McKinley in your days?

RK: Most of them were active. Fudge Matsuda, he was the class officer, he was the senior class treasurer. Dan was homeroom chairman, I think, but I don’t think he had a student government [position] but Dan was active enough. There were others before me. Shiro Amioka was student body president when I was a sophomore.

MK: What about women in those days, or girls?

RK: Yeah, that’s a good question because I think, at that time, girls were not as expected to go on to college as men, as boys. Some of the smartest girls in our class did not go to college immediately after graduation. But interestingly enough, they went to college after—much later. In fact, I still remember this, when I was teaching here in my large political science class, I walked in at one opening of class and I see in the front row this lady grinning at me, one of my classmates, twenty years after graduation coming in as a freshman. She was a very bright girl, so I’m glad she came on.

But, girls were not expected automatically but boys weren’t either. But most of us were doing well enough and if our families could afford it, we went to college. Most of us
could only expect to go to University of Hawai‘i. All of us tried to seek some kind of financial aid. But even some of the smart boys didn’t go to college right after graduation. Some of them went later with the GI Bill. But the girls especially, as I think back, some of the smartest girls didn’t go on to college.

MK: How about the case of your older sister?

RK: Yeah, she reflects that period because after she got out of high school—and she did very well in school. Some of her friends went to the university, but I think our parents said, “Go to a business school,” so she was enrolled in a business college.

My mom said she got sick and tired of my sister coming home every day moaning the fact that she didn’t go to the university [like] her friend Stella, Stella Lau, who was Andy In’s wife. Stella and my sister were very good friends in high school. I guess Stella would tell her—Stella came to the university—and what they were doing. So my Mom finally said, “Okay. Why don’t you change and go to the university?” So she came in late but she did get to college. I’m glad she did because she had the ability, eventually she got an Ed.D. and taught at Hilo, University of Hawai‘i at Hilo.

But it wasn’t customary. When I look back in our neighborhood, there were two other girls the same age as my sister who did well in school, too, but didn’t go on to college.

MK: And then staying with that McKinley High School period, I know that you were active in student government but McKinley also had a number of other extracurricular activities, the Citizenship Club. What other extracurricular activities did you participate in?

RK: Yeah, McKinley had lot of clubs, and the clubs were very active. The [McKinley] Citizenship Club [MCC] was something a little special. Dan Inouye makes a great to-do about that. That was a group that we had to sort of do community work, community service work. I don’t know if it was the MCC, but I recall that when I was in high school, they activated the draft, the selective service, so they needed people to help when they were testing the inductees. I remember working couple of days, full days, at Queen’s Hospital or somewhere where they were giving these tests. The job, it wasn’t messy but you didn’t want to get assigned to urinanalysis. But the interesting job I had was these people who were taking—well, these were inductees already. So they were taking shots. They had to take blood samples. One afternoon I got assigned to that and I still remember how you see a fellow come in, he looks so small and weak and thin and when he sits there, grins, and I put on the rubber tourniquet, the nurse draws the blood, and he just smiles. And I see this guy coming in, he’s all muscles, he’s like Mr. Atlas. I put on the tourniquet on him, he turns white, and the nurse pokes the needles, and he faints. (Laughter)

That happened a couple of times. But we did things like that.

MK: So that’s the MCC?

RK: Yeah. I don’t know what else. We were called upon to help in different stages. So we did that sort of work.

I think back, McKinley, I guess at that time, thought as “Tokyo High,” or something of that sort. Maybe that’s the reason. Miles Cary was under fire. The Honolulu Star-Bulletin—the Honolulu Advertiser—they didn’t like him. They thought he was a
socialist because he was a Democrat, more a Democrat, not a Republican. He worshipped Franklin D. Roosevelt in some ways. The local establishment was solidly Republican, so it wasn't comfortable for him. Of course, Gregg Sinclair at the university was also a Democrat.

But at any rate, I remember McKinley, was it during our junior year, senior year, I wonder whose idea it was. Maybe it was the band leader. But in one of the football games, big football games, at night we all lit candles, we had candles at half time, and we sang patriotic songs. That's where I learned "God Bless America" and we sang some other songs. That was very, very dramatic and when I look back, maybe this is to show that "Hey, we're Americans too," I don't know, but it was very effective. I don't know if anyone took (photo) shots at that time, but.

