

## TOKUSUKE OSHIRO

My name is Tokusuke Oshiro. I was born on August 5, 1901 in Okinawa. The place I'm from is now called Itoman City but it was Kanegusuku-son. I am the third of four children. The two above me died when I was small and I had a younger sister.

Since my father went to Hawaii when I was six, I really don't know what he was doing at that time. I have a memory of going to Naha to see my father off to Hawaii, but I don't remember it clearly. It was the Okinawan style at that time that when the ship left, the ladies would pray so that it would reach the destination safely. They would sing on the road on the way back. I can remember that, but I can't remember the feeling I had when he left.

My family was on the poor side. I'm sure my father sent back some money, but since we were still young it wasn't our concern. My mother took care of it, and there were times when she'd ask that money be sent.

### *Life in Okinawa (1901–1915)*

My mother raised us by herself. She was a very healthy person, but she got an infection on her leg by her knee. We call the sickness *chinshifuruchi* in Okinawan. Even though she got a limp from it, she took all kinds of jobs, most of them in farming. In Okinawa the poor people only had enough to farm for themselves to eat. They didn't have the leeway to grow something like cane.

The poor people's house in Okinawa was a thatched-roof house. It's something like a birdhouse if you look at it now. If you had a wooden floor, it was a rather good house for the poor people. Luckily the elder brother, my mother's brother, was a carpenter. He brought a big pine tree and from that made a floor for us. That was good because some houses had floors made from bamboo that would sag here and there when you walk on them.

Back then, there were maybe 100 homes in my *aza* (village section) in Okinawa. The addresses would go from the village office, which was number one, to the school, number two; then from the back of the school, the number of the addresses would increase. Right in front of our house was my uncle. The people around us were all related and it was very good, for they were very kind to us.

When I was small, I liked to *sumō* (wrestle) the most. I would *sumō* quite often. Once I had a *sumō* match with my second cousin who is three years younger than me. I knocked him down and the others, five or six of them, jumped on top of me. He fell down on his hand which was twisted and it broke. Even as a child I felt like I had to fix it. I thought this was big trouble.

When I got home my cousin's father said that in fact it was good since he could avoid being drafted. My mother, however, said, "You broke someone's arm! You injured someone!" So I got tied up to a post. I remember that well. But after she heard about what really happened, she regretted it and said, "I shouldn't have done that."

Besides *sumō*, I also liked to fish for *funa* (a fresh water fish). Whenever I had time I used to do that. Poor children didn't have things like horses, but we did raise cows and pigs, so we had to go and cut grass for the cows. We'd spend some of our time doing things like that. It was *kōkua* (help) for my mother.

My education in Okinawa ended in the sixth grade. After I graduated from elementary school at age 14, I came to Hawaii right away. The name of the school that I attended was Kanegusuku Elementary School. Most of the teachers were from Okinawa. However, Mr. Matoba, the principal, was from Kumamoto Prefecture. At that time we were using the Okinawan dialect. The teachers, however, didn't think we were progressing fast enough. So there was punishment for using the dialect. There were watchmen here and there who caught us when we did use it. Fortunately there wasn't any time I got any special punishment for using the dialect.

I didn't like math the most and I wasn't too good in writing—I was below average. I liked the music class the most. The teacher would gather everyone and play the organ while we sang. I don't know whether I had a good voice, but I liked singing.

Because I also liked mischief, I remember being scolded by my teacher quite often. When I was small I would fight a lot. Sometimes I bullied my teacher's child and got scolded. Since the teacher was the parent, I felt I got scolded more.

After I graduated from elementary school, I came to Hawaii. My father called for my mother and me, leaving my younger sister in Okinawa. I felt no difficulty in parting because I wanted to go to Hawaii quickly and see my father's face. There was more of that feeling.

I really didn't have any idea of how Hawaii might be. I saw a photograph of my father all dressed up in a coat and tie—such fine attire. I never dreamed that we'd work in the canefields getting all black. It looked as if

we'd be doing well. Up to that time we were very poor, so when I came to Hawaii I had a wish to have a comfortable home.

