

Tape No. 23-2-1-92

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sumiko Yanagisako (SY)

April 10, 1992

Kuli'ou'ou, O'ahu

BY: Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

MK: This is an interview with Mrs. Sumiko Yanagisako on April 10, 1992, in her home in Kuli'ou'ou, Honolulu, O'ahu. The interviewer is Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

Okay. Mrs. Yanagisako, I think I'll start today's interview by having you talk mostly about your father and his involvement in his store. So maybe we can start with your father's background. Like, when and where was your father, Ishichi Matsuda, born?

SY: He was born in Komatsu, Ōshima-gun, Yamaguchi-ken, Japan.

MK: And where—when was he born?

SY: I don't have the date, but I can always figure because he's thirty-six years older than I, born in the same Year of the Tiger. I have to deduct thirty-six years from 1914, then I get his date.

MK: Eighteen seventy-eight then.

SY: That's right, 1878. I have his exact date [December 1, 1878], but I have it upstairs, I don't have it in my (memory), so.

MK: That's fine. And tell me about your father's family background, his mother, his father?

SY: His mother was, her maiden name was Nakaya. His father's name was Matsuda. From what I understand, his father came as a *yōshi* and should have—his name should have been Nakaya. But after all my grandparents, grandmother's family had gone, he changed it back to his name, Matsuda. (Chuckles) I understand my grandmother—that's my father's mother—was an orphan and was brought up by the Suenaga family. My [paternal] grandfather is not a native of Ōshima-gun. He came as a government surveyor to Ōshima-gun and then he married my grandmother. That's about all I can remember about my grandparents. They had a rice store. They used to sell rice. My father came to Hawai'i in 1899. From what I heard from my parents, he went to Wainaku plantation and after two and a half years, he didn't complete his three-year contract. He was asked to leave because he was considered a labor instigator. (Chuckles) He asked for some better working conditions, but the plantation figured he would start lot of labor problems, so they had asked him to leave. So he came to Honolulu.

From stories I've heard, he worked for American, Caucasian family as a cook. The name sounded like Van Brocklin. Later, he must have started a hotel called Yamaichi Ryokan, because when my mother came, he had this hotel on Beretania Street near where they call the Tin Can Alley. She told me [about] that, her hardship of having to chop woods to start fire. She also told us about the women who used to come to live there, some of them were working in Iwilei. Do you know what was happening in Iwilei?

MK: The women working in Iwilei were prostitutes.

SY: Yeah. They would come over and live there for a while, or something, you know. So she kind of knew some of the women who, later on, adjusted to society.

MK: Did she ever share any stories about these women with you?

SY: I beg your pardon?

MK: Did she ever tell you anything more about these women who were employed as prostitutes in the Iwilei area?

SY: No, she didn't say much, but. . . . No, no.

MK: I'm going to ask you to back up a little bit. You talked about your grandparents being rice merchants, and I was wondering, what number son your father was . . .

SY: My father was the oldest, and he had another brother who came to Hawai'i later. He had about, as far as I can remember, three sisters. We only met one sister when we—when I was about twelve years old, we went to Japan. At that time, we met one sister who was still living on the island of Ōshima. She had a daughter, and recently, in 1989, I met my cousin's son. He said he went as a *yōshi*, to his mother's aunt's family, because evidently she didn't have any children. Gee, I've gone to Ōshima-*gun*, well, after the war [World War II] this is two times, and it looks like a beautiful island with nice beaches. There is a famous museum where they have this huge battleship (*Mutsu*) that was sunk, and they have the remains all exhibited there. Gee, I forgot what the name of that—there's a famous, huge boat that they had, Japan had, and I don't know how it was sunk, but, during the war, yeah.

MK: It's there at Ōshima-*gun*.

SY: Yeah.

MK: I was wondering how much you would know about your father's early life in Japan, his boyhood, his education, and any early work experience he may have had prior to coming to Hawai'i.

SY: Yeah, we don't have. We never asked him and he never talked about it. Only thing he talked about was when he worked for this Caucasian family as a cook, how he brought in the cake, with the fire on it.

(Laughter)

MK: Was that a flambé?

SY: Flambé, yeah. They must have put some alcohol and lighted it, and he brought it.

MK: In terms of your father's education in Japan, I think you mentioned something about *terakoya*.

SY: Yeah, they didn't have school, so he had to go to a—he could read and write Japanese, so he must have gone. He went to *terakoya* to study.

MK: And his parents being rice merchants, did he assist them in any way in the business?

SY: Oh he never talked about it. He never talked about his father and mother.

MK: I think at the other time I talked with you, you mentioned that there was some conflict . . .

SY: Yeah, I figure . . .

MK: . . . between himself and his parents?

SY: I figure that because his father had a bad temper and he had a bad temper, they couldn't get along, so he came to Hawai'i, yeah.

MK: Did he ever express why he came to Hawai'i?

SY: No.

MK: Or how he came to Hawai'i? But he did come in 1899?

SY: Yes, yeah.

MK: And his brother [Tsunezo Matsuda] also came to Hawai'i, later on.

SY: Not—yeah, later, yeah.

MK: And he [Ishichi Matsuda] worked at Wainaku plantation. He left as a quote, unquote, “labor instigator.” Came to Honolulu, worked for a Caucasian family, he served as their cook. Then he started Yamaichi Hotel [Yamaichi Ryokan] about the time your mother came, and that's about 1908.

SY: Yes.

MK: And who were the clients at this Yamaichi Hotel.

SY: The island people, because they were all moving on to the Mainland. But after a while, they stopped that so I guess business was bad, so. . . . Then when the Kuakini Hospital [the Japanese Hospital, renamed Kuakini in 1942] was organized, they were looking for a cook, and they wanted the menu and the cost, so my mother assisted making the menu and they got the job, and that's where they were. I don't remember too well, but I was in the kindergarten at the time, so I was about five years old.

