

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Charles Koichi Yamashiro

Charles Koichi Yamashiro, the eldest of five children, was born in Ha'ikū, Kāne'ōhe, Hawai'i in 1921, to Koki and Tsuru Yamashiro, immigrants from Okinawa-*ken*, Japan. His father was a farmer; his mother, a homemaker who later started a roadside fruit stand.

Like many others who grew up on the Windward side of O'ahu, he attended Benjamin Parker School. Later, he attended schools in Honolulu: Central Intermediate, McKinley High, and Hawaiian Mission Academy (HMA).

A 1939 HMA graduate, he enrolled at Pacific Union College in Angwin, California.

During World War II, he was initially held at Merced Assembly Center; later at Amache War Relocation Center (Granada, Colorado).

Through the efforts of Dr. E. Cossentine, president of Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, he was released in Fall 1942 to complete his BS degree there.

Charles Yamashiro received a Master's degree in Biochemistry from the University of Utah and graduated from Loma Linda University Medical School in 1950. He completed his internship followed by residency in OB-GYN at Los Angeles County General Hospital.

He served two years in the U.S. Army Medical Corps after which he established a practice in Kailua, O'ahu, Hawai'i in 1958.

Retired since 1991, Charles Yamashiro and his wife, Naomi, reside in Kailua.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Charles Koichi Yamashiro (CY)

Kailua, O'ahu

August 18, 2011

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

MK: This is an interview with Charles Koichi Yamashiro. Session one on August 18, 2011 in Kailua, Hawai'i. And the interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

So we're going to start hearing your life history from today. And we're going to start off with real basic things like where were you born?

CY: I was born up Ha'ikū Road. That's in Kāne'ohe, O'ahu. There was a Libby, McNeill labor camp. As I remember, there were about three bungalows. Each bungalow was divided into, I think, four apartments. Our family occupied one of them.

MK: And in what year were you born there?

CY: Oh, 1921.

MK: And in your family, how many children were there, eventually?

CY: I believe, six. Yes, six of us. [Eddie, Kojo, Harry, Clara, Raymond, and I.]

MK: What number child were you?

CY: I was number one. (Laughs)

MK: What was your father's name?

CY: Koki.

MK: And your mother's name?

CY: Tsuru.

MK: Now based on what you've heard about them, what do you know about your father's family background and his life back in Okinawa?

CY: Well, I don't know too much, but his father was a teacher. Before that, I think they came from a number of warriors. From what I have read, they traced their background to Tametomo Minamoto.

MK: And during your father's time, what was his family doing?

CY: At that time, well, he [CY's grandfather] was a teacher. He was good, as I was told, in calligraphy. I've seen pictures with him. In fact, when I went back there when I was about fourteen or fifteen, I did meet him. He was, by then, aged with a beard, but he was happy to have dinner with me. In fact, whenever we ate, he made sure that I was present (laughs).

MK: And that would be your grandfather?

CY: That was my grandfather. My father's father, right.

MK: When people talk about coming from Okinawa, they often say, "I'm from Naha or Shuri or Itoman." Where did your father's family come from?

CY: Shuri.

MK: You know, when you look back on your father's life, what have you heard, in terms of his upbringing or education or economic situation?

CY: Well, I don't know too much about it, but at least what I do know is that when King Kalākaua went to Asia to recruit laborers, the first wave was the Chinese. I think he came with the second wave—the Japanese. He was here for a few years and then went back to Japan to find a wife, at which time, he met my mother.

MK: And that would be Tsuru.

CY: Tsuru [Yogi Yamashiro], right.

MK: What have you heard about her background and her life?

CY: From what I remember, she was a daughter of a rich, prosperous businessman who used to go to Taiwan. I think it was camphor that he used to bring over and do business with it. But he went bankrupt. So when she was in third grade, she had to quit school, and she was working at a hat shop, where my dad saw her. I guess, he fell in love with her (chuckles), and thereafter, tried to persuade her to join him, you know, by coming to Hawai'i. Well, you know, how they—men proposed. (WN and MK laugh.) Painted a rosy picture: "Look, let's go there. We'll work hard for a few years, we'll make a lot of money, and then we'll come back home and we'll live happily thereafter." He was finally able to persuade her.

MK: And so, they ended up here in the islands . . .

CY: Right.

MK: And initially, where did they settle?

CY: I can still picture the bungalow apartment that I was raised in. But she told me that when she first came here, after a few days, she wanted to pack up and go back to Okinawa because she never worked so hard in her life as she did in Hawai'i. She worked in the pineapple field hoeing, picking pineapple under the hot, tropical sun. She was ready to pack up and go back because she didn't anticipate all this tough labor.

- MK: What kind of work was your father doing?
- CY: My father was involved in pineapple raising and harvesting.
- MK: I think, during our last meeting, you mentioned that, eventually, he got out of that. If you could explain to us what he did.
- CY: Well, the Japanese used to get together, pool their earnings in what was called *tanomoshi* [mutual financing arrangement among family and friends]. He participated in that and was able to raise funds through that source, as well as through, I suppose, help of his relatives. He had two other brothers—actually, four other relatives who were close to him. He was able to raise money, and with that money, he purchased a five-ton Mac truck. He used to go to Moloka'i during the summer when the pineapple harvesting season was at its peak and made extra money that way. He gradually accumulated enough money to get out of working as a laborer working in the pineapple fields.
- MK: And so, when he got out of the laboring situation with Libby, McNeill, Libby, what did he get into?
- CY: He first started working as a taxi driver. Then, he went into banana farming. The lands that he cultivated were essentially “virgin” farmlands—lots of wild guavas, the fruits of which enriched the soil as it decomposed in it. At first, he would clear the land of all the shrubberies, trees, et cetera. Then he would plow the land before planting banana. He soon found out, because of the unusual fertility of the soil, all he had to do was to clear the land, dig a hole in the ground with the backhoe of his tractor and plant the banana sapling in it. He specialized in raising Bluefield bananas, and did very well. At that time, the Bluefields commanded a better price than apple or Chinese bananas. The largest one he harvested was a hundred-and-fifty-pound bunch. Unfortunately, a viral disease (Panama wilt) affected the Bluefield bananas throughout the islands. Now, you rarely will find Bluefield bananas in Hawai'i.
- MK: And in those days, when your father farmed all these bananas, where did he take them to market?
- CY: He first took them to River Street [in Honolulu] produce markets.
- WN: That's Downtown?
- CY: Downtown on River Street.
- MK: You know, it seems like your dad had a pretty big operation. So who was providing all the labor for planting, harvesting, and marketing?
- CY: (Chuckles) He had a Filipino laborer who lived in a hut in the field. He [CY's father] would take groceries and supply other things that he [laborer] needed to live on and placed him on salary. To clear land, my dad used a Fordson tractor. Then, he did all the plowing. But when it came to harvest time, he would cut the stalks, harvest the bunch of bananas, and I had to carry it to the road. (Laughs) I was the oldest boy, you see. I was in my early teens then.
- MK: So he relied partially on . . .
- CY: Partially on me.

- MK: . . . family.
- CY: He had Filipino laborers. At least, two laborers.
- MK: And what was your mother's role in the farming?
- CY: My mother's role—actually, I rarely saw her out in the field. It was more home—household duties—preparing food, feeding us guys.
- MK: And you know, I know that last time, you mentioned that your mother, somewhere along the line, also had a fruit stand?
- CY: Oh yeah. As they prospered, she started a roadside fruit stand.
- WN: Oh, you told me where it was.
- CY: Yeah, it was opposite St. Mark's Church in Kāne'ōhe. It started out with a platform where she displayed her fruits—banana, papaya, and a few other things, and it had a galvanized roof over it. That was the beginning. She prospered, especially during World War II. Military buses used to stop by. The soldiers enjoyed Hawaiian fruits, especially banana. Civilian tour buses also frequently stopped there. Business was good. As a result, they were able to build. If you go there now, a concrete building still stands there (chuckles) as a testimony of their hard work. (Laughs)
- WN: She sold bananas as one of the things . . .
- CY: Bananas, papayas, . . .
- WN: . . . she sold.
- CY: . . . and a few other things—breadfruit and some Hawaiian flowers. She also made ginger *le's* to sell.
- MK: Oh, wow. And so, all of the items that she sold actually came from . . .
- CY: The vast majority of them my parents raised. There were a few local farmers who brought [fruits and other plant products] to my folks—who purchased them and sold them from there, instead of taking such produce to Honolulu. My father, initially, took most of the bananas Downtown, and sold the rest at Kāne'ōhe. But toward the end, primarily, he used the Kāne'ōhe outlet.
- MK: And I'm moving back a little bit, but you know, you mentioned that your father—after leaving his work at Libby, McNeill's, he was a taxi driver for a while. Where did his taxi go?
- CY: I really don't know, I have seen pictures of him as a taxi driver. But I don't think that lasted very long. I think, through *tanomoshi* and other ways—personal loans—he made money and was able to become independent and build his first house up Ha'ikū Road. His friends were a great help in its construction. Much of the lumber used, as I remember, was secondhand lumber (chuckles). They were able to build a two-bedroom house, with a porch, a kitchen, a toilet and a *furoba* or bathroom.
- MK: And were the bathing facilities, like *ofuro* and the toilet facility, in the house or separate?

