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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Jane Komeiji (JK)

April 24, 1993

Nu'uanu, O'ahu

BY: Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

MK: This is an interview with Jane Sachiko Okamoto Komeiji at her home in Nu'uanu, Honolulu, O'ahu on April 22, 1993. The interviewer is Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

Okay, to start today's interview, we're gonna focus on the World War II period. And the first question deals with December 7th. When December 7th came and the bombs fell, what happened to you and your family?

JK: Would you like to know where I was? I used to take *o-shūji* lessons from Mrs. Moribe [wife of Ryuichi Moribe] on upper Nu'uanu, on Nu'uanu. So I had gone for my lessons at 7:00 or 7:30 in the morning. By the time the lesson was over and we were walking over to Hongwanji for Sunday school, we noticed smoke. I think it was coming from, now that I know where it was, the corner, Liliha and Kuakini. So that area. People were saying, "It's a war, it's real war, it's Japan," as we were walking. So it must have been after 8:00 A.M. that we were walking. When we got to the [Honpa] Hongwanji Betsuin on Fort Street I quickly ran to the telephone. Borrowed the telephone and called my mom and told her, "It seems that there's a war. It's not a practice session. It's not maneuvers. [You] should not leave the house, it's dangerous because I saw a fire." There was another fire down on School Street, off School and Fort street in Leilehua Lane where also some shrapnel fell. And so, people were reporting these things to us as we gathered together at Hongwanji.

Then Howard Kozuma says, "Eh, let's go see the fire."

So there (were) a few of us, (who) jumped in a car, and we drove to some peninsula. Somehow I recall (their) saying that there were leprosy patients here [Kalihi Receiving Station] either before or then. And from there, that peninsula, we could look out and into Pearl Harbor. So I saw a lot of that burning, black, black, black smoke and a little red underneath. Red-orange underneath. It was really awful because there was so much black, dark black smoke. (When) they took me home, needless to say, I really got it. My mother (said), "You telephone me to stay in the house and how dare you go around where. . . ." She told me how worried she was and that (it) was pretty close to twelve o'clock, noon. By then, of course, the streets were really emptied out excepting for vehicles that were rushing. I guess because we were near the depot, maybe, we saw a few more trucks going out. Then pretty soon, a Mr. Kazuo Yoshida, who worked in the store and who was a *kibei,* called to say, "I'm coming over, there's no man in the house for you folks." He's concerned about our

safety. So he says, "I'm coming over." So he came and he spent the evening with us. There was a blackout, (and) you know, we had no lights on. And somehow, he did that for a few weeks. Stayed on. Of course, as the days went by, we had blackout curtains and we were able to get fabric from the store. I don't think the stores opened on the next day. 'Cause on that Sunday we were closed, but I think on the next day we were not open. I don't recall when the other stores [were] reopened. But those were anxious times because we did not know what was happening. We knew that Pearl Harbor had been bombed, but there was always that fear of Japanese landing. And there were a few air raid sirens at night. I slept through them all.

(Laughter)

JK: But they laughed at me because they said, "My God, you didn't know?"

And I said, "No, I didn't know anything about it."

But I remember in the dark, listening to the radio. We had a stand-up record player, *chiku onki* is what they used to call it, you know. We had a little radio on top that or on the side and we huddled around it as we listened to---or whatever we could listen to.

MK: How did your mother react to this outbreak of war?

JK: Well, her first---the reaction that I remember more vividly is her anger at me. But, you know, I feel that she felt that we were American. Somehow, I get this strong feeling of her identifying with America. That is my recollection. Not from anything she said specifically, but in the way she kind of took the situation on. I think her primary concern was safety for us. I'm sure she thought about her family in Japan, but she really never mentioned them to us. Whether there was anger or anxiety about her being an enemy alien in those early days I know she did not outwardly tell us. But I do know that she had worn a kimono all her life. Very soon thereafter she was in western dress. And her kimono was---I think [before the war] only on Sundays she probably wore a dress. When we went to visit friends. And even at that she still wore kimono many times. So that was a drastic change in the outward appearance. But she never really shared her innermost feelings. Excepting when her mother died---and this was right after the war that she got (the) news. She apologetically asked me to go to (the) *otera* for some kind of a service for her mother who had died in Japan probably during the war. I told her, "Why are you asking me? *Itte kudasai masuka?*"(Will you please go?) or "*Itte kudasai*" (Please go.) This kind of way. Because after all I told her, "That's my grandmother and you don't have to apologize." But I think the fact that she was an enemy had something to do with the feeling of how she asked me to go to the temple.

MK: You know when she stopped wearing her kimonos and started wearing dresses, did you ever ask her?

JK: It was a shock. But she said she could not wear a kimono anymore because that's Japanese. Everything was, "Be American. Speak American." "Don't talk in the enemy's language because the enemy may be under the table listening or behind the door listening." In the store itself, we had central column of a four-sided mirror column. And above that very prominently were signs, "Speak American. Be American." But this was her outward conversion.

MK: And you know you also mentioned you weren't sure how long the store was closed, but you

remember your getting blackout material from your store. Would you remember if other people came to your store to buy blackout material?

JK: Yeah, that's right. Now that you bring it up, people came to buy blackout fabrics. I kind of have a vague recollection that, you know, even if a person wanted the whole bolt and they would have been glad to sell the whole bolt prior to the war, but I think they had some kind of system where they tried to spread the fabric around. And, of course, I think if you were a regular customer and a friend, you got a little priority treatment.

MK: And you know this blackout fabric, exactly what kind of fabric was it?

JK: Well, you know, it had to be an emergency thing, so they had to use whatever blackout, black fabric that they had. I remember a fabric called Indian Head. Kind of a coarse material. None of it really blocked out the light completely because they were not meant to be as such. They used satin, cotton satin 'cause that was a little thicker than some other fabrics. But in the early stages, whatever was dark went I think.

MK: Did it have to be black, though?

JK: I don't think so. I'm sure navy blue would have been okay.

MK: And, I know that a lot of people associate your store with an ad that was very suspect during the war years. Can you tell us about that ad that's, you know, come to be very famous?

JK: It was very famous. In fact, it was so famous I don't know how the story got around (the) navy base. But we had navy wives coming in. People that we had never seen. But let me tell you about the ad: The ad appeared a few days before December 7th in the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* and it depicted a cloud at the top. I think it was not too small an ad. Maybe a quarter page, not a quarter page, maybe an eighth of the page. It was a rectangular ad and at the top of the rectangle was a dark area that was shaded in, in the form of a cloud. On it was written, "Fashions by the yard." And below it---and then it said, "Look! Our silks on parade." Below that were different kinds, different fabrics and their prices. And of course, on the bottom was Hawai'i Importing Company. Now the reason---I guess in the hysteria people looked at that dark design as being a cloud. And then, "Fashions by the yard." The word "fashion" may not have been so important, but, "by the yard," was important because "yard" signified Pearl Harbor Navy Yard. According to those that interpreted the ad. "Look! Our silks on parade." Parade, air raid. I mean, you can stretch your imagination.

