

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Shirley Onizuka Matsuoka

Shirley Onizuka Matsuoka was born in Lanihau, North Kona, Hawai'i in 1934. She is the oldest of four siblings born to Masamitsu Onizuka and Mitsue Nagata Onizuka, both born and raised in Kona. Masamitsu Onizuka was the founder and proprietor of Onizuka Store in Keōpū. Prior to starting the business in 1933, he was an employee at I. Ota Store. Following Masamitsu's death in 1969, Mitsue took over sole proprietorship of the business and ran it until her death in 1990 at age 76.

Matsuoka grew up helping her parents in the store and caring for her younger siblings while her parents were busy with the business. She attended Honokōhau and Konawaena schools. She then studied to become a stenographer at Honolulu Business College and worked for American Factors, Dillingham Investment Company, Captain Cook Building Supply, and Konawaena High School. She retired in 1995.

The oral history interview was conducted at the Ellison Onizuka Space Center at Keāhole-Kona Airport, where Matsuoka volunteered much of her time. The space center is named in honor of her younger brother, the late astronaut.

She married George Matsuoka in 1959. The couple raised two children.

Tape No. 35-2-1-00

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Shirley Onizuka Matsuoka (SM)

Keāhole, Kona, Hawai'i

May 1, 2000

BY: Nancy Piianaia (NP)

NP: This is May 1st, in the year 2000. This is Nancy Piianaia and I'm at the Ellison Onizuka Space Center at the Kona Airport with his sister, Shirley Onizuka Matsuoka.

Thank you so much, Shirley, for agreeing to take this time to be interviewed. I think we'll start by having you tell me when you were born and where you were born.

SM: I was born here in Kona, in Lanihau, at home. Dr. [W.J.] Seymour was our doctor. He lived right across the street, which was convenient.

NP: Can you tell me where Lanihau is?

SM: Lanihau is above Kailua, about ten miles from here. I was born [in] 1934.

NP: And could you tell me the names of your parents—where they were from. Or where their families are from, just to give me a little background of your mother and father and their families.

SM: My dad [Masamitsu Onizuka] was born here. His parents were from Fukuoka-ken, Japan. And my mom [Mitsue Nagata Onizuka] was also a second-generation, born here. Her parents were from Hiroshima-ken, Japan.

NP: And why did their parents come here? Do you know anything about the background

SM: Well, I guess they were looking for better opportunities. That's probably one of the reasons they came to Hawai'i.

NP: Did they come directly to Kona, or did they work on plantations first?

- SM: I think my dad's parents were in Kohala first, and then they came on to Kona. But as far as I can remember, my mom's parents were here in Kona. They lived in South Kona. Captain Cook.
- NP: And what did they do for work?
- SM: They had a coffee farm.
- NP: And your dad's parents, when they came to Kona . . .
- SM: I think they worked on the plantation first, and then came to Kona and started a coffee farm.
- NP: So the store started with your parents, not with your grandparents.
- SM: Yes.
- NP: All right. Could you tell me a little bit about the history of the beginning of the store?
- SM: The store? Well, my dad [once] worked for Mr. [Isamu] Ota, who had that I. Ota Store [in Lanihau], which isn't very far from my dad's store. And he [Isamu Ota] was going into truck farming, so he kind of encouraged my dad to go into the store business. At that time, my dad was going to get married to my mom, so that's when he built the store and started a little grocery store—general merchandise store.
- NP: So as newlyweds, they opened up the store?
- SM: Yes, that was in March of 1933.
- NP: When they got married?
- SM: They got married and opened the store at the same time.
- NP: What an amazing way to start a new life together . . .
- SM: (Laughs) Yes . . .
- NP: . . . a new business.
- SM: My mom did some sewing. She was good at sewing men's pants. She did a lot of that, and she did some dresses also. My dad also had a taxi [business], transporting people to wherever they wanted to go.
- NP: That was from the very beginning of the store, that he had the taxi business . . .

SM: That's right.

NP: . . . and you mentioned that was in 1934?

SM: Probably in '34, I think, when he started his taxi business.

NP: And they had already opened the store when you were born, so you were really a store baby.

SM: Right.

NP: Do you have any early, early memories in the store, when you were really young?

SM: Like . . .

NP: Well, you know, there are some people who have grown up in stores who remember being put in a box somewhere in the store, and the customers coming in and, you know, kind of cuddling you, playing with you.

SM: Oh yes, we were left in—I guess it was more like a playpen that we were put in. We were left out in the porch, because they were working in the store. So they would leave us outside. People would talk to us. And I think once my mother said that I was out of the playpen, and I had kind of crossed the street. She got frantic, because the cars would be coming. Luckily, there were no cars coming. But then I had crossed the street, and I was on the opposite side (chuckles).

NP: And you were just real little?

SM: Real little, because I crawled over (laughs).

NP: Oh my gosh, you were a lucky person (laughs).

SM: Yes, right (laughs).

NP: And you spoke of "we." You had brothers and sisters?

SM: I do.

NP: I know you were the oldest. Could you tell me the names of your brothers and sisters?

SM: I have a sister, Norma. She's married in Honolulu. And Ellison. And Claude is with American Savings in Kailua-Kona.

NP: So you were a family of four children.

SM: Right.

NP: I imagine your parents were quite busy in the store.

SM: Yes. So I think we learned to take care of my brothers. And we did the laundry. So we started out young. I was still in elementary [school] when I would have to do the laundry. I can remember we never had a washing machine at that time, so everything was with that big galvanized tub and with that wooden board that we would scrub [clothes] on. And because I wasn't very big, my dad would have to come and kind of wring out the sheets and the heavy things for me. And we'd have to hang them out.

NP: They would be so huge.

SM: Right!

(Laughter)

SM: And then we did a little cooking, too, so we started out early. Ellison was born when I was twelve, so, that's when I started taking care of him. And because my dad and my mom were busy with the store, if we needed to go anywhere, like a movie, we had to be sure that they [siblings] had taken a bath, and we had fed them, and they were ready to go. Because when my parents closed the store, they would just get ready, and then we would go to the movie.

NP: Sounds like you were brought up to have responsibilities from a very young age.

SM: And we had a kerosene stove, those days. No electric or gas stoves until way later.

NP: Would you have to light the stove, too?

SM: Yes, and we would have to fill that kerosene—it was like a gallon, I think, that you would fill. We had to be sure that that was filled before we cooked, so that we'd have enough to prepare meals.

NP: What did you learn to cook? Can you remember some of the earliest meals that you . . .

SM: I think my dad used to always have stew. That was about the first thing that we learned. And for breakfast, we would cook eggs and things.

NP: Where would your food come from?

SM: Well, we had a store there, so we would tell my parents what we needed, or they would bring in whatever we needed.