### *Preparation for the Voyage*

My mother took care of preparations for the trip to Hawaii. She had no education and often I would interpret for her. I had to apply for a passport in Okinawa. There was something like what is now a travel agency and there were companies that would take care of the preparations for the travelers. I remember the name of the company that made our arrangements as Kaka-zu. They, however, made no arrangements for my job. It was just that my father called, so I was going along and didn't know what job I'd be doing.

There was no academic exam back then. The physical examination included an eye exam and an exam for hookworms since everyone in Okinawa raised sweet potatoes. For the eye exam, you just went to the hospital and had some medicine put in. The exam for hookworms was the hardest since you had to drink an oily medicine. I don't know what kind of medicine that was, but it was wrapped in edible rice-flour paper. You put it in a cup and drink it down whole! Some children didn't want to take it and cried. I was already 14 and knew I had to get to Hawaii in any way possible, so I said, "Yes, yes," and took it. It made my stomach run.

### *Journey to Hawaii*

From Naha I went to Kobe and on to Yokohama. From Yokohama it was straight to Honolulu. The name of our ship was the *Shunyō-maru*. This was during World War I and Japan was allied with the U.S. A Japanese war-ship would watch us, and at night we had to turn off the lights.

The women and men were in separate rooms. Being a child, I was with my mother in the women's side. The women all took care of me even though I'd do mischief. When they were sleeping, I'd take some ink and draw a moustache, and I remember being chased!

The cooks would make their pocket money selling rolled *sushi* for a profit. The picture brides bought them and gave them to me.

When we were nearing Honolulu, we had a party for the safe trip. They showed moving pictures, and because I was only looking there, I didn't see a Negro boat-boy who was sleeping right where I was walking. I just stepped over him and went over there. Then I got surprised and looked back. Really, I should have apologized, but since I was a child, I became afraid and just ran away!

There was the one Negro boat-boy and the rest were Japanese. I think there were some *Pakes* (Chinese), but we never talked. If we had talked, we could tell whether they were Chinese or Japanese, but we just looked at each other. Since we looked alike, I thought they were Japanese. Most of the people would become close, like brothers and sisters. Because we were immigrants, we were third-class passengers. People in second class were especially rich people.

On the ship, I wasn't really worried, but as we came out to the middle

of the Pacific, sometimes it'd be rough and the wave would be over us. I used to wonder, "Would this reach the destination?" But we finally arrived in Honolulu.

### *Arrival in Hawaii (1915)*

When we arrived, we were taken to the Immigration Office. There we met a person from Okinawa Prefecture, Mr. Tajima. He told us, "Since you're Japanese, you must do well like a Japanese." Although we had no exams at the Immigration Office, we had to fill in forms. Every day there'd be *udon* (noodles). We had never eaten *udon* until we were full before, so that was the best meal.

The thing that gave me the most problem was the toilet. The Japanese style is different from the Western style—you squat. I wasn't used to the Western style so that was troublesome. When I did my "thing," it'd fall plop and the water would splash on my rear!

My father came to pick us up. It was the first time for me to see him in six years. We shook hands and I just thought, "So this is my father."

From there we went to the Komeya Hotel. I remember going to meet my mother's aunt who was living in Waipahu on Oahu. Although there were a few cars, there were mostly horse-drawn carriages; that's how we got there. We stayed in Waipahu three days, but those people had to work so we couldn't stay too long.

I didn't really see them at work, but I did see the sugarcane field. Since it was on level ground, it looked like the ocean. Water would flow from a dam to a big ditch. That was interesting to me because there's nothing like that in Okinawa.

From Waipahu, we returned to Honolulu. We got on a boat and sailed to Kahului, Maui. The trip took one night so I slept. When I woke up, we had already reached Kahului where we were greeted by an aunt.

### *Settling in Wailuku, Maui (1915–1917)*

Since my father worked in Wailuku, we moved there. We arrived there just a short time before New Year's and stayed at a *Naichi* couple's house in the Mill Camp. They were making *mochi* (rice cakes) and I remember eating it. The Wailuku Sugar Mill was nearby. In a little while the couple moved and we stayed on and lived in that house.

