

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Edith Kashiwabara Mikami

Edith Kashiwabara Mikami was born in 1934 in Honolulu, O‘ahu, Hawai‘i to Seisaku and Sato Kashiwabara, both immigrants from Yamaguchi-*ken*, Japan.

The Kashiwabara family—composed of six children, having lost two in infancy—resided in Honolulu.

Seisaku, a fisherman, owned the largest sampan on O‘ahu—the seventy-five-foot *Koyo Maru*. He also served as an officer of ‘A‘ala Market.

With the outbreak of war, Seisaku was removed from his home and held at the Sand Island Detention Center. His sampan was confiscated.

Released for a time in late 1942, he and the family were notified of their all being transported to the U.S. Mainland. Within a two-week period, household possessions were sold or given away.

Seisaku Kashiwabara and family were held, first at the Jerome War Relocation Center in Arkansas, later at the Gila River War Relocation Center in Arizona.

At war’s end, the Kashiwabaras returned to the islands.

After several years, the Kashiwabara children managed to buy back their father’s sampan. The older children worked full-time jobs while the younger ones took on part-time jobs.

Edith received her high school and community college degrees in Honolulu.

A retired school cafeteria manager since 1987, she still enjoys preparing meals for family and friends. She has two children and four grandchildren.

Tape No. 57-11-1-12

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Edith Kashiwabara Mikami (EM)

Mililani, O'ahu

July 30, 2012

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

MK: This is an interview with Edith Kashiwabara Mikami, session number one on August 23rd, 2012. We're in Mililani, O'ahu, Hawai'i.

We're going to start from the time you were born and we're going to take it real slowly, okay? So, first of all, what year were you born?

EM: Nineteen thirty-four.

MK: Where were you born?

EM: In Kalihi. Coombs Lane.

MK: What was your father's name?

EM: Seisaku.

MK: Based on what you know of him, either from him or from other family members, what do you know about him from the time he was in Japan?

EM: I think he's from a fisherman family, because when I went to visit in Japan I found out that the family had different ships—boats. They used to go and catch those balloon fish and send them to Tokyo every morning.

MK: What *ken* or prefecture was your dad from?

EM: Kaminoseki, [Yamaguchi] I think.

MK: How did he end up here in Hawai'i?

EM: That I don't really remember. All I know is when I used to be with him—either pulling his white hair or quiet time—I would ask him questions. That's when he told me about the immigrants not being able to speak English. He pantomimed and so I would laugh. (Example—One person will put one hand “opened” under his chin and say “coco-coko” while the other hand pointing to the rear saying “pūūt?” Expressing the hen had laid an egg.) It was amazing how they had to communicate like that because many of the immigrants were either Chinese or Japanese. The *lunas* were either German or somebody from the Mainland.

MK: So it seemed like your father was a plantation worker?

EM: That I'm not sure of, because I don't know how he managed to save money to buy a boat.

MK: From the time you were a child, what was his occupation?

EM: As long as I can remember he was a fisherman. People told me that he was also a businessman. I couldn't figure that out until we came back from the Mainland. We used to store our clothes in the—Japanese say *toronko*—trunk. Since we left unexpectedly, we just put it underneath my sister-in-law's mother's house which she rented out. So, when we opened the trunk, I found so many suits and kimonos, so I questioned because before the war if you have just one suit it's something. But he had several. So, that's when I said maybe he was a businessman and a fisherman.

MK: When you say fisherman, what kind of fisherman was he? Like, just from the shore or on a ship or what did he go after?

EM: He would go. He would leave the island for about two to three weeks. So that's when I wouldn't see him and when he comes back then he'll call and say if we wanted to go out to the movies, because that was the thing in those days. So, daytime we would catch the bus, but coming home we would catch the taxi. He would always put us in a taxi. We were all girls, so more so.

MK: Where was his ship docked?

EM: As far as I know it was Kewalo Basin.

MK: What was the name his ship?

EM: *Koyo Maru*.

MK: When you think back, was that a large ship or regular size in those days?

EM: I just thought it was a regular ship, but then when I asked, "Why do we have to be interned?" they said we had the largest sampan. From what I remember it was seventy-five footer. The [American] navy had all the ships destroyed. So, it became a lookout ship for the island. That's what I was told.

WN: You mean your father's sampan was used?

EM: Yes, they took our sampan. When we returned we had to buy it back. They used it but we still had to pay to get it back. That's why we all went to work—to save money to buy it back for my father.

MK: Were you folks successful in buying the ship back?

EM: Yes, yes. So, we went baby-sitting, cleaning house. As my sisters got older, they did more adult kind of work. But I know I used to baby-sit and clean house too in the summer. Entire paycheck I just give it to my brother. Out of that we would have our allowance every week—a dollar. That's for your car fare, your lunch, and any kind of entertainment.

But since we couldn't afford and my brother wanted us to go to church, we would go Sunday church, Sunday night, Wednesday night, Friday night. Friday night was play night at the church. That was on Owen Street. That's near the—present time—it's the Love's Bakery. So from there we could see all the events of December 7th.

MK: Before we get there, I just want to inquire, how long did you folks have to work to get the money to buy back your dad's sampan?

EM: I think. . . I'm not sure.

MK: It went on for like, months?

EM: Oh, years.

- MK: Years.
- EM: Several years.
- WN: So years after the war. You folks came back and you had to work part-time all of you to earn enough to buy back your father's sampan after the war.
- EM: And my brother [Fred Kashiwabara] worked two jobs.
- MK: Oh, my goodness.
- EM: My brother was the only male—surviving male—so he took two jobs.
- MK: You mentioned that when you folks came back and you looked in the trunks and you discovered your dad's suits, you thought, "Ah, I guess he was a businessman." I know that earlier you mentioned that there might have been some connection with 'A'ala Market?
- EM: Yes.
- MK: What was that connection?
- EM: Someone told me that he was the president of 'A'ala Market. That's the first time I heard Otani. So, I think Mr. Otani took over when my father left. That's the understanding I had.
- MK: Now I'm going to switch over to your mom. What was your mother's name?
- EM: Sato Kashiwabara.
- MK: Where did she come from?
- EM: She was on an island near my father's place [Kaminoseki, Yamaguchi-ken]. I can't remember the name but I saw (it) when I went to Japan. When I visited my auntie, she showed me where the island [Iwaishima] was. She told me about it but I forgot. There's so many islands in Japan.
- MK: I know that you mentioned that she came to the islands after your father came?
- EM: That's the way I understand.
- MK: You were telling me that your mom was really skillful in doing different things. What did she do?
- EM: Yes. I remember going with her to different events where she would carry these large platters. She would make the—they called it *morimono*—plates. Just like a relish dish. Very fancy. She cuts it all different ways. Then, I caught her one time dressing someone in a kimono and she was fixing the Japanese hairstyle—the wig. Then she was a seamstress, and one day she made a slipper out of the corn husks—the fresh corn husk. I marveled at that. I said, "How did you make this?" So, she said---she knew how so she made one. Fresh corn husk. I thought that was something!
- MK: You mentioned she was like a seamstress. She did that for a living or for mostly the children?
- EM: That I'm not sure. But, I know she used to go to the church and help the *bon-san*. The priest.
- MK: You know, being the wife of a fisherman, what was her life like?

EM: I'm quite sure she was lonesome. But I know when my father used to come home, before we go to bed, we'll sit Japanese style and we'll say *oya*. . . *oyasumi*.

MK: *Oyasuminasai?*

EM: *Hai*. Uh-huh.

MK: "Good night."

EM: Yes. That I remember.

My sister used to take *okoto* and my brother used to take her surfing.

WN: Oh really?

MK: Your brother—who did he take surfing?

EM: That one that took the *okoto*, that's Alice.

MK: Oh. Uh-huh.

EM: I wanted to go but I didn't know how to swim. (EM and MK laugh.) So, we had to learn to swim.

MK: How many children were there in your family?

EM: As far as I know there were eight of us. Two died before I was born. My mother used to always mention the two was a girl and a boy. But somehow I can't recall the name right offhand. She said they were very smart, but they died as infants the way I understood, so I never got to meet them.

MK: Earlier you mentioned your father was a fisherman; he was a businessman. Your mother, she was a housewife, mother. She also helped at the Japanese temple. She helped the *bon-san*. I was wondering, how active was their involvement in the Japanese community?

EM: Oh, I remember we used to go on picnics. I don't know why but I could remember. He would bring his boat and he would throw a watermelon in the water and we would all chase after it—those of us who could swim. I don't know why but somehow—every time I remember a watermelon I think of that. Whenever we had large gatherings he would bring a lot of prizes, like a hundred-pound bag rice and we had good prizes. It was a big event at Ala Moana Park.

MK: What were these gatherings for?

EM: I don't know why. I guess for the different prefectures to stay united somehow.

MK: So it was like *kenjinkai* [prefectural association] gatherings?

EM: I guess so. We used to look forward to that. (MK laughs.) Being children we played games.

MK: What kinds of games did you folks have back then at the gatherings?

EM: We used to race a lot. (Pause) That's about all I can remember was racing.

WN: A three-legged race *kine*? Three-legged race. . . . No, you don't remember that?

EM: No, it could be relay. . . .

- WN: Sack race?
- EM: I don't know if it was sack race because later on I did play so I get a little confused. I know I used to run.
- MK: You mentioned the prizes. What kinds of prizes did you folks get?
- EM: They were pretty good.
- MK: Yeah. (Chuckles)
- EM: Like I said, a hundred-pound bag rice. In those days hundred pounds is something. (Dog barks.)
- MK: That's huge. You mentioned that your mom helped the *obon-san*?
- EM: Yes, I don't know how she helped but I know she used to go.
- MK: You were saying your mother would go help the *bon-san*. What temple was that?
- EM: I don't know. The only reason I remember that was because in those days we had that washing machine where you had the roller.
- MK: Yes. (Chuckles)
- EM: My one sister—the one above me—got her hand caught. So, they called my brother and he was upset because my mother was at the church instead of watching the children. So, I don't know what church.
- MK: You mentioned there are eight children in the family. Were your parents involved in say, the equivalent of a PTA with the Japanese-language schools or anything like that?
- EM: No, I can't recall that. But we did go to Japanese school.
- MK: There were eight children, family was living in Kalihi. Where in Kalihi did you folks live?
- EM: Coombs Lane.
- MK: Whereabouts is that?
- EM: That's near Fern School.
- MK: Try and describe for us what your house was like at Coombs Lane.
- EM: It was nothing fancy. (Pause) As far as the home, I just considered it a regular house. Being so young we used to go out and play a lot. So, we had nice neighbors. One was a Hawaiian lady married to a Japanese fellow. She taught us how to *hula* (and make *haku lei*).
- I was always—I don't know why—I was always wanting to make money for the family, so I used to baby-sit two children that were bigger than me. All I had to do was open a can of Campbell's soup and make sure they rested. I got fifty cents for the day. So, my mom said don't ever tell my father that, because in those days girls and mothers didn't go out to work. Whenever my sisters wanted money, I would lend them my money. (Laughs)
- MK: So you had one neighbor—it was a Hawaiian woman married to a Japanese man. You had another neighbor who had children that you baby-sat.

EM: I think they were Portuguese. Very neat. The parents were so neat and so nice.

MK: What other neighbors did you have in that area?

EM: We had lots of Japanese. In fact, one of them is Ohara. Ohara family. I see them—the two daughters—at church every Sunday. We used to go and bother them. We sit waiting to listen to them or have some reaction. Sometimes the one I see in church, she would say, “Go home you girls.” (EM and MK laugh.) We’re just uninvited guests and we’re just staying there to get attention.

(Laughter)

MK: So, a lot of Japanese families in that area?

EM: Yes, I think it was more Japanese family.

MK: From your remembrance, I was wondering what kind of work those families did, just to figure out what. . . .

EM: That neighbor we used to go and bother—the Ohara—I think the father died when they were very young. The Portuguese couple that used to hire me, I don’t know what they did but they were always neat and very courteous. I remember there was one Filipino couple. They were elderly but they used to make banana fritter or something and they would give us some. Later on when I went back to my church one of the members there said she was our neighbor and I don’t recall her because I think she was born after me and we had already left. They say they remember us—the parents remember us.

MK: So you had houses in this area. What else was nearby?

EM: I remember there was a church about two blocks away—one-and-a-half to two blocks away. I think it was St. John?

MK: St. John’s Church?

EM: And a graveyard. There was a small little store on the corner. And of course, Fern School. Other than that, we used to play with the Kalihi Valley children, most of whom were Okinawans. We got along fine.

MK: What did you folks do for play?

EM: Oh, (laughs). You know those empty milk cans? Yes, milk cans, like Carnation milk cans. We would squash it and then we would put this sticky thing from a bean and we used to walk on that with clang clang. With a loud noise. We used to play army game, and of course every morning we were at attention.

(Laughter)

EM: We used to go and pick those—the beans, for the horses.

WN: *Kiawe*. *Kiawe* beans.

EM: Yes. If we had a gunny sack—one bag—we would get a dollar. That was near Kalihi Union Church. So, we would have extra money.

MK: Where would you take your *kiawe* beans to though?

EM: I don’t remember that. All I know is I used to pick them with my sisters. (EM and MK laugh.) All you have to do is pick it off the ground.

WN: So you would get your own sack and. . . .

EM: But, we all joined together. I had been most of the time the youngest, so I had to do what I was told.

(Laughter)

WN: So you would pick the algaroba *kiawe* bean from the ground and put it in the sack.

EM: I believe so. Of course, some of them were low enough that we could take it from the branches.

MK: And that you would get near Kalihi Union Church?

EM: It's in that vicinity.

WN: I guess animals would eat that, yeah?

EM: They said they used to feed that to the horses but I don't know.

WN: You know the bean? The sticky thing that you use to put on your feet to stick to the can so you could walk. Do you know what kind of bean that was? Different from---not *kiawe* bean right?

EM: I don't think so. But, I know we used to go and pick tamarind. So, I don't know if they use that, but we used to eat the tamarind.

MK: By the way, in that area besides the tamarind, could you pick other stuff and eat?

EM: There were five finger—starfruit. We had mangoes. Our neighbor used to go hunting so he would make sausages and give them to us. They were delicious!

MK: In those days did you folks have home gardens?

EM: We didn't have. I don't remember. My brother always loved to work on cars. So he became a mechanic.

MK: So when you were small, did your family have a car?

EM: My brother had a car I think. But he's much older than I am. Something like fifteen, nineteen years apart.

MK: So of the eight children when you were small, how many actually lived in your house?

EM: There were six of us. The two had already died when I came long.

WN: So your dinners must have been lively, yeah? Your meals.

EM: I think we used to take turns, I'm not sure.

(Laughter)

WN: Yeah, you didn't eat in a big table?

EM: I don't recall, no. Because my father used to be away a lot, we used to consider my brother as a father. So, if he's angry we just look at his face and we know we're supposed to behave. I never---I take it back, only once I saw my father angry. [It] was when we lost our gas masks. We went down the beach and we had our car fare money in there—the trolley money. We had put it in the gas masks, and there's a case. We left it on the mat when we went to swim. When we came back it was gone. So now, how were we going home? So, we walked from Waikīkī all the way to Kalihi. Then when we got home, I

think the next day, I recall my father was chasing us with a broom. That was the one and only time I saw him angry. Otherwise my parents were very patient.

But then later, this wealthy Japanese man found our masks. All of them. Our neighbor had his masks there, so went with two, three boys, and the rest of us were girls. We walked. He recovered those gas masks because we're not supposed to lose them. Apparently we must have had our name in there because he called my parents and he invited us over. When we went, he had a swimming pool and everything. He was very wealthy, we can tell. He used to live in Diamond Head. That area.

WN: So this is during the war then? Because you wore gas masks.

EM: Yes.

MK: But, you mentioned your father was there still?

EM: He was there, yes.

WN: So your father wasn't picked up until later on. Is that?

EM: Apparently, yes. But I know---the way I understood it was the day of the attack he just happened to come in from fishing and then the FBI was waiting for him. They had a record of my brother as well as his.

MK: We'll be asking you about that. When we were talking about your childhood and that Coombs Lane area, you mentioned St. John's Church, Kalihi Union Church. What church did you folks go to?

EM: We went to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which is now being called Community of Christ, because in foreign lands they have a difficult time so they considered that for many years. Within two years we're converting that to Community of Christ.

MK: You folks were members of that church from the time you were small?

EM: We got baptized a little later.

MK: But when you folks were children, you . . .

EM: I was baptized in 1949 when we came back.

MK: Oh, okay. Were some older members of your family part of that church already before the war?

EM: I think we all got baptized after we came back. I think.

MK: After. So, you folks became members of the church probably after the war.

EM: We were attending the churches but we weren't baptized yet.

MK: Oh, I see, so you folks were attending this church even before the war.

EM: Right. My brother made us go there, I guess to stay out of trouble. (EM and MK laugh.)

MK: Coming from a large family, although you're the younger one, what were your responsibilities or chores?

EM: For me it was not much, because I was still young. I guess my mom did most of the work.

MK: How about your older sister or brother?

EM: Well, the one above me—so the last three of us, we were always together somehow. But the other two, they were much older, so I guess our talk and conversation was completely different, so the three of us were very close. We went to church. I don't remember the other two going church.

MK: What school did you go to?

EM: I went to Fern School. Fern Elementary. Of course, we went to Arkansas, we went to Jerome [War Relocation Center]. When we moved to Gila [River War Relocation Center], Arizona I was still in elementary.

MK: Keeping to the time when you were still a child, what memories do you have of going to Fern School?

EM: I enjoyed going there and the lunches—we used to eat the cafeteria food. I recall Mrs. Campbell. I'll never forget her. One day I went to the restroom and I happened to wipe my hands on my dress. When I came back, she spanked me. She thought I had wet myself, but it was on the side of my dress so I couldn't understand that. That's the one bad experience.

Then, we were playing baseball and someone swung the bat and it hit me over. . . . so I ended up in the hospital. My mother happened to be in there, so when the nurse took me to her—she must have had her appendix out I think—she said, “No, not that one.” I never forget that. She wanted my sister above me because my sister was the intelligent one as my father. I was never really close to my mom. But, because I had older sisters, I was more or less in tune with them.

MK: You also mentioned you went to Japanese-language school?

EM: Yes, after Fern School [class hours] I had to go to language school.

MK: What Japanese-language school was that?

EM: I don't remember. (EM and MK laugh.)

MK: But it was there, at Fern School?

EM: No. Not at Fern School. I think it was at another.

MK: It was at a different site?

EM: Different site. I know we used to exercise—Japanese style was you exercise before we start school. I didn't like Japanese school.

(Laughter)

WN: I guess not.

EM: I just didn't like Japanese school. So I just went, I think, first grade.

MK: At Fern you went kindergarten, first, and second?

EM: Yes. I think up to second.

MK: Around that.

EM: Because I was seven when we left and I turned eight when we reached there.

MK: When we get into the war—you know when the war started December 7th, what memories do you have of that day, December 7th?

EM: Okay. Our church was located near Middle Street. So, we were help cleaning the church, sweeping the outside and so we saw the airplane. We said, “Oh, they’re practicing,” because we could see the cloud—the dark clouds, at that time we thought were dark clouds.

So, we were watching them for a while and one of the older members came out and said, “You have to go home.”

We said, “Church didn’t start yet.”

He says, “No, you go home right now. You don’t go through Middle Street. You go through Kam[e]hameha] IV Road.” And we don’t want to go to Kam IV Road because the Kalihi Union priest used to always be on that corner to entice us to go to his church. So, we don’t like to go through that road. But, because we were told, we listened and we went home that way. Then, later on we found out because Middle Street was [bordering] Fort Shafter, there were some homes that had bullets in the walls. That’s what I was told. So we said. oh, we’re glad we didn’t disobey and followed the person that told us to go home.

MK: So at the time you folks were told to go home, were you folks aware of what was happening?

EM: No. No, we just thought they were practicing.

MK: Those early days of the war, what changes did you notice, if any? You’re still a young kid. Did you notice anything?

EM: Just that my father was picked up by the FBI. At that time the FBI was really something you know?

MK: Tell us about that. What do you remember about your dad being picked up?

EM: Well when they came, they took whatever shrine we had, the radio, and camera. But at the time not many people had cameras. So I don’t know whether we had one but I was told they took the radios and cameras and shrine down. They had record of my brother who was I believe married at that time. And, they took my father and when he came back I asked him where did he go.

He said, “To Sand Island [Detention Center].”

I said, “How was it?”

So, he said, “Well, for some of us they were stripped,” because there were some I guess, fanatics they wanted to start a fire or they were resented so they had to take their razor blades away. So my father said, “That’s the only reason they stripped them, because they didn’t behave.” But he didn’t speak ill of the FBI. But I remember—I don’t know why—he came home with a bunch of banana. (Chuckles) I don’t know where that came from, but I can still picture him coming home. So, I thought he must have had fun, because he came home with the bananas.

WN: This was from between the time after Sand Island and before he left for the Mainland, he came home first.

EM: Yes. He came home.

MK: So he had been held at Sand Island. About how long do you think it was that he was at Sand Island?

EM: That I don’t remember.

MK: I was wondering, as a child what thoughts you had about your dad being taken.

- EM: In those days we just listened. We didn't question much. You were to be seen, not heard. So, we were wondering what he did wrong. (Pause) Of course when we left they took him away, so we went to the immigration station and I don't remember seeing him until we got on the ship.
- MK: So, what happened was that your father was taken December 7th, he was held at Sand Island, and then he did come home the time he brought home the bananas, and he was at home for a period of time?
- EM: I think so.
- MK: Was that about the time when your gas masks . . . ?
- EM: Must be.
- MK: Around that time? It was during that time?
- EM: Because I remember he came at us with a broom. So he was home.
- MK: With the war on that time that your dad was home, could he—what was he doing for a living?
- EM: I don't know.
- MK: The ship was. . . .
- EM: I don't know how soon they took the ship, but I don't think he was able to go out.
- MK: He wasn't able to go out yeah?
- WN: You said earlier that the FBI had something on your brother, or some information on your brother.
- EM: Well, they had a record of him but there was nothing much because I think he was young yet and he wanted to join the army as soon as it broke out. But they said he was the only male and I guess they questioned my father, so they didn't take him.
- MK: I don't know if you can even answer this, but during that time where your father was home, was there any difficulty in supporting the family or did you sense anything like that? Or it seemed okay?
- EM: No. All I know is that we had to sell everything. Refrigerator, all the big items. Some we had to just give away.
- MK: And that occurred when?
- EM: After we were notified that we have to leave. They didn't tell us when, but we had to get out. So, we have to get rid of everything.
- MK: How much time did you folks have, do you think, to do that?
- EM: I don't know but someone told me there was about two weeks, so it was not much time.
- MK: So what did you sell you were saying?
- EM: I think they had to get rid of the refrigerator, the stove—the big items—the washing machine, typewriter, that kind of thing. But, I don't know the exact item that they sold but I know we had to get rid of them, because we can't take it with us.
- MK: Items that you folks stored you were saying you folks stored at your . . .

EM: Oh, that's personal things that . . .

MK: Personal items.

EM: My sister-in-law's mother owned several homes. So, she let my sister-in-law take and store it there. But you know, in the old days we had those houses where it's dirt underneath and you can store things there. We covered the thing, I remember that. It's rather damp and it got all molded.

MK: From what you're telling us it was like your family did not have a choice.

EM: Oh no. No choice. No.

MK: At that time, did the family know where they were going to go?

EM: No. We didn't know where we were going. We don't know how long we're going to be away. Even on the ship, we were wondering, "Where are we going and how long are we gonna be there?" Because we don't have winter like the Mainland, we were wondering who is going to clothe us. We don't have that type of clothes. Small as I was, I remember worrying about those things. So, on the ship we were herded like cattle at the bottom. Where you would store your things, the big items—they had cots. We slept on cots. Many of them were just throwing up, so they had cans or buckets. So we being a little younger, I guess we were more tolerant. So we used to go up and play. One day we were playing and then I said, "Oh, there's a periscope!" I got all excited with the children near me I said, "Look, there's a periscope! We have to go tell the sailor."

So we called him and we told him and he looked and he said, "Don't worry. You see all those flags they're putting up? They're telling them that we're on board, so don't worry." So, we saw the periscope go down a few minutes later.

We had to practice on the ship. Get on the life boats. They timed us. Too slow we have to keep doing that until it got to the point it was reasonably fast enough. So my father was—we understood—out of the whole group only three of them that went up to the cabins to help, so I hardly got to see him. I don't remember seeing him until we reached the Mainland.

MK: So, on the ship it was your mother and the children together way at the bottom.

EM: Right. Where everybody else was.

MK: How did your mother fare on that?

EM: She was really upset. She was very resentful, and I didn't understand that until I got married and I was living more comfortable. I said, "What if somebody came to me and said you have to get out of here. Can't take anything with you." You don't know where you're going, how long you're going to be away. I would be really resentful. So that's when I understood, but I sort of hated my mother because she couldn't take care of me. Later on she had a nervous breakdown. There were other things involved which I didn't know until years later.

MK: You mentioned like on the boat—on the ship—your father was separated from you folks. What was he doing?

EM: I don't know. The way we figured out was they had some other people returning back to the Mainland. Either they were pregnant or they were going back to the Mainland. So they stayed in the cabin away from us. But, we could never go up. We would always have to stay below.

MK: So you couldn't go and see your dad or anything.

EM: No.

- MK: Prior to getting on the ship, the family was held at the immigration station. Tell us about that time.
- EM: I don't think that we stayed there that long. But, I had bad memories about that place. I guess because we didn't know where we were going. So, it took me years when I used to recall bad feelings. Because I guess we were separated and the question of our future.
- MK: At the immigration station were you able to see your father at that time?
- EM: I don't remember seeing him. There were hundreds of people there. So maybe he was there. I don't know. I didn't see him.
- MK: When your family was there, to what extent did you mix with the other families there?
- EM: There were some people that we knew. The boy that walked with us—[when] we lost our gas masks—they're from the same prefecture, so they were taken and they don't know why they were taken.
- WN: Do you know what kind of work his father did?
- EM: No, but the father died early. They had a large family too. We used to play with them. There were several families, even after the war they said they don't know why they had to leave. About twenty years ago there was a family up the street here—Michihara. They were taken in and he was in his what, sixties or seventy when he said, "To this day I don't know why we went." All they can remember was the father had a letter from the Emperor [of Japan] and he was a carpenter or mason. This man that I spoke to was a mason, but he said he couldn't understand why they were taken in. The reason I found out was because he was able to get the 20,000 [dollars].
- MK: Oh, the reparations.
- EM: Uh-huh. But then he wouldn't go to the meetings, so I would go to the meetings and come back and give him the information. He got the 20,000. They had several siblings too.
- MK: Sometimes when we would talk with people who were at the immigration station, they would tell us what it was like in terms of being with other kids. How about in your situation?
- EM: That I don't recall playing with anybody or talking to anybody. I guess we were brought up that you don't say [anything] until you're spoken to.
- MK: So you folks kind of stuck together?
- EM: Well, I don't know about my sisters, but I don't remember playing with them until I got on the ship.
- MK: Then on the ship, you kind of told us that the younger ones a little bit more tolerant of seasickness. You folks would go up on deck. What did you folks do to pass the time?
- EM: Well, couldn't do much. (EM and MK laugh.) So we would go out and watch outside. We're looking if there's anybody else around, and there are other ships too. From what I understand later, the [SS] *Lurline* was in the convoy. I don't believe we were on it but they said that it went with us.
- WN: You weren't on the *Lurline*?
- EM: I don't know if I was or not.
- MK: Oh, I see.

WN: So it was a group of ships, a convoy of ships?

EM: Yes. That's why everybody said, "How come you left in January and you reached in February?" When you're with a convoy you can't go straight, you have to sort of zigzag. That's what I was told.

So when we reached California, I recall when we were on a train. Whenever we changed a state, I noticed the milk tasted different. One was richer than the other. I didn't really care for milk but I learned to like it. Japanese aren't tolerant of milk, but I learned to like it and I noticed that every time we changed I thought to myself, "Uh oh, we're changing place." So we would know we were going elsewhere. In Texas, I recall, that was a big state. We'd say, "We're still in Texas?"

(Laughter)

MK: The milk still tasted the same!

EM: In Utah, I don't think I have Utah but I remember Utah they had that salt. . . .

WN: Salt flats.

EM: Right. I said, "What is that?" I never saw anything like that.

They said, "That's salt."

So I said, "Oh."

MK: So you folks could look outside?

EM: Yes, we could look outside. But, when we hit towns like that, just before we hit the town they would tell us to draw the—what do you call that?

WN: Shade.

EM: Shade. Down. Then they had soldiers with rifles on the end of each train, so that was really scary. We never saw a gun before. So before we hit the town they would tell us to draw the shades down. Then, when we hit the town, if the people knew they would bang on the train and say, "You Japs! You Japs!" you know, so we were really afraid because there was only soldier on each end of the train.

We said, "Oh, they're going to kill us," because it was really loud. It was scary for us. The only time I remember we stopped was on this high area. If you took two steps over that way you would fall hundreds of feet down. Then, we could get out of the train just to step outside and stretch our legs. Other than that we couldn't go out any place. We were told when we could get out of the train. So, I recall that because better not miss a step, small as I was. It was real precarious.

MK: You mentioned the milk. What else did you folks get during that time?

EM: We were pretty well fed though, from what I recall. Like a regular dining room. I thought that was sort of neat, being a youngster.

MK: How about sleeping? How did you folks manage?

EM: That I don't recall. All I remember was we sat on our regular seats.

MK: I remember someone saying that they couldn't even really clean up. You know, you're on this train. What was it like for your family?

EM: I guess that's possible that we weren't allowed to do a lot of things, because there were so many people. But we as youngsters, we would get wind of where we're going. They have snakes, and I used to have nightmares about snakes. We were going to Arkansas. I don't know whether they knew or not, but they told us, "Where you're going they have snakes." I couldn't sleep. (Chuckles) I hate snakes. And there were snakes in Arkansas.

MK: And somebody told you that they're where you're going.

EM: They told us. I don't know who told us but from then on I just couldn't sleep.

WN: As for an eight-year-old kid, then you're being taken with your family on the ship and then the train and you said there were some military on board, and there are people who are yelling "Japs" and so forth, I was just wondering, if you recall, how did you view these men? You know, Caucasian men with uniforms on. Did you see them as someone to be afraid of or someone to protect you? What was the feeling?

EM: I guess both sides. Because we felt we were Americans, so they're going to protect us. But yet, we thought they might shoot us, because they think we got involved somehow. That's why we've been taken away. When we came to the towns, we felt they were the only protection we had. So, it worked both ways.

WN: Same with the troops at the internment camp too? Did you have that same feeling toward them?

EM: Well, in camp, there were towers—huge towers—on the surrounding. They told us, "Don't go near the fence," and just behave I guess. So we got to go in the forest, which was really huge. We used to go and pick—my father taught us how to pick mushrooms and a lot of things we don't have here. Persimmons. So he would dry them and share with other people. It was very interesting, but that's how I got my chigger bites when I went in there one day with my sisters. They told us to watch out for snakes. One day we came across a snake and we said [if] we would run across a snake we're just going to throw our hatchet or whatever we had. We came to the snake—it was coiling—and we were all frozen. My sister had the hatchet or something, and we said, "Throw the thing!" We all couldn't move, but luckily there were some young men and they came and they had this prong-looking thing.

They cut the snake and they said, "Don't worry, that wasn't poisonous." But we did have poisonous snakes in Arkansas. So we were taught don't play with the snakes. But they said that one was harmless, but just the thought of it, we were so scared.

WN: So when you said that you could go in the forest, for example—that's outside the gates right?

EM: No.

WN: Oh that was within the compound?

EM: As far as I can remember. In fact, there was a river too—small river. So we were told not to go there because they have snakes that go in there sometimes.

MK: This was within the confines of Jerome?

EM: From what I remember.

WN: I see, I didn't know that.

EM: Yes, so I was wondering whether we were—I'm sure we were within the barbed wire.

MK: You mentioned you folks could have a hatchet.

EM: Yes. Uh-huh.

- MK: It was okay for you folks to have things like that hatchet?
- EM: I think so. Because I know we had some kind of—I thought it was a hatchet. My father used to chop down the tree to make cane.
- MK: Going back to your trip across the country to get to Jerome on that train ride, where was your dad?
- EM: I think he was with us. I think when reached California I think. I think he was with us.
- MK: All through that train ride you had the guards on both ends of the train. Did you see other people too, like when you folks were traveling across the country? Ever see others?
- EM: No. They said we're going to go places where there's not many people around. So when we were forced to go into a town, we didn't get to see them either because we had to pull the shades down.
- MK: Could you see like towns from afar from your windows?
- EM: None at that time, going time.
- MK: Not that time.
- EM: But going to Jerome, I mean to Gila [River War Relocation Center], we caught the Greyhound bus. That we could see. It was nighttime, but we could see.
- MK: You could see. And all through this time on the train ride, again how was your mom, how was your dad?
- EM: I can't remember too much about my parents. All I know, we always listened to my brother.
- MK: How was your brother taking all this?
- EM: I don't know. He didn't say much. But wherever help was needed, I noticed my father and my brother always helped. Within the camp.
- WN: Like what kinds of things do you remember?
- EM: He would work in the mess hall, because you had to take turns to do something. Of course later on he went to work in the mechanic shop because he was good as a mechanic.
- WN: Your brother?
- EM: Yes. My father though, I can remember when we were in Arkansas he used to go in the forest and do things—I mean bring back things. In Gila, he used to go to the Indian village. That was a total of about fifteen miles, it was seven miles. That's a long ways. We tried it one time. Never forgot that. But he used to go to the Indian village and he used to catch the catfish and he'd give it to the Indians because they would eat it. We wouldn't eat it. They in return would give pomegranates and tamales.
- The Indian women were beautiful. As they got older they got so huge, so the horse, they would have that little thing, they would sit on that because they got so huge. So we said, how come when they were single they're so beautiful and when they get married they get so huge? We just couldn't get over they were beautiful when they were young, when they were teenagers.
- But the Indians used to like him. So one day, we said, "Why don't we go where my father always go?" So we got canteen and we're all prepared. Coming home somebody didn't

cap the canteen good or something. We didn't have water. I don't know how far coming back, we were all tired and so sad. Japanese are very inventive. We used to have this fan and they put a screen on and they have water running somehow in a gunnysack. It's just like air-conditioning.

So the water—there's a pipe in front—we went for that and this person came and said, "No, don't drink the water." So he said, "Just tap your mouth with a cloth. And then later you can drink." So, we just listened. As children we just listened to them. But we never forget that!

In Gila we used to have sandstorm. That thing is so painful. The sand is just hitting, so you have to get something to cover your face. They had these huge ants. They had a water tank on the very top and somebody got bitten really bad. Huge, the ants were so huge. They had cactus growing all along the mountain and down. They said, "You have to wear boots or some leggings to cover your legs." We thought that was silly because it was so hot, but we found that the cactus as you pass it would jump on you. That's why the cowboys always had those long leather. . . .

WN: Chaps.

EM: That's what we found out. "Oh, now we know why they're telling us." We from Hawai'i don't know, so we just laughed at them.

MK: Going to someplace like Gila River, that's totally different environment yeah?

EM: So we could see the Superstition Mountain. They told us that's where there's a gold mine in there. But don't go, because you'll never come out. Nobody has come out from there, but there is a gold mine in there. So we said, "Oh, we want to go," being kids. We wanted to go, we couldn't go.

MK: Like you were saying that the Indian village was fifteen miles away?

EM: I think maybe closer to seven miles, so coming back. It was a long ways. I don't know how far it actually was but somebody said it was about seven. I could believe them.

MK: So how would your father go there? Foot?

EM: Walk. Mm-hmm.

MK: So you folks—as small as you folks were—walked too?

EM: Well, nothing else to do you know.

MK: Oh my goodness. Kind of going back to Jerome, I was wondering. Think about the first time you got to Jerome, what were your first impressions?

EM: We had to live in barracks. That was something new. The restrooms were in the middle of the block. Washroom was in the middle of block. Whether it's cold or hot, you have to go there to use the restroom. So when it was cold, we would still take our baths but the *kotonks*, they said "Why do you take a bath? It's so cold."

We said, "No, we have to take a bath." So we always take someone with us because it's dark. Then laundry, and of course the mess hall. I believe they worked in shifts or days. But we were well-fed.

MK: What kinds of foods did they supply?

EM: I guess we ate more American-style food. But I know special occasion—New Year's or something like that—I know my father he used to make either sake or some kind of beverage for the elderly with the potatoes. One was rice and one was potato. So I was surprised.

MK: Where would he make it? In your barrack?

EM: That I don't know but I know he used to make it. Then of course, like I said Japanese are very inventive. I know they used to make sushi with whatever we had. That kind of stuff. Although it wasn't what you expect over here, but they improvised.

MK: Like you were saying, the food there was more American.

EM: American-style.

MK: Was that a big change for you compared to what you folks were eating in Hawai'i?

EM: It was for me, because when we went to school the first day I went there—see I came in a little later somehow from the others—the teacher took me with him and we went into this nice mess hall. He said, "Follow me," so I went. It was just a cafeteria style. You help yourself to whatever you want, and you get a tray and all that and you could take whatever you want. I didn't know what, so whatever he took I took.

So when you sat down you have to eat everything. If you ate everything Monday through Friday you get a star for each day so Friday you have a choice of dessert. We have at least two different types of dessert. Well, the first day when I was with the teacher, he took celery and I never had celery before. You have to eat every leaf, even with carrots. If there were any greens we have to eat that. I said, "I want the dessert, so I have to eat it." After we finished with our lunch, then they would check your plate and you would get a star. After we're through eating, we would have a singing session. (Sings) "Under the spreading chestnut tree." Something like that where they teach you different songs. I thought that was fun.

WN: This is at school? At Jerome.

EM: When we went to eat. Yes. So I thought, "From now on I'm not going to take anything I don't know."

(Laughter)

MK: You'll forever remember your first exposure to celery.

EM: Celery, yes.

MK: Oh my goodness.

WN: Do you eat celery today?

EM: Yes. (WN and MK laugh.) I make myself eat whatever, even if I don't like it I eat it with something I like, then it will go down somehow.

MK: Then you mentioned the *kotonks*. They think, "You folks going and taking a bath even when it's cold." What else do you remember about the *kotonks*? You know, the Japanese-Americans from the Mainland.

EM: Well, we used to see some youngsters marching and carrying the Japanese flag. So we would get after them. We would say, "We're Americans," so they were afraid of us. So, they wouldn't do that. At first, like I told you, the Hawai'i people always stuck together. Even if I don't know you, I know you came from Hawai'i, I'll go and help you if there's a fight. But the *kotonks*, I can be your best friend, he would run away, turn away. That's why they were afraid of us, they would call us "The Hawaiians". (Laughs)

MK: Then you were saying in terms of language what did you notice?

EM: Well, they spoke beautiful English and beautiful Japanese. So, when they speak Japanese they'll say "*ano ne*" [Japanese interjection], everything is *ano ne, ne* [isn't it?]. For English, they would say, "You're gonna get that, huh?"

So one day I asked a person, "Why do you folks always say 'huh' and 'ne'?"

They looked at us and they said, "Well, you folks say 'yeah no?' so is it yes or no?"

We looked at each other and we said, "Yeah, what is it?" We're just saying "yes" and then we follow with "no". So that was funny too, I thought. (WN laughs.)

I was fortunate to be in a class—like I say we came in a little late—so they would come to me and say, "You're lucky you come here. You have clothes now. You don't have grass skirts."

I said, "No. In Hawai'i we have regular clothes like this."

"Oh, you have a house?"

I said, "Yes. We have a house just like this."

They said, "What bus did you come on?"

I said, "How can you come on the bus? We were on the ocean." I mean, as young as we were, we knew the difference. They didn't know because I guess they never traveled.

So, next door to my class we had—at that time they called it "deaf and dumb". They couldn't speak and they couldn't hear. So, if your name was Nancy, they would go—we would go "A, B, C" (EM makes sign language signs for A, B, and C) like that. But they would have sign language where you just made one sweep with the hand and they know. They speak so fast. It was real interesting.

MK: So there were facilities for special needs children?

EM: I believe so.

MK: They had a class.

EM: That was the only one class though that I knew of—that was next to us.

MK: When you first started school, were you like on par with like the Mainland Japanese kids?

EM: No, they didn't understand us. We didn't understand them. (EM and MK laugh.) So it was a challenge. They really didn't understand us. I don't blame them, (EM and MK laugh.) because when I came back I couldn't understand the local children in Fern School—I went back to Fern School. The principal would hug me and she says, "You come with me."

I said, "Oh no."

Then she would tell the other children, "Why don't you talk like her?"

I would think to myself, "I wish I could talk like them because I feel out of place. I don't want all that attention." So, it was a mixed feeling.

WN: So you actually learned to speak so-called "good English" while you were there at the camp, because you had some friends who were *kotonks*.

EM: Mm-hmm.

- MK: How were the teachers at Jerome? You were there for what, grades two and three?
- EM: Yes. I think we stayed there about maybe three years or so? We had good teachers. They were considered good teachers. This was way after the war we found out. We could voluntarily take these classes. We would take tap dancing, piano, majorette was before school, if you wanted to take. They taught us how to make the weave—use the loom. We made these—what do you call those?—not chain but with leather we made wallets. We made these things that the coach would carry around.
- MK: Oh, lanyards?
- EM: Yes.
- MK: Lanyards.
- EM: So there were a lot of things we were exposed to which became real handy for us.
- MK: So you took all those types of classes?
- EM: If we wanted to.
- MK: You could.
- EM: So I did. It was fun, I thought. The wallets like that—beautiful ones they used to make.
- MK: At Jerome, is that were you did some baton twirling?
- EM: Yes, so I'm in that. I'm in there.
- WN: Oh, the photo?
- MK: Oh, the photo.
- EM: But they're huge, yeah. That's a huge group. But not everybody finished. We had outsiders come in to twirl—contests like that. One of them I remember did two at a time. I'm the type that don't want to lose, so I started to do that too, with two. My sister could do it too. They were really good.
- MK: So you had an opportunity to do baton twirling, learning some crafts. In terms of music, what?
- EM: I took tapping.
- MK: You took tapping?
- EM: My sister took piano. She could play piano by ear, but since they were offering us she learned piano.
- MK: In terms of the studies, how rigorous were they in the classes?
- EM: I didn't think it was difficult, but when I came back to Fern School they said I was way ahead of the local children. I came back in October or November, so I thought I was going to be way behind, but when the teacher talked to me she said, "You're way ahead."
- MK: When you folks were not in school, what did you folks do?
- EM: We had volleyball (pause)—I know we had volleyball because our team, I named it "Rainbows". Ironically, I named it "Rainbows". (MK laughs.) That I remember. (Coughs) We would go out to play and in Jerome we go to the forest. (Coughs)

- MK: You're okay?
- EM: Yes, I just found out a couple days ago it's the medication I was taking. So I had to call my doctor. He says don't take it anymore.
- MK: So you would do volleyball, maybe go out into the forest, and you were saying your. . .?
- EM: We had a garden. We didn't work on the garden but we used to go pick flowers and huge acres. So I think vegetables like that they used to give it to the mess hall. Of course the Japanese people used to dry their things too, so you can keep it.
- MK: You were saying that your father sometimes would take you folks out into the forest to collect things?
- EM: Not that often but we would more or less go on our own. He would go alone.
- MK: What would they collect?
- EM: There were persimmons, mushrooms. He used to make canes for the elderly.
- MK: When you were on the train ride, somebody told you about snakes. What encounters did you have with snakes and other things in Jerome?
- EM: We made the leather wallets and stuff like that. So some of them from the snakeskin. At one time, they told us, "Try this meat, it's just like chicken." If you refused to eat it, we wanted to know what it was. Someone ate and they said, "Oh, it's just like chicken."
- So after they ate it, they said, "Oh, that was snake."
- They said, "It was delicious."
- I guess that's where we got our leather to make the wallets—the skin.
- MK: You mentioned there was a river or stream?
- EM: Yes, it wasn't that big but I know there was one.
- MK: Could you go fishing or anything there?
- EM: Not that I know of because they said there were snakes. I think if there were snakes, I don't want to even deal with snakes. (EM and MK laugh.)
- MK: You were mentioning that later on at Gila River you had sandstorms, yeah? How about at Jerome? What were the weather conditions like for you as a kid?
- EM: It was so cold. We were not accustomed to the winter. Just going to school we would leave our pajamas on, and then put the outer layer. We would just cover ourselves. Of course we had a small little stream that would harden and we used to skate on that. We practiced in the laundry room because it's all concrete, but wintertime we would go on that small little canal or whatever you called it. Not real big you know.
- WN: You would ice skate or roller skate?
- EM: Ice skate.
- WN: But on the concrete in the laundry room, you would ice skate too? How did you do that?
- EM: I know we skated in that. I don't think it was ice skate. The water one, maybe. But I could never handle the one blade skate. I'm not that good.

MK: Where did your family get their needs, like clothing or even getting skates for you folks?

EM: There was a canteen, but I guess when we first went there the government must have given us some clothes because we had just a limited supply. So after that I think we used to get things from the canteen.

MK: Your father worked mess hall.

EM: Yes.

MK: Your brother worked as a mechanic.

EM: Mm-hmm.

MK: How about your mom?

EM: I don't remember her going out, so maybe she just stayed at home.

MK: If funds were needed to purchase items it was generally from that work?

EM: I guess so. I know in Arkansas, we used to walk to school. One day we got wind of a lady finding a big diamond, because there is a diamond mine near us. That's what I was told later. So, every day we're going to school we're looking if we could find a diamond. (EM and MK laugh.) Other than that we just walk because it's beautiful pebbles. You know, beautiful pebbles. But they said that she found a big diamond. See how big this. . . .

MK: Oh, the photo of the baton twirlers.

EM: Yes, and the caps there, that was from the oatmeal box.

MK: Oh, Quaker Oats oatmeal box?

EM: We had to be inventive yeah? (WN laughs.) I'm somewhere on here.

MK: And you are somewhere over there among the little ones.

EM: Mm-hmm.

MK: This is something.

EM: So like I said, I was very fortunate because that friend we used to play with, I don't know how the brother did it but he took a lot of pictures. A lot of other pictures about us.

MK: He took?

EM: Yes. He made a collection for us. I have it somewhere. He took this one, he took my brother's. This is a man that died—I was telling you.

MK: Yeah, yeah.

EM: This is my brother.

MK: In the forest, yeah?

EM: Mm-hmm.

MK: Chopping wood.

- EM: We had—in our block—this largest stock of firewood. We had a stove in the house for winter so we can cook and all that.
- WN: So that stove was for cooking and for heating?
- EM: Only small items. Because you have to go to the mess hall to do regular cooking. Just heating something like tea. . . .
- WN: But to keep warm in the barracks. . .
- EM: Oh yes, that helped.
- WN: . . . was that the same stove?
- EM: Mm-hmm.
- WN: Oh, I see.
- EM: That really helped.
- WN: So people had to go out and cut their own firewood?
- EM: Well, the menfolks would always. . . . So you know that doctor that I mentioned at the first reunion? He mentioned that we had the largest stock of wood. He remembered that.
- WN: When you would take a bath in that community bath, what kind? Was it showers?
- EM: Shower.
- WN: The community laundry, was that hand wash?
- EM: I believe so, yes. I don't remember any machine. The lady that talked to us on the first reunion, she said she had to wash the clothes. She was young, so apparently she would wash it all by hand.
- WN: It's 11:30.
- MK: Yeah.
- WN: Shall we?
- MK: Let's end here?
- WN: Do you want to [word unclear]?
- MK: Well, let me just ask, since you have this family with kids and everything—kids get sick. You know, you catch colds or things happen to kids. What were your experiences—say if you got sick—what kinds of services were available to you and your siblings?
- EM: I know there was a hospital and they had young interns—young doctors—because the good ones were all going overseas. So, my father refused to have us go to the doctor, because the one child had to have her tonsils out and she died. So, he wouldn't let us go. My dental work, I didn't go for over three something years. When I came back, the dentist said, "Wow, you have very good teeth." But I think I had one filling I think I had to do.
- MK: I guess your father was really worried about the quality of care.

EM: And Arizona, because it's so hot, when I'm reading like that in school I would have a headache and I would see the papers turn different colors. I just was miserable when we had that real bad heat. Even with the chigger bites that I had in Arkansas, I had mumps at the same time—two sides. I ended up in the hospital. But that he said, I guess it's external—not going in—so. . . .

MK: He was okay with you being there for that.

EM: Apparently, yes. Plus, I don't think (we) knew how to take care.

MK: How do you treat chigger bites? What do you do?

EM: I don't know but I got well. (EM and MK laugh.) I had mumps. I'm the only one that got mumps, two side.

MK: Oh my goodness. Maybe today if we can stop here and we'd like to come another time and ask you about Gila River [War Relocation Center] and how you folks managed when you came back. Readjusting to life. So, we'll end here today.

EM: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 57-12-2-12

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Edith Kashiwabara Mikami (EM)

Mililani, O'ahu

August 30, 2012

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

- MK: This is an interview with Edith Kashiwabara Mikami in Mililani, O'ahu on August 30, 2012. Interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michiko Kodama Nishimoto. It's session number two.
- We had been speaking about your time at Jerome [War Relocation Center]. We're almost finishing up talking about that time. You had mentioned that your father worked at the mess hall. What kind of work did he do there?
- EM: Actually, I assumed that because the adults would try to help out wherever help was needed, I believe they took turns. He was a good cook too, being a fisherman.
- MK: How about your brother? What did he do?
- EM: I know in one camp he worked as a mechanic. He loved to work with cars.
- MK: So, when you say that your brother worked with cars in one of the camps. . .
- EM: They had a shop. I guess the buses and whatever needed to be repaired.
- MK: You spoke a little bit about the daily activities that you had as a child. Like, what you did for play, going to school, and I was wondering when you look back, in what ways were your school experiences similar or different from what you had gone through up till then?
- EM: Well, I was constantly amazed at all the different things that was going on. I was aware of that. So, I tried to learn as much as I can.
- WN: You came from Hawai'i and then you were in the school with *kotonks* and Hawai'i kids and so forth. Were you corrected at any time for your English or anything like that?
- EM: Oh yes. They used to make fun of us. 'Cause half the time they couldn't understand us.
- WN: What about in school? Did your teachers try to. . . .
- EM: Teachers were more patient. But the children—children can be mean too, you know. So like I told you, they would come and say, "You're lucky you have clothes," because they thought we had grass skirts and, "You have a nice house." They thought we lived in grass shacks. Those are little things that I remember.
- WN: But you don't remember the teachers teaching you how to pronounce things or anything like that?
- EM: No, I think they were rather patient with us. I assumed they thought we would—being young—we would pick up and try our best because we were a little ashamed too that they [*kotonks*] speak so well, whether Japanese or English. But as far as I remember my mom

telling us, “Why don’t you folks be like the *kotonks*?” Because the *kotonks* would wake up, put on their shoes, and go do their work. Whatever work was delegated to them. And then, they’re done. But the Hawai’i people were playing, playing, playing. When the sun is setting, then we start doing our work.

(Laughter)

Oh, we’re terrible. You should do your work first, you know? I remember that.

MK: When you say “work,” what was the work? Chores?

EM: Oh, little chores. Little chores.

MK: What kind of chores?

EM: Like, maybe we would tidy up outside of the barracks. Sometimes we have leaves, rubbish. Little things. Very minor things because we were young too.

MK: You were saying that like the *kotonks*, they were better in English?

EM: Oh yes.

MK: And in Japanese?

EM: Oh yes.

MK: Both?

EM: They spoke beautiful Japanese. Beautiful English. That’s why at one time I asked, “Why do you always say ‘huh’?” Or, “*ano ne*” when they speak Japanese.

They said, “Well, you folks say ‘yeah no’? So what is it? Is it ‘yes’ or ‘no’?”

So I start thinking, “That’s right, we always say ‘yeah no’.” (MK and WN laugh.) So, I got to thinking, “That’s right, we’re confusing the way we’re talking.” Then one day, I was sweeping the porch and the next person—adjoining—this lady was doing something. I said---I came in the house and I told my mom, “Ho the lady, she’s *kāpulu*. I told her she’s *kāpulu*.” And I said, “She didn’t understand me. She’s not very bright.” *Baka*, you know.

So she said, “You’re *baka*. *Kāpulu* is Hawaiian word, not English.” (WN and MK laugh.) Little things like that we would say, and they’ll look at us and question what are we talking about. So, that was another problem. (Chuckles) Hawaiian pidgin mixed in. I guess our pronunciation too.

That’s why when I came back to Fern School, I tried my best to understand them [children at Fern School], but I couldn’t. I had the darndest time. So I think to myself, “I wish I can speak like them and understand them.”

But the principal would always take me around and she [said], “Why don’t you speak like her?” I’m thinking to myself I’m the oddball. (Laughs)

MK: So you kind of had to adjust to people in the camp and then coming out of the camp you had to kind of reacclimate yourself to the kids at Fern School.

EM: Yes. Right.

MK: I was wondering, in the area that you lived what kinds of people were near your barracks? Like you said, there was a woman sweeping. She was a *kotonk*.

EM: Mm-hmm.

MK: How about other people near you folks?

EM: Well that's the only time—I can't recall what camp that was in. I remember she was a *kotonk*. But, when we first went to Arkansas, we were with the *kotonks* but because we went a little later, then they moved us to where all the Hawai'i people lived. So I guess we won't have that much of a problem or conflict.

MK: As far as you could notice, how were your parents managing? You know, being in camp with *kotonks* and other Hawai'i Japanese.

EM: Well, the only time I remembered was when I told you we were in the mess hall. That was the first camp we went in Arkansas that my father asked to pass down either salt or something. They wouldn't move so my brother stood up and he said, "Why can't you pass it down? He asked nicely." That was the only one time I saw there was a little conflict among the adults.

MK: I know that one time when we came here, you remembered kind of a tragic incident involving a man who committed suicide?

EM: Yes, that was in Arkansas.

MK: In Arkansas.

EM: All the bachelors lived in block one. That was far away from us. You figure there's about two hundred in each block, and we were forty. (Dog barks.)

In the middle there's this huge acre or acres of land where they planted vegetables and flowers you know. It was a huge camp. At least I thought it was huge.

So, then the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] came down. Now, this is what we heard. They said so many bachelors were dying and one of them—when the FBI came—they found him in a chair just like he's sleeping. So, they investigated what happened but we didn't hear anything after that.

That was a time when most of the people were going out [leaving]—the first camp. So that there weren't too many people around either. It was very sparse then. The Hawai'i people were left behind. Most of the *kotonks* were going out.

MK: As young as you were, you also kind of heard about that incident.

EM: Mm-hmm.

MK: What did you think at that time?

EM: Well, some people thought there were outsiders trying to kill us. But I mean, that was just. . . . Not really thought of but somebody thought maybe they don't like us. So, every night before the sun would set we would put all the lights on even though it's in the same block. Put the lights on and we would make sure we take a bath before the sun sets. Because you know, the bath is in the middle of the block.

(Taping is interrupted, then resumes.)

MK: You were just telling us about those bachelors and the FBI, and all that occurred at a time when people were vacating Jerome.

EM: Right. That's what I recall.

- MK: For you folks I know that you folks were at Jerome while you were in grades two and three. Eventually, you folks moved to Gila River [War Relocation Center].
- EM: Yes, I think Arizona. I was somewhere around fourth or fifth grade.
- MK: Fifth. Okay.
- EM: 'Cause I have an old picture that I looked about that age.
- MK: Okay. Okay.
- WN: Yeah. Fourth, fifth grade.
- MK: Why is it that your family went to Gila?
- EM: Mostly, I really don't know but I think there were many Hawai'i people that went. There were some *kotonks*, because I remember the [L. T.] Kagawa family. The Kagawa family, the older girl [Betty Kagawa] won valedictorian. Later on we found out the school really was was one of the very good ones. So, apparently we had good teachers.
- MK: Your family as well as other Hawai'i families moved to Gila?
- EM: Mm-hmm.
- MK: What do you remember about that move? Like, you remember the time when you moved from Hawai'i to Jerome. What do you remember about this move, Jerome to Gila River?
- EM: That one I remember we took the Greyhound bus. Leaving, I remember it being in the evening. It was dark. So I would watch the driver. Every time we were away from the cars he would put the high light on. I didn't know how to drive so I said he has the high light and the next thing you know he has the low light. So, what's going on, you know? I didn't sleep the whole night when we drove, because in Hawai'i we don't have those kind of buses too. So that's about the only thing I remember going to Gila.
- MK: What did you feel about leaving Jerome? By that time you had classmates that you knew. Your family was at Jerome for a while. What did you think?
- EM: Well actually, we don't have a choice. Even years later I used to think to myself—you know the Germans, they got killed—I said, "Gee, they went willingly," you know? To the gas chamber and all that. I thought to myself, "Wow, we went blindly wherever they told us. We trusted the government." So then, I realized—humans—we try to think the better thought than thinking the worst. But at that time, like I said, we don't question anything. At least, we didn't. I don't remember questioning that. They just said we were going to move, so we had to pack again.
- MK: What kind of reactions did you as a child notice from your parents, if any?
- EM: Like I said, they just followed whatever they were told. I didn't hear any bad remarks, I don't recall.
- MK: When you folks got to Gila, what did you think of the place?
- EM: It was hot. In nowhere (chuckles)—no-man's-land.
- WN: What time of year was that?
- EM: That I don't remember. But, it was just no-man's-land. (Laughs) Couldn't find anything, just desert. It was just---we said, "Boy, what are we going to do here?"
- MK: What were like the barracks and camp conditions like?

EM: Well, more or less about the same. The only thing was it was so hot that I guess the menfolks thought of making that gizmo. Like an air condition[er]? They had the fan and they built something around it. They had the gunny sacks—burlap sacks. Somehow it was wet all the time, and we would get like an air condition in the house. They were so clever.

WN: They would wet a gunny sack?

EM: Somehow I just remember the gunny sacks were always wet on the outside.

WN: I wonder if they put ice cubes or something in there.

EM: No, because we couldn't—we didn't have. I don't remember having a freezer.

MK: Just wet gunny sacks and . . .

EM: The fan.

MK: . . . the fans.

EM: Ours was on the outside, of course. So, it was pretty comfortable like that. But if you go outside it was hot. Just hot.

MK: Because you're so young you had to go to school. What was the school like at Gila?

EM: (Pause) I guess it was about the same, like Arkansas. Only thing, we spoke a little better. They could understand us now. At least we came a notch higher, getting a little better.

(Laughter)

But we were still making fun of them. We got to be good friends with a lot of them too. You know children, they somehow get adjusted pretty good.

MK: So outside of the classroom, what did you folks do as kids?

EM: We played volleyball— you know, sports. But I do remember in Arkansas our former pastor came to visit us. That was Howard Miller. My sister said he took them out, but I don't remember going out of the camp. I remember he came, which I thought was very unusual.

MK: You know now that you've mentioned the visitor to Jerome, I forgot to ask you, were there any other visitors like the nisei soldiers or others that you might recall visiting?

EM: No, not (Gila, Arizona), but Arkansas there were constantly. Practically every weekend.

MK: At Jerome?

EM: At Jerome, uh-huh. And they would have dance where—they call it a canteen—so we would go on the roof and try to peek in. (MK laughs.) Because we were young. My sister used to go but she was older. My brother loved children, and so he always had like a clubhouse—the young soldiers would come over. He had dumbbells [weights]. He'll have a map. So next time when they hear from them or where they are, then he would mark it. Before they left, we don't know where they're going. Many times, no sooner he puts the thing up, we find out that they died. It was kind of sad. They were very young.

MK: Were any of those GIs that came to visit . . .

EM: They were from the 442[nd].

MK: . . . acquaintances of the family?

- EM: No, we just welcomed them because most of them were from Hawai‘i—the 442 boys. They were close to us from what I understand. Their camp was—where was that now?
- WN: Camp Shelby.
- EM: Right. So I remember my mom—with all the vegetables that they had growing—my mom used to make *tsukemono* like that. So, they would look forward to eating that kind of stuff.
- MK: So they would have *tsukemono* and. . . .
- EM: Rice. You know. Just like *chazuke*. They would bring chocolates, because we couldn’t get chocolates. (Pause) I know they used to come quite often.
- MK: So your minister had come to visit, the 442 guys. Were there any others that you recall?
- EM: Like, I showed you the picture of the majorette group. We had some visitors come and show us their routine or if they were picked as a champion or something they came in and they performed for us. I thought that was neat.
- MK: When you went to Gila, did activities like that continue? Like the baton twirling?
- EM: That’s where they went more into the loom—you know weaving? Because I guess the Indians were nearby. I don’t know if they were Indian women, but I know someone taught us how to weave with the loom. I thought that was awesome.
- MK: Is it in Gila that your father used to go out to the Indian village?
- EM: Yes.
- MK: What did he do?
- EM: He used to fish. He loved to fish, so he would catch tilapia (or catfish). In those days, nobody ate (catfish or) tilapia except the Indians. So he would give the Indians. And they’re so grateful, so they would give him pomegranates and tamales, because they have the outdoor oven, just like the Portuguese had. So he would bring back. We would ask him, “Where did you get this from?” In the desert, we can’t see.
- He said, “We went to fish.”
- MK: When you say he went to fish, is it within the campgrounds or beyond?
- EM: No, it’s outside, but there were no fence. In Gila there was no fence.
- MK: No fence?
- EM: From what I remember. There was no fence. There were no soldiers. So I guess we were in no-man’s-land, so we could get lost if we venture out. I don’t remember any fence or any soldiers.
- MK: He’s Japanese and he’s getting tamales.
- EM: Mm-hmm. We didn’t know what it was, but he accepted it because they insisted he take something. So that’s how we got to learn to eat tamales. (EM and MK laugh.)
- MK: Pomegranate.
- EM: Pomegranate, we know. We know what that was. So we were curious, so that one time we went out—I don’t know how far but it sounded—it seemed endless. But he would do that practically every day, if he could.

MK: On foot?

EM: On foot.

WN: So you recall much more freedom at Gila River as compared to Jerome in terms of being able to go out?

EM: I guess I didn't think any different because we used to go in the forest. There was nobody that accompanied us.

WN: You mean from Gila River—I mean to go out.

MK: Jerome.

WN: Oh, in Jerome.

EM: Well, both sides. In Jerome, I don't recall going through any fence. We just went to the forest whenever we wanted. In Jerome, of course there were soldiers on the posts, but in Gila, it was so desert. So we used to venture out but we couldn't go far because it was so hot.

WN: No place to go anyway.

EM: Yes, right. So we found some antique things. I wish I had saved it. They had the date on.

MK: Oh.

EM: Yes, and we were so tired and thirsty that we just wanted to go home. (MK and WN chuckle.) But you can find old items. It's so hot. It's so hot. Of course they had a lot of cactus.

MK: Did you folks do anything with the cactus?

EM: No.

MK: No. You've already described the heat. Some other people have mentioned the sandstorms.

EM: We did have.

MK: What was that like?

EM: Oh, it's terrible. If your face is not covered, it just hits you, you know. So, sometimes you have long sleeve it's not too bad, but your face is exposed so we just have to cover our face.

MK: With your hands?

EM: Or whatever we had. Handkerchief, like that. Not that often but we did have several.

MK: While Jerome had chiggers, Gila had ants?

EM: Yes, they had huge ants. They were really big. I saw them. But, chigger, not everybody got it. I'm the lucky one that got it.

(Laughter)

My family nobody but me.

MK: You (chuckles).

EM: Mm-hmm.

MK: In terms of like of having medical facility or dentist, what do you recall about that?

EM: Well, my dad didn't want us to go, because from what we heard this young girl needed to get her tonsil out, and she died. So after that, he wouldn't let us go. But the time that I did go for the chigger bites and mumps, we didn't know what it was, so we went. That was it. I didn't have to stay there, so I assumed he let me go. Plus it was exterior, it wasn't inside (the body).

MK: So, he felt it'd be okay. I was curious too when you folks were at Gila River, again, what was it like at the mess hall and the foods that were available to you folks?

EM: Very similar.

MK: For your dad, what kind of work did he do at Gila?

EM: All I can remember was he used to go fishing. So, every opportunity he had he would go. But, I don't remember him working—going to work for any reason.

MK: How about your mom?

EM: Oh, my mom was always a housewife.

MK: So she took care of the kids. And so, when you say that your dad, every opportunity he had he'd go fishing. Although he didn't have his sampan anymore and he couldn't go out in the ocean to go fish, he still could fish.

EM: I guess if you have the will, you'll find some way.

MK: So in terms of the fishing, how did he manage to have the equipment? The poles and . . .

EM: That I don't know. That I don't know. Maybe he got it from the Indians, I don't know. But he used to catch fish. Otherwise he wouldn't be coming home with all that food. (Laughs)

(Interview is interrupted by barking dog, then resumes.)

MK: When your time at Gila was ending, what were your thoughts?

EM: They told us we were going home to Hawai'i, but we had to go to California to wait for the ship. So, I believe we were at Anaheim I think. From there we had to wait. So, we wanted to go to the city. Like I said, we always had three of us always together, so we went out one day and we hitchhiked. We were thumbing our way to get a ride. So finally this *haole* lady stopped by and she said, "I'll take you. Where do you want to go? I'll take you, but don't you ever do this again," because I guess there were some people that were still resentful [towards] the Japanese. So we said okay.

MK: Who was with you? You said the three with you.

EM: My two sisters. My two older sisters. So now coming home, we caught the bus and we went to the back of the bus. The driver said, "No, you can't sit in the back, you have to come forward."

So we said, "Why not?"

He said, "No, you just come in the front." So, I just assumed that either the colored were supposed to sit there, I don't know. We just did what we were told. But when my sisters

went out in Arkansas—I don't know why but my older sister was able to go out. She said when they went to this little town, she said when you walk and there's a Caucasian coming by, if you're walking you have to step down off the sidewalk or you have to cross the street. Then if you have to use the restroom, they have sign—black. They have the sign you can't use it. My sisters could use it but not the colored. And then the stores—whatever stores they had—they were no glass. The food was just—the flies were all over it.

So, later on she said---we were talking and I think one of us said, “Wow, we're supposed to be prisoners but we're taken better care than the colored.” The houses they had is all *totan*. We could see that from the train when we were coming in. So, it was really sad you know.

MK: Being on the Mainland, you got a glimpse of what life was like yeah?

EM: Mm-hmm. That's why I really understand when somebody talks about it. I don't tell them, but I know. I was there. Well I'm not, my sister was there.

MK: So you folks were in California, and how long do you think you folks were there?

EM: I think just a few weeks.

MK: Were you folks kind of taken care of in a camp-like situation or on your own?

EM: No, I recall we were in a—looked like a regular house. That was after the war, so I figured I guess we can live like other people. I don't remember exactly who lived with us, but we had to wait for the ship.

MK: What were your thoughts thinking about home—going home to Hawai'i?

EM: Oh, we were elated. (MK laughs.) In fact, when we went to Arkansas, we wanted to hear something from “Hawai'i Calls”.

MK: Oh.

EM: I don't know, somebody was able to get through, but you have to wait there at a certain time—the time difference. So we have to wait there—we have to be there to listen to the radio, because not everybody had that shortwave I guess. Just to hear the music, we were happy. Like I said, I don't know how the family friend—he had pictures of us—I don't know where he had the camera because they took all our cameras away. And the shortwave now, we don't know who brought that. Maybe it was a GI, we don't know. I don't know.

MK: And it was in Jerome you remember doing that?

EM: I believe it was in Jerome.

MK: So all those years you have this feeling for Hawai'i?

EM: Oh yes. Yes.

MK: When your family came back to Hawai'i, that would be about November 1945? Around there?

EM: October, November, somewhere around there, because I know I missed a couple of months of school. That was in sixth grade.

MK: Where did you folks live? You came back and. . .

EM: We went to live in Kaka‘ako. My father’s good friend, Takao. My sister-in-law’s mother had several rentals, but she had to give the tenants time to get out. Then from there we went to one of her homes in Kalihi. Democrat Street I think it was. Then that’s when I went back to Fern School.

So in Kaka‘ako, I don’t remember going to school ‘cause I guess we weren’t settled, so when we moved to Kalihi that’s when I went back to Fern School.

MK: So, you folks lived at the Democrat Street home?

EM: I believe it was Democrat Street. It was my sister-in-law’s mother’s rental. So we would walk to school—Fern School.

MK: I know that you’ve already told us the story about how the Fern School teacher reacted to you and your quote unquote, “good English”. (MK and EM laugh.) You became the model for other kids.

EM: Yes.

MK: So you were at Fern a little while?

EM: Well, sixth grade.

MK: Sixth grade.

EM: I went a couple of months in October or November. So, before we finished—I’m only up to sixth grade—before we finished the principal kept telling me, “You have to try Stevenson.” That’s the English standard school at that time. So you have to pass the test. She said, “You won’t have any problems, so go take the test.” So reluctantly I went. Passed. So I was there seventh and eighth grade.

Then, my father said, “You don’t know any Japanese. So you have to go learn Japanese.” So I went to Kalākaua. That’s where all my sisters went to. So, at Kalākaua I won the speech contest.

Then the teachers that had me said, “You must go back to Roosevelt [High School]. Go back to Roosevelt.” That’s when I had to take the test again—the written and oral test. So, I was accepted, so I graduated from Roosevelt.

MK: Your sisters, their language was not as affected as yours?

EM: I’m quite sure they were adjusting and. . . I don’t know why they didn’t go to English standard school. So, they all graduated from Farrington [High School]. So when people question, “How come you’re the only one who went to Roosevelt?” I say I don’t know. I was told to go so I just go.

(Laughter)

MK: You were saying that your father made you go to Kalākaua because he said you didn’t know any Japanese.

EM: Well, I could understand but I couldn’t write or read. So I had to go with the little ones—first graders. So, I felt so terrible (EM and MK laugh.) being with all the little ones. But I could understand Japanese ‘cause my parents spoke Japanese and my dad could speak a little English too.

MK: How about your sisters? They didn’t have to go to Japanese[-language] school like you?

EM: I don’t remember them going to Japanese school. Let’s see, my sister above me was two years older than me, and she was the smart one. Then above her was three years older.

- So, maybe they knew more Japanese because once in a while they could read certain *kanji* [written Chinese character] like that. So I guess that's why I was the only one that had to go. I don't know, but I know I was told to go so I have to go. (EM and MK laugh.)
- MK: In the beginning when you folks first got back to Hawai'i, in terms of a livelihood what did your parents do? How did they manage?
- EM: That I don't know. All I know was my dad couldn't get his sampan back. So, they had to make arrangements to get—buy the sampan back. He being an alien, he couldn't buy it. My brother had to buy it.
- MK: How did you folks manage to get the money together to buy it?
- EM: Apparently my sister-in-law's mother was well-off, so I'm quite sure she helped us quite a bit. Oh yeah, from Kaka'ako we went to live at her place. She worked for the wealthy people. Her husband worked for the Hawai'i Meat Company. So they had free housing, everything, utility. So I think that's why she saved the money—to buy rentals. Smart.
- MK: I think in a pre-interview or a phone conversation you also mentioned the kids helped to contribute to the buying of the sampan?
- EM: Oh yes.
- MK: What did you folks do?
- EM: Well, I was still too young to go out to work, so we used to baby-sit. Summertime we would clean houses. Of course my sisters were older, so if they were working at this certain place and they get a little older where they can go out to work—they paid. They would I guess, the owner would recommend if I can come and take over. I was always able to work—to help out.
- MK: How about your brother? What did he do for a living?
- EM: Well, he was a mechanic. He was very good at it too. So, I told you he was working two jobs as far as I can remember. Von Hamm [-Young Co., Ltd.] and Studebaker [Distributors]—they used to always entice him for more money to come to their place. So he landed up with Nissan. This is much, much later but he landed up at Nissan in Kailua.
- MK: Yeah, Windward. Windward side.
- EM: While we were in Kalihi, I think he was working at Studebaker.
- MK: It seems like your family never returned to the Coombs Lane home then.
- EM: No. No. But I did go—after I got married—I did go one time, just to see if anybody else was there. But, everybody had moved on. The only person—the longest living person that was there—he came after the war. So, he didn't know anything.
- MK: That home at Coombs Lane, was that a rental?
- EM: I think that was a rental.
- MK: Okay. I was wondering, how did people react to you folks? You know, you folks had been away. Had they known what had happened to you folks?
- EM: That I don't know.
- MK: If other kids asked you, "Edith, what school you went to?" You know, when you first came back when you came to Fern. What did you think?

- EM: Well I couldn't have much conversation because I didn't understand them. (EM and MK laugh.) All I remember was when we had choir like that and I would talk to them, but other than that I just didn't understand them. So, there was not much interaction at that time.
- WN: Did you feel that you came back a different person?
- EM: Not really. Until years later, I could see that there must have been something different. But at that time, I said, "Why can't they understand me? Why can't I understand them?" Being so young you don't understand.
- WN: Did you get teased at all for talking like a Mainlander?
- EM: Not much because half the time I was with the principal. When I went out of the class she would always grab me and take me around. So, I felt like an oddball. 'Cause kids, you tend to want to be like them—with the crowd. You don't want to be different.
- MK: After you graduated from Roosevelt in 1952, what were your dreams? What did you want to do at that time?
- EM: Because I was rather the sickly one in our family, I wanted to be a nurse because I encountered so many nice nurses and doctors. But then, we didn't have the money because we were still helping out, so Roosevelt senior year there was a program where we could go out to work. But instead of going straight to work, they offered this restaurant training class. So, I went to McKinley [High School]. After I go to Roosevelt in the morning, then about ten o'clock or so I would go to McKinley. Started restaurant training. Because the teacher there knew I wanted to be a nurse, she got me a job at the Queen's Hospital nurses and doctors dining room. But then, I felt to see everybody else working at the restaurant it wasn't fair. I just felt like I was being favored.
- So then I went to look for another job as a waitress. The Sun Chop Suey that was on King Street. Later they opened in Waimalu. He was really nice to me. So I went to two schools and I worked two jobs. On the weekend, Mr. Yim the owner, a co-partner. He said, "Can you baby-sit?" We couldn't go out much so I said okay. He'll pick me up or he'll bring me home. It was pretty good.
- WN: At that time were you still helping to pay for your father's boat?
- EM: I don't know if we were still paying for that boat but we were giving the whole paycheck to my sister-in-law, because my brother was always working. She would give us an allowance. I believe it was a dollar for me. So that included the carfare, your lunch, and your outing on the weekend. So she said if you want to make lunch, save money. That's why I hardly ate cafeteria lunches. I'm so tight with my money so anytime they tell me you want to save money and make lunch, I would make lunch.
- I was fortunate I didn't get that food poisoning when I was working at the Richard Cooke [residence] Richard Cooke, Jr. My girlfriends—most of them—had food poisoning from the ham that the workers had cooked halfway. It was so late so they put it in the refrigerator. The following day they finished off on the cooking, so not every place was—the bacteria didn't get to it. I guess the centerpiece in the center of the ham. Even after my girlfriends had got the food poisoning, even after they got married their stomach would act up once in a while.
- MK: This is a case of food poisoning that occurred at . . .
- EM: At Roosevelt. So, I was working at the Richard Cooke's, and he too told me, "If you want to save money, go and make sandwich, take it to school." So that day when he came home he asked me if I had eaten the lunch.
- I said, "No, you told me to save money. So that's what I did." He was relieved.

MK: When you were going to Roosevelt then, you were working as a schoolgirl boarder?

EM: That was a little later. Because, senior year I worked at two jobs. Then, my sisters had all gone out too—they were eighteen—so I was the only one left. I went looking for a job to live-in. At that time there were a lot of live-ins. So I went to work for Chun Hoon. That's the one that owned the Everybody's [Super] Market. So, the next morning I woke up and my eyes were all swollen because it's the first time I ever lived outside. The hardship we had at our home, that's the only life I knew, so I told her I would stick it out, so I did.

Then later on I went to work (pause) for Richard Cooke. And then from Richard Cooke I went to [Ellen] Sayegusa, that's the *Sogetsu* teacher. So all that through the paper—I found the job. The only reason I left Cooke's was 'cause he got a divorce and they were going to the Mainland. He wanted me to go as a governess. I was still young. Only a senior, so I asked my brother what I should do. He says, "No, I don't think you should go. That's too big a responsibility." So I would come home with them on the summer and go back after—because they have to go to school on the Mainland. That's when I went to look for another job and I went to Sayegusa. From there I worked almost four years for . . .

MK: As a live-in?

EM: Live-in. And I went to community college.

MK: And then a live-in, how does that generally work?

EM: Well, you don't have to pay for your boarding. They just give you an allowance every month. So I remember at Sayegusa I used to get twenty-five dollars a month, so you had all your meals—you got a place to stay. After all that's all you really needed. But for---I had to save because I wanted to go to more schooling. So I had to save money for my uniform since I was going to community college I was thinking of taking up cafeteria management, because my sister-in-law said, "You should try that field."

I said, "Gee, but I never used to eat cafeteria food. I'm not a good cook." So, (pause) I would work there during the summer at the cannery to save money for the uniform, the shoes, the carfare. And a lot of times we had to eat at work. If I didn't make lunch at the home, then I have to buy food at the cannery. So you know just in case I had to have extra money. So I did that. We finished in two years.

Then the first job was at Kunia Elementary [School]. But I was still working at Mrs. Sayegusa, so my husband—at the time we were boyfriend-girlfriend—he said, "You have to quit this side because you're not having time to rest."

MK: So while you were a live-in you were going to Honolulu Community College?

EM: Yes.

MK: And you took up cafeteria management. What was that curriculum like? How did they run the program?

EM: Our junior teacher was very strict. She was a local girl from the island, and married a *haole* fellow from the Mainland. They both were in the food field, so he became a teacher at Kapi'olani and she was a teacher at Honolulu Community College. She was very strict but very compassionate, so if she tells you to make fifty pies in one hour, she can do it—and neat. Everything was neat.

And she would make us go on the—we would hook up all of the tables—you have to walk and constructive criticism. We have to tell--the students would say she's walking, she's swaying too much. I was in the baton and I used to do the majorette, so I used to sway a lot of times. (Chuckles) Then some other girls would sort of slouch. We had to wear stockings that had lines. They had to be straight—every day. She taught us how to make our caps. We had to starch that in cornstarch. Crisp like a cardboard. We used to

polish our shoes every night. She was very strict. We were the only ones that wore caps, the other girls in the other fields, they didn't wear anything like that.

But, because we couldn't mingle with the boys—they had a lot of metalwork, auto body, and all those other men field—we couldn't interact with them. The only reason I was able to because I was secretary of the student council. So, I got to meet a lot of boys and girls. So the only time the other girls could meet was at lunch and at snack time. But we were working right? We have to feed them and we have to serve them. So they would invite us in the night, weekends. A lot of them were from the island too.

So when we graduated I was the only one—I take it back. Junior year I was—we had about twenty to thirty students. By November our junior teacher tells us if you think you can't make it, that's your Christmas present, either you go on or have to let us go. So we dwindled on. So senior year we had something like thirteen, and when we graduated only seven went to actually work in the cafeteria. Because it was a lot of paperwork besides cooking.

MK: In this cafeteria management course—curriculum—that you had, you were taught how to dress appropriately for the job.

EM: And we have to call each other by our surnames. I can't call you Michiko-san, I have to call you by a surname. We got so used to that, so when I started to go with my husband I saw my girlfriend and I said, "Oh Miss Kajiwara."

He said, "Why are you so formal?"

I said, "I don't know her first name." (WN and MK chuckle.) Because that's for respect when you go to schools. The children are supposed to call you by your surnames. That's how strict our junior teacher was.

MK: In that curriculum you learned how to run a cafeteria?

EM: Oh yes. Well, the first year was more paperwork. So the junior teacher, Mrs. [Jane] Ditzel told us that the books she picked up were all comparable to the freshman university level. So that's why it's going to be a little hard. That's why she had a strict cut-off point. She think you can't make it, you're out. No sense wasting—you don't want to—wasting their time.

MK: So you learned management skills, all the paperwork connected with it . . .

EM: Bookkeeping.

MK: Bookkeeping.

EM: How to manage.

MK: Ordering.

EM: Mm-hmm.

MK: How about . . .

EM: Having problems with the children and the faculty. She was really efficient. She was very compassionate, because like I said, most of them were from the outside islands. Most of them were live-ins, so my grade started to go down so she said, "What happened?" She would call you in for a conference. She was very thoughtful. But if I see her outside for some reason she would say, "Let's go have coffee." Completely different person, because school is school.

MK: Like you mentioned something like if she told you to make fifty pies in an hour, you would be expected to. So you folks also learned the cooking?

EM: Oh yes. Like she was very adamant about chopping everything—the senior teacher—everything through the grinder. The senior teacher always wanted to know the gossip, and I wouldn't gossip so she didn't like me. The ones that didn't gossip—'cause they're outside island girls so they didn't know who to talk to. So, she would want to listen to all that. I didn't like that. I could be your best friend and you would talk about me. I didn't like that.

WN: Senior teacher is the one above your direct supervisor. I see.

EM: If the junior teacher liked me, she wouldn't like me. So one day I was so upset with her, I just called her off on the side and I gave her a piece of my mind. After that, she was so nice to me. Because she knew she was wrong. Our junior teacher was so good. Really up-and-up yeah? So even before she died, we would go with her to luncheons and several of us would invite her out like that.

MK: You mentioned you folks would be taught how to cook. When you folks all went out as cafeteria ladies, were you folks all using the same recipes that you learned while in training or how did it work?

EM: No, at the beginning in senior year we were going out as just like interns. So I went to Pu'uhale, some other girls went to Ka'ahumanu.

At Pu'uhale School she [cafeteria manager] was such a quiet person. Her husband was a policeman. She was so nice. I was so fortunate—really blessed—to have good teachers.

From there, after we graduated, then we went to our own school. Of course, many of them weren't permanent, because at that time just to get in—most of the managers won't leave once they get in there. So we had to go to smaller schools, worry about the outside islands. Most of the girls did go outside island, but I was dreading to go outside island—like I said I didn't know how to use a kerosene stove. But then I was fortunate I got Kunia. So, some of the other girls were saying, “You know Mrs. Sayegusa knows all these big shots so you didn't have to go island.”

But I told Mrs. Sayegusa from the very beginning, “I don't want you talking to anybody. I want to do it on my own.” So she never interfered.

MK: So, at first you ended up at Kunia?

EM: Mm-hmm.

MK: Then where did you go successively?

EM: I used to take the civil service test every year to see how well I'm placed—I'm doing, rather. So, I was always two steps—I was able to get two steps. From Kunia—there was a maternity leave so I went to Helemano. Then, from Helemano, nobody wanted Pearl Harbor Intermediate. So, each time I'm climbing—going up. So, because I had taken the tests, I just was able to transfer, so I got into Pearl Harbor Intermediate. From Pearl Harbor Intermediate—they were going to tear that down because the navy owned that property, so they were going to build officers' place—because I had already taken another test I got Radford High. Radford High was actually intermediate at the beginning—eighth and ninth. Later we went into strictly high school.

So I started there in 1957 I believe. That was my permanent school. You have to be able to pass at three months before you get officially hired. That's the testing point. At Helemano I didn't want to go to Pearl Harbor because I heard so many bad things about it. It was a service school, mostly service children went there. But then my principal said, “You should take a rough school, because if you take a rough school you can handle anything after that.” So I took his suggestion. He was like a father to me. He used to invite me to that army retreat parade and all those kind of parades and sit in with all the officers. (MK laughs.) He was really nice to me.

I was really blessed with nice bosses and my principal at Pearl Harbor Intermediate, so many people went there but they didn't want to stay as permanent so they would ask for transfer. So one day he came in and he says, "Edith, do you drink?"

I said, "No."

He said, "This kind of job, sometime it's good you drink you know." (EM and MK laugh.)

I said, "Do you drink?"

He says, "Yeah. Because it's so frustrating."

Everyplace I went I was shorthanded because I started to feed more children. I was always shorthanded. So when the auditors come, they would tell me, "When do you have time to sleep?"

I said, "That's the point." Bookkeeping I bring home, and I work twelve, fourteen hours it's nothing.

So my husband used to tell me (EM pounds on the table), "You should quit work. Quit work. Go private. You're doing it, that's why they won't hire any more." But, our process of hiring upgraded. It's a long process. It's done only once a year. So, just when I was able to hire more people at Radford, then I got this offering at Kipapa.

The auditors were real nice to me. They always try to make it a little easier. So at Radford, he told the principal I could hire—I could have the students learn bookkeeping and I would train them and grade them. That way relieve me of some paperwork. Then cashiers. But see, most of the bright ones belong in clubs and because the majority were service children they would have their clubs at lunchtime. So, it was difficult for me to get the good ones. But there were some that were straight-A children that came to work. Like I told you that one student was from Wai'anae. He used to catch a ride to Pearl Harbor, and then going home he hitchhiked. So naturally when we moved, he moved with us to Radford. He became an engineer later.

MK: So actually, being a cafeteria manager is not just running the cafeteria and feeding the kids . . .

EM: Oh no, you listen to . . .

MK: . . . but you eventually work with the students.

EM: Yes. And we hear different stories. The children come to my ladies and they tell it's not fair the way the registrar is handling the registration. They're being favored and all that. They come to us with their problems too.

Some would come visit me at Kipapa. The teachers would tell me, "You got a new hire."

I said, "No, that's my former students." Some of them were really bright. Real straight-A, good kids.

WN: I was wondering. I know most everyone has the same supply in terms of foods that you make and things like that.

EM: Cooking. Mm-hmm.

WN: I was wondering, because you were at Pearl Harbor Intermediate and then Radford for a long time, a lot of military kids go there. Predominantly military.

EM: Well, it was half of 'Aiea. Aliamanu.

WN: Okay. I see.

EM: Because 'Aiea (High School) wasn't built then.

WN: Oh, kids from 'Aiea went to Helemano?

EM: Aliamanu, I'm sorry.

WN: Aliamanu. Oh. I see.

EM: Aliamanu. Yeah.

WN: I was just going to ask you about did you have to change your menu a little bit to accommodate kids that maybe not used to eating sticky rice or anything like that.

EM: Oh yes, it was a challenge. Because the local kids wanted the sort of sticky rice (MK chuckles.) and then we had government commodities they called it. You know, surplus. They would send us this Louisiana-type rice—Chinese rice, long grain, no taste. So at that time when I was at Radford, you can do your own menu—do your own buying. But you have to stay within that cost. Not too big a profit, not too much of a loss. So, I would mix the rice in three. One-third. One-third Louisiana, one-third brown rice, one-third of the regular Calrose.

MK: Medium grain Calrose rice.

EM: Yes. So it was acceptable then, but if you made straight brown rice it's too dry. Then the service children, they wouldn't know what watercress was. And cold cuts—we had sandwiches, we had a separate line for sandwiches—they used to hate the bologna and things that you have every day at home. They get tired of that. We used fresh corned beef, I'm sorry, canned corned beef sandwich. What was the other thing they liked? Egg, tuna, salami. We had a variety anyway. So whatever we sold good, we know what they wanted.

For Radford—like I said we could buy whatever we wanted. So Foremost—I think the *haole* children used to like Foremost. I think it was richer fat-wise. And Meadow Gold was the other side.

So the children requesting, so I'm giving one line for Foremost and one line for Meadow Gold. And ice cream, I said that I'll give to Meadow Gold.

I was trying to fight for a better place for the seniors because they were packed like sardines. I was trying to have an area for the seniors—at least break away from the pack. I was fighting for this area but when I submitted they said no it's going to change the ambience of the place. But years later when I had a reunion, they had one.

MK: They changed it?

EM: Mm-hmm. They changed. So I got along good with the student body.

MK: So actually, you had to kind of meet the needs of the students.

EM: Oh yes. Like class day. I make all their colors. Whatever colors. If I have a large supply of turkey coming in or roast beef or chicken—they warn you ahead of time what you're going to get. So I usually give three choices. The committee would come and I would say what would you want. They would pick whatever they want, and then, what are your class colors? So I would make the desert or something class colors. The ugliest one I made was purple with blue. Never forgot that. But we made the frosting, you know. They would come first in line just for that one day. We made it so it was a special day for them. At least I tried to make it anyway.

- MK: So the cafeteria is really just a part of the school community yeah? You try to be part of. . . .
- EM: We try to be. We have to get along with the teachers too of course. But that's up to you if you want to get involved or not. That's how I started to teach the baton twirling after school. After working.
- MK: Originally you wanted to be a nurse, but finances did not allow that. You went into cafeteria management. You retired in 1987. Around then?
- EM: I think it was '87.
- MK: [Nineteen] eighty-seven. What . . .
- EM: [Nineteen] eighty-seven or eighty-nine, I forget because my first grandchild was—I think it was eighty-seven.
- MK: When you look back, what do you think on your career as a cafeteria manager?
- EM: Because I went through a lot of hardship, I think I was blessed to go in that field. Because I knew how a new child coming in feels. I was in their place. Whenever they came to work as a cafeteria worker, I always try to put them with somebody that they knew, because they can be from different classes or they're from the same class or they met before.
- So this one mother from Wai'anae side, she didn't want her child to come to Kipapa. She was so worried. But one PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] night I didn't go because (my) children were big already, so she wanted to meet me. Since I wasn't there, the teacher said she wanted to thank me because she said her son was so happy at Kipapa. He came one of the selected few that was picked for best-dressed.
- So it was I think sort of like a good experience. Of course you have to work with the children, the teachers, and the parents. I've been in all places. I really appreciate what we tried to do. Because I was involved with association here, I try to be a buffer between the teachers and the parents. So when they needed something I would ask the teachers, "What do you need?" So, at one time I remember we had (Waipio Assn) money, so we allotted them twenty-five dollars for each class, because some children can't afford. You know, a lot of teachers they take a lot of things out of their own pocket, so we said to use that money to your own discretion.
- MK: And then, you were married in about what year?
- EM: Nineteen fifty-six.
- MK: How many children do you have?
- EM: I have a girl and a boy.
- MK: A girl and a boy. And grandchildren?
- EM: I have two in Japan and two here.
- MK: We always ask this question of everyone. To what extent do your children know about what you went through during the war years?
- EM: Not much.
- MK: Not much. Have they asked?

EM: Not really until I told my granddaughter that lives here who you were and why were you coming. Of course my daughter, she was worried. When I tried to tell them a couple of times, my husband said, "You don't want to hear your mother's story. You're going to take out the violin if she starts talking."

(Laughter)

I tried to just kind of reinforce them not to waste and go for whatever you dream of—whatever you want. Try to be good to others and just try your best at anything, whether work or play. Making money. I try to tell them as far as finances, it's good to share but you have to always keep some for yourself. You don't know what's going to happen. So you don't want to be dependent of others.

WN: What was the family reaction toward the reparations?

EM: Oh, most of them had died. This is on the Mainland?

WN: For you, for example.

EM: For me, I gave ten (thousand) to each of my children. I figured they can keep that for their children's education.

WN: Were they ever curious about, "Can you explain how you got this money Grandma?" or anything like that? Or your children?

EM: Not really. I guess I lightly told them because we were in camp. That was about it.

MK: Right now you were saying, "I just told them because we were in camp." Do you think they had a conception of what camp was?

EM: Not really.

WN: Pretty low-key then. Wasn't a big deal.

EM: Right. Many of us—even for the reunion—most of them didn't want to go. Even for this thing that we made—the manual-looking. . . . You call them and they say, "No, it's too painful." They don't want to speak about it. And the being together? No, it's still painful. This is years later now. The only time I really got hit was when my girlfriend was taking her girlfriend. She said, "Come, we're going to the Arizona Memorial."

When I went in there and I saw the pictures, my eyes just welled and I said, "I have to get out of here." It just brought back some bad memories. Like the immigration station. So, I didn't get to see the whole thing. I tried to go back later, but I couldn't. So they had the film yeah? So I looked to that—the bombing and things like that. But as far as going back to the pictures, I try to. . . .

But luckily, I guess I was younger so it wasn't like some of them. They were schoolteachers and they had good positions. Because what if somebody come to you and say, "Okay, you're going to have to go now." And your husband is going someplace else. One day I thought about it. I was kind of comfortable here, I said, "Wow, what if somebody came and said I have to get out of here? They're going to take my home and everything." Wow, you know (it) really hit me!

But I do a lot of thinking like my son. We think a lot. So, little things. So my sister always said, "You're always thinking about all *kine* stuff." (MK laughs.)

Like my son, when he was very little, he says, "Mom, is this island going to sink?"

I said, "Why?"

He says, "They're building so many high-rise." A little child asking that.

So I said, "Oh boy." (EM and MK laugh.)

WN: Okay, a good place to end? Thank you so much.

MK: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you for the stories and everything. Welcoming in and. . . .

EM: Did you want to eat goodies?

END OF INTERVIEW

(Note: Although this is just a small portion of my hardship I believe the Lord has blessed me. I always answer my very close friend of detailed things in my life, I answer them. I believe the hardship was a blessing in disguise to be better or strive to be a better person.)

Unspoken Memories:

Oral Histories of Hawai‘i Internees at Jerome, Arkansas

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa**

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