

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Masayoshi Wakai

Masayoshi Wakai was born in Bingo, Hiroshima-*ken*, Japan, in 1916. He is the oldest of seven children born to Henry Gengo and Ryu Wakai.

He, his sister Mary, and parents arrived in Hawai'i in 1921. His father taught at Japanese-language schools on Kaua'i and established the Japanese Congregational Church in Kapa'a, Kaua'i.

Masayoshi Wakai, a student at Kapa'a Grammar School and Kaua'i High School, graduated in 1935. He earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of Hawai'i in 1939.

He enrolled at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. While still a student there, he received news of the attack on Pearl Harbor. From April to September 1942, he was held at Tanforan, a race track converted to a camp for the incarceration of Japanese Americans. There, he received his diploma.

In September 1942, he was incarcerated at Topaz War Relocation Center. At this camp, he was ordained a minister.

About a year later, with the sponsorship of Dr. Albert W. Palmer, president of Chicago Theological Seminary and former minister at Central Union Church in Honolulu, Masayoshi Wakai gained his release. He went to Chicago where he was at seminary, taught Japanese language, worked for the YMCA, and counseled youths.

He married Helen Miyoshi in 1945.

Returning to Hawai'i in 1946, he has been a minister, counselor, educational specialist, and missionary/teacher (in Japan).

He and his wife, Helen, raised two sons.

Tape Nos. 55-39-1-10 and 55-40-1-10

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Masayoshi Wakai (MW)

December 13, 2010

Honolulu, O‘ahu

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

WN: Okay, this is an interview with Masayoshi Wakai—Rev. Masayoshi Wakai . . .

MW: Just call me “Mas.”

WN: And we’ll call you “Mas.” And today is December 13, 2010, and we’re at his home in Honolulu, O‘ahu. The interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

Rev. Wakai or Mas . . .

MW: Just call me “Mas.”

WN: Good morning.

MW: Reverend is too long. (MK laughs.)

WN: Okay. Can you tell us first when you were born and where you were born?

MW: Well, all I know is what my parents told me. I was born in [1916] Bingo, Hiroshima, which is hundred miles north of Hiroshima City. My father was a Congregational minister there, and he was converted because he loved biscuits. The British women missionaries baked biscuits after the Bible meeting. So that’s how he was converted. The rest of my father’s family are Buddhists, still Buddhists, nominal Buddhists.

MK: Where did your father Henry Gengo Wakai originally come from?

MW: Maebashi. I think so.

MK: What kind of work did your father’s family do, way back when?

MW: I can’t remember. I know when I was four or five years old, they had a store. The parents, I think, they retired and they had a store. It wasn’t making money but something to keep him busy. My brother Calvin went up north and they said the ancestors were rice farmers up north, north of Maebashi. Gumma. You know, it’s called Gumma-*ken*. *Ken* is “province” [i.e. prefecture] there. Yeah, I don’t know too much of the background.

MK: What have you been told about your mother, Ryu Ichimura Wakai?

MW: Ichimura, yeah. On my mother's side, I think they were in the silk business. They used to unravel by hand. You know the Japanese movie [television series] called *Ōshin*? They showed how they unravel. You boiled a cocoon, and then you had to put it on a spinning thread or something, and then wind it up. So if you go to Maebashi, on the city street there's a replica of cocoon, large cocoon, right on the street. I noticed that. So that was the historical background, I think, back there.

WN: So they were commercial silk farmers?

MW: Probably so. When we went to China, we went to one community and these farmers had rice patches. But also they had silkworm and mulberry leaves [that the silkworms] were eating. It shows how primitive things were in China. Farmers had side business. Like a silkworm, I guess, you can have them going all year around. Rice is only seasonal. So maybe that's how in Japan probably did the same thing.

WN: So your father and mother were both from Maebashi . . .

MW: Maebashi yeah.

WN: . . . which is the name of the town . . .

MW: City.

WN: . . . the city in Gumma Prefecture.

MW: Prefecture, yeah.

WN: Japan.

MK: Eventually your father moved from Gumma to Hiroshima or where did he go when he became a Christian minister?

MW: I was born in, let's see, Bingo. He was, I guess, converted. He was the only one who was converted to the Christian faith, yeah. So he had, I think, two pastors. Bingo where I was born, and then Onomichi. It's on the seacoast. From there, 1921, we got on that Japanese steamboat—I forgot, *Taiyo-maru* or something—and arrived in Sand Island [Honolulu, Hawai'i] in quarantine.

WN: Did your father ever tell you why you folks moved to Hawai'i, came to Hawai'i?

MW: Oh, I know my mother was the one. My father liked to stay one place long time. So she used to contact the *haole* missionaries. She said, "Go America, go America." She was one that pushed it. My father liked to stay one place. (MK chuckles.) So that's something. I remember from Sand Island, we stayed at a hotel, Japanese hotel, on River Street, and then came to Waimea [on Kaua'i]. I guess the parsonage wasn't built then in Kapa'a. Kapa'a was still kind of backward at that time. See, Līhu'e was the main town in Kaua'i, county center, yeah. So my father was teaching Japanese classes, and then from there we went to Kapa'a.

There's a little anecdote maybe if you don't mind listening. There was a bakery, Taniguchi Bakery [in Waimea] near the parsonage. There's a Hawaiian church in front of us. And my father always give me ten cents to buy a loaf of bread. Those days bread was cheap, ten cents. So in those days they didn't have paper bags, so they wrapped it in paper. And being five years old, I never seen cars. I was fascinated. I carried underneath my arm, and when I came home, I had only the paper. My father said, "Where's the bread?"

(Laughter)

So that's what my dad used to tell me. So from Waimea when the parsonage was completed we came to Kapa'a, 1921.

MK: I know that before we started the recording, you had another anecdote that you shared with us, your first instance of being a small juvenile delinquent at age five. What did you do that was so bad?

MW: Oh, I didn't tell you? I saw the local kids [in Honolulu] putting rocks and sticks on the streetcar tracks, and then when the conductor came he just yelled and swore at us. So I remember that's my first delinquent act.

(Laughter)

MK: You mentioned that your father ended up in Waimea, Kaua'i until . . .

MW: We came there first because the parsonage wasn't built in Kapa'a then. It was a new town for the Congregational church there.

MK: When he was in Waimea, Kaua'i, was he ministering to the community there or teaching Japanese language there?

MW: No, there was a church there already established. There's a Hawaiian church in front of our place, still there, I think. Oh, I guess they moved, and then there was a Japanese church there. Right next to the beach. Later years we used to visit people, and then the Hawaiians had *hukilau*. So we all go and pull the net. When the fish and everything was pulled up, the fishermen reward everybody. We were small kids then, but they gave you two fish to take home. Yeah, the Hawaiians were very generous. Anybody who helped got something.

WN: Who were your friends growing up in Kapa'a?

MW: I didn't have too many friends. Most of the people I hung around were older people, older ones. They just kind of treat you pretty mean. You did all the dirty works.

(Laughter)

I remember one fellow whose name was Haruto Henry Takemoto. Parents had a photography shop and the brother went to Chicago, and got special training, came back. He used to let me take care of his younger brother. They used to go near the swamp and catch fish. So I had to kind of watch him. One time he was crying, crying, and then the Portuguese family nearby telling him to, "Shut up. You're making too much noise." (Chuckles)

My fond memory of Kapa'a is, we had a church built. The land slanted down, so every time there was a heavy storm, all the water from the road came down into the back and there was a pool of water. So I used to make little boats. I put rubber band and propeller, and play right in the backyard. But now, I guess, they contain the water, so you don't have too much—you don't have flood over there.

In those days we all walked barefooted to school. Sometimes you stepped on glass, and you get your foot cut, too. We used to walk on the road. The road had tar. It's kind of hot, so we had to get off the road. You had these student traffic officers. Every morning, people walk down. They check and see if everybody's doing all right. So if you were playing on the road, they wrote a

report on you and then, I guess, gave it to the principal or somebody. Yeah, they had kind of strange things, those days. Kids took their positions very seriously.

MK: You know, you mentioned that your father was the first minister at Kapa'a?

MW: Kapa'a. Yeah, it was a new church there. Actually it was, name of the church was Japanese Congregational Church and there was no church building there, but we had a parsonage. So the parsonage became the center for Sunday school, summer school, everything else. Let's see, the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] had a club. The men came first. The women said, "We want to have a place to have a meeting," so our living room became the center for all the activities for YMCA and the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association.]

MK: Would you remember members of the community that helped your father build that church? We've heard about maybe the Wilcoxes, or . . . ?

MW: The Wilcox sisters, Mabel and Elsie. They were very staunch missionary families, and very supportive. So they kind of spearheaded a lot of funds, I think. There was a Dora Isenberg. Her husband, [Rev. Hans Isenberg,] was sugar plantation manager [i.e. managing director of Lihue and Koloa Plantations]. So they were very supportive. Christmastime you know, they used to send boxes of apples. So one of the highlights of the Christmas program, after the pageant, Mary and Joseph story, we put candy and apple in the paper bag. So all the kids would come around. Even though they are not members of the church, you get free bag, so that was something they look forward to. So one of the girls that grew up in that area said, "Well, every Christmas I'm Buddhist, but I go over there, and get my candy."

(Laughter)

WN: And you said your father was a Japanese-language school teacher?

MW: Yeah, all the churches—well, he had two Buddhist sects: Hongwanji and Jōdo-shū, I think—two sectarian. They're competitive, trying to keep their kids to stay within their own faith. So my father wasn't trying to snatch people from other—those who wanted to come, fine. They came to our—my father had [Japanese-]language school on weekdays and then Sunday he had the church. So he worked seven days a week. So we had language school. You go public school during the day; and after school, you go to language school. In a way it was good for lot of the plantation families because parents work late and their kids go to the language school. So it was kind of helpful in many ways, I think.

MK: What was your mother's role?

MW: Well, first she was a wife. She was also unpaid language teacher. Even the Buddhist priests' wives, they all worked. So my mother was also housekeeper, cook, and everything else, and language teacher, too.

MK: We know that you're the oldest of seven children.

MW: Yeah.

MK: How did your mom manage with seven children in the household and helping your father and everything?