And of course the fabrics, and these fabrics had names like matelasse, which had been a very common fabric. Kind of a heavy embossed looking kind of fabric, matelasse, but they would look at that and say, "M and there's a T and E and an L." M-A-T-E-L-A-S-S-E is how it's spelled. But M and Hawaiian Telephone, at that time, was known as Mutual Telephone and T-E-L is an abbreviation for telephone. There was a fabric named Yipee at the end. And fortunately, or unfortunately, this happened to come at the very end of the ad. The last item on the ad and so it was (interpreted) to be hooray or *banzai*.

There was a fabric named shantussa. Tussa, T-U-S-S-A. USS *Arizona*. And then they added a fabric, tip high. Tip high, P, it ends with P and (high) begins with H. So Pearl Harbor, and it cost a dollar and fifteen cents a yard so one plus one plus five equals seven. So the raid

would be at seven o'clock or thereabouts.

So, they made all kinds of connections and I don't know who really started this (rumor). But I do know that these navy wives came in and they would come and say, "May I see, shantussa?" And of course the clerks could show them shantussa because this was a registered trademark name. And then they would say, "May I see matelasse." And they would show. Or, "May I see tip high?" Then they would be satisfied and they would walk out. But apparently it must have been quite a story on the naval base or among naval wives, because there pretty soon came a novel based on this store's ad. But as far as Mr. Hino, who composed the ad, and he used to do a lot of this (for) the ***Bulletin*** and in the Japanese papers. He tells me that the ad, a similar ad, in fact with similar materials, some of the materials were the same (ones that) had appeared the year before and it brought in such a good response, the cloud and the fashions by the yard, he thought it was clever. So he repeated the ad, but no official ever questioned him about the ad. So, he found out that people were questioning others around. I don't know whether it was the naval intelligence or the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] but people, the wholesaler, for example, was questioning the integrity or loyalty of Mr. Hino and my mother probably. People generally, at first were so scared that they wouldn't say that I was questioned about you. But, later on the stories came out and (they) said, yeah, people came around asking. But they were not---my mother nor Mr. Hino was directly ever confronted with the ad.

MK: So, when did your family become aware of this significance attached to that ad?

JK: We never really caught on except that people used to come in with a clipping of the ad. Or come in only to ask for the fabric. I think the analysis had to be made later on when. . . . They never questioned it. Maybe when Gwenfread Allen brought this out in her book [*Hawai'i's War Years, 1941-1945*], that we knew about, you know the analysis.

MK: So, Mr. Hino nor your mother were ever questioned?

JK: Not directly. But they did come to check the store, especially our living quarters upstairs. They just came, several of them and they just ran up the back steps and we had one, two, we had about three or four *tansu*. They took out the drawers and they checked stuff. But they couldn't find (anything) and so they left without saying anything.

MK: Did they even ask to see the premises and say what they wanted to look for?

JK: I don't know, but I don't think so. My mother's recollection was, "*Tōtō Tōtō. Nikai ni agatte itta.*"

MK: And would you remember who these people were?

JK: No, I was not home at that time, somehow. But I did see the things kind of scattered afterwards.

MK: You know, when you came home and you saw your things scattered and you had heard what had happened from your mother, what did you feel or think?

JK: Frightened. I think it's the uncertainty, why did this happen, why? I had heard that Mr.

[Taketo] Iwahara was interned, I think, on the very first day, December 7th and we had known that and so there was this feeling, I had only a mother and I had younger siblings, what is going to happen to us? I don't think I was worried about the war, excepting that invasion. I mean the complexities of loyal to disloyal, none of that entered my mind. [It] was more what's gonna happen to us. I don't even think I was real angry. I didn't know enough that my constitutional rights were being trodden upon or anything. It was fear.

MK: And, you know, your store HIC, was owned by your uncle, Eikichi Nakamura?

JK: Nakamoto.

MK: Nakamoto. And his wife?

JK: Mina.

MK: And was managed by your mother? Now, all three are alien Japanese, how was it that Hawai'i Importing Company was able to still stay in business after the outbreak of the war?

JK: I think there were many businesses who had alien proprietors that stayed in business. Although it may have been that my cousin's husband may have been brought into the picture as part-owner because Eikichi and Mina Nakamoto's only daughter married in the early [19]30s and Taro Nakamoto came on board more like overall *shihai*. And I don't know the legal status, whether he was given, whether his name was entered. It may have been because *o-nii-chan* as I called him used to come quite often. Of course, not during the war often, but after that. Before that too. He used to come to Honolulu to see how the business was doing. It was not my aunty because she was coming and going on her buying trips to Japan and would stay in Japan for six months. So Taro Nakamoto may have been---if there were a corporation, a partnership, he may have been president at that time. And he is a citizen.

MK: So that might have . . .

JK: It might have. . . .

MK: Helped the situation. You know, you just mentioned that like your aunt used to spend months in Japan. At the time that war broke out, were your aunt and uncle in Hilo?

JK: My uncle had died in 1938 in Japan. And I think my aunt, after a while I think she was in Hilo during the war.

MK: And so when war broke out, to your knowledge, how were the Nakamotos doing?

JK: What do you mean?

MK: In terms of their carrying on their business and also being interned or not interned?

JK: Okay. None of the family was interned. I don't think they---I mean, everybody suffered to some extent because goods were hard to get, business hours were different and et cetera. But I think *o-nii-chan* did quite well. He was quite a positive person and a very sociable person who was easy to work with. I do know that they had kept some of their old employees in Hilo

and these people continued to serve during the war.

MK: So they were all right?

JK: They were all right.

MK: And then as for Hawai'i Importing Company during the war, who continued to manage it and who were the employees from say, 1941 to 1945?

JK: Mr. Hino was with us for part of the time. But it may have been in ('46) or thereabouts that he decided that. . . . He had been thinking about being independent for a long time. And so he decided to make the break and he went out and he literally peddled his goods from house to house and he had such a (good) reputation. He had his clientele so I think he did quite well and eventually established a store in the McCully district in the Chrones Building. I don't know why I remember that insignificant detail. But he tells me that I named his store, Fashions by Hino. And I don't recall that. Then we had a Mr. Yamamoto who came in like a manager person. Mr. Yamamoto used to work for Nagao Dry Goods [Nagao Shōten]. I don't know how we got him, but he became the manager. Then we began to employ women. Until then we did not have women clerks on the floor. If we did, they were smaller in number than the male clerks. I don't know whether it was because males were harder to get during the war, but we had people like Mildred Suekuni, Helen, who became a Doike. We had young girls. We had Toshi-*chan,* who was such a beauty that the boys all used to come to see her. (MK chuckles.) Toshiko Moriyama. They would stand outside and look at her. Maybe she came in just before the war. But anyway. (Coughs) Excuse me.

