

Tape No. 31-32-1-99
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Ruth E.M. Wong (RW)

Mānoa, Hawai'i

June 14, 1999

BY: Holly Yamada (HY)

HY: This is an interview with Ruth [E.M.] Wong. It's June 14, 1999. We're at the Social Sciences Building at UH Mānoa. The interviewer is Holly Yamada.

Okay, let's start with when and where were you born?

RW: Hilo, Hawai'i, 1926.

HY: Okay, and so you grew up in Hilo?

RW: Mm hmm [yes].

HY: Maybe you could tell me a little bit about what you know about your parents' background.

RW: Oh, let's see. Very little, I guess, because my grandparents had all died by the time I was born. But from what my parents [Jinshi and Sakae Murashige] told me, it was their parents who had come to Hawai'i from Yamaguchi-*ken*.

I think my mother's parents first went to Kaua'i and then to Waipahu, where my mother was born, and then to Pa'auilo on the Big Island. I know some of the graves were in Pa'auilo because we'd go there annually for the *bon* festival.

My father's parents, let's see, they also came from Yamaguchi-*ken*, from a different area however. [I] don't remember what island they went to first but I do remember that they left the plantation as soon as their three-year term [contract] was up. I know that my grandfather was a homesteader on the Big Island. But I know that sometime prior to that, they also had some kind of shop in Kalihi because I think my father was born there. But in any case, they ended up on the Big Island.

HY: So, essentially your father was raised on the Big Island as well? Or do you know when he left Kalihi?

RW: He remembers [Kalihi] so he must have been fairly old. But then he went to the Big Island and I know that he was out for high school in Honolulu for a while until his father had some kind of financial disaster and so he went home. I know that he spent some time in Kona as well, before moving finally to Hilo.

HY: What kind of work did your father do?

RW: He was an insurance man. He started off at a little bank in Kona, I know. Then when he moved to Hilo he was at a trust company. Then he started in the life insurance business, I think in 1923, and he was in it for the rest of his life.

HY: And what about your mother?

RW: My mother? Let's see. I think she spent the bulk of her time in Pa'auilo because she would talk about going on the train from Pa'auilo to Hilo and back. Then when she was through with the eighth grade, I guess, she came out to Honolulu to go to the Territorial Normal Training School, which was then the place where you went if you wanted to be an elementary schoolteacher. So she was an elementary schoolteacher.

HY: And she taught school in Hilo, then?

RW: Yes.

HY: So do you remember her going to work?

RW: As a teacher? No, because she quit, I guess, as soon as she started having her children. By the time I was old enough to remember she was at home.

HY: And you said you were the second child of . . .

RW: Of three.

HY: Of three?

RW: Yes. I have a sister a year older than I am and I have a brother who is eight years younger than I am.

HY: I don't know if you know, but do you know how your father got started with his lifelong career in insurance?

RW: No, I don't think so. I could probably refer to an article that was in (a publication of) the Manufacturers Life Insurance [Company], (for which he was an agent). There was quite a nice article about him, I know, (for his consistently high productions). I think that might describe everything. But I don't remember.

HY: Okay. Maybe you could describe the house that you grew up in.

RW: It was built by my grandfather (on the corner of) Kino'ole and Kawailani Streets. I think it was a two-acre lot.

Like all typical (Hilo) houses it was up on stilts and it had a corrugated iron roof. It was painted, oh, that dark reddish-brown stain. There was quite a flight of stairs up to the front porch. Off the front porch on one side was a little study for my dad. Then on the other side was an extra bedroom. One went into the living room first. The construction, I think, was also typical of so many of the older homes in Hilo. It had these supports so that between the living room and the

dining room on either side there was a little cabinet that jutted out with a pillar going up. So (when) you walk(ed) in and the living room was there and then the dining room beyond.

Our bedroom, my sister's and my bedroom, was on the left. On the right was a bedroom for my parents. One bathroom on that floor and on the left, next to our bedroom, was the kitchen. Then there was a little porch in the back and another little room in the back, a bedroom. That was the workroom. You did your ironing over there and sewing.

Then there was a flight of stairs down to the basement. The basement had the wooden bathtub, the *furo*. That was the wash area too because I remember the washerwoman coming once or twice a week and I'd go down and watch her washing sometimes. There was that old fashioned . . .