There were about 14 or 15 houses in the camp. The plantation houses were quite good. There were all kinds of people there; most of them were working at the mill while some worked at the harbor in Kahului.

My father worked as a *kompang* (contract cane cultivator). He would go to the canefields to *hanawai* (water the cane). There was little rain so they had to water it until two or three months before cutting.

We were the only Okinawans there. The Okinawans came 10 to 20 years after the other Japanese. So in a way, I felt we were looked down upon. We felt that we were Japanese, but the people from other prefectures would sometimes call us a name like "Okinawa."

There were other foreigners too. There was a *Pake*, a Chinese who worked in the plantation office. There was a little girl there and she would say, "There's an Okinawa boy." She would come and see, thinking it was a different race. When she saw me she said "Okinawa" and ran away. I used to get angry.

Although we were the only Okinawan family, we weren't especially lonely. There were others from Okinawa Prefecture in nearby camps. My parents would go over to visit them sometimes. They probably were happy talking about Okinawa, but I really don't know since I never went with them.

I would play with the other children at the camp. The relationship among the children was good and we all became friends. At that time all the children would speak Japanese and we didn't use English when we played marbles and other games.

Sometimes we'd go out to see moving pictures. The funniest ones I remember seeing most often were called *Iron Claw*. We also saw cowboy movies. They were interesting and easy to understand. They cost about 15 cents or 25 cents.

At that time I really wasn't working but sometimes I had to go. I really wanted to go to school with my friends and play. Sometimes I'd be just dragged to work. Since I was still young, the camp police would say, "You go to school," and he'd bring me back all the way home. My father told him that in a little while we'd be moving to the Big Island. He'd say that he planned to send me to a good boarding school there. So the next day I'd be back at work. There was no way that my parents could have afforded to pay for such an education. But I believed him, so finally I just worked.

We had to get up every morning at 4:30 or 5:00. After drinking coffee we'd meet at 6:00 o'clock in the assembly area. There they determined which gang went where.

I got a job working with the ladies through a Portuguese *luna* (foreman) in one camp. After *kaukau* (lunch) time, I had to take the lunch boxes and the cups out from the fields to the road where they could be taken away easily. My salary was 50 cents a day which my father took. But I was still mischievous then. There were a lot of Portuguese and Spanish boys who were probably on vacation there. We took the water bottles out from the lunch boxes and lined them up on the side of the road. We used them as targets and broke them all. The next day the *luna*, a good and kind person, got angry at me. Maybe since I couldn't even understand what he was saying, he took pity on me and I wasn't punished. The Portuguese and Spanish boys, however, were spanked until they cried.

Most of the boys in camp were going to night school and they asked if I wanted to go too. I agreed and went with them. It was a Japanese night school and I attended it for about two years or so, although half the time it was for fun. The class met on Saturdays and Sundays from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Our teacher was a judo teacher so he'd often tell us stories about judo. I liked things like that so I attended regularly.

When I think of it now, the lifestyle in Wailuku camp was rather poor, although the cost of living was cheap. There was mainly salted salmon and dried fish. With 25 cents you could get a big *shiotara* (salted cod fish). There was one toilet per house which was in the back away from the house. There was also a communal camp bath where men and women bathed together.

*Ka'u, Hawaii (1917-1923)*

I left Wailuku and moved to Ka'u on the Big Island in 1917. My father was there before and his sister, my aunt, was there. We lived in a place called Manya. There were mostly people from Kumamoto Prefecture. Two or three were from Okinawa and some from Okayama Prefecture. A boss named Shiomi was from Okayama Prefecture.

Most of the Okinawans were single people so they were there sometimes and gone again. But there was one named Hirata who was there all the time. He too had called his son from Okinawa. We often played together.