- CY: Well, here was this—this was the living room, the bedroom, the porch here. It was connected to another building here which housed the kitchen and right next to it was the *furo* and the toilet was over here.
- MK: For those days, that's a pretty . . .
- CY: It wasn't bad. It served our needs.
- MK: . . . large house.
- WN: Is that the house that you remember where you were born? Is that as far back as you remember . . .
- CY: Well, no, that wasn't. I was born in one of the Libby, McNeill's bungalow houses.
- WN: And where were those?
- CY: You go up Ha'ikū Road, approximately in the area where the entrance to Ha'ikū Plantation is situated.
- WN: Oh, okay.
- CY: Later, that area became Iijimas' chicken farm and papaya field.
- MK: And then the house that your father built . . .
- CY: It was further down. Above He'eia Elementary School.
- MK: You know, when you look back on the neighborhood or the area near the home that you lived in for a longer period of time, who lived near you?
- CY: Well, across my father's property was McCabes. The father was a policeman. Just above that was the Jones family. A lot of kids. Below us, was Tamashiro, below that, Ajifus, then Gibo and Nakamuras. Then, just below that was a big area where I think was Knoll's property. He planted some kind of legume plant. Below that was a graveyard located just above the Kāne'ōhe Windward Mall.
- WN: Oh, [present-day] Windward Mall parking lot?
- CY: Windward Mall, yeah. Near there, on one side, you find a large monkeypod tree and there's where the graveyard is located.
- MK: You know, as you named your neighbors, I noticed that it wasn't all Japanese. Also, the Japanese names were actually Okinawan names.
- CY: There were other nationalities living there. On the left and *mauka* [towards the mountain] of our house was a residence of a Chinese family who raised frogs—frogs which grew up to quite a large size. Beyond that on the right of Ha'ikū Road, as you face the mountain, the Iijimas had a papaya and chicken farm. *Mauka* to that were the Tokushiges—Tomomi, Norito and Masami. Opposite of Tokushiges was Tenny's estate. Ha'ikū Gardens was located in Tenny's estate.
- MK: That restaurant, Ha'ikū Gardens, was it sort of a Hawaiian-style motif eating place?

- CY: I don't quite remember, but it was a popular restaurant.
- MK: So there were other kinds of people living there where you grew up.
- CY: Yeah. And there was a man by the name of Mizushima who was employed by the Tennys, as a maintenance man who took care of the estate. He was somehow related to the Sakamoto family who lived on the estate. One of the Sakamoto boys grew up to be quite a baseball player.
- WN: Oh. Is that the one who was with Castle High School?
- CY: Could be. He was quite a pitcher.
- WN: Was he the athletic director at Castle?
- CY: I don't know. Maybe, he later became an athletic director, but in his younger days, he was quite a pitcher. The Tokushige families lived across the road in a banana patch. The sons were very innovative. They harnessed the river near where they lived by damming it and generated their own electricity. (Chuckles) They were able to supply electricity for themselves and for the Tokushige families.
- WN: You know, those bungalows that you grew up in—that you were in first—that was part of McNeill? Was that owned by McNeill . . .
- CY: Yeah, it was McNeill's.
- WN: Was your father working for McNeill?
- CY: Yes, in the beginning.
- WN: Libby, McNeill's. That's where you folks first lived in the bungalows . . .
- CY: Yeah.
- WN: How old were you when you folks moved? From the bungalow and built that house.
- CY: I don't know exactly but I think it was in 1935.
- WN: You mean, from the bungalows to the house in 1935. Oh, so you're about a teenager then.
- CY: I was a teenager. I vaguely remember, there was a concrete slab that led to this thing that connected the kitchen and to the bedroom and living room. (Inscribed in the concrete were the numbers 1, 9, 3, 5.)
- WN: And so, the new house that—near He'eia School, . . .
- CY: Above He'eia School.
- WN: Above He'eia School. Was that lease land or . . .
- CY: Lease land.
- WN: Do you know who owned the land around there?

CY: I think, initially, Castle—Kāne‘ohe Ranch company. And then, there’s a guy named Knoll, K-N-O-L-L. I think he leased the land and then subleased it to my folks.

There was a Chinese family who lived nearby who raised frogs.

MK: What were the frogs for?

CY: *Kaukau* [food]. (Laughs)

MK: Oh, okay.

CY: They sold them to the restaurants. They were nice, big frogs.

MK: I remember, when you were describing the area, you said something about, “Oh, that part, we had rose apple.”

CY: Oh yeah, that was Coombs who lived above the Tokushige family. There were *haoles* [Caucasians]—a very nice family. This was the second estate. The first estate was Tenny’s. Across the road was Coombs. The trees were tall so we had to knock down the fruits before we were able to enjoy them.

(Laughter)

MK: Oh, boy. And you know, as your family prospered, you know, what was your father’s role? How would you describe your father’s role in the community of people he dealt with?

CY: Well, most of the community efforts were in conjunction with the school and the *kenjinkai* [prefectural club]. When they had picnics, they got together, went down to Waimānalo or Kailua Beach. They had all kinds of races, *sumōtori* [sumō wrestling], et cetera. The kids and adults would engage in these competitive sports. He was also involved with the He‘eia *Nihongo Gakkō*, a Parent-Teacher Association of the local Japanese-language school.

MK: And can I assume that you went to *Nihongo gakkō* [Japanese-language school], then?

CY: I did. (Chuckles)

MK: What are your memories of going to Japanese-language school?

CY: Well, we had to. After attending [public] English school up to about one or two o’clock in the afternoon we had to go to the Japanese school for about an hour each day. On Saturday, we had classes from eight or nine [o’clock] to twelve noon. Mr. Hirayama was the principal who also taught us. Mrs. Hirayama was the other teacher.

The most difficult thing to master in Japanese was to learn how to read *kanji*, the big Chinese characters. There always was the temptation to put *kana* (Japanese syllabary) next to those characters. A conscientious student will not do that to increase one’s reading skill. I sometimes did.

(Laughter)

We made sure the teachers didn't see that. We'd erase them before the teacher found out. (MK and WN laugh.) But in general we studied hard and tried to be good students.

MK: Well, at least you could—you knew what *furigana* [Japanese syllabary] to put next to the *kanji* [Chinese characters]. And then, in addition to the reading and the writing, what else did you get exposed to at Japanese-language school?

CY: We had *shūshin* or ethics. In the upper grades, we were introduced to Japanese history and geography. I don't think I had much *rekishi* [history] or *chiri* [geography] until I went to Hawai'i *Chūo Gakuin* [Central Institute] in town. I think up to the eighth grade, He'eia *Nihongo Gakkō* has more reading, writing, *tsuzurikata* (calligraphy), and lectures in *shūshin*. We played football in the meantime. We played football when we didn't have any classes.

MK: What were your thoughts on going to Japanese-language school back then?

CY: Back then, I really did not fully see its value. I'm glad my dad took personal interest in my study and made sure that I seriously studied. Graduation time was a good time to see if I was conscientiously studying or not. Because during the ceremonies at that time, scholastic recognition with prizes are given out.

MK: And then, in the case of He'eia *Nihongo Gakkō*, was it affiliated with a temple or was it free . . .

CY: No, it was a free standing. It was more a community-supported PTA. Its members were primarily Japanese. A few other ethnic groups were represented.

MK: So your dad was active in the PTA of the Japanese-language school, . . .

CY: Yeah.

MK: . . . he was active in community service although he was a farmer.

CY: He related to me a story how he and Mr. [Giichi] Wakamoto, a *Nippu Jiji* reporter, were invited to dinner by Kāne'ohē sheriff, George Cypher. A delicious meal was served. Both of the invitees asked the sheriff what good stuff they were eating. Toward the end of the meal, they were told that they were enjoying a member of the canine family. You can imagine that the next hour or so, they were vomiting, trying to get out what they had eaten with great pleasure.