WN: You went to language school at the same time, too?

RK: I did. After Waikiki School, it was much more traumatic when I transferred to Hongwanji, that "black coat school" on Fort Street. We had to go to Sato Clothiers in 'A'ala Park to buy our black coats. Hopefully it lasts for two years, you won't outgrow them.

WN: Do you know what Miles Cary's view of language schools were? Did you hear him state any opinion on it?

RK: No, I really didn't. Nothing specific as far as I know. I don't think he discouraged it. I don't know if he encouraged it.

MK: People refer to that school as the "black coat school." I've always wondered, what did you folks do with the coats while you were at English school? Did people go home, get the coats out, and then go?

RK: I couldn't do that because I lived in Waikiki and it was in McKinley, it's almost two-thirds of the way (to the language school). Oftentimes we walked from McKinley through Thomas Square and up the hill to school. Most of the time we carried our coats around, or I don't know, maybe we parked it somewhere at McKinley, but then we had to carry it and then we got there, we had to wear the coat.

MK: And then how was the teaching there? How did you fare there at this Japanese-language school?

RK: I must say I did very well. From the first I was the maybe class kyūchō, class leader. I had to stand up. When the teacher came in, we got to bow, then sit down and meditate. There, in the sense, maybe we were more raucous, too. They stressed discipline a little more, and the black coat was, I guess, was a way of enforcing that. And of course there was segregation. The boys were one side, the girls were at the other side. The leader of the girl's side in our class level was Margaret Awamura, Inouye now. Maggie was always my counterpart on the girls' side as we went through all the grades. I was kyūchō on the boys' side, she was kyūchō on the girls' side. In fact, my senior year at the language school, I was also the student body president, although we had very few student body activities, and I was editor of the annual. Don't ask me. I can't even read the stuff I wrote then.

Once a week, anyway, it was Monday or Friday, we all had to line up in front and the principal would make his announcements. I had the job of getting everybody to stand up
and bow and everything else. Although I went to Christian church in the early days, this is a Buddhist school, one of the teachers Mr. Takeda whose English was very good ran the Sunday school in English. And so he got me to be his choir boy a whatever, I had to help him and wore my yellow gown and stand up front and say, “All rise,” for the chanting of this and that and so forth and then do the readings. I did that for a couple of years.

The Japanese school also had a Boy Scout troop that they started Troop 49. And interestingly enough, our kerchiefs were purple, color of the Buddhist thing. Our aim was to go to the Olympics in Japan in 19... When was it? And the war [World War II] came and we never did go. We were practicing the ‘ukulele and everything else.

WN: This is the Olympics?
RK: Yeah, I think the Olympics was going to be held in Japan. So we were preparing to go. We were learning Hawaiian songs and we bought ‘ukuleles, but that never came to pass. Troupe 49 is still in operation I think, sponsored by the Buddhist church then. Yeah, the Japanese school was quite so-called strict and demanded a lot in the way of homework and things. And the oratorical contests. I did both in McKinley and in Japanese, oratorical contest, and had my share of wins. I don’t know how we memorized and learned that stuff.

MK: You mentioned you worked on the Japanese-language school annual. Were you active in publications at McKinley, the Daily Pinion or the yearbook there?
RK: No, I was not, my friends were. One of the interesting things is, McKinley sent its student body president to a national conference every year, I don’t know if I mentioned this earlier, National Association of Student Councils. And when I got elected student body president, I was lucky because the meeting was in Boston, and the school paid for it. The way we paid for it was, football (spring practice game) every kid who wanted to go [to the game] paid ten cents. Well eventually, anyway, the donations came up to $400, which was what it took then for me to go by ship and train to Boston and back.

WN: Did you talk about this in the last interview?
RK: I did talk about this last time.
MK: Was it on tape?
WN: Was it on tape?
RK: I think so.
MK: Okay. So we won’t make you say it again.

(Laughter)

But, I was wondering, here you are at McKinley, you’ve got all your studies to take care of, you’ve got your extracurricular activities, your MCC activities, you’ve got student government, you’re going to Japanese-language school after school, you had some extracurricular duties, and Boy Scouts, how did you manage to do all this?
RK: It was busy but you manage. You couldn’t find time to go to the beach. Maybe on a good weekend, you might. If the 'ōama or something were running we would (go to the beach) but this happened usually in the summertime. So, we didn’t do too much of that. Come to think of it, we seldom got into the water during school days, even if we lived right on the beach, practically.