The relationship among the people in the camp was very close. There was a thing called "home sermon." Each week or month a sermon was held at a different house. Even though the Shin sect was really established in Pahala and the Nichiren sect was in Kapapala, the Nichiren sect priest would come also. A house would be divided into two. On one side lived the single people and in the other were the married couples. The home sermons were usually at the married couple's side. The other side would go *hana* (work). The Nichiren sect priest was the funniest. Everyone would yawn so much that he would ask if we would like to hear a sermon or a *naniwa-bushi* (folk song). Everyone agreed that a *naniwa-bushi* would be better, so he sang—and he was good. He was quite a great man and became the abbot in Honolulu.

Because it was a plantation camp, the bath was communal. We all took a bath together. If, however, you got in last, it would be very dirty. So you wanted to get in first. For that reason I'd come running even if I were two or three miles away. It would make about 20 minutes difference. By the time everyone got back I'd already taken a bath. The baths cost 50 cents per family. My mother did the wash in a laundry area which was also communal.

The things we ate back then I now consider pitiful. Mainly there was a thing called *nawa-fu* (rope dough). The *fu* (something like dough) was put around a rope which was later taken away. It's something like bread crust and was used as a side dish. There were small sardine tins which cost about five cents. We took those for lunch. Maybe once a week there'd be something like meat. All the bachelors would go to the *ōgokku* (big cook) and wait in line to be served. Sometimes you'd get a good server who would scoop out the meat very well. Other times you'd end up with a dish which was runny and it would be hard to find the meat.

In Ka'u I was mainly *kachi kane* (cutting cane) or *hō hana* (weeding). For one year I was a stable boy taking care of the horses. My father had these jobs before me, and when he got sick I'd take his place. But the others wanted the jobs too, so in the end they were taken by them. The jobs paid the same amount.

I worked six days a week with Sunday off. But as a stable boy I didn't have Sunday off because I had to take care of the horses on that day, too. I had to take the horse out sometimes to walk it. Then I had to clean the stable, although I don't think I received any extra pay.

My father took my pay from me. In the olden days, the car would come down from the plantation office with a bag of numbers (employee number tags). My father would take mine and pick up my pay. I'd then receive an allowance, so I really don't remember how much I was getting.

At that time, I was 16 or 17 years old. Whenever Mr. Hirata from Okinawa wasn't there, his son and I would get some homemade beer and go to the corner room with a bottle. The two of us would get a coffee cup and we'd drink the ones that really weren't liquor yet. It would be sweet, but it did have some alcohol in it and we'd get drunk. The two of us had a *sumō* match there.

The Emperor's Birthday was celebrated everywhere. Mainly there was *sumō*. At that time I had already left Manya and was at Kusono Camp. Several young men, usually the good ones, got together at a camp and had Japanese-style *sumō* matches. The famous *sumō* wrestler at that time was a Mr. Mizuno.

There was also a *Bon* dance called Iwakuni that I went to two or three times. I was still young then so I would dance the Fukushima dance.

There was a toy at a Japanese store called Kanbara Store. It was a children's *shamisen* (three-stringed instrument) that I bought for around \$1.50. I played "chin, chin, chin, chin" on it. My father must have thought that if I played the *shamisen* my work would go down and he broke it to pieces! There was a Mr. Fujii next door who was a very good carpenter. He took the headpiece, the string section, and the drum part and pieced it together. This was very strong so it wouldn't break. Finally it lasted to the end.

My mother passed away at age 44 because of influenza. My father then took the children and returned to Japan, and I became a bachelor. My father felt he couldn't do anything with all the children here and just men around, so he returned to Japan. When he returned to Okinawa, my father must have been 45 or 46. He took a second wife and they had three more children. Their oldest son is just one year older than my eldest son.

In 1923 I got married. It was my father that arranged it for me. I used to know her when we were small; we played together after school. Also, her father was in Hakalau on Hawaii. Her maiden name is Nakaza—Kame Nakaza. It was me, not her father, who called for her. Since it was a picture marriage, she had a wedding in Okinawa only as a formality. We had a real one in Honolulu after coming out of the immigration office. We were married by the Reverend Seikan Higa. Though we weren't Christians, the people of the hotel used to take Okinawan couples to him. We didn't have anything special like a party after the ceremony.