HY: The wringer.

RW: . . . the wringer, yeah. There were lines downstairs to hang clothes, but also outside if it were a sunny day. We didn't have very many in Hilo. (Chuckles) It rained a lot. So, let's see, I guess it had—one, two, about four bedrooms but just one bathroom upstairs and there was a half-bath downstairs.

HY: Did you grow up in that house?

RW: Yes.

HY: All through your childhood you lived in that house?

RW: Right, yes.

HY: Maybe you could talk a little bit about what the neighborhood was like.

RW: Oh, yes. I remember very clearly. Right across the street from us was an empty lot. It was full of guava trees and other brush. Then next to that empty lot but still across the street was Waiākea-waena School. Facing the street from our house, the lot on the right was that acre that was not used for our yard but it was still part of my dad's property. Beyond that there were very few homes and then a section of older homes began again.

Kitty-corner from us was initially a very small grocery store run by the Ando family. Then they built this larger store next door and then, I guess, they rented it to this other family. But the Ando family, we sort of grew up with because we enjoyed playing with all of the girls. I guess the oldest was a son and he was quite a bit older. But the oldest girl was my sister's age and the next one was (a year younger than I). Then there were two others below that. We really enjoyed it when the older two could play.

But very quickly they had chores at the store. They either had to help with the sales or they had poultry so they'd either have to go to feed the chickens or collect eggs. Occasionally they would allow us to go along. (HY laughs.) I mean their parents would allow us to go along. But normally not, because as soon as it was time to go and start their chores, I guess they knew that the girls wouldn't get things done quite as efficiently with their (chuckles) playmates along. So that sort of ended the days that we really enjoyed having neighborhood friends because they'd come over or we'd go over and we'd just have a great time together.

Across the street from us, on Kawailani, there was a service station and there were two children there, too. But somehow we didn't get along quite as well so we almost never played with them. Further down there were some very old families. I remember one Hawaiian family who lived, oh, just about a half a block down, and my mother knew them. So when I was little, frequently she would go for a walk in the neighborhood and she'd visit while we played in the yard. Then there were a couple of Portuguese families that we got to know quite well because one of them (chuckles) made the best Portuguese bread, the chewy type. The children would be sent out with these freshly baked loaves. When they came up the front steps I know that we'd always say, "Oh Mama, let's get a loaf of Portuguese bread."

If you went straight down Kawailani, then there was a park area. But we didn't use that very much. We would occasionally go up to school because there would be a slide and some swings. But one of the things that we really enjoyed doing when the Ando girls could come over, was to go into that extra acre and climb on the guava trees and swing and make houses in the fern. The fern used to grow wild there and it was very nice.

HY: Now you've mentioned that your playmates had chores to do. Did you have chores, too? At home?

RW: I think we must have started when we were a little older than they were. I can't remember how young they started, but our chores were things that didn't take us away from afternoon play, because they would be things like wiping the dishes or setting the table or maybe changing the sheets, but that was just once a week. After a while, I guess, we were responsible for cleaning our own rooms and then we had to take turns cleaning the kitchen and things of that sort. But nothing that was business-oriented so I guess it wasn't quite as pressing or required as much time.

HY: What about cooking?

RW: Cooking, let's see. . . . I didn't have grandparents that were living but we did have other adults in the house for a while because my two aunts and an uncle who were younger than my father lived with us until they finished Hilo High School. I know that one of my aunts would always be baking because she loved to bake. So she provided the desserts, I guess. I think my other aunt helped a lot with the cooking, too. But when they were gone I had things to do to help my mother cook.

When my brother was born, so I must have been eight then, we had a live-in maid and she used to do a lot of the cooking and the cleaning up. Once she left, I guess I did a lot more.

HY: Was your live-in maid a family member or was it somebody that you didn't know that your folks hired?

RW: The latter.

HY: Now, was that kind of unusual to have a live-in maid?

RW: I guess it wasn't the general practice at all. But I do know that one of my very good friends also had someone, a live-in maid. In fact, they had had a live-in maid forever, as long as I remember.

HY: Maybe you can talk a little bit about your schooling, where you went to school.

RW: I went to Hilo Standard School, which [later] changed to Riverside School. It was a public school but it was designated as an English standard school. It required that you speak standard English before they would allow you to enroll there.