Because I lived in Waikīkī, I had to take the bus or the streetcar to Washington. At that time, take the streetcar and the bus to Hongwanji and then from McKinley, sometimes we would walk but that’s another long haul home. I had to take the bus to King Street from upper Fort Street. And of course, Japanese school was on Saturday, too, which was nice. On Saturdays, in the morning, go to Japanese school. And most of the time, we wouldn’t catch the bus down, we’d walk down Fort Street, because we could go to Nips Potato Chips and get the fresh potato chips. They’d give you a bagful, overflowing, for only five cents.

WN: Where was this?

RK: Nips Potato Chips. It was on Fort Street. They made potato chips, fresh. You got it fresh over there and they give you this sack, they didn’t close it, they just put as much as they can. So we’d buy that and we’d walk down Fort Street. If Princess Theater had a good show, we might go to it. We usually went to Kress, the big store downtown. We bought Dick Tracy comics or those comic books. I used to buy a lot of paints, the paints were ten cents, a small can, to paint our boards and things. But that was our Saturday outing, walking down Fort Street.

MK: And then going back to McKinley, we’ve talked about the core curriculum. And you talked a little bit about Miles Cary and about that one student who was made to feel like somebody because Miles Cary would be there, and he would actually converse with one of the students. Just looking back in those years, what was your relationship like with Miles Cary? How much contact did you have with him?

RK: I had a lot of contact with him because I was active in student government. And in my senior year when I was student body president, I saw a lot of him. And the school oratorical contest, I won that, so I was to go into that was then the territorial finals. This was a big thing. Patsy Mink won it one year, Tom Gill won it the year before. So I was a McKinley representative. But Cary said, “You can do a better speech than you did.”

I said, “Well, I’ve got to rewrite this thing.”

And he says, “Well, I’m not going to help you, but if you want to, why don’t you come over to my house where you have peace and quiet.” So for a couple of nights he took me home to his home in Mānoa. I lived in Waikīkī and he knew that I lived in a two-bedroom, maybe three-bedroom house, one bath, and there were six kids besides my parents. So he took me to his home in Hillside [Avenue] right up here. I better take a look whether it’s still there. He had a nice study, he left me there to do it. He’d look over and make a few suggestions. So I got know him quite well.

Later on, when he left Hawai‘i, he became professor of education at University of Minnesota. And through Allan Saunders’ influence, I went to Minnesota. It’s another story, but Miles Cary was there. So we took the cheap way to Minnesota, my wife [Mildred] and I, after our first year of marriage. We went by cheap plane. We flew from
here to Portland, took us twelve hours. And my God, they didn't give us water, I thought. . . .

But anyway, we had a very good friend, Margaret Cuenod, who was the YWCA [Young Women’s Christian Association] director on Kaua’i when my wife was there, was now at Portland so she picked us up at the airport. We stayed with her for a couple of days. At that time I was a poor traveler. I was so sick from the plane ride, I just slept for a day. Then we took the train from Portland to Minneapolis, and that was a long train ride. We couldn’t afford sleeper, so we stood up, sat up, had these hard seats all the way. When we got to Minneapolis early in the morning, who was here to greet us but Miles Cary. He knew we were coming. My wife was going to be his teaching assistant. We had hotel reservations, but he canceled them and he took us to his home. So we stayed with him for a week or so until we found a place.

Also, they had a strong Hawai‘i delegation at Minnesota. Jimmy Kamo, who was then at law school, was the head of it. So Jimmy and others were there, too, to greet us at Minneapolis. So at Minnesota, we’re very close to the Carys. We did many things together. I remember going down—he’s very fond of fishing—he took me down to his basement and he showed me all these lures. He had wooden plugs. He said, “This is the bass plug, this is my best. You can see the teeth marks?”

I said, “You’re pulling my leg.”

He said, “No, no, it’s true.”

I said, “You mean the fish will bite these wooden things?”

He said, “Yeah.” So I used to go fishing with him, we used to have a lot of fun. He had a very small, five-horsepower motor that we could attach to, we used to rent sort of a barge. We used to picnic on it in Lake Minnetonka especially, or the lakes around there. We did a lot of fishing together. I have some beautiful pictures of him, especially when he caught a three-inch fish.