Her father came to see us when we arrived in Hilo. We went to Hakalau and spent a week there before coming to Ka'u.

We were there for one and a half years. It was such an out-of-the-way place that there was no doctor except for the plantation doctor. Once you



got sick, you couldn't do much unless you went to Hilo. Therefore, my wife's father's folks told us to come and live in Hakalau. Ka'u was such a forlorn place, so, we moved to Hakalau and lived there from 1923 to 1931.

***Hakalau, Hawaii (1923–1931)***

There was no camp in Hakalau; we were all in *kompang* (contract cane cultivation), so the houses were usually situated near the river. There were 20 or so houses, all scattered about because we lived wherever it was convenient for us. The house we had was close to our land.

People built their houses by themselves back then. In those times, the houses were mainly made out of rough boards of one-by-twelve. I, myself, did not have to build since we lived in a house that somebody else had already built. We bought it for \$300 and lived there. We were so poor that we couldn't afford to pay \$300. So my wife's father paid for us.

We had a small meeting house and we got together on such occasions as *Bon* and the Emperor's Birthday. On the Emperor's Birthday, we gathered there and we drank and sang songs. For the New Year, each household had it's own celebration and we visited each other for the New Year's greeting.

While in Hakalau, I was engaged in *uke-kibi* (contract sugarcane work). There was such a thing as the New York Market Quotations for sugar; the price of sugar would go up and down. Sometimes there was a real good profit since when things went well, we had more bonuses than our wages. We each had three acres or so of land, usually situated on the river banks to cultivate our cane planting. There were talks that somebody had earned \$3,000 on contract on one of those pieces of land.

At times the price of sugar would fall. When we moved there, the price was coming down so we didn't make money. The land was not so good, but we did have two harvests in four years since cane would take two years to grow.

In those days, the daily wage was \$1.50, but there were other jobs like binding cane. You would make bundles of cane which were 40 pounds each. They would pay you 15 cents per ton. If you get a contract to do that kind of work, you would get three dollars a day, whereas other jobs would pay only \$1.50.

We were quite poor, so we wanted to earn as much as we could doing highly-paid jobs. Yet the plantation urged us to take care of our *uke-kibi* land since weeds started to grow after the harvest. But we didn't have the sugar growing contract yet. We wanted to work on the *uke-kibi* land after we worked at various contract jobs on the plantation. Our opinions did not agree. I said I would quit; I would desert the land and all. Then we moved to Hilo.

***Waiakea Homestead, Hilo (1931–1938)***

Until 1938 we lived in Waiakea Homestead. For a while I worked as a sampan bus driver. The fare was 15 cents for commuting to Hilo; but because there were many buses and there was a lot of competition, we charged



10 cents or so in secret. That, however, did not work too well. I had something like a contract to give children rides to and from school. The fare was \$2.50 or \$3.00 a month per child. After five or six years, times became harder and fewer jobs were available. Portuguese men started to become bus drivers and they only charged 5 cents a ride. I thought that there was no future in the job and decided to join the Waiakea Plantation.

During the time I was a bus driver, I had an experience which I now consider to be funny. A man named Shiroma used to brew 'ōkolehao (liquor from distilled *ti* root) during the days of the liquor prohibition. I used to live in a house down below his and he asked to rent a room that we were not using. I agreed and he hid the liquor there. Another man by the name of Igawa brought the liquor there; he and Shiroma were the brewers. Igawa was arrested and taken to jail and one day he and a detective came to my place to ask me to be a witness in a trial. They said that if I agreed to be a witness, I would not be charged. I was scared and insisted that I had no idea what they were talking about. I had emptied all the gallon containers of liquor that were being kept at my house. Although they saw the gallon containers, I told them that they were there before I moved in. Even though I told them I didn't know anything about any kind of scheme, I was considered an accomplice to the crime and taken to the police. Since my wife had had a baby the week before, I did not have enough money to put up a bond and be released. Luckily, when I was first arrested, they had written my name incorrectly as Kama Oshiro, so they had to let me go. They then rewrote the paper and came back for me. I had arranged to have the bond raised this time, but the bond man took such a long time to come up with the money that I was taken to jail. I was there for an hour or so, then came out.