- NP: Did the store carry a great variety of goods and . . .
- SM: Yes, we had meats, and we had frozen things, canned goods. Some dry goods, and hardware. So it was a regular general merchandise store.
- NP: Do you know where your meats came from?
- SM: They had a Kona Meat Market in Kainaliu, when our store started. But then at that time, because my dad helped the Greenwell [Ranch] working cowboys, they would sometimes give us pieces of meat.
- NP: And you said you had a freezer. Were you one of the first stores to have freezers? Or was that pretty typical when you were growing up?
- SM: It wasn't way early that we had a big freezer. We had a regular refrigerator with a small freezer on the top. And then later—I can't remember when—we had a freezer for the store. When my parents started to carry frozen meats and frozen vegetables, we got a little freezer to put those in.
- NP: But in the early days, you had fresh meat and fresh produce . . .
- SM: Um-hmm [yes]. Fish . . .
- NP: Who would bring in the fish?
- SM: They had these people that used to peddle. The fishermen would catch the fish and then they would come and peddle.
- NP: Do you remember any of their names or . . .
- SM: No, I don't. I know they used to blow the horn and they would say, "*ōpelu.*" (Laughs) But that's about all I can remember.
- NP: And what about vegetables?
- SM: Vegetables? Oh, people would grow it and we would get it from them, or they would give it to us. And then, in later years, Rancho Produce would come by, and so that's when my mom started to carry cabbage and things that lasted for a while. Onions and potatoes.
- NP: What about tofu? Did you have that?
- SM: Yes. We had this lady, Mrs. Kikumoto, who lived not very far from the store. And she made tofu. So we would go there to buy our tofu. And when she stopped making, then

we had people deliver tofu. So we would put our orders in. Or people would give their orders to my parents and my dad would order a whole batch.

NP: He'd order for the customers, or certain customers.

SM: Right.

NP: Did the tofu taste different back then, do you think?

SM: No, I think it's about the same. Especially the Hanato Tofu.

NP: Yes, it's good tofu.

SM: Yes, it is. Of course, now, they have different kinds of tofu, like the smooth, silken tofu, and all that. But I think we're more used to with like what Hanato makes.

NP: The more rougher, firmer . . .

SM: Um-hmm [yes].

NP: And what kind of salted or canned goods did you have? You remember in the store in the early . . .

SM: In the store? Well, we had corned beef, and we had Spam or luncheon meat. Sausages, and soups.

NP: Would this be in the real early days, as far back as you can imagine, or was this later?

SM: Well, as I can remember, I know we had those canned goods. And jams and jellies, those things.

NP: Did you have goods brought in from Japan also?

SM: No, my parents got goods from wholesalers from Hilo. They would come and take their orders, and then the truckers would deliver the goods.

NP: And which wholesalers were those?

SM: I know American Trading [Company]. And there was Hawaii [Retail] Grocers [Association], and [Y.] Hata [& Company]. Those I can remember.

NP: Did you have salt salmon?

SM: Salt salmon. Butterfish. And codfish. Codfish was so cheap in those days. You could get a whole piece for maybe not even a dollar.

- NP: And now it's like a delicacy . . .
- SM: Yes, it is. A little piece would cost you maybe four dollars. A whole fish is like twelve dollars, probably.
- NP: And you mentioned dry goods, also.
- SM: She would carry fabric. So that people came by to buy fabric. Or they would choose a fabric and have her sew a dress or whatever for them. And she carried khaki materials, and denims, and she would sew pants for people.
- NP: When did your mom find time to do that (chuckles)?
- SM: Well, her sewing room was right next to the store. So she would be sewing, but she could also watch to see if people came to the store. And as we were growing up, we would be the ones watching. If someone came, we would say, "A customer is here," and she would come out . . .
- NP: She would put down her sewing . . .
- SM: And she did a lot at night, also.
- NP: Amazing how hard people worked. I imagine she sewed your clothes, then?
- SM: Yes.
- NP: Did you like that?
- SM: Well, we grew up like that, with her sewing our clothes. I remember she taught us how to sew also. I'm not a good seamstress (chuckles) but we even sewed our own slips. Then she would sew dresses for us.
- NP: Can you describe what the store was like, as far as the layout of the store?
- SM: She had dry goods in one corner, at one end. We had toys also in the front, where people could see. Then on one corner they had hardware items. And then the canned goods were all on the shelves in the back. And we had the refrigerator where we kept meats and things like that.
- NP: Did you have the glass counters [i.e., display cases]?
- SM: Only the meat case, that was glass. But then everything else was open.
- NP: It wasn't like some of these stores that had the wood around it, and the glass . . .

- SM: No. Everything was like open on shelves.
- NP: And behind the store was your home.
- SM: Right.
- NP: It was connected. Was it a walkway, or did it open directly into your home . . .
- SM: Well, we would go around the corner, but it's the same building. Like through the back door of the store, and then we would get into our. . . .
- NP: Is the house still there now?
- SM: The house is still there, but someone else is living in it.
- NP: What was the house like when you were growing up, as far as size and . . .
- SM: Well, we only had one bedroom. My sister was the baby, so she would sleep in the crib. Then my mom and I slept on the bed, and my dad (chuckles) slept on the floor, I think. We had a living room, kitchen, and the store in the front. And then they [later] made an extension to enlarge the living room, a dining room, and two more bedrooms on the side. About when Ellison came, we made two rooms. And then later on, we extended in the back again. We [originally] had an outhouse. So when we made an extension, that's when we put in a bathroom and a bathtub. Before then, the outhouse was separate, and then we had the *furo*, which was separate again. This was outside.
- NP: I hope you kept the *furo*, so you could still use it.
- SM: Well, I have a *furo* at home. A wooden one, (chuckles) I don't use it, but I have one.
- NP: But your family kept the *furo*, and they kept it going, even though they had built the tub inside?
- SM: Yes. So it was laundry and the *furo*, in one little building.
- NP: Kind of like a washhouse?
- SM: Right.
- NP: So your parents actually somehow managed to start their married life and have enough money to build or . . .
- SM: Make extensions, renovate the building.
- NP: The building was already built?

SM: Yes, so they just added to that.

NP: And this was the I. Ota Store that they took over or . . .

SM: No, this was a new building.

NP: Oh, a new building.

SM: Right.

NP: So somehow they managed to build this small store and a small house.

SM: So that's why it was only a one-bedroom house when they [first] built it.

NP: I wonder where they found the money even to do that, as young people?

SM: I'm not sure, really.

NP: It's kind of amazing, it seems.

SM: I guess because my dad worked at I. Ota [Store], he probably got help from them, too. And my grandparents were around, so probably they . . .

NP: Do you think everybody pitched in to try to help them?

SM: Well, I think so. I can't remember back then. But as far as the land there, I know it was my grandfather and my dad and his brothers that worked and bought that property—the store, and where my uncle lived.

NP: Does your family still have the deeds to that?

SM: Well, in those days, in Japan, it was like the eldest son gets [the family property], so my grandfather had put my uncle's name on the deed. It was like, verbally, "This is your place." So that's what happened. My uncle's family now owns the property.

NP: It's complicated.

SM: Right.