(Laughter)

So we’re very close. They lived near Lake Harriet, which is maybe three or four miles from campus. And, of course, we took an apartment. I liked to live near the school so about two blocks from the campus.

I still remember, once he got very tired and he felt sick so he came over. He used to come to our meager apartment, but he’d lie down and get his rest. We did a lot of things with them. We introduced the Hawai‘i people to him. When one of our friends got married, we used his home for the wedding. He and Mrs. Cary were very nice, we got together for many, many picnics. Mrs. Cary was a very slow eater. Miles Cary and I would gobble down our food, we liked to get out there, go fishing. Mrs. Cary would sit there and she’d tell Mildred, “Don’t worry, just take our time, let the men wait.”

(Laughter)

WN: And how was that transition from mentor to colleague?

RK: Well, here’s another case, the three men, when I look back, were really influential, Miles Cary, my high school principal, Allan Saunders here at the University of Hawai‘i, and
Mulford Sibley at the University of Minnesota, my graduate advisor. When I look back, all three had a tendency to treat you as an equal. They never lectured you, they asked your advice on things. They knew you could do some things better than they could. It was no problem at all. They just treated you as an equal, and when I look back, it was a great thing. At times, I thought was sort of embarrassing. And in all cases, we got to know their wives very well.

MK: I was curious, did the Carys have children?

RK: No, no children. They had no children. They were high school sweethearts. I went to Edmonds, their birthplace, beautiful picture of their graduating class of about nine members.

MK: You told us that story about your being taken up to the Carys’ house in Mānoa for you to practice for your competition . . .

RK: To rewrite my speech.

MK: . . . to rewrite your speech, how did you feel then, to go to your principal’s house all by yourself and to be there?

RK: I thought, gee, well, it was a special privilege, but I don’t know that I was any intimidated or anything. As I said, I lived in a neighborhood where we had lot of Haoles, too. And of course, this was my senior year, after the war started. I had that summer, gone all over the Mainland on this trip that McKinley paid for. In San Francisco I stayed with a Haole family, who were my parents’ friends.

MK: And then that speech that you were working on, what was the topic?

RK: Oh, I don’t know, it was some kind of patriotic theme because the war had started. I came in second for the territorial. I looked the other day at my badge, it says “first” but first place was gotten by a very nice girl from Kahuku High School, Filipina gal, who spoke very emotionally about the war because Philippines are impacted and so forth. I couldn’t beat her in terms of the emotion.

MK: And then, since we’ve sort of gotten into it, what were you doing when war first started?

RK: Yeah, I remember that quiet vividly, it started on Sunday morning. Saturday afternoon, I’d gone on picnic, class picnic at Kailua, and had run around in the sun and had a great time. So Sunday morning, I woke up very tired. My legs were stiff and everything. So I got on my brother’s bicycle, it was always around before seven [a.m.]. I thought I’d loosen up and bicycle all the way through Kapi‘olani Park, pretty much on Kalākaua Avenue, went all the way to Diamond Head and came back. As I was coming back, when I reached Kūhiō Beach where we lived, I still remember sitting on the bike and on the (sea) wall and looking up and saying, “My goodness, all these airplanes, boom, boom, all over the place. What’s happening?”

And the neighbor came, after a couple of minutes, our neighbor came running, he says, “This is real, this is war, go home, go home!” I still remember that, I could see from Kūhiō Beach, looking towards Pearl Harbor and the smoke and seeing the planes coming around.
Then when I got home, my younger brother, who was delivering the Show Parade, Consolidated [Amusement Co.] had a weekly that went out on Sunday (to) advertise their theater showings, he came home all white because he said a bomb landed near the Waikiki Theater. I think one of the shells landed there, like they landed in McCully.

Of course, we had a blackout, no school. I volunteered for the first aid station at Thomas Jefferson School, and they made me the supply clerk. I had to keep track of all the bandages, and medicines, and so forth. Later on when they issued gas masks, I was in charge of issuing gas masks. Here I am, a high school senior. And the thing I remember that flabbergasted me, there was a group of people coming to tell me that they’re not going to accept gas masks. They were Jehovah’s Witnesses. So whatever happened, happens. “We never take gas masks.” I didn’t know what to do or what to say. I had to call whoever was in charge, (the) director.