When I had a trial, a man named Inoue was there too. It was his house where they brewed the liquor. The police had asked Inoue and me to serve as their witnesses because they wanted to arrest Shiroma in the act. They wanted to hear us say that they were right. In the trial I said that that was the case.

We had to pay the lawyer \$300 and Shiroma hadn't even paid me five cents. I couldn't make money as a bus driver for those times or even collect on the room I had rented out, but I still had to pay the lawyer. That was quite an experience for me!

Shortly after quitting the sampan bus business we moved up close to Camp 5 to work in the plantation. I used poison weed killers to get rid of the weeds between the cane. When cane-cutting time came, I did that. Our wages were \$1.50 for a ten-hour day. We started at 6:00 in the morning and worked until 4:30 in the afternoon. Cane cutting was a contract job and we were paid according to how much work we did together and by how many days an individual had worked. I was far from making money, being paid \$1.50 a day.

In 1938 my wife ran a chicken business on the side. Back then, a dozen eggs would cost 50 cents. But I figured that if you hatch an egg, you could sell the chick for 15 cents. I bought two incubators from a Chinese man that

I knew. We ran the business to supplement our income, but that didn't last too long.

While in the canefields, we'd sometimes play a gambling game called "*kama no tekachie*" (game of throwing sickles) in Okinawan. When you throw a sickle into the ground, it stands with the handle in the air. The second person aims at the handle and throws another sickle at it. Others do the same. The sickle with many hits would lose the handle. We played this game and others like it when we were supposed to be working.

We felt strongly against the plantation and wanted to make trouble for them. There were weeds called *Kaleponi* (California grass) which we were supposed to dig, but instead of doing that, we cut the tops off and covered them with soil. We also pretended someone was dead and had fun carrying that person while someone stood on a stone pile and watched for the *luna*. The playing and gambling was done by the young ones who had just graduated from school and us. This lasted for a week or so.

The plantation became hard on us. In those days there was a thing called a processing fee for contract jobs. The processing fee made contracting unprofitable. Consequently, all of us became \$1.50-a-day laborers. But for \$1.50 a day, 10 days of work would only make \$15. The plantation took away our incentive to work.

So I had a grudge against the plantation—I made waves. I told my fellow workers, "You guys are doing silly jobs earning \$1.50 a day, now that the plantation has taken the processing fee away from you." I was fortunate; I lived in a house that was not part of the plantation. We lived in my relative's family house above Camp 5 and not within the camp itself. People said that it was easy for me to say those things because I was not living on the plantation camp and that they would be at a loss if they were to lose their housing in the camp. The people in the camp, therefore, were on the side of the *luna* and the plantation. I said to them, "You guys are the same Japanese as we are, but you are acting like the plantation's watchdogs. You shouldn't side with the plantation." Since I talked with reasons, even the *luna* couldn't talk me into his side. Finally it became known to the plantation office and I was summoned there. I didn't know much English so a man named Yasuda came to interpret. I told him, "You people have taken away the processing fee from us. For only a dollar and a half a day, we cannot work for 10 or 15 days obeying the *luna*. If you are going to fire me, that will suit me—I shall quit." Although they said they weren't going to fire me, the manager who was above the *luna* told me to stay home for awhile until people's feelings calmed down. I said, "All right" and stayed at home.

### *The Tōfu Shop (1940–1966)*

Right then, a friend of mine had a *tōfu* (bean curd) shop which he was going to quit. So, I took over the business. I got up around 1:00 or 1:30 a.m. In the morning I had coffee around 5 o'clock and had no lunch. I wasn't used to the job. When I would drive past a small store, I would stop and have a Coca-Cola. I didn't have time to eat and in the end I got a stom-

ach ailment. I was very skinny—only 110 pounds. Thinking back on it now, I am amazed at all the things I did. It was 4:30 or 5:00 p.m. when I got back home.

My shop was in front of Hilo Hongwanji for 20 years, from 1940 to 1960. Later I moved my business to another location and finally quit the business in 1966, just when I started getting the retirement pension.

My wife and I made the *tōfu* and I would go out to sell it. I would sell my *tōfu* to restaurants as well as to camps. The farthest I went to sell was Olaa's Juyonri—the camp at the 14 mile marker in Olaa. I had regular customers who knew the days that I would come. So when I honked my horn, people would come out with container in hand. Others who had *tōfu* shops in Hilo were Mr. Nishimoto, Mr. Ushijima, and Mr. Kaku. There was another man in Waiakea, but he didn't go out to sell.

Soybeans were cheap then, about \$3.50 for 100 pounds. *Tōfu* was cheap too; five cents was the price. We also sold *aburage* (fried bean curd) to *sushi* (vinegared rice) shops. I remember that there was a man Mr. Oki who made lots of *sushi*.

Since early 1940 there had been rumors that a war would break out. Among friends we were talking about it. Because they wanted to sell more, the wholesalers encouraged us to buy as much soybeans as we could before the price went up, so I had plenty in stock. In 1941, the military people came around to check. Officers came to my place and told me not to touch the beans, saying that when the situation became worse, they would need it for cows' feed, because milk is a necessity for children. If their supply for cows ran low, they would come back and seize what I had. I was an enemy-country man and couldn't say anything about that, so I kept my mouth shut. Yet I felt that something should be done.

I talked with Mr. Ushijima, and the two of us went to see Mr. Maneki who had a degree in agriculture and also acted in place of a temple minister. We asked his assistance in dealing with the military. He explained to the military people about *tōfu*; how much vitamins it contained and how much soybeans it took to produce *tōfu*. He explained that one piece of *tōfu* had twice as much vitamins as an egg and that even if many people shared one piece, it could still be the main part of a meal. The military people didn't know these things and encouraged us to produce *tōfu*.

Because I was delivering *tōfu*, I was allowed to go out after 8 o'clock at night even though other people couldn't. Hongwanji was occupied by the military and soldiers would shoot if they saw a light in the blackout. It was in those days that a Japanese submarine hit the pier in Hilo twice; I saw the explosions.

During the war, I was never investigated by the military because I wasn't yet involved in associations like *kenjinkai*. I joined the association after the war. *Kenjinkai* is an association of people originally from the same prefecture. In the beginning there were more than 100 people in the Big Island Okinawa *Kenjinkai*. The association's president and some of its members were caught and its secretary and treasurer had burned their books,

fearing they would be caught too. Many people and other associations donated their money to the military. I suppose the Okinawa Kenjinkai also donated its funds because when it reopened after the war, there was no money left over from before the war.

### *Postwar Life (1945)*

After the war was over, the Christian people started a relief activity. They sent old clothes, breeding pigs, and various items to Okinawa. But after two or three years we heard rumors that the people in high positions would take the best things and sell them, whereas the people in general would only get junk ones. We began to think that we had better stop sending relief items.

Since I was around many places because of my job, I heard many people talk. In a meeting on relief I said that a lot of people think it was time to stop relief activity. I proposed the group be changed to Okinawa Kenjinkai. There were many people who agreed with me and so we reopened Kenjinkai. This was around 1946.

Kenjinkai is represented at its members' funerals with monetary offerings for their families. When VIP's from Okinawa would visit us, we'd hold welcoming parties. Because the U.S. forces controlled Okinawa, there weren't any prefecture governors. Instead they had chief representatives. The first chief representative was the late Mr. Shusei Higa. Next was a Mr. Jugo Toma, then Mr. Ohta, Mr. Matsuoka, and another one before the current governor. Six or seven people had come to Hawaii and we had met them all.

Before the war, I belonged to a music club called "*Uruma-kai*." People 40 years and under gathered and participated in music. It was like a *seinenkai* (a youth club).