MK: And you know, in terms of, say, religious activities, what were your parents involved in?

CY: Well, actually, as I recall, they had a chop suey type of religion. They were raised as Shintoists. They practiced Buddhism. They believed in animism—the spirits, you know—*obake* [apparitions, ghosts] and so forth. So actually, it was a mixture. We attended the *Bon odori* celebration. *Bon* dance. I don't know, maybe I danced once, but I didn't know what I was doing. I was just a little kid. I did it because (chuckles) others were doing it. My mother used to consult a Buddhist priest in Nu'uānu behind where Chock-Pang building is (located).

WN: Mm-hmm [yes].

- CY: Right back of that, there was a little stream. I think now it's covered. But right back of that was Mr. Gima's residence. He was a Buddhist priest and also a spiritual medium. He communicated with the spirits. My mother and Mrs. Ajifu—Ralph Ajifu's mother—used to go there toward the end of the year to inquire about the future. (Laughs) For that service, some donation was made to him. They observed Emperor's Day. They participated in the Buddhist [rituals] at the Kāne'ōhe Buddhist temple.
- MK: And as children, what were their expectations of you?
- CY: Well, in what way?
- MK: Like, did they expect you to follow the religious beliefs that they had or . . .
- CY: No, the only time they expected us to participate was when *senkō* [incense] was offered. Aside from that, we were not asked to join them in their worship or rituals.
- MK: And then, earlier, you also mentioned *kenjinkai* picnics. In your case, what group did your father belong to?
- CY: There were a number of *kenjinkais*—Kumamoto, Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, et cetera. My folks belonged to the Okinawa *kenjinkai*.
- WN: Where were these held?
- CY: Usually at some Windward beaches—Kailua, Mōkapu, Kāne'ōhe, and other beaches.
- WN: Members—families that were members of these organizations—*kenjinkais*—were they mostly people who lived in the area and were they mostly farmers?
- CY: I guess so. They constituted the main segment, but were diverse groups, representing the different demographic.
- MK: The picnic sounded like a lot of fun.
- CY: A lot of fun. Lot of good food. Soda water. I don't recall ice cream. They had ice cakes—various colored, tasty and refreshing ice cubes. Various competitive sports were held such as running races, three-legged races, bag races, sumo (wrestling), et cetera and were divided into different groups according to age and size. An interesting and amusing event was the foot race between my dad who was 5' 1" to 2" in height whose short stubby legs made him run like a rabbit and Mr. Azama, approximately six feet tall, who took long strides as he ran. It was like an annual major event. Some years Mr. Azama out-ran my dad; other times, my dad was the victor. Anyway, these were joyful times and times when spirit of camaraderie prevailed.
- MK: And then, on an everyday basis, what did you do for fun? You know, as a kid.
- CY: As kids, we enjoyed playing marbles. There was a game called “in-a-in-a” hole. There were five separate holes; and starting with the first, each player was given chance to go from one hole to the next and back to the first. First to return to the first hole was considered the winner. In another game called “ring”, a bunch of agates or marbles were placed in the center of a ring that was drawn in dirt. From the periphery of the ring, each player tried to knock out the marbles or agates in the ring. The players took into possession the marbles/agates they knocked out of the ring.

Another game [was] called “peewee” where the materials used were made from cut-up segments of a broom handle and a few made from sticks.

We used to swim quite a bit.

WN: Where?

CY: In nearby rivers. There was one famous swimming hole called Makawiliwili. It had a beautiful waterfall where tons of water tumbled down that fall into a large oval pool. Lots of island people—it seemed—came from all over the island to swim in it. On the Kahuku side was a steep rocky wall. However a little pathway led to the top. People would swim in the pool. When they got “cold” they would climb up the rocky wall to the top, spread themselves over the large boulder-like rocks and warm up. And then, go back to swim in the pool below.

MK: And did you folks go, like, fishing or getting crayfish or any of that . . .

CY: Yeah, *‘ōpae*, *‘o‘opu*. There were *funas* or goldfish, but they were too fast to catch.

WN: You used to catch and eat *‘ōpae* [shrimp]?

CY: Brought home the *‘ōpae*, fried it in a frying pan until it got nice and red. But *‘o‘opu* [goby fish], no.

My dad also took me torching. The torch was made of a cylindrical galvanized container, stuffed with gunnysack which was drenched with kerosene. The intensity of the light from the burning gunnysack would blind the fish at night which were speared. An elder gentleman who used to join us in these ventures in the shallow waters of Kahalu‘u and He‘eia Kea used a machete instead of a spear. He had to hit the water surface perpendicularly; otherwise it would glance in the water missing the targeted fish and may even cut his leg.

WN: What kind fruits, besides bananas, did you folks grow?

CY: As mentioned before, banana was my dad’s main crop. He eventually became probably the biggest banana grower in Windward O‘ahu, in particular Bluefield bananas until a viral disease, Panama wilt, hit the islands. As a result, you could hardly find that variety of banana in the islands.

Other fruits he harvested were papayas, breadfruit, avocado pears, oranges, and lychees. These were from essentially seasonally fruit-bearing trees.

WN: Now, you mentioned Ha‘ikū Valley. Was it by your house in the He‘eia area?

CY: Permit me to define it this way: Ha‘ikū Road extends all the way up to Ha‘ikū Valley. On both sides of Ha‘ikū Road from the mountain end of Ha‘ikū Valley to the ocean is the area called He‘eia. This was where I spent my early days growing up and engaged in the various activities as a youngster.

As I grew older, I became more interested in baseball and football, in activities held more at the Kāne‘ohe public park, theater and Benjamin Parker School.

MK: So in those days, you folks used to go see movies, too?

- CY: Trouble is, we didn't have much money. I think I went to movies about twice—I mean, the theater-held movies. We usually looked forward to Japanese movies held at the Japanese school. Most of these were samurai or cowboy movies.
- WN: How often would you folks go Downtown? I mean, Kāne'ōhe town?
- CY: Well, during school days, almost every day. We walk to Benjamin Parker School and back.
- WN: That was the main part of Kāne'ōhe town?
- CY: Where Benjamin Parker School is located. The fire station is just across the street from it.
- CY: Below Kea'ahala Road used to be the old Libby pineapple cannery.
- WN: Was it on Kea'ahala Road?
- CY: Yeah. Way back there. The cannery didn't last very long, (probably because pineapple did not flourish in the wet Kāne'ōhe climate.)
- WN: And you know, you mentioned that your father was a farmer, and your mother was like the merchant . . .
- CY: Yes.
- WN: So did you help them? How did you help your father and how did you help your mother?
- CY: Being the oldest son of the family, I did most of chores around the house such as feeding the chickens and the pigs, heating up the *furo*, *hō hana* around the house to keep the weeds down, and, as I grew older, milking the cow for house-use milk.
- My mother was a very good and efficient housekeeper. Aside from simple chores—like sweeping, mopping the house or washing dishes once in a while—much of my duties or work was out of doors.
- MK: As a boy, you had some chores, helping out, but did you ever have to work part-time somewhere?
- CY: Yes. When I was about fourteen or fifteen, I worked at the Waimānalo Sugar Plantation. A large plantation truck used to pick up a truckload of boys from Kahalu'u, Kāne'ōhe, Luluku, and Kailua very early in the morning. Our pickup point was at Harada Store in He'eia. We had to be there by 5:30 AM. This contingent of young workers—the older workers being in the late teens—were taken to the sugarcane fields in Waimānalo to hoe weeds, cut cane, clean irrigation ditches, et cetera—starting at the early morning hours until *pau hana* time about eight hours later. In hoeing, we were promised five cents a row, from ditch to ditch. Conscientiously, we kept a record of how many rows we hoed. We were delighted that we hoed enough rows at the end of the day to earn an average of \$2–2.50 a day. But when payday came, we averaged only about twenty-five cents a day despite all the hard work and sweating under the hot tropical sun.

At the age of about sixteen or seventeen, I was fortunate to find employment at Dole Pineapple Cannery in Honolulu. I got a job as an assistant to a mechanic who serviced

and repaired truck tractors—those small tractors used in the cannery to haul freight in the working places. I think I made about sixty-five cents an hour then.

MK: In terms of your schooling, where did you go to school? Where did you start?

CY: Benjamin Parker School.

MK: What was Benjamin Parker School like back then?

CY: I don't recall the early days, but I went there when I was six or seven. I think I wasn't very happy in a strange and new environment. So I used to tag along with my older cousin. From what I was told, she got disgusted with me because I would follow her wherever she went, even into the toilet. . . .