But here I was, busy at one point, later on, issuing gas masks. But it was a good thing. I did something, it was sort of service-oriented. And I got paid for it. That’s where I got my first monthly paycheck. I still remember it was a $125, and what did I do with it? I told Mr. Ikeda—Ikeda Music Store, was on Sheridan [Street]. It was right across the old Civic Auditorium. Before that, he had shown me a brochure with this huge phonograph console, Philco for $125. So I bought it. (Chuckles) In many ways it was a wise purchase because for a couple of years we had blackouts, we couldn’t go out at night. We just played one phonograph record after another. It was mainly Bing Crosby, singing the “Blues of the Night” and all that. But because we had a good phonograph, the whole family enjoyed listening to the music.

MK: When you realized that it was war between Japan and the U.S., what were you thinking or feeling?

RK: Well, in a sense, you felt somewhat in a quandary. But the nice thing was, our neighbors never took it personally. We never had any problems, as far as I know. I, personally, didn’t run across any form of discrimination or anything. Generally, we felt loyal to the United States. I guess a year or so before, in our family, we had deliberately cut off our dual citizenship. So we were no longer [Japanese citizens]. A lot of people kept their dual citizenship, but we were no longer Japanese citizens anyway. I know our parents made a definite commitment to stay in this country, so that wasn’t a problem. We were surprised at the boldness of the attack. But when you’re caught up in that period, you just figured, oh well, you’ve got to be patriotic, do what you can.

WN: What about your parents, how were they affected?

RK: I guess they had some concern. In terms of relatives, we had only my father’s sister in Japan. And my mother’s younger brother, he was Otokichi Ozaki. He got interned, so we knew about that problem. We tried to help that family out. So during the war, we took care of the grandparents on my mother’s side. They didn’t go with the Ozaki family to the Mainland, into their internment camps.

MK: And then, because the war started, how did it affect your schooling at McKinley?

RK: As I remember, all schools were closed. We didn’t get back to school until February I think, or somewhere along that. I don’t know what the dates were, December 7 (and) all through December, all through January. I think (in the) middle of February, somewhere along there, we started school again.
At McKinley we had to share our quarters. We weren't taken over by the military, but Saint Louis High School was taken over as a hospital or something by the military. So McKinley had to share the facilities with Saint Louis. And since they didn't want people to travel great distances, the students who lived in Kaimuki, we created our McKinley branch in Kaimuki. So McKinley was split in two and that's the beginning of Kaimuki High School. But they had to get the logistics. They had to accommodate Saint Louis High School. They want to minimize travel time and all that sort of thing.

And a lot of our classmates, especially the non-Japanese, did not come back to school. They went to work at Pearl Harbor, other places, where work was available. So our graduating class was whittled down to maybe 600, because we started at about a thousand. I'm not sure of these figures. And we graduated with all wearing gas masks. I mean with a gas mask strapped around us. Everybody carried gas masks in those days.

MK: And then since you folks lost several weeks of school, how were your studies affected?

RK: I guess we didn't get as much, but I don't think it made that much of a difference. Because I think, in some subjects you have to so-called cover the ground, but as a wise professor said, "Our job is not to cover that subject, it's to uncover the mind." And to uncover the mind is a perpetual thing. That's the main thing, as far as I can say. In fact, you can always go to the encyclopedia, you can go to the Internet, whatever, and by golly, facts have changed. So it's not memorizing things or covering the ground as they say, but learning techniques, methods, motivation. And in some ways, I guess, things became more serious after the war.

WN: This is your senior year already, yeah?

RK: Yeah. So a lot of our programs were interrupted. Although we did have a senior prom, but we had to quit early. And we drove around in cars with tiny peepholes (for headlights).