- MK: And you also told me that besides being a cook for what came to be Kuakini Hospital, he started supplying goods to the Japanese ships.
- SY: That's right.
- MK: Can you tell me how that worked?
- SY: That one, he used a Mr. Kai Tong's grocery store, which was in the Kekaulike district, and he would go there when he had his—the boats come in and give the order, and I guess he must have bought some things from Mr. Kai Tong. Wong, his last name. Then when the 'A'ala Market was organized, he moved there.
- MK: And when you say that he supplied the ships from Mr. Kai Tong's store, what ships were those?
- SY: There were all the Japanese ships [Nippon Yūsen Kaisha], I'm sure. And sailboats. There were lot of sailboats coming in with lumber and the cook will be Japanese, so he got, I guess that's the reason why he got the order from them.
- MK: And when he supplied them from Mr. Kai Tong Wong's store, what kinds of goods did he supply?
- SY: Mostly vegetables. Vegetables, I think.
- MK: So he was, I guess, would you call him a middleman between Mr. Wong's store and the ships?
- SY: Gee, I guess it was sort of a---he was using Mr. Kai Tong's grocery store only when the boats came in. So I wouldn't say he was a middleman, yeah.
- MK: And finally, in 1919, your father helped to establish 'A'ala Market.
- SY: Yeah.
- MK: Can you explain.
- SY: It was organized by Chinese and Japanese people, and some of the names, big stockholders, Japanese, were Dr. [K.] Haida, Mr. Uichi Yamane. Oh, and I also got a name, called on Mr. Nerio. I got his first name, I talked to the daughters the other day. Mr. Nerio's name was Benzaburo Nerio. Other Japanese. . . . There were a lot of small stockholders because I remember at the end of the year, when the dividends were distributed, some men would come and my father would have it ready for them. He got it for them, and so they'll come to pick it up. So there were lot of other stockholders. That's about all the biggest stockholders, yeah. Of course there were lot of Chinese people there. One of them is—what's that, oh, I forgot. The big one, he still has a big estate now. What did I say the last time? Lum Yip Kee. Yeah. And there was a Mr. Tan. I can't remember the other Chinese people, but my sister—I had the picture, but I don't have it now. My sister has the picture when ('A'ala Market) was organized, the opening, all the people are there. All the people, you know. We all got one, but I don't know where mine went.

MK: I think you mentioned that Mr. Kai Tong Wong . . .

SY: Yeah, yeah, he's another big [stockholder], yeah, yeah. So he also moved there too, yeah.

MK: And I noticed that you mentioned Dr. Haida and Mr. Uichi Yamane of Kalihi as stockholders. These two men had their own professions or businesses.

SY: That's right, yeah.

MK: How about the other stockholders, were they directly involved as businesses . . .

SY: No, no, no.

MK: . . . at 'A'ala Market or . . .

SY: No, they didn't have it. They didn't have any business in the market, no. The small stockholders were maybe carpenters or something like that.

MK: So it was your father who had a business there, who held stock.

SY: Yeah.

MK: Mr. Kai Tong Wong, who held stock and also had business there. Were there others like them that . . .

SY: Yeah, there could have been another Chinese person on the Queen Street side, you know. But I don't remember their names.

MK: And would you remember who the leaders were in this establishment of 'A'ala Market?

SY: Well, I would say my father was, because he would go to the meeting. Mr. Yamane. Of course the Lum Yip Kee, and Kai Tong [Wong], yeah. And then, Mr. Tan that I mentioned, yeah.

MK: And you know, all of these vendors that came to the market, did they have businesses elsewhere before coming to the market?

SY: No, I don't think so. I can't remember.

MK: Okay. And maybe you can tell me why your father started his store.

SY: For one thing, he couldn't work with others. He had to be the boss.

(Laughter)

SY: He had to be the boss, yeah. So . . .

MK: He was more temperamentally suited.

- SY: Temperamentally he couldn't, he wouldn't be able to work with people, because he was outspoken. He was always for the underdog. He always helped the underdog. Well, because of his bad temper I guess. (Chuckles)
- MK: And so he established his own store.
- SY: Yeah.
- MK: I. Matsuda, Limited, located in 'A'ala Market. Now, where was 'A'ala Market located, and where was his store in 'A'ala Market.
- SY: Oh, it was bounded by Queen Street. It was within Queen Street and bounded by 'A'ala Rengō and the river.
- MK: And his store, where would it fit . . .
- SY: Oh yeah, his store was . . .
- MK: . . . in 'A'ala Market?
- SY: There was an entrance from the 'A'ala Rengō, in the center of the building on King Street. And as you came in, in that 'A'ala Market, my father's was the first one on the right-hand corner. He had the biggest store, biggest space.
- MK: And about how big was it?
- SY: Gee, I don't know how to say it but---I wouldn't know how to describe it, yeah, the size, because—well anyway, it was the biggest store. And there was a large space as you came in, and we also started a flower shop there too. We started to sell flowers too.
- MK: Cut flowers.
- SY: Yes. That was all my mother's idea, "Let's sell flowers." She was always thinking of something.
- MK: So you had the I. Matsuda store and what other stores?
- SY: No—oh around? Next door, as far as I can remember is [Junichi] Fujimoto. And then, next door there was also a flower shop. And then, there was a little alley—not alley, but walkway—and then my father's brother opened his store there. And there was on the other end, which was almost on Queen Street, a Chinese store. Mr. Kai Tong's store was sort of in front of ours, there was a bakery and Mr. Kai Tong [Wong]. The rest of the stores were all stalls, in the center of the market were stalls—like the Kekaulike Market is—where they sold meat, pork, fish. There's a little chicken stall there too.
- MK: And, you know, when you mention all those other stores, like Fujimoto Store, your father's brother's store, what sorts of goods did they sell?
- SY: They sold the same thing. We were all competitors. So my father helped his brother open the

store and became a competitor. But I wouldn't say exactly competitor, because my father sold a lot to the ships. He had Kalaupapa [Settlement] contract, and the Japanese Hospital [renamed Kuakini in 1942] contract. And the Kalihi Receiving Hospital [formally, known as the Kalihi Receiving Station].