- MW: Well, being the oldest, my mother said, “You the oldest, you have to take care of your brothers. You have to help cook this and clean the house.” So every Saturday, sweep the house and mop the place. So I had to be kind of big brother to everybody.
- MK: You mentioned that in those days, people went to public school and after that they went to . . .
- MW: Japanese school.
- MK: . . . Japanese-language school?
- MW: Yeah. All the Japanese kids, yeah.
- MK: What English school did you go to?
- MW: Same, Kapa‘a Grammar School. First year, I couldn’t speak English, so I flunked the first year. So I spent two years, first grade. (Chuckles) But after that they had A, B, C classes, huh? So I was in the A class all the way up the eighth grade. Took me nine years to finish eighth grade. (Chuckles)
- WN: You went to the language school that your parents taught at?
- MW: Yeah.
- WN: How was that? How was going to Japanese-language school with your father and mother teaching?
- MW: Well, like everybody else. In those days, you have to listen to your folks. You can’t act any way you want. My father was very strict, too. But in those days, teachers were teachers. They look up to the teachers. They were supposed to be the educated. Most of the people were plantation workers. So language teachers were honorable people, I think. My father worked about seven days a week. So six days he had Japanese classes in the afternoon. Then Sunday, he had the church. They called *hōmon*, he used to make calls to different camps. And had Sunday school classes. Yeah, he was a hard worker. He had a Model-T car. He used to watch the mechanics clean the spark plug. In those days, they take the spark plug out, they clean it with gasoline. So he comes home and practice on the spark plug, put it back. (Chuckles) Yeah, he was kind of innovative.
- MK: How far did he travel to minister to the community?
- MW: Well, he went to a few camps. Let’s see. He went from Kapa‘a. There was a camp in Keālia. Keālia was a sugar plantation. Up in the hills there was another camp there, plantation camp. I guess sometimes he went to Anahola, but I don’t know whether he had Sunday school classes there or not. It’s kind of remote. But he had a few Christian families back there. They called it *hōmon*, home visit. Used to travel around, and once in a while I used to ride with him. The Model-T cars, used to crank to start the car.
- MK: How frequent were those home visits?
- MW: I didn’t go with my father, so I don’t know too much. But being the minister, you go over there. You listen to them, give them consolation. Ministers were very helpful for people who are sick or had death in the family, yeah? So, turn to spiritual support and guidance, I guess. Yeah, it makes a difference. If there’s a sickness or death in the family, the minister comes, gives them consolation. I guess just being there makes a lot of difference.

There's one incident I'd like to mention. There was a young woman who, her husband died working on the stonewall breakwater, in Hilo. I don't know, a crane was lifting up a heavy rock, I think, that fell on him and he died. There was a wake at the home. I was a minister from Honomū Church there. I came back from Chicago. I had long rubber boots, shoes. Those days, everybody take their shoes off, go in the house. So I had nice rubber boots and my black shoes in there and left it on the porch there. When I came back, I couldn't find mine. Somebody walked away with it. People, I guess, work in the plantation. So I had to walk barefooted down in the wet place there. Caught a bad cold. So that was one, the early experiences. People want something, they take it away. (Chuckles)

MK: Going back to the time when your father was the minister in . . .

MW: Kapa'a, yeah.

MK: . . . Kapa'a, you mentioned that he taught Japanese-language school.

MW: Yeah, everybody, all the ministers' family and the Buddhist priests' family, they taught language school. Japanese language was a second language for many families. This was one way to keep the kids in the Japanese culture, language, so.

MK: Did he teach *shūshin*, ethics or morals, in the Japanese-language school?

MW: He might have. I don't know. He might have done it. Yeah, in the Buddhist group, I guess, they're more cut and dried, yeah?

WN: Yeah, I was wondering, you probably had some friends who went to the Buddhist Japanese-language school.

MW: Yeah.

WN: Did you ever talk about it and see—did you ever try to see what the differences are between going to a Christian-run Japanese-language school as compared to a Buddhist-run Japanese-language school?

MW: No, we didn't get to that level up there.

(Laughter)

We were down here.

(Laughter)

WN: Okay. (Chuckles)

MW: Going to language school was something required by the parents, huh? I guess, one, is to teach them language, and then morals or ethics, yeah. Another one was to keep them busy. See, lot of plantation families, they work late. So kids went to language school and they can spend their time after school, grammar school. School ended at two o'clock. So you get long waiting period. So language school, I guess, like a babysitter, huh?

WN: I would imagine, too, being born in Japan and English being your second language, Japanese being your first language, you must have been pretty good in language school.

MW: So-so. I was good in pidgin.

(Laughter)

So I had two languages. At home you talk Japanese and then you go to school, you try to speak proper English. And among my peers, speak pidgin. You haven't heard pidgin for long time, but that was the everyday conversation with kids.

"You *bin* go?"

"No, no, I no go. *Bumbai* I go."

(Laughter)

WN: Did you have non-Japanese friends?

MW: Not too many. Yeah, they used to make fun of our name, too. "Wakai came to Kaua'i and they ate *kūkae* [dung, feces]." In fact, somebody wrote in my dictionary, all this kind of thing. So anytime they see me, they give me this slang. My father said, "Well, don't listen to them." You know, you grow up, some things you can't fight back. You just have to just take it and pretend nothing happened. Yeah. It was kind of rough going.

WN: Being the minister's son and the Japanese-language school teacher's son, did you feel different from the other boys?

MW: My mother would say, "You're a minister's son. You have to behave little better." So they teach you morals and ethics. In those days, you have to respect your parents. That was taught by the Japanese families. So in a way, you had very few delinquent Japanese kids. Not that I know of. You have people of other racial groups. There was a lot of prejudice against other racial groups. They used to have a little chant about the Chinese. "Ching-Ching Chinaman come from China, trying to make a dollar out of fifteen cents." That thing still rings in my ears. Japanese, said, "You eat *daikon* [pickled turnip]." So when we were angry at each other, we had epithets. Talk about the food, too. We won't say about the Hawaiians.

Our neighbors were a Hawaiian family. They were very gracious. They used to pound *poi* [mashed, cooked taro root]. I used to stop by, and they say, "You take this home." Give the taro. Yeah, you watch them pounding *poi*. Kind of hard life. You get the *poi*, what do you call it, big platter. They pound it. You put the sweat. (Chuckles) We used to watch them pound the *poi*. My father liked *poi* so he used to order from Waimea, Kaua'i. They used to put in a cloth bag and they used to distribute. He was very innovative. He liked to try different things. He would try *bagoong*, too. You know what *bagoong* is?

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

MW: I don't know. Awful kind of taste thing. But he tried different things. He liked, what's that, kind of sour milk thing?

MK: Buttermilk?

MW: Buttermilk, yeah. Buttermilk. I don't know, he drank with a lot of gusto, so I tried. Didn't taste so good. (WN and MK chuckle.) Yeah, he was kind of innovative, yeah?

I told you about the time he went to the luncheon meeting and put his finger in the lady's bowl? She said, "Rev. Wakai, we don't do that anymore." In the old days, they had a single bowl. Everybody put their finger in, Hawaiian style.

WN: Oh, you mean, for *poi*?

MW: *Poi*, yeah. Didn't have small dishes. So everybody. . . . (Chuckles) So, "Rev. Wakai, we don't do that anymore. Get your own bowl."

(Laughter)

WN: Oh, I guess in your father's time it was more communal, huh? People . . .

MW: At home, . . .

WN: . . . eat from the same bowl.

MW: . . . but not outside, yeah. If you went to the church, you get your own bowl. (Chuckles) Small.

MK: Did your father also service non-Japanese as a minister?

MW: No, the people who came were all Japanese descent.

WN: So, Japanese Congregational Church was the name of the church.

MW: Japanese, yeah.

WN: So the congregation was pretty much 100 percent Japanese?

MW: Japanese. In our town. Congregational church came from the New England missionaries.

WN: Right.

MW: So you had the memorial building next to the city and county.

MK: Uh-huh.

MW: That was our central office, then. I guess they had different branches. The Chinese had their own. Hawaiians. I guess Filipinos came a little later.

MK: I was kind of curious. How good was your father's English?

MW: Well, it wasn't smooth English. He could write better than speak. But at least he could communicate.

MK: You mentioned you went to Kapa'a Grammar School.

MW: Yeah.

MK: Where did most of the kids come from?

MW: Well, from the town. Japanese families had stores. The rest came from plantation camps. See, there were sugar mills and people who worked in the cane fields had camps in different places. So

they came from all over. See, Kapa‘a School was on a hill. There’s a high school there now, I think. So we all had to walk up there. Then shortcut was up the muddy hill. Red dirt, when it’s wet, it’s slippery. Many times, we try to walk up the hill, you slide, you get your pants all dirty. (Chuckles) So when you went to school, they gave you pajamas. (Chuckles) And you wait until your clothes are dry or something. So up to eighth grade, we went barefooted. Only on graduation, we wore shoes. So we felt kind of clumsy walking in shoes. So barefoot was very practical, yeah?

WN: How would you compare Kapa‘a Grammar School with Japanese-language school? Which one did you like better?

MW: I preferred the English classes. Japanese was kind of tedious, huh? I had a lot of brothers, so I had to baby-sit, kind of watch them. So I didn’t have too much of the language, I think, up to eighth grade. After high school, I . . . Kind of baby-sit more, look after my brothers. There’s seven in the family. So, while my parents were teaching, I’d be watching the youngest ones. So being big brother, my mother always wished I was a girl because girls supposed to take care the kids.

WN: But did your sister Mary have those kind of responsibilities, too?

MW: No, she was spoiled.

WN: She’s the only girl, yeah, out of seven.

MW: Yeah. (WN chuckles.) But later years, she kind of helped the younger siblings, I think.

MK: When you look back at your days at Kapa‘a Grammar School, are there some teachers that kind of stand out in your mind?

MW: Stand out? The worse one was Mrs. [H.T.] Sheldon, the sheriff’s wife. She was a music teacher. She used to go around to each classroom. They have music hour. She also was in charge of glee club. She, being Hawaiian, she chose only Hawaiian girls to sing in that choir. I guess, she felt that other racial groups weren’t good singers. I remember she was the fifth-grade teacher. If you misspelled, she got a stick and used to hit our hands. Real sore. I think one time she beat up the principal’s son. I guess she was put on the carpet or something. I don’t know what the. . . I heard she was kind of rough on people.

Yeah, there was one teacher was real kind of nice to us. It was a Portuguese teacher. On Saturdays, he used to take us fishing. The time I went, didn’t catch anything, but just the idea that they were interested in us. That kind of remains with you a long time. Yeah, grammar school was good and bad, but as you get older, you appreciate the work of the teachers. Yeah, one Portuguese teacher, his name was Rodrigues, seventh grade, he loved penmanship. He went to St. Louis [College], I think. Old school. In those days, writing was an art. He used to kind of punch our shoulders and say, “Put your shoulder straight up,” or something.