So my classmates became my friends and they were not neighborhood children. One of my very best friends was the daughter of a dentist and lived pretty far away. But it turns out that we started in a private kindergarten together and we were in the same homeroom and took our basic courses together from then all the way through the University of Hawai'i.

Later she married somebody who was at the University of Illinois and that's where I started my graduate work and so we renewed our friendship. And then when I went back to Michigan to finish up [graduate work] we would go down and spend holidays with them. So we've . . .

HY: From kindergarten.

RW: . . . kept—yes, we've kept up a long, long friendship.

HY: What was her name?

RW: Her name is Elizabeth Easley. She was Elizabeth Fujioka. People would make fun of us both in high school and at the University of Hawai'i because I was relatively tall and she is very short. So we were a Mutt and Jeff.

(Laughter)

RW: Then I lost track of her and met her again when she came back, of all things, for her brother's funeral. We've tried to keep in touch since then and that was about five years ago. But with very good friends, I guess, it really doesn't matter how long you haven't seen them. We went to kindergarten together, then to Hilo Standard School, to Hilo Intermediate [School], to Hilo High [School], and to the University of Hawai'i.

HY: I was going to ask you your home language. Did you speak—was English the . . .

RW: The only language, yes.

HY: I know a lot of kids grew up having to go to . . .

RW: Japanese[-language] school?

HY: . . . Japanese-language school after school. Did you do that as well?

RW: I did that except that my parents started us later. So it was interesting because we went to the Japanese school at Hilo Hongwanji [Mission] and I guess some parents started their children in Japanese school first, and some at the same time, (but) we started later. So I was in a class in Japanese school with (some) people who were one or two grades (behind) me in regular school.

But I did go to Japanese school and my dad taught us how to answer the phone and what to say because he had a lot of clients who were older Japanese who preferred speaking Japanese. So I

had to learn how to ask who they were and to say that he was out but that he'd return their call and get the telephone number and so on.

HY: So you knew a little bit.

RW: Yes. I think it was just an hour from, let's see, was it 3:00 to 4:00 or 3:30 to 4:30? Then there was a class on Saturday, I know, which I wasn't very happy about . . .

(Laughter)

RW: . . . having to get up to go to. I think I went to Japanese school for (six or seven) years.

Even went to those Japanese sewing classes. Because on Saturdays, at some age, you were expected to go to learn how to sew kimonos, I guess, eventually. But I was always at the stage where I had to just learn to stitch. (Chuckles)

And you know, one doesn't learn that much in those short periods but what was astounding to me was (what happened when I took Japanese again years later). I participated in the (NSF) [National Science Foundation] Institute for American Teachers in the (Far East, teaching classes near Tokyo for three summers in the 1970s. I enrolled in UH Japanese course prior to each session and attended classes as time permitted. It meant that I sometimes missed announcements of upcoming tests).

(On one such occasion,) we had to write some (characters). I thought about it and (chuckles) scribbled something down. The instructor—these were all people from Tokyo—came to me when she returned the paper and asked me whether I had studied Japanese at some point twenty or thirty years ago. I said, "Oh yes, I went to Japanese school (as a child)."

She pointed out I had written the character for country, *kuni*, in this way and that (character) has been simplified so that you no longer (have as many strokes in the box). I hadn't learned the new thing but I dredged up this character. . .

(Laughter)

RW: . . . from thirty years before and she was surprised. She said, well, had I studied anything between?

"No." (Chuckles) But I thought those courses that the university offered were excellent because I had absolutely no problems in Japan. I think that that was really far better than some (who) had learned (their) Japanese growing up with grandparents in the household. The people (in Japan) were just very rude to her because it wasn't appropriate Japanese as far as they were concerned.

HY: Interesting.

So now, when you went to a standard English school, do you remember the criteria they used to determine whether you would go there?

RW: Well, I really don't. I do remember what they asked me to do. They seemed to be concerned about whether you spoke standard English or not. So I remember them asking me did I know anything about counting, and could I count to—I guess it was just fifteen or something like that.

I said yes. They handed me these pencils one at a time and had me count. Then they said, "Could you tell us something about your family? Do you have any sisters? Do you have any brothers? What do you enjoy doing with them?" and so on.