MK: Did he also have a walk-in trade?

SY: Yes. That was the main, more or less, regular, everyday business.

MK: And how about the other stores then, they also had . . .

SY: They only have walk-in trade. Oh, we also had lot of teahouse orders. Because, I guess, my father was (chuckles) a good customer of theirs. So he was, he brought in unusual things from Japan. Fresh *wasabi*, but they don't allow it now. And they call it *udo*, Japanese—they don't have it. It's a white thing, crispy, and we use it in *namasu*. My father call it *udo*, but it's not asparagus, you know. I never saw it after, since we stopped selling that in Hawai'i. That—those things were sold mostly to the teahouses.

MK: When you say teahouses, what were the names of some of the teahouses . . .

SY: Well . . .

MK: . . . that he had as clients?

SY: Shunchuro, which is Natsunoya now. It's run by the Fujiwara family, called Shunchuro. And Mochizuki. There was one called Kasuga. There was one on School Street. Oh, that's where James Shigeta [actor] used to live. You know who's James Shigeta, that . . .

MK: Uh huh.

SY: He happens to be a distant relative of ours. They all came from *Ōshima-gun*. (Chuckles) Yeah, that's---and there was one on Mō'ili'ili. They're still there. I forgot their name.

MK: Is that Rainbow Garden?

SY: Yeah, Rainbow Garden. They had a Japanese name, I forgot. So he sold a lot to the teahouses.

MK: So he had a very varied clientele. He was supplying what came to be Kuakini Hospital, the receiving station . . .

SY: Yeah, Kalihi.

MK: . . . for Hansen's Disease patients in Kalihi.

SY: Yeah, Hansen's.

MK: Kalaupapa and the ships that came in.

- SY: That's the Japanese, Nippon Yūsen Kaisha. And at the beginning, there were lot of sailboats, as I said. They brought in lumber. I guess they brought in all those heavy stuff, yeah.
- MK: And did also service the Japanese warships that happened to be . . .
- SY: That's right. Yeah, warships.
- MK: Okay. How about any other vessels, say, American vessels?
- SY: No.
- MK: Primarily Japanese. And he had a walk-in trade.
- SY: Yes, yes.
- MK: This walk-in trade, were they mostly area residents or people that came from far away?
- SY: Oh, some of them came from far away, like we had this charcoal maker who would come with his truck and buy almost a whole month's supply. They used to live around—I hear they used to live around here in Hawai'i Kai. They used to make charcoal. Lot of bad debts, they don't pay. (Chuckles) Japanese in those days, I don't know why they wait for you and they never go to collect and---I remember once my mother went to collect and, boy, what she got, she got good scolding from the man. You know, they owe you money and then they make you seem like a bad guy. It was terrible those days. Lot of bad debts in those days, you know.
- MK: So some purchases were made on credit.
- SY: Yeah.
- MK: Rather than cash.
- SY: The best ones were the boats because they pay, you know, regularly. So there was people like that. And we had Hawaiian customers, when payday comes, they buy a lot, you know. They were clean, they pay, you know. And the Japanese were the worst customers. (Chuckles)
- MK: You know, nowadays we use credit cards.
- SY: Yeah, that's right.
- MK: In those days, how did someone buy on credit?
- SY: By, just by your face, and being your friend. Oh, the Japanese, more or less, they trust each other. Well I guess many of them were having hard time, they had their hard time paying.
- MK: Were there like regular collections, was there a system?
- SY: No, there's no collection. Never.

MK: So, if someone bought some goods on credit from your father's store, he would pay . . .

SY: Oh yeah . . .

MK: . . . when he had the money available, rather than meeting a particular date.

SY: That's right, no, yeah, but we had to buy everything cash. 'Cause I remember sometimes I had to go to American Factors or [Theo H.] Davies, everything is cash. But he had lot of uncollectible bills.

MK: And now you mentioned that you had to pay cash for your goods. Where were the major places you got your goods for the store?

SY: Well, when the boats came in, we need fresh vegetables, we used to go out. My mother would drive the truck and go and pick it up at the farm. There were farms---oh that Rainbow Gardens, Shinonome. Around there, they had the [farms]---I guess must have been near the university district, yeah. I remember the---and there was, Kaheka Lane, over there used to be Chinese vegetables there, farmers. We would go and collect. You know, because we have, as soon as my father came in from the boat, he used to go out on the tugboat. So by the time the boat comes in, he had the order, so he comes back to the store and he gives the order to my mother, and then she would go out to the farms. Because this all have to be shipped by four o'clock. They come in at eight o'clock [in the morning], the boat. By four o'clock [in the afternoon], all this has to be on the boat. So my mother had to go and get all these vegetables, you know, fresh vegetables, and bring it back and then our truck will, we had a truck driver who would take it, yeah.

MK: And did she have regu---did your parents have a regular supplier?

SY: Yeah, a regular supplier, yeah.

MK: These farmers had a relationship with your parents.

SY: Yeah. This Chinese farm, Japanese farm.

MK: And when these ships were not coming in, would your parents be going out to these farms to get produce, or would these farmers be coming in?