After the war, we thought that that wasn't the way it should be done and formed a new club called "*Ongaku-aikō-kai*" (music loving club). Just five or six of us friends gathered and had meetings. Meanwhile we again had Okinawan music broadcasted. That caused trouble among the members since someone said he didn't like the kind of music that we were playing on the air. This person was good in music, but he was not a very nice person.

Back then, when you wanted to hear certain music on the radio, you had to pay five dollars or so. I thought that was a silly custom, so I asked supermarket and restaurant owners to sponsor the program. I also collected ten dollars from each of the five or six people and had their names broadcasted. Our program was a 30-minute program. That's how it all started.

It lasted for about nine years until a month break that the radio station wanted to have. After that they asked to do the program again. At the beginning it cost too much since we had to use an entire tape. I had \$200 donated by the Kenjinkai to cover the expense. We thought it would not last unless it was done by congenial friends. Only five or six of us were doing it, so we asked only the people who came to our gatherings to take part in programs. Those in the Kenjinkai who were not included didn't like that.

There was also trouble between the Buddhists and Christians within Kenjinkai. It all started when the Buddhist people wanted to have a *Bon*-dance. Christian people thought that wasn't necessary. The opposition caused trouble and we did not function for a while.

There was no obvious antagonism between the Okinawan people and other Japanese people in Hilo in the old days. There are well-known doctors like Dr. Yamanoha and Dr. Matayoshi who are considered to be very important figures in the Japanese society here. There has not been discrimination as such here for being an Okinawan. I don't know how other people feel inside, though. I have heard instances in which people refused to marry their children with Okinawans. But I haven't seen any discrimination displayed at all.

### *Family Life*

I have five children, eight grandchildren, and 12 great-grandchildren. When my children were small, I hoped, above all, that they would become schoolteachers or lawyers if they liked studying and had a capacity for it. I wanted to assist the children as much as I could, so when they graduated from high school, I gave them \$1,000 for scholarship. But my children were not suited for those professions, I guess. However, among the grandchildren, one is a schoolteacher.

World War II started when the children were in junior high school and the Japanese schools were closed. They speak everyday Japanese, but when it comes to more complicated matters, they cannot handle them.

My sons were drafted in the war, but those who were in food production could apply to delay their draft. So my first son postponed his draft for two to three years. The war was almost over when he went for service. He was sent to a cooking section, therefore he did not really fight. My second son served during the Korean War; he was in the postal service section, so he didn't engage in fighting either.

My children never learned the Okinawan language at all. No young ones in Hilo can speak Okinawan. I know some youngsters in Honolulu are really good at it, but not here.

When the land in front of Hilo Hongwanji became available, I applied to buy it from the government. I asked my children if they wanted to take over the business, but nobody wanted to do that kind of job. I felt I wouldn't mind keeping the shop small until I started collecting my pension so I moved to a smaller location.

I think it's natural that none of our children wants to take over the business. They don't like it. Since we were so poor back then, there was no choice but to work hard. Once you start, I feel you should go all the way. That's how we strived in the business.

### *Reflections*

In the old times, one's life span was said to be 50 years, but today it is prolonged. There are people in their 80s and 90s. When I look back, I am

amazed how I could live through all those years. I have gone through close-call situations many times and I am grateful for being alive.

I am glad I came to Hawaii; the climate is good and the standard of living is high. Once I wanted to go back to the place I was born, but when I got there I wanted to come back quickly. It was better here after all. I once yearned for the places where I used to play, but after the war they all changed; there remained no memories of old times. I felt like I was in a foreign land.

I was born in Japan so I wanted to see Japan progress and prosper. But the United States is the country that my children and grandchildren belong to. During the wartime I wished that there was no war between the two countries.

We have just celebrated the 80th year of Okinawan immigration to Hawaii. Hawaii has become Americanized, but I think we will still have a strong Japanese influence here for some time. The forefathers had toiled here and I wish for continued prosperity among our people.

# UCHINANCHU

## A History of Okinawans in Hawaii

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UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA

HAWAI'I UNITED OKINAWA ASSOCIATION



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