

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Lillian Yamasaki Hisanaga

Lillian Yamasaki Hisanaga, the fourth of five children, was born in 1929 in Wai‘anae, O‘ahu, Hawai‘i to Kenichi and Itsuo Yamasaki.

Her father was a nisei, born and educated on O‘ahu. Her mother was an immigrant from Hiroshima-*ken*, Japan.

The Yamasakis owned a store—one of only five in Wai‘anae.

Kenichi Yamasaki, a longtime resident of Wai‘anae, was a well-known, active community member. He supported the local Buddhist temple and Japanese-language school.

With the outbreak of war, federal authorities removed him from his home and held him at the Sand Island Detention Center on O‘ahu.

Months later at Sand Island, Kenichi Yamasaki was told that he was being relocated to the U.S. Mainland. He instructed his wife: “Go close the store. Then we all go. Every one of us go. If not, I don’t want to go.”

Itsuo Yamasaki sold what she could and gave away what remained within a two-week period.

By early 1943, Kenichi Yamasaki, together with his family, was sent to the Mainland; initially they were at Jerome War Relocation Center in Arkansas, later they were at Amache War Relocation Center in Colorado.

Returning to the islands at war’s end, Kenichi Yamasaki did not return to Wai‘anae. He held various jobs, including ones at a jewelry store and a furniture store.

Lillian, a seventh-grader at Wai‘anae in 1943 who continued her studies at Jerome and Amache, graduated from McKinley High School in Honolulu in 1947.

Married in 1950, she and husband Akira raised three children.

Tape No. 57-27-1-13

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Lillian Yamasaki Hisanaga (LH)

Mililani, O'ahu

March 8, 2013

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

MK: This is an interview with Lillian Yamasaki Hisanaga. This is session number one. It's March 8, 2013. We're in Mililani, O'ahu. We have myself, Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto and Warren Nishimoto asking questions.

Mrs. Hisanaga, good morning.

LH: Good morning.

MK: Thank you for meeting with us today. Thank you.

What year were you born?

LH: Nineteen twenty-nine.

MK: Okay. Where were you born?

LH: Wai'anae. [Officially recorded as Honolulu, but not] Honolulu. I found that out—when was it?—when I made my driver's license. No, I couldn't get it because I'm not driving anymore. So I made one—what do you call that?

MK: State ID?

LH: State ID. That's when I found out.

MK: So you're officially recorded as being born in Honolulu . . .

LH: Honolulu.

MK: . . . but you actually . . .

LH: Wai'anae.

MK: . . . born in Wai'anae.

LH: My father too.

MK: You know your family, I'm going to first find out a little bit about your mother. What was your mother's name?

LH: Kawamoto.

MK: And her first name?

- LH: Itsuo.
- MK: Where did she come from?
- LH: She come from Hiroshima.
- MK: What did you hear about her parents or grandparents? What were they doing?
- LH: They supposed to be---in the olden days there's four classes of Japanese. The *tono* class, the merchant class, the farmer's class, and the *chorinbo*. She come from number one. The first class. The *tono* class. My grandfather had to go nine times to get her to marry my father.
- MK: Oh my goodness.
- LH: The only reason why that he was able to get to her was we had plenty money. *Okane mochi datta*.
- MK: Oh, okay. So, your father's father—your grandfather—arranged a marriage between your mother and father.
- LH: Actually it's not an arranged marriage but it's just like they bought her.
- MK: Nine times he had to go visit the family?
- LH: Yeah. To get her. (Chuckles) She was real pretty yeah.
- MK: When you say that your father's father had to go nine times, that's from Hawai'i to Japan, or just . . .
- LH: No, no, no. In Japan.
- MK: . . . in Japan.
- LH: Yeah.
- MK: He went from his home in Japan, okay. And your father's family, where do they come from?
- LH: My father's family? Hiroshima.
- MK: Hiroshima. What was your father's name?
- LH: Kenichi. Ken-ichi.
- MK: Kenichi. Where was he born?
- LH: He was born Wai'anāe—my father.
- MK: So how come his family ended up in Wai'anāe?
- LH: The story I heard is my grandfather used to work for—came as a contract worker and was on the Big Island. He ran away from over there. The only place that he can think of was Wai'anāe. So he went to Wai'anāe and that's where his cousins, his relatives all came. Second cousin, first cousin. So we had plenty second cousin, third cousin, fourth cousin (laughs).
- MK: All living Wai'anāe side?

- LH: Wai‘anae.
- MK: And so, your grandfather was a [sugar] plantation worker. He ran away, ended up in Wai‘anae, and what did he do in Wai‘anae then?
- LH: I guess how he made the money was I think he opened up a bar. So, that’s how he made money I think.
- WN: Wai‘anae was still plantation back then?
- LH: Yeah.
- WN: Had plantation.
- LH: Then without my grandfather’s permission, the [sugar plantation] manager didn’t hire anybody. He had that much trust in my grandfather.
- MK: And so, your grandfather—he owned a bar—did he own other businesses later on?
- LH: Yeah. He had a store.
- MK: What was the name of the store?
- LH: Yamasaki Store. *Mise* yeah?
- MK: What kind of things did your grandfather sell?
- LH: Mostly, what do you call? Dry goods, and soda, and ice cream.
- MK: From that time when you would hear stories about your grandfather’s store, how many other stores were there in Wai‘anae?
- LH: One, two, three, four, five. Five stores. Three stores was big store yeah? Two stores were small, dinky store. My next-door neighbor and one across the other big store was a small, dinky store where there’s a Tamura. You know Tamura?
- MK: Uh-huh [yes].
- LH: It was a small, dinky store. But you know, they had the most brilliant children. They were all smart.
- MK: But they started from a small business. Your grandfather had this business and around that area, you had other stores. What else was around that time—your grandfather’s time?
- LH: One theater. Every Wednesday they had a movie. The plantation would allow us to go see the movies. Everybody would go with five cents. (LH and MK chuckle.)
- MK: What *kine* movies you folks would see?
- LH: Regular movies.
- MK: English? Japanese?
- LH: English. English. Really unusual. The theater was so small yet. Inside get wooden seats.
- WN: Where was the theater? On the ocean side or the mountain side?
- LH: As you’re going to Wai‘anae it’s on the right side.

- WN: The right side. So the mountain side of the street.
- MK: Mountain side yeah? Okay. So, you had stores and the theater, anything else?
- LH: We had barbershop. We had one taxi driver, but it cost money eh—for ride taxi for go anyplace. So he wasn't doing so well. They called it *Komai* Yamasaki. Us, *Ōkii* Yamasaki. (Laughs)
- MK: Oh, *Ōkii* Yamasaki and *Komai* Yamasaki. Any relation?
- LH: No.
- MK: No?
- LH: No relation.
- MK: No relation. Oh. So then you have barbershop, you have stores, theater, how about temples or churches?
- LH: Church. Yeah. And Japanese[-language] school. We had to go. We always had to go Japanese school.
- MK: So you had your grandfather and your father, and your father married your mother who came from Japan. And so, where did you folks live?
- LH: Behind the store. We had a house, and we had attached to the house was kitchen and dining room. Attached to the kitchen and dining room was where you washed clothes. We used to wash clothes over there. But my mother, she never do nothing. She had all maids do it for her. For cook and any *kine*. The maid would do it for her.
- MK: In that house—when you were a kid, who lived in that house?
- LH: We all did.
- MK: So, mother, father? And how many brothers and sisters in the house?
- LH: One brother and three sisters. With me, four.
- MK: How about grandfather, grandmother?
- LH: No, they were all in Japan.
- MK: Oh, they went back to Japan?
- LH: Japan.
- MK: Grandfather and grandmother?
- LH: He went back to Hiroshima and he bought the biggest house in Hiroshima. *Kane mochi datta*.
- MK: He was a rich man.
- LH: *Totemo*, *Taiheiyō Ginkō ni*, plenty money *ga atta sou*. But I don't know how much.
- MK: So your grandparents had a lot of money in Pacific Bank? *Taiheiyō Ginkō*.
- LH: Mm-hmm [yes].

- MK: So they still kept funds in Hawai‘i? They still kept some money in Hawai‘i.
- LH: Like I said, he was filthy rich.
- MK: Hiroe—your oldest sister . . .
- LH: She was in Japan. Was raised in Japan. And right before the war, she came home.
- MK: Oh, okay. How about Morris [LH’s brother]?
- LH: Morris was home with us.
- MK: And then Wilma [LH’s sister], home with you folks?
- LH: Mm-hmm [yes].
- MK: So only Hiroe, she was . . .
- LH: In Japan.
- MK: . . . taken to Japan and raised there.
- LH: You know on December 7, we were at home. She [Hiroe] said, “Oh, Japan plane passing over.”
- So, we laughed at her, we say, “Everything you see is Japan, Japan.” We laughed.
- MK: Oh my goodness. And so, in your family before the war started, all five children were living in Hawai‘i.
- LH: Yeah. Because my sister came home.
- MK: She came home. Did she go to school in Hawai‘i?
- LH: No, she was adult already.
- MK: You know, the Yamasaki family was *kane mochi*, had business, yeah? In the community of Wai‘anae, like you were saying your grandfather—he would be consulted for hiring. How about your father? How active or how well known was he in the community?
- LH: He was well known. Everybody liked him.
- MK: What did he do? Did he hold office in organizations . . .
- LH: No.
- MK: . . . or active in . . .
- LH: He had a store and he used to go and take *chūmontori ni iku no ne*.
- MK: Go take orders [for purchases].
- LH: Take orders.
- MK: So people knew him?
- LH: Yeah, they liked him, because my father was a kind man. (My parents never locked the main house door. Sometime the neighbors would come and wake up my father saying someone in their house is sick so take him to the hospital in Waipahu.)

- MK: I know one time when we came here, you were telling us that your father also did things with the Japanese consulate?
- LH: Oh, he was a member of the Japanese consulate, because he donated money. *Chitto demo*, he used to send because my grandfather was a member. So he just continued. So December 7 *sugu ni kita yo*.
- MK: They came to take him away—your father. I was wondering, around your home, your neighborhood, what kind of people did you folks know?
- LH: They were all nice people. Do you know that when we go get clams, my father has to go in the truck. We all go in the truck, and he'd bring home bags and bags of clam. Do you know that people know that we went to get clams, they were waiting for us at our house? (MK and WN laugh.) They want yeah.
- MK: Where did you folks get the clams from those days?
- LH: Honouliuli.
- WN: What do you mean, 'Ewa side?
- LH: Yeah, 'Ewa side. He had to bring home bags of them. *Ippai no ippai* yeah. Bring home.
- MK: Those days was it mostly Japanese people or all kinds of?
- LH: Japanese people mostly.
- MK: Mostly Japanese people?
- LH: But, some we know. Some we know other, different nationalities.
- MK: Like you mentioned, your family would go get clams. What other things you folks used to do as a family?
- LH: What did we do? (Pause) (Laughs)
- MK: Especially since your father had one truck. He could take you folks places.
- LH: December 7, when they came to get him, we had a car too. We had a truck and a car. My brother took the car and was going to Honolulu, because he goes to Honolulu to go to school. When he was going to Honolulu, December 7 attack had attacked. He went and he didn't know what was going on.
- MK: You mentioned like, where did your brother and sisters go to school?
- LH: My brother was going to McKinley High School, but he was going to our relatives' house and he stayed there and go school, and weekends he'd come home.
- MK: Your other sisters like Wilma, Cynthia. They were going school Wai'anāe side?
- LH: In Wai'anāe.
- MK: Okay. You folks all went Japanese[-language] school too?
- LH: Mm-hmm [yes].
- MK: Where did you go Japanese school?
- LH: In town.

- MK: Oh, in Wai‘anae side?
- LH: In Wai‘anae town.
- MK: Was the school connected with a temple or it’s just. . . .
- LH: Yeah, temple.
- MK: It was connected with the temple?
- LH: Mm-hmm [yes].
- MK: Would you remember the name of the Japanese school you went?
- LH: Wai‘anae Hongwanji.
- MK: Wai‘anae Hongwanji Japanese school. So, was your family a member of the Hongwanji?
- LH: Yeah. My dad donated plenty money to them. Every New Year’s they would come our house. Christmas my father would buy for us toys. When they come in New Year’s to have dinner with us, we have to give the toys that we had for Christmas to them.
- (Laughter)
- Because they had nine children.
- MK: You mean the minister’s family?
- LH: They had nine children.
- WN: How did you feel about giving your toys to somebody else?
- LH: We didn’t think anything of it. Okay, we give. We give. We get something else. My dad would give us something else.
- MK: Then New Year’s, who would come to your house? The *bon-san* would come?
- LH: *Bon-san*.
- MK: Who else would come? *Shōgatsu*.
- LH: Only them. *Shōgatsu*.
- MK: How about family?
- LH: No.
- MK: Did you folks go?
- LH: No.
- MK: You folks . . .
- LH: Stayed home.
- MK: Stayed home. How about in those days, like *Bon* dance or. . . .
- LH: Oh yeah. You know, we used to have *Bon* dance. My relative—the one that my brother goes to stay . . .

MK: In town.

LH: . . . in town would come. But my father has to go outside and catch all the frog—toad—that was around the house, because the lady is scared. . . .

MK: Of the toads?

LH: Of the toads.

(Laughter)

MK: She would come for *Bon* dance?

LH: Yeah. They would come. There was the lady and the mother. The lady and the grandma would come, and the husband. The husband come every time for fishing. He likes Wai‘anae fishing. He says, “*Obake ga oru yo.*” You know what’s *obake*?

MK: A ghost. Yeah. (LH laughs.) So your father would go fishing with the [relative].

LH: No, he goes himself.

MK: He goes by himself? Oh.

LH: You know, Wai‘anae get *maruko yama*. You know *maruko yama*?

MK: *Maruko yama*. The mountain?

LH: Yeah, it’s a mountain but out in the ocean. He says, “*Obake ga oru.*”

MK: But he would go out fishing over there anyway?

LH: Mm-hmm [yes]. Because he liked the over there fishing. He always catch something over there. Those days my mother wants to eat (pause) what do you call that? *Nani are*?

MK: Was it some kind of fish?

LH: Yeah. Lobster.

MK: Lobster.

LH: Lobster yeah. My father goes to where get lobster. She wants ‘*ōpae*. He raises ‘*ōpae* in Wai‘anae, out by the sandy beach place. They get river over there, so he would reach in. He would go get for her. The ‘*ōpae*.

WN: How did he raise ‘*ōpae*? He had like an enclosure?

LH: No. Had the river. Had a small river.

WN: Leading into the ocean?

LH: Yeah.

MK: So he would kind of raise ‘*ōpae* over there?

LH: Nobody go because they no more car. So he goes and go get for her the ‘*ōpae*.

MK: How about things like sea cucumber or. . . .

LH: No. Wai‘anae no more.

MK: No more? So fish, *‘ōpae*.

WN: Lobster.

MK and LH: Lobster.

MK: How about *tako*?

LH: Yeah, *tako* too. He goes and gets whatever my mother wants. He goes and get.

MK: How about vegetables and things? Did you folks raise vegetables?

LH: No. People would pay us with vegetables instead of money (laughs). So, we had a lot of vegetables.

MK: How about like chicken, or beef, or pork? Where did you folks get it from?

LH: I don't really know but, chicken—my father used to raise chickens.

MK: He raised?

LH: We had a big property you know. Big property. The house, the kitchen and the dining room. To wash clothes, and the bathtub, the enclosure yeah?

MK: And the store too yeah?

LH: Yeah, and the store. So, when December 7, my father was interned. Was pulled in. There was a family by the ocean, by the beach, that lived. Husband and wife. The daughter lived in Honolulu. They came to get the man too, but later on this happened. So Mr. and Mrs. Nakahara. My mother gave her a room behind the store. We had rooms over there. Gave her a room. I want to keep her company until she got used to the place.

MK: December 7, you said your older sister looked up and she said there are these Japan planes. What else do you remember about that day?

LH: About that day? They came to pick up my father.

MK: Tell us what happened. Who came?

LH: The FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] came with big truckload of army soldiers and the soldiers had machine guns, rifles. The FBI came and picked up my dad. My father said, "I'm going inside. Go change clothes."

"No no! No! You cannot go inside."

"I need a jacket."

"Tell your wife to go get it for you."

When my mother went to get the jacket to them, they had to inspect it before they gave it to my father. Scary it was, you know.

WN: Where were you at that time? Were you in the house?

LH: Yeah, I was watching.

MK: Your father was nisei yeah?

LH: So I'm sansei you know.

- MK: Yeah. And your father was educated. . . .
- LH: In Hawai'i. He went to Mid-Pacific Institute. He went to 'Iolani School. *Kane mochi datta no.*
- MK: Was your father saying anything to these FBI or military?
- LH: No. We didn't know where he went. We didn't know what happened to him. We found out he was in Sand Island [Detention Center]. A few weeks later, we were allowed to go visit him. Since I was his pet, my mother took me and my youngest sister. So the three of us went, but to go there we had to go with a car to the pier. This (neighbor's boy called Ebone Orita) drove the car, because my brother had to stay home and watch the store. We went and my neighbor (Orita) took us go. We went to see my dad. My dad was coming up, my mother and us we're all crying and coming out. It was sad. Sad that we had to leave him behind.
- MK: How did you folks find out where he was taken?
- LH: They called. They told us. Oh, we had the only phone in Wai'anae.
- MK: You know, when the men came to take your father, how was your mom? How was she taking it?
- LH: She didn't know what was going on. She was more worried about my brother because he would be just around 'Aiea. We need to help him. Right across Pearl Harbor. She was worried about him too.
- MK: So the relative that he stayed with lived in 'Aiea? Or just that he would be around there now.
- LH: No, he was going. He was going there.
- MK: Because he was driving.
- LH: He said machine gun came and you know the cars that was all in line to go to Honolulu all stopped to watch it. They would shoot right across. Machine guns.
- MK: So when he was driving by 'Aiea. Oh my goodness. You mentioned that this other family—Nakahara—later on the husband was pulled in. What other people in the Wai'anae area pulled in?
- LH: The *bon-san*.
- MK: The *bon-san*?
- LH: I don't remember anybody else. But Nakaharas, my mother gave her a room behind the store. We had about four rooms behind the store. Had toilet there and had kitchen. So my mother made her stay over there, and she tell me, "You go and stay with her a little while."
- MK: That was nice of your family to help her out.
- LH: Yeah. My mother was nice. She was real *okusan* though. (Laughs)
- MK: She would just speak Japanese?
- LH: Mm-hmm [yes]. She would be in the store, just real *okusan*. And she would let me wear panty. Store-bought panty. I tell her I don't want that. I want homemade *kine*. You know those? The rice bag used to come in printed rice bags. The families, they used to make panties for the girls with that. You remember that?

- MK: Yeah, I've heard about it. (LH laughs.) You wanted that kind?
- LH: Yeah.
- MK: Not the store-bought one?
- LH: No. (LH and MK laugh.)
- MK: My goodness. Now the war comes and your father's taken away. How did other people in Wai'anae react? Did they. . . .
- LH: All *kine* rumors. They said, "Honouliuli get one camp over there. Prisoner-of-war over there. Your father stay over there." We wondered how come over there.
- MK: So later on you heard.
- LH: Later on we found out he was in Sand Island.
- MK: Because your father was taken, did people still come to the store?
- LH: Oh yeah.
- MK: They still came to buy?
- LH: But when my mom visited him, he said he wants to go relocation camp on the Mainland. Because since he's American citizen, they said they're going to take him go on the boat and take him to the Mainland. We went on the *Lurline* you know.
- MK: So it's when your mother—one of the times she went to visit him that he told her that?
- LH: He said, "Go close the store. Then we all go. Everyone of us go. If not, I don't want to go."
- MK: Your older sister Hiroe, she was already kind of old right? She was born 1918, so she's twenty-two yeah at least.
- LH: Mm-hmm [yes].
- MK: And then Morris, born in 1920, so he's about twenty, twenty-one. How did they take it, going to the Mainland?
- LH: My father was the boss.
- MK: When you heard from your mother that you folks are all going to go, how did you feel?
- LH: (Laughs) Nothing. I didn't feel anything. In fact, I didn't have no say. [They said,] "We're going."
"Okay."
- MK: So your father told your mother, "Sell the store." How did that go?
- LH: She had to sell in like two weeks. Nobody come by. Even sale. She tell me, "Free." She said that. "Free" *yuttara* they came like hogs to come get the store.
- MK: So even when she made the items cheaper, they didn't come?
- LH: They know we had to get rid of them. Smart you know, the poor people.

- MK: Before that—before she sold the store—the business was still going on?
- LH: Yeah.
- MK: It was okay?
- LH: My uncle in Na‘ālehu said he wanted to come and take over when he heard that we were going to the Mainland, but he said he was afraid that they might get him too. Everything is: If they come.
- MK: After the war started, but before you folks went to the Mainland, how was your life? Still going to school?
- LH: Yeah. Japanese[-language] school. English school.
- MK: But no more Japanese school huh?
- LH: Had. After the war started, no more.
- MK: Yeah. No more. But you were going [until the war started].
- LH: Because the *bon-san* was picked up too. Later on we found out.
- MK: You went to Wai‘anae School. What do you remember about going to Wai‘anae School?
- LH: Since my father was a wealthy man, they treated me good.
- (Laughter)
- They treated me good you know. I make leis. I’m handy with my hands. I make leis. I get not first prize, but I guess second prize in something. But all that donated by my dad.
- MK: So he would help the school a lot?
- LH: Mm-hmm [yes].
- MK: Finally, when you folks went to the Mainland, you’re about seventh grade yeah?
- LH: Yeah. Twelve years old. But thirteen when we went—I’m March born, so when I was thirteen years old we went.
- MK: Oh, okay. What do you remember about leaving Wai‘anae? Who took you folks from Wai‘anae to town?
- LH: We went with our own car.
- MK: You went with your own car from Wai‘anae to town?
- LH: To my father’s cousin’s house.
- MK: So you went Honolulu in your own car. Then where did you folks go?
- LH: We stayed with one of the cousins at Kaka‘ako. We had to stay over there. *Itta yo*.
- MK: From there you went to the immigration station?
- LH: Yeah. When they call they said we have to go. We have to go to immigration station. We stayed over there, like overnight or something.

- MK: Then from immigration station. . . .
- LH: We went to ride the boat. The ship. It was the *Lurline*.
- MK: How were you folks on that big ship?
- LH: I was seasick. I was seasick all the way. My youngest sister and my father was (pause) they don't think nothing of it. The only thing I can eat and hold down was grapes.
- MK: But your younger sister, she was fine? Father was fine?
- LH: Mm-hmm [yes].
- MK: That time, already you didn't see your father long time because he was at Sand Island. How did your father look when you first saw him?
- LH: He looked good.
- MK: He looked good?
- LH: He made shell leis, shell pins. They find shell on the floor, on the ground. And *kukui* nut.
- MK: They made that while they were at Sand Island?
- LH: Sand Island.
- MK: So, from the time you were at the immigration station you were together with your father? When did you get to be together with your father?
- LH: From the time that they told us we got to go.
- MK: So, from the immigration station time or before that you folks were together with your father?
- LH: No.
- MK: It was from the time you folks went on the ship?
- LH: Uh-huh [yes].
- MK: So, how about your mom? How was she on that?
- LH: She was sick too.
- MK: She was sick too? (MK and LH chuckle.)
- LH: Everybody was sick. Only my dad and my youngest sister [were not sick].
- MK: You know you folks were going Mainland, and how well-prepared were you folks for Mainland?
- LH: We were well-prepared because my mom made for us long pants, because winter. Corduroy pants. She bought for us jacket and when we went on the Mainland, we got all the Sears Roebuck. Sears Roebuck and all *da kine* we ordered. Everybody was given three dollars for staying in the camp. But three dollars is nothing. *Nandemo kawaren*.
- MK: So at least clothes you folks had ordered from the catalog.
- LH: Yeah. We were well-prepared.

- MK: When you got---how about the train ride? After you . . .
- LH: We rode the train. We reached San Francisco and we rode the train. To go to Arkansas took us long time too. About five days. Five days, four nights. When we come to a town, they tell us, "Pull your shades down," because *abunai* you know. So we were doing that. They wanted to—what you call?
- MK: So they tell you to pull the shades down.
- LH: When we pull them up, when you look, you see the mountains. You see the mountains. We used to see that.
- MK: What did you think?
- LH: I was thirteen years old only. I didn't think nothing. In fact, it was exciting. (Laughs)
- MK: By that time, did you make friends with any of the other kids your age?
- LH: No, not really. Not really. After we reached camp, there were three blocks of Hawai'i people: 38, 39, and Block 40.
- MK: Which block were you folks assigned?
- LH: Thirty-nine.
- MK: What do you remember about your block? Block 39.
- LH: We used to wear *geta*, because between blocks was a mountain-like. They made it so water would drip down.
- MK: Oh, I see. Yeah. So you had to wear *geta*.
- LH: So we used to wear *geta*.
- MK: Who were some of the people in Block 39? The ones that you remember.
- LH: Had the wives. The husband was in concentration camp because they were schoolteachers or *bon-san* you know. My dad used to take good care of them. No more lumber yeah. No more . . .
- MK: Firewood.
- LH: Firewood. So my father used to get for them firewoods. They were lucky because we were nearby.
- MK: Sometimes we hear that the mothers and fathers, they found work in the camps. How about your mother and father?
- LH: They never went to work.
- MK: They didn't go work in the mess hall or go work at the hospital or anything? No? How about like Morris and Hiroe?
- LH: Hiroe got married to Morikuni—our neighbor. He was a Japan-born, Japan *sodachi*.
- MK: Oh, she got married in camp?
- LH: In camp. And she had a baby in camp. One girl. One daughter.

- MK: So they lived in a separate . . .
- LH: Yeah, after she got married, they lived separate I guess.
- MK: How about Morris? Morris was. . . .
- LH: Morris went to—what do you call that?
- MK: Did he go 442[nd Regimental Combat Team]?
- LH: No, not 442.
- MK: Did he go intelligence service?
- LH: Intelligence.
- MK: Translating? Interpretation?
- LH: Mm-hmm [yes].
- MK: MIS. Military Intelligence [Service]. So he joined the military then.
- LH: And Wilma *wen* move to Chicago.
- MK: So, I know you told us that you folks lived Jerome one and a half years. After that, the family went to Amache [Relocation Center].
- LH: Amache, Colorado.
- MK: Did Morris and Hiroe go to Amache?
- LH: No, Hiroe went to Gila, Arizona.
- MK: Gila. And Morris?
- LH: He was in the service.
- MK: How about Wilma?
- LH: Wilma moved to Chicago.
- MK: Okay. Okay, I see.
- WN: What did Wilma do in Chicago?
- LH: I don't know.
- WN: She worked though?
- LH: Yeah. I told her, "I want to come to Chicago."
She tell me "No."
- MK: Little bit young yet yeah. Little bit young.
- LH: It's a humbug.
- MK: You know, since you were young in Jerome—you were twelve, thirteen . . .

- LH: Thirteen, fourteen.
- MK: What did you do in Jerome? What did you do?
- LH: I went to school.
- MK: What was that school like?
- LH: Hard to get grades. All *Nihonjin* yeah. They smart you know, the *Nihonjin*. Hard to get grades.
- MK: Harder than Wai‘anae?
- LH: Yeah.
- MK: Some Hawai‘i people—they tell us when they went to Jerome, Hawai‘i people talk a little bit different from Mainland Japanese yeah.
- LH: We used to call them *kotonks*. The Mainland Japanese. (MK and LH laugh.)
- MK: Was it real different with them?
- LH: Different. They think us Mexicans.
- MK: Huh?
- LH: They think us Mexicans.
- WN: The *kotonks*?
- LH: Yeah.
- WN: The *kotonks* thought you folks were Mexican? How come?
- LH: They said the way we talk yeah. (WN laughs.)
- WN: Did you folks get along?
- LH: Not really. Not really.
- MK: Then your teachers in school, who were the teachers?
- LH: *Haole*, but most of them were retired *kine* people. They came back to teach us. But to get good grades, one teacher I remember, “Nobody gets an A from my class. Nobody’s perfect.” She won’t give no A’s. A-minus the highest.
- MK: So you went school. How about other activities? Like some people say, we did baton twirling or we did this or that. What did you do?
- LH: I didn’t do anything really. Us crossing the empty lot—there was empty lot between Block 40 and 39. I was crossing over there, and then when I started to cross, a snake came right across me. It went up like that and it look at me. I froze. *Kimochi ga warui no. Hebi ga oru ne*. Then the snake went away. I came home and told my mother. She says, “You see this hole here? I get that hole so snake no like me.” I don’t believe that’s true.
- MK: That’s what she said?
- LH: I don’t believe that’s true.

- WN: Something on her face?
- LH: No, over here. Try look. I get one hole.
- WN: On the ear?
- MK: You have a little hole.
- LH: I have a hole here.
- WN: On your ear?
- LH: Yeah.
- MK: Well that's good then that the *hebi* didn't like you.
- LH: Yeah, but, that's what she said but I don't know how true it is.
- MK: How come you were walking over there? You were going to go visit?
- LH: We have to go cross the empty lot to go home.
- MK: Oh I see.
- LH: In the evening. Afternoon, about 3 o'clock off school. Scary you know, when you see one *hebi* cross. . . .
- MK: Crossing your path.
- LH: I don't know if it was dangerous kind or venomous kind or what.
- MK: Some people told us about chiggers.
- LH: Oh you walk—you play inside the bushes, you get chigger bites.
- MK: Did you get?
- LH: No. Because we don't play in the bushes.
- MK: What did you folks—what did you do for fun then?
- LH: We went dancing. We had dances.
- WN: Where were the dances?
- LH: Every block had a hall in the back.
- MK: That was at Jerome?
- LH: Amache had one too.
- MK: Your mom and dad, you would see them at Jerome. You folks living together. How do you think they were managing?
- LH: She got sick. She got sick and she had to have hysterectomy done. They came to operate her. Since it was a rare operation, they came and doctors from nearby towns all came to watch the performance of the operation. Blood transfusion, person-to-person kind. Not the kind that somebody would donate blood, and so got to test the blood first to see what

- kind of blood is my mother. There were plenty *kibeis*. You know *kibeis*? They came to donate.
- MK: They came to help out? To donate blood. How long did your mom have to be in the hospital?
- LH: I don't know. Long time though. Most of her time in Jerome.
- MK: So who took care of you folks? You were still kind of . . .
- LH: Well, my father was home. We went to eat in the mess hall. I didn't have to cook. All I did was sweep the bedroom. [Dust] the *tana*.
- MK: So your mom was in the hospital kind of long time when you folks were in Jerome.
- LH: One of my neighbors used to go in the forest and bring home *kikurage*. You know what is *kikurage*?
- MK: Oh, the fungus. You can eat it yeah?
- LH: Yeah, yeah. Elephant fungi they called it, *kikurage*.
- MK: How do you cook it though?
- LH: Well, my mom was home at that time when the guy brought home, so she made *namasu*. My father would go to the store and get *namasu*. They were selling watermelon in the—what do you call?—store. They were selling like one dollar, one. To us it's cheap. But the *kotonks* thought no buy. "No buy now. Going to come down cheaper."
- First we bought. Then, we were waiting to come down. They were selling it for ten cents, one.
- MK: Who was growing the watermelon?
- LH: The nearby farmers.
- MK: They brought it in. It was brought in.
- LH: Because, too much you had to go to the market. So they could sell to the relocation camps. Ten cents, one.
- MK: I heard that sometimes the people in the camp would plant stuff. How about your father?
- LH: No.
- MK: He didn't plant?
- LH: They used to come in the empty lot and they used to plant seeds. *Daikon* seeds like that.
- MK: Oh, *daikon*. Then when it came to food, you folks would go mess hall to eat.
- LH: We used to eat horsemeat you know. (Laughs) They used to serve us horsemeat. I learned to eat a lot of food, because if you don't eat, you go hungry.
- MK: What else did you learn to eat? Horsemeat?
- LH: I learned to eat---we had horsemeat, we had fish but different *kine* fish, not Hawai'i *kine* fish.

- MK: How about lamb?
- LH: No, no luxury. No luxury food.
- MK: So horsemeat, and American style?
- LH: Yeah.
- MK: How was the food cooked?
- LH: American style.
- MK: All American style. Sometimes people tell us they would somehow get some rice and they would . . .
- LH: We had rice.
- MK: You had rice. Sometimes the mothers would make *musubi*. How about your mom?
- LH: My mom was in the hospital most of the time. Most of the time she was in the hospital, so. . . .
- MK: She must have been pretty bad then if she had to stay in the hospital long time.
- LH: Long time she stayed. We used to go visit her. Nearby it was, the hospital.
- WN: Were the doctors Japanese or were they *haole*? They're Japanese—nurses and the doctors.
- LH: Doctors was Japanese, but the doctors that came to see the operation was different nationalities. Had black doctors and had *haole* doctors.
- MK: They came to watch.
- WN: Do you remember who the Japanese doctors were?
- LH: No. I was so—I care less who the doctors were.
- MK: You just wanted Mom to get well yeah? (MK and LH chuckle.) So all that time, if your father didn't work—he didn't go work someplace in the camp—what was he doing?
- LH: Nothing.
- MK: Nothing?
- LH: He was taking care of the neighboring ladies that the husband wasn't staying with us. They were in the concentration camp. So he would get lumber for them, charcoal for them.
- MK: So he had things to do then. Then, kind of a big decision for a son to join the service yeah. You remember any conversation or talking between your father and your brother?
- LH: No. All I know is he's going to join the army and they going to intelligence school. By that time, Japanese was under martial law. Was it martial law?
- MK: You mean in Hawai'i we were under martial law?
- LH: No.

- MK: Oh, Japan later on was under occupation.
- LH: Yeah.
- MK: How come your family went Amache and didn't go like Gila River like your sister went?
- LH: No. You see, Gila River is a hot place yeah. Amache Camp was a nice place. Since she was not healthy, was allowed to go to Amache. The only thing wrong with Amache was we had dust storms. Oh, the dust storms was terrible.
- MK: How bad was it?
- LH: It was so bad we had to—coming home from school—get the dust off. We have to put kerchief around our face like this. Then come home.
- MK: You have to get all covered up.
- LH: Otherwise, oh!
- MK: But the barracks are pretty sealed up so that the dust wouldn't come inside or . . .
- LH: Mm-hmm [yes].
- MK: . . . it was okay in the house?
- LH: In the house it was okay.
- MK: Then your mother, you were saying she wasn't that well. How bad was she?
- LH: She was okay when we went to Amache.
- MK: She was okay. When you look back and you compare Jerome and Amache, what do you think?
- LH: Jerome, we had Hawai'i people. Amache we were among *kotonks*. So, I missed Jerome. (Laughs) I told you the first snow we had in Jerome, the Hawai'i people all stayed home. . .
- (Laughter)
- . . . to play in the snow.
- MK: But Amache, not that many Hawai'i people?
- LH: Our block it was only us.
- MK: So it's different. How was school at Amache? You still had to go school. How did it compare?
- LH: Same thing.
- MK: Getting grades hard? Still hard.
- LH: Then in Amache I went to work after school. That was already coming home from *da kine* [camp]. I went to work statistics department.
- MK: In the camp?
- LH: In the camp.

MK: That was still while you were going to school?

LH: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: So when did you go work? After school?

LH: After school and summertime.

MK: How much did you get paid?

LH: Oh, cheap. (Chuckles)

But the boss was happy because Japanese workers were diligent workers. So they were really happy.

MK: What was your work in that statistics department?

LH: People going in and out of Hawai‘i—off of camp.

MK: You keep track?

LH: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: Did you like that job?

LH: Yeah. Easy.

MK: How about your dad? At Amache did he do any work?

LH: No. I told you—my dad, life of luxury.

(Laughter)

MK: When the war ended, how did you folks feel? You folks are still in camp when the war ended?

LH: When the war ended, we were in camp. Everybody was going out already. Some people didn't want to go back to California because the Mexicans was taking over. They were really cruel. Because they take over. People go come home, they take over. The *haoles* had to take care of the Japanese, because *haoles* no like the Mexicans.

MK: So when the war ended, what happened to your family?

LH: We had to move out of the camp. From Amache, we went to Seattle. While we were in Seattle, from there we came home, but we had to get shots because Hawai‘i was different—what do you call that?

MK: Because we're a territory?

LH: Yeah, territory. So they had to give us shots for go home. Plenty you know. All *kine* shots. I remember it was October 31st, they put us in housing. The kids go come trick or treat. So my father said, "What is this?" Then he remembered, "Oh it's Halloween." We no more nothing to give, so he go give coins that he had. He closed the lights and after that we didn't go out, but my father gave them the coins. They was happy you know.

(Laughter)

MK: This was in Seattle? Oh my goodness.

LH: Like I told you, one kid called me “Jap,” eh? So I grab him by the neck and I say, “Say it again.” (Laughs)

“Oh sorry. Sorry! Sorry ma’am!”

WN: This was in Seattle?

LH: They call me “Jap,” get me mad you know.

MK: Wow, so how long did you folks stay in Seattle?

LH: Oh, about a month I think.

MK: About a month?

LH: We came back on the *Yarmouth*.