SY: No. Daily, they come early in the morning and they deliver, and then I guess you ask. Say you want so much of that, so much of that. All the merchants would come to that, you know, they would come to 'A'ala Market. There was an alleyway where they parked their cars, you know. Then everybody goes and buy what they wanted. Yeah, it was only this special orders from the ships that my mother had to go and pick it up at the farms.

MK: So normally these farmers would bring in their goods to 'A'ala, and storeowners like your dad would purchase from them?

SY: That's right.

MK: Right there, at 'A'ala.

- SY: Yeah. So with these special orders, we have to go out and get it from the farmers.
- MK: And I was wondering, when you mentioned produce, what types of produce did you carry?
- SY: Mostly---oh, some we have to order from the River Street [stores]. They had lot of produce stores. Like fresh things like lettuce, green onion, I remember. The rest were mostly from the produce, yeah.
- MK: And when it came to non-produce grocery items, where did you go to get your supply?
- SY: Davies and American Factors, they were the two wholesalers. But they don't order those things too much in Hawai'i. I remember sometimes my father had to go and look for cheese. Where did we get that cheese? But anyway, most of the things they could get on the Mainland, they get it on the Mainland, see. This is really the fresh produce they had to buy. Or maybe---oh, pineapples. Fresh pineapples. Well, in season, watermelons, yeah. What else? Oh, they used to buy papaya too, I think. Those we would get it from the River Street produce stores. So. . . .
- MK: And you know, your walk-in trade, if you had to determine what ethnicities came to the store, which ethnic groups frequented your store?
- SY: Mostly Japanese, yeah.
- MK: So were the produce and can goods tailored to their needs?
- SY: Mm hm. Can goods, Portuguese people would come and, as I said, the Hawaiians. The Japanese didn't eat too much can goods those days. I know my mother, we never open the can. (Chuckles) We never open can.
- MK: And for the Japanese goods that he had imported, did he get them, get these products imported by himself . . .
- SY: No, he didn't.
- MK: . . . or did he go through another wholesaler.
- SY: [Yes,] except for the *wasabi* and the *udo*, because he had connections with the boat, the people would bring it. But all the rest of the can goods, then we have to go through local wholesalers. There was one called Hiyama. I don't know if my father did any business with the Sumidas. Hiyama is the one, yeah.
- MK: And, you know, in terms of the competition, how was the competition within 'A'ala Market. You had these various stores.
- SY: Gee, isn't that funny, we never thought of each other as competitors. We all thought of each other as friends. (Chuckles)
- MK: Was there a feeling of competition with, say, Kekaulike Market?

- SY: No. That's the thing, we were not born merchants. Parents became accidentally merchants, you know. They don't have that background of generation and generation—like the Iidas [of S.M. Iida, Ltd.] have [for] generations—but by accident. But maybe by luck, maybe—oh, I don't know.
- MK: You know, if you didn't have that sense of competition, was there then a sense of cooperation among the stores of 'A'ala Market?
- SY: It's not just [that] exactly. But I guess we all had different clients, eh. The Hiroshima-*ken* people will go to, maybe, Fujimotos. And the Yamaguchi-*ken* people come to our store, or something like that, you know.
- MK: And I notice that the store obviously had a large clientele, large variety of goods to offer. In terms of who had to handle all this, who were the workers at your father's store?
- SY: Oh yeah. We always had a Chinese man and one Japanese. Isn't that funny, we had Chinese. Probably because he could help to buy the vegetables from the Chinese farmers. I remember when I was a child, there was always a Chinese. I still remember there was one called Mr. Lee. And there was a Mr. Wong.
- MK: So the store had one Chinese.
- SY: And one Japanese, yeah, yeah.
- MK: And what were their jobs, then.
- SY: Well, usually the Chinese---well, he would sell too. He buys the vegetables, I guess, the Chinese fellow. But the Japanese fellow would be the delivery. Oh, we used to do a lot of deliveries. Family would order, and we used to deliver to the homes. That's why the Japanese guy did the delivery, yeah.
- MK: So for those deliveries, did the families just order through the telephone . . .
- SY: Yeah, telephone.
- MK: . . . or you had *chūmontori*.
- SY: No, no, we didn't have *chūmontori*. We didn't have. They would order through the telephone, or order---of course, Japanese used to buy the hundred-pound bag rice, you see. That's why we had to deliver I guess. Yeah, I notice the next store, Mr. Fujimoto didn't sell those bulk things. He was more vegetables. We had vegetable, can goods, rice, you know. Yeah, I noticed that now, when I think about it. He didn't have those rice and things. Or shoyu, we used to sell, you know.
- MK: So you had a Chinese employee, a Japanese employee, who would do sales, deliveries, pick ups of goods. And how about your mother and father, what would their roles be?
- SY: My father just sit at the desk. (Chuckles) "Do this, do that, do that." Oh shucks. (Chuckles)

MK: And your mother?

SY: My mother---oh, we had, we all eat at the store. Even the workmen ate too. She had to cook, yeah. She had to cook.

MK: So there were facilities at the store . . .

SY: Yeah, it was a kitchen in the back. So we ate all our three meals there, except on Sunday, because we close half a day, so Sunday we eat at home for dinner.

MK: And was there a space at the store where you could, you know, have dinner and everything.

SY: There's a table, stove, sink, you know. It was not clean like the, you know, but it was in the store, back of the store.

MK: Was that the usual way for the families of 'A'ala Market to have their meals.

SY: Well, most of the---the Chinese, I notice, would carry layered containers and go to Hotel Street and buy their food. And I noticed the meat market [owners and workers] eating at---they don't eat breakfast---and they're eating (at) ten o'clock. I heard the Chinese ate only two meals. I don't know how true it is. But they were eating at ten o'clock. But they [market owners] would go and one of the workingmen would go. But we fed our workingmen too.