(During World War II the sole bread winners of some families were interned and the remaining wives and children were left "stranded," especially at the onset, without any support. Mother helped out whenever she could within her means for some of those families had nowhere to turn.) We had Mrs. Miyake. I remember her specifically because Mrs. Miyake was the wife of my Japanese[-language] school *sensei*. And Reverend (Eimu) Miyake was a brilliant man. He was a reverend but I think his assignment was mostly with the Japanese-language school. He was interned during the war. And so, to help the family out and I guess to also help our own personnel situation, Mrs. Miyake came to work at the store. This was the first time in her life, she's Miyake *no oku-san* and she came and she did clerking. We also had her son, Jiro, who did odd jobs around the place (and) later Jiro got to know the fabrics a little better so he was able to clerk. But those two people stand out in my mind during the war.

MK: And what happened to the regular male employees that you had prior to the war?

JK: Okay, Mr. Tagawa, by then, either had retired or had died. No, he had retired. Maybe during the war he was still there because Mrs. Tagawa, at one point, came to work upstairs and took care of us. Mr. (Kazuo) Yamasaki, also, after a while left and he became a carpenter or something. And Mr. [Kazuo] Yoshida, the one who came to stay with us, volunteered into the army and became a paratrooper. So when he came back, and it was still during the war, I remember he came back and he gave me his paratrooper's pin that I still have to this day. I don't know where he is. We had a Mr. (To) Igawa working for us. Mr. Igawa, basically, was trained as a carpenter in Japan. So he became an independent carpenter.

MK: And, you know, those employees that left during the war for other jobs, did they go because they could make more money outside of the store?

JK: I don't really know exactly when they left. But---and I don't know whether they left. . . . I'm sure they must have left for money. I recall that horror much later in my life when I saw that my mother had been paid something like a hundred dollars a month up around that time. She had to give thirty dollars to the maid, which left us seventy dollars to live with. And so if she and Hino-*san* were the highest paid, what would the rest get?

MK: So salaries were not very high.

JK: They were not. Yeah.

MK: And you know when Hino-*san* left the company, would you remember how your mom felt and how she had to manage then, without Mr. Hino, who was like her right-hand man?

JK: Yeah. I think she had to make a lot of adjustments and make decisions, I mean, she would talk with Mr. Yamamoto, I don't know if he came right on. But I sensed the difference in the relationship. With Mr. Hino, it was like cohorts working together for the same goal and there was a togetherness. With Mr. Yamamoto I did not feel that togetherness. It could have been that Mr. Hino was with my mother from the time that he was young. She kind of nurtured him along. Whereas Mr. Yamamoto came to us after he had been managing or working a long time at Nagao Shōten, so you know, he had his own ways and my mother had her own ways.

MK: Kind of a different working relationship?

JK: I think that changed the whole relationship within the store. Although the girls were very close to us. I know that Mr. Yamamoto was not close to us.

MK: Before it was more like a family?

JK: It was a family.

MK: Kind of operation. So during the war you had some change in personnel. One went to join the armed services and some left to follow other pursuits. Now, how about in terms of the goods that the store provided? Were there any changes in the goods that you noticed from before war and during war?

JK: Okay, before the war we were maybe one-third Japanese and two-thirds American. Now, after the war all things Japanese were no good. I don't know whether we threw the merchandise away or whether we stored them someplace else. I wish we had them now. Because they involved everything from *chōchin* to *o-zōri*. Now, I think our---I'm trying to recall the shelves were not stacked as high. Because goods were harder to get. But the relationship between the buyer, in this case my mother and Mr. Hino, and the wholesaler was solid enough that I think we were given preference by these wholesalers and they probably gave us as much as they could. So we did have merchandise to sell.

MK: Did the types of merchandise change? Other than the fact that they were all American, were

there more of one type of material than in the prewar days?

JK: Gee, I couldn't tell you that. You just bought whatever you could buy at that point I think, you know, from the wholesaler. Shipping was bad between the islands and the Mainland. You almost have to say, thank you to the wholesaler for selling you anything. It was the reverse prior to the war, you know. One thing I remember is Mr. Hino and my mother talking about, "Oh, we have to make this payment because it is within the thirty-day period or ninety-day period. So we gotta be sure that we have to put this money aside to be able to pay." And some of it---when they paid Minami-*san,* for example, who worked for Wakefield and Sons. He came directly to get the check. It was not sent through the mail. So sometimes I know that they used to kind of wait around, wait around, until Hino-*san* would say, "Yeah, the check, *wa dekite imasu.*" (Yeah, the check has been made.) But he would be waiting on the customer and the seller had to just wait there until he was free and go upstairs to the mezzanine floor to get the check because Mr. Hino, I think used to sign the checks. He used to issue the checks.

MK: So during the war years, then, they really were dependent on the wholesalers and. . . .

JK: Yeah, I think every business. . . .

MK: . . . it was a seller's market for the wholsalers.

JK: Yeah, that's right.

MK: So when it came to selling their products to the regular buyers, when your mom was selling things to customers, what kinds of people came during the war years as opposed to prewar years?

JK: Because goods were scarce, we not only had the regular clientele, but we had people that we never saw before because they were going (from) shop to shop looking for something that they needed. For example, if they needed something a little dressier, we didn't have too many occasions for that, but if a girl is getting married, for example, they wanted something a little bit special for her, they could not do all the fancy stuff, but people would go from store to store looking for stuff. The particular thing that they needed, if we had it then they would buy it, you see. So we had shoppers like that around. The people from the country did not come out as often.

This is a kind of a funny thing. There was a lady, I don't know where she came from, but she was able to get fish. So she would get off the train or the bus or whatever it was at O'ahu Railway, and she would come down and she would spread her wares that were wrapped in newspapers underneath the steps or in the back of the store. My mother would buy the fish from her. We also had somebody coming to sell us watermelon. They were not the great big watermelons because the person had to hand-carry the stuff. But they would come and sell the watermelon. That was always transacted in the back of the store.

MK: Was there any bartering, direct bartering of say, fish for fabric?

JK: No. That had to be exactly---because the fish was for our personal consumption. The store's money was basically separate money. But you know, not only my mom, Mr. Hino would buy fish, too. That kind [of transaction], I remember that in the back of the store. That was all

hush, hush because actually that was a black market I think.

MK: And so going back to your customers at the store, what was the clientele like? You were telling me that in the old days you had people from the plantation, now they didn't come as frequently during the war days so . . .

JK: No.

MK: And you had people that you never saw before looking for things that they couldn't find elsewhere? Now, who else came to the store during the war years?

JK: It was mixed group as I recall. You know, *Haole*s and not too many Chinese, but *Haole*s I remember. And the usual Filipinos and Japanese. But, you know, being that we were under wartime conditions I think the feeling of buying was a little different. There was not as much gift-giving for example. And that, you know, used to be a big part of the business, too, when people gave gifts of fabric. I can't really picture that.

MK: How about defense workers or military people?

JK: We saw a lot of the, you know, because there was a bus stop right in the middle of that building. But not too many of them would buy fabrics because those were primarily men and they were here largely without their families. Whatever things we were selling they could get. Now, this is my perception. It may have been totally different.

MK: You know I heard that there were some restrictions on the amount of money, cash, that a person could have in his or her possession at any one time. Would you know if that affected people's buying habits at your store?

JK: No. See, during wartime conditions, you have to get your basic necessities. You can make do with old clothes, but you needed the money for food, for gas. And a lot of people, for liquor. Liquor was rationed so I think we, a lot of people made do with what they had in terms of fabric.

MK: So do you think sales went down?

JK: I'm sure sales must have dropped. Although maybe the prices may have been higher. But it couldn't be too high because they were controlled. The Office of Price Control, OPC, used to check around I think. I used to hear them talking about, "Oh, price control, price control." So they must have come to check the prices because you probably could not have beyond a certain mark-up.

MK: That's interesting. And you know, during these years how was the *honten-shiten* relationship? Was it still going strong, that relationship? Or were the two branches more independent because of wartime conditions?

JK: Oh, I could not tell you that. But, you know, there was limited travel between the islands, so *o-nii-chan* could not come that often. We did not use the telephone to that extent, so if anything, they probably sent statements to Hilo by mail. It took a lot of---it had to be a real emergency before you made an interisland telephone call.

MK: And then, you know, during those years, what do you remember about the ʻAʻala Rengō families and the businesses? What happened to the families and businesses of ʻAʻala?

JK: Okay, Mr. [Taichi] Sato was interned. But I'm wondering whether the Satos were no longer living upstairs at that time. They may have moved out to Piʻikoi Street. And so they were out of the place. I would think a place like Okazaki Tailor or Pacific Woolen, whichever one it is at that time, may have been busy because they would have to sew uniforms. Aloha Curio, I think, was a booming place because the sailors or defense workers wanted to send home curios. Iwahara Shōten was boarded up for a long time because Mr. [Taketo] Iwahara was interned. And I remember that, it must have been right after the war, that the place was put out to bid, by whom I don't know. But a *hui* made up of Takaichi Miyamoto, Sakae Amano, and it may have been Dr. Harry Kurisaki, there were three or four of them who bought the store and ran it for just a short while. My husband tells me—and they had Asahi Furniture—that furniture was so hard to come by and his father was not interned. And being bulky goods, it was even harder to get furniture in from (the Mainland). So they had to rely on some local carpenters to do some of that kind of work. They had to do their own upholstering or reupholstering, so my mother-in-law I know worked at that time. Akahoshi Drugs kept on operating with Professor Ito, I think.

MK: And they had a fountain there, right?

JK: They had a fountain, but during the war, I don't know whether the fountain was (given up) already.

MK: How about places like Amaguri Taro?

JK: Oh, they had no chestnuts after a while. I think that was even before the war that the supply of chestnuts was limited because the chestnuts came from China, and Japan was already at war with China starting in 1936, I believe. So, they had to abandon their chestnut and they had to sell other things in the store like western candy.

MK: And how about Kobayashi Dry Goods?

JK: Kobayashi Dry Goods---I don't know whether. . . . I think the Kobayashis sold out and returned to Japan prior to the outbreak of war. And the Kiyohiros came in at that time. I could not tell you exactly whether it was so.

MK: And Haseyama-*san* [Toso Haseyama]?

JK: Haseyama-*san* was around the corner and I think he was interned for part of the time, but not immediately following the outbreak of war. I'm not certain about that. But I would presume. . . . I don't remember his making uniform-like things. I think he made suits, primarily, so I would suspect that his business was down.

MK: And how about Heiwa-Do, the Awamuras' jewelry store?

JK: *Ojisan* was not interned if I remember correctly. And being that it was a luxury item, people would have to take care of . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: Okay, you were just talking about the Heiwa-Do jewelers.

JK: I don't think it was a very up, up kind of business. Although they may have done some business, increased business with people who were defense workers, et cetera, who were waiting for the bus. Because they were closer to the bus stop than we were. Defense workers had a lot of money. And I'm just guessing, they may have sold out a lot of their merchandise, I'm not certain.

MK: And how about the shoe store?

JK: Lion's Shoe Store next door. I only remember going in there and not being able to get my size shoes. So I wonder if they were limited in their selection and in their sizes. I'm sure they just sold what they could (get). And here again, this was more a necessity than the jewelry.

MK: You know, when you describe all these businesses, some were up, some were down.

JK: But that's a child's perception now.

MK: Uh huh. From your point of view as a youngster. You think some businesses were doing better before the war, some were not faring as well. You noticed that some businesses had lost their fathers . . .

JK: That's right.

MK: . . . because of internment. Now, what was the feeling in the ʻAʻala Rengō community about this whole situation.

JK: For me, what I recall is, I sensed a breakdown of the closeness that used to prevail. I think each merchant had his own problems. Each was trying to cope as best as he could under the wartime conditions. They had regulations left and right that they had to abide by. I really don't think they advertised together during the war or as much. There was a breakdown in the feeling of community (in terms of business).

MK: I know that prior to the war, the ʻAʻala Rengō Association used to have meetings and gatherings. Now, when war fell upon Hawaiʻi, what happened to the ʻAʻala Rengō Association as a business unit and a social unit?

JK: I'm not too familiar with the business unit part. But I sensed that each was coping on his own. They were sympathetic with each other, but there was nothing you could do to circumvent regulations or circumvent shortage of materials. I think there was sympathy. I don't know whether people actually went in to help each other, although I know that if people didn't, you know, if a customer coming in didn't see a particular type of merchandise that he or she was looking for, you would probably say, "Oh, *tonari no o-mise ni itte gorannasai.*"

(Oh, try the store next door.) So that kind of referring I know went on. But for me it was a time, I recall, of the beginning of the downfall of that area (as a business center).

MK: How about the ʻAʻala Rengō families getting together for social things like picnics or parties? Did those things continue during the war?

JK: There were no picnics that I can recall. I think you can readily see why because a lot of them were alien owners of businesses and they should not be in that kind of position. But for us living in the area, when we had to evacuate the area at night, there was a period of time that we were told that we could stay there during the day, but that we were not to stay there at night because we were too close to the waterfront. And so there is---I know three families, the Komeijis, the Kawanos, and us rented some space at Mochizuki Tea House in Kunawai Lane. So we would have early dinner and walk up or ride up, when we could get rides, and we would lay out the *futon* over there and all of us sleep there. It was a kind of a fun time. (MK chuckles.) After you got there, you'd eat early because, you know, we had no cooking privileges there. So you know, the old teahouse where they could just open the *fusuma* and you know, you'd have a large room. It was kind of a fun time. That did not go on too long, but it was long enough for us to enjoy it.

What stands out most in my mind about the fellowship during the war was that my mother, Mrs. Kawano, and then, Mrs. Komeiji, who became my mother-in-law, used to have early dinner because the stores were closed at night. They were not opened at night as they used to be. Mrs. Komeiji and Mrs. Kawano would come up our back stairway after dinner and the three women would lie down on the *tatami*. . . . See, I didn't have a father so there was no matter of *enryo* for these ladies. I don't know what they talked about, but they talked every night excepting when movies resumed after, I don't know, after the war. Then Mrs. Kawano and Mrs. Komeiji would once in a while go to the movies. But for years on end, they met almost every night. When it was mango season it was fun to watch them because all three of them really loved mangoes. They would spread the newspaper out on the dining table and I swear Mrs. Kawano who liked mango the most ate fifteen or sixteen. Of course, they were not the kind of mangoes that we see today, they were more the common mango. Chinese mango all that strings, and the three ladies would be dripping all over the place. That I recall.

While the younger ones of us, at first we used to be just be talking outside in the dark after we were able to go outside. Then somebody started going to---some of the boys decided going to dance lessons at the Nuʻuanu Y[MCA, Young Men's Christian Association] or at the Nuʻuanu church. Then the boys started to say, "Hey, let's dance at night." So we used to go up to the second floor of the storage area of Asahi Furniture, kind of move the things aside, and they would play Benny Goodman records, you know, "Stardust" and "Smoke Gets in [Your] Eyes." [Music by] the Ink Spots, Glenn Miller, and that kind of songs that we used to dance (to). Sometimes they used to play cards and I think we used to solve the problems of the world. Some of the men were really loudspoken and they would argue. They didn't need any beer or anything, they could really argue. It was a fun time. Then we would go home about 8:00 or 8:30. That happened for most nights, too, for after a while.

MK: And then during the days, how was your school affected? You were going to Saint Andrew's Priory, right? And then UH [University of Hawaiʻi], during the war years?

JK: Yes.

MK: Now, how were you affected during the day by wartime conditions?

JK: Well, we had to walk to school which was par for the course, but at first I think we went to school for half a day at Saint Andrew's [Priory]. Many people went to work out in the fields as part of the patriotism. But most of us at Saint Andrew's never did go out to the fields to work, so I did not really contribute to the war effort. I felt very guilty about that because some of the fellows that we knew, who lived in the area had gone to war. Kawano *no* Tet-*chan* (Tetsuo Kawano) as a member of the 100th [Infantry] Battalion. And I felt, that gee, we don't have anybody to serve in the armed forced directly. My brother was much too young. So I talked with Mr. Hino. (There was) the Women's Army Corps, the WACs. I told him that I wanted to join the WACs as my family's contribution to the war effort. Oh, I caught it from him. He just told me, in no uncertain terms, that that was not what I should do. I guess among the people at that time, they saw the women going into the Women's Army Corps as just like prostitutes. This is the connotation that I got from him. He said, "You are not to do this. Don't you ever talk about it again." So after a while I gave up the idea and by then the war ended, so.

MK: You know that you mentioned that Kawano *no* Tet-*chan* had passed away during the war, were there other families at ʻAʻala that lost their children?

JK: No. He was the only one directly from ʻAʻala. But there was another boy who used to come to ʻAʻala, Asaumi, Kenneth Asaumi. He used to write and I used to write back to him because I thought, well, at least that's one way I can do [i.e., contribute to the war effort]. He was no special friend, but he died. He was member of the 442[nd Regimental Combat Team]. He was a little older than I was, but he died. I guess, Barney Sato went into the service, my husband [Toshio Komeiji] went into the service, George Maeda went into the service. That's about all.

MK: How did the mothers and fathers of ʻAʻala react to their children, their sons, going into the service and off to war?

JK: I guess it was something that had to be done. Uncertainty and fear of safety. I know that when my husband went and reported to Schofield [Barracks], my mother-in-law went out to the first open house (at) the first opportunity she had. We have pictures of her going out there. To travel out to Schofield or Wahiawā at that time was really not that easy. Mrs. Kawano used to talk about Tet-*chan*. Tet-*chan* was a *kibei* who was drafted into the (army). (After the outbreak of the war, the Japanese American soldiers were pulled out of their units and reorganized into the 100th Infantry Battalion.) He was the first one from our area who went. He was the first and only one, really, from the ʻAʻala group (who) was killed. So he touched all of us.

MK: And you know, how did the ʻAʻala Market side fare during the war? The markets, the stalls in the back? Would you know how they were doing businesswise?

JK: Well, here again, fish was very hard to get. And so, I would think that the fish people—I can see empty counters. Whereas the counters used to be quite well stocked. I could see Mr. Tamura for example or Mr. Okada cutting the fish. But later on there were no fish to cut. Beef and pork, too, were not that easy to come by. So the general trade was again down as I recall.

MK: So, if Tamura-*san* didn't have fish to cut and meat and pork were not available to the meat and pork dealers, what did they sell?

JK: I don't know, somehow I see dried stuff. Not at the fishmarket, but even at the general produce store. Not too many fresh things were available too, because they were not coming from the Mainland. Our local production was not big enough to (supply) them (fully). Somehow I see packages of stuff, regular shelf material. (As far as) the greens (were concerned), I think there was some degree of saving for the regular customers. We used to patronize a particular store, so they would keep these things in the back for us. So you would have to kind of go and wait around until there's no other *o-kyaku-san* and then they would shove the stuff down (into a bag), you know. That kind of thing I recall.

MK: So, like Tamura-*san,* Okada-*san* with very little fish to sell, these stalls still remained in operation, though, during the years?

JK: I don't know when Tamura-*san* went out of business, but of the three big ones—he was the smallest of the three, Otani being the largest and then Okada—he went out of business first. Now, what year he went out of business I don't know. But Okada and Otani, both, were able to survive.

MK: And, you know, 'A'ala Market side, you have the Fujimoto store where "Hapa" [Fujimoto] went into the 442, yeah?

JK: Yes.

MK: And Matsudas, I guess by then they were out?

JK: They were out because it was before the war that Mrs. Matsuda went and opened her beer hall, we used to call it.

MK: And would you remember the details of any other 'A'ala Market family at that time?

JK: No. The other Matsuda (store), I think eventually just---I'm inclined to say just shrivelled up and went. You know, they just went, (a victim of circumstances).

MK: And you know when you look back, the World War II period, and you look back at the 'A'ala neighborhood, are there changes that you notice from prewar and wartime? Just kind of visualize the area.

JK: Yeah. It was, to me, no longer the big center of activity that it used to be. It was never able to regain the prominence that it had prior to the war. Of course, there were different shopping areas that came up. But people, I think, during the war, gasoline was rationed and we had to be in(doors) by six o'clock or so. So (we) could not travel at night. Stores were not opened at night. A general quietness fell over.

MK: How about in terms of entertainment? You know not too far from you folks you had these old Japanese theaters. How about over there, were they real quiet or was there any activity over there?

JK: My family was not much (for) moviegoing. I think it probably may have been (an) economic decision at one time, because my mother never went to movies. So, as a result we never went to the movies. But I know the Matsuo brothers were running Nihon-*kan*. And Fred Matsuo who was very active in the business went into the war, I mean into the service during the war. So, I would not know who took over.

MK: So you folks didn't frequent the theater too much?

JK: No, no we didn't.

MK: How about like neighboring businesses like the *furoya* that you talked about last time and Darumaya and the other businesses outside of 'A'ala Rengō proper? How did they all fare?

JK: Well, I think like everybody else, the Darumaya-*san,* for example, used to sell candies and tobacco and fruits. I'm sure his inventory was down. But he was across from the railway depot which meant that maybe he sold more cigarettes although those were not easy to come by also. And the *furoba*. Now the Iwaharas must have gone, and I'm sure that I must have gone, too, periodically. But when they sold the store, they bought a house in St. Louis Heights on Frank Street and they had to move out. So that was a kind of a severing of a relationship at that particular point.

MK: So no more *furoya* visiting.

JK: No, no more *furoya*.

MK: (Chuckles) Okay. Now, you know, as we go towards the ending of the war, you know, the war ends, from your perspectives, observations, what changes did you see at Hawai'i Importing Company as the war ended? Now this is prior to your mother leaving the store in '51, '52?

JK: [Nineteen] forty-five. You know I was so busy playing in college. . . .

(Laughter)

JK: Frankly, that's true you know. I had a good time in college. I did not want to go to [University of Hawai'i] Teachers College which was across the street [University Avenue], for example, because I thought that they were such squares. They just buried their heads in books and I was out there to have as good a time as I could. (MK laughs.) I was very active in student affairs.

MK: Student government?

JK: Student government. Believe it or not Patsy Mink was Patsy Takemoto, I beat her and I became ASUH [Associated Students of the University of Hawai'i] secretary.

MK: Oh! (Laughs)

JK: And I remember that campaign, Judy Ito Kishimoto, she's kind of a creative person. She made a poster and she said, "Stick with Jane." And she gave people gum. That stands out in

my mind. I was very active in student government, not only (in the) ASUH, but grade-level government. We had the big carnivals and—but that was after the war. Yeah, because I went to college beginning in '43. The veterans were coming back so we used to have a lot of picnics and that kind of stuff. I had a good time in college.

MK: I know that eventually you got into the teaching profession, though?

JK: Yes.

MK: That was later then?

JK: That was way after my children were born. I worked at the University [of Hawai'i] right after I got out of college in June of '47. I went to work for the Bureau of Sight Conservation. (Then) the university, Barbara Clark of Student Activities called and asked whether I would come on board. So I was a counselor in the Bureau of Student Activities situated in Hemenway Hall until I went to the Mainland with my husband.

MK: So you graduated in '47, and then got married in '48?

JK: That's right.

MK: And then subsequently went to the Mainland and then. . . .

JK: We went to the Mainland in '51. It was after (Bum's) freshman year in college that we were married. Then after he got out of college, he decided that he wanted to have some background in decorating. So we went to New York for a year.

MK: And then you came back?

JK: Yeah, I supposedly resigned at the time that I left. That was interesting because I didn't realize until later on that it was non-teaching faculty position. I had turned in my resignation, but the resignation letter was never officially turned over to the head of the division, or the Bureau [of Student Activities] as it was called. So when I was on my way back (from) New York, I came up, met up with a letter from Barbara Clark asking me to return to the job. So I returned to the job for another year or so before I went on maternity leave.

MK: And then you had John and David?

JK: And David.

MK: And then you subsequently. . . .

JK: That's right. After I had David and stayed home a few years—I stayed home after I had John. I thought, well, I'll be a very good housewife and a good mother. I did a lot of baking, I tried to do things with the children. I took them to this place and that place. But after a bit I got tired of it. (MK chuckles.) I needed adult company and that kind of, different kinds of challenges. So I swallowed everything that I had said about teachers and went back on a partial scholarship that the PTA [Parent-Teachers' Association] gave me—the Hawai'i Congress, [PTA]—and went to school for two a year and a half, in the Accelerated Teacher

Training Program [ATTP]. ATTP (was set up) because there was a shortage of teachers at that time, in about '50. [Nineteen] fifty-seven, '58. So I went into that program and became a qualified teacher.

MK: And then subsequently taught for twenty years?

JK: Yeah, my total experience in the classroom is twenty years. I was first assigned to Mokapu School on the other side of the island. When I realized where Mokapu [Elementary] School was, I called up the people in the district office and told them that I had very young children and in case of an emergency it would be awfully difficult to come across the Pali because I was then living in Kaimukī. The children were in school. David originally started off at Mother Rice in Mō'ili'ili and John started off at the [University of Hawai'i] Lab[oratory] School. So I told them that it would be difficult for me because my husband was in business and he generally could not leave. So they transferred me to Hickam Elementary School. I taught at Hickam for about three years before I went on maternity leave when I had Paul. When I was home with Paul, the department called me to say that there was an opening at Ma'ema'e [Elementary School] and that they would like for me to go (there). And this was in mid-year because the teacher, the classroom teacher had died. So they said, "We need somebody there on Monday." This is like Wednesday of the week before.

I said, "No." I don't think I wanted to go to work at that time, yet.

But the (person, I think it was Mr. Sanborn) told me, "Oh, it's not going to be very often that we're going to be able to offer you a school like Ma'ema'e." And so, you know, "Can't you make some arrangements on this kind of stuff."

Fortunately I advertised in the paper and I was able to get a neighbor to respond to the ad. And so I think I did not go on the exact day that they wanted me to, but I was able to go within a week or so to Ma'ema'e.

MK: And then you remained there?

JK: No. They were not able to keep me because there was a surplus of health aides. So the principal wanted to keep me, but she had to, by directive, employ the health aide as a classroom teacher before she could take anybody else. So I went back to Hickam for only two, three months. When in the middle of, maybe, October, November, I got called out of the classroom one day and the VP [vice-principal] told me that the district office was looking for me and that I was to call at recess. So I called at recess and they told me that they have a vacancy for me at Ma'ema'e. I said, "But I cannot go. I have started a class. I have one problem child who was placed in my class (specifically) because they thought I could handle him. (There) was (an) obligation to that child. I could not leave." The district office told me in no uncertain terms that I had no alternative but to go, because there was a teacher from Waipahu who had already been assigned to my slot at Hickam. So I had to make the move.

"So would you please go to Ma'ema'e School this afternoon."

So that's how it happened.

MK: And how long did you stay at Ma'ema'e from that time?

JK: Sixteen years or seventeen years. It was an interesting experience.

MK: And then after that you got involved in university-level instruction?

JK: When I retired, the first year after my retirement I did not want to do anything special. All I knew that I had to do something for myself so five days a week I went to aikido *ki* lessons. And Paul got involved with me and John was taking karate for a while. So Paul would go on weekends with me. So I did that for about a year until somebody said, "Oh, why don't you go into adult education." So I went into adult ed and taught English to Japanese-speaking people for about a year out at the Kalihi[-Pālama] Library. This was out at Farrington Adult School [now Farrington Community School for Adults] when the University [of Hawai'i] called and asked whether I would come as a college coordinator for student teachers. Here again my remark was, "I have these students, I cannot go until I (find) a replacement."

They said, "Okay, I'll wait for you then."

Fortunately, Judy went. Judy Kishimoto (was interested). So I went on to the university as a lecturer.

MK: And then in the interim, you know in all the years that you started your educational career, your mother in the beginning was still at HIC, right, and then . . .

JK: My mother left HIC about 1951 or '52 (when I was in New York).

MK: You know, why did your mother leave HIC?

JK: I think there was unhappiness between her and Mr. Yamamoto and *o-nii-chan*. Somehow something did not go right there. I was away at the time that she retired and I only got a letter saying that she was going to retire so don't be shocked. She was moving out from those quarters there back into our Kaimukī home on Sixteenth Avenue. As I recall, some discussion later, it was some kind of a slur at her that she took something or she was not being up and up. She says she swears that she did not. She says, "I had all the chances to take money if I wanted to." But she did not. She felt, well, it's about time. So she just up and retired. She's a woman who used to make fast judgments, (chuckles) decisions.

MK: So actually, your mother retired in '52 and if you can, just for moment, you know, if you can think back to that short period of time between '45 and '52 when you were still in college. Remember you were saying you were having a good time and did you notice anything different at Hawai'i Importing Company since the war?

JK: Yeah, I keep on saying this, but there was not that same feeling in the store that we used to have before. Mr. Hino, Mr. Yamasaki were just like fathers or big brothers to us. But Mr. Yamamoto, we never felt that closeness. I think, generally, the area declined so the business was not on the high end as it used to be.

MK: And how about the other business at 'A'ala Rengō? Iwahara Shōten was sold (and) under different management, Sato Clothiers in the [19]50s were moving out.

JK: Moved out.

MK: Haseyama Tailor would eventually in the late [19]50s be moving out. What was it like, you know, in the [19]50s, the early [19]50s?

JK: Yeah. Okay the---Star Shoe Store which was next to Iwahara moved into our area and they not only had a space where they sold shoes, but they manufactured slipper type of things. So there's a difference in the ambience of the area. It was no longer more or less chic, it was kind of a dusty, (lonesome) kind of place, the feeling that you get. Akahoshi also closed up. It was boarded up for a while and then Ozaki Hardware Store from up the street moved in. So, having a hardware store, versus having this *akarui* drug store once again (made) a difference. Lion Shoe Store kept on going and we had Mr. Matsuda after a while who was kind of the manager and who lived upstairs, leaving. And (the) Satos left. The Kiyohiros were operating a kind of a dry goods store there. But it really became, almost---oh, the Heiwa-Do of course [was] running, but not too much. So from the level of a centralized shopping area, it became more like a neighborhood shopping area.

MK: Changed the character, yeah?

JK: Somehow they painted the building a dull green or something and little maroon trims and that did not add to the building.

MK: And I know that like in 1947 is about when the train stopped stopping there and of course you had the buses, so. How did things like that happen? How did those things affect businesses there? The train not running anymore, there are buses but people are also driving more, how did those things have an effect on ʻAʻala Rengō?

JK: I think one of the big things is the growth of neighborhood shopping areas here and there. So people did not have to come to where we were. They could shop in their areas. And Sears [Roebuck and Co.] came out after a while. So that was a big draw, Sears. "Speak American, Be American," people wanted to go to the Liberty House. Then Fort Street for a while did quite well when Ritz came out on Fort Street. Kress was there. So, you know, things Japanese were not good. So if they can go to Liberty House and buy the same thing, why not.

MK: So business just sort of gravitated away from . . .

JK: (Yes,) away from [ʻAʻala]. When you don't have the business, then you can't buy merchandise, you know, it's a vicious circle, I think it just goes.

MK: And yet the Nakamotos continued running Hawaiʻi Importing Company?

JK: The Nakamotos tried very hard. My aunt came (from Hilo for a while) to run the store. Of course, running a business in Hilo and running one in Honolulu are two different stories, very different. I think she had a very difficult time running the business that she brought in her oldest grandson, my cousin George. He tried to help out. But that really didn't fly, too. So eventually they closed the store. I wish I could get you the date, but it must have been in the [19]60s that they closed the store completely. In the meantime they also closed the Hilo Store.

MK: But the building still remained?

JK: The building remains. But they also bought more real estate somewhere along there, right on

Kamehameha Avenue, so they were landlords.

MK: You know, you just mentioned your cousin, George coming into the Hawai'i Importing Company business. I know in the case of Sato Clothiers before they left, the second generation became involved. The Iwahara Shōten children had begun to have the children involved prior to the war. Now as the second generation got involved, did you notice any changes occurring at 'A'ala Rengō that came directly from their involvement?

JK: Now my cousin George was an outsider as he came in. George came because he was told to come. He tried his very best, but he just did not have the background that would have enabled him to succeed. Besides, the market (was) a down market and you come in with an untrained person, so the acceleration of a downgrade is faster I think. Then the Satos, the second generation, Bob was very educated and Barney. . . . Bob was doing a lot of the outside kind of work, the PR [public relations], you know, the president (of organizations) kind of work. Although his father was back, but the father used to play *go* in the afternoons I think. So Barney really came in and helped with the store.

The Kiyohiros were second-generation people and they were new kids on the block. At Pacific Woolen, Mr. Morikubo, from the time he came in was aided by Raymond and Tad Kanda. So the second generation at that store worked along with the first generation. Richard Chow, who came into the candy store slot selling ready-made goods, children items or work clothes and that kind of thing, was second-generation Chinese. But he started his own business. George Maeda had gone off to the army and he served in Japan for quite a while. So his wife and his mother, who had been a Japanese[-language] school teacher and she did not—wasn't able to teach so she and the husband and---after the war Toki (George's wife) came and they ran the store. Awamuras, there were no boys to take the store and each went on her own. They had six girls. Kawanos, Hideo came in and Hideo once again had received an education in Japan and so he had a background. His brother, Toshio, came in after his time in the service and took over. And Iwahara of course went. And Asahi Furniture, my sister-in-law, Kay, came back on one of the last ships before Pearl Harbor and so she worked at the store with her father and they had several longtime employees that helped kind of carry that thing. But Kay worked, and after a while, my sister-in-law, Fumi came into the store and worked. My husband had helped a little bit. When we came back in '52, then he started working. So Asahi [Furniture] had definitely a second generation. It was interesting because when we came back, Bum had certain ideas about what a store should look like. His father had other ideas. They're both really non-talkers. So his father would have (the) furniture displayed in a certain way. (He worked for) half a day. Then he would leave the store (for the afternoon) because he had his *go* playing. Then his son, my husband, would come and rearrange the furniture. We lived up in Kaimukī and the folks lived upstairs. So the father would come down early in the morning and silently rearrange the furniture into the way he wanted. I mean, this went on and on and on. Until eventually the father said, "Okay, you take over."

MK: And when about was that?

JK: Okay, Bum---it's interesting the store was in existence for sixty-six years. (The store was closed in) about 1985, so in about 1952 or '53, after (we) came back (from New York, Bum) was made to be in charge. So both of them served for thirty-three years each.

MK: So the Asahi Furniture Company had a second generation?

JK: Yes.

MK: Sato Clothiers had a second generation. The Awamuras did not have a second generation.

JK: No. Aloha Curio had.

MK: Aloha Curio had a second generation. Iwaharas did not. They had already left, they had sold their business. At Hawai'i Importing Company there was a second generation in the form of your cousin.

JK: Actually it may have been. . . .

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 23-25-3-93; SIDE ONE

MK: This is a continuation of the interview with Mrs. Komeiji on April 22.

You know, we were just talking about the second generation entering the businesses at 'A'ala Rengō. Now, I don't know how much you know, but how did the introduction of second generation, new blood into the businesses affect 'A'ala Rengō?

JK: Okay. Well, I couldn't say for---I know at Hawai'i Importing I may be partial, but the same customers I think. . . . I didn't go into Hawai'i Importing very often. But from what I heard, (the customers) missed my mother. Because she had been to them, you know, somebody that they would go to and rely on her. Because my aunt and my cousin came from the Big Island and they were not established here, I think that made a world of difference. But I think that situation is a little different from the rest of them whose immediate families took over and who had been a part, really, an unofficial part of the business right along. So Bob Sato, when he came, I think had big ideas and moved the store off closer to the town, center of town because we were no longer the center of even the Japanese community. So he moved and he had a nicer and a bigger store. And Aloha Curio, Hide-*chan* stayed on there although I feel that here again Hide-*chan* was maybe the president or the manager, but the one after a while who was doing the day-to-day work was Toshio. The store continued in pretty much the same vein, that store. (Hide-*chan* went on to open a successful investment firm, H. Kawano & Co.) Well, I didn't know too much about Asahi Furniture. Kay [JK's sister-in-law] tells me that the war years were very difficult years because of the merchandise not being available. But they had a pretty good share of the Japanese market at that time.

MK: And then later on when your husband became heavily involved in the business, I guess there was some difference of opinion of how things should be done?

JK: Yeah.

MK: Like you said the arrangement of the furniture.

JK: And there was a difference from what I hear my husband talking and I hate to say this, but I was never interested in the business and I would listen to it out of one ear and let it go right through my head. But I think the volume of business increased because he was advertising in the [*Honolulu Star-*]*Bulletin*, or the English papers, as well as, the Japanese[-language] radio and newspapers. But he began looking for bids, bidding, with the City [and County of Honolulu] and with (other local companies). I know that he did when Kukui Mortuary had a new facility, he bid on that and he did a drawing for them because he's capable of doing that kind of thing. So not only was there in-store business, but he was able to go out and get business as well.

MK: Which was different from before?

JK: I think so. Although, you know, before, maybe Sōtō-*shū* would call and say, well, they need so many tables that kind of thing because father [JK's father-in-law] was a member of Sōtō-*shū*.

MK: And, you know, I think when I interviewed Bob Sato, he was saying that when the second generation came aboard, when there would be meetings of all the ʻAʻala Rengō operators, there would be sometimes differences of opinion because the second generation brought in different ways of doing things as opposed to the issei. Would you know anything about that sort of difference occurring between the operators of ʻAʻala Rengō?

JK: I played while I was in college and I got out of college in '47. Then I got married in '48. After I got out, I was working so I was concentrating fully on my work. Then in '48 when I got married and I was even more divorced from the business and because there was some unhappiness at the time that my mother left, we really did not go back to the area.

MK: So you just really wouldn't know?

JK: No, I wouldn't know. Well, I would know that we used to go to Asahi Furniture every day to eat because my mother-in-law felt so sorry. I guess they felt that I was working and he was going to school. So they fed us dinner five times a week.

(Laughter)

JK: Good deal.

MK: So, I guess I'll---knowing that you weren't that involved and wasn't privy to too much knowledge about ʻAʻala Rengō in the postwar years, especially after your mom left the company, let me just kind of wrap up the interview then by just having you comment on what you think were the special qualities of ʻAʻala and ʻAʻala Rengō? You know, after having had over twenty-five years of your life kind of connected with ʻAʻala.

JK: Well, I feel very fortunate in having grown up in an area which was a meeting place for a lot of people. So there was always a meeting of different peoples, not only different ethnic groups, but people from the country, people from the city, and this kind of stuff. So it was an exciting place to be. There was always something interesting out on the sidewalk. The business itself, the businesses were looked upon rather on a pedestal. It may be my partiality, but you know, "Oh, *asoko de kattano?*" (Oh, did you buy it over there?) Like a little bit of

higher class than buying elsewhere. Maybe (than) in Pālama. So, we were treated with that kind of a little bit of tenderness by other people. I enjoyed the kind of merchants (who) were there because they, too, were. . . . They spoke not, "You-*ga,* me-*ga*." That kind of [pidgin] Japanese. They spoke proper Japanese. They were the kinds that---for example Mr. Awamura or even Mr. Matsuda from the market, and Mr. Sato could go out into the community and hold their own heads up high and participate and you would read about these people in the newspaper and somehow you make that identification with the person. "Oh, yeah, I know that man." And [it] kind of boosts you up. I really think that the area served the people very well. The merchants were honest, really hardworking. But for their time, rather innovative, I think in that they went beyond the mom-and-pop store stage with everybody *zōri dake* in the store. They were properly dressed and used proper language. It was a privilege. That's how I feel. I'm really happy that you're doing this because I think the people later on could only see the down side of ʻAʻala because ʻAʻala kind of gives you an, "Oh, ʻAʻala," kind of reaction whereas it was not that when we were growing up.

MK: I'm going to end the interview.

JK: Yeah.

END OF INTERVIEW