They just spent a lot of time talking to me and asking me questions and that was it. But it was very evident that the bulk of the students were Caucasians. This dentist's daughter was one other American of Japanese ancestry and I remember another girl who lived in Villa Franca who was Japanese.

I enjoyed Hilo Standard School and I was sad that they decided that that was illegal or discriminatory and they abolished all of those schools.

HY: Now, your mother having been a teacher I would assume the academics were important. Were they emphasized or was that something of concern to your parents?

RW: I guess they were but I don't think they ever explicitly said anything. But those were important things—there was absolutely no question about the fact that everyone was going to go to college.

HY: You just knew that from an early . . .

RW: Right. And academic work was always very easy for me so that was no problem. Except for my geography. (Chuckles) I hated that in elementary school. Just couldn't understand why one had to answer all those questions at the end of the chapter.

HY: What were your favorite subjects?

RW: My favorite subjects? Let's see—well, at Hilo Standard [School] there were just so many things that we did that I found interesting. More than what we did I think I remember my teachers. I thought that they were just very interesting people. They weren't deliberately encouraging but I think that they must have set up an atmosphere that made everybody want to do all sorts of things, because they always had a variety of activities.

One of them I enjoyed just because of the artwork that we did. She'd say, "Why don't you, when you're out during your noon recess, just find something that you'd like to draw this afternoon." I remember going around and finally settling on a strand of *honohono* grass because it had these pretty blue flowers. Well, there were plays that we wrote and all kinds of creative activities, I think.

HY: At standard school?

RW: Yes. Most of them were pretty strict and required a lot. But—yeah.

HY: What about mathematics?

RW: Mathematics?

HY: Because that's the career you eventually . . .

RW: I liked it but I don't think I knew then that I really wanted to pursue that. I do remember my ninth grade algebra teacher at Hilo Intermediate. I really enjoyed my algebra class. I remember

that as being something that I really enjoyed doing. Then I mentioned my horrible experience with geometry, (chuckles) which made me decide I wasn't going to take any more mathematics. So many of those feelings about different areas of studies seem to be tied in with the person who was teaching.

HY: So who would you say was very influential or had an impact on you, then, of your teachers?

RW: You mean to get me into mathematics?

HY: Or just influential at the time or the way you ended up thinking.

RW: Oh, probably a Miss Beveridge, whom I had for English. Now, let's see, it was at Hilo Intermediate (pause) and I don't remember whether it was the eighth or ninth grade. But she was an older woman and very soft spoken and would talk a lot. One of the units that we had was (on the) Spanish influence. I remember very clearly that she would talk about historical events, and I hate history.

(Laughter)

RW: But I enjoyed that very thoroughly. I guess I enjoyed the fact that she would always include in any unit that we had some aspect of (creative work)—write a piece and it could be a poem or an essay or a short story or a play on either some character we had studied or some event we had learned about. That I enjoyed a lot. I really would dig around and think about what to do.

HY: Now, did you have any kind of an adjustment when you went to Hilo Intermediate? Because now you're not at a standard English school.

RW: Oh, I guess what they did was to keep our group together as much as possible. So I know that we ended up in the same English class and we had our social studies together. The only place where we got split up were things like physical education or music or something like that. So it wasn't a real change because you still dealt basically with the same people.

HY: I see, they kept you folks together.

RW: Yes. I think that was true through Hilo Intermediate School. In fact, I remember that when we got to Hilo High, too, a lot of the people, I guess most of the people in my English and social studies classes were still the same people that I knew.

They used to section when we went to Hilo Intermediate and Hilo High School. I remember very distinctly (chuckles) at Hilo Intermediate you were either in X, Y, or Z. For X you had X1, X2, X3, and Y1, Y2, Y3, and Z1, Z2, Z3. I'm sure that educators would frown on that kind of practice now.

HY: The Xs and Zs and [Ys] didn't mix so much, that's what you're saying?

RW: That's right.

HY: Okay. Then you went to Hilo High School.

RW: Yes.

HY: That was during the war [World War II], then, right?

RW: Ah, yes.

HY: Do you remember what grade were you in then when the war started?

RW: I was in the ninth grade.

HY: Oh yeah, you were in high school then.

RW: Well, it was—no, no, no. I guess . . .

HY: Or was that part of the intermediate school?

RW: It used to be part of the intermediate school but now I'm trying to decide. December of '41, so I must have been at Hilo High as a tenth grader because I graduated from Hilo Intermediate in '41.