MK: Would you know about how much your workers were getting then? They're having their meals there.

SY: Yeah, I don't think they got more than hundred dollars.

MK: How did the Great Depression affect the business?

SY: Depression was in the [19]30s. Yeah, I remember it was '30. Nineteen twenty-nine was a big stock crash, so 1930. Yeah. Gee, I guess we were children, so we didn't know what's going on. Japanese families are---Americans talk about it and say, "We gotta tighten our belt," or something. But Japanese, they don't let their children know.

MK: Did you notice any difference or hardships on your family?

SY: I didn't quite understand until later, yeah.

MK: I'm just gonna turn the tape over now.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: Now, I don't know if you can really answer this question, but how did you think the business was doing? You know, how was it faring? Were there any times when it seemed to be doing

very well and growing, or any times when you thought the business was not doing well?

SY: I guess after the [19]30s the business was not doing well because my mother had to innovate a lot of things. We started to sell chicken too. She always thought of something, you know. And I know we were selling chicken, fresh chicken, you know. She would kill the chicken, clean it herself. (Chuckles)

MK: She would do that herself?

SY: Yes. Many people squirm about killing chicken, but she cut the neck and she knew how to hold 'em so it won't fly around. At one time we were---at Christmastime, she even roasted chicken and started to sell roasted chicken. She always thought of something, you know, to. . . . And we used to sell well, because Japanese didn't know how to roast chicken those days.

MK: But the Japanese had the taste?

SY: Yeah, uh huh. But of course, this was only for New Year's they would buy, you know, it was only for New Year's.

MK: And you've been saying that your mother was really the innovator . . .

SY: That's right.

MK: . . . in the store. She started the selling of the flowers . . .

SY: That's right.

MK: . . . in the store. The fresh chicken.

SY: Yes, and then later on, prepared chicken. Yeah. Almost like a delicatessen.

MK: And she also drove the truck.

SY: Yeah. And you know that dasheen, *araimo*? You know that she realized people didn't like to peel because they get itchy. So we had a big barrel and she put her stick in and put the *araimo*, and somehow she moved it and the skin would come off. So we were selling *araimo* with the skin peeled. Today it's all with the skin. She thought of lot of things, when I think about it. Oh, and then we started to add more can goods, and she used to watch how the others sold, and she always made—even if one penny less—she make it less.

MK: So she . . .

SY: That was the [Great] Depression time, I think. She was thinking of all these things.

MK: So she would kind of compare prices?

SY: Yeah.

MK: From other stores?

SY: Other stores. Even if it's only a penny, she would lower it, yeah.

MK: And how about your father? Was he doing these sorts of things?

SY: He was spending the money, going to the teahouses.

(Laughter)

SY: When I think about it. Well, he made the contacts, like, you know, with the Japanese Consulate to sell to the boats. And made the contacts with the teahouses so he could get big orders, but. . . .

MK: That's really interesting, they had to figure out some way to have clients.

SY: Yeah. But he would---but I can only remember him sitting on the chair and with his feet on the desk, and smoking. Oh another thing is, because he could read and write, lot of people like carpenters, masons, on their way home, would stop at our store and he would give all the political news of Japan. They used to come to listen, because these people couldn't read and write, I think. So, you know, he'll---when the China war [was on], you know, the Japan, the Manchurian war. They would come and he's telling them all what he reads in the paper, now. He cannot, he cannot analyze. He would tell them what's going on in Japan. I remember there was a time when lot of people were making money with Japanese yen. And he thought that was really unpatriotic. There was chance of making money with the yen, I remember. He was a bad-tempered man, but he knew what was right and wrong. Yeah, he did, as I said, he was always for the underdog, always helping. So the fishermen liked to come and talk to him too. As I said, these people who go to work early in the morning, you know, these carpenters and masons, they, about four o'clock, they're on the way home, so they stop at the store and he would talk about all this news. The Japan news, yeah.

MK: So, it was sort of like a social center too.

SY: Probably, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MK: He could read . . .

SY: That's right, that's right.

MK: . . . the news from Japan. Since he was literate, did he also write letters for people?

SY: They didn't ask him to write letters, no.

MK: It's mostly reading the newspaper and informing them of what was happening.

SY: Yeah. What was happening in Japan, yeah.

MK: Were there other people that just came to congregate at the store? Was it like a hangout?

SY: No, there was a place in the back of the---where they played *shogi*. So my father used to play a lot of *shogi* with the Asahi Furniture man—what’s his name? [Risuke] Komeiji. Yeah, those two used to play a lot of that *shogi*. See, business in those days were slowly going, no rush and you know, what it is today. So there are lot of times in the afternoon where, you know, they can go and play *shogi*. But I know he used to play with Mr. Komeiji, he had the furniture store, yeah.

MK: And so he was interacting with other business owners, right, like Mr. Komeiji.

SY: Yeah, mm hm.

MK: He was interacting with carpenters, masons. I think you also mentioned that he was very active in the Japanese community. Maybe you can talk about that aspect of his life.

SY: No, he never did, but I remember he used to go around collecting donations, yeah.

MK: You mentioned something about the United Japanese Society.

SY: That’s the one, United Japanese, yeah. He rather be helping them than the Japanese Chamber of Commerce because he figured the Japanese Chamber of Commerce were only thinking of business people or only about themselves. Well, [United Japanese Society] he thought was more for the ordinary people, (for the community) you see. So he found that he would rather work with them. Anyway, as I told you, he’s bad-tempered, so he couldn’t work with them, which would be business people. And you know, ideas were to help the poor more than the big business, so you know, he couldn’t get along with those [businessmen].