NP: Let's talk a little bit about the life of your family as you were growing up with a store. And the life of a family with a store. Was your life different from some of your other friends because you had a store?

- SM: I don't think so. My parents were pretty good. If we needed to go somewhere, they would let us go. We would have responsibilities, but if we finished our work, then we were able to go and play. We would go to the neighbors and play.
- NP: You mentioned that part of your work was cooking, making meals?
- SM: That was as I grew older, maybe seventh grade, somewhere around there.
- NP: What about when you were younger?
- SM: Usually my dad or my mom did the cooking. We would just help out. And they would tell us to watch it or stir it while they had to go out. That's what we did.
- NP: What were the hours of the store?
- SM: The store opened early in the morning, probably about six. And they stayed open until about ten at night. Because the farmers would work late, they would come for their shopping at night. So the store stayed open until about ten.
- NP: Did that mean that you couldn't really have a dinnertime, or did you still manage to . . .
- SM: No, we managed to have dinner. Either my dad or my mom would be there, and we would have our dinner, and we would take turns to go and watch the store if somebody came. Then we would call whoever was (chuckles) having their dinner. So we managed to have our dinners. My dad always said that we should have our meals together as often as we could because he said that's the only time you're really together. So we tried to have our meals together, if we could. Breakfast, we did, because everybody is up early to have breakfast. We tried to have dinner with one of them, which was okay. But lunch, we'd go out and watch the store, and then they would go in and have their lunch. So, we did it in shifts.
- NP: Did the store ever close? Did you ever have holidays, or time off?
- SM: The only time, I think, they closed was maybe for New Year's. Other than that, the store stayed open every day.
- NP: New Year's must have been a big holiday for your family. You could close.
- SM: And then people would come. Because, New Year's, you would prepare food. So they would come. There were groups of men that usually came by, and they would go from one house to the next house. I mean, we had the door open, but not for business.
- NP: Just for visitors to come through.

- SM: Just for visitors to come through.
- NP: So the men would come. Would they come to visit your father . . .
- SM: They would come to say "Happy New Year."
- NP: And maybe have a toast . . .
- SM: Have a toast. Then they would go to the next person's house.
- NP: And would your dad go along with them, too?
- SM: My dad would go along with them, right.
- NP: Your father sounds like he was quite an active man. What was he like? How would you describe him?
- SM: My dad? Well, he would do whatever he could in the community. [During World War II] our store was a station for the—they called it the "Home Guard"? You know, the blackout, the war days? If from Kailua they would see a light up on the hill, they would call and they would have to go and tell them, "There's light leaking from your home." (Chuckles) So, it was a store, and a station, he did a lot for the community. He was active. He was also like a councilman for the Boy Scouts, as they [SM's brothers] were growing up. He was really active in church.
- NP: Which church was that?
- SM: Kona Hongwanji Mission.
- NP: And that is located . . .
- SM: In Kealakekua. In fact, the day he died, he was supposed to go to a meeting that night. They were having election of officers, and he was supposed to be elected as a third vice-president. But he passed away, so for a whole year, they had that slot vacant. They didn't fill that position.
- NP: You mentioned that he also drove a taxi?
- SM: Yes.
- NP: And that was from the very beginning of the store?
- SM: I'm not sure, but I know it was really in the early years, because I was really young. At times I would go along with him, and he would transport people to Kailua or, if he had to go to the bank for them.

- NP: Can you describe some of the variety of things that he would do as a taxi driver? Or where he would go?
- SM: Well, he transported people. During elections, he was hired by the politicians like [William H.] "Doc" Hill and Robert Hind.
- NP: Would he drive them themselves, or . . .
- SM: No, he would drive the people down to the booths so that they could go and vote.
- NP: Oh, for voting.
- SM: For voting. So he would be hired to transport the people down to go and vote.
- NP: Was that because you would vote down in Kailua?
- SM: Down to Kailua, right.
- NP: There weren't little precinct offices . . .
- SM: No, no. There was an old courthouse down in Kailua, I think where Hale Halawai is right now. So that's where he would transport them. The polls were down there.
- NP: Now how would that work, when he would transport people? Would he do it one at a time, or would he fill the taxi with people?
- SM: Well, he would fill it as much as he could, but then if there were just one or two, he would still transport them because he's hired to take them down to vote. If he didn't take them when they're available, they're not going to go and vote. So he would have to transport even if it was one person.
- NP: Would they give him a list of people? Or how would that work . . .
- SM: Well, it was only within the community, in our area. So he would take the people from our area and he would tell them that he was available to take them down. So they would come, or they would call, and he would pick them up and take them down to vote.
- NP: So he didn't have a list of people that he had to contact . . .
- SM: No, not that I know of.
- NP: It's really interesting. And that must have happened all over Kona. For them to get down, there must have been other drivers doing that.
- SM: Yes, I'm sure.

- NP: It must have been a special occasion for people to come down the hill and vote.
- SM: Because not everyone had cars in those days. So they would depend on whoever had a car and that's how they got down. I guess that's why politicians hired him to transport people because, if not, they wouldn't be able to get all those votes.
- NP: I wonder if they stayed down and had a party, or if they came right back up the hill.
- SM: No, they would come right back. I don't think they had parties those days. I'm not sure. I remember going to the rallies at where the Door of Faith church is now in Hōlualoa across Paul's Place. That used to be Hōlualoa Theater. So they would have rallies there, and we would go along. We never voted, but we went along to see the entertainment.
- NP: What other kinds of things did he do with the taxi? What kind of services, or interesting errands or jobs he would do?
- SM: It was only transporting people, or delivering goods that they needed. At times, Dr. [W.J.] Seymour's car wouldn't start, then he would come down and use my dad's car because he would have to go to the hospital.
- NP: Was that hospital where the Kona Hospital is now?
- SM: No, it used to be above American Savings [Bank]. I think there's the old folks' home—where the National Guard Armory is?
- NP: That's quite a distance. What were the roads like back then?
- SM: Oh, not very good. Very narrow (chuckles).
- NP: Paved?
- SM: It was paved, but narrow. Very narrow.
- NP: We're talking pre-war, are we?
- SM: Yes. Like where we lived, the roads were really narrow. Right now, they've widened it and paved it. But we used to walk to school on that narrow road, so if we'd hear a car coming we'd have to jump into the grass on the side.
- NP: Now, where did you go to school?
- SM: Honokōhau School.
- NP: Honokōhau. And what was that like when you were going to school?

SM: Well, the school had only two buildings, but they had four classrooms, and each classroom had two grades in it. So we had first and second [combined], and then third and fourth.

NP: With one teacher?

SM: With one teacher.

NP: Small classes, then?

SM: Small classes. I think my class, we only had about eight of us. Not very big.

NP: The teacher did, like, double preparation of what she'd be doing now.

SM: That's right, yes. Because he or she would have to take care of two classes.

NP: And what ethnic groups, mostly, were in the school?

SM: Well, we had a mixture of Portuguese, Hawaiians, Japanese, and now Filipino people.

NP: Do you have good memories of that school?

SM: Yes. I remember playing (laughs) and walking to school and fighting and . . .

(Laughter)

SM: We had experiences where somebody's donkey got loose, and it just chased us. And we had to run all the way to school. I just remember those days (laughs).

NP: Did you have shoes, or were you barefoot?

SM: We went to school barefooted.

NP: You had really tough soles.

SM: Oh yes, we had tough soles. I can't do that now (laughs).

NP: Did you bring your lunch or did you . . .

SM: Yes, we took lunch because there was no cafeteria there.

NP: What did you used to bring for lunch?

SM: Usually sandwich. Sometimes rice ball. Most of the time it was sandwich.

NP: Your mom would make for you?

- SM: Yes, my mom or my dad. We would just grab our lunches and run to school. And on rainy days, my dad would take us. Or come and pick us up.
- NP: On the taxi? That must have been nice.
- SM: I would call him and I'd tell him that it's raining. Then he would come and pick us up (laughs).
- NP: What would you do after school?
- SM: Well, we'd help out in the store, like stacking the shelves and doing odds and ends.
- NP: Do your homework and . . .
- SM: Homework at night. And then we'd take care of Ellison and Claude when they were young.
- NP: Did you have electricity?
- SM: Yes, we did. But no TV, just the radio. And we used to weave, too. I didn't do a lot of *lau hala* weaving, but my neighbors did a lot and their children did.
- NP: Who were your neighbors?
- SM: The Hayashidas did a lot of weaving, so I learned some from them.
- NP: Did you go out and collect the *hala*?
- SM: *Lau hala*? We used to buy it from them.
- NP: And would you make large mats for floors or . . .
- SM: No, we just made coin purses or coasters. Those were the little things. I didn't do very much, but I did some.
- NP: Were those for selling in the store?
- SM: Well, we would weave it and the Hayashidas sold it. Somebody would come and buy it from them. Hiroshi Matsuyama, he had Matsuyama Store. He used to buy a lot of those *lau hala* goods and things. I'd do a little bit.
- NP: Do you still do it sometimes?
- SM: No, no time.

(Laughter)

SM: I have a *lau hala* tree in my lot, but I haven't done any *lau hala* weaving.

NP: Now you were born in nineteen . . .

SM: . . . thirty-four.

NP: So when the war [World War II] came, you were quite young.

SM: Yes, because I had just finished first grade. Nineteen forty-one is when the war started.

NP: Tell me about the war years, and what your memories are of the war.

SM: Well, we had the store. There were some military people stationed not very far from where we lived. And so they would come to the store and they would want to eat soup and things, so my mom would prepare it for them.

NP: When you say "wanted to eat soup," homemade soup, or . . .

SM: No, the canned soup. Sometimes, I guess they're out, so they didn't eat their meals before they came, so they would want to have some soup. So she would heat the soup up for them. But they were nice. We had them also stationed at the school. So we didn't go to school there [during the war]; we went to the church that we had on the hill, that's where we had our classes.

NP: That's when the school was transformed into a . . .

SM: Army post.

NP: Interesting.

SM: Later on, we were able to go back to school, but they had us carrying all those gas masks. I think if anything happened, I don't know if we'd be able to put the gas mask on (laughs). And carrying that big thing that looks like a piece of ham (laughs). Whenever the trucks passed by with the soldiers on it, we'd make a "V" [victory sign with their two fingers] to say that we were Americans (laughs). So I remember those days.

NP: Do you remember the blackouts?

SM: The blackouts, right. We had our windows all painted black. Wherever we couldn't paint, we had to put those black tar papers on so that no light shone. That why my dad---they had the station at our place, like I told you the Home Guard? And so, from

Kailua, if they saw any lights up on the hill, they would kind of tell them where it is, and they'd have to go and tell the people that a light was leaking out of their house.

NP: You had to somehow figure out who was taking care of what section.

SM: Yes.

NP: Do you remember any shortages or, like, did your family run out of rice, or some of the supplies?

SM: Well, we had a store, my dad was able to get some rice. But it was not because we had a store, that we always had rice. We ate potatoes and things like everybody else, because he says, we're like anybody else. And he would share whatever rice that he had. So he would package it into five-pound or ten-pound packages, and he was able to share it with them. And like regular customers, he might give them a little bit more. But he always had enough to share. So we never had like a whole bag of rice for ourselves. We would have to eat potatoes, also. We also planted a little sweet potatoes in the back.

NP: Did you always have a garden? Did you folks keep a garden going in the back?

SM: Not a big garden. Just a small section. Because most of our vegetables were either given to us or we purchased it from vendors.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

NP: And during the war, did your dad have special permission to drive anywhere, or did he need passes because he was a taxi . . .

SM: Well, he didn't have to go anywhere special. It was a routine thing where he would transport [people]. Or if the soldiers needed to go somewhere, they would ask him to take them to Kailua or to Kealakekua, or wherever. So I don't think he needed any permission or anything to go anywhere. Because where he had to go was not restricted or anything like that.

NP: Do you remember the end of the war? Do you remember any celebration or sense of relief that everybody had . . .

SM: There was a sense of relief, yes. Everybody would say, "Oh, the war is over, the war is over." You were more relaxed and you were able to do more things.

NP: You would have been eleven in 1945. So that's probably a good time for memories to really start.

SM: Yes.

NP: Then after you graduated from your first school, where did you go next?

SM: I went to Konawaena. From Honokōhau I went to Konawaena.

NP: Honokōhau was through intermediate.

SM: Till eighth grade. So, nine, ten, eleven, twelve was at Konawaena.

NP: And how was that? Different school, I would imagine.

SM: Different school, yes. But then we had friends that we had met before we went to high school. So it wasn't that bad, it was fun. You made new friends, and we went to school on a bus.

NP: Was it exciting to change schools? Go to a bigger school?

SM: Yes, because we thought we were grown up.

(Laughter)

SM: The first bus that we had was made out of lumber. They had built it. It wasn't the kind of buses that children ride now.

NP: Not the yellow school bus?

SM: Not the yellow school bus, but a wooden bus. They had these curtains that were rolled up, and we had this chicken wire—there's no windows. So they had all these wires. And when it rained they would put those curtains down. And it was so dark and stuffy in there. And everybody is sitting across [from each other] because it's like benches.

NP: Oh, it's like an army . . .

SM: Right, right. They had like, one row, and there were two rows in the middle, and another row. So you're sitting facing each other. But then everybody got along. Nobody fought.

NP: Nowadays, there would be fights all over the place.

SM: I know. They would say to start filling the bus up from the back. But then people would still sit wherever they wanted to sit. So you have to cross [people] and go in. But then, it was okay.

NP: I wonder how far that bus went? Where did it start in order to get to school?

SM: Ours would start up in Kalaoa. And then we'd go all the way to Konawaena.

NP: Wow. It must have taken quite a long time. Lot of stops.

SM: Yes, lot of stops.

NP: What time would you leave for school?

SM: Well, I think it was maybe seven in the morning. I guess the people in Kalaoa were picked up about six-thirty or so.

NP: And you would get there about eight o'clock?

SM: About eight o'clock.

NP: And bouncing along . . .

SM: Bouncing along. The road wasn't very good; it was narrow. We picked up people in Hōlualoa, too. Of course, the classes weren't very big then, so we were all able to get on the same bus.

NP: That's a lot of distance to cover.

SM: Yes. And then, later on, I think when we were juniors, that's when we got these yellow buses that they have now.

NP: What was important to you about high school?

SM: Important to me about high school? Well, I had always wanted to work in an office and be a secretary. I wanted to go into business.

NP: Did you take business classes?

SM: Business classes, yes. I made a lot of new friends there, and school was different because they had a cafeteria and things, which we never had before. So those were some of the interesting things. And then we were able to go to proms and [be in] clubs.

NP: Did you go out on dates?

SM: Yes.

(Laughter)

NP: What about back home at this store. Had things changed after the war, let's say, as you got older and the family—brothers and sisters—were growing up? Did you have different types of responsibilities . . .

SM: Well, it was more or less the same. But we had to do the housework and the cooking, because of the age difference between my sister and I and my brothers.

NP: Let's see, Ellison was twelve years younger than you were. And your sister Norma was . . .

SM: . . . five years younger.

NP: And Claude was . . .

SM: . . . fourteen years (chuckles). So there's a big gap there. So when I went away to college, my brothers were still in elementary school. And my sister was in high school. Then I graduated from Honolulu Business College. I came back because our neighbor Mr. Nakahara said there was an opening at Amfac [American Factors, Ltd.]. And they needed somebody. No, excuse me. I was home for Christmas. They needed somebody to help out at Amfac. So that's when I started there and I worked there until, let's see, I started in 1953. Nineteen fifty-nine was when I left Amfac.

NP: Six years.

SM: Six years. So when I went to work at Amfac I used to take my brothers to school in the morning.

NP: You had a car by then?

SM: Not a car. It was my dad's jeep.

(Laughter)

NP: Great!

SM: He had a car also, but I had to take the jeep because I was going to Kailua where the air is salty, and he didn't want his car to get ruined. So I had to take the jeep to work, and I used to take my brothers and drop them off at school—my brothers and a few of his friends.

NP: They were in elementary school?

SM: At Honokōhau.

NP: Okay, so you'd go there first and then you go down the hill in the jeep. Was this an old World War II jeep?

SM: Yes. But it was painted, so it looked a little nice (laughs). So even if it rained or shined, I still had to go down to work in the jeep.

NP: No roof on it . . .

SM: No, there was a roof.

NP: Oh, thank heavens. So you couldn't say you were unusually sophisticated . . .

(Laughter)

SM: And there was no windows, so if it rained, I had just like a raincoat that covered me on the side so my dress wouldn't get wet when I'd go to work (laughs).

NP: Oh how funny! Was it a reliable jeep?

SM: It was.

NP: And what did you do at Amfac?

SM: At first, when I got there, I did filing. Then I did their switchboard, and worked . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

NP: You were talking about working at Amfac and what you did there.

SM: So I did, like, changing their prices, and their filing, and I waited on customers that came to the counter, and did their switchboard.

NP: Were they a pretty big operation at that time?

SM: They were. I think they were the only wholesalers here in Kona at that time. The farmers and the stores all depended on Amfac.

NP: How did the goods come in? How did their system work?

SM: I think it came on the boat. I'm not sure what boat it was—*Humu'ula* or whichever, but I think that's how they got their merchandise.

- NP: And I assume they would have deadlines that you would have to call in by in order to . . .
- SM: Well, they had salesmen going out, and they would take orders. Or you could call in your order, and then come and pick it up later. They also had delivery services. They had a coffee mill, also.
- NP: Did you have to be a certain size to have a delivery made, or could you be a really small store?
- SM: Well, they would go up to Palani, and go down the line. So all the stores, I guess even if it was a small order—as long as they were going that way, they would be able to deliver. If not, then they would come and pick up their orders.
- NP: So as long as you were on whatever route they had . . .
- SM: But I remember a lot of times my dad used to go down and get his things, because we used to go down with him . . .
- NP: . . . when you were younger . . .
- SM: . . . we were younger. We used to go running through the warehouse, and they had these big barrels of dried shrimp (chuckles). I remember just sticking our hands in it and putting the shrimp in our pockets and running around (laughs).
- NP: Like you feel you got away with something.

(Laughter)

- SM: But then everybody was like that. I'm sure they knew we were doing that, but they never said anything. So we used to wait for my dad to go to Amfac so we could get a ride down with him. They would work in the store, and even if it was late, they would close the store, have their dinner, and my dad would say, "Oh, let's go for a ride." So we would take potato chips and a bag of cookies, maybe, from the store. We would all get into the car, and we'd go down the Palani Road and then go up where—it's Hualālai [Road] now, where you come out by Kimura Store [i.e., Kimura Lauhala Shop]. We would go down to Kailua and go up the Hualālai Road, and then go on home. And that was our outing.
- NP: Big excursion.
- SM: But they tried to take us places. My mom learned to drive after she had Ellison. Then as Ellison and Claude were growing up, she would take them down to the beach in the afternoon, with a couple of their friends—even for an hour she would take them down.

They would of course have to do their chores first, and then she would take them down for a swim.

NP: Which beach would they go to?

SM: Kailua. It was right where King Kam[ehameha Hotel] is right now.

NP: Why do you think she learned to drive at that time?

SM: Well, I guess she figured my brothers were growing up, and they would need to go places like to baseball, and things. And if my dad wasn't able to take them. So I guess that's why she learned to drive.

NP: So life was changing. There were more activities for the boys than there had been for you and your sisters, perhaps?

SM: Yes.

NP: Do you see that as, let's say, between the pre-war period and maybe, post-war, did you see a change in the community that you lived in?

SM: Not really.

NP: Or a change in the store, perhaps, in what you sold and what you needed to provide?

SM: Well . . .

NP: I know it's hard because you were really young in the early period. But I'm interested in seeing how the store changed and what it provided for the community.

SM: Well, I know my parents had to extend the building a little to bring in more things.

NP: Was that because the community needed more things?

SM: Well, yes, the community was growing, too, with more people. And they needed different things. So I'm sure that's why they expanded a little bit more.

NP: People maybe having a bit more income . . .

SM: In the later years, yes, they did. They had more income. Not in the beginning. I think when I was young, I guess those were like more [Great] Depression times. So they weren't able to spend as much, and everything was so cheap then. I remember even my mom sewed a dress for two dollars; and my dad would transport people to Kealakekua and it would be like two dollars (laughs). So they didn't charge very much.

- NP: How did they handle accounts with people?
- SM: It was like, you'll pay during coffee season. So you'd have a change account for the whole year. The farmers would charge for a whole year, and then they would pay after they sold their coffee.
- NP: So they would sell their coffee somewhere else?
- SM: They would sell it to Amfac. I think Amfac was the only one that used to buy coffee then, that I can remember of. [Captain Cook Coffee Company was the other major coffee-buyer in Kona at that time.] So they would sell it to Amfac. When they got paid, then they would pay for their groceries. It was like a one-year thing.
- NP: That must have been very difficult for your mother and father.
- SM: But there were others that would purchase [from the store], and they had a monthly account. He would help out people, even if they were on welfare, and they were able to pay when they got their welfare checks.
- NP: Who would do the accounting in the store?
- SM: My dad. When he passed away [in 1969], my mother took over.
- NP: Would your dad do it on a nightly basis? Would he come back into the house and sit down and. . . .
- SM: Or during the day, if he had time. When there were no customers around. And, during the later years, he stopped his taxi business.
- NP: What would happen if people couldn't afford to pay then?
- SM: Well, they would pay, even if it was a little. It took some time, but he knew that they would pay. So he would give them merchandise. He didn't want to see anybody starving.
- NP: You don't ever remember him having to cut people off because they couldn't pay?
- SM: No. But I've seen him carry balances on. And they would pay whatever they could pay. Sometimes they would bring him things in exchange for merchandise. Like fruits, vegetables.
- NP: Just whatever they could . . .
- SM: Whatever they could, yes.

NP: Sounds like your father was a kind man.

SM: I think he was, yes. He tried to help them as much as he could. So a lot of people, even now, would say, if it wasn't for your dad's store, they would not have had anything to eat. I've heard them tell me that. They all appreciate the help they got.

NP: What was your mom like?

SM: My mom? My mom was okay. A little strict.

(Laughter)

SM: You know, always checking on us, and made sure that we were doing things right. She wanted us to all grow up to be respectable people.

NP: So of the two of them, she was the disciplinarian, or the stricter one?

SM: Yes, my dad was more easy-going on us. But then if he said something, we'd listen because it's not often that he would try to reprimand us.

NP: It sounds like they were both hard workers.

SM: They worked, yes. Because my dad, I think, went to Honolulu. That was the only far trip that he took, before he passed away . . .

NP: He never was able to go to Japan . . .

SM: No, he never went to Japan, but my mom went later with her church group. So she's traveled to the Mainland, to Canada, with the church group. When she would go, we would take turns watching the store. My sister would come from Honolulu and if I went to work during the day, then she would be there. For a week. And I would take some vacation time, and we would take turns to watch the store while she was on her vacation.

NP: So you didn't really leave the store, even though you didn't work full-time in there?

SM: No, because even after I got married, every weekend we used to go over to help her stack shelves. She had this old Coca-Cola cooler which they would fill water in it. So every week we had to go and clean it out, because the water would get so dirty from all that dust. So my children, too, I've taken them to work in the store. So they remember my mom—she had this refrigerator where she kept meat in. It's glass, and then it sort of got all wet on the outside, so she was always wiping it. So the kids would go there, and they would wipe it also (laughs).

- NP: When you worked at Amfac, you were living at home . . .
- SM: Yes, I was.
- NP: . . . so because of that did you end up working in the store as well?
- SM: As well, yes. And I tried to help out, because my brothers were young, and my sister was still in high school.
- NP: Then you left American Factors, and where did you go . . .
- SM: I got married in 1958. But I wasn't living at home then, but I worked at Amfac until 1959. Then I had my daughter, she was born in 1959. Then I went to work for Dillingham Investment for a few years. Then I went on to Captain Cook Building Supply, which is Hawai'i Planing Mill right now. Worked there until 1970. And then I went to Konawaena School as an account clerk.
- NP: Can I ask you how you met your husband [George Matsuoka]?
- SM: My husband? We met in high school (chuckles). It was in like the end of my freshman year, so I had known him for many years before I married him (laughs). I went to school in Honolulu, and he went into the service, but I guess it was meant for us to be together because we got together.
- NP: So you folks were high school sweethearts. Wow. He went to [Korea] for service?
- SM: It was after the Korean War.
- NP: He was stationed in Korea?
- SM: Korea for a while.
- NP: That must have been hard. Hard climate.
- SM: He has pictures of a lot of snow.
- NP: And you were married in Kona?
- SM: Yes.
- NP: Did you have a Japanese wedding?
- SM: Not in kimono. I had a regular wedding gown. We didn't wear kimonos then.
- NP: Because I understand now, people are starting to wear kimonos . . .

- SM: Again. But at that time we didn't wear kimonos. The Kona Hongwanji Mission is where we got . . .
- NP: And where did you have your honeymoon?
- SM: Oh, we went to Honolulu, and we went to Kaua'i (laughs).
- NP: And where did your husband work?
- SM: He had worked for his dad for a while. They had the Matsuoka Coffee Mill. Then he worked for Aloha Airlines in the [ticket] counter there. And then he got into the fire department. So that's where he stayed until he retired.
- NP: You were both hard, hard workers.
- SM: Well, when we first started out, our salaries were really, really small. I can remember, when I first started at Amfac, my pay was like \$200 a month. By the time they took taxes, you didn't have very much left.
- NP: Lucky that you were living at home, then.
- SM: Yes. And then, whatever I had that I could spare, I would give to my parents so that they could use it for my brothers.
- NP: Let's see, you went to Honolulu Business College. And, did Norma go to college also?
- SM: Yes, she also went to Honolulu Business College. And Ellison is the only one that went to Colorado. Claude went to business college, also. I think it was still [called] Honolulu Business College then. I think they've changed the name.
- NP: And Ellison, when he went to Colorado, he went to the [U.S.] Air Force Academy?
- SM: No, he went to University of Colorado in Boulder.
- NP: How did he happen to do something so different from the rest of you?
- SM: He always wanted to be an engineer or a pilot. I think at that time, they had a good aerospace program I'm not really sure, but that's why he went there. I'm not really sure why, but he chose Colorado. When he got there, he got into the ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] program there.
- NP: Your parents must have been very proud when he went to the Mainland.

- SM: My parents were one that, if we wanted something and if they could afford it, they'd give it to us. And encourage us. He got an Air Force scholarship, so that helped out a lot. So he was able to come back like, during Christmas (chuckles).
- NP: And Norma came home? Did she stay in Kona or did . . .
- SM: No, she stayed in Honolulu. And she worked at Hawaiian Trust, and then got to Bank of Hawai'i.
- NP: You went to Konawaena High School. For a long time you worked there, from 1970 . . .
- SM: Till 1995.
- NP: Did you like working at Konawaena?
- SM: I enjoyed my work, yes. And I enjoyed the students there. It made the day go by so fast when you see them passing by and changing classes. And the teachers were nice, so I enjoyed working with everyone there.
- NP: And you saw that school grow . . .
- SM: Yes.
- NP: It became huge while you were there.
- SM: We even had a fire once. One of the older buildings got burned while I was there. The only thing that I could think of was, "Oh no, the inventory . . ." (Laughs)
- NP: You did inventory (laughs).
- SM: I had to do it. But not by myself. I thought, oh no, everything's burning there. We had to account for things that burned.
- NP: Inventory is a nightmare.
- SM: I know! We had a lot of inventory. We would have the teachers take the inventory, and we would have to match it up with what we had. But it worked out all right, and everyone was nice.
- NP: I'm going back to the store a little bit more. There were good years and bad years for coffee farmers. In the years when pay for coffee was very poor, would you see an effect on the store?
- SM: Well, they would only buy the basic necessities that they needed. They would plant their own vegetables, raise their own chickens, and have their own eggs.

- NP: So the real basic necessities would be what?
- SM: Like bread, rice, and milk. And *poi*, and things like that.
- NP: Who would you get your *poi* from?
- SM: It was the Higashi Poi Factory.
- NP: And how often would they deliver to you, do you remember?
- SM: Well, let's see, I think it was like, once a week. So people would need to stock up for a week.
- NP: And would he deliver a certain number of bags, or pounds, each week? Do you remember how that worked?
- SM: My dad or my mom would say, we needed this much for every week. So then he would bring the same amount every week. And if they needed more, they would have to call him and have the order increased. But then it was more a standard order. Even breads, and things like that. It was like a standard thing.
- NP: Where would the breads come from?
- SM: Kona Bakery and Standard Bakery. Two bakeries that we had. So they would alternate days and come.
- NP: So you would have bread deliveries every day?
- SM: Oh yes, we had bread.
- NP: Would you sell out every day?
- SM: Not every day.
- NP: What would happen to the leftovers that you didn't sell?
- SM: Well, they would take those back, and give us the fresh . . .
- NP: More like consignment. You didn't have to live with what you didn't sell?
- SM: No, no.
- NP: Would you sell out your *poi* all the time?
- SM: *Poi* was always a sell-out.

NP: Did your family eat *poi*, also?

SM: Yes, we did!

(Laughter)

SM: And we never used sugar either. No sugar (laughs).

NP: They say the *poi* used to be better back then.

SM: Yes, I think it used to be. Now, it seems like—I don't know if it's the taro, but it seems like it's more watery. It used to be thicker, before.

NP: Maybe they use more water.

SM: Probably.

NP: What kind of bags would it come in?

SM: They had bags sewn out of cloth. So you could wash it (chuckles).

NP: Would people return the cloth bags?

SM: I can't remember. Maybe they did. I'm not sure. I remember those cloth bags that they had before. And then they changed to those plastic bags.

NP: And the rice came in cloth, also?

SM: Cloth bags, right.

NP: Would you make use of the cloth bags?

SM: Yes!

NP: I bet your mom sewed things with that.

SM: Made dish towels and things. And then sometimes they would bleach it and make hats, with the rims on? I think they used it for a lot of things. Some people used it also to put on the ceiling. You know, they had those roofs with no ceilings? So they would put the cloth there as a ceiling.

NP: Metal roofs?

SM: Yeah, metal [i.e., galvanized iron] roofs. So they'll use that [cloth] to look like Canec or something.

- NP: Those rice bags were about the most versatile things . . .
- SM: They used that to sew underwear and things, also. Of course, we had a store, so we didn't have to use rice bags. But they used the rice bags for a lot of things.
- NP: Did you have fishing supplies, also?
- SM: A little fishing supplies. Almost everything. Because people can't go anywhere.
- NP: You mentioned that your family did celebrate New Year's?
- SM: Yes.
- NP: And you did close the store New Year's. Did you have any other traditions or holidays that your family would celebrate together?
- SM: Well, like Christmas and Thanksgiving. But then, the store was not closed. But we would close early and have dinner together. And Christmas was special to us, too, because we would stay up late and help my parents. Then we would go to sleep, but while we were sleeping, they would prepare packages for us. And when we'd get up, they'd say, "Oh, I think there's a box for you out in the front." So we would open the front door and there's this box. There was a present in it with nuts and cluster raisins and things. So we would just look forward to Christmas because we were able to get some things. And then they would give us a dollar and we were so happy with the dollar (laughs).
- NP: What would you spend it for?
- SM: The funny thing is, instead of spending it at our store, we'd go to Komo Store and buy something there.
- (Laughter)
- SM: It's like, you know, we went somewhere else.
- NP: It's a treat.
- SM: Yeah, it was a treat for us.
- (Laughter)
- NP: You wouldn't take it down into Kona to spend? Was Kona a big attraction for you? What was the town like when you were growing up?
- SM: Where do you mean?

- NP: In Kailua-Kona.
- SM: Kailua-Kona? Well, they had celebrations down there, too. Like parades and things. But if our parents didn't take us, we weren't able to go. But we could walk over to Komo Store and purchase our things. We didn't even have bicycles then. We just walked.
- NP: What kind of food would you have on Christmas and Thanksgiving?
- SM: Oh, we would have like roast turkey or chicken. The things that you don't usually eat.
- NP: And New Year's?
- SM: New Year's, we had all those things, plus we had sushi and all those traditional New Year's food, the Japanese . . .
- NP: Who made the sushi and the Japanese food?
- SM: My mom would make.
- NP: So she was a good cook as well?
- SM: She was. And we would help her. But then, for New Year's it was our job to clean out all the cabinets and change the paper, and wash all the curtains and clean all the windows.
- NP: Getting ready for the new year.
- SM: Yes. So when our [school] vacation started, it was like work, because you had to clean the house and get everything ready. Then wash your sheets and have everything clean for the new year.
- NP: So the real vacation started on January first . . .
- SM: When you went back to school, right.
- NP: . . . you know, when everything was all cleaned up and . . .
- SM: Oh yes, right, right, right. And they would prepare the food at night, you know. Midnight, they're still working. And then, New Year's morning is when we ate the food.
- NP: Would they stay open till midnight on New Year's Eve?
- SM: New Year's Eve. Because the children—the boys—would play firecrackers and things. They had no cars, nowhere to go. So they would come to the store and buy their fireworks, and they would play their fireworks there.

NP: So your parents sold fireworks, too.

SM: Yes, at New Year's.

NP: Back then, were there a lot of restrictions on firecrackers, or was it pretty easy to get?

SM: Pretty easy to get them. I don't think there were many restrictions.

NP: Not like today. Didn't have guards standing around . . .

SM: No, no. They would buy the firecrackers and they would play it right there. So in the morning, you'd have to sweep it all up, because all that rubbish was right there. But that was the fun part.

NP: As you look at the history of the store, it sounded like it started really small with your parents when they were newly married and they were young. And then, it expanded to be a general store. What was the real high point of the store? When it was, say, the most prosperous, most productive?

SM: Maybe when my brothers were growing up, probably. Those years were better than when we were growing up. That's when they kind of enclosed a portion to make another storeroom. So that would be like, maybe in the late forties, fifties, somewhere around there?

NP: And then, after that, it became small? What happened to the store . . .

SM: No, everything was kept same. Of course, when my dad passed away, it was only my mom. She didn't have dry goods---I mean, she had some, but whatever was left. She never went into dry goods. It was more like groceries and . . .