(Laughter)

Mrs. Harada was my second-grade teacher. I was her pet—a teacher's pet. I was shown in the second-year class picture as sitting in the second row with an arrogant look and folded arms like a little Buddha.

WN: What would you say was the ethnic breakdown of Benjamin Parker School? What percent were Japanese, would you say?

CY: This is merely a guess. Maybe, at least 50 percent or 70 percent were Japanese. There were other nationalities—Chinese, Filipino, Hawaiians. But predominantly, it was Japanese.

WN: Would you say the majority of your friends or families were—the kids that were going to that school were farming families?

CY: Yeah. Some of the Japanese families like Honda owned a store, Dote and Okabayashi were storeowners. Mr. Oshima was service station operator. There was Mr. Yoshida who had a barbershop.

MK: I noticed that you went through Benjamin Parker School, and then you went to Central.

CY: Yeah.

MK: How come you had to go to Honolulu for middle school?

CY: The reason was because I found out that after finishing the seventh grade, the emphasis during the next eighth-grade year would be the future farmers' program—a curriculum to promote knowledge in agriculture and how to become a good farmer.

As I told you before, my dad used to take me to the produce markets in Honolulu on River Street. On such occasions, I would see young men working in the offices of business firms, such as American Factors, nicely dressed—wearing white shirts with a tie, sitting comfortably behind the desk with perhaps a pen in the right hand. Quite a contrast to me, wearing dirty working clothes, sweating, hoeing, carrying bananas, or weeding in the muddy taro patches. I wanted a better job than being a farm worker. So my first ambition was to be an office boy. I told my dad how I felt and that to attend downtown school would enhance my chance of becoming what I wanted to be.

WN: Were you a good student up to then?

CY: Yes, I was.

WN: When you went to Central, how did you manage?

CY: Scholastically? No problem. I did well.

WN: You commuted?

CY: Yes, five weekdays. On Saturday, a half day, to the Japanese school.

MK: Oh, *Chūo Gakuin*?

CY: Yes.

WN: Wow. (CY laughs.) So all five of you [who shared a ride] went to Japanese school?

CY: We all did, five of us.

MK: Was there a fee for this transportation daily?

CY: I think we paid about five or ten bucks—five or ten bucks a month. It was big money then, but not now. (Laughs)

WN: You would pay the [driver's] family?

CY: No, to the driver.

MK: So, you know, since you were, quote-unquote, sort of like a country boy going to town, what was it like being with town kids?

CY: Well, we were the *pūpule* house boys [boys from Kāne'ōhe, the site of the territory's mental hospital], as I told you. They [city boys] were a little more sophisticated and spoke better English than us guys. Us guys, you know, we used pidgin. Among us guys, when a guy tried to speak good English, they would say, "Oh, you *haole*fied [speaking like a *haole*, a Caucasian]." (MK chuckles.) So that used to discourage us from speaking good English. So, in the beginning, we had some difficulties. At home, we usually spoke pidgin. "Eh, we *buss laugh!*" You know, when you burst into laughter. "Eh, we *buss laugh!*"

(Laughter)

WN: So did the city boys tease you guys?

CY: Well, sometimes, but we used to counter their teasing. We would tell them, "Hey, you know, we have a famous institution in Kāne'ōhe. We doubt you would pass the examination, a very stiff mental exam."

They'd say, "Yeah, what is it?"

- We'd tell them, "It's the Red Roof College, that famous institution in Windward O'ahu. As you look down from Pali, it's that large conspicuous building complex that had red roofs—a well-known institution, but not all would qualify admission."
- WN: Right, so the state [territorial] hospital.
- CY: Right, the territorial hospital.
- MK: Yeah.
- WN: The mental hospital. You folks called it the *pūpule* house.
- CY: Red Roof College—because its roof is reddish.
- WN: That's where Windward Community College is located today.
- CY: Right. (Laughs)
- WN: So did they tease you folks for being—did they call you *pūpule* house boys?
- CY: Sometimes. It didn't bother us. At times, we responded by telling them that they on the leeward or downtown side breathed in the air that we on the windward side breathed out.
- MK: And then, academically, what was it like?
- CY: Academically, in the public school, we had no problem. We did just as well as the downtown students. But Japanese school, we initially were behind. So we had to study doubly hard. But we caught up.
- MK: And then after Central, you went McKinley [High School].
- CY: McKinley, yes.
- WN: For one year.
- CY: One year.
- MK: How was that for you?
- CY: I enjoyed it. I had not only an attractive homeroom and social studies teacher, but a very competent and inspirational one in Miss Baptiste. My Latin teacher, Miss Wikander, was another excellent one. Most male students had to take ROTC, but because my blood pressure was a little up, I was sent to rest period, a one-hour time each day resting on *goza* (mat). The summer before that school year, I worked at the sugar plantation where we really worked "our tail off." The *lunas* (foremen) came around with commandingly loud voices, yelling "Huki, huki," as we were hoeing. The only time we had a "break" was when the water boy came by and we paused to drink water. This continuous heavy work with hardly any time to rest—just during *kaukau* (eating) time—probably affected my blood pressure.
- When I was there, a student by the name of Pfeiffer was the highest-ranking student officer in ROTC. I believe he became president of some big company—Alexander & Baldwin or Matson Navigation Company.

- WN: Oh, yeah, [Robert J.] “Bobby” Pfeiffer?
- MK: Yeah, I think so. I think so, yeah. He was involved with Matson or something
- MK: You know, I had a woman interviewee who was two low in weight, so she had to go to the rest room . . .
- CY: Rest period.
- MK: But they gave her cod liver oil (laughs).
- CY: Yeah. Well, when we were in grade school, we were given cod liver oil. I believe it was for a bone disease—to prevent rickets.
- MK: How come only one year at McKinley?
- CY: Well, I had a friend who was planning to attend Hawai‘i Mission Academy. So I said, well, maybe I’ll go join him because he was in the same car that I was commuting into Honolulu.
- MK: But Hawai‘i Mission Academy had a tuition, right?
- CY: McKinley was free. Hawai‘i Mission Academy charged a tuition. But my father was able to afford that.
- MK: Hawai‘i Mission Academy was affiliated and is affiliated with the Seventh-Day Adventists?
- CY: Right, I didn’t know that.
- MK: So because of that affiliation, were there certain restrictions that you had to deal with when you went to Hawai‘i Mission Academy?
- CY: Yes, we weren’t supposed to smoke, drink alcohol, take drugs or misbehave. They had a moral standard.
- WN: But you were able to adjust going to this religious school?
- CY: It was no problem. It was no problem because I used to attend a Methodist Sunday school in Kāne‘ohe.
- MK: Oh.
- CY: Chinpei Goto was the pastor. He was a former Asahi ball player. After the Sunday service, he used to take us to the public ballpark up Kea‘ahala Road. We used to play baseball. I love it. Playing baseball and the mango trees in the church courtyard attracted me to that church. During the mango seasons, those trees were loaded with delicious fruits that we enjoyed greatly—apple mangoes, cream mangoes, Chinese mangoes, mangoes galore.
- MK: The Reverend Goto is legendary.
- CY: Rev. Goto, right.

MK: He's legendary with Asahi baseball.

CY: You know him? You remembered well.

MK: I've heard the name, yeah. So going back to HMA, how was it for you? You know, academically, socially—going to Hawai'i Mission Academy.

CY: Well, academically, I did all right. Not boasting, I was among the top students. But my dad realized that I was being drawn into Christianity before the first semester was over. He told me that I was going back to McKinley after that year at HMA. He reminded me that being the oldest, I had the family Buddhist altar to take care. I did not object to the plan then.

I said, "Okay."

But toward the end of that school year, an election of officers was held. I was asked to be one of the editors of the school paper. I informed my dad about this. He was so happy to think that his son was academically making progress. With pride, he said, "Go back and do a good job." That's where he made a mistake. Because when I went back the following year, I took a course in Bible and was converted into Christianity.

WN: So you were named an editor of what? Yearbook?

CY: No, *Ka 'Elele*—the school paper.

WN: Oh, the paper. I see. Oh, so your father was very proud of you, so he . . .

CY: Yes.

WN: . . . let you continue at HMA for your senior year?

CY: Yeah.

WN: Senior year was when you were editor-in-chief.

CY: Yes.

MK: Wow. But to be asked to be editor of the newspaper, that is kind of a big deal. And then, in addition to being involved in the newswriting, were there other activities you participated in at HMA?

CY: Well, we had our class functions. I was president of the graduating class. Time for extracurricular activities was limited because after English school, I had to attend Hawaii *Chūo Gakuin*. After that, for home over the Pali.

MK: You had a hard schedule, yeah?

CY: Yes, it was a tight one.

WN: And HMA, in those days, was not where it is today. Where was it?

CY: Presently the academy is at the corner of Pensacola and Lunalilo Street. (The old academy was on the *'Ewa* side of Makiki Park.)

WN: And where did you live when you were going to HMA? Oh, you commuted?

CY: I commuted.

MK: Oh, that's really . . .

CY: I was a *pūpule* house boy [i.e., boy from Kāneʻohe], commuting from Kāneʻohe.

WN: Always a *pūpule* house boy, yeah? (CY laughs.)

MK: Now, how about your siblings? Where did they receive their schooling?

CY: Well, by then I was in the states. So I didn't know exactly where they attended. In their early years, they attended Benjamin Parker School. My brother, just below me, had a physical when World War II started but was rejected for military service because of flat feet. So, he took up auto mechanics and prospered. Eventually, he became owner of a hardware store, a trucking and a rental business. He started from a little service station in Kāneʻohe which my dad was going to give me instead of going to college.

Because of my desire to attend a Mainland college, shortly after completing my seven years at HMA (Hawaiian Mission Academy), he arranged a meeting between Pastor Goto (minister of Kāneʻohe Harris Memorial Church), Mr. Asato (a good friend of my dad and a Sun Life Insurance Company insurance broker) and me at our home—hoping to persuade me to accept my dad's offer instead of attending a Mainland college. I reiterated my desire and my dad finally consented to my wish.

MK: So, you graduated and wanted to attend a Mainland school for what reason?

CY: To become a physician.

MK: Why did you want to become a physician?

CY: I first wanted to become an office boy. And then, when I was attending Central Intermediate School, my brother died of brain hemorrhage. That was when I came in contact with doctors. I was impressed how they were able to help people. I got the impression that they were in a profession where they could help people—help relieve pain, cure the illnesses and so forth. And then, about that time, I read about Dr. James Kuninobu . . .

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

CY: He was featured in the *Nippu Jiji* newspaper. There was a picture of him and an article about how he was elected to be the chief of staff of Kuakini Hospital. I read about it. I felt that perhaps I could be like him. Then, I found out that he attended College of Medical Evangelists. That was what Loma Linda Medical School was called before. So I wrote to that school and got a bulletin which told about the school and the admission requirements. I treasured that bulletin because it not only told about its program, but about subjects that should be taken in high school or academy in preparation for the study of medicine.

So, after graduating from HMA, I decided to attend PUC (Pacific Union College) and enroll in the Premedical Program.

MK: You know, since you had read that article about Dr. Kuninobu and you knew that he went to Loma Linda, did that information kind of motivate you to attend Pacific Union College?

CY: No, not initially.

MK: No?

CY: No. It was after I was attending HMA that I learned of Dr. [James] Kuninobu's Adventist connection. By then, I found out that there were other physicians from Hawai'i who graduated from Loma Linda and also had attended PUC (Pacific Union College). As I recall, there were the Hata brothers, both of who became ENT [Ear, Nose, Throat] specialists, Doctors Maeda, Higa, [Yorio] Wakatake, and Perry Sumida—the latter was an ophthalmologist. There was a Caucasian doctor by the name of Dugan—connected with the state's tuberculosis division—who also graduated from Loma Linda.

PUC had a reputable pre-med program. I learned that most received their preparatory training at PUC, a few went there following one or two years at the University of Hawai'i.

MK: That's interesting.

WN: Should we stop here?

MK: Yeah, we've gone for over an hour and a half already.

CY: That's all right.

WN: We have you graduating from HMA. You have some questions?

MK: We could stop here and then continue next time? Does that . . .

CY: Whatever you say. You're the boss.

WN: So we got you at 1939. (CY laughs.) It's not bad.

CY: Not bad, huh? (Laughs)

WN: We just covered eighteen years.

CY: Eighteen years? Wow! I don't mind continuing.

WN: Really?

CY: Yeah. Look, I'm ninety now. I started as a youngster. (WN chuckles.)

MK: And look at all the changes you've seen. You know, when you talked about Ha'ikū or He'eia, and you describe it the way you do, and all the different things you used to do, it is a totally different world now.

CY: It is a different world.

MK: It's different. And if you told your grandchildren or great-grandchildren . . .

CY: They wouldn't believe it. (Chuckles)

MK: . . . it's like, "What? What did you do?" (CY chuckles.)

WN: Okay, we'll stop right here.

MK: This is really interesting.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 55-45-2-11

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Charles Koichi Yamashiro (CY)

Kailua, O‘ahu

August 25, 2011

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

MK: Okay, this is an interview with Dr. Charles Koichi Yamashiro. This is session number two on August 25th, 2011 in Kailua, Hawai‘i. And the interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

And we’re going to start with your Pacific Union College years. So we’re taking you back to 1939. And first of all, why did you go to Pacific Union and not elsewhere?

CY: Well, Hawai‘i Mission Academy is affiliated with Pacific Union College. I knew of a number who had gone to medicine by that route, a few from the University of Hawai‘i.

MK: And where is Pacific Union?

CY: It’s in Angwin, California.

MK: And whereabouts is that?

CY: That’s in Napa County, a grape-growing county.

MK: And what did your parents think about you going to Pacific Union—going away to college?

CY: I don’t think they were too happy. I told you about the counseling session that my dad arranged with Mr. Asato and Pastor Goto. I still refused to accept what appeared to be a very generous parental offer. In my naiveté, I told them just to give me \$200 and I can make it—earn my way through college.

WN: Were there other universities on your list?

CY: Well, I thought of attending University of Hawai‘i, University of California, and others. I heard of others who had gone to PUC, such as Kuninobu, Wakatake, and the Hata boys. Tadao Hata and the brother became ENT [Ear, Nose, Throat] specialists. Yorio Wakatake became an obstetrician and gynecologist. His son, Minoru, became a dentist after attending the school of dentistry at Loma Linda.

WN: Minoru, the dentist, right. Yeah.

CY: He was a schoolmate of ours at PUC (Pacific Union College).

- MK: Ah, okay. You mentioned that going there, you would be with other classmates from Hawai'i Mission Academy. So what was it like for you, adjusting to being in college there?
- CY: I had no difficulty adjusting. Transition did not bother me. I was determined to study and was happy for the opportunity.
- MK: Ah, so it was a good challenge.
- CY: It was a good challenge, yeah.
- MK: What were your living situation and finances like when you were in college?
- CY: Well, I worked about twenty-five to thirty hours a week while taking a full load. When I first went there, I was given a job working down the farm—harvesting corn, cantaloupe, picking tomatoes and so forth. The second year, I worked in the print shop. I was the floor man.
- MK: Wow. (Chuckles)
- CY: I caught you. I said “floor man,” not “foreman.”
- (Laughter)
- MK: Oh, a floor man!
- CY: Floor man, yeah, the one who sweeps the floor!
- (Laughter)
- MK: Oh!
- CY: Every nook and corner of that print shop.
- WN: (Laughs) You were waiting for her reaction, yeah?
- MK: Yeah.
- WN: “Wow, foreman!” (Laughs)
- CY: (MK laughs.) That’s how lots of people interpreted it when I said “floor man.” (Laughs)
- MK: So you worked on the farm and then in the print shop, sweeping . . .
- CY: Sweeping, yeah.
- MK: . . . all the floors.
- CY: Keeping the place nice and neat.
- MK: What was your living situation like?

- CY: I lived in the boys' dormitory on the second floor. At that time, I had two roommates—one from Brazil, a Japanese by the name of Nakamura, and the other was a Filipino theology student. We had one double bunk and a single bed—all in one room. We ate at the cafeteria.
- MK: How often did you get together with your Hawai'i classmates?
- CY: Usually on the weekends on Sunday or Saturday evenings. We'd cook and talk stories. But most of us were busy. We had to work to defray some school expenses. So we didn't have much spare time to waste.
- MK: What was your field of study?
- CY: Pre-med.
- MK: Pre-med. What did that all include back then? What was the Pre-med curriculum then?
- CY: We had to take different types of chemistry—inorganic, organic, qualitative, biochemistry, physical chemistry—physics, psychology, speech, English, language, biological sciences and religion.
- MK: How did you fare as a student?
- CY: I did well.
- MK: Were there any courses that posed a real struggle for you?
- CY: No. I enjoyed my studies there. It was a challenging experience acquiring knowledge and a bit of wisdom.
- MK: As you look back on your years at PUC (Pacific Union College), what stands out in your mind about your professors or the school in general?
- CY: Well, as you know, medicine is an applied art. The Pre-med program at PUC, I felt, was well designed to acquire basic knowledge and skill in languages, mathematics, the different sciences—such as biology, chemistry, et cetera—history, social studies, and so forth. Emphasis was not just in acquiring knowledge, but wisdom to use them. Also, principles of morality, the transcendent purpose of serving God and humanity. We had some excellent teachers—professors, et cetera.
- MK: Having come from Hawai'i, how did you fare in the speech class?
- CY: Now and then, a little bit of pidgin comes out. I didn't have the fluency that the *haoles* had. But then we caught up.
- MK: That's something. Now, you know, you were at PUC from 1939 till the time—well, till '41. What do you remember about December 7th, 1941? The day of the Pearl Harbor attack?
- CY: I was really surprised. I knew that the U.S. and Japan were at the negotiating table. A Japanese ambassador was in Washington at that time. Then I heard that Pearl Harbor was bombed. One of my first concern or interest was my dad's reaction. Before I left Hawai'i, I knew my dad was a Shintoist—believing that the Emperor was god, something that he

was taught from the time he was young. Therefore, Japan was invincible as god's country and its manifest destiny was to become a world power among nations. I recall a conversation I had with him before I left Hawai'i—here he was justifying Japan's invasion into China, that it was to liberate them from the exploitation by white people—the English, the Dutch, the British and others. In the course of the conversation, I remarked that the Emperor was no god. That instantly got him very upset. He quickly pulled off his farmer's boots and threw them at me barely missing my head. So when Pearl Harbor was bombed, that day of infamy, I wondered about my dad—his allegiances, his loyalty. Shortly after that incident, I got a letter from him, in which he wrote, "Son, you are an American. Be loyal to your country." As far as Mother and he were concerned, "Where you go, we will go." I was very, very happy when I got that letter. Why that change in attitude, in his allegiance, I do not know. It was a remarkable and a very grateful transformation.

I never did ask him what happened to bring about this change. Nevertheless, he was a changed man. In addition, he told me that as his contribution to the war effort, he was taking a truckload of banana every week to the Marine base in Kāne'ohe. A few old-timers shook their fingers at him and he was warned to cut out that nonsense because one of these days, the victorious Japanese fleet with its armed forces will come sailing into Pearl Harbor and he'll be among the first guys whose neck they'll chop off. (Laughs) But my father kept on doing it.

MK: And then what were your thoughts about Japan attacking the United States and Pearl Harbor?

CY: Well, I felt it was a treacherous act. Unfortunately, many innocent people were going to suffer as a consequence. Wars often bring out the bad feelings, suspicion, attitudes, and so forth against the other races. I always have loved my country, proud of what it stood for even though I was mistreated. As I told you before, I was happy over my father's conversion in his allegiance—a Japanese who became an American at heart.

MK: And you know, your being ethnically Japanese, . . .

CY: Right.

MK: Being in California, you know, on the day of the attack and after that, how were you treated initially?

CY: Generally speaking, I think we were treated with respect. Most of them were kind, friendly, benevolent in spirit, sorrowful of the "mess" we were in being treated as second-rate citizens.

There were some Japanese who were upset because of the short notice given them to evacuate the West Coast by General [John L.] DeWitt's decree. Their source of income was cut off. Some of them (mostly farmers) were anticipating a bountiful harvest of their farm crops, now lost that opportunity.

MK: So you folks were a little more isolated from the general public?

CY: Perhaps. In Napa County and the school was situated in a former resort area.

MK: Were there any opportunities to go outside of that area?

- CY: Yes. That is, before the evacuation decree, we went to St. Helena, a nearby town and sometimes took the bus to San Francisco.
- MK: During the early days of the war, were there any restrictions placed on you Japanese American students?
- CY: Not at the school. Initially, evacuation of the Japanese living in the coastal areas—such as those living in Los Angeles and San Francisco—took place in 1942 following General DeWitt's decree. About the middle of June 1942, twelve PUC Japanese students were transported by bus with our personal belongings to a relocation center in Merced, California.
- MK: What were you told about this moving to Merced Assembly Center?
- CY: Actually, not much. We were just following orders. Merced was to be our temporary assembly center. From there, we would be sent to a more permanent area, such as in Arizona, Colorado or Wyoming.
- MK: So you basically—well, just followed the order?
- CY: Yeah, we just followed orders—government orders.
- MK: And then, would you remember who else from Hawai'i, who were at your college, went too?
- CY: There was Elono, from Moloka'i. Wakatake and Tom Oshiro from Honolulu. There was a Kaua'i girl who took up nursing. The others were from California. There was a Nakamura from Brazil and a girl from San Francisco. I forgot her name. But there were about twelve of us.
- MK: Twelve of you.
- CY: Oh, yes, there was Yaeko Shimada who became a teacher.
- WN: And these were all Pacific Union students?
- CY: Right. One morning, we had to pile into a bus and were taken to Merced.
- WN: Now, the semester wasn't over yet, was it?
- CY: Well, it was toward the tail end. School was about to end—about one or two weeks before the end of semester.
- WN: What about finals?
- CY: Finals, I don't know whether we took them or not. I can't recall. At least, they gave us credit for that semester.
- WN: They did? Okay.
- CY: Yeah.
- MK: What was the mood of the group?

CY: Facing an unknown, ambivalent future, the mood was solemn.

MK: And then, what do you remember about the facilities at Merced?

CY: Well, they were hastily built bungalows. The framework was wood two-by-fours frames. They covered them with tarpaper. There were four large rooms or compartments in each bungalow. Our room was occupied by Wakatake, Tom Oshiro, Nakamura and I who later became a dentist, an OB-gynecologist, radiologist and an OB-gyn specialist, respectively. The girls had their own groups. We had a cafeteria where we ate. There was a common mess hall in each area.

MK: How about like toilet and shower facilities . . .

CY: The toilet facility was cleverly made. There was a long one-by-twelve-inch board with *pukas* (holes) every three feet or so over a slightly inclined galvanized tin trough built below it. At the higher end of the trough was a water container which periodically emptied itself to wash away the excrement in the trough out at the other end. Men and women had separate shower stalls.

WN: I see.

MK: What were the meals like?

CY: Essentially, Japanese-style cuisine with some fish, chicken or beef for protein. Also, *tsukemono* and lot of rice.

MK: I know that you said you were there for maybe about—you were there during the summer at Merced.

CY: Right.

MK: So what did you do, day to day, at Merced?

CY: Merced Assembly Center occupied a large sort of rectangular piece of land, surrounded in the periphery by barbed-wire fence. At each corner, a soldier was stationed with a rifle. Approximately 7,000 Japanese were gathered from the surrounding areas and incarcerated there. The first day we arrived there, we toured the place because we were interested to know where we were living. As we were walking, we saw an object splashing water in a puddle of water as it lashed its tail. I excitedly said, “It a Gordius, a whipping worm.” I don’t know if I correctly identified it, but I must have said it with confidence and so positively that the civilian administrator of Merced who happened to be there must have been impressed by my “supposed knowledge” that I was asked to see him at his office the next day. I was asked to be the sanitary inspector of the camp at that time. I was flattered because I was just a third-year Pre-med student. The previous year, however, I had taken a parasitology class under Professor Fallon at PUC who took a graduate course in that subject at Tulane University using the book authored by Craig and Faust.

I asked Tom Oshiro to be my assistant. We both had a female assistant each to examine the women’s toilet and shower stalls. Each morning we reported to Dr. Higaki, the civilian administrator who probably practiced dentistry in San Francisco before being interned.

We were paid sixteen dollars a month by the government. Teachers, pastors and other professionals hired received nineteen dollars a month. The average laborers—and there were many of them in the cafeteria and kitchen—got about twelve dollars a month.

- MK: You know, since you were, you know, working with the administration, how did the other internees look upon you?
- CY: It was a respected job, going around evaluating the quality of food and services which the various sections provided. An amusing aspect of the job was that the people thought we were the judges of the weekly contest the cafeterias had with the winners getting extra food—something delightful. Thinking that we were the judges, we were royally treated when we came around for inspection—sometimes, we were given a slice of delicious ice-cold watermelon or some other delicacy.
- MK: Being a Pre-med student, were there any opportunities to, say, work in a clinic or something?
- CY: Perhaps. There were two to three doctors in the camp and a clinic to provide simple and uncomplicated health care. The volume wasn't there to interest me.
- MK: Looking at things as a Pre-med student and as a resident, what were the health conditions like, generally?
- CY: I was not aware of any significant medical condition or problem in camp or among the residents. The one big problem was environmental. With thousands of people living in close proximity in a hot, dry place and many walking around, the dirt of the ground got to be like powder—pulverized. When the wind blew, it became very dusty. There will be a cloud of dust in the air. You had to cover your face. Living was very uncomfortable because of that.
- MK: Okay, now. You were at Merced for about a summer, yeah?
- CY: Yeah.
- MK: And then, you were sent to Amache [also known as Granada]?
- CY: Amache, yeah.
- MK: You were telling us that you were among the first group there.
- CY: Yeah.
- MK: What did you folks do there?
- CY: We were the first group of internees sent there to clean up the living quarters before the permanent group came to live there. There were scraps of lumber, et cetera, to be gathered and be disposed of. The place had to be cleaned up.
- WN: So you were told that Amache—I mean, I'm sorry—Merced was just an assembly center, and they were starting to relocate all . . .
- CY: Right.

- WN: . . . everybody at Merced to different camps . . .
- CY: No. Primarily to Amache.
- WN: Primarily to Amache from Merced.
- CY: Right.
- WN: I see. Okay. And so your job was to go earlier—a little early . . .
- CY: To prepare the place.
- WN: And how many of you did that?
- CY: I don't recall. Perhaps, a dozen. There were also non-internees working people there.
- MK: Providing the physical labor needed to do all that. (CY chuckles.) And I think you were telling us you were there about two weeks. I'm wondering, you know, I don't know how much you remember about the journey from Merced to Amache. Do you?
- CY: I don't remember. We were taken there by bus.
- WN: Was there any heavy security; were there guards?
- CY: I don't recall. I don't think there were.
- MK: And when you got to Amache, was it already a very secured area?
- CY: That, I don't really remember. We were just a handful of internees sent there to help prepare it for the more permanent internment.
- WN: And, how would you compare the two places—Merced and Amache?
- CY: Physically, it was better. Tarpaper was not used. Wood was mainly used for building.
- WN: I see.
- CY: The basic framework in Merced was wood covered with tarpaper. Whereas in Amache, wood was used more extensively.
- WN: Oh, okay. So I would guess the assembly center was where it had to be put up really fast.
- CY: Right.
- WN: So then, while you folks were all at the assembly center, they could spend a little more time constructing the permanent camp.
- CY: I guess you're right.
- WN: In Santa Anita it was actually stalls.
- CY: Stalls?

- WN: Horse stalls. They used the existent stalls for the internees.
- MK: And you know, you mentioned E. Cossentine's efforts to gain the release of you and other students from Pacific Union College. Would you know how he did that?
- CY: Well, he was president of La Sierra University in Arlington, California. He was transferred to Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska to be the president there. He was aware of what had happened to the students from Pacific Union College and started working in our behalf. The government was informed that the school will vouch for our safety and to grant us the opportunity to complete our college education.
- WN: So did you know him personally or was he at Pacific Union when you were there?
- CY: No. He wasn't there. I got to know him afterwards.
- MK: And so you went to Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska in 1942.
- CY: Yeah.
- MK: Okay, after being at Amache.
- WN: Fall of '42, you started at Union College in Nebraska. So actually, all through this, you never really missed—aside from latter part of second semester of '42, you never really missed any school time, yeah? (Chuckles)
- CY: Yeah.
- MK: Your incarceration was all during that period when you sort of weren't in school.
- CY: One or two weeks of the remaining school year in June 1942.
- WN: Okay.
- MK: Okay, so you ended up—in 1942, at Union College. How did you feel? You know, being allowed to leave the camp and living in college?
- CY: I was happy for the opportunity of graduating from college. During that period, I wrote to various medical schools to see if I could get into their program. I had already fulfilled the minimum requirements of getting into medicine just before I was evacuated out of California. In fact, I was accepted by Loma Linda School of Medicine for the fall 1942 freshman class. Because Loma Linda was in California, I was not able to attend there. Although I wrote to the different medical schools, invariably, I got a letter back, stating because of the war hysteria and my ancestry, it wasn't wise to accept me as a student. I thought of joining the ASTP (Army Specialized Training Program) program offered at the University of Nebraska. I was informed because of my ethnicity, I was not acceptable.
- Because two of my Union College friends applied and were accepted by St. Louis University School of Dentistry in 1943, I thought I would try that. I did and got accepted. The first day of attendance, the Jesuit priest, Dean Pointer, introduced us to the program and gave us an idea of what the program was like. He stated that school was also being held on Saturdays, the Adventist Sabbath day. Because of that three of us students from Union College saw him the next day appealing for exemption from Saturday classes and

that we would make up for that absenteeism. We were counseled, that because we were preparing for a humanitarian type of work, our church would grant us dispensation as his church would. Because we could not conscientiously accept the suggestion, two of us decided to do otherwise: Joe Yamamoto, who later graduated from Physician and Surgeon School of Dentistry in San Francisco, and I, who decided to pursue chemistry as a career instead of compromising our religious belief.

MK: So, what followed?

CY: I decided to attend University of Nebraska and get into its graduate program in chemistry. I worked at Lincoln, Nebraska's May Company after school washing dishes, pots and pans at the restaurant to help defray some school expense.

The following summer, I went to Walla Walla, Washington and joined the Morikone boys to pick cherries. We averaged about three bucks an hour—quite a contrast from earning twenty-five cents an hour as a youngster at Waimānalo Sugar Plantation.

We used a ladder to pick the fruits. A bucket was hung around our necks. Most of the cherries went into the buckets, a few went into our tummies. It was lot of fun picking cherries. Later, we picked prunes at another orchard.

WN: What else did you do to earn some money?

CY: Well, when I was attending Union College, I worked at the furniture shop building cabinets. While attending University of Nebraska, I washed dishes, pots and pans at May's Company in Lincoln after school.

After attending University of Nebraska, I switched to University of Utah. That year, the University of Utah Medical School expanded from a two-year program to a full four years. The goal was to upgrade the medical school so that it would enjoy the reputation as a Johns Hopkins or Mayo Clinic of the West. That year I got a job at University of Utah as a teaching fellow in chemistry which helped me financially.

WN: And, where did you live—in the school dormitory or some rental place?

CY: I lived in a rental house—a two-story building with a basement where the owners, an elderly Greek couple, lived. It was located just below the university on 232 South 13th East. Two of the rooms were occupied by two niseis each. We didn't socialize much because we were too busy and had different programs to attend to. Occasionally, I ate at the drugstore restaurant, but did most of the cooking at home—simplest was combination of corned beef, cabbage and rice, at times, with tofu and chicken.

WN: How did the people treat you, say, in Nebraska and in Utah?

CY: In general, they were real nice and friendly. I didn't notice any overt animosity. One day, on my way from Walla Walla to home in Utah by bus, I was heading for the restroom when I was passing an Indian who extended his right hand for a handshake and said, "Hey, I'm a Cherokee. You must be one, too." My swarthy complexion after working all summer in the fruit orchards made him think I was his tribal brother.

WN: At Utah (University of Utah), what did you major in?

CY: I majored in biochemistry and was conferred a master's degree in 1945. That summer, you remember, the Japanese, after the dropping of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and then Nagasaki, capitulated. The war machinery, its political leaders, and Emperor were brought to their knees and surrendered to the United States. As a result, General DeWitt's decree, which excluded Japanese and those of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast, was lifted. I reapplied to the medical school in Loma Linda and was accepted for the fall class of 1945.

WN: I have no idea what kind of training a doctor receives, you know. What was the course of study then, generally? How would you describe it?

CY: As you know, medicine is an applied science. The first two years were spent at the Loma Linda campus learning the basic knowledge and principles of medicine. The last two years—the junior at Los Angeles County General Hospital and the senior year at the White Memorial Hospital clinics—were spent in applying them in a clinical and hospital setting.

The basic philosophy of Loma Linda School of Medicine was to train physicians to make man whole—physically, mentally and spiritually. It's based on the concept that man consists of those three things. To be well, all those components had to be healthy.

I graduated in 1950 followed by two years of internship. One year of internship would have sufficed, but the additional year placed one in a more favorable position when applying for a surgical or OB-gyn residency.

WN: So what happened?

CY: In 1952, I was accepted in the surgical residency program at UCLA School of Medicine. However, after a month or so in the program, I found out that it had a "pyramid" type of residency where each year, one of the residents was eliminated and had to go elsewhere to complete the specialty training.