MK: And I think you mentioned that he was also involved with Kuakini Hospital.

SY: He was one of the original organizers of the elderly, old man’s home. I think it’s in their history, yeah. So every time he (got) angry (with us) he says he doesn’t care about us because he can always go there. (Chuckles) He threatened us.

MK: So I guess he ran the store. He was there at the store. He delegated. It was also a social center for him.

SY: Yeah.

MK: People would come to see him there.

SY: Yeah, the Japanese never had people come to your homes and socialize, I realize that. In the olden days, when there was a wedding, only the men went, you know, that. Did you know that? So when he comes home, the wife have to ask him, “What did the bride (wear)? And what did—” and the man don’t know anything about it.

(Laughter)

SY: Yeah, I realized that too, when I was (young). Only my father goes. Very seldom my mother goes too. Funny, yeah. Real chauvinistic society.

- MK: You know, I guess, I was also wondering, what was his relationship with the 'A'ala Rengō people? How much contact did he have with them?
- SY: They didn't socialize, but I know when there was an emergency, like when there was a flood. You know, the river flooded, and the rice is all on the—of course there's a board [i.e., platform underneath], but the rice. I know Mr. [Tokuyoshi] Awamura came and helped us put [up] the rice, you know. In the emergency time, they helped. And well, if there's funeral, oh, we would go to the funeral. But there wasn't socializing. Only the children. Yeah, but I didn't socialize because I was too old. Their kids were---my sisters were younger, you know.
- MK: So your father was in that 'A'ala Market from 1919 to 1939, what happened in 1939?
- SY: Well, Mr. [Matsujiro] Otani said get out, so we just . . .
- MK: How did that come about though? You had---he was not part of the shareholders when they started 'A'ala Market, or was he?
- SY: My father? Oh, Otani?
- MK: Yes.
- SY: No.
- MK: How did . . .
- SY: So Mr. Otani, I guess, being a smart man, he realized when the lease was going to be up. So he had a very good lawyer, Mr. [William] Heen. He was a senator at one time. I guess he got lot of advice from Mr. Heen. So before we knew it, he had the lease from Dillingham. So he took over the whole market, with the understanding that he was (going to) improve (the building), I think, yeah. He must have made some kind of a concession to Dillinghams.
- MK: And I know that your father left the market, were other storekeepers affected?
- SY: They stayed, yeah. Because, well, as I said, my father would argue with Mr. Otani, and you know, they---although my father used to buy a lot of fish from him too, you know, to send to Kalaupapa. But later on he took that away from my father. Yeah, my father bought lots of fish from Mr. Otani.
- MK: So despite that . . .
- SY: Yeah, despite that.
- MK: . . . he had problems and he left. And where did your father then go?
- SY: For a short time he was on Nu'uaniu Street. Was that above---yeah, above Vineyard. A small little store, I guess it was empty so. . . . Above Vineyard, on the 'Ewa side of Nu'uaniu Street. He wasn't there too long, thought, he moved back to Kukui Street, near the produce [stores], where the produce were.

MK: And I guess he did that, he was at Kukui till about when?

SY: Till the war started.

MK: And when war started?

SY: I took over for a little while. But I was going to (have) my second child, so I didn't, couldn't work there, so I just closed it. Because the wartime, there weren't much goods to sell. You know, hard time getting it from the produce. On top of that, his big businesses (was) all gone, the [Nippon Yūsen Kaisha] ships, you know. So it was not worth running the store.

MK: How did the, say, the Office of Price Administration [OPA] and their regulations affect the business?

SY: Oh, that, I don't remember [OPA] affecting the markets.

MK: And I know that when December 7 came, your family was affected by it very, very much. Maybe you can tell me what happened to your family on December 7 and the succeeding days.

SY: December 7, I was living [at 749 Judd Street] with my father and my husband [Howard Yanagisako] and my son. My father had gone down to the store, because he opens the store and stays there for half a day at least. So when the bombs started to fall, he wasn't home. And of course on that day, four people in a car got killed (near our home). A girl sitting on the porch got killed. And I remember in our bedroom, I felt something fall on me, and there's this shrapnel [that] went through the ceiling, and some of the dust fell on me. My father came home and he just couldn't believe it. He used to be in contact with the [Japan] navy people because he used to go [to] the battleships and training ships. [He] said people on the battleships said Japan can never fight United States. Because they [Japanese officers] travel and they've seen how big United States is. So he can't believe it. He just couldn't believe it at first. But then, he started to hear this. The FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] came and pick this man, that man. He was thinking he would be picked up. But they didn't pick him up until one week later [December 14, 1941]. It was on a Sunday. I was home with him. Two men came, one was a police officer, and one was an army officer, and I could see that he was a major because (of the) insignia on his shoulders. They were very friendly. They were holding that long gun--you call it a gun? Anyway, he left it on the porch and came in and asked for Mr. Matsuda. So he said, "Yeah, I'm Matsuda."

Said, "You have to come with us."

And then he said, "Well, I want to put my clothes on."

He said, "Yeah. Go, go, put the clothes on."

So he went to put on his suit. And the two men played with my son. From what I heard about others, you know. And as he was coming out, he said he had to go to the bathroom. The police and the officer laughed, and he went to the [bathroom], and then he went out. But according to my father's diary, some men were in the car already. They had picked up some other men. I gotta read it over again, but anyway. So that was the last we saw of him until

after the war.

MK: And then after they escorted him from the house, what did you know about him?

SY: Well, we don't know where he went. I was still at the store. I used to go down to the store every day. Then one day, a young man came to the store and told me—well, he just came out from the immigration station. [He said,] “Your father is there. And he told me to come tell you that he's okay.” He was a fisherman he said. You know, I didn't get to ask him his name, and who he was. So we were kind of relieved because there were all kinds of rumors that they were digging ditches and, at Sand Island. They said those big businessmen like Mr. Sumida was digging, you know, (who) never did labor job. But I, from what I hear, my father was at the immigration station, and this man said, “Oh we were having good time talking about old stories.” (Laughs) They had nothing to do but talk about old stories, yeah. That's what he said.

MK: Did he say anything about the conditions there?

SY: No, he didn't say anything about it. I mean, the young man didn't say anything.

MK: And how many days was this when you heard about your father.

SY: Oh shucks. Nineteen forty-one---I have no idea, yeah. But it was, I don't think it was one month, yeah, because after that they were all shipped away, yeah.

MK: And so your father was at the immigration station. You got word of his status.

SY: Yeah, there.

MK: After hearing word that your father was there, did you get to see him at all?

SY: We never got to see him. Never, right through.

MK: Did you have any sort of communication about him or with him?

SY: No. We only---I got a phone call once. It was, I know he was Japanese male, spoke very good English and said, “This is to tell you that your father had died.”

And here, I was so shocked, I couldn't ask who you are or what, you know. And the guy cut the phone. So I told my sister, “Oh, *Otōsan* died, you know.” And we all cried. And this was just a hoax, you know. A terrible thing, yeah. There were people like that in the community.

Then there was this special group made up of Mr. [Mitsuyuki] Kido [and others]. Who else? Some of the well-known local (nisei). They tried to help us, but to us, it was no help. And they were the one that went around to tell the boys to go into the army. What did they call themselves? Emergency . . .

MK: Oh, Emergency Service Committee.

SY: . . . Committee, Service Committee.

MK: When your father was taken away, was he interviewed or did you have any cause---did you think there was a cause for him to be interviewed?

SY: Oh, the only cause was that he was a Japanese citizen and he did business with the battleships. That's the only reason I can see

MK: And I think you mentioned that at one time, there was some sort of panel?

SY: There was, we called it the kangaroo court. And that time, in my father's diary, mentions this lawyer, Japanese (American) lawyer, who in private life was my father's lawyer. He (was) questioned in front of them and that's when they decided whether you gonna get out or be shipped to the Mainland. So he mentions that in his [diary]---and my husband was called, and he was asked questions like, "Does your father-in-law think Japan is going to win the war?"

So I said, "What did you say?"

Said, "I don't know what he's thinking."

You know, we never had time to discuss those things. So they decided he was undesirable (chuckles), so they got shipped away, I guess.

MK: Where was he interned?

SY: Oh, lot of different places. He was in Wisconsin, Shelby, and in Louisiana, and the last one was in New Mexico. Yeah. Santa Fe, I guess that was.

MK: Did he ever talk about his experiences there?

SY: When he came [back to Hawai'i]---when we went to pick him up, my sister went to pick him up in Japan. He had a stroke. So already, he was not normal. So when he came back, the things he talked [about] was something way back. You know. He had forgot(ten). We used to live on Judd Street, okay. But I had moved already because the alien property [custodian] took over that. So I was living on McInerny Tract called Nairo Street. So when my father came home, he stayed with us. And the Thursday Club asked him to come and speak. So he went to speak. They picked him and then they were---when they brought him home, he forgot where the house was, so he walked down and we had a dog. And the dog came, so he said, "Oh, this is my dog." The dog showed him the house, came back. One time he left the house by himself, and do you know where he was found? Where his old house was, 'Ālewa Heights, Judd Street.

And one time he was walking on the street and my relative, this Yamada---his mother was a *kanyaku imin*---found him and brought him to my [sewing] school. So then we realized he was not normal already. So he had forgotten lot of things, and then he deteriorated.

MK: And earlier you just mentioned the Alien Properties Act. What happened to the family's assets and property?

SY: Well, there was his home. They Alien Prop---I had the power of attorney and so I used to send him money. Or when he said he had to go the Mainland, we sent him money. I think

when he was interned too, we sent him money. And when he was going to the Mainland, we sent him his overcoat—bought an overcoat, you know, 'cause (it was) winter, so. I don't know if he got it or not, he never wrote.

So one day, the Alien Property told me to come over, so I went over. But Mr. Adachi, Masayuki Adachi—I remember his name—called me on the phone, and the way he said it was as if, “We are going to transfer this house to you because you have the power of attorney.” But that was to get me to come down there, I realized later, because when I got there the man was very arrogant—the *Haole* guy. He said, “We want you to sign this.” You know, just the way he—that's the way he talked.

That was, gee, after my third child was born or---no, when the third child was born, I couldn't come back from the hospital to my father's home because they had taken over. I had to go to my mother's house. So that was---must be before Sylvia was born, I had gone down to sign it. So by the time I was---you know, I went to the hospital, and I was supposed to come out, my sister folks—my sister and my husband, of course—took everything and moved it to my mother's house. I remember putting everything in the garage. But one thing we left there was the Japanese flag.

(Laughter)

SY: Then Mr. Adachi called up and [said], “Take that thing out of the house!” He was more scared, you know.

Well, that wasn't my mother's, [it was] my father's. See the Alien Property [custodian] can have it.

MK: So you had to sign over your property to the Alien Property . . .

SY: Yeah, I have to sign my power of attorney.

MK: So what happened to the property?

SY: They auctioned it and this Chinese family bought. About a few years ago, three or four years ago, we three sisters said, “Let's go look at the house.” You know, nostalgic, you know, we lived there and we went.

The guy who bought it in the auction—they had auctioned it, I guess—was very nice and he let us come in and look at the house, everything. He told me, “Oh my friend said this thing is so well-built. The three step going to the yard, you know.” He said, “You can't find this kind of thing, you know.” He was so proud of the house, you know. He was real nice about it. So we looked around the house and he said his mother was living in the last bedroom. (Chuckles)

MK: So the house was auctioned off.