HY: Yeah, so you were a sophomore.

RW: Yeah, December 7th was just a very curious day because my dad was going to pick us up. We went to Sunday school at Hongwanji. It was a Sunday and he was going to pick us up after he made a call on a client. We were waiting outside for him to pick us up. He was delayed and when he came to pick us up he said something about he wasn't sure what was going on but something seemed to have happened. Do you know that we never got any news? We just never got any news at all. That evening we were just sitting down to dinner and of course had all the lights in our house on. The police ran up the stairs and said, "Turn off all of your lights."

It must have been one or two days later before we ever found out what was going on. I can't believe how bad communication was.

(Laughter)

HY: How did that affect your schooling then?

RW: Oh, they stopped all of the schools. Then it was blackouts every night. I don't recall how much later they decided that they would have classes at different centers closer to your home.

So I got assigned to the [Harry] Wessel home, which was great for me. This was just about three blocks down Kino'ole Street. And Margaret Wessel was one of my best friends from Hilo Standard and her mother was a schoolteacher also. So that really wasn't much of a school because they just put everybody there who lived in that area so it was just a variety of grade levels. I think that they must have distributed some books but I don't know that we had anything special really to study. We'd go down there every day during the week.

Then they finally opened up the schools. One day of the week, however, was supposed to be for either helping out on the plantations or starting victory gardens. My parents didn't think I should go out and do work in the cane fields so I got assigned to making a victory garden at Hilo High and that was just so ludicrous. (Laughs) There were implements given to us but nobody knew how to use a pick or. . . . That didn't come to very much.

HY: Did they tell you what to plant?

RW: We didn't even . . .

HY: You didn't get that far.

(Laughter)

RW: We didn't even get done with the bed. Because I remember trying to dig and there were rocks and nobody was very energetic about getting that done. But they certainly convinced everybody that he should have an air raid shelter. We had one built. I mean, I think practically every household had one built. I didn't care to go into it but I think they had some drills where you had to go down. They had specified a minimum number of supplies that you should have in there and every once in a while they'd make you go down there and stay for a short while.

HY: Are you aware of how it may have affected your father's business?

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

HY: Okay, I don't know if that other side caught that last question. How did it affect your father's business or are you aware of that?

RW: I'm not aware of it at all. My dad was very private. He never said very much about either his history or his business. So I don't really know. But if he did have any problems at all, we certainly weren't aware of them. From what occurred later, I would guess that he recovered very well if there were any difficulties.

HY: But to your knowledge he just continued at his work?

RW: Mm hmm, right.

One thing that did occur during the war, however, was the fact that he belonged to the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and the military was very suspicious of anybody who belonged to any kind of organization like that. So we were visited by everyone under the sun. I couldn't believe this. It was first Naval Intelligence, maybe. Then [U.S.] Army Intelligence. It was just different groups, but you'd think you got done with one and pretty soon somebody else had to talk to you. And they were looking through everything. They really must have panicked and couldn't decide what they should be looking at.

I used as my desk a very pretty secretary that had these little cubbyholes and drawers. At that time I had a pen pal in Nebraska and another pen pal, maybe in Iowa. I kept selected letters from each of them in separate cubbyholes and I couldn't believe that each group that came to talk to my parents went through everybody's papers and books to see what you were reading or what you had written. One of them was trying to be very friendly so when he came later he said, "I noticed that you had pen pals."

And I said, "Yes." He knew the names of those pen pals and where they lived. I couldn't believe this. I mean, why would they care about reading through letters?

HY: How did you feel?

RW: Well, I was incensed by the fact that they would have to read through everything that was in my desk. I'm amazed that my parents were as patient as they were. I think I would have exploded about (the time) the second group came and said they needed to ask me questions. Because they would just go on night after night until very late. The only thing that I recall very distinctly was—I forgot what the Japanese Chamber of Commerce is called in Japanese (chuckles) but it's *Nihon* something and one of them insisted that it wasn't *Nihon* it was *Dai Nippon* wasn't it? I remember that my parents were angry about that because that was supposedly an indication of the imperialism (chuckles) of Japan or something.

HY: Now when your schooling resumed at the high school, was it different from before? Or was there an adjustment period or did you just kind of go on?