I would gladly take care of a patient any day of the week, even on Saturdays if the patient needed or can be helped by my service. But going to school on Saturday as required was contrary to my belief of proper Sabbath keeping. So, I decided to submit my resignation from the UCLA program. I then applied for the Los Angeles County Hospital OB-gyn residency program which was a "parallel" type of program—one in which one could receive the entire training as long as the expected responsibilities and duties were fulfilled. Fortunately, I had previously taken the examination and interview. So, about a week later, I received the acceptance letter and I happily accepted the offer.

WN: How did you like it?

CY: LA County General Hospital was a large hospital—at least 3,000 beds. So, I was privileged to see and be involved in treating many kinds of diseases and complications.

MK: You, being a Japanese, how was it like living in LA? How was it like, say, looking for a home, a place to live?

CY: Fortunately, I found the home of Dr. Hiroshima, a chiropractor, near the corner of Boyle and First Street. It was a three-story building. His office and kitchen were on the first floor. His family sleeping quarters and our room were on the second. The third floor—a smaller area—was occupied by Dr. Taira, a dentist who recently graduated from

Physician and Surgeon School of Dentistry in San Francisco. Bob Chung, a Korean boy from Hawai'i, was my roommate.

I had no problem living in this non-Japanese neighborhood. There were a few Jews, Latinos, and scattered Japanese families as well as whites in that area. Frequently, especially at weekends, I went to Little Tokyo with my friends.

The last two years of my medical school days and during my first year of internship, I lived with the Hiroshimas, a nice, friendly and hospitable family, who occasionally invited me for dinner.

MK: As interns at the hospital, did you receive any compensation?

CY: Yes, sixty bucks a month and as resident physician, \$200 monthly. Living within our means was my primary concern at that time. Frequently, we worked sixty hours or more a week at the hospital. As interns and even as residents, we didn't really mind it because we felt we were getting good training in the profession we chose.

By the time I finished my specialty training in OB-gyn, nationally a big hike in compensation to interns and residents took place. In many hospitals, to begin with, interns started getting a thousand dollars a month—and, today, much more than that.

During my second year of internship, I married a charming girl from the Big Island (Hawai'i) who was taking nursing at the nearby White Memorial Hospital. We really had to stretch that sixty dollars a month to live comfortably. Twenty dollars a month went for rent. At a local Japanese grocery store, we purchased tofu, *age*, linkets (a vegetarian wieners) and a few other items. We raised beans, radishes, zucchinis, onions, lettuces, et cetera, in our own backyard garden to supplement our diet. We really had to economize but did not starve.

Upon completing the specialty training in 1955 and because of the doctors' draft due to shortage of physicians in the U.S. Armed Forces, I was inducted into the U.S. Army Medical Corps at the end of that year. I was sent to Fort Sam Houston for a six-weeks orientation course.

WN: And how did you enjoy army life?

CY: It was a good experience. At least I got to serve my country as a soldier, although initially, I was deprived of my rights as an American. In spite of some inconsistencies in our government, there's no better place to live than under the "Stars and Stripes."

I was also fortunate to be assigned to Tripler Army Hospital in my home state. Captain Moran of the navy was the head of the Department of OB-gyn. An army colonel was second in command. I was the third, as an army captain. We trained doctors in the OB-gyn specialty as well as provided OB-gyn care to dependents of military personnel and female members in the armed forces.

WN: Did you see action while in service?

CY: No, I didn't. If I were drafted earlier, I could have been in the tail end of the Korean campaign. You remember how our armed forces pushed the North Koreans northward toward the Yalu River, but with the help of the Chinese with their "burp guns" (I believe

that was the name given to their rapid-firing guns) and in hordes descending upon our troops, we suffered a humiliating retreat. Our forces were pushed back.

Then [General Douglas] MacArthur executed a strategic move sending our troops by sea to Seoul or near there and was able to stop the North Koreans and Chinese at the 38th Parallel or Pyongyang. My body could have been there, decomposed and providing nutrients to the wild flowers, shrubberies, or trees in the battlefield.

- WN: After completing your service in the army medical corps, did you decide to practice in Hawai‘i? Perhaps California?
- CY: I was offered a job to join clinical professor of USC, Dr. Baba, to practice with him in Japanese town of LA. We would have been the only Japanese OB-gyn specialists there. A very tempting offer. But I decided to practice in Hawai‘i, more specifically, in Kailua.
- WN: What attracted you to Kailua?
- CY: It was a growing town, often referred to as the bedroom of Honolulu. It had beautiful beaches and ocean to enjoy, surrounded by majestic Ko‘olau mountains, hills, and a large meadow. The latter is actually a swamp, a green one, habitation of all kinds of birds—egrets, ducks, coots, gallinules, et cetera, with cattle grazing in its peripheral areas.
- WN: What about the physician population?
- CY: It was pretty well represented. We had the family practice physicians and the other different specialists. The biggest problem that burdened us was patient hospitalization. We had to go the way over the Pali to Honolulu to hospitalize and treat our patients there. Fortunately, by 1963 or 1964, a hospital on the Windward side of O‘ahu became a reality.
- WN: Well, how did it?
- CY: While I was stationed at Tripler [Army Hospital], there was quite a controversy about having a hospital on the Windward side among the doctors and various community leaders. People generally saw its need. Different organizations, such as St. Francis Hospital, and other national church organizations in the hospital business, were consulted. These, apparently, were not interested in the project.

However, the Adventist Church with hospitals all over the world became interested. Initially, there were objections to the idea of having an Adventist hospital for various reasons. It was believed that being Saturday Sabbath-keepers, no care would be permitted on Saturday. People objected to the idea that food served will be vegetarian. And, no alcohol and habit-forming drugs as well as tobacco smoking would be permitted. The denominational officials responded to clarify the Church’s position and stated that it would like to initiate a health-promoting lifestyle and care: that diet will be basically vegetarian with physicians permitted to order “clean meat”; habit-forming drugs, and alcohol will not be allowed; smoking only in designated areas; and as far as Sabbath work, whatever is necessary or needed to relieve pain and suffering and help restore or improve a patient’s health and well-being was permissible. Perhaps what really helped to unite the doctors to back the Adventist Church’s offer took place at one of our meetings.

- WN: And that was. . . .

CY: Windward doctors were invited to Dr. [Raymond] Dehay's house. Present were also some officers of Hawai'i Medical Association, State Board of Health, and a representative from Kaiser Permanente Health Group. After discussing the advisability and necessity of a Windward hospital, the Kaiser group representative stood up and informed the group that his organization was willing to build a clinic or hospital in Kailua if the doctors were not interested in pursuing such a project. The revelation of this attitude by an HMO organization, I believe, really helped to solidify support of the Adventist Church's offer. The doctors in those days generally feared competition with such organizations. Of course, today it's different.

WN: So that really gave impetus to build. It started as a 70–75 bed hospital?

CY: Yeah. It rapidly grew in size; presently there are approximately 160 beds. It has been recognized as one of the top-notch hospitals providing quality care. Department heads of the medical staff are well-qualified, usually Board-certified members. Standards of practice adopted are those of respective national board specialties.

WN: In what aspect of health care has Castle Medical Center contributed to the people of Windward O'ahu and Hawai'i?

CY: Besides providing easier and quicker access to medical care, this facility has been promoting healthy lifestyles by emphasizing nutritious, well-balanced vegetarian diet, regular exercise, no smoking or indulging in habit-forming drugs and alcohol, and a positive mental attitude. Its mission has been to provide health care to all people regardless of race, color, gender, or creed, as well as social, educational, economic and religious status, with the spirit of Christian kindness and love in a fiscally responsible way.

Castle family and its foundation gave the hospital land on which to build as well as frequent financial support. So have the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Weinberg Foundation, various corporations and people of the community.

The medical facility is not just an isolated country hospital but one that has integrated well with the island hospitals and their practitioners to provide quality health care to the people of Hawai'i.

Although long retired now, it was a privilege and pleasure to have been connected with Castle Medical Center and use its facilities and resources to help people with their medical and health problems.

### **Addendum**

For further information, refer to *Men and Women of Hawai'i*, 1972 edition by B.F. Buker published by Star-Bulletin Printing Co., Inc., page 632. Synopsis of CY's wife's (Naomi) history may also be found there.

END OF INTERVIEW

**CAPTIVE ON THE  
U.S. MAINLAND:  
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of Hawai‘i-born Nisei**

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

**April 2012**