SY: Yeah.

MK: The house was gone. And in the meantime, I guess your father had been repatriated to Japan, right?

SY: Yeah, uh huh. In the second exchange ship, [*Grisholm*, September 4, 1943].

MK: Did he ever say anything about his life in Japan, or his feelings about being repatriated?

SY: No. No, we used to send him a lot of things and---oh, he told me one thing about when he made coffee, anybody passing by will stop by, so he had to offer that coffee. You can smell it, I guess.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

SY: Oh, the atomic bomb fell, his friend, Mr. Hamamura, who was also interned with him, who was living in Hiroshima, said he wanted to come and visit my father, with two women who used to live in Hawai'i, but they were *geisha* girls. They were very successful and so they went home. But my father said, "Please don't bring those two ladies." 'Cause this is---people might think terrible of him.

Anyway so he didn't come. And the atomic bomb fell and he says he feel real bad about it because that man died in the atomic bomb. After the war, my father worked as an interpreter for the English government.

MK: He did?

SY: Yeah, English people were---the English government occupied Iwakuni. So he was hired as an interpreter for a little while. Yeah, so, oh, I don't know how he interpreted his English but, well, he was able to, you know, say simple things, yeah. So he was making a living working for the English government. Then after that, I guess they didn't need him. So he told us to send old clothes. So we sent, you know, usable old clothes. Of course, we used to send a lot of food for him.

And then we were made---we found out Mr. Uyeda came back, was able to come back. So we asked him how he did it, and so we went through the process and we made lot of papers, and we sent him to sign it. But the funny thing was it came back without being signed or answered. So then we realized something's funny. Then we got---I don't know who wrote to us, I don't quite remember, but that he had a stroke. So that's when we decided somebody would have to go. But in the meantime, we did make the papers, and he was allowed to come back through a special (act). Something special passed by, through our delegate to Congress. Because we had a brother who was, who had, was drafted and was in the army. And all the children were here, so one of my sisters, my next sister brought him back.

MK: And how was that arranged? I think you mentioned a Mr. Kometani and Delegate Farrington.

SY: Yeah, that's right. Yeah, because Mrs. [Elizabeth] Farrington was our delegate, and Mr. [Katsumi] Kometani was a very active Republican, and so, through him, they passed a special whatever you call it, law—not exactly a law—to allow my father to come back. Because he went back without a passport, so they had to do something in Congress.

MK: So actually he was sent back to Japan in a prisoner exchange.

SY: That's right.

- MK: And so do you know about when he was sent back to Japan?
- SY: I have the record in this old *Hawai'i Hochi*. *Hawai'i Hochi* has all the record of who, what group went to the Mainland when, and I have the old newspaper, and so I can look through that. And . . .
- MK: So when he was initially sent back to Japan, was he like a free man? He could do whatever he pleased in Japan?
- SY: Yes. In Japan he was---he didn't---well, he was not restricted to anything.
- MK: And he went back to his home?
- SY: That's right.
- MK: And besides being an interpreter for the British, do you know anything else about how he managed in Japan during those years?
- SY: Looks like this Mr. Komatsu---oh yeah, as I said, he thought his father had left many, you know, property or something for him, because he was sending back money all the time, you know. But when he went back it was all in his sister's name and, well, I guess the sister took care of the parents, so maybe they gave it all to her. But so he had, he was living with this family called Komatsu. And when I visited Japan in '89, I met the lady. And previous to that, back in--when was that? Maybe '73, I met her husband also, but already he had passed away the last time. He lived with them. I guess they rented him a room or something, you know. And because we used to send him lot of things, he would exchange that for the room, probably. And what else did he do in Japan? I can't recall anything else.
- MK: I guess that part is kind of sketchy, yeah?
- SY: Yeah.
- MK: Because of the distance and his deterioration in health.
- SY: Yeah.
- MK: So he was in Japan, through a special, I guess, act of Congress, he was brought back, and he returned in 1954, yeah.
- SY: Yeah.
- MK: And health was kind of deteriorated, and finally in '62 [November 8, 1962] . . .
- SY: That's right, he passed away.
- MK: I guess, you know, we can close this section about your father, with just maybe your thoughts of your father as a businessman and as a father. What are your impressions of him?
- SY: Oh. I guess he was a typical old Japanese, never showed his emotions. But you can see that

he cared for us. In my case, he realized we were not in a very good financial condition. He said, he told us why don't you come and stay with him? You know? And I also remember, because we always ate dinner Sunday at home, he would buy more than what we needed. So there would be leftover for me to use for the following week. So there was a good---you know, besides being a bad-tempered man, he really thought about his children. I guess he didn't know how to show his love, emotions. In spite of his bad temper and the way he treated my mother, we feel we respect him. I feel part of me is what he was. He was always caring for the underdog and, you know, helping the people. Oh, he was the first one to go and help if there was tragedy in a home. He forget his business and he'll go and help the people, you know. That's what he, how he was. So, well, he just didn't know how to show his love to his children or his family.

MK: Did he, you know, ever express his feelings about his wartime experiences and his being sent to Japan, being separated from his family?

SY: No, he never said anything. As he wrote in his diary, he is not a very good writer, he cannot express himself. So he just wrote what he can think about, you see.

MK: So I think I'll end it here today, and I wanna come back just one more time. And that time, we'll concentrate on your mother, her history, and your growing up, your life as a child and young woman in the 'A'ala area, and your remembrances of that whole area.

SY: Okay. (Chuckles)

MK: Thank you for today.

END OF INTERVIEW