WN: Oh, he used to correct your posture.

MW: Posture, yeah. Well, teachers did the best they could. They went to Normal School two years and became teachers. So being a teacher was a real respected profession, those days.

WN: Did you have any teachers from the Mainland?

MW: Not that I know of. Maybe some probably did, yeah. In the high school, you had a lot of Mainland teachers. Practically all were *haoles* [Caucasian]. There was only one woman. She was a cafeteria manager. She was part Hawaiian. So high school, Kaua'i High, were all *haoles*.

MK: Where was Kaua'i High?

MW: Līhu'e. You know where that harbor is? Right above, the hills there. Kaua'i High is still here, I think.

WN: It's above Nāwiliwili Harbor, yeah?

MW: Yeah, above there.

WN: So how did you get from your house in Kapa'a to Līhu'e for high school?

MW: We all drove cars.

WN: You drove a car?

MW: Oh, yeah. At age fifteen you can get your license, see? There was family call Yukimura family. They had a car. So my mother said, "Go ahead and ask if you can drive the car and take the girls to school." So I picked up only the girls. There were about three girls in the family and another neighbor, I think. So I drove the cars for three years. You pay seven dollars if you rode in someone else's car. So the first year I rode in another friend's car and paid about seven dollars a month. So you pack, what? You can have three people in the front and maybe another three or four in the back. So everybody commuted. There was only one high school, Kaua'i High in Līhu'e. People from Waimea had to start four o'clock in the morning. But today, you have schools all over. So it's very convenient.

WN: So when you use the Yukimura's family car, you drove that car?

MW: Yeah. Just for transportation, go to school and come back.

WN: So they trusted you to drive their car?

MW: Well, that's what they did.

(Laughter)

MK: How did you learn to drive?

MW: Let's see. Oh, I know. My mother asked a family friend. He had a pick-up truck. They don't teach you how to do it. He said, "Okay, you drive." Then I didn't put my clutch on. You put your left foot down and then you put your gear in, see. When you put your foot down, it's put in neutral. You can move around. So he kind of scolded me. I didn't know you had to put the left foot. They didn't teach you how to do it. He says, "Okay, you drive." So he kind of gave me hell then. But you learn. You practice whenever you can. My father had a Model-T first. I didn't learn to drive the Model-T. Later on he got another car, had gears on. You know, Ford had gears, huh? Yeah. In those days, they had the non-shatter glass that was something new. My father bought this Ford car, which was pretty good. One time I was driving on the street trying to go as fast as I can. You go sixty miles, the car starts shaking. (Chuckles)

WN: So from Kapa'a to Līhu'e, was it a paved macadamized road by then?

MW: Macadamized road, yeah.

WN: How long generally did it take you folks to drive from Kapa'a to high school?

MW: Maybe half an hour slowly. Traffic wasn't too heavy until they start to widen the road and people used to go fast. Being young, always trying to race cars and try to beat each other. Good thing accident didn't happen. But sometimes, accident happen to other people.

WN: So when you started at Kaua'i High School at grade nine, right?

MW: Grade nine.

WN: Ninth grade, you started at Kaua'i High School.

MW: I finished grammar school '31. I flunked the first year because I couldn't speak English. Then Kaua'i High was four years. So there was only one high school there. So people from all over town. Hanalei, way up in the sticks. And from Waimea, they started about four o'clock in the morning. They have to get together. Roads were kind of bad, those days. From Kapa'a, took about twenty minutes or half an hour about. Anything else?

MK: You mentioned that the teachers were mostly Mainland teachers.

MW: At high school, yeah.

MK: At the high school.

MW: *Haole* teachers. They're practically all *haole* teachers.

MK: What do you remember about these Mainland teachers?

MW: Well, they did their job. Our days, being students, you didn't have too much prejudice, anything. They're teachers, and we are students. We didn't have any personal contact or anything.

MK: Were there any that stood out in your mind as being real good or real junk?

MW: We weren't so critical about teachers. We felt they were teachers. Being Japanese, you respect teachers. They did as best as they could, I think. English class was something kind of rough on us. But the one I liked most was class in sociology. I had math, and physics, and all that, but I wasn't so good in math. I guess social studies was something I liked.

WN: Why don't we stop right there and we'll change tapes.

END OF TAPE NO. 55-39-1-10

TAPE NO. 55-40-1-10

WN: This is tape number two, session number one, with Rev. Masayoshi "Mas" Wakai.

MW: Okay.

- MK: We were talking about your days at Kaua'i High School. You mentioned that you liked social studies. What, in social studies, did you find so interesting?
- MW: Well, that happened so long ago. I guess it was more down-to-earth, I think. Where you take physics, math, and all that, it's kind of non-social. I was good more in social studies than in the science subjects.
- MK: Because your teachers were mostly from the Mainland, . . .
- MW: Practically all.
- MK: . . . since they were from the Mainland, were there any opportunities when they would talk to you about Mainland life, or things on the Mainland?
- MW: Not that I remember. They do their jobs teaching the class, and then *pau*. There wasn't any kind of social kind of thing.
- MK: And then, high school . . .
- MW: You know, Japanese kids are more reticent. Teacher-student relationship was above and below. So, it's not like a peer.
- MK: I was wondering, what kinds of extracurricular activities did you participate in at Kaua'i High?
- MW: Kaua'i High? I guess in my senior year, there were lots of these, you might say, political kind of things in student body activities. I wasn't too much outgoing. Just studying, studying. They pegged me as a kind of studious guy or something. I was more planning go college. My mother said, "Go college, go college." So you try to study. So I didn't take part too much in activities, I think.

One incident about phys. ed. [physical education], "Sparky" [Spark Masayuki] Matsunaga [later, a U.S. Representative and Senator] was one of our schoolmates there. I guess he had boxing gloves and we were kind of just practicing. He really punched hard. I still remember he hit me on the chest over there. Yeah, Sparky. He was quite a public figure, liked to speak, yeah? Yeah, there were some outstanding kids there. Sparky was the one that kind of stood out.

In fact, there's a story about him. In those days, they had a contest. The one that had the most subscriptions paid by the subscribers got a thousand-dollar reward. In those days, thousand dollars was a big sum of money. Sparky was a go-getter. So he won the thousand-dollar prize.

- WN: Was this a magazine?
- MW: No, newspaper. *Garden Isle* paper there.
- WN: Oh, *Garden Isle*? Wow.
- MW: Yeah, he's a go-getter.
- WN: So he won a thousand dollars?
- MW: At that time, yeah.
- WN: Wow. (Laughs) That's huge.

- MW: Yeah, big sum of money. You can check with *Garden Isle*, and still they have that information there.
- WN: Were you in the same year as Sparky?
- MW: Sparky was above me, I think. Couple years or something. Even in high school, he was kind of outstanding in public speaking and so forth, I think.
- WN: You said that you liked social studies.
- MW: Yeah, that was more my speed, I guess.
- WN: I noticed that your father—all your younger brothers are named after presidents.
- MW: Presidents, yeah. They were born in Hawai‘i, see, U.S.
- WN: Right. Born in Hawai‘i. So you’re the only one that has a Japanese . . .
- MW: My sister and I were born in Japan, yeah.
- WN: Right. So your brothers like Warren, Ted, Calvin, . . .
- MW: Ted. Calvin. Coolidge.
- WN: . . . Coolidge, and Herbert.
- MW: And Herbert. Named after presidents.
- WN: Did he ever explain to you or tell you why he did this?
- MW: No, no. Theodore, I guess, on that day, the navy had a plane that flew over our Kapa‘a town. All of us heard about the planes coming and we had rehearsed. Then we all line up, white clothes or white shirt and put “N.” They took a picture of the formation of the students out in the yard there. So that was part of the incident I remember, grammar school. Yeah, my father was a historian. Somehow he read U.S. history. In fact, when he came to Kapa‘a, he was good friend with the principal. He started first grade and up to sixth grade, I think. He used to attend classes to learn his English. After school, they borrowed the classrooms and had their language school there until we built our own church and Sunday school rooms over there.
- WN: Did you consider your father to be little more American than most issei on Kaua‘i?
- MW: Well, if you compare with the Buddhist priest, he was more advanced, I think. It depends on the minister, too. Some had contact with *haoles* and they were able to communicate and associate more. My father had contact with the Wilcox family. One [Elsie Wilcox] became a senator. And Mabel [Wilcox] was a nurse, World War I. She was active in nursing field. Another one was Mrs. [Dora] Isenberg. Her husband was a plantation manager, I think. Somehow he had good contacts, Christian church. So he got along with lot of the *haole* ladies.
- MK: How about your mother? How Americanized was your mom?
- MW: Well, when we lived in Kapa‘a it was more kind of usual. Housewife, and being minister’s wife, she had to help with the church. Weekdays, like the Buddhist priests’ wives, they were unpaid

teachers, language teachers. So they had enough. There were seven in my family. I'm the oldest, so I had to baby-sit my brothers quite bit. (Chuckles)

WN: I'm just wondering, like food at home, did you have American foods as well as Japanese foods at home?

MW: Mostly Japanese, I think. I don't remember too much. My father was kind of innovative. He ate *poi* and had sour milk.

MK: Buttermilk.

MW: Drank buttermilk. I thought it was kind of awful. (WN chuckles.) My father liked to try different things. I told you that he tried *bagoong* [condiment made of fermented fish or shrimp]. That was kind of awful stuff.

WN: For example, breakfast. Did you have Japanese breakfast or. . .

MW: No. We used to have cereal, cooked cereal. We had mush, cereal you cook. Dry cereal was kind of later on, I guess. We had mush all the time. Mush and bread. Breakfast was more Americanized, I guess. But lunch and dinner were Japanese food.

MK: How about in terms of dress? Was your mom more apt to be wearing a dress or kimono?

MW: She was local. Old-fashioned dress. Only for special occasions, I guess, might wear the kimono. But kimono was kind of special.

WN: When your father gave sermons, for example, what did he wear?

MW: He had a coat on, regular coat.

WN: I mean, did he wear a . . .

MW: Tie.

WN: . . . tie?

MW: Yeah, coat. Yeah, he was kind of neat and proper, I guess.

MK: Also, being issei, when it came to things like Tenshōsetsu or o-shōgatsu, did your parents fully participate in those occasions?

MW: See, ours was more Christianized family, so we didn't have too much. Although, I guess, my mother was busy all the time with the church work and all that, so didn't have too much Japanese food. But neighbors used to give us *sushi* and *ohagi*, all kind of things. But we loved the *ohagi* [rice dumpling covered with bean jam], was kind of special. So our diet was kind of normal, not fancy stuff. We didn't eat too much meat in those days. Fishermen used to come around and deliver fish. You order what you want. Once in a while, some neighbor would slaughter their pig and they take the order before they slaughter. Usually, New Year's time. Another interesting thing was our Congregational church was across the street from the Hawaiian church. There was a graveyard across and they had a church there. So certain time of the season, they have *lū'au*. So my father always donated five dollars and got to eat Hawaiian food there. Yeah, we looked forward to Hawaiian food. We had neighbors all around. Hawaiians, you know.

WN: Did your father speak Hawaiian, too?

MW: No, he didn't speak. But he loves to eat *poi*. (Chuckles)

MK: You mentioned that when you were in high school, your mom was already thinking you're going to college. You have to go college.

MW: Oh, she just brainwashed me. "You're going college, you're going college," yeah. I guess she was the ambitious one.

MK: How about your father? What expectations did he have for you?

MW: No, he didn't say too much. In those days, issei parents and children didn't communicate too much. You respected your parents and you spoke when you're spoken to.

MK But your mom was set on you going to college.

MW: Going college, yeah. I don't know whether she encouraged me to become a minister or not. I forgot. But she said, "Go college, go college." So in Honolulu, you had this Okumura dormitory [Okumura Boys' and Girls' Home]. Rev. [Takie] Okumura built that castle[-like] church, Makiki [Christian] Church. He had a dormitory for all the Japanese kids. So I guess, every night you had Bible study and you had to read the Bible in Japanese.

WN: So you graduated from Kaua'i High School in 1935. That same year, in the fall, you traveled to Honolulu to attend the University of Hawai'i.

MW: Attend, yeah. There was a dormitory there.

WN: The Okumura dormitory.

MW: Yeah.

MK: When you first came to Honolulu, what did you think? You know, coming from Kaua'i, what did you think?

MW: Well, we didn't travel too much. Honolulu was a big city. Our experience was to go to school. But in a way, it's liberating to be away from home, but my parents said, "You have to write every week to us." Write in Japanese, huh? My mother says, "You say the same thing, over and over."

(Laughter)

"*Buji de aru.*" You're doing okay. Every Sunday, you had to go to Sunday school, attend church service. Okumura dormitory residents all had to, women and men, go to evening services. So the college kids brought their books and had to study. They sit in the pews and read their assignments. (MK chuckles.) They're not going to listen to the Japanese sermon. So we all got by.

MK: What was it like, living at the Okumura dormitory?

MW: Well, I remember, one thing they always have. They have *o-kōkō* [pickled vegetables]. You had communal bath. They give you twenty-cents every day for lunch to buy at the school.

MK: Were all of the dorm people college students or were there high school students?

MW: Some were going to high school. But mostly were college kids, I think. Unless you were orphaned. Rev. Okumura took care some of the orphans, too. So young kids grew up over there. Either homeless or orphans. They had the girls' dormitory. Miss Ikeda, I guess she was getting old, invited us for dinner. I don't know, her taste buds were getting old, I think. She put so much salt in that *sushi*, we couldn't eat. She said, "Oh, you young men, you all are able to eat more." It was so hard to eat something salty.

(Laughter)

You can't complain. In those days, we being Japanese, we're polite to elders, huh. That was an awful experience.

WN: (Chuckles) Were all the students or the boarders Christian?

MW: No, they took anybody who wanted to go there. I guess they accepted. I don't know how they screened the people. Parents like to send people where they can afford. We paid, I think, twenty-five dollars a month. Those days, you could live very cheaply. He got subsidized, so every Christmas or so, he goes to all the rich *haoles*, Dillinghams and others, for donations and I guess got subsidy from them. Donations to continue. So it was a non-profit thing. But it's a kind of service, which was very helpful.

MK: So, by being at the dormitory, what did you folks get? You have your room and board?

MW: Room and board, yeah.

MK: What was included in that? Which meals were provided?

MW: Breakfast and dinner. You eat lot of *o-kōkō*. I get lot of *o-kōkō*, pickled stuff. We get twenty cents for lunch, go to school. In those days, you could get a twenty-five-cents meal at the university. Was pretty cheap. If you worked, you got twenty-five cents an hour. So it was kind of standard.

WN: How did you get from the dormitory to UH [University of Hawai'i]?

MW: Streetcar and then bus. By the city hall, there was a bus that go over there. You can ride a streetcar and then you get transfer, go to UH. Many times the buses were crowded. There was one instructor over there, *haole* lady. She was waiting to get in the car and the bus was full, so they pass her by. She was kind of upset. Okumura dormitory had a pick-up truck, so they put some of the kids in there. We went inside there.

MK: At the dormitory, did you have certain duties or chores to help out?

MW: Yeah, we had firewood. You had *furo* [Japanese-style bath]. They chop the wood [to heat the bath water]. That was one of the main ones. And clean the yard. Not too many chores. In fact, if people want to iron their clothes, they had the old-fashioned charcoal. They provided charcoal iron to iron the clothes. (Chuckles)

MK: When you look back at the time you were dorming there, would you remember some of the people's names? You know, other young men and women who stayed at the Okumura dorm?

MW: There's a Maeda family. The father was a minister, 'Ewa Beach, over there. Sparky [Spark Matsunaga] came later on, I think. Not too many people I remember now. But they all went to

UH. So the families, Japanese families, were very ambitious. They wanted the kids to continue their education.

MK: At UH, what did you eventually start taking up as your main studies?

MW: Sociology was my major there. My mother wanted me to become a doctor. Said, "Be a doctor, be a doctor." I wasn't good in science, so I didn't do so well taking science courses. So when I decided for myself, then I got more interested in the social science courses there. When you finish four years, you wonder what to do. Just before graduation, you go downtown looking for jobs. Everyplace, in the corner, you see all guys. Everybody looking for jobs. So, I had a religion class. Dr. Dunstan, the teacher at that time, I consult him where to go to school. So he said, "Well, I went to the seminary in Berkeley." He said, "These are the schools you can go to." So going to the Mainland was a very interesting experience. Took, what, four days or five days on the boat?

WN: Besides this Dr. . . . What is his name again, the religion professor?

MW: Dunstan. John Dunstan.

WN: Dunstan. Besides him, were there other influential professors that you had relating to social sciences at UH?

MW: Let's see, there was a sociology teacher there. I forgot his name now. (Dr. Andrew Lind.) You mean, some of the important teachers?

WN: People that influenced you or. . . .

MW: Oh, is it Dr. Andrews? No. There was a sociology teacher there. I forgot his name. We didn't have too much contact with teachers. This Dr. Sinclair was very interesting. He became the [university] president later on.

WN: Gregg Sinclair.

MW: He was the English literature teacher. Yeah, Sinclair. He was a very interesting man. He had lot of stories to tell us.

MK: In those days, do you recall a Dr. Lind or a Dr. Adams, Romanzo Adams?

MW: No, I didn't have contact with Dr. Adams.

MW: In those days, who were some of the classmates that you were kind of close to?

MW: It's a funny thing. I don't make friends too easily, close friends. So I was more a loner, I think. The one I came close to was Nishimura—Bert Nishimura. He and I, I guess, worked on the yearbook. Yeah, he was kind of model. He was very intelligent, very ambitious. I guess he became a colonel and retired a colonel.

WN: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MK: Yeah.

MW: Bert Nishimura, yeah.

MK: Well known.

WN: Was he in the 442[nd Regimental Combat Team] or. . .

MW: He was 442, yeah.

MK: Yeah, Bert Nishimura.

MW: He went to McKinley High School. You know, McKinley High School had the junior ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps]. All the young men went over there. So when they came to UH, they were sergeants to begin with, not buck privates like us. I was an alien, so I didn't have to take it as a required course. I volunteered, took one semester. I think I got enough. (Chuckles)

WN: So everyone else was required to go ROTC?

MW: If you're a citizen, yeah. I was alien, so I didn't have to take it. But I took one semester, I think. I didn't do so well.

(Laughter)

I think they gave me a *D* or something.

(Laughter)

You had to take a test. That's the only way they can—a written test. Some of my classmates, they were way up in the balcony. They kind of help each other. You get true-and-false test, they used to share each other. (WN laughs.) I couldn't do that. (MK chuckles.)

WN: So you were at University of Hawai'i for four years, majored in sociology . . .

MW: Yeah, '35 to '39.

WN: And then you graduated in 1939 with your bachelors of arts.

MW: Yeah.

WN: I was just wondering, your mother wanted you to be a doctor and you weren't too good in science. I was just wondering, what was her reaction when you told her you're not going to be a doctor?

MW: I don't know if I told her or not. I guess you can't force people to do whatever they think is good for you. My father more was reasonable. My mother say, "Be a doctor, be a doctor." Because she says, "You get good name." But my brother Coolidge became a doctor.

WN: So when you graduated in '39, you decided, with the influence of Dr. Dunstan, . . .

MW: Dunstan.

WN: . . . you went to the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California.

MW: Yeah, he recommended there, so. That was a nice part of my experience. Get away from home. It's a good feeling being liberated. So three years was kind of interesting. Finished in '39, and then '41, war came. And we all went to this camp.

WN: We'll talk about that next time.

MW: Next time, okay.

WN: But I wanted to ask you about what was it like when you got on that boat to go to Berkeley, California?

MW: Oh, I thought was kind of liberating experience. Free, free from. . . . Your mother always say, “Do this, do that, do this.” The shackles came down. Yeah, my mother was saying, “You’re number one. You have to be the good example.” That thing kind of rings in your ear all the time. So, going away from home was the best thing.

WN: To go away to go to religion school, knowing that your father was a minister, how did you feel? Was it a good feeling that you had that “I’m going to do, in essence, follow my father’s footsteps.” Anything like that?

MW: Not so much. When you go to school, you’re seriously involved in your studies. You don’t have enough time to contemplate what happened before or what your parents [expect]. Being away from home was the most liberating thing. You get your mother’s lectures all the time. Some of my bad dreams was, I’m up in the pole, and my mother or father or somebody saying, “Do this. Do this.” (WN and MK chuckle.) Yeah. You get kind of tired. Being number one in the family, you have to set that example. So getting away from home was the most liberating thing, I think.

WN: Was it hard to convince them to let you go?