But also (during) the war, that summer, I got a terrific job. Our high school counselor was Bill Wise, another man of football fame. So Bill got a contract to have us become sort of stevedores. They were importing a lot of things into Hawai‘i and they didn't have able-bodied people. So Bill, I guess, had a contract to hire high school kids like us to help in the summertime, to act as stevedores. And it was back-breaking work. I might have weighed about hundred and twenty pounds or whatever, and we had to carry those Brazilian wheat bags which were hundred twenty pounds, I think, or more. Other bags were hundred pounds, eighty pounds. We were constantly moving them, stacking them, getting them off trucks and piling them all over the city as emergency supplies. I remember, at Mō‘ili‘ili, to Wai‘alae, to King and University, those shops, where Puck’s Alley is now. We stored a lot of flour there. They were all empty office spaces then. We had a lot of flour stacked in those places.

But later on I got the best job ever. I became a checker at the cold storage plant. I guess I told you the story about where they brought in tons of butter, Lands O’Lakes butter from Wisconsin, Minnesota; and lots of beef from (the) Mid-West, frozen. Those things were in short supply. Hard to get. They were rationing beef, they were rationing butter. Here I sat with all these.

(Laughter)
O'ahu Ice Company or whatever we had taken over, I was a checker there. Sat out there and people come and they had to have a special authorization to take out so many cases of this, so many cases of that. That was a comfortable job, just pushing a pencil. I just looked forward to having lunch at the small Alapa'i [cafe] there where you could have a bowl of *saimin* that was very good and pork chops for a dollar and a quarter [$1.25]. So it was a nice summer.

**MK:** I was wondering, prior to these jobs, did you have other jobs? Other summers, you know . . .

**RK:** Well, generally, I worked at home. I didn't get to work in the pineapple canneries as most of my friends did. I did go and visit occasionally when they were working at the pineapple canneries, but I never did work in the canneries as my friends did. My mother ran the laundry and she needed help at home.

When you're high school age, that junior year summer, I was sent to the Mainland. I spent about six weeks on the Mainland, so that summer was shot, so to speak. And then, 1940. . . . One summer, besides working at home, I had to represent the family for my grandparents on my mother's side, their fiftieth anniversary celebration in Hilo, 'Amauulu. So I spent a good deal of the summer there with the Ozaki family.

And then the war came and that summer I worked for Bill Wise. This was better than working at the cannery because I made much more money. In fact, I made so much money that summer that I was denied a scholarship to the University of Hawai'i because they looked at my earnings that summer, and they said, "You can cover your expenses." Later on, I did get a scholarship, it helped. So as a freshman, I lost my so-called scholarship, I was denied one because I was told, my summer earnings were so great.

**MK:** So when you graduated, what were your aspirations?

**RK:** From high school?

**MK:** Yeah.

**RK:** Yeah, I always thought I'd be a lawyer. I liked political science, I was active in student government. Even when I went to Boston for my conference at Tufts [University] then, I have a beautiful picture of my visiting Harvard Law School. I have a picture of my standing at the Harvard statue. I thought I'd go to Harvard Law School.

**MK:** And, when you were graduating from high school, did you have any thoughts of going away for college for your undergraduate years?

**RK:** No, that wasn't a possibility. There were a few scholarships and you were happy to get to (the) University of Hawai'i, which at that time we thought was difficult enough to do. That's all we could afford. I had to get part-time work and so forth to pay my way through. So I couldn't think of going to the Mainland.

**MK:** And then at that point in time, what did you know about going to UH, going to college? What was in your mind? What did you think it was going to be like?

**RK:** Nothing special. Because my sister was there and several friends and a neighbor were there. One of them was Ike Nadamoto, who was an orthopedic surgeon later. Ike was two years above me. He lived on Cartwright Road with us and he had a car. When I was
freshman, I used to get a ride with Ike. Going from Waikīkī to the University of Mānoa (by public transportation), you had to, well, transfer once, get off twice, it wasn’t a very convenient route. You get off at Pāwa’a and take the bus up here. So I used to catch a ride with Ike most mornings.

And I still remember, Ike was a biology major because he knew he was going to be a doctor, M.D. Every time we came across a dead cat or a dead dog in the road, he’d come to a screeching halt and pick it up and put it in his trunk because he was going to dissect it. He became a very well-known orthopedic surgeon. He always wanted to study the body parts, the bone structures especially so. Every time we saw a dead cat, we’d tell him, “Ike, hey, there’s one over there.” Riding to school, I remember stopping several times to pick up dead cats and dead dogs.

WN: Should we stop here?
MK: Yeah, we’ll stop here then.
RK: Okay.
WN: It’s a good transition to the university next time.
RK: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW