

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Mabel Kawamura

Mabel Kawamura, eldest of six children, was born to Kazuto and Kimiyo Ikeda in 1926 in Hōlualoa, Kona, Hawai‘i. Both parents were born in Hawai‘i, but Kazuto was raised in Japan and Kimiyo, in Hawai‘i.

Kazuto Ikeda, a Japanese-language school teacher, also worked for the Japanese-language newspaper, *Hawai‘i Hochi*. He handled much of the letter-writing needs of Japanese residents.

Kimiyo Ikeda taught language classes and sewing classes. She and the children helped tend coffee lands.

The Ikedas lived in Keauhou, then later Kealakekua, Kona, Hawai‘i.

December 7, 1941 was an exceptionally traumatic day for the Ikedas, who were in Hilo for the cremation of a family member struck down by a hit-and-run driver the day before. As word of Pearl Harbor and of the arrests of prominent Japanese reached them, even the children of the Ikeda family were affected.

In April 1942, Kazuto Ikeda was removed from his home, incarcerated first at Kīlauea Military Camp, then at Sand Island Detention Center on O‘ahu. From there, he notified his family that he could be with family if they were all removed to a U.S. Mainland facility.

In December 1942, Kazuto Ikeda and family were transported to Jerome War Relocation Center in Arkansas. They remained there until the center’s closing in 1944. They were then moved to Heart Mountain War Relocation Center in Wyoming.

After about two months at Heart Mountain, Mabel was allowed to leave for Minneapolis, Minnesota where she studied to be a beautician.

The Ikeda family, released from Heart Mountain at war’s end, returned to their old residence and coffee lands in Kona.

Mabel also returned to the islands. She married Wallace Kawamura in 1949.

For many years, she owned and operated her own beauty salon on O‘ahu.

Mabel Kawamura has one daughter and two grandchildren.

Tape No. 57-25-1-13

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Mabel Kawamura (KA)

Honolulu, O‘ahu

January 30, 2013

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

MK: This is an interview with Mabel Kawamura. This is session one. Today’s date is January 30th, 2013. We’re in Honolulu, Hawai‘i. Warren Nishimoto and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto will be asking the questions.

So, Mrs. Kawamura, good morning.

KA: Good morning to you.

MK: Thank you for meeting with us today.

KA: Oh, my pleasure.

MK: First of all, we’ll ask an easy question. What year were you born?

KA: I was born in 1926.

MK: Where were you born?

KA: I was born in Hōlualoa, Kona, Hawai‘i.

MK: Okay. I’m going to ask you first about your mother. Kimiyo Ikeda. Tell me what you know about her background.

KA: She was the only daughter with three brothers. That’s about all I know.

MK: Do you know where she was born?

KA: She was born in Hilo.

MK: I was wondering, would you know what kind of work or situation her family was in?

KA: I don’t know.

MK: Okay. But your mother was a nisei then?

KA: She was so she spoke both languages.

MK: Just based on a guess, how much education do you think your mom had?

KA: Maybe about eighth grade.

MK: When it came to like the languages that she spoke, what languages did she communicate in?

- KA: Both languages. She was fluent in both languages.
- MK: Your father—what was your father's name?
- KA: My father's name was Kazuto Ikeda.
- MK: Where was he born?
- KA: He was born in Pa'auilo, Hawai'i.
- MK: In those early years when he was born and a little kid, what were his parents doing?
- KA: You know, I have no idea. I'm sorry.
- MK: When we were here last time, you showed us a photo of a hotel.
- KA: Yes.
- MK: Tell us about that.
- KA: I think after they left Pa'auilo. Kailua-Kona was the first place they came. What made them build this hotel? I have absolutely no idea, but my grandmother was very enterprising. She was smart. (Those were the days) when all the brides came from away and they needed a place to stay before going up to the farm. I think this was the reason why she started [the hotel].
- MK: Your grandfather, we know it's "T." Ikeda.
- KA: Tsuneishi.
- MK: Tsuneishi.
- KA: Tsuneishi Ikeda.
- MK: And your grandmother?
- KA: Kei. K-E-I.
- MK: Your grandparents were *issei*?
- KA: Yes, they both came from Hiroshima, Japan.
- MK: You were also mentioning that after they had the hotel, your grandparents had a store or something later on?
- KA: (No, they had a coffee farm in lower Hōlualoa. After several years, they purchased six acres of undeveloped land in upper Hōlualoa. They built a house and planted two and a half acres of coffee trees. They lived there the rest of their lives. This was a memorable place for us. My grandparents planted many fruit trees—peaches, grapes, loquat, pomegranate, plum, and many other trees. We had a great time there.)
- MK: I noticed that you said you were born in Hōlualoa.
- KA: Yes. I was born in Hōlualoa.
- MK: The last time we were here, you mentioned that your father, Kazuto Ikeda, was born in Pa'auilo.
- KA: Yes.

- MK: But when he was very young, he was taken to Japan.
- KA: Japan.
- MK: Tell us that story.
- KA: Yes. According to what I heard through the family, my grandmother wanted him to have an education. At that time, she felt that he had no chance here. He must have been around six years old when they took him back to Japan and left him with her mother.
- MK: What have you heard from your father about the life he had in Japan?
- KA: You know, my father didn't say much. So, I have no idea, but he was appreciative of his education.
- MK: Having been raised in Japan, six years old till probably young adulthood, how was his English?
- KA: He learned English after he came back, and so he didn't speak a lot of English, but he could write. The letters that he sent from internment camp were surprisingly good. I know he didn't have somebody else write it for him, because it was written exactly the way he thinks (laughs), so it was his writing.
- MK: In your father's family, you have his father.
- KA: Yes.
- MK: Mother.
- KA: Yes.
- MK: Himself.
- KA: Yes.
- MK: Were there other siblings?
- KA: Yes, there was a sister below him. She got her education here. She died when she was in [Territorial] Normal [and Training] School. That's all I remember.
- WN: So your auntie—this sister—she must have been very different from your father in terms of language ability and. . . .
- KA: I would think so.
- WN: She was born and raised in the islands.
- KA: I'm sure.
- MK: You were saying that your father returned to Hawai'i. Probably learned English when he came back.
- KA: Yes.
- MK: What have you heard about his early life in Hawai'i? When he came back, anything?
- KA: No. I have absolutely no idea.
- MK: Eventually Kazuto, your father, married your mom, Kimi. . . .

KA: Kimiyo.

MK: Kimiyo. What have you heard about their courtship and marriage, if anything, maybe from your mom or anybody else?

KA: You know, I absolutely don't know but I'm sure it was a *miai*.

MK: Arranged.

KA: Arranged marriage. Yes.

MK: Most likely?

KA: Yes. I'm sure.

MK: You were born in 1926 and if you can just kind of concentrate on the time between your birth, [19]26 and [19]41, we kind of want to know the places you lived at. First you were at Hōlualoa.

KA: Yes.

MK: Then. . . .

KA: Well, all I can remember is being in Keauhou. I don't remember ever being in Hōlualoa except that was my grandmother's house, and I can't remember ever living in her house, except weekend visits. All I remember was in Keauhou. I went to Keauhou Elementary School until I was in the eighth grade.

MK: When you think about living in Keauhou, try and describe for us what your home looked like in Keauhou.

KA: Those days we thought it looked pretty nice. (Laughs) My father altered that house several times, so it fitted our family. It was a place where we had a lot of visitors. Because my father worked for *Hawai'i Hochi*, there were lots of visitors from Honolulu (and Hilo). Sometimes they stayed with us overnight. When people came we always got to eat chicken (laughs). It was fun to have visitors, and we had them quite often I remember.

MK: You mentioned chicken. So, were you folks kind of keeping chickens or how did you folks get the chickens?

KA: (Chuckles) My parents always felt that we should have chores. So, my father started with a few chicks and when they grew up, he made a chicken coop for us. Then we had another hundred, so he had to make another chicken coop. At one time we had about five hundred chickens. As they grew we'd sell some, and eat some. The rooster was the first one we ate. Since the hens laid eggs they were useful. When (the roosters) started to crow, it was time to kill them off because they would eat too much food. It'd be expensive. Because they were young, you just skin it, soak it in *satōjōyu* teriyaki sauce, and then grill it outside. That was the best. (MK and WN laugh.) And (on special occasions) we'd fry it (in butter). (That was so good.) (Chuckles)

(Taping interrupted by ringing phone, then taping resumes.)

MK: Okay. We were just talking about your home and your father having all these chicken coops and the chicken being served up as *gochisō* to visitors who would come. I was also wondering, you had chicken, were there other things like vegetables being grown or other livestock?

KA: At one time we had two little pigs, but that didn't last too long. Everybody grew their own vegetables. We all shared.

- MK: You mentioned having a neighbor who would share vegetables with you. Tell us about your neighborhood. We were just talking about some of the families that were near you folks.
- KA: Yes, Mr. Yoshida loved to fish, so he would go down to Keauhou Beach. He always brought us fish over the weekend, *menpachi* was my favorite. We'd share chickens. Everybody shared.
- MK: How about your eggs? You must have had a lot of eggs too.
- KA: Yes. Those, somebody came to pick them up. I guess they sold it in the stores.
- MK: So far you've told us about Mr. Yoshida, the neighbor that used to go fishing. How about the Tanimas? What do you remember about the Tanimas?
- KA: I don't remember much about the Tanimas. Simply because I don't remember any children.
- MK: Ahh. Then in contrast you have the Okanos.
- KA: Yes, the Okanos didn't live there until later on. Just before we moved I think they moved into that place. But we've always known the Okanos.
- MK: You mentioned that Mr. Okano used to come in the mornings from. . . .
- KA: Honalo, he rode his little donkey every day and came to work on his farm. He was a hard-working man.
- MK: In your home area, did you folks have coffee lands too?
- KA: Yes, we did.
- MK: Who worked those coffee lands?
- KA: We did. My mother did a lot of that, because my father was busy outside. That was all of our job (chuckles).
- MK: In those days, what did working on the coffee farm involve? What did you have to do?
- KA: During the coffee season, you have to pick the coffee. There's a lot to it. You have to hoe the grass and then at certain periods after the coffee is finished, you have to cut the old branches. Then new shoots would come out, so you have to pick some of the shoots off, because there would be bunches of them. So you have to pick all the unnecessary ones. All the branches that you cut were to cut it in little pieces. Lots of that was used for *furo*, to boil the water.
- WN: Firewood.
- KA: Firewood. That was used for *furo*.
- MK: So your home had an *o-furo*?
- KA: Yes.
- MK: Whose job was it to heat it up and take care of it?
- KA: Whoever came home first.
- (Laughter)

- I think my brother did a lot of that, he was young then.
- WN: So there was an open fire underneath the *furo*, is that how it worked?
- KA: Yes. It was an open fire. The *furo* is on the top. It's like putting a pot on the stove.
- WN: Yes.
- MK: Was the *o-furo* attached to the home or separate?
- KA: Separate. It usually is together with the laundry room. At least the places I've lived was like that.
- MK: So your home in Keauhou was big enough to accommodate the kids and have visitors . . .
- KA: Yes.
- MK: . . . and you had an *o-furo* and laundry area.
- KA: Oh yes. Way in the back.
- MK: How about the kitchen?
- KA: It was in the house. Part of the house.
- MK: In those days, what was the water situation in Kona?
- KA: Everybody had a tank. So you learned to conserve water. It's amazing, but that stays with you the rest of your life. You conserve water. You don't waste it, because when it's dry you don't have any. It's different today. They have running water. Those days it was strictly tank water.
- WN: Was the water in the tank used for coffee fields too, or was it only for drinking and cooking and bathing?
- KA: Cooking (and bathing and drinking). But you needed water to wash the ground coffee bean. There are two little beans in the red. . . .
- WN: The cherry.
- KA: Cherry. You have to wash it, because it's all slimy and sweet, before you dry it. That's when you need a lot of water. You need a separate tank for that purpose.
- WN: Did you folks have a drying platform also?
- KA: Yes. A grinder to grind the coffee and a great big box that the beans went into. They put water in it and you step on it to wash the slime off. Then you dry it on the platform.
- WN: Where was the platform? Was it over the roof?
- KA: No, it was separate.
- WN: All these jobs that you were talking about, what did you do? Did you do any of that besides the picking and the . . .
- KA: Oh yes, we took our turns washing the ground coffee because that was fun. You just step in there and walked around. (KA and MK laugh.) That was lots of fun. My mother did a lot of that job.

- MK: For your family, were there hired workers who helped?
- KA: During coffee season, we hired people to pick so that the red coffee beans wouldn't drop. If it drops it's hard to pick it up. That's when we always found somebody to help us. Other than that, hoeing and cutting and things like that, the family has to do all of that; otherwise I don't think you could afford it. Coffee was so cheap those days.
- WN: In picking, did you have those *lauhala* baskets on around your waist?
- KA: Baskets. Oh yes! That was the thing. Either *lauhala* or bamboo baskets. The size of your baskets is accordingly to your size. When you're little you have tiny little baskets, but as you grow up you get little bigger and bigger baskets.
- WN: Were the trees tall enough so that you had to go on a ladder?
- KA: During our days, the trees were tall so everybody had to have a ladder. Because, I guess if you cut a lot of that you wouldn't have too many beans. Since the trees were tall, you went on a ladder and then you just hook (the branches) down and just pick. But now, the trees are cut really short that you don't need a ladder. You can use a hook and hook (the branch) down. Just pick (the beans) and release it.
- WN: This hook was made of branch—coffee branch.
- KA: Yes. Coffee branch with a little hook (chuckles).
- WN: So that you would . . .
- KA: You just chose one with a little branch on the side.
- MK: I'm curious. At what age did you folks start going out into the coffee fields to help out?
- KA: (Chuckles) As long as you can walk around.
- (Laughter)
- You started with tiny little baskets and you just picked the lower portions. About third grade.
- MK: You were going to ask a question.
- WN: Yeah. Did you say that you folks ground the coffee too? Did you have the hand grinder?
- KA: Oh, that's after you roast it. We were little so we didn't drink any coffee but I remember my parents grinding it early in the morning and making coffee.
- WN: Oh, coffee just for you.
- KA: For your family.
- WN: As far as selling. Bagging the coffee—you would just bag the parchment?
- KA: Yes. What I remember is we sold only the parchment.
- WN: So it went from picking to the washing to the drying. From there bagging.
- KA: Yes. Now they just sell the red beans. They don't do any of that anymore.
- WN: Oh, I see.

- MK: We know that in old days people would take their bagged coffee—the parchment—to various stores.
- KA: Yes.
- MK: At your time, what store was your father and mother taking the coffee to?
- KA: I am not sure.
- MK: Going back to your neighborhood, we know you had the Yoshidas, Tanimas, Okanos, and in addition to these Japanese families, you had the Alike family and the Falconers.
- KA: Yes.
- MK: What would you remember about these two?
- KA: Well, I can't remember too much about the Alikas, but the name Alike rings a bell. Mrs. Falconer lived two doors away from us. When we were kids, she was *haole* and we looked up to her. Of course we didn't associate with her because after all they were one above us. I can remember her feeding the cows in the back. I remember seeing it from the road. She drove a nice car and she was very nice to everybody. She was very kind to us.
- MK: What was her occupation?
- KA: I think she was a teacher.
- MK: In your memories, who were the families that your family was sort of close to, if any?
- KA: Like the Yoshidas and Okanos and there was one—Kanekos.
- MK: Kanekos?
- KA: Yes, there's a Kanekos.
- WN: Oh yeah, we know Ed Kaneko. (Pause) Ed. Ed Kaneko. Do you know him?
- KA: (I can't remember the name.)
- MK: Yeah, large family. Kanekos.
- WN: Okay. Okay.
- KA: Very nice family.
- MK: Kay. Kay Kaneko.
- WN: Kay is married to Ed though.
- MK: Oh.
- KA: I think there's a girl named Kazue. And Mitsue, there's a Mitsue. A nice family.
- MK: In terms of the community that your family was a part of, what was your father's role in the community?
- KA: My father taught Japanese[-language] school. He worked for the *Hawai'i Hochi*. What I can remember is he used to do a lot of correspondence for the community. Whoever came, mostly Japanese old people, if they wanted to write a letter to somebody in Japan. Most of these people really couldn't write Japanese as well, because they came at such a

- young age, so he would do a lot of that kind of stuff for them, or if they needed to write to the consul or anything like that he would do that. I remember at one time when everybody had dual citizenship and then they had to cut their Japanese citizenship. My father (did the correspondence).
- MK: Sometimes when we would talk to people about their fathers who were active in the community, sometimes they'd say, "Father was the one who would always have to give talks at these community gatherings and things." How about your dad?
- KA: Yes, he did some of that.
- MK: What was your mother's role?
- KA: My mother taught Japanese[-language] school too, but she was a housekeeper. She managed all of us. Made sure we did things correctly and were not out of line (laughs).
- MK: When you mentioned your mom taught Japanese[-language] school, did she also teach the girls things . . .
- KA: Sewing?
- MK: Yeah.
- KA: Yes. She did. Saturdays were sewing lesson days. I remember that.
- MK: Would they come over to your house?
- KA: Yes. Saturday was *saihō gakkō*. (Laughs)
- MK: She worked hard.
- KA: Yes, she did. She really did. She was a workaholic.
- MK: We've been talking about your family, but in your family tell us how many brothers and sisters you had.
- KA: I had three brothers and two sisters.
- MK: You were the eldest?
- KA: Yes.
- MK: You kind of mentioned some of your chores. You folks would help with the chickens?
- KA: Oh yes (chuckles).
- MK: You folks would help in the coffee lands?
- KA: Yes.
- MK: You being the eldest, did you have additional ones like taking care of the younger ones?
- KA: Yes. I did that too. I think my mother did most of it. She did all the disciplining and things like that.
- MK: Oh.
- WN: Being the oldest girl, did you feel any kind of pressure to work hard like your mother did?

- KA: No. Not at all. (KA and WN laugh.) But, I remember I was kind of bossy because I was the oldest one. If they didn't mind me, I was real bossy. (MK laughs.) That was just a little while.
- WN: But you know, like working out in the fields picking coffee, you had your basket and everybody had their basket. Were you responsible for making sure they worked or anything like that?
- KA: No. No. That was my mother's job.
- WN: Ahh.
- MK: How about things like *onbu*ing the little kids? Carrying them?
- KA: I did that too. Taking care of all the sisters and brothers. Yes, I remember doing that.
- MK: So you did take care of them. You're carrying them around.
- KA: Yes. But I can't remember they putting too many demands on me either.
- WN: Besides your own coffee fields, did you go to other coffee fields to pick?
- KA: No. That was as much as we could handle. (Laughs) We went to our grandmother's to help there too.
- MK: You were still young.
- KA: I was still young so. . . .
- MK: When it came to schooling, where did you go?
- KA: I went to Keauhou Elementary School until the eighth grade. After the ninth grade I went to Konawaena High School. My senior year I was gone. I started in November and then I went all of November and part of December. And of course Christmas vacation came up. We left on the 23rd of December for Hilo.
- WN: This was in 19 . . .
- KA: [Nineteen] Forty-two.
- WN: [Nineteen] forty-two.
- MK: End of [19]42 yeah?
- KA: End of [19]42, yes.
- MK: So when you look back on your years at Keauhou, what stands out in your mind about your elementary school days?
- KA: Mr. and Mrs. Nakano.
- MK: Nakano.
- KA: She taught first grade. First and second grade I think. Mr. Nakano was the principal. They were such good people. They made sure that kids learned. He did all kinds of things. He had the little farm that he made the kids go out to and learn. They had a home in Waimea, so every once in a while they'd invite us to go with them. I remember going there several times and oh it was such a fun time. I remember it so well. I think I learned more from the two of them than anybody else, (other than my parents).

MK: That Keauhou school, how would you describe the kids that were going there? They were sort of like you, Japanese? Or mixed?

KA: No, there were all different kinds of nationality. They were Chinese, lots of Hawaiians, and Japanese. We had several Koreans. It was not all Japanese. Lots of, lots of Hawaiians. Because they came from the Keauhou Beach area.

MK: Like you were saying, you think you learned a lot from the Nakanos.

KA: Yes.

MK: What was it about their teaching that made it work?

KA: They did practical things. They did things that you could see, that you thought, "That's good." And, they didn't tell you to do this, but they practiced what they preached, and now when I look back I think that was the most impressive thing. They always wanted us to be honest. Do your best. Study and read. That was a great thing for me. I thought that was such an interesting thing. (Chuckles)

It's so funny because we didn't have a cafeteria those days. Everybody brought their lunches. Sometimes, we'd have a hard time because some of the kids didn't have breakfast or lunch, so they would steal people's lunches. But, Mr. Nakano always made sure he got to the bottom of it. He always found out who did it and made them own up to it, so they wouldn't do it again. On the same token, he'd always provide something for them to eat. You know, on the side. That was always so impressive to me (laughs).

WN: What kind of things did you bring for lunch?

KA: Rice and we had lots of eggs. So you have fried eggs with little meat on it. (Laughs)

WN: Sounds good.

MK: Yeah.

KA: Yes, like scrambled eggs. That's what I remember the most, because we had so much eggs. (Laughs)

MK: Did you folks kind of share your food? How did you folks . . .

KA: No. We had a small lunch box with rice and you have your . . .

MK: *Okazu.*

KA: . . . *okazu* on the side.

MK: Sounds good. (Laughs)

KA: Everybody brought (their own lunches).

MK: Then I was wondering, when it came to special times like Christmas or May Day or times like that, were there special events at Keauhou?

KA: We did have May Day. It never was at Keauhou because the Keauhou School was very small. They always had it at Hōlualoa [Elementary School]. May Day was a big thing with the Maypole dance. We always got a few little pennies to spend, so that was a real big day for all of us. It was always held on Hōlualoa [School campus]. This included all the schools around there. There were five or six schools participating together.

MK: That was a big event then.

- KA: Yes. Yes. If your school was chosen to do the Maypole dance, you practiced and then presented your thing on that day. That's the day when all the families brought great big lunches. It was a big thing.
- MK: I was wondering, how far was Keauhou School from your home?
- KA: Not too far. It was maybe down to the bottom of the hill.
- MK: Not too far yeah?
- KA: Not too far.
- WN: Maybe a couple hundred yards? A couple of hundred of yards?
- KA: It wasn't too far.
- WN: Not too far.
- KA: We always walked. Everywhere.
- MK: Not on the donkey then.
- KA: No. No. We could walk. It was close enough to walk (laughs).
- MK: When it came to transportation then for your family, walking was the usual?
- KA: If it's close distance. But my father had a car. Model-T car. So, we rode on that when we had further (distance to go), which was very seldom.
- MK: Did he use the car for his work with *Hawai'i Hochi*?
- KA: Yes. *Hawai'i Hochi*.. He needed a car, so. . . .
- MK: By the way, when you say working for *Hawai'i Hochi*, what did he do?
- KA: You know I have no idea. He (wrote Kona news). I guess part of it is you have to collect. . . .
- WN: Oh, subscription. Money.
- KA: I have a feeling that was it.
- WN: Where was there a *Hawai'i Hochi* office in Kona?
- KA: No. My father did it from home. He had a room all to himself as an office. When people came to talk to him, they go in and he'd close the door. We always knew it was a private time.
- MK: You went K through eighth to Keauhou.
- KA: Yes, and right after I graduated eighth grade, my parents bought a house in Kealakekua. Because I was going to high school, they decided they should move because it would be too far. I'd have to ride the bus. Transportation was bad, so they bought a house in Kealakekua that was right next to the Greenwell Ranch. It was close to the meat market. So, it was very close. You can walk to Konawaena High School. That's what I did.
- MK: So schooling was really important to your parents?
- KA: Yes. (I guess so.)

MK: To make that move, yeah?

KA: Yes.

WN: So if they didn't make that move, do you think you would have still been able to go to Kealakekua?

KA: Oh yes. I'd have to ride the bus. There was a bus.

WN: Was it pretty much general? I mean, everyone from eighth grade Keauhou School—did everyone go to Konawaena?

KA: Yes. Konawaena was the only high school.

WN: But you don't remember any children who didn't go.

KA: Some of the kids didn't go.

MK: But generally, many of the students—your classmates—continued?

KA: Yes.

MK: What did you think? "Wow, now I'm going to go Konawaena."

KA: Well, it must have been exciting.

(Laughter)

WN: New kids—right? From different areas.

KA: Right. It's interesting because see, I didn't live in Kealakekua too long, so I don't know too many people around that area. I knew kids from Keauhou. . . . But that's one of the reasons why I don't know too much about Kona I think. I thought about it the other day. I hear names and I think that's kind of familiar, but I don't know any of the siblings or anything like that because I left when I was sixteen and never came back.

WN: But you moved to Kealakekua in ninth grade.

KA: Ninth grade.

WN: So that's about twelve years old? Nineteen thirty-eight maybe? Around there.

MK: No, she was older than twelve.

WN: You were older than twelve? Ninth grade.

KA: (Ninth) grade. Thirteen, fourteen [years old].

WN: Oh, that's right. (MK laughs.) Just before the war then.

MK: Yeah.

WN: When they moved to Kealakekua, did they still have coffee fields too?

KA: Yes, yes. You have to have a coffee field to make ends meet I think.

MK: How did the house, the whole living situation in Kealakekua compare to Keauhou?

- KA: Oh, it was horrible. It was just horrible. This house—this property that we bought—had this old ramshackle house. Just an awful house, but we needed a property. We had no money to rebuild this thing, so we had to grin and bear it. I can remember as a kid just practically crying when I saw this house. It was just so awful compared to our house in Keauhou.
- MK: Was it just as large?
- KA: Well, it was old. They didn't even have windows when we went. They had a wooden—just a hole like this—wooden slats for a window. You'd have to push it open with a stick. That was all around. So when you put it down, it was dark.
- MK: Did this home have a *furo*?
- KA: Yes it had a *furo*—outside. But, oh that place was so awful. Of course my father fixed the windows, but it still was pretty bad (laughs).
- MK: How about the coffee lands?
- KA: The coffee land was a good land. I think it was four or five acres or something like that, but it was good-producing land. It was a leased land, but very good property.
- MK: So in terms of coffee it was good.
- KA: Yes. Yes. It was close to the school, so that's what my father decided on. Probably there was no other place.
- MK: And again, were there chickens and vegetables being raised?
- KA: We didn't have chickens, but we did have a vegetable garden.
- MK: So that chore disappeared.
- KA: Yes. (MK laughs.) That chore disappeared.
- MK: When you started going to Konawaena, what changes did you have to go through? You went from a small school to a much bigger one. How was it for you?
- KA: I don't remember, but I was pretty happy. I was just happy to be out there. (Chuckles)
- MK: At Keauhou you had the Nakanos that you remember quite well.
- KA: Mm-hmm [yes].
- MK: Konawaena?
- KA: I didn't know anybody. You mean the teachers?
- MK: The teachers.
- KA: No, I didn't know anybody. But, that was all right. I remember being very happy to be there. I guess it's ninth grade.
- MK: By the time you go to ninth grade, what extracurricular activities did you get involved in, if any?
- KA: I don't know whether it was the first year, but going to Girl Scouts or Girl Reserves. I remember being in the Girl Reserves too.

- MK: What was the Girl Reserves?
- KA: If you ask me now, I don't know what we did. (MK and KA laugh.)
- WN: Wow, I've never heard of that before.
- KA: Girl Reserves? Oh yes. That was a big thing. It was a little club.
- MK: See, Girl Scouts we've heard of. Boy Scouts. Girl Scouts. But Girl Reserves?
- KA: Girl Reserves. Yes. I thought it was a national thing. But I guess it was only Konawaena. [KA is correct in identifying Girl Reserves as a national organization. It started in 1918 as a part of the YWCA.]
- WN: Did you get involved with FFA [Future Farmers of America] or FHA? Any of those kinds of activities?
- KA: No, I didn't do that. I know lots of kids did that.
- MK: How about things like dances? Socials.
- KA: You know, I can't remember ever having socials.
- MK: Another thing we'd like to ask you about is Japanese-language school. Your father was a schoolteacher.
- KA: Mm-hmm [yes].
- MK: Your mother was a schoolteacher. What was Japanese-language school like for you?
- KA: Well, we were just like other kids. We didn't have any special favors or anything. If we didn't do our lessons, we'd really get it at school and at home. It wasn't too eventful.
- MK: You went to Keauhou Japanese-language school. One that your father . . .
- KA: As long as I was there. Yes.
- MK: After you folks moved from Keauhou, did you continue?
- KA: No. I don't know if there was any Japanese[-language] school, come to think of it.
- MK: So Keauhou Japanese[-language] school and then that was it for your formal [language education].
- KA: That was it. Yes, that's it.
- MK: What did you think about that (chuckles), you didn't have to go anymore?
- KA: I must have been happy.
- (Laughter)
- MK: You were mentioning that your father though, stopped teaching when you folks moved to Kealakekua.
- KA: Yes.
- MK: So he just did the *Hawai'i Hochi*?

- KA: Yes, *Hawai'i Hochi*.
- MK: And the coffee lands?
- KA: Yes.
- MK: I was also curious about your parents' involvement in any of the temples or churches. Were they active?
- KA: No. That's one thing. My parents were never involved in church work there, at that time.
- MK: As a child did you attend any temple service, church service?
- KA: No.
- MK: When it came to other organizations, say *kenjinkai* or business groups or *kumiai*, how active was your dad?
- KA: In *kumiai*? Whenever they had gatherings we would all go with him. We always had picnics.
- MK: What were those picnics like?
- KA: Everybody brought food. It's a *gochisō* day. You swam all day and had fun.
- MK: Where did you folks go for the swimming?
- KA: Keauhou. Keauhou Beach. That was everybody's favorite at that time.
- MK: Before the big hotels were built.
- KA: Oh yes. Yes. (MK and KA laugh.)
- MK: I don't know if you know but, before the war started, how aware or how discussed were Japan-U.S. relations in your household? Did they. . . .
- KA: No. They used to have sailors come and when they came to Kona my father folks used to take them around. But that was the extent.
- WN: So when the ship—Japanese ships—would dock in Kona, and then your father . . .
- KA: Yes, the Japanese community would honor them and take them around. I remember seeing that, but that's about it.
- WN: We're finding though that a lot of the internees—the fathers—they did that. Greeted the ships and they interacted with the sailors and things like that.
- KA: The sailors. Yes.
- MK: As we move closer to World War II, you were telling us about what happened in early December. In June 1941, your grandfather Ikeda had passed away already yeah?
- KA: Yes. He passed away in June.
- MK: Then, if you could tell us what happened to your grandmother Ikeda.
- KA: My grandmother, on December 6, was going to a friend's house for dinner around 5:00, 5:30. She was walking over and was hit by a car. They couldn't find the man who hit her. It took them until midnight. They blocked off the roads and this man was drunk and he

was sleeping in (his car in) somebody else's garage. They took him to jail. Of course my grandmother died instantly. Just one hit and that was it, she was dead on the spot. This man who killed my grandmother was caught around midnight and [they] took him to jail. The next day, it was war. December 7. So, they opened the doors and said, "You go home." So there was never a trial or anything. We don't even know who the man was. That was strange. Real sad thing really. December 7 was her funeral. Wartime. Since it was a police matter, they gave us permission to take the body to Hilo to be cremated; we had the service early in the morning and we drove to Hilo. In between going to Hilo, we'd be stopped by sentries. They'd look at what's in the car. Sentries with bayonets. I remember being so scared seeing that. All the way. We got into Hilo and (it was) almost dark, so it took us a long time getting there. We took her to the crematorium, and then went to a hotel because it was blackout those days. That was the time rumors started to really come out that so-and-so got pulled into—FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] came to pull them in and stuff like that. I can remember at that age being so frightened, because I knew that my father was on the list; he taught school and he worked for *Hawai'i Hochi* and he had things to do with the consul. He was prime target. That night while in the hotel, all these rumors started. I was so scared and shaking like this. [Mabel Kawamura trembles.] To this day I can even feel that shaking. It was scary. I don't remember too many things, but that I remember. I was truly, truly afraid.

Then, the next day of course we were lucky enough that they allowed us enough gasoline to come back home. They gave us a permit to buy enough gas to come back.

MK: Then going back to Kona were you again checked by sentries?

KA: You know, I can't remember, we came back from Waimea side. So, I don't think so. By that time I realized what a problem we're going to have. As young as I was, I knew my father might be taken in. So I was full of anxiety I think. Of course my parents were, and they didn't discuss it, but I knew that my father would be taken. So, it was a hard time.

My father wasn't taken until April. April 17th, that was my brother's birthday. A detective—a friend of ours—came the night before and told my father that tomorrow morning early, "I'm going to come and pick you up." So he wanted my father to say whatever he needed to say or get rid of things he wanted to get rid of. That's how he knew one day ahead that he was going to be taken. True enough, about 4:00, 4:30 in the morning, he came and took my dad.

MK: It was the same detective that your family knew. He was a local police officer.

KA: Mm-hmm [yes]. I think he was extra nice to come and tell my dad ahead of time.

MK: What memories do you have of that time from when your family was told—your dad was told—and his actual leaving?

KA: He came late at night. And I did hear it. But none of my sisters and brothers. They were sleeping. It was very scary, because (we did not know what was going to happen to Dad).

MK: So at that point, did your mother or father say something to you about what was going to happen?

KA: No. They didn't say a thing. I don't think so.

MK: You're hearing all that. You're not talking about it either. You're just thinking about what you heard.

KA: Uh-huh [yes]. But, it was not a surprise really, because we all kind of expected from December to April. He weeded out his collection of books. It's so sad because these things must be valuable today, but he got rid of a lot of things. He was a book collector. He was an avid reader, so he collected oodles and oodles of books. It took him days and days to look at all these things and he just dumped it all out and burned it. We could have a valuable collection today I'm sure.

- MK: So he just dumped his books. He burned them?
- KA: He burned it. Yes.
- WN: Besides books were there other things, like artifacts or anything like that?
- KA: I'm sure there were things that if he thought it was. . . . He just got rid of a lot. Things (that looked Japanese). Of course there were flags and swords. Those things he just buried them somewhere. (Laughs) All those things are all gone.
- MK: How about family items? Family heirlooms. Were they also. . . .
- KA: They have some left of those.
- MK: For the family life, say from early December till the time your dad was pulled in, was it like usual or different?
- KA: Well, this was wartime already. I think every day my dad felt that somebody was going to come and get him. He was prepared for that. In a small way—with me at least—I knew that some day they would come. It was a very unsettling time when I think back now. It wasn't a joyous time. It was a scary time.
- MK: Then to have lost your grandmother unexpectedly.
- KA: Mm-hmm [yes], and we had to go through all that.
- MK: All that too, yeah.
- KA: When I think of it now, I feel so sorry for my dad, because he must have been so sad about that, besides himself. But when you look at the whole picture, it was the best thing, because I don't think she would have come with us to Jerome.
- MK: Your grandmother.
- KA: My grandmother. We'd have to worry about her being here with maybe relatives. It would have been sad. (She would have worried about us all the time.)
- MK: Then when your father was pulled in, where was he taken?
- KA: At first he went to Kīlauea Military Camp. After that he went to Sand Island. We didn't hear from him at Kīlauea. We heard from him later on when he went to Sand Island [Detention Center]. We didn't hear from him for maybe two months or so.
- MK: Did you or your mom know where he was at all?
- KA: No. Absolutely not. We sort of had an idea that he might be going to Kīlauea Military Camp because that would be the only place in Hawai'i, but we didn't know.
- MK: At that point, what other people did you folks know of whose fathers were pulled in?
- KA: At that time, we didn't know anybody.
- MK: How did people react when they became aware of your dad being pulled in?
- KA: You know, I don't know. A neighbor—the Watanabes—they were always so good to us.
- MK: With your father gone, how did your family manage? That's a long time.
- KA: Yes.

MK: How did you folks manage?

KA: I remember during those days there were lots of soldiers coming in after a while. People starting to make things to sell to them. One thing was those *lauhala* cigarette cases. Like this with a little cover on it. Somebody suggested to my mother, “Why don’t you learn how to make this?” So they can buy whatever she made and it’d be income for us. So we used to gather *lauhala* leaves and soften it and she would weave it in the wee hours of the morning. I don’t know, we got four dollars (for a box of sixteen) something like that. It was some income plus eating vegetables. . . . And the neighbors [helped].

MK: How about your coffee lands though?

KA: Oh, we did the coffee too. We managed the coffee land. We didn’t depend on my dad, because my dad didn’t do much of it. My mother did most of that. That was no problem. It was the money situation. At that time I kind of sensed it, but my mother never told us how desperate they were. But, you could guess.

WN: Things like the *lauhala* cigarette cases, how did she sell it? Did she go someplace to sell it?

KA: No, there was a person that came to pick up whatever my mother made. . . . she was the middleman. She came to pick it up and she would sell it for a profit.

WN: I see.

KA: She paid my mother (twenty-five cents apiece).

WN: And this middle person had a store or something? Do you know?

KA: I don’t think so. I think she took it to the store probably. I don’t know how they did that, but my mother’s job was only to make it (laughs).

WN: You said there were soldiers around. Was it a lot? Do you know?

KA: I don’t remember seeing a lot, it’s around Kailua area and more towards Kohala area [that you’d notice troops].

WN: Yeah. Yeah. There was a big encampment up in Waimea side.

KA: Yes, yes. Lots of the soldiers would buy these things and send it back to their families. Souvenirs.

MK: Since your mother is a nisei . . .

KA: Yes.

MK: . . . your father’s a nisei too. Were there any attempts made to force an explanation or release? Nothing yeah?

KA: No. You did what you were told. That was it.

MK: Later on when you were reunited with your father, what if anything did he share about his time at Kilauea or his time at Sand Island?

KA: Yes, Sand Island. Yes. One of the things I remember is they used to dig little shells from Sand Island. Then they would make hatbands. It’s amazing that they’d dig for these small little conch shells. Then they’d sit and rub that thing right on the concrete. Just the core of the inside—the spiral part. They’d shave off both sides and make that as a band, all over like this. I remember having it, but I don’t know where it went to really. But that’s hours and hours and hours of sanding on cement. You know how hard shells are. Only the

spiral part was used for a hatband I don't know how many you have to have, but it must be quite a few. Lots of the Sand Island men had a hatband like that. But my father said you'd dig and look for these shells, and then you sit and rub it like this. Rub it.

MK: Until it wears out the bottom.

KA: Yes. Sand on both sides. Then make it. But one of the funniest things my dad said, he was so sick and tired of being in Sand Island, so he said, "I wish I could go outside and see." So he decided he would have a toothache. (Chuckles)

MK: Okay.

KA: So he went up and he said he has a toothache. They took him in a car with the window all covered. (Laughs) He couldn't see a thing.

MK: Oh, he was all covered up. He couldn't see.

KA: The car was all covered up. The windows. (Chuckles) So he couldn't see out at all. He went up and (the dentist) pulled his tooth out.

(Laughter)

He was minus a tooth.

MK: Did a wasteful thing.

WN: The tooth didn't hurt at all huh?

KA: No, he wanted to see the outside so badly. (He thought) they would probably just look at (his tooth). They pulled it out. (Laughs) He came back with all these swabs in his gums in a covered car, so he couldn't see out at all.

MK: My goodness.

KA: He laughed about that many times afterwards.

MK: Did he share any other stories about that time? His experiences?

KA: He told us about a man who tried to climb over the fence and got shot. He was so desperate. He wanted to leave. They shot him. So, that was sad.

MK: Your dad did talk about the time he was at Sand Island.

KA: Little bits and pieces. When other stories come up and he'd think about it. He'd share his. . . .

MK: My goodness. Shall we end over here today? You know, we'd like to come back one more time and then we'll ask you about the family and your father going to the Mainland and being at Jerome [War Relocation Center]. Your Heart Mountain [Relocation Center] time. We know that that time was short—Heart Mountain.

KA: Well, my parents stayed there.

MK: They stayed.

KA: I was there only from June to August.

MK: So we'll be asking you about going to the Mainland, life in Jerome, little bit about Heart Mountain, your life in Minnesota, you and Ruth Oekawa, you going to beauty school and everything. Then your return to Hawai'i. Your story, you. . . .

KA: You know it's been a long time when you think about it. It's almost seventy years?

WN: It's good, you're doing really good remembering all this.

KA: That's a long time.

MK: We thank you for today.

WN: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 57-26-2-13

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Mabel Kawamura (KA)

Honolulu, O‘ahu

February 7, 2013

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

MK: 7 is an interview with Mabel Kawamura in Honolulu, O‘ahu, Hawai‘i. The interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto, and the date is February 7th, 2013. This is our second session.

In our first session, we started from the time you were born all the way up to the time when your family was going to the Mainland. We got up till December 1942 yeah? We know that your father had already been pulled in and he was taken to Sand Island. Then the decision was made that the family would also be going into a camp. Now, how did that come about? How did. . . .

KA: Well, we got word from my father. He wrote to us and he said there’s a possibility that we can join and go to an interment camp. I don’t know who else told us, but it was my dad that wrote that first letter saying that we have an opportunity to do that. My mother felt that was the only way. There was no two ways about it. She wanted to go.

MK: Would you know why it is your father was allowed to. . . .

KA: Oh, yes. He was an American citizen. I think most of the people who went like that were American citizens. They were at Sand Island.

MK: You were saying that there was no two ways about it. Why do you say that?

KA: Well, my mother said if anything happened to my father—we didn’t know how long the war was going to last. Could be five, six years. If anything happened to my dad, if he died or if he was very sick, we wouldn’t be together. She felt it was very important for our family to be together no matter where it was. So, there was no question. She wanted to go.

MK: What were your thoughts on the matter?

KA: As a kid probably it was an adventure. You don’t have to pick coffee. (KA and MK chuckle.) That sounds great to me. I don’t know whether that ever came in my mind, but the idea of being together with my dad was very important I think. Being all together. If we stayed apart—financially—it would have been terrible. Now that I look back, it would have been, because my mother couldn’t have earned a living to take care of all of us. Because I was sixteen, and the youngest one was small then. It was the best thing to do.

MK: How much time was there between your getting—the family getting—that letter from your father, and actually going?

KA: You know, I think it was only a month, because it was in November. (December 24, 1942, we left for Honolulu.)

MK: Up to that point, how much contact did your family have with your father? Like you received that letter from your father. Were there several other letters before that that came from him?

KA: We must have had three letters. It wasn't often, but I remember this letter real well.

MK: After you folks made the decision that you're going to go to the Mainland to be with your father—to be together—what preparations did you folks make? What did you have to do?

KA: My mother knew that it would be cold, so she and my uncle's wife did all the sewing for all six of us. They made us flannel pajamas, to wear under our clothes. Tried to make as warm clothing as possible. So, I don't remember being really cold, but she sewed day and night. I thought of this many, many times because it must have been hard for all these many children. She sewed day and night.

MK: How about the things you folks had? What happened to all the . . .

KA: We were really lucky I think, because my mother's brother and his wife decided to move into our house. My uncle was an electrician for the Kona Electric Company, and so he had a good job. They decided to live in our house and take care of the coffee lands. My parents said they could take whatever they made out of it—that's fine. So they took care of the property. When we came back, we all had a place to stay. We didn't have to look for a house. That much I'm really grateful to them. They had one daughter. She was a little older than our youngest brother. The house was close to Konawaena School, so it was good for her.

MK: And so, old family heirlooms or those types of things, what happened to that?

KA: Lots of things that was very Japanesey, my father burnt it. Destroyed it. He was not taken in in December. He had up until April. So, all his books and all the things that were really Japanese, he destroyed it. Burnt it. I think some they buried it. In Kona they have these outhouses, they just throw it in there.

WN: For example, do you remember what kinds of things?

KA: You know, I don't really remember that much really. I remember my dad took days to clean out stuff.

MK: My goodness.

KA: I remember, my grandmother's—like a *tansu*. Those things that were just in the house, I guess they still have it.

MK: Oh my goodness. Then when it came time to go, you folks were up in Kona, but you had to go down to Hilo, yeah?

KA: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: How did you folks get down there?

KA: There was a truck, kind of army truck. That's what we rode. Our house was a little far away from the street—not real close. The truck couldn't come in, so we had to carry our stuff up to the road and then got on the truck and we went off. We stopped at—I guess it must have been the Oekawas because I didn't know them either. Picked them up and we all went.

MK: So the truck picked up other families going on the same ship.

KA: I remember picking up somebody else.

- MK: Then you folks rode the truck to Hilo?
- KA: Yes.
- MK: In Hilo, where did you folks stay?
- KA: You know, I can't remember that. Whether we stayed in a hotel one night or whether we got there and went on the ship, I really don't know that.
- MK: Through all this, how was your mother and your siblings? How are you folks taking this?
- KA: (Laughs) It must have been traumatic. It was something new. Something different we've never done before. It must have been scary. But somehow . . .
- WN: Yet, you said it was an adventure.
- KA: Yes. Yes. When I look back about it. It came to my mind. It's an adventure. Something different. Don't have to pick coffee anymore. (Chuckles) But there were many times that you had a funny feeling inside.
- MK: I think last time you mentioned that your brother's behavior or his personality kind of changed.
- KA: Oh yes. His personality really, really changed. He was such a talkative kid. All of a sudden when my father was taken, he just stopped talking. He just became really, really quiet. It was just kind of a strange thing that stands out in my mind real sharply. All of a sudden this kid that talked all the time became so quiet. Didn't say too much of anything. His personality really changed. It really must have affected him badly.
- MK: Did his talkativeness come back later on?
- KA: No. No. It really never did.
- MK: With so many little ones in tow—you're sixteen and all these little ones, how did your family manage?
- KA: I give my mother a lot of credit, because the three youngest I think she kept (them close to) her [tape inaudible]. We kept an eye on the others. But, it was my mother's strength I think that kept us together. She was a very timid soul, but I guess she had inner strength that now that I'm older and I can see, it took a lot of strength to do that. It wasn't easy. I mean, it's the unknown.
- MK: What do you remember about leaving Hilo and coming to Honolulu?
- KA: Well, we were assigned to one of the bunks. I get seasick, so I was sick the whole time. My mother was sick too. She gets seasick too. So we were all kind of seasick. It was not a good a trip (laughs).
- MK: Oh boy. Getting to Honolulu and being at the immigration station, what was that experience like?
- KA: I don't remember too much about that, everything was so new. It was so different. It was like being in a new world or something, But you knew that you were incarcerated. You weren't free.
- MK: What gave you that sense of being incarcerated?
- KA: Well, all the other people too. Other families. There were loads of other families that came from all over Hawai'i when we went. Then later on, Maui and Kaua'i—there were

- people from there also. Everybody—you could hear families being worried. You had to obey. They tell you one thing to do, you did it. You know you're incarcerated somehow.
- MK: At the immigration station, were you folks still allowed to be doing things together as a family or was it like the kids go eat and sleep one place? Mom is one place?
- KA: No. You stayed together.
- MK: You were still together.
- KA: Together. Yes. You did because you didn't want to get lost. This was all new and strange. So you stuck around with your family. What if somebody took you somewhere and you can't find your mother? That was scary times. So you stayed right there. Right where you can keep an eye on your mom. When she said "move" then you did. It was a scary time really.
- WN: Coming from a place like Kona where all your neighbors and everybody is Japanese or local, Hawaiian, and so forth. Then, very little exposure to white people.
- KA: That's right. Yes.
- WN: I'm just wondering, going on this voyage you probably at least encountered or saw more white people.
- KA: Yes. On this ship going to the Mainland, there were lots of troops. So they were all *haole* boys. That was different.
- MK: Where along this trip did you finally get to be with your father?
- KA: Oh, right at the immigration station. Right before we left, they brought all the internees from Sand Island to meet with their families, and we all went together. That was a happy time. But that was just before we left.
- MK: What's your recollection of your father at that time?
- KA: He looked so different. He was so dark and his face was all drawn. He didn't look like the father I remembered. That was my first thought. He looked so drawn.
- WN: Did he look like he'd lost weight?
- KA: Yes, he's a thin person anyway. But he was so dark and so drawn like he really had the weight of the world on his shoulders. Even if he was happy to see us we could see he had a hard time. It wasn't easy. He tried to look happy. Of course he was happy to see us, but you could see that . . .
- MK: That he suffered.
- KA: Yes, he suffered. That was my first thought. That was so sad.
- MK: Then on the journey on the ship, the *Lurline* to San Francisco, how were you folks quartered? Were you still with your family?
- KA: Yes. Yes. I don't know whether my father was together with us, but I was seasick the whole time, so. . . . (Laughs)
- MK: How about your mother?
- KA: My mother too. She was halfway out the (chuckles). . . . It's a good thing we didn't have babies that needed milk. That would be another whole big problem because you have to

- make the milk for the babies. But we could go down and eat our meals so it wasn't that bad.
- MK: With you not feeling well and your mother not feeling well. . . . (MK and KA chuckle.)
- KA: I wasn't worried about anybody else. (Laughs)
- MK: Oh my goodness. How about father?
- KA: You know, I can't remember. He probably took care of all of us. (Laughs)
- MK: When you got to the West Coast—San Francisco . . .
- KA: Then they took us to Oakland. From Oakland we went to Jerome.
- MK: Again now, you're going on a different mode of transportation. You're going to be on a train.
- KA: Yes.
- MK: What was that like, traveling cross-country?
- KA: Well, the thing is at that time when we got on there were lots of MPs [military police]—soldiers looking in, keeping an eye on us. When we got on the train ready to move out, we had to put our shades down. Whenever we got to kind of a town, we had to do that too. You couldn't see cities at all or big towns. In the barren land you could open up and see but that was about all.
- MK: What did you think as you're traveling?
- KA: Oh my, this is a big place. (Chuckles) Days and days. It took five days or something like that.
- MK: When you looked out did you ever see people?
- KA: You know, I don't remember ever seeing people. Really. I can remember seeing bullrushes and things like that. Bare land.
- MK: How about—you have these people who are watching you folks, these guards. What was that like on the train?
- KA: I think it's a little scary, but after a while you get used to it. As long as you behaved it was all right.
- MK: What were conditions like on the train?
- KA: I guess adequate. I don't remember being really bad.
- MK: The food or the toilet facilities and all that?
- KA: I can't remember anything of that. Food or anything.
- MK: At that time did you folks know where you folks were going?
- KA: No, no. At least I didn't know. Maybe other people knew, but I didn't know.
- MK: Then when you folks finally got to Jerome—I guess that's like January 7th or so, somewhere around?

KA: Yes. It was at night. It must have been really, really really cold. That was kind of scary because we didn't know where we were going after we got to this camp. What conditions were meeting us or anything like that. So, it was scary. We had lots of apprehension.

MK: Then you get off the train and you folks entered the . . .

KA: And then we got to Block 39. That's where we were assigned. Then they told you this is the place that you're supposed to—you're Block 39 Row certain-certain. There were six, seven, eight of us, so we got two rooms. It was right in the center, so it was adjoining rooms with no door. You have to go outside and go in.

MK: Oh.

KA: There were two doors like this. So if you're in this one and want to go this one, you have to go outside and then open this door. There wasn't a door in between.

WN: You had your own private entrance then.

(Laughter)

MK: How did the family use the two units then? Who was where?

KA: Half of us were in one room and half in the other room. I think the younger ones got to stay with my parents a lot more. We were older so we got to stay in the other room.

MK: Each one had a potbelly stove?

KA: Yes.

MK: Had you folks ever seen a potbelly stove before?

KA: No. (MK and KA laugh.) One of the things I remember that first night, it was cold because they didn't have anything to burn. But the thing was, they used raw lumber, so it dried up and it had little cracks all over the windowsill. They had tar paper over it. I remember the wind blowing in. During the summer, it was really dusty. Somehow we didn't get sick.

MK: So in the cold winter you're still exposed to elements, because the walls are not . . .

KA: Yes, after a while I think they put some narrow wood on top of it I guess.

WN: So you could actually see out through the slit? See out or in?

KA: You see the black tar paper.

WN: I see.

KA: The thin type.

WN: Oh, so a single-wall construction with tar paper.

KA: So I think after a while they put some board in between the wide slits. (Laughs)

WN: How big—do you remember how wide were the slits?

KA: Oh, like this.

WN: Quarter inch or so?

- KA: Yes.
- MK: Oh boy.
- KA: The winter months. That's cold! (Chuckles)
- WN: I know.
- MK: It comes through, huh?
- WN: Was it a windy place?
- KA: Not windy, but it must have been windy at times because all that dust came in. That's what I hated the most was all the dust.
- MK: Then when you folks went there, was there snow?
- KA: No.
- MK: No snow?
- KA: No.
- MK: No snow yet.
- KA: It didn't snow very often.
- MK: That potbelly stove, how did you folks get it started and everything? You folks never had that kind of thing.
- KA: I think it was paper and kindling. Then let it burn and put logs over it. So, the men in the block had duties. They go out and get the logs and then they chop it and make it into piles. So you go and get your own pile and bring it home. That was your share.
- MK: You know all this time in Kona you folks were a family unit living in your own house, having your own meals and everything that mom prepared. Now, when it came to food in camp, how was that provided?
- KA: Well, everything was provided. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. When the time came, you went (for your meals). After a while you get to be friends with everybody so you ate with your pals. You really didn't eat with the family. There's no way you could control your kids to come and eat at the same time. Especially most of the ladies in camp worked. The older kids like us, we were kind of left alone and did whatever we wanted to. The younger kids, my mother always took them. If my mother was working, then we'd have to take them.
- MK: So like your mom, what kind of work did she do?
- KA: She was a dishwasher. And my father was kind of a cook I think. In Block 39. But he must have had a little more responsibility because he got nineteen dollars; my mother got sixteen. (Laughs)
- MK: Had your father ever cooked before?
- KA: Yes. He was a good cook. My grandmother was an excellent cook. I think they just have good taste buds. My father was a reader, so he read all kinds of cookbooks. He always said if you can read you can do almost anything.
- MK: Oh, I see.

KA: My mother was a terrible cook. She hated cooking. (MK and WN chuckle.) So that's why she worked on the farm a lot more than my father did. (He did most of the cooking.)

MK: You mentioned kids your age could go and have meals together, whatever. Who did you go have meals with?

KA: We went with Sally Kirita, Marian [Kirita], the kids that were around. Whoever was ready to go and eat meals. We go with them.

MK: Oh, I see.

KA: Ruth [Oekawa].

MK: When you say you folks would go do the meals together, how about like bathing or laundry or anything else?

KA: Bathing you did whenever you felt like it, but it was all open. There wasn't any curtain or anything like that. So, they put a nail on and the other end they had a string around it, so you took a bathrobe and put it over like that, like a shower curtain so people couldn't see you. (Chuckles)

Laundry, you did it with everybody else. As long as there was an empty washtub you could use any one. So that worked out all right.

Toilet too. You sit on the john and there's no door. So, you get to be. . . . (Laughs) You can't be too shy.

WN: I'm just wondering if being a country girl—you had outhouses and things like that—I was just wondering if you think you fared better than say the city kids who maybe weren't used to that kind of. . . .

KA: Yes. If you came from a family that was well-endowed, probably you would have had a hard time I think. That's why I think like the [L.T.] Kagawas—they've lived well—it must have been very difficult for them.

MK: With all those tasks or jobs that had to be done by the people in camp, who were the ones who kind of organized or kind of made sure that things get done?

KA: You know, I don't know. I guess it's a block manager. Mr. [Saburo] Sugita probably.

MK: Mr. Sugita. That's Grace Hawley's father then.

KA: Yes. He was our block manager.

MK: Was there like an equivalent of a sort of police there to keep order?

KA: (I am sure—after all, we were prisoners.)

MK: While making the trek from Kona, all the way to Jerome, you know there is this sense of incarceration. Again in camp, how did it feel to you? You're in a camp.

KA: Well, when you're a young kid and have lots of kids to play with, it was fun. It was a joyous time. For the parents, now that I'm old, I really realize how difficult it must have been for parents. As kids, you had lots of new people you haven't seen before and made friends and did things together. That was fun. I can't remember feeling real mad or anything. I don't remember that. It was pretty joyous I think. Only thing, it's certainly not like home. But I think kids adjust a lot better than we give them credit.

MK: How about your parents or that generation of people there? How did they manage?

- KA: You know, my parents never shared hardships. I think that's true with all Japanese people. They didn't share a real hardship with their kids.
- MK: How about with each other or their friends? Like *sōdanshi*, people they kind of relied on. What was available to them?
- KA: I don't know in camp whether they did that or not. I'd have no idea. Maybe they did.
- MK: You had mentioned that when you first saw your dad, your dad—his face was drawn. You know he was happy to be with the family, but still looked worried. As time went on at Jerome, did he change or still. . . .
- KA: Yes. He looked much better. Of course, I guess being with all of us too he didn't have to worry about any of us. It was as normal as you can get.
- MK: Earlier you mentioned that it wasn't homey. It wasn't home.
- KA: No, no.
- MK: But, what attempts did your parents make to make your barracks homey? If any.
- KA: I don't know if all the barracks looked the same except your personal things around. Pictures and that's about it.
- MK: So you had your pictures?
- KA: Uh-huh [yes].
- WN: What about outside? Were there like---did you plant anything?
- KA: Yes, little flower garden. Or some people planted a few vegetables and some people planted squash. Made a little trellis-like thing and have it climb up. Everybody did their own things.
- WN: Do you remember what you and your father and your mother did?
- KA: My father didn't do anything because he was kind of busy. We had some flowers in the front. That's about all I can remember.
- MK: How about furnishings? Over time, did your parents start making things or getting things?
- KA: Not really. They didn't have the means to buy anything. One of the things is, when we went there they put all our belongings in this real big carton. Like ply board [plywood]. We used that a lot for partition and things like that.
- MK: We're finding out that people were very ingenious. They used what they had at hand.
- KA: It was a hard time. (Everyone got to be very creative.)
- MK: You were mentioning your father worked as a cook. Your mother worked in the kitchen too yeah? What were you doing at that time at Jerome?
- KA: When I finished high school, I finished in May.
- MK: Oh, actually tell us about your schooling at Denson [High School while at Jerome]. What was that like for you?
- KA: You know, I don't know because I started in end of January, and by May I was graduated. I don't think I learned anything.

(Laughter)

When I think about it—at Konawaena I started in November [due to the school schedule that accommodated the need for labor during peak coffee-picking seasons]. Then December 24 we went to Jerome. So I had very little (time at Konawaena in 1942). It was almost toward the end of January that I got into school in Jerome. So January, February, March, April, and May. I remember taking bookkeeping and I took Spanish.

MK: You took bookkeeping and Spanish?

KA: Well, that was the thing they told me I have to take. (Laughs)

MK: How much choice did you have in what you could take?

KA: I guess not too much because. . . . (pause) that was my electives I guess.

MK: What would you remember if anything about the teachers there?

KA: I remember only one teacher, and that was my Spanish teacher. Because she had a funny-looking eye. She must have lived outside in Denson. I don't know whether she was qualified to teach either.

(Laughter)

Anyway, that's the only one I remember.

MK: Had you had any courses in Spanish prior to camp?

KA: No. No. (Laughs) That was what they gave me.

MK: I see. When it came to extracurricular activities at the school, what were there for you?

KA: I can't remember doing much at school. We did [get together] among Block 39 kids.

MK: What did you folks do? Your Block 39 kids you know?

KA: Well (laughs) not too much.

MK: But you folks were like teenagers already.

KA: Yes.

MK: So, did you have dances, socials, anything like that?

KA: You know there must have been, but I didn't go. We were new to the school.

MK: What was it like meeting the Mainland Japanese American kids? We call them *kotonks*. What was that like?

KA: I remember some. It was always a good relationship. There was one girl that I remember real clearly. Her name was Alice Iwamoto. She played the piano very well.

WN: Alice Iwamoto?

KA: Yes.

WN: Iwa. . . . Iwamura?

KA: Iwamura? I thought it was Iwamoto.

- MK: You know, by coincidence we know the son . . .
- WN: Yeah, piano player.
- MK: . . . and Alice, the mother.
- WN: Well, I'm not sure yet if this is.
- MK: I think this is Alice [Imamoto]. Paul Takemoto's mother.
- KA: She had a limp. She played the piano real well. She's the only one I remember, and she was really smart.
- WN: You're right. You're right.
- MK: Yes.
- KA: Iwamoto. Because that name's kind of stuck with me. She was such a sweet girl.
- WN: She's living in Washington D.C.
- KA: She is?
- WN: Yeah. If this is the same woman, I met her. Because her son works in Washington D.C., and he wrote a book on his parents.
- KA: Really?
- WN: She was incarcerated while her husband [Kenneth Takemoto] was a 442[nd Regimental Combat Team]. Her husband is local boy from Kaua'i.
- MK: Takemoto.
- WN: Alice [Imamoto] Takemoto.
- KA: I wonder what company he would be in.
- WN: I'll find out. I'll show you the book.
- KA: Really. I remember her. She was always so sweet. I wasn't there long enough to make a real close friendship, but I remember her so well. She was so kind and such a sweet person. I felt she was such a nice girl. She always stood in my mind all these years.
(Laughs)
- MK: You know, eventually she went to Oberlin College in Ohio. She continued her interest in piano.
- KA: Isn't that wonderful!
- WN: Last I heard she's fine.
- KA: Fine? That's wonderful.
- WN: Yeah. Living in Washington.
- MK: You know, funny. This morning after we had breakfast and I was wiping my hands on a cloth, it's a cloth that Alice wove. She does hand weaving on a loom.
- KA: Really?

- MK: It's that cloth I used this morning.
- KA: Isn't that. . . .
- WN: That is a small world (chuckles).
- MK: You know we have to bring that book [*Nisei Memories: My Parents Talk about the War Years*] over to you.
- KA: You know it's amazing, because that short span of my life—that's when I knew her—just while I was in high school. After that I don't know where she went or anything like that.
- MK: We will get Alice's telephone number for you.
- WN: Wouldn't that be something?
- KA: Oh my God. I don't know whether she even remembers me or not. But I sure remember her.
- WN: So you remember her from Denson? From school?
- KA: Yes. Yes. From school.
- MK: You said that you knew she was a very good pianist. Were there opportunities for her to play there?
- KA: You know, I don't know because I can't remember her playing either. See?
- MK: But you remember that she played piano.
- KA: Played piano. She was always such a nice sweet person. I can just see her little face yet.
- WN: Glasses?
- KA: Yes. Glasses. Isn't that interesting?
- WN: My goodness.
- KA: But she's the only one that I remember from school.
- MK: So who were your closest friends while you were at Jerome?
- KA: Like the Kirita girls.
- MK: That would be Marian?
- KA: Marian and Sally. Yes. Ruthie.
- MK: Ruth Oekawa.
- KA: And then we had the Yamane girls from Hilo.
- MK: So you still kind of were together with the Big Island girls. You folks were all from the Big Island?
- KA: Yes, they were from the Big Island. But that wasn't the reason. I think our houses were very close to each other. Probably that's what. I was closer to Marian's age, so we chummed around a lot with the Sugita girls.

- MK: You were saying “pal around with them.” What did you folks do?
- KA: I don’t think we did very much.
- MK: You also worked in camp yeah?
- KA: Yes, after high school. I went to nurse’s aides class, and then worked at the hospital as a nurse’s aide.
- MK: Basically, what was your work as a nurse’s aide?
- KA: All kinds of things. You know, a regular nurse’s aide, you did whatever they told you to do. They had a TB [tuberculosis] ward also. There were two sisters. All the island girls (who were nurse’s aides), became real good friends. We also worked in pediatrics and maternity ward. That was fun.
- MK: You know, just your being a nurse’s aide, what kinds of ailments did people have in camp?
- KA: I don’t think I know that too well (laughs). We were on the bottom of the totem pole, so you just did the bedpans and give them baths and things like that.
- MK: People were giving birth? You had the maternity ward.
- KA: Yes. (There was a woman who labored for thirty-six hours when she had her first child.) When I think of Jerome hospital, I always think of her, because she was in there for such a long time and had such a hard labor.
- MK: Who were the doctors back then?
- KA: From here, it was Dr. Miyamoto.
- MK: Dr. Kazuo Miyamoto.
- KA: Miyamoto. And there was a Dr. Taira.
- MK: Dr. Taira?
- KA: And Dr. Ikuta. He was an eye specialist.
- MK: How about dentists? You folks have dentists?
- KA: There must have been, but I didn’t go.
- MK: You didn’t have to go.
- KA: It’s not that you didn’t have to go, we just couldn’t go I think (chuckles) unless it was (a toothache).
- MK: Oh boy. You had your friends and I think people have spoken about the 442 [Regimental Combat Team] men sometimes coming. What are your remembrances of those visits?
- KA: I remember that real well. I don’t know how long after we were there. It must have been [19]43. They had a 442 baseball team. They came to play with the camp boys. They came quite often.
- There were also some musicians, like Jiro Watanabe who played the steel guitar. Just two or three boys. They used to come down too.

MK: Were there some that were like sons of your parents' friends? Personal acquaintances that came too?

KA: Yes. Lots of them. Like Herbert Okano. He came down. In fact, he came several times. Some of the boys came more often than others. I understand they had just a certain number of boys that could come, so they'd all pool their money and sent couple boys. They were the ones selected to bring back the *tsukemono* and *musubi*.

MK: They would come and the mothers in the camp would prepare the *tsukemono* and *musubi* to give to the men?

KA: Well it's the kitchen that did that, the people in the kitchen. That's why they used to kind of save some rice so on weekends they could make extra *musubi* to send it back to the boys.

MK: When you say *tsukemono*, what kind of *tsukemono* were they making?

KA: I guess it's just a Napa.

MK: Cabbage?

KA: Kind of dark leaves.

MK: Napa.

KA: (And head cabbage.)

MK: No *takuan*?

KA: Yes, they had *takuan* too. That smelly one, yes.

WN: *Daikon*?

KA: Yeah. They had that.

WN: Somebody told us that they would get the watermelon rind and cut it up and make *tsukemono* like that. Do you remember that?

KA: No. Not being in the kitchen. One thing I remember. Earl Finch. He sent down a great big truckload of watermelons. That was the first time and it tasted so good. I guess [Block] 39 was the recipient of it, I don't think it was a whole camp. He was so good to the 442 boys. He was really wonderful to them.

MK: What was his connection with Block 39 at Jerome though?

KA: I don't know. Because it's Hawai'i boys probably. I don't know whether that's true or not, but. . . .

MK: We've heard sometimes that the USO [United Service Organization] group at Jerome would have dances.

KA: Yes.

MK: Were you involved in that too?

KA: No, we didn't go to the dances. We were young kids, so they wouldn't let us in. But, a busload of boys would come to our recreation hall for a USO dance. I think that's when Jiro played the steel guitar. I think without him they wouldn't have had a dance. I'm sure about that. I should have asked him while he was still alive.

- MK: I think one time you were saying that you even got to go to Shelby. How'd that come about?
- KA: They went several times—the [Camp] Shelby boys paid for the bus to take us there. My father didn't allow me to go because he didn't really like the idea, until Mrs. Miyazaki from Kaua'i got to be a chaperone. That was all right then, so I got to go once (laughs).
- MK: When you went to Camp Shelby, what did you folks do?
- KA: Oh, it was really only for that dance. It was fun because you didn't have to know how to dance because you just go one step and [words unclear]. There's so many boys.
- WN: Oh boy, I see. They would—what do you call that?
- MK: Yeah, cut in.
- WN: Cut in. Yeah.
- KA: Cut in.
- WN: Boy, you must have felt special, huh?
- KA: Right, right.
- MK: Oh my goodness.
- KA: That's why we were saying, "No wonder you girls wanted to come." (Laughs)
- WN: How many of you girls actually went on that trip?
- KA: I guess a busload would be about forty? I would think. Mary—what was her name? I should know her name so well. She was a Mainland girl and she was an avid person for getting the 442.
- MK: Was it Kochiyama?
- KA: Kochiyama, that's her married name.
- WN: Oh, Mary Kochiyama. Yeah.
- MK: Okay, so she kind of . . .
- KA: Oh yes. She worked hard for 442. She treated the boys so well. She was the one that went out (to the gate to wave) goodbye to the boys. (Her name was Mary Nakahara.)
- MK: When you folks went to Shelby, how long did you folks get to stay?
- KA: I can't remember that, but we stayed overnight. It took one day to go. Then having the dance, probably came home the next day. So it would be the weekend.
- MK: At the dances at Shelby, would there be a live band?
- KA: I don't remember that either. There must have been because they had a band. Camp Shelby band.
- MK: How neat. Other than that time when you got to go to Camp Shelby, were there other opportunities to go out of Jerome?
- KA: I really don't know, because I didn't go out. Some people must have gone out to Chico.

- MK: Other than the 442 boys coming in, were there other—even people in the community outside of Jerome that would come in for various purposes?
- KA: I don't think so. I never saw anybody. I only saw the people in the guard house. [Tape inaudible.]
- MK: So you would see them. The men up in the guard house with their guns.
- KA: Yes, they had guns. That was their job.
- MK: I know that you were still really young when you were in Jerome, but were there really sad things that you heard about while in Jerome? One woman told us about a *kibei* man committing suicide. Were there any things like that that come to mind?
- KA: No. I don't remember. There must have been some sad things, but I don't remember. There's one man in our block who passed away, but he was sick.
- MK: If someone passed away, what services would be held for a person?
- KA: There were lots of *bon-san*, so it was no problem having services. He was buried in Jerome. There must be a few people buried there. But this man was a *kibei* and he was buried in Jerome. I remember he being sick while we were working at the hospital.
- MK: You mentioned there were a lot of *bon-san*. A lot of ministers.
- KA: Yes.
- MK: For your family, what religion were they following at the time they were in camp, if any?
- KA: No, they didn't follow any religion as far as they're concerned. My grandmother was Hongwanji, but my parents never really adopted that.
- MK: In Japanese families, when someone has passed away, often times there's the *butsudan*. You do the *osenko*, you do the rice.
- KA: Yes, right, right.
- MK: And the water.
- KA: Right.
- MK: Tea. Were people still practicing things like that in camp?
- KA: I don't know. Maybe with that many ministers they probably did. But that was in the privacy of their own home.
- MK: I thought I'd ask that because you folks had just lost a family member not too long before the war.
- KA: My grandmother was cremated. The reason why they did that is because my father felt that someday he might take her back to Japan. That was the reason.
- MK: When Jerome was closing, you and your family went to Heart Mountain [Relocation Center in Wyoming].
- KA: Yes.
- MK: How come Heart Mountain? Because there were other places.

- KA: My father said he was so hot in Jerome that he wanted to go somewhere that was cool. That was the only reason. I guess the people who went to Heart Mountain felt the same way (laughs). He didn't want to go to Gila [River], because that was in Arizona. He said that's too hot. (Laughs)
- MK: How hot did it get at Jerome? How bad was it?
- KA: It was muggy. It was very muggy. It's humid. It wasn't like Arizona, hot hot. But it's that humid kind, the kind you'd perspire.
- MK: What relief did you folks get from the heat? What could you do at Jerome?
- KA: Put some wet cloth like this [against skin]. (Laughs)
- MK: That's it? Okay.
- KA: Practical.
- MK: Very practical. So you folks left Jerome because it was closing, and went to Heart Mountain. When you first got to Heart Mountain, what was your reaction to the place? Different camp, different area. What did you think?
- KA: Well, my thought was it looks the same. Because you see the barracks, they're all the same. But we weren't living all together. I think the Sugitas also went there. Of course the Oekawas were there. I don't know who else, because I was there only about two months. It was a very short time.
- MK: Were there any differences that you noticed between Jerome and Heart Mountain?
- KA: I didn't notice that.
- MK: Why is it that you were there only two months?
- KA: Well, my father said I really should have some kind of training or go to school—which was true. Even when we were in Jerome, he was thinking about that in case we had an opportunity. When we went to Heart Mountain, Ruth [Oekawa] and I decided going to a cosmetology school. It was short, not too expensive. You can always find a job. We were talking to this lady who was right across the way, and she was a *haole* lady, married to a [Japanese] minister. She said, "I understand you want to go to Minneapolis."
- Sally Kirita was in Minneapolis, so she wanted us to come to Minneapolis. That was the first place we thought of going. So, this lady told us, "I have a daughter in Minneapolis. So, maybe we can ask her to help you." She was married to a serviceman, Takahashi. She looked *haole* so she went to all the cosmetology schools, looked around, and talked to everybody. She sort of chose one that was right in town and so it was kind of decided that we would go to this school because she thought the owner of the school was good and very understanding. That's the kind of place we want to go. We decided that's where we should go.
- In the meantime, Sally's boyfriend, he passed away. He was one of the first ones in 442 to pass. Sally wasn't doing too well. In fact, she was seeing mirages of him coming home. It just scared Ruth and I, so we decided to just go and be with her. So we left kind of early. We stayed at this lady's daughter's apartment for two weeks until we found a job working for our room and board. Then we moved out. It was such a big help because she scouted the schools and talked to the principals, so it made it real easy for us.
- MK: What did she explain to the principals?
- KA: Well, she must evidently told them that we were Japanese. She was aware of discrimination, so she wanted to be sure that we weren't ostracized or anything like that. She promised that she would take care of that. She must have talked to the students. We

- had really no problems, because Minneapolis is lots better than most southern states. We really did very well.
- MK: What was Sally Kirita doing in Minneapolis?
- KA: She was working for a family.
- MK: So not going to beauty school?
- KA: No.
- MK: Then, you said you stayed with the *haole* woman's daughter in Minneapolis for about two weeks.
- KA: Two weeks.
- MK: Then you folks found a place of your own for room and board.
- KA: Room and board.
- MK: What kind of work did you do?
- KA: Mother's helper. After dinner you wash the dishes and clean up and sweep up and tidy up. If they have children then you took care of the children. Just whatever mother tells you, you do that. So, mother's helper. (Since we did not have any children, I vacuum cleaned the house and also cleaned the bathrooms.)
- MK: So you would do that and when you're not doing that, you were going to school?
- KA: So during the day you go to school. After you come home, you take care of the dinner and lots of times the breakfast dishes. If she told you to wipe the floors, well you did that too. So, whatever mother would tell you, that was your job.
- MK: Ruth and you were at the same household?
- KA: No.
- MK: Different ones?
- KA: Different ones. Everybody had one girl.
- MK: How were you treated by this family?
- KA: Very well. The only thing with my family, she was a businesswoman and he was an engineer for the railroad, so he didn't come home at times. They were busy people. Whereas if you have children, you get to be part of the family a lot, but I had a different role. (During the season, we made strawberry and grape jelly and canned peaches and pears.)
- MK: But she had children though?
- KA: She had one child who was in the South Pacific, and (he was killed in action). I've oftentimes thought they were so good to me (even when their son was killed by the Japanese). It was interesting because he had a dog—a German shepherd dog, (mascot for the unit). After he passed away and when some of the boys came home—they hid this dog in a bag and brought him home. So when I got to the house, the dog was there already. He didn't like women too well because he was not used to ladies, he's more attuned to soldiers. In fact, I think that story was in Ernie Pyle's book about that dog.
- MK: In Minneapolis you had Sally there. I think the Sugita family, they were in Minneapolis?

KA: I don't think so. No, they were in Chicago.

MK: They were in Chicago. I see.

KA: Yes, they were in Chicago. It was just Sally and Marian and us I think.

MK: So in terms of a social life in Minneapolis, who did you kind of hang out with?

KA: We all joined one of those churches there. Reverend Nagano from California was a minister there too, so he took care of us and kept us under his wing. He was here at Makiki for a while too.

MK: A Reverend Nagano?

KA: Nagano. Yes. I don't know what happened to him, but he was in Minneapolis. So he took Oriental kids—Japanese kids under his wings.

MK: I know like the MIS [Military Intelligence Service] men were . . .

KA: Yes, there were lots of MIS people.

MK: Did you folks ever get together?

KA: (Reverend and Mrs. Nagano always invited the boys to join us.) From the church group I think we went once to Camp Snelling or something.

MK: During your time in Minneapolis, were there ever any instances where you felt really uncomfortable being Japanese American?

KA: Well, sometimes there's a kind of second thoughts, but I don't remember really, really being ostracized. I had kind of an interesting experience, because I was on an end of the bus line. I always rode in the morning kind of early. One day, I looked out at this bus stop, and there were lots of men with black hats and black coats. It must have been wintertime, maybe February. There was a lady among that group. She wore a dark, purple hat. Purple galoshes. And a purple coat. She had red hair and white, milky skin, with a purple cane. I looked, I said, "Oh my, so unusual." Because this is wintertime, it's black and brown. That's all you see.

She hobbled on the bus and I could see she was a little lame. I thought to myself—"I hope she doesn't sit near me," because when anyone sees her, then they'll see me too. I was conscious about that. My goodness, she plopped right next to me. Sat right next to me. I looked outside and I didn't say anything. I just rode.

Pretty soon she chirped up and she said, "This is such a lovely day." (Chuckles) She was a chirpy little lady, and she asked me, "Do you live around here?"

I said, "Oh, I live four blocks away."

She said, "Are you from here?" All these questions I don't want to get involved.

(Laughter)

So she asked me whether I was from here, from Minneapolis.

I said, "No, I'm not."

She said, "Where are you from?"

So what can you do? I said, "I'm from Hawai'i."

She said, “Oh.” She said something about Bataan. She must have made a mistake with Philippines.

So I said, “No, it’s the Hawaiian Islands.”

And she said, “Oh, why are you here?”

I’m in a locked spot. So I spilled the whole thing, and I said, “I was interned and I’m out here going to school.”

She was so curious. She wanted to know all about it. She was such a chirpy little lady, so I said, “Oh, you’re so joyous.” She’s so joyous and she was. She felt joyous.

She said, “Well, when I was first married, my aunt told me yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery.” What was that? Today is—I don’t know, I can’t remember.

WN: Has to rhyme with mystery and history yeah?

KA: Yes, well anyway. This is—today is all we have. Anyway, so I said, “Oh, how nice.”

She said, “I’ve lived by it all my life. You have to make sure that yesterday is all gone and tomorrow you can’t tell. You have only today. So today you enjoy.”

So I said, “What a wonderful thing to learn.”

So we went downtown and she got off the bus. She held my hands and she said, “Remember, Dearie. Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift—enjoy.” She said, “Repeat after me.”

(Laughter)

Because I was a kid. I repeated. “Now,” she said, “keep that in mind.” And off she went downtown. For three months every single day. I looked out to see whether I could see her again. I never saw her again. So, that was it. Just like a little angel.

MK: What a sweet lady.

KA: I always thought I’d never forget it, but today is (a gift—enjoy!) (Laughs) So, that was a funny experience. Out of the clear blue sky.

MK: Wow. That’s a neat experience.

KA: Yes. But the thing is, I never saw her again. You would think around that area is residential with lots of lakes around, you would see her again, but I never did.

MK: Then you were saying that beauty school was short. How long do you stay in beauty school?

KA: I think it was nine months. Nine or ten months.

MK: How much did it cost?

KA: (I don’t remember.)

MK: Then in those days, what was the basic curriculum like? What did you have to learn in beauty school?

KA: I think it’s the same thing as today. Only thing, methods have changed.

- MK: It was mostly just hair or other aspects of. . . .
- KA: No, hair was the first thing. Then you did lots of facials and things like that too.
- MK: So it was more cosmetology then, not just. . . .
- KA: It's a cosmetology school.
- MK: All the time you're in Minnesota, your parents were still at . . .
- KA: Heart Mountain.
- MK: When did they finally leave the camp?
- KA: At the end of the war.
- MK: At the end of the war they left?
- KA: End of the war, and the camp was all going to close. So, the war relocation center called us to tell us that we can go home. They paid our way to LA [Los Angeles].
- MK: So did you get reunited with your parents and come home together?
- KA: Yes. I got there first. Then I went to the train station to meet them. I got there before they did.
- MK: When you say there, where was . . .
- KA: At the train station.
- MK: In?
- KA: LA.
- MK: In LA. Then from LA?
- KA: You know, we went to Santa Ana. I think we stayed there about three weeks. Santa Ana Air Base I think. We stayed there quite a while. It was kind of fun for us too, because we knew quite a few people by then, like the Naganos were in LA too, so we got to see them. We could take the bus and go all the way down to LA. It took a while before they were ready to ship us home.
- MK: When you and your parents came home, again where did they stay? You were saying they had a home in Kona.
- KA: Yes. So we stayed with some distant relative for a few days in Honolulu. When the time was ready they shipped us home to Hilo. Then bussed us home to Kona. We were fortunate because our uncle and his wife stayed in our house. At least they still had the farm they could farm and they could do that. Compared to other people that I hear, (we were very fortunate).
- MK: So when your parents came back, they had their home.
- KA: And they had the farm.
- MK: And farm. What else did they do for their support? Was that enough? They were okay?

- KA: Well, I don't know. I started working at Outrigger down here. I worked there ten years. I used to send money home. I guess they made do like everybody. Like old people do. They just made do.
- MK: Then for yourself, you had come back to Honolulu and you started working at a beauty salon at the Outrigger.
- KA: At Outrigger. And I was there ten years.
- MK: Ten years. Then after the ten years what did you do?
- KA: Then, I opened my own salon in Kaimukī. So I was telling a daughter of a friend of mine—we were talking about the number of places that we worked—I said I worked a little over forty-four years and I've worked only three places. One, I stayed at the Outrigger for ten years. I worked in Minneapolis at CAL's for a while, until I came home. I had my shop in Kaimukī. Only three places.
- MK: My goodness. And your clientele? What was your clientele basically? All the years you had your shop.
- KA: You know I was really lucky when I think about it, because I worked at the Outrigger for ten years and I got to know a lot of people and a lot of tourists that came down. Tourists used to come for three months those days. They didn't stay for a week or ten days. They rented a condominium or an apartment around Kaimana Beach. So you get to know them real well. When I opened my shop, they always came to Kaimukī. Lots of people did that. I also had lots of *kama'āina*. Those days you didn't have many Oriental people. At least in Waikīkī you didn't. My clientele was large majority of *haole* people.
- MK: When you mentioned the Outrigger, that's the Outrigger. . . . Not the hotel yeah?
- KA: No, the hotel came way later. It used to be the Outrigger Canoe Club.
- WN: Oh, Outrigger Canoe Club.
- KA: Yes, Outrigger Canoe Club. They had a little arcade there. The canoe club was right on the beach area, and they had this arcade and we were in that arcade. After Outrigger Canoe Club moved to where the Outrigger built their hotel. That was after we left.
- MK: Then what made you go on your own and open up your own shop?
- KA: I don't know. I was happy at the Outrigger. But, by that time (I was married and building a home in Moanalua).
- MK: When did you get married?
- KA: Nineteen forty-nine.
- MK: Who did you get married to?
- KA: Wallace Kawamura.
- MK: How did you folks meet?
- KA: I guess with 442. Feels like so long ago.
- WN: He was a L Company in 442.
- KA: L Company.
- MK: But you met him over here in the islands?

- KA: Yes. Probably at a dance or some place like that. I knew him for a while.
- MK: All your married life, your husband was a contractor?
- KA: Yes. After we got married he decided to go into contracting.
- MK: You folks have how many children?
- KA: We just have one, our child is adopted. We have one daughter.
- MK: One daughter. Do you have grandchildren too?
- KA: Yes, we have two grandsons.
- MK: Oh, good. Good. When you look back on your life, especially having been interned—your family and yourself having been interned—how do you think you've been affected? Or what place does it have in your life?
- KA: Well, I'm not glad that we were interned. I'm not bitter about it or anything like that. I think it's part of our lives. Actually, even my parents because of all that hardship around 1952 they found Tenshoko Daijingu-kyō religion and it was the best thing for them, gave them a lot of peace. It was good for them. I really am grateful for that, because if they didn't have this experience, they probably wouldn't have embraced it so readily, because my mother was the one that first found out. She immediately practiced the teaching, and it was a blessing for all of us.

As far as I'm concerned, I'm glad I had this experience; made me grow. But, I don't want anybody else to ever have to go through this. Incarcerated by your own country for nothing what you did, except the color of your skin and nationality. I'm aware of that now. When they abuse American citizens of another nationality, it hurts me. So, if I can do some little part, to make sure they don't have the same suffering we did, because it's unfair, . . . It doesn't mean I don't appreciate what we went through. I think it helped everyone of our family, from the oldest to the youngest. It helped each one of us grow. I think we all appreciate it for this fact. For my parents to be able to do as much for their kids, it's fantastic for the limited resources they had. I think we fared very well. But, I don't want anybody to have to go through this.

- MK: We really thank you for sharing all of this.
- WN: Thank you.
- MK: Oh my goodness.
- KA: Lots of memories I didn't remember. (Laughs)
- MK: You did fine. Thank you.
- WN: Thank you so much.

I'll turn this off now.

END OF INTERVIEW

Unspoken Memories:

Oral Histories of Hawai‘i Internees at Jerome, Arkansas

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