RW: No, I don't remember that there was anything. I guess it was back to what we were doing before the war. Except that we had to lug around gas masks and we had to have these drills where they would put you through tear gas chambers. And I could never get my gas mask to fit right without leaks so I'd always end up crying.

(Laughter)

HY: Now, did you have—you must have classmates that were going through the same type of thing at home where they were being questioned or searched.

RW: Well, a lot worse because I think a lot of them had parents who were shipped away.

HY: Yeah. So now that you were in high school now, who were your influences there? (Pause) If there were any.

RW: I don't really know of anything special in high school. I enjoyed all those courses.

HY: Did you have favorite subjects, then? Or you liked most of them?

RW: I liked my English classes. I've never been fond of social studies and I didn't particularly care for those courses. No, I don't really remember that I had—it's difficult to pinpoint anything that was a big influence on me.

HY: What about other activities during that high school time?

RW: Oh, they were very, very minimal. I think most of the activities were cut out. I was fairly active on the school newspaper staff but other than that. . . . For example, I don't think clubs or after school activities were allowed.

One of the things that happened during the war, though, the USO [United Service Organization] brought in people for the entertainment of the armed forces. So that gave us the chance to see people like Maurice Evans and Judith Anderson, because when they found out we were studying

“Macbeth” and “Hamlet” they said, “Well maybe you could get some students who would be willing to usher.” So we got to see some of those. That was nice.

HY: What about working? Did you work at all during high school?

RW: No.

HY: Summers or. . . .

RW: No, I didn’t.

HY: Okay, so let’s see. You graduated in ’44? Is that right?

RW: Mm hmm.

HY: Then where did you go after graduating? Did you come right to UH [The University of Hawai’i]?

RW: Yes. Yes.

HY: Did you always know you would go to UH or did you consider other places?

RW: No, I don’t think my parents ever suggested that I should consider anywhere else.

HY: So what was it like when you got here then? To the university.

RW: Well, my parents had moved by then to Honolulu. So I just lived at home. Yeah. So I didn’t ever live in the dormitory or anything like that.

HY: But did you graduate from Hilo High School?

RW: Yes, I did.

HY: Okay, so they moved about the same time you were going to college.

RW: Right.

HY: Do you know why they decided to move here?

RW: No, I don’t. It might have been partly the fact that the dormitory arrangements for my sister didn’t work out very well because she was here before me. But I don’t really know.

HY: Do you know what kind of work your father did here, then?

RW: He just continued.

HY: So what were your impressions of the campus then?

RW: Oh, it was certainly a very friendly and not an intimidating experience at all. I guess maybe if you just stay here and it’s a small enough school it’s just like the continuation of high school. I

didn't think it was anything different. But I think that they did a lot in terms of orientation for new students because there were people assigned to each new student. There were camps, there were. . . .

HY: By camps you mean—what do you mean by that?

RW: Well, the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] and the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] would get together, and there used to be a YMCA camp in Kāne'ohe. They would have, let's say, a three-day camp.

HY: This is with the new students?

RW: Right. Where you could get to know new people and find out about the campus and about the courses that were available and things of this sort. There were guided tours of the campus. Anyway, I think that they set it up so that you didn't feel lost at all.

HY: So that was an easy transition for you, sounds like.

RW: It really was and I think that the academic advising was really well set up, too. Because you were given an academic advisor who really advised you and was around enough to talk to you about anything you wanted to talk about. And few enough [students] per advisor so that you didn't feel like you were taking someone else's time if you needed to run in and ask about something. We had to have our programs approved every semester. They really looked over you. (Chuckles)

HY: Now, did you know coming in that you—you got your degree in education, right?

RW: Mm hmm.

HY: Did you know that from the beginning then?

RW: Yeah, because I did apply to become a teacher.

HY: What was it that made you follow that route?

RW: (Pause) I don't really know.

(Laughter)

HY: That's okay. So you started in ed[ucation]. Who were some professors here that were influential on you, if there were?

RW: Oh, the big, big influence, I think, is Bob Clopton. Robert W. Clopton. I think that he influenced all the secondary teachers during his tenure. I don't think anybody before him or after him has done as good a job. I don't know what there was about him because he rarely (told you what to do). I mean, he was very laid back and wasn't aggressive about how you thought about various things. But he certainly managed to develop a kind of basic philosophy, I think, that is missing in so many people.