MW: No, my father died when I was freshman in college, UH. Yeah, that was a real blow on my life. You know, your head of family. But I got over that. But getting away from home where your mother cannot tell you what to do that was kind of very liberating, I think. You have to get away from home to realize what it’s like to be free.

MK: Going to the Pacific School of Religion. . . . I don’t know anything about that school. Like where was it located?

WN: You know where Berkeley is? Berkeley, UC [University of California] is over here, and we’re on the hill. They call it Scenic Avenue, and it faces the Golden Gate [Bridge]. It’s a beautiful town over there. Nighttime, you could see the fog rolling in. And sunset, right over the Golden Gate. So it was kind of interesting. The professors all were very nice and friendly. They used to invite students for dinner at their homes. We had very close ties. So we have lot of love, aloha, for the school. We keep in touch. In fact, we donate some money in memory for my wife’s family at the school. So we keep in touch after all these years. Let’s see, 1955—I finished over there in 1941. I had a church in Honomū, Hawai‘i. Then I went back for post-study. Mostly in counseling. And 1955, went back there.

MK: When you first went to the Pacific School of Religion, what was the curriculum mostly like? What did you study? See, I’m totally . . .

MW: You don’t know seminary?

MK: Yeah.

MW: Well, we study New Testament, Old Testament, church history. You get church music and I guess religious. It’s more professional school, prepare you for the ministry. You also had fieldwork. You’d be assigned to certain churches. So there was a Plymouth Congregational Church, all *haoles*. I guess the minister was very liberal and they had two students, *haole* students, from our seminary going there. I don’t know. Somehow, the two guys probably recommended

me. So there was another nisei student, George Aki, he was a chaplain with the 442nd before. They invited me to come over there, help with their Sunday school and help with the youth program. In those days, I guess the church and the minister were very liberal, very open-minded.

MK: Was it difficult to be Japanese American and to be pursuing a role in the ministry?

MW: Where? You mean . . .

MK: On the Mainland.

MW: Mainland. Being Japanese, there was a Japanese church there, Congregational church in Oakland called the Sycamore Church. They moved up to Berkeley now. It wasn't difficult. Christian church are more open-minded, not as conservative as some other church groups. So I worked for this Plymouth Congregational Church as a youth worker there. Taught Sunday school and advisor for the youth group. We became close. There wasn't much prejudice. The only thing I experienced prejudice was, these young people belong to some kind of club, probably. And the parents probably up in Piedmont Hills. There was a private swimming pool. All the kids were in there, so I was trying to get inside, stay with the kids. One of the *haole* boys said, "No, we don't accept you people inside here. You have to stay out." Then I thought, "Oh, there's little prejudice there." But it didn't affect me too much because I was kind of shocked they get very particular about things. I don't know how prejudiced they are today. Today you can sue them if they do those things.

WN: Were there other Hawai'i students at the Pacific School of Religion?

MW: Not that I remember. The only---there were two guys, niseis, George Aki, he became a chaplain with the 442nd, and there was a John Yamashita. These are the people that I knew. There were several nisei students, California students, at the school, of Japanese descent. At seminary, it's just like a small family. It's not like a big college. So we got along okay. So I don't know how I was chosen to become Sunday school teacher and a youth advisor. Probably the two *haole* kids that were working at this church probably recommended me. The minister was very liberal, too.

WN: Plymouth Congregational Church was mostly *haole*? All *haole*?

MW: All *haoles*, yes. In those days, if you're a certain race, you go a certain school, certain churches. So there were Japanese Congregational churches and then *haole*. They never got together.

WN: So Plymouth Congregational Church. And there was, you said, the Sycamore Church was Japanese.

MW: Japanese, yeah. Plymouth was a Congregational Church. In fact, the minister came to Honolulu and started Central Union Church, yeah?

MK: Oh.

WN: Okay.

MK: Going back a little bit, you mentioned that your father had passed away when you were a freshman in college.

MW: College, yeah.

MK: You come from a large family, seven kids. And now at that time, your mom was widowed. How did you . . .

MW: Manage?

MK: . . . afford to go to . . .

MW: I don't know what arrangements my mother made, but. . . Oh, I know. There was this Rev. Okumura at that church, Makiki Church. I guess, through them, we moved to Honolulu. They brought a cottage from someplace else, and Rev. Okumura let us stay at the Makiki church grounds over there. So that's how we survived there.

MK: When it came to affording tuition and being able to live on the Mainland, how did you manage that?

MW: Tuition was very minimum. I forgot. Maybe just registration. Ministers, student ministers, were very poor. They didn't have too much money. So, tuition was minimal, I think. My mother used to send *kozukai* or personal money for personal expenses off and on. Oh, I know. I worked at the church and they gave us fifteen dollars, I don't know. Maybe ten dollars the first month or so. That was big money. (Chuckles) The school gave us some allowance, too. And then you work at the library. First year, I had to *hō hana*, take care the yard.

MK: (Chuckles) Where did you live when you were going to the Pacific School of Religion?

MW: There was a dormitory there. We lived there. So they had an eating co-op. You pay maybe fifteen dollars. Hired a cook. We all did washing dishes and clean up the place. We survived somehow. Today they have a beautiful dining room. The students still work, but they get better pay now. So, the school's managed to help the students in many ways, I think. If you work at a church, they give you a small allowance or subsidy. I don't know. It depends. Some of the Methodist students, they were licensed and they have their own church. They have small churches out in the country. Some have to commute maybe hundred miles or so.

WN: This Pacific School of Religion, was this all branches of Christianity?

MW: It started as a Congregational church seminary. But they're open to anyone who wants to study there. So the Lutherans had theirs. Presbyterians had their own seminaries. Baptists had their own seminaries.

WN: So this was . . .

MW: Pacific School was kind of open, yeah.

WN: But primarily Congregational?

MW: Well, background, yeah. You know that area, Berkeley, up in the hills? Scenic Avenue going up the hill. If you go there, it's a nice-looking place there. You can look out to the Golden Gate.

WN: How far away were you from UC?

MW: Just walking distance. We're up in the hill and UC is right next to us. Every morning, you know, campanile? Somebody plays their organ there? I guess, bells, I think. It's real pretty. Morning and the afternoon. Yeah. The chimes, real nostalgic. Berkeley is a nice town over there. Clean and friendly. Mostly for students, too.

MK: Before the war started, I was wondering, how much contact did you have with *Nihonjin* [Japanese] up in the Berkeley area? Other Japanese living in California?

MW: Well, there was this Yanaga family. He was a professor of Japanese history, I think, at Berkeley. So he was from Hawai'i.

MK: Chitoshi Yanaga.

MW: Yeah.

WN: Oh, Chitoshi.

MW: His brother Oliver was assistant to my dad one summer and got to know him. So I used to stop by. They used to invite me. Just like a family. When their baby was born, they want to go out, they said, "Mas, can you come and look after"—you know, baby-sit, yeah? Well, being an infant, no problem. So the war came and he was a language teacher out in Boulder [Colorado]. I guess teaching maybe military people, I think.

WN: So you did a lot of babysitting in your early years.

MW: Early years and later years.

WN: (Chuckles) Later years, too. Okay, we're done for today. Thank you.

MW: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape Nos. 55-41-2-11 and 55-42-2-11

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Masayoshi Wakai (MW)

January 11, 2011

Honolulu, O‘ahu

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

MK: This is an interview with Rev. Masayoshi Wakai on January 11th, 2011. This is our second session, and it’s being taped in Honolulu, Hawai‘i. The interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

During our first interview, we covered your early life, and we went all the way up through your being at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley.

MW: Uh-huh [yes].

MK: And today, we want to continue by having you tell us about what you remember about December 7, 1941, the start of war.

MW: War? I have to get back there. Nineteen forty-one, let’s see. I guess I was a senior in seminary, and then in April, we were all enforced to go to camp. There was a declaration. I guess the military said all the Japanese people were dangerous to the welfare of the country. So they couldn’t decide who was (chuckles) innocent or who was a good citizen and who was a bad citizen. So they decided to send the whole Japanese population to camp—concentration camp. First was assembly center. The one I went to was Tanforan—it was a racetrack near the present-day [San Francisco International] Airport.

MK: You know when war first broke out on December 7, what were your thoughts?

MW: I couldn’t believe it, that something like that would happen. I was, more or less, in a state of shock, a little bit, but I guess things kind of leveled off, so. . . . See I was away from Hawai‘i, so—I know this was a Sunday morning; I was at church. There was a young *haole* boy, he said, “Oh, the Japs attacked Pearl Harbor.” I was in shock that something like that could happen. December 7th.

But the people of the church I belonged to—it was a *haole* church and the minister was quite liberal, very understanding. They asked me, “Is there anything we can do?” They were very supportive. They said, “We’ll be here to help in any you want.” So the *haole* church was very kind and helpful.

MK: How did *haole* people outside of the church membership react to someone like yourself: Japanese American in California in December ’41?

MW: Well, I didn't have too much contact with the *haole* population, except at that church. So from my point of view, things were maybe in a state of shock or something. So they probably were in a dilemma how to handle Japanese people. I didn't have any kind of prejudice or remarks made against me at the time. So we just kind of went with the flow, and then all the Japanese people were given notice that they have to be transported into a central center. So we were five months in this camp in this racetrack.

MK: So first . . .

MW: That's where I was ordained, yeah. There was a friend of mine—a classmate—George Aki. He later became one of the chaplains of the 442nd [Regimental Combat Team], and he and I were first to be ordained in camp as officially a minister of the Congregational Church at the time.

MK: I know that you mentioned that you went to Tanforan, the assembly center . . .

MW: And from there we went to Utah.

MK: Topaz.

MW: Topaz, yeah.

MK: When you mentioned you were ordained in camp, was it at Tanforan?

MW: Tanforan, yeah, yeah.

MK: You know, going back to your Tanforan time, what was your reaction when you got the word that you would be moved to Tanforan?

MW: Well, I was born in Japan, so not a citizen of the United States. So I felt, well, this is what the government wants. But I think people were in a state of shock because we never thought of—not doing anything criminal, and yet, being herded in like cattle into this camp, so . . .

WN: I was wondering, you're from Hawai'i and you're born in Japan . . .

MW: Uh-huh [yes].

WN: Did you feel any different from the other people that were—the Japanese people that were living in that area?

MW: In the Bay area?

WN: Yeah.

MW: Not so much being citizen or not citizen, but more a racial thing that affected us. I guess the ones that were more traumatized were the young Japanese people who were born in the States as citizens. Because I was teaching a class in camp, and one of the boys said, "How come I'm a U.S. citizen and being locked up?"