MK: *Yarmouth*. When you folks arrived in Hawai‘i, where’d you guys go? Where did you folks go? You come back to Hawai‘i, you went home to Wai‘anae or what did you do?

LH: No, no. My dad didn’t want to go back to Wai‘anae. So, we stayed with my father’s cousin on Dole Street. Then my dad and my mom bought a house on Sunset Avenue, 797 Sunset Avenue. (Chuckles)

MK: That’s Kaimukī?

LH: Kaimukī.

MK: You know, how did he manage to have the money to buy a house?

LH: He had some money in an American bank—Bank of Hawai‘i, and most of the money in the Pacific Bank. But that one, the American [government] confiscate that.

MK: The Pacific Bank one they took. But he had enough in the Hawaiian bank.

LH: I told you the Yamasakis were *kane mochi* yeah.

MK: Did your dad go out to work?

LH: Yeah, he went to work. He went to work Wai‘anae friend store. He went to work at Ming’s.

MK: What did he do at Ming’s?

LH: I don’t know.

MK: That’s a jewelry shop huh?

LH: Yeah. I don’t know what he did but he went to work there. He was talented you know, my dad.

MK: You mentioned he worked at a furniture store? Where was that?

LH: That was Wai‘anae. The boss was from Wai‘anae, and he married a lady older than him, but he hired my dad because my dad used to be good to him before. So, my dad worked for him.

WN: But the furniture store was where?

- LH: Kaimukī.
- WN: Kaimukī.
- MK: Kaimukī. And then, how about your mom?
- LH: My mom?
- MK: Yeah.
- LH: She didn't work. And then she went to work—what do you call that?
- MK: She went to work someplace?
- LH: She went to work. . . .
- WN: What *kine* work did she do?
- MK: Did she work store or. . . .
- LH: No, not store.
- MK: But she did go out.
- LH: To work.
- MK: Then you went school? What school did you go to?
- LH: I was going to McKinley [High School].
- MK: What year did you graduate?
- LH: [Nineteen] forty-seven.
- MK: [Nineteen] forty-seven? After that where did you go?
- LH: After that I went to work for appliance store. That's where I met my husband. He was working for the wholesaler and I was working retail. We got along fine on the phone. Do you know, he go come see what I look like. (MK and WN laugh.)
- MK: That's so cute. So you met your husband and when did you folks get married?
- LH: Nineteen fifty.
- MK: Nineteen fifty.
- LH: And he died 1999.
- MK: In between, you folks had how many children?
- LH: Three. Two girls and one boy.
- MK: Even when you folks were married and had kids, you folks still worked?
- LH: Yeah.
- MK: Where did you work?

- LH: I worked Honolulu Roofing [Company].
- MK: For a long time?
- LH: Mm-hmm [yes]. Long time. Thirty-(four) years. After that I went to work Castle & Cooke, [Ltd.]. I didn't like it. There was one girl who picked on me. One of the supervisors. She was rude to me, so I told my husband I'm going to quit over there. But Castle & Cooke was good, but because of her I didn't want to stay there.
- MK: So you've been retired long time then? When you look back on your life and being interned, well, your father being pulled in and your family going to Jerome and Amache, when you look back, what do you think? What comes to your mind about those days?
- LH: I feel bitter about it. I feel real sad because gee we could have had life of luxury, you know? And then, come to think of it, Wai'anae then, we used to know Hanabusa family. You know Colleen Hanabusa? Her family. She lives in town, but at that time she wasn't even born yet. I used to be friends with one of the Hanabusa boys. His name was Toru. But, he and I was good friend you know. Every time he go come my house, and we were good friends. But family sent him to Japan, because the family wanted one of the boys come home to Japan. So he went and he died in the war. Sad, no? I cried.
- MK: You folks were friends, yeah? For your family, you folks were very well off. Very well off in Wai'anae. So with the war, you lost. . . .
- LH: We lost—changed from riches to poor. Poverty.
- MK: How did your father and mother take all this?
- LH: They took it for, this is the life they had. I remember Christmas time we was living the Sunset Avenue house. My sister didn't have a Christmas tree. We didn't have a Christmas tree, so I said, "Cynthia, I going get for you a Christmas tree." So I went and got pine tree and then decorated. I said, "Here's your Christmas tree."
- MK: Did Morris and the sister that went to Chicago, did they come home too?
- LH: My sister—the one that went to Chicago—she didn't come home. She ended up with a Seattle boy. They called him "Mud," because his last name was Tsuchikawa. (MK and LH laugh.)
- MK: So she ended up living on the Mainland.
- LH: On the Mainland, in Seattle.
- MK: And Morris?
- LH: Morris came home. He went Japan yeah.
- MK: And then he came home after that.
- LH: But he married—they were staying at the Sunset Avenue house. Then my mother arranged a marriage. They had one girl.
- MK: Your mother and father, they lived all the way in Hawai'i?
- LH: Mm-hmm [yes].
- MK: What a story.
- LH: What a story yeah.

MK: Your family couldn't have imagined how life was going to turn out. Anyway, thank you for telling us your story.

WN: Thank you. It was good.

MK: You ever go out to Wai'anae to go. . .

LH: Yeah, when I go Wai'anae, I get homesick. But, Wai'anae is bad now.

MK: Is the building still standing? Your old store building?

LH: No, somebody bought the place and then since my father lost his what you call?

MK: Oh, the lease?

LH: The lease. Somebody else bought it after that.

END OF INTERVIEW

Unspoken Memories:

Oral Histories of Hawai‘i Internees at Jerome, Arkansas

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