HY: Maybe you can elaborate on . . .

RW: On that.

HY: . . . on what that philosophy was. Is this a philosophy about teaching or just life in general or both?

RW: Both, I guess. But primarily, I guess, educational philosophy. I guess I'd have to think about that to know how to express it. I guess the fact that you're not expecting students to just regurgitate information, that you are actually helping to change the way one looks at things or the way one acts. Coupled with, I think, a trust in the basic worth of every individual. (He expected you to be intelligent and have a solid background and to use this knowledge to do your own thinking.)

HY: You felt he was very respectful of each of the students?

RW: He's the only one, I think, who could make people think. To me, that is one of the basic things one needs to do in teaching. I don't know how one does it.

HY: Do you feel like you were given the tools to approach teaching in that way?

RW: Mm hmm.

HY: So how was your overall feeling about the program that you went through at that time?

RW: Well, I think it was very good because of him. It's interesting, I think, that you can see this just in talking to people. Because when you find somebody who reacts and seems to have a similar philosophy, it turns out he or she got his degree about the time that he was there. And it's missing in other people. I don't know what it is.

HY: What about your classmates, were there people from Hilo that you also went to school with at UH? I assume most of the students at that time were in state.

RW: I think they were, but do you know none of the people whom I knew from Hilo High ended up in the same program here that I did. My very good friend from Hilo, whom I went to school with from kindergarten on, split after the second year because she wanted to become an elementary teacher and so she had a different course entirely. I think most of the other people (from Hilo Standard,) because they were Caucasians, went to Mainland colleges. So I sort of lost track of them then.

HY: What about other campus activities? Were you involved in anything else?

RW: I was active in the *Ka Leo* [*O Hawai'i*]. I was advertising manager and business manager. Pretty active in the Associated Women Students, which is no longer an organization on campus, I don't think. They were very active, particularly in orienting new women students, I know. We did a lot of work then. Let's see what else. . . .

HY: Was that their primary function, to orient new women students?

RW: And I guess deal with any issues that had to do with women students.

HY: What about within your own field, what was the demographic of women and men?

RW: Oh, gosh, let's see. I guess there were more women than men. Of course while I was here—let's see, was it the second year? There was this huge increase in population of men because the veterans came back. But none of them, as I recall, went into education. They were headed for other fields. But that changed the complexion of the student body a lot, I think. Because then you had much older people and more experienced people.

HY: I interrupted you about your activities. Were there other activities that you were involved in?

RW: I can't remember any right now.

HY: Okay. What about other courses? Were there other professors or other subjects that sparked your interest?

RW: I really enjoyed my basic chemistry course.

HY: Who did you take from?

RW: It was Robert Dean, who left soon after that. But he was excellent. I don't know what I liked about it but it was just very good. I had a Robert Spurr, also, for chemistry, whom I enjoyed. Had physics from a guy named [Ervin] Bramhall who came directly out of MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] and was a real hard taskmaster. I loved it until I hit electricity and I have never, never understood (HY laughs) electricity because it just seemed very (contradictory)—a real conflict to me to tell me that current flowed (from) a point of high potential to low potential but current is the stream of negative ions and they go in the opposite direction. (Chuckles) Which way is the current going? I could never figure it out.

I enjoyed my botany courses so I took a lot of botany, which I didn't really need. Because if you were going to be a secondary science teacher, you had to have all kinds of courses. So I wasn't supposed to take that many botany courses, but I enjoyed (them). Charles Engard was the botanist and he was excellent. So I really enjoyed my science courses and that's what made me have to go back and take mathematics. Then I got interested in mathematics.

Let's see, among the mathematics courses, there was a summer course that was taught by (Paul Comba). He's left since. He taught mathematics more like what Bob Clopton, I think, expected one to teach. But I guess I've picked up a lot more ideas about mathematics and mathematics teaching and how important teachers are in the whole process. That has been my focus for the last I don't know how many years. I did most of my work in teacher education because I really think it's important that mathematics be something that students enjoy because they know what mathematics really is and not enjoy it because of the incorrect ideas they have about mathematics.

HY: Now, you said something interesting the last time, too, about mathematics, and maybe it's related to that. You had said that a lot of students that do very well in math through their secondary education come to college and they think they want to be math majors. I remember you saying that the thinking process is actually very different.