I said, "Well, because of your Japanese racial background." So that's the only rational answer I could give him, not because he did something wrong. I think the young people

who were born as American citizens, they had kind of very mixed feelings about their status. They wondered why.

WN: So not being a citizen, you didn't feel any . . .

MW: I didn't feel too bad because, well, I'm an alien, and well, that's what life was.

But in a state, you are kind of mixed because I grew up in Hawai'i since age five, and in my thoughts, I feel more like an American citizen because you go to public schools and pledge the allegiance to the flag, raise your hand and all that thing. So I felt that, well, I'm an alien, so that's what it is.

It didn't traumatize me too much; the shock was the war—how can Japan attack Pearl Harbor? Honolulu was my home for a long time.

MK: You know, from December to April, when you were moved to Tanforan, what communication did you have about or with your family in Hawai'i?

MW: Oh, my mother would write in Japanese before, but when the war started, I guess, had my brother send letters in English. I noticed one of my brothers wrote about the attack and all that, and then the censors cut out all the pieces, yeah. Made some, I guess, a little holes in the letter. So the war was really shocking to many of us.

MK: You mentioned that you got word that you were supposed to be moved to Tanforan. How did you get notified about being assembled and sent to Tanforan?

MW: I can't remember. Must've been maybe newspaper or. . . I can't remember how. I guess notice came out some way.

MK: In going to Tanforan, what did you take with you?

MW: We went to the assembly center. . . Oh, they say, you can carry two bags, with both hands. There was a rule saying you can take only what you can carry.

MK: So for yourself, I was curious, you being . . .

MW: Being single, yeah. Didn't have much to take though.

MK: . . . single and college student, what did you take with you?

MW: Well, my clothes. . . Books and things get too much, so we just left it at the school, and then later on, when we went to the more current camp in—oh, I know, we left at the church, and then when we went to Utah—relocation center—they sent all the books over.

MK: Ah. And, you know, when you were given the notice that you have to report to Tanforan, were there other Japanese . . .

MW: Yeah the isseis, yeah.

MK: Any aliens or Japanese Americans that you knew . . .

MW: . . . then families, yeah. Mix in all the parents and the children. Yeah, because I was teaching that class in history, and one of the boys says, "I was born as American citizen. How come I get rounded up and put in camp like this?"

I said, "You know, because of your Japanese face."

I think the young niseis were probably more confused than many of us. I was an alien, Japanese citizen. Although I've been living in America since age five, I was more Americanized. But because of my citizenship, I felt well, it is what it is. We just went along with the tide.

MK: How did your brother, Coolidge, react to it?

MW: Well, I don't know, they were all living in Hawai'i at the time. I guess they had mixed feelings, probably. I didn't question that. We were too busy taking care of ourselves at the time.

MK: You know your brother Coolidge, was he a student at Berkeley High School at that time?

MW: Yeah, he came over, age sixteen, to Berkeley. I asked one of our friends what to do. He said, "Well, you can advertise for school boy job." So the family, the man was assistant manager of Sears Roebuck, and they wanted somebody to be a companion for their eight-year-old son. So my brother was going to Berkeley High School, so things worked out pretty nice.

Another interesting thing was he was corresponding with this Cox family. [The] father was a minister in New York and invited [him] over to come and stay with them, so he left by himself.

MK: So Coolidge, did he go to Tanforan first?

MW: Yeah, I think he went to camp with me.

MK: Did Coolidge also go to Topaz with you?

MW: No, no, I said he went to New York . . .

MK: From Tanforan?

MW: Tanforan, yeah.

MK: Why is it that you couldn't go along with your brother Coolidge to upstate New York?

MW: Well, the story is, Coolidge had this pen pal, Cox family with a son. He was a minister up there in New York—I forgot the name of the town in the state. So they invited him to go over. They were asking the officials, is he safe as a, you know, coming over? They were kind of questioning, but he went to the town, and they treated him pretty nicely.

MK: Did your alien status kind of prevent you from going with your brother?

MW: No, the alien part had nothing to do with it; it was the relationship. Yeah, this Cox family knew Coolidge from his son's contact. I didn't know them personally. But they were very nice to accept him and . . .

WN: So were you aware that if you weren't an alien, I mean, if you wanted to go or if they invited you to go, could you have gone to New York?

MW: I would think so because camp life wasn't something you love to stay. It's like a concentration camp. You can go out to shop and come back. Let's see, at Tanforan, you were restricted there; we were there four months. Then when I went to Utah, they were more liberal about going out to work, you know, and stay out. The citizens, mostly the young guys, they were free to move out. Parents, even though they were citizens, some were very reluctant to go. They were afraid about how they would be treated outside. So many of the young people were invited by the Quaker group, so they were able to get help and go to school—continue school, mostly college students. High school kids stayed back.

MK: Going back to Tanforan Racetrack Assembly Center. What do you remember about conditions there?

MW: Well, it wasn't like home. It was more like camp, I think. You know, you go to summer camp and all that. For me, being bachelor, wasn't so bad because you can run around and just take care of yourself. But I think the families were more concerned because there are a lot of sanitation outlets. In fact, oh I know, some of us were living in the stables, and then some had, what do they call, bigger buildings. Actually, they were real flimsy things, with tar paper walls and all that. Families were all crowded in, so there was little privacy for a lot of the families.

WN: So the families, more or less, had the buildings and bachelors like you had the stables?

MW: Let's see, Tanforan, the racetrack, I guess, was all stable. But when we went to a relocation center in Utah, you had regular homes. At the ends, they had enough for two beds for bachelors and singles. So in the middle, you had the larger ones, so the families could stay. They had big, what do they call—oh, no central heating system—you had big, I don't know, iron furnaces. They've got charcoal, you know, coal. You had to put coal inside, so start the fire, you start with the tinder. Just wood and then charcoal. They'd give you big coal to warm up the place. It was very primitive.

The meals were all centralized. They had the blocks: block one, block two, block three. Each block had its own kitchen management group over there. So when we moved to Utah, you have a more organized group. Whereas Tanforan was racetrack, so it was very primitive.

In fact, I hate to say it, but I went to the restroom at night, and a lady was in the men's section. I guess she didn't want to go far away from her residence or whatever. It was kind of embarrassing, but things were kind of a little messy. That was one occasion that was not talked about.

But the Japanese people were very efficient. Those who were cooks, they said, "Well, I can help in the kitchen." So first they had big pots that the military gave. When you cook rice, only the bottom will be cooked and the top would not, so they decided to get big flat pans, and then they cooked it on the stove. So they were pretty smart, yeah. So we were fed well, you know, enough to eat.

So when they said—after four months—we can go to the camp up in Utah or other places, the young guys were able to continue to college, through the Quaker organization. And they called them Friends. So we were treated okay.

MK: How about in your case, was that an option for you? You were still a fairly young guy, still in seminary. Was that an option for you, to leave the camp and continue schooling in the Midwest or East?

MW: Yeah, actually, I finished my seminary, '42. So I got my degree in absentia, in California. So when we went to Utah, I wrote to the minister who was—Dr. [Albert W.] Palmer—he was a minister at Central Union Church, and he was at Chicago. So I said, “I’d like to come to Chicago.”

There was a kind of selfish interest, too. See, Oberlin was another seminary over there. I said, well, if I go to Chicago, I’ll be able to meet more young girls over there. (MK chuckles.) So I decided Chicago is a better place. So (chuckles) I went, and that’s why I met my wife there.

WN: So in September of '43, you left Topaz and went to Chicago . . .

MW: Chicago . . .

WN: . . . Theological Seminary . . .

MW: Seminary.

WN: . . . with the sponsorship of Dr. Palmer.

MW: Palmer, yeah. Albert Palmer.

WN: Going back to Topaz, you lived in like a---did you live with someone else?

MW: Yeah, see, when I was at California, that racetrack there . . .

WN: Tanforan . . .

MW: I was in the housing section there, helping people go to different apartments. It could be horse stables, anyway . . .

WN: How did you get that responsibility?

MW: Well, I’ve seen some of the young guys that I knew, so they said, “Well, you can work over here.” They paid, I think, eight dollars a month. (Chuckles)

So I had some experience in housing. And you know, we rode the train for two days and two nights. It was kind of, real traumatic. I don’t know, somehow, they said, “Well, you be the captain for this section of the train.”

So we tried to see that the parents were taken care—if they basically had milk provided and so forth. So I decided, since I had some experience in the housing section, when we came to the new housing center over there in Topaz, I went there. But somehow, people’s feelings become a little bit raw. They start demanding, saying, “I want this. I want to stay near my girlfriend,” and all that.

I decided, the best way is, “Put your request in writing!”

Then you don’t have to face them and try to pacify them. Yeah, it was kind of rough. Because I didn’t have enough sleep, I was getting real nervous and a little tired. In fact, one man was an issei man who came in, and I kind of swore at him. So later on, I apologized. You know, it came to a breaking point. I tried to get to the hospital, but they didn’t think I was sick at all. But emotionally, you were all spent. So I just stayed outside the—what do you call—the camp hospital, just to kind of cool off things. So after that, afterwards, your body, mind, and emotions are all kind of rundown. So it was kind of rough going. So after that, I kind of just took it easy in the camp.

WN: What kind of conflicts were, you know, caused you to have all of these emotional troubles? Like for example, what?

MW: Well one is: we were on the train, two days two nights. I guess I was physically just kind of spent, and you just can’t take any more. In fact, I told one guy, “Just go to hell.” You just couldn’t stand it any more, although I apologized to this issei man later on.

WN: This was on the train from Tanforan to Topaz . . .

MW: Topaz, yeah.

WN: Do you remember how you felt about the prospect of moving from Tanforan to Topaz? Did you feel really unsure of what was going to happen?

MW: I don’t remember any kind of emotional thing. I was asked to be a captain for this one section—one coach over there—so you do as best as you can. Being a minister and being asked to kind of head this group, so you tried to do the best you can. But there’s a breaking point, you can’t forever be on the high level. And the train’s going day and night; you can’t sleep well on the train either. So it was kind of real critical thing for me at the time.

WN: And you know, you got your diploma in absentia while you were at Tanforan.

MW: Tanforan, yeah.

WN: So you got your minister degree . . .

MW: I was a senior then . . .

WN: Pacific School of Religion, right?

MW: Yeah.

WN: So you got your diploma at Tanforan.

MW: Yeah.

WN: So was it well known at Tanforan that you were trained as a minister?

MW: We had an ordination, officially examined and then given the title of “the Reverend.” So there was George Aki and myself, the two of us, so it was quite a prominent occasion. In

fact, the newspapers said first time in the history, you have two young guys ordained in a camp, in concentration camp.

So it was kind of a very important time in my life.

WN: Did you feel like you had more responsibility or did you feel the pressure to have to calm people down?

MW: Well, not in, let's see, the current camp [i.e. Tanforan]. It was more when we went to Utah. People kind of have to get reoriented to different places. You know, because as I said, one guy became very belligerent: "I want to have a section—room—next to my girlfriend," and all that. But I was kind of emotionally spent. I guess I kind of blew my top off (chuckles).

MK: When you were at Tanforan, following your ordination as a minister, were you assigned ministerial duties for the people at Tanforan?

MW: Yeah, the ministers were good, people from different denominations. They were pretty nice, especially the Bay Area people. They organized themselves as a Protestant church. You had the Catholic group, and you had the Seventh-day Adventists. So they got along fine.

MK: As a minister, were you providing services at Tanforan?

MW: Yeah, we had church services. Yeah, yeah, temporary. It was pretty well organized. I guess they had the Japanese-language group and the English group, you know, but they were pretty nice.

MK: I know that you talked to us about the trauma of being transported from Tanforan to Topaz . . .

MW: Utah, yeah. Topaz.

MK: . . . and having to deal with the housing demands of the people there and how it affected you. What were conditions like at Topaz? I know one time you mentioned the soil and everything.

MW: Yeah, Topaz was kind of more settled place. They know that this was going [to] be permanent—not permanent, but for long term because of the war. I guess people felt a little more relaxed. It's a big area. I think one square mile, or something. It was a huge thing. But they had armed guards all on the sides. They said to protect them from the crazy *haoles* that was going to come in, but nobody came in. I think there was rumor or incident happen, maybe one Japanese issei was coming under the fence or something and was shot at or something. I forgot, some rumor was going around. One square mile is kind of a big place there.

So we were treated pretty nice. And people from the outside came. The Quaker group came, brought their own teachers. The LDS [Latter-day Saints], the Mormon group, they sent their missionaries to help out, too. So the relocation center was much better place for living together, I think.

I taught classes for one semester. I thought it was enough, yeah. But there was no books.

MK: What subject were you teaching?

MW: I tried to teach grammar. Well, you do the best you can. Actually, the school houses were actually regular barracks or homes, would have been used for homes. So wintertime, it gets cold, so I had to get up four o'clock in the morning, and then start the fire, so when the kids came to school, it would be nice and warm. It snowed, too. One kid was kind of real rascal; my back was turned and he kind of threw snow on me, and I turned around. He showed his back. So I said, "You the one," and I guess I threw snow at him, too.

(Laughter)

MW: Yeah it was kind of rough going, but the people tried to work together. So you had the regular cooks, they had blocks—maybe ten blocks—so they were quite organized. In fact, one guy said, "Ey, come. Reverend, come," and then he said, "I have some steak." So he made some steak. You got to eat before the other people come. (Chuckles) So the cooks were lucky, they had the choice food over there. But people managed, and we got along.

MK: I know you mentioned that there were cooks who provided food in mess halls.

MW: Yeah.

MK: You have teachers. People who served as teachers.

MW: Yeah. You had nurses' group. In fact, some of the nurses trained young girls how to be aides. So they were pretty good, very adaptive.

MK: How was the medical care there?

MW: Well, there was a regular hospital. The doctors, they kind of organized themselves, and then they did surgery. They would do some minor surgery there. So everything was pretty well organized.

WN: Were the doctors Japanese?

MW: Japanese, yeah. All the people in the camp were Japanese. Only the heads were *haoles*, so they got along very well.

MK: Being a minister, what could you say about the problems that people may have experienced at Topaz?

MW: Well, I didn't have too much counseling experience. That was later on, which I got. You play it by ear.

MK: What kinds of problems did people come to you with?

MW: I don't remember too much because I wasn't too much trained in counseling. You do the best you can. They came, talked to you, but I don't remember. There was one case, the mother was upset because of some kind of, oh, I guess, housing. People like to stay together. And some families had to have more than one apartment because there were more children around. Sometimes they had about six beds in one small room. I was in housing, so one time, I decided to get the end room for two people, and then the middle one was larger for bigger families. So when I decided to get the end room for myself, I

went—you can't live by yourself. You're supposed to have a partner, or a couple single people. The parents took the small one, and I had to stay with the boys. These are California boys. Brothers, they're always talking, talking, talking. (MK laughs.) The name was Bando. I couldn't stand it, so I had to go back and stay with the old man in the single place. If you had a family, well, you could stay in the larger place there like the family. But privacy was kind of limited. Just like a bare wall in a bare room like this and do the best you can. Sometimes, you get a frame, and you put sheet over, so you divide the family: the children and the parents.

It was rough going, but people had no choice. You either put up with it or go someplace else. So when we went to Utah then, Topaz, people started going out to work and going to school, so things were more normal that way. Some of the young niseis decided to stay with their family in camp for the duration of the war.

There was the time when the 442nd [Regimental Combat Team] was organized, so many volunteered to go out. I was an alien; I volunteered, but they wouldn't take me. I was trying to be a chaplain. But my friend, George Aki, he was my classmate at seminary, and he volunteered and became a chaplain with Masao Yamada and Hiro Higuchi and a few others. So when I came to Chicago, I was teaching the officers Japanese language. So that was my bit of support for the war effort, I think.

WN: So at Topaz, you said that you were like one of the housing people in charge of assigning people to housing. Do you remember any kind of emotional problems that people had that they needed to come to you and talk about like marital troubles or anything like that? Do you remember?

MW: Not that I remember. Well, Japanese people are not open like the *haoles*. They had enough problems just getting settled physically, so I didn't get too much experience like that.

WN: Let's change tapes.

MK: Okay, we're going to change tapes.

END OF TAPE NO. 55-41-2-11

TAPE NO. 55-42-2-11

WN: This is tape two, session two, with Rev. Masayoshi Wakai. And we're going to continue.

MK: Before we leave the topic of Topaz, I wanted to know what were some of the activities or things that you did day to day to pass the time while you were in camp?

MW: Oh. What do you want? Topaz?

MK: Topaz.

MW: Let's see, the one assembly center was over here.

MK: Yeah, Tanforan.

MW: Tanforan and Topaz. Topaz was more open place. Let's see. Oh, I know. Ministers were getting sixteen dollars a month. So I taught school. There was a young nisei guy, he was an assistant superintendent. So he was asking all college students who can help with the teaching. Whether you taught or not, they want you to help. So I volunteered. I got, what, sixteen dollars a month. Room and board free. (Chuckles) So I was able to at least assist. At least you get a little income coming in. But without any books, it was kind of hard.

MK: In your free time, what were you doing?

MW: I don't know, just kind of took it easy, I think. You mean, after working hours?

MK: After working hours.

MW: Oh. I don't remember too much. I was single, too, so there weren't any prospective young female friend that you might get acquainted; I didn't find any. I decided, well, my best bet is go to Chicago and that's where I met my wife. She was a student of social work at the school, University of Chicago. See, Oberlin had a seminary there—that's out in the country. I decided, well, maybe Chicago is a better place, and a friend—or not so much a friend, an acquaintance—introduced me to my wife. Her name was Helen Miyoshi, from Sacramento. So I got to know her, dated her, and married in Chicago at the time.

MK: To get out of Topaz to go to Chicago, what was the process you had to go through to gain permission to go out?

MW: I guess, one was they didn't want you to just get out and be left in dire straits, so somebody had to sponsor you, I think. I think that's the thing. I don't remember the details, but Rev. Dr. Palmer was a minister of Central Union Church over here, and then when the war came, he was president of the Chicago Theological Seminary. So I wrote and said I'd like to come to Chicago. Abe Akaka was there too, and I think Mitsuo Aoki. So there were friends there, so when I went to Chicago, I stayed with Abe Akaka for a while. Yeah, he was pretty generous. The Big Five people, I guess, gave him some subsidy, so he gave me ten dollars, twenty dollars. [He] said, "Here's some money." He was pretty generous. So Abe kind of gave me little *kozukai*. Little spending money. My mother sent a can of *poi* when I was in camp. So I brought it over and gave it to Abe. Abe was so happy to eat *poi* during the war years. So that was a little incident I remember.

But Chicago was a good place. They said all the niseis and others who wanted to find jobs, if they went to Chicago, they'll find jobs. Wartime, there were a lot of factories going on, I think. So Chicago was kind of interesting place.

WN: Being an alien, do you remember any kind of roadblocks or hurdles that you had to go through . . .

MW: As an alien?

WN: . . . more so than the regular American citizens? You know, to get out of Topaz?

MW: No, if there was a place you can go to, you were allowed to go. I don't remember the restrictions so much.

MK: In Chicago, where did you live?

MW: I stayed at a seminary for a while. Then a mutual friend introduced me to my wife, and we got married over there. My first son was born in Chicago. Later, her sister—older sister—came to Chicago, too. She found work over there. She lived in a family, help with the cooking and things like housework. But during the day, she went out to work for herself.

MK: What type of work did you do while you were in Chicago?

MW: Oh, Chicago? First, I knew someone who---let's see, he was a professor at Chicago University. He was training the officers for occupation, and then they were learning Japanese; they were taking language classes. So I was teaching Japanese language for a while. So, more or less, a kind of oral language. Later on, they said they going to be learning how to write in Japanese. I wasn't too good, so I decided, "Time to move on!" (MK chuckles.)

So I worked at the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association]. I found a job with the YMCA. See, at the time, the young people were drafted. At this YMCA headquarters, they said, "Well, this married guy might be moving out," so they were training me to take his job. The boys' assistant---the boys' worker, yeah. But he wasn't drafted, so I decided, well, time to move on.

Then I got another job as a counselor for young kids. We used to pick the kids up after school for play—they called it Play Clubs of Chicago, that was the name—and took the young kids, grammar school kids. So I did that for about two years until the war ended. So when the war ended, then we were able to come back home.

WN: Besides yourself, do you remember others from Topaz who came to Chicago?

MW: (Pause) Not that I remember. I guess they were scattered. See, Chicago's a big place, and then all the niseis came because work was available. So I don't remember too many; not too many local kids. I know there were many like Ralph Yempuku and others who were in intelligence in Minneapolis. They used to come to Chicago to spend the weekends, so I met . . .

WN: Did you know them at the time? Did you know Ralph at the time?

MW: Ralph. . . . I didn't know him personally, and this guy Buto, yeah.

MK: Junichi Buto, mm-hmm [yes].

MW: Yeah. I think very few people. Oh, I know, I met [Kanemi] Kanazawa. These were officers---you know there were University of Hawai'i ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] cadets? So wartime, they were commissioned as a first lieutenant or second lieutenant. They were up in Minneapolis, and they used to come down. There was some sukiyaki restaurants—they liked to eat Japanese food—so they came to Chicago. That's how I met few of them over there.

WN: So largely, when you were in Chicago, the Hawai'i boys sort of . . .

MW: Yeah, Sparky [Matsunaga] was there, too.

WN: . . . gravitated towards each other?

MW: Sparky came. Yeah I met him.

WN: Sparky?

MW: Yeah he treated me to dinner at the place in Chicago (chuckles) when he came. You know we were in school at Kaua'i High.

MK: Uh-huh [yes].

MW: (Pause) So it was good to see local boys up there. So the people like Yempuku and Kanazawa, they were in Minneapolis . . .

WN: They were at Fort Snelling MIS [Military Intelligence Service] school . . .

MW: I think so. They said they came from Snelling. Well, there were a lot of, I guess, secret kind of things going on, so they didn't say too much. But we didn't ask too many questions either.

WN: It must have been nice for you to be with some Hawai'i boys for . . .

MW: Yeah, make you feel a little . . .

WN: . . . after all that time.

MW: Make you feel at home, yeah.

Yeah they had good Japanese restaurants in Chicago; that's why they came down. And for R and R. Chicago is a big place, but you don't see too many local boys.

WN: For the most part, how were you treated by the people in Chicago?

MW: No problem. There wasn't any prejudice. In fact, we were able to get housing. Oh I know, there was one incident where we were married. There was an ad for [a] room. So we went there to apply, and that night we stayed there, there was one guy who was kind of little upset—*haole* guy—he was banging at our door, trying to break in. And, I guess, said, "Damn Japs," and all that. It so happened that his brother was wounded in the war. I guess he was upset because his girl turned him down or something. That was the only bad incident that happened. So next day, we moved out and waited.

Later on, there was an ad in the paper, and my wife answered it, and we got there. We were able to get the apartment, in a nice section in Chicago. Let's see, University of Chicago was here, and then down, just several blocks down. So there was a Danish guy—he was a driver for this rich man—and he said, "Well, they're citizens just like us." So he kind of backed us up, and we were able to stay at this apartment for a while. Upstairs apartment. This guy liked to keep his apartment warm, so he always stoked the furnace and had a lot of heat over there. So we stayed there about two years, I think, until the war ended. You know, that was the best part: coming home.

WN: Your wife, Helen Miyoshi?

MW: Miyoshi.

WN: She's from Sacramento . . .

MW: Sacramento.

WN: Where did she come from? I mean, what camp was she at, and why did she come to Chicago?

MW: Oh, she was accepted as a student to the school of social work. Her father had a shoe store, and I guess he moved to—let's see, Salt Lake. Salt Lake, I guess he had some distant relatives. So they took him in, and then later on, he went to town and then had his shoe store there.

WN: In Salt Lake?

MW: I think so.

WN: Okay, so your wife was never interned?

MW: No, no, she was able to move out.

MK: So as the war ended, yourself, your wife, and . . .

MW: And my first son.

MK: . . . and your first son came back to Hawai'i. Why was that decision made? Why not stay on the Mainland? Why come back?

MW: Well, I'm from Hawai'i, and I had some contact with the church over here—headquarters here. So I wrote to, you might say, the superintendent of this church over there about work. In fact, first, he would send money for our transportation. I went to my local minister in Chicago. He said, "Well, like missionaries, when they're invited to come to a church, the church provides the money." So he intervened for me, and then he wrote, so they sent a thousand dollars. So we were able to pack all our household goods and everything. So we got our transportation and all the big crates—we had huge crates—put all our furniture in there. I think two crates came to Hawai'i. So first place I was assigned to was Honomū, Hawai'i.

WN: Big Island.

MW: Big Island, yeah.

WN: Was it easy to convince your wife to leave the Mainland to come to Hawai'i?

MW: She had no choice.

(Laughter)

MW: She was a social worker. Oh there was an incident when we came back here. She had a job with the welfare—state welfare—and she was interviewing a Korean man. The Korean man couldn't speak English very well, and my wife couldn't, I guess, communicate. If you talk proper English, Korean man wouldn't understand; maybe pidgin, he would understand. I remembered that Koreans were taught Japanese, so I said, "*Kim-san, Nihongo hanashimasuka?*" You know, can you speak Japanese? He said, "*Hai*," so my wife interviewed him in Japanese. So that was kind of an interesting anecdote.

- MK: So your family returned to Hawai‘i, your first assignment was at Honomū, and your wife was a social worker with the state.
- MW: Then we had my son—my son was born in Chicago—Eugene. So he was one-year-old when we came back in ’46.
- MK: And in Honomū, what kind of---how would you describe your . . .
- MW: It was a plantation town and there was a well-known minister named Shiro Sokabe.
- MK: Mm-hmm [yes].
- MW: He was, quotation mark, known as a saint, because he was very humble and very much concerned about people’s welfare. In fact, he had a dormitory there. In those days, plantation workers want to send their children to high school or grammar school. They’re working, and they don’t have time and place for their children to—what do they call. . . . Well, I guess people didn’t own cars at the time, so transportation was a problem. So this was a dormitory, and being a Christian minister, had boys and girls. The parents could send their children to get educated. So from Honomū, they maybe rode a bus to Hilo to go to school there.
- MK: When you were assigned to Honomū, you took the place of Rev. Ted Chinen.
- MW: Chinen came, before me. See, Mr. Sokabe was there from 1904 or something there. He stayed there for a long time, and then when he retired—maybe was forced to retire—then Ted Chinen came over there. He stayed there about seven years, I think. I stayed about five [eight] years. You know, it came to a saturation point; you can only do so much. I had Hakalau, Honomū, and Pāpa‘ikou. You had about three services, and then you had to rush back and forth. Well, I guess things got into my system, and I couldn’t take it anymore. So I had to get away. I went back to school again. So it was kind of a little therapy. So kind of straightened up. From there, I learned about counseling, so I decided to major in counseling later on.
- WN: This was in 1955 when you . . .
- MW: Went away to school.
- WN: . . . left Honomū, and you went to Pacific School of Religion. . .
- MW: School, yeah.
- WN: . . . back to Berkeley.
- MW: Yeah, yeah. So let’s see. I think 1947, I went. I was there about eight years, I think. Yeah, ’55 I went back to school again.
- MK: Following your training in psychiatric counseling at Pacific School of Religion, you also got more training in Topeka, Kansas?
- MW: Yeah, yeah. [The] Menninger [Clinic] was a psychiatric center there. They moved to Houston right now. So specializing in counseling gives you a little bit more insight about yourself and relationships. So that kind of helped me come back here and be able to work with the prisoners. I went to work at the Kūlani Prison Camp after I came back.

WN: On the Big Island?

MW: Big Island, yeah.

MK: When you worked that the Kūlani Honor Camp, where did you live? Where did your family live?

MW: Reed's Island. No, Reed's Island is actually like an island, get the river on both sides. There were only the *haoles* who lived there first. There was a Japanese woman married to this *haole* man, and he was the first mixed family on that place there. There was a doctor that came—Dr. Miyamoto. There was a Chinese doctor that lived there, Dr. Loo, yeah. So after us, more Japanese people came, living there, too.

WN: This is Reed's Island . . .

MW: Reed's Island . . .

WN: Hilo?

MW: Hilo, yeah. There's a little bridge, let's see, next to the library. There's a public library on the main street over there, and then on the—oh I know, there's a high school, and ours was on the opposite side. It's in like an island, yeah.

MK: And also, while you were living there, you witnessed the 1960 tsunami?

MW: I didn't witness any. I witnessed the aftermath. Yeah, because one morning I was going to work, and I see one house right in the middle of the street. Downtown, the tidal wave came and moved the big house right into the middle of the street. Was kind of a little surprising.

MK: But how did you . . .

MW: Let's see, '46 was the first tidal wave. The one was '50. . . .

MK: Forty-six and '60, yeah?

WN: The two main ones were in '46 and then 1960.

MW: Sixty?

WN: Yeah.

MK: So you remember seeing the house?

MW: House, yeah. Store moved right in the middle of the street. That was kind of a little shocking.

MK: After working at the Kūlani Honor Camp . . .

MW: Yeah.

MK: You came to O'ahu . . .

MW: O‘ahu, work at the boys’ home as a chaplain. So at Kūlani, they called a supervisor—let’s see, in training and treatment, I got a section. I told the administrator, “I want to be a chaplain.”

They made, I guess, a special job opening for my work over there: Ko‘olau. They called it Ko‘olau—let’s see, Ko‘olau was out in the sticks before, and they moved to Kailua and they called it the Hawai‘i Youth Correctional Facility. Yeah, that’s the name. So I was a chaplain there for many years until I retired. About seven years.

WN: Did you enjoy that job?

MW: Yeah, it was very good. Well, relationship with the community. I was a member of the Kiwanis Club. So whenever we need money, King’s Bakery had sweet bread, so we’d have sweet bread sales. And Kiwanis Club people helped quite a bit. Then we had local churches come in—Catholic church, the Protestant church group—so many organizations came to kind of assist us with programs. At the same time, they brought some goodies for the kids. They like to have some cookies and things given to them. Soda.

So there was a younger boys’, and the older boys’, and the women’s group—girls’ group. So there were three types of cottages over there.

MK: And you retired in about 1978?

MW: Somewhere in there, yeah.

WN: We’re just about---we’re done?

MK: Yeah, I think so.

WN: We’re finished!

MW: Oh, thank you.

MK: We’ve got your life (chuckles).

MW: Now, I’m retired (chuckles).

WN: Right.

MW: So I’m enjoying my retirement—take it easy.

MK: And you have two children?

MW: Two boys, yeah.

MK: Eugene and . . .

MW: Eugene, yeah.

MK: And Allen.

MW: Allen is kind of interesting because he went to Japan. I told him if he get hard up, teach English, so he taught English at a high school, I think. Eugene is in insurance now. So they're doing okay.

MK: So I guess we can end the interview here, and we thank you for telling us about World War II experiences.

MW: Well, thanks for coming over.

WN: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

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Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa**

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