NP: But it still was a successful store?

SM: It kept her going. But then, when the supermarkets came about, it sort of changed. People would come and just buy the necessities that they needed. For emergencies, things that they forgot to buy. They would come. Because naturally the prices were different. At supermarkets you can get it cheaper because they buy it in quantity. So I think her store got smaller, and carried less things. Probably canned goods, and the regular breads, and things. But she did away with her dry goods. Hardware was like whatever she had that she would sell. She never went into any more.

NP: Do you remember talking to her about this? About needing to change the store?

SM: Well, her thing was, you see---my brother had gotten into the astronaut program. And after he passed away [in the *Challenger* disaster], for her it was just to have it open to

meet people. And people would stop by. And she said, "I can't close." Because the truckers would pass by and stop for soda, or pastry. And she said, if she closes, it would be a hardship for the neighbors, in case they needed something. And she just wanted to keep her store going. She enjoyed meeting people, talking to them.

NP: Because of Ellison, did she meet a lot more people, do you think?

SM: She did. And it wasn't just people from the community. It was people from everywhere that stopped by. And people brought her, like, little gifts and things. People even brought her some peanuts that they had grown on their farm in Virginia. And somebody brought her some salmon and things from Washington. People were really nice. They would just stop by to chat. And then she would give them coffee, or whatever she had that she could share.

NP: How old was she when she died [in 1990]?

SM: She was seventy-six years old.

NP: Seventy-six. Can you tell me the story. . . . I heard she died in the store, actually.

SM: No, it was not in the store. Well, we had told her, "You're getting old, so why don't you close the store? You can go to senior citizens'."

And she says, "No, I'm not the type to go there to be sitting around." She always had to be doing something. So she said, "When my eyes close, I close the store."

Well, it was a Sunday. I guess she wasn't feeling well, but she didn't tell us. So we thought she had gone to church. But actually, she hadn't gone. She had closed the store like she said. She had gone into the back.

NP: And the store was ordinarily open on a Sunday?

SM: Yes. But it was in the afternoon, maybe about after 12:30, because somebody had seen her at 12:30. After 12:30 she closed the store, and went in the back. She was just there. She had a brain hemorrhage. I couldn't get her by phone, so I called the neighbor. And I had her go and check, and she was the one who found her there. So it was just like she said, "When my eyes close, I'll close the store." She closed the store, and that's what happened.

NP: So she knew something was happening. Either she didn't want to call you, or she couldn't call you . . .

SM: I don't think she could have called. I think it happened suddenly. She must have felt dizzy, or didn't feel very well, because she had taken her glasses off, and put it on her

dresser. She must have bumped her head on the door, because she had a little cut on the side of her eye. She probably didn't feel well. She had gone to the bathroom, but not using the bathroom. She had kind of just leaned on the wall, and that's how they found her.

NP: Very short.

SM: Very short.

NP: How many years did they actually have that store?

SM: My mom died in 1990, and they opened it in 1933. So fifty-seven years.

NP: Did you folks keep it open any longer, or did you just decide that, with your mom's passing, that was the time to close?

SM: We decided to close.

NP: Must have been a hard moment. How do you feel when you go by now and it's not your store anymore?

SM: It's a little sad. For me, because I was born there in that house, I think I feel it more. You have a sort of lonesome feeling. Like you lost something.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

NP: So after your dad passed away, did your mom stay in the store by herself?

SM: Well, my brother lived with her for a few years, and then he got married. He and his wife stayed there for a while. Then he built his home in Kealekekua, so he moved. And she stayed on by herself. And then toward the end, my cousin stayed with her for a few years, about six years or so. He worked for Hawaiian Tel[ephone] and he needed a place to stay, so my mom said, "Well, you can stay with me." So he stayed with her. Which was good for us because then we didn't have to worry. We knew somebody was there with her. We used to call her every evening. But then when he was there, I wouldn't call every evening because I knew he was there with her. And if anything happened, he would let us know. But it was a sense of relief to know that somebody was there with her.

But she was independent—very independent.

NP: This sounds like this was a perfect job for her, in a sense. Or a life for her. It was more than a job. It seems like it was . . .

- SM: It was her life. Because after she got married, that's what she got into the store. And carried it on.
- NP: And looking back over the store, what would you say was the value of that store in the community that you lived in? Why was it important?
- SM: It's important that my dad was there to be able to help the people in the community, and he was able to do a lot of things for them. Back then, a lot of people didn't have checking accounts, and they would need to send their monies away for things that they had to pay for. So they would bring the cash to him, and he would in turn send his check on. But he would write the check right there in front of them so they would know that the check is being sent, and put it into the envelope, and mail it. And [for] the aliens, he would do their alien cards every year. He would help them. And so, he helped everyone, and he didn't mind doing it.
- NP: So he did banking, he did alien card registration . . .
- SM: Cards, and whatever he could help.
- NP: You said he was also an Aloha Airlines . . .
- SM: . . . agent. (My dad was a ticket agent for Trans-Pacific Airlines, which later changed its name to Aloha Airlines.)
- NP: And a taxicab driver.
- SM: A taxicab driver.
- NP: I know he helped with marriage arranging, sometimes.
- SM: Yes, sometimes he did that. And then he would help out at the church. When the reverends would come and they needed to meet people in the community, he would be the one to take them, to meet them. Always if people were around, he would tell my mom to prepare food for them, dinners. And if there was someone that he had with them, and it was close to lunch hour, he would call so my mom would prepare lunch. He would bring whoever was with him, and then they would have lunch at our place.
- NP: Was their telephone used a lot by people? People who didn't have phones . . .
- SM: There were a lot, yes. We had those pay phones, where you would put your monies in? So it was like a station. Some place for everyone where they could come by.
- NP: Did you feel like it was a community center, sometimes?

SM: Sometimes, yes. Whatever time of the day or night, even if we were closed, if people came by, they would come up the back door and my dad would open the store for them and give them whatever they needed. Or help them with whatever help they needed.

NP: So incredibly different from the stores we have nowadays. It's like almost impossible to imagine. I think we've lost something in the process.

SM: Yes, but he didn't mind doing those things.

NP: And how did you feel about being part of a family of storekeepers? Did it ever bother you that you had to be so available to everybody at all times?

SM: Not really, not really. I enjoyed it, because I enjoy meeting people, and talking to people. It was interesting to be there in the store, and I met a lot of people. Like I'm here at the Space Center, and I have met so many people who have known Ellison or have worked with him. So it's interesting.

NP: Okay. Well, I think that we've covered a lot of the areas that I wanted to talk to you about the store, Shirley, and we really appreciate the time that you've given from this busy day here.

SM: You're very welcome. I'm glad I was able to share whatever I knew.

NP: We'll stop now, but I think if you and I think of more things maybe we'll continue.

SM: Okay, sure.

NP: Thank you so much.

SM: Well, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

Kona Heritage Stores Oral History Project

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