RW: Yes.

HY: Maybe you can just kind of explain what you mean.

RW: I think many students come in with the notion that mathematics is something that the teacher shows them. The teacher presents something and shows them step by step what needs to be done to get this answer and there is one correct answer, and that's the sum of what they think mathematics is. So all they can think of is: you give me a problem of the type that the teacher showed me how to do and I'll just whiz right through it because I've gone through these steps over and over and I get this (correct) answer and I'm good at that so now I'm going to be a math major. And I think if I had to pick the aspects of mathematics that are missing, they would be maybe thinking, certainly, and . . .

HY: You're talking about thinking rather than a kind of . . .

RW: Rote process.

HY: Rote, yeah.

RW: Thinking and communicating ideas. That just never, never seems to enter their minds that they're really communicating ideas. When they put a bunch of symbols down, they better know what idea that's trying to . . .

HY: Equations as sentences.

RW: That's right. So, I know that they practically revolt when you say that they have to write. "What is there to write?" You don't write because all you have to do is something to some numbers and that should satisfy you.

I think that the other aspect that—well, it's also active participation. I think that's something that they don't seem to recognize. You don't learn mathematics passively. You've got to get in there and think and participate in the process. Otherwise it's just going to be memorization.

Certainly, one of the things that they have never met up with is frustration. I think you talk to any mathematician and they will say you have to learn to tolerate frustration and you have to be able to persevere in the face of mounting frustration. (HY laughs.) You know, the first time you give a student something a little different, they will shoot right back at you, "You didn't teach us how to do that problem so don't give it to us." That's the attitude that they have. It's something you have to learn, I guess. But I wish that they would be exposed to it earlier. So I guess that's how I got to feeling that you really need to do something about changing the ideas about mathematics that teachers have. Because then maybe (more of them) would do things in the classroom, which would give students a more accurate idea.

HY: How do you teach somebody to deal with frustration?

RW: Frustration? I guess you have to lean over backwards to provide feedback continually and provide some hints so that he doesn't get totally lost and unable to do anything. One of the things that I think nobody ever taught them was if you reach a point where you've tried everything you could possibly think about and nothing's working, stop working on that and do something else because when you come back you'll look at it with a fresh eye.

I guess I was convinced of the fact that something needed to be done with teacher education when I set up in-service, summer and academic-year institutes for teachers. I (once) had, as the instructor of one of the (required) courses, someone whom I thought they could just sit and

observe and they would learn a lot. But (some) didn't. They were complaining to me about, "He doesn't show us anything so how does he expect us to get anything?"

I said, "Why don't you watch him?" I said, "Ask him a question and watch what he does."

Because you could throw a question at him that he hadn't thought about and he would say, "Oh, let's see. Maybe we can consider this case and see what's happening there. That didn't (help). Well, how about this?" But you know, I think that if you would take the time to watch somebody like that—but here were (some) teachers who had a lot of experience just sitting back and saying, "Why didn't he just tell us?"

(That experience prompted me to write) some instructional materials for a mathematics course for elementary teachers. We had two courses for a while for elementary teachers. Then the last project that I worked on was a course for high school teachers, which would emphasize communicating ideas and writing. That was interesting, too.

HY: How well was that received by the teachers?

RW: It varied. (HY chuckles) We had some real enthusiastic people and some who (saw no value in it). (Chuckles) But we were encouraged enough to want to continue with another course. I don't know what happened then. (We may have run out of money.)

HY: Okay, so back to your student days, then. Did you feel yourself that you were prepared for the courses in mathematics here? You were talking about how students are not—they didn't feel—the type of mathematics preparation specifically did not ready them necessarily to be math majors. Even though you weren't a math major. Did you feel like you were well prepared?

RW: I guess I didn't find out what students might feel earlier until I went to do my graduate work.

HY: Oh, I see.

RW: I really don't know how to differentiate because we do have students who come straight out of high school. We've had early admission students who've had the usual courses and seem to be able to bridge the gap. So, I guess what I'm thinking is—I guess I feel like something needs to be done for (a large number of other) students. But I think if you have a really good student they sort of recognize that immediately or (the student could very well have had a teacher who provided appropriate experiences). I don't know what it is.

HY: Maybe we can resume this next time.

RW: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW