

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Evelyn Shigeno Matsui

Evelyn Shigeno Matsui, third of seven children, was born in Hala'ula, Kohala, Hawai'i in 1917.

Her parents, Kame and Uto Shimabukuro, were immigrants from Okinawa-*ken*, Japan. While still a teenager, Kame Shimabukuro rose from sugarcane plantation laborer to foreman; he later prospered as an independent sugarcane contractor.

A 1936 graduate of Kohala High School, Evelyn Matsui received her early education at 'Āinakea and Hālawa Schools. She also attended Japanese-language school for ten years.

On O'ahu, she continued her studies at Phillips Commercial School. By 1938, she returned to Kohala where she worked as a secretary for a social worker.

Eager to leave the islands, she boarded a ship to California in 1939. In Los Angeles, she studied cosmetology at Marinello School of Beauty.

She was living in Los Angeles at the start of World War II.

In March 1942, she was ordered to Santa Anita Assembly Center in California. Approximately four to six months later, she was incarcerated in Wyoming, at Heart Mountain War Relocation Center. There, she married John Matsui, whom she had met earlier in Los Angeles.

In August 1945, at war's end, the Matsuis were released from Heart Mountain.

The couple returned to Los Angeles where they bought and operated a restaurant. Their restaurant, Johnny's Shrimp Boat, became an LA institution, attracting generations of diners.

After more than four decades as restaurateurs, the Matsuis sold the business.

Long-retired in Hawai'i, Evelyn Matsui passed away on April 23, 2010.

Tape Nos. 55-7-1-09 and 55-8-1-09

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Evelyn Shigeno Matsui (EM)

Honolulu, O‘ahu

November 23, 2009

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

[NOTE: Also present at the interview is Claire Shimabukuro, EM’s niece.]

MK: This is an interview with Mrs. Evelyn Shigeno Matsui. This is session number one on November 23, 2009, and we’re here at her home in Honolulu, O‘ahu. The interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto.

So, Mrs. Matsui, we’re going to start the interview. And first, I want to say thank you for letting us come to do the interview. First of all, can you tell me what year you were born?

EM: Nineteen seventeen.

MK: And where were you born?

EM: Hala‘ula, Hawai‘i.

MK: And, you know, I don’t know where Hala‘ula is. Whereabouts in Kohala is it?

EM: You know the town of Hāwī? From Hāwī, how many miles could I say? Quite a few, though. About a hundred miles, at least.

WN: A hundred miles from Hilo?

EM: Hundred miles. Kohala is on the top [i.e. north on a map]. You know, the Big Island is like this. We’re on the top. Hilo is around here, near the end.

WN: So you’re about a hundred-mile drive from Hilo?

EM: Yeah, a hundred miles.

MK: Wow. And, you know, in your family, when you were small, about how many children were in your family?

EM: Seven. But until my older brother was sixteen, he was raised in Okinawa by the grandparents because they wanted my father to go back, which he didn’t. So my father sent his oldest son at four years old to Grandma and Grandpa. Then my father wanted him to come [back] to Hawai‘i and go to school. So he came when he was sixteen, back to Kohala. He stayed with us and went to school. Then he was going to Makapala Grammar School. But since he was from Okinawa—

raised over there—he couldn't speak English so much, so he never went to school. He went to the beach—run away and go. But he'd come home after school, so we thought he was going to school. But we found out from [principal] Mr. Lindsey that my brother wasn't going to school. And he was about sixteen, already. So my father took him out of school at Makapala and sent him to Honolulu. Now, what school? Oh, I forgot the name. I wish my other sisters were here. So he sent him to school over here. Mid-Pac [Mid-Pacific Institute]? There's a school called Mid-Pac?

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

EM: Yeah, he sent him over there. My father was a *luna* [foreman] in the Kohala [Sugar Company] plantation, so he made money. He had about seventy Japanese and Filipinos working under him, because he was a contractor in cultivation. So that's how he raised us. So, my brother was sent to Okinawa since he was four years old, and they didn't bring him back until sixteen, so couldn't speak English at all. Then my father sent him to Makapala School, because he knew the principal. The principal would pick him up in Kohala and take him in few miles away. Because he couldn't speak English, then he [EM's father] thought that maybe if Mr. Lindsey took him and, you know, gave him a special class, then he might. So he did okay. He graduated high school. And then he left home, kind of ran away from home, to come to Honolulu, because my father was so strict and he couldn't take that. So one day, he got on the boat and ran away. My father went over here and found out where he was, took him back, and then he was going to school again. Then he ran away again, so my mother told Dad, "We better let him go already, because he wasn't raised with all of us." My father never went after him after that. Then he got married. I don't know, kind of young, though—about nineteen, I think, yeah. So he was on his own from nineteen. And he had four children. The first one was (chuckles)—I'm forgetting their names. The first one was a boy—he lives in New York now, married. And his wife works as a beautician over there. He had four children—two boys and two girls. He was very independent, yeah. And my father used to lecture him. But he would run away, because he didn't want to go to school. My father would bring him back from Hilo or Honolulu, sit him in the living room, and, you know. Cha-kah [slapping sound]! You know, my father was a strict man, and he would use his hand, even to us, which I never got once. I was his pet, kind of. I would do anything he wanted me to do. (Chuckles)

MK: So in your family, when you were growing up, how many children were there, total?

EM: Seven altogether. But he was in Okinawa until he was sixteen.

MK: And then what number child are you?

EM: Three. I have my older brother, my older sister, and then me. Then I have another sister, then a brother—he lives in Kāne'ohe now. He used to teach in L.A., and he was good in sports. He lives, now, in Kāne'ohe.

MK: So a family of seven kids, and . . .

EM: Seven, yeah. Oh, my father was so strict. My older brother, he wouldn't listen, so he sits on the floor in the living room, cha-kah! But he wouldn't cry. We would be crying. (Chuckles) He won't cry. Tough, he was. About nineteen, he moved away. And he wasn't working, he wasn't going to school. My father sent my mother over here. And then my sister, Sue, she was about five years old, she would bring her away to Honolulu and find out where he is. Then my mother would bring him home. How many times he did that. Poor Mother, you know. She was always getting it. You know how men are, they get after the women, huh, if the children don't grow good. (Chuckles)

- MK: And then, I was wondering, what was your father's name?
- EM: Kame.
- MK: And last name was?
- EM: Shimabukuro.
- MK: And I wanted to know, what village did your father come from?
- EM: Came from Chatan in Okinawa. And my mother came from Urasoe. My mother's family was real samurai, Okinawan samurai. That's why when they got married in Hawai'i, mutual friends introduced them. My mother's friend from Okinawa knew who she was, so he told my father, "Oh, I have a beautiful woman, she's samurai family, I want you to get married to her. Good chance."
- So my father said, "Okay," without even looking at her [in-person]. So she came, and they got married. And they were married for, I don't know how many years. Quite a few years, yeah? Around fifty or fifty-two.
- MK: Wow. Long time. And, you know, your father, what kind of background did he come from? Your mother was from samurai background. How about your father?
- EM: My father was. . . . In Chatan, they had forests, trees, so what you call that? Not a farmer, but they had trees. They would cut down and sell the trees, things like that.
- MK: And in his family, how many children were there?
- EM: My father?
- MK: Mmm [yes].
- EM: I gotta think, because my father was adopted by his uncle. The uncle never had any children, was the richest man in his place. I went to the home over there, beautiful home in Okinawa, my uncle. And he had a beautiful wife. She always wear Japanese-style and always wear kimono. Very distinguished woman. Because they had money.
- MK: So your father was the number-two biological son, and he was adopted by his uncle and aunt?
- EM: Because they didn't have any children.
- MK: And from what you've been told, how much education did your father have in Okinawa?
- EM: Oh, my father went to tenth grade, yeah. And my mother went to school until she was sixteen. At that age, you know, because they were samurai family, so they sent them to school.
- MK: Then your father, after he finished tenth grade, what kind of work did he do in Okinawa?
- EM: Well, he moved to Hawai'i already. About [age] eighteen, or something. Then he worked for Kohala Sugar Company.
- MK: So your father, he came when he was a teenager, to Hawai'i?

- EM: When he was eighteen.
- MK: When he was eighteen. How come he left Okinawa that time?
- EM: Oh, I guess he's ready to make money, yeah?
- MK: Because I think last time we came, you said something about the Russo-Japanese War. Was he trying to . . .
- EM: Avoid that? Yeah. He tried to, and he did. Never went back. So he's smart and found a way. He was adopted, so he was the only son there. So after the war, they want him to come back. But my father had married through their mutual friends, yeah—same place from Okinawa—so he never went back. He never went back until after the war [i.e. World War II]. (Chuckles) He was the only son adopted, so. They had money, see? I went to their place when I went to Okinawa.
- MK: They didn't want to lose him during the Russo-Japanese War.
- EM: Yeah, yeah, he never went back.
- MK: And your mother, what was her name?
- EM: Miyasato.
- MK: What was her first name?
- EM: Uto. U-T-O, Uto Miyasato.
- MK: You were saying that she came from samurai background, and she went to school. Did she have any other kind of training, like sewing or weaving?
- EM: She did a lot of sewing—even Japanese *kimono*.
- MK: Did she ever talk about having to do any other kind of work or chores for her family in Okinawa?
- EM: I don't think so. Because they were samurai family, so the girls didn't go to work.
- MK: So in your mother's family, how many brothers and sisters did she have?
- EM: Okay. She had two brothers, and then my mother. . . . Three sisters altogether. Five. I remember that. I remember that. I went to Peru to meet them, too.
- MK: Did any of them come to Hawai'i?
- EM: To visit.
- MK: Only to visit?
- EM: Before going to Okinawa, they'll stop here and visit. So they used to see them. Maybe, I think, three times in their lifetime they've met them because they would go to Okinawa and stop [in Hawai'i].
- MK: You know, you were saying that your mother came as a picture bride, yeah?

EM: Oh, yes.

MK: Now, what did you hear about that? Did they ever say anything about that, being a picture bride? Did she talk about it?

EM: Not too much. My mother was born the same place with this man. He introduced my father to my mother. He said, "Oh, I have a beautiful lady. I'm going to tell her to come to Hawai'i and then you going get married." And my father said okay. So she came and they got married and had seven children.

MK: Did he see a picture of your mother before they got married?

EM: Who, my father?

MK: Yeah.

EM: Oh, yeah.

MK: Oh, so for-real picture bride, then?

EM: Yeah, oh yeah.

MK: At any time, did your father or mother tell you what it was like when they first met?

EM: I don't remember them saying anything, yeah. But sometimes they used to argue, but they talk in Okinawan language, but we already understood. She said, oh, "I come from samurai family, you're just a farmer's family. If I stayed in Japan, I would've never married you. Because I came to Hawai'i, I married you." They used to argue. Many times I heard that.

And one time, I told my mama, "Don't say about that anymore. We all know." But when she gets mad, she tell him off. But he kept on. So I used to go in my mother's ear and tell, "Mom, we understand. That's enough already. You say it one way, he going to say three more ways. And then three to six." They spoke in Okinawan, but we understood already. Oh, yeah, every word we already knew. We just picked it up by listening.

MK: So, at home, did you use Okinawan language, too? Did you use *Uchinaguchi* [Okinawan]?

EM: No, we just hear them talk. But we understood every word. Only Japanese. We went to Japanese-[language] school. I went to Japanese[-language] school for ten years. And then went sewing school every Saturday, Japanese *kimono* sewing. Sit on the ground, oh, my legs used to cramp, but we cannot move. So when the teacher stand up and do something, we stretch our legs. And then when she come, we put our legs back again. They were so strict. We used to sit around in the living room and learn how to sew. We went to Japanese[-language] school. But every Saturday, ho, for about three hours, we had to sit down and sew Japanese *kimono* that way. That was hard, though.

MK: Who was your sewing teacher? Was she the wife of the Japanese[-language] school teacher?

EM: Yes, yes.

MK: And the sewing that she taught you was only Japanese *kimono* sewing?

EM: Oh, yeah, only Japanese. Sit on the floor, our feet get cramped, but we cannot stretch. So whenever she stands up when the telephone ringing, ho, we all stretch our legs. When we hear her coming, put it back. The leg is numb. Oh, it was hard.

MK: Was too hard, yeah?

EM: Yeah.

MK: And then you were saying that you were born in Hala‘ula, Kohala, the Big Island.

EM: Uh-huh [yes].

MK: When you were just a child growing up here, tell me again, what kind of work your father was doing.

EM: My father came from Okinawa when he was seventeen and a half. At eighteen, he already became *luna*—you know, foreman in the cane field [overseeing] the Filipino men. Three years later, he became an [independent] contractor. He had about seventy Filipinos [working for him]. And every first of the month, he would pay them cash from our living room window. Every first of the month, he would get the money in a bag. They put the money in there. Put all cash. Then my father would pay from there, from the window. They all come to the porch. Before, maybe one or two days, I used to help him make the payroll. He had the names, and the [*bango*, employee ID] numbers, and how much. Then when the day come, he sits on the desk and I’m standing next to him, and I tell him, “Okay, number five, Jose Lopez,” or whatever. I had all the names. We’d prepare that before we do it. And then when the day to pay [came], he and I would do that. Until then, my older brother used to do it, but he went to school and went away, so I took over when I was fifteen.

My father had a big safe, you know. I was the only one he taught how to open it. My mother didn’t even know. He said, “No use teaching Mom, because she’s going to forget.” And I had an older brother and an older sister—I’m the third one. I guess I was his favorite. So I learned how to do it—he showed me. As years went by, my father’s contract, they took it away—no more contract. He had our birth certificate, our graduation [diplomas]—all that in there. But he didn’t open [the safe] all the time after that, because there’s no cash in there. So I had to remember, yeah? I put a circle, zero, one, until twelve. Yeah, about seven numbers.

When the war came, I was in Heart Mountain, [Wyoming]. And then when he came after the war, he called me, “You know, I want to get papers,” of mother and him so they can go back to Japan, with the *ryoken* [passport] or something—Japanese. So, it’s a good thing I remembered.

Yeah. I say, “You give me time.” I sat at the kitchen table when everybody went to sleep, and I concentrated. I wrote it, and I think I made one mistake, so I said, “Try this one first, and then you try this next one. I’m quite sure it’s going to open.” So he did that, and he called me—we had telephone already, see.

He called me, “Shigeno, you’re still my daughter.” It opened. Oh, was I happy, you know. I remembered. He told me, “You’re still my daughter.” I was so thrilled, you know what I mean. Otherwise, they cannot get their [documents], they cannot go to Japan. They went to Japan after that. My sisters, they all went to universities, so the diplomas, he had in there. So, good thing I remembered. So I was the one. I was his kind of favorite, out of five girls.

MK: So your father, you mentioned that he came to Hawai‘i and soon after he became a *luna*. How come he got to be a *luna* so quickly?

- EM: My father was a smart man. (Chuckles) So I guess he went to work in the fields, and then the assistant manager found out that he's able to take over. He had seventy to seventy-five Filipinos and about three Japanese men helping him.
- MK: Did he have any experience in sugar in Okinawa?
- EM: No. Never. They had a lot of forests, I hear—pine trees. When I went to Okinawa, I saw that, too. That's what they had, so he never worked in a cane field.
- MK: And I know your mother, she's from a samurai family . . .
- EM: Oh yes, yes.
- MK: . . . but she ended up living in Kohala.
- EM: Oh, yes, because she married through my mother's *tokoro* man [acquaintance from the same village]. And then my mother, they knew each other, so they match married and they got married.
- MK: So in Kohala, did she do any kind of work?
- EM: She did Filipino laundry when we were growing up. We had to help her Saturday. Once a week, she do the laundry for the Filipinos—maybe about seven of them. Then my sister and I used to help her.
- MK: How did you folks help her?
- EM: Oh, had the tub and had the scrubbing board. She had two, because she used one and my older sister used to do it, then I took over, see. Really scrubbed. (Chuckles) And then we had to go Japanese[-language] school every afternoon—Saturday, half a day, Japanese-[language] school.
- MK: And you said you used to help your mother with the Filipino men's laundry. How about the ironing?
- EM: Oh, we had to iron. That was the hard part. Washing, okay, but ironing was the hard part. But they had seven children, you know, and my father was the contractor. And I remember he was making four hundred dollars a month, when everybody else was making hundred dollars. So he made three hundred dollars more than his fellow workers. That's why we never went to work. Summertime, they all go in the field and work from [age] thirteen. My father never sent [us]. We stayed home and learned how to sew and cook. Yeah, we were lucky. So that's why they used to say, "Oh, the Shimabukuro girls are spoiled. Don't get them as your wife because they're not going to do anything." But we had a lot of marriage [proposals] from Hilo, Puna. They all used to come because he had five girls.
- Oh, and my father adopted two children. His name, Shimabukuro. His wife died, so he married a Hawaiian lady, young lady. Then the neighbors called my father. They felt sorry for the children because of the mother not taking care of them. So my father and mother went one weekend, Friday, and they came home Sunday, about six o'clock—it was getting kind of dark. He parked the car in the street. So my older sister and I, we run out, and we see the two—a boy and a girl—come down the car. She and I said, "Hey, don't tell me they going to live with us." Okay, Mother came out, and we said, "What are they doing here?"
- "Don't say anything, especially to Father, because we brought them home to raise them with us." They were seven and six. One passed away about three weeks ago. The son, he used to teach at

University of Hawai‘i—Shinkichi Shimabukuro. They live in Kapolei. So, good. And then his sister became a secretary, and then she had an older sister in Hilo that had a butcher market. She went to work there as a secretary, yeah, so they were together. They both married brothers because she was there, too, so it worked out real good.

MK: Your mom and dad . . .

EM: My father was a good-hearted man.

MK: Yeah.

EM: I know my mother would kind of say, “My god, we got seven children, he bring two more home.” She would grumble to me and my older sister, but not in front of our dad. My dad would get after her. My father was a good, strict man. Oh, man, we cannot answer back, we cannot talk bad language. Oh, my father was a good man. My mother was real soft, but she didn’t want Dad to bring the two children because she had seven—which I don’t blame her. But whatever my father wanted, it went through. My mother couldn’t say anything. So we brought the two children. One is a doctor—Shimabukuro. He was at the University of Hawai‘i—he just retired. And then the sister got married, lived in Hilo. They had a meat market in Hilo. So she lived over there, and she passed away about three weeks ago in Hawai‘i Kai. So she’s gone.

MK: You know, I was wondering, you have so many kids in your house. What did your house look like in Kohala? What kind of house did you live in?

EM: Well, big living room, one bedroom for my dad and then the brothers, another for my mother. All the girls stay with him, the father. And there were extra rooms, little smaller rooms. And then my father brought [others]. They came from Okinawa and they came to our place because they didn’t have relatives, so my father kept them in that room. My sister and I said, “*Chee*, with more family, more cooking, more washing.” But we had to go [along]—my father was very strict. When he says gotta go it goes. Otherwise, we’re going to be kicked out of the house. My father had a big heart.

MK: Who owned that house?

EM: My father, from the plantation. They give you the house. Since my father was a *luna*, they called it, he had a nice, big home. That’s why we were able to raise outside kids—two of them.

MK: And where was the house located, was it in a camp?

EM: You know Kohala?

MK: Not that well, but . . .

EM: Well anyway, Kohala, Hāwī, Kapa‘au, Kohala, Hālawa, Makapala and Niuli‘i. We had school in Makapala, Kohala, Māhukona—three schools. So wherever you were close, you used to go to that school. So yeah, it was good.

MK: You know, where your house was . . .

EM: My home?

MK: Yeah. What kind of neighborhood was it? What other people lived near by?

- EM: We come from Hāwī, and then we come to Kohala. There's a hill over there. We pass the hill, and we go into Kohala. One family lived in the corner, and we lived in the second house, and another Japanese live in the third house. The fourth house was Portuguese and some other—the husband was mixture, Hawaiian-something. So it was good, growing up.
- MK: In those days, did you folks get together? Did the neighbors get together?
- EM: Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes.
- MK: What times did you folks get together?
- EM: Usually, in the afternoon. And like New Year's, they come. And we had a movie theater. So every Christmas. . . . We were Christian. My mother and father were Buddhist. But my mother wanted all the children to turn Christian. So since small time, she sent us to Christian school. And then every Christmas, when I was already teenager, the four of us Japanese, we have to go every house and get donations. So we had a program and [we distributed] brown bags [filled with] candy and one apple. Every year we used to do that, ever since I graduated high school. My mother them wanted us to do that.
- MK: How come your mother wanted you folks to be Christian?
- EM: She figured that living in America, that Christianity would be better for us children. But they stayed as Buddhists, though, until they died—they had Buddhist funeral. But I lost my sister, she had a Christian burial. My father didn't say anything. My mother was the one that said that we had to change to Christianity, the children.
- MK: And, you know, you mentioned that your father and mother, they stayed Buddhists, even though the children were Christian.
- EM: They didn't change. But they wanted us—especially my mother—wanted us to turn to Christian. So we went to Christian school ever since I can remember. I don't remember going to Buddhist school, only Christian.
- MK: And when you say “Christian school,” do you mean Sunday school, is that Sunday school?
- EM: Yeah, Sunday school.
- MK: And you were saying that New Year's, you used to get together with the other people. What did you folks do for New Year's?
- EM: New Year's? Oh, home made all kinds of *gochisō* [feast], you know, *sushi* and fried chicken and Japanese *nishime* [vegetables boiled in soy]. Everything Japanese, we made. And then the neighbors come, and we go to the neighbors. Oh, that went on for years.
- MK: How about the Portuguese family?
- EM: No, they hardly . . .
- MK: They didn't?
- EM: No. My father was a *luna*, so he had some Scotch people. They were the heads of [tape inaudible], so he would invite them. And then every Christmas, my father gets an invitation but

he never went. Me and my adopted sister used to go. My father never went, my mother never went. But we two used to go, among all the *haoles* [Caucasians] and very few Japanese.

MK: So you folks would go to the Scotch manager's house?

EM: Oh, yeah, manager assistant—assistant manager—and some other head, because my father was a *luna*.

MK: You mentioned that your father had all these Filipino workers.

EM: Yeah, about seventy, seventy-five.

MK: Did he speak Ilocano or Visayan with them?

EM: No, only English.

MK: Only English?

EM: Only English. No, he never learned.

MK: How good was his English?

EM: Someplace pidgin. And being with the Filipinos every day, he had to speak English. Ever since I remember, he was a *luna* already.

MK: And because your father was a *luna*, I was wondering, how active was he in the community—you know, like officer or president?

EM: Oh, he was number two all the time. There was this [*luna*] Mr. Shimokawa in the Japanese community. He was always the president in the Japanese community. My father was the vice president. (Chuckles) And you know what? Like New Year's, we go to the hall and he got to make speech. My mother hated that. She didn't want him to get up and make speech, but he liked it. My mother didn't like it. "You don't have to do that." (Chuckles) But my father was like that.

MK: Okay, we're just going to change the tape, yeah?

EM: Oh yes, okay.

END OF TAPE NO. 55-7-1-09

TAPE NO. 55-8-1-09

MK: This is tape two of session one with Mrs. Matsui.

And you were just telling us about how active your father was in the Japanese community. Mr. Shimokawa was always number one, . . .

EM: My father was number two.

MK: . . . your father was number two.

- EM: So, in Kohala, they had two main streets, divided, and homes on this side—home, street, home, street, home in camp. So this one was my father—Shimabukuro Camp—and that was Mr. Shimokawa Camp, ever since they were living there. My father liked to be involved.
- MK: So the Shimabukuro Camp, who lived in Shimabukuro Camp?
- EM: Oh, all kinds of nationalities—Filipino, Portuguese, Japanese, very few Hawaiians. Hawaiians lived on a different part. Yeah, so all nationalities.
- MK: And then the people in Shimabukuro Camp, were they the workers that worked for your dad?
- EM: And some worked for the mill, you know, work in the main sugar mill. All mixed. It was nice. Yeah, we really enjoyed. I go there every time I go to the Big Island.
- WN: What did Mr. Shimokawa do? What was his job?
- EM: Like my father, *luna*.
- WN: He was a *luna*.
- EM: Yeah, he had about seventy-five people, too, and my father had about that, yeah. They were two big shots in Kohala Camp, you know. (Laughs)
- MK: You know, because your father was Okinawan, were the workers under him Okinawan or were they *Naichi* [Japanese from the main islands of Japan]?
- EM: No, they were Okinawan.
- MK: They were Okinawan?
- EM: Yes.
- MK: And I was wondering, people from long time ago, they would talk about how Okinawans and *Naichi* didn't get along sometimes.
- EM: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Because the *Naichi* people would look down on the Okinawan people, and the Okinawan people fought that, see. I remember. That's why we were sent to Japanese[-language] school from first grade till eleventh grade. I went to school eleven years in Japanese. Yeah? And I went to sewing school every Saturday, half a day, and then Sunday, Sunday school. No time to, you know, fool around. We were at school or church. We were baptized as Christians when we were about first grade. Even at graduation, we went to church—baccalaureate service and all that. Very, very religious. We were very Christian. Very few Buddhists, even the Japanese.
- MK: In your time, do you remember any incidents where the *Uchinanchu* [Okinawans] and the *Naichi* would get into fights or arguments or conflicts or have disagreements?
- EM: No, we did not, but we could hear our parents, that the *Naichi* looked down upon them. So I remember. That's why the Okinawan people try hard to go above them. I can tell, the way they talk to their friends.
- MK: I was curious. When you were a child, when you were young, what did you folks do for fun?

EM: For fun?

MK: For fun.

EM: Not much. We went to school five days a week, and then one hour Japanese[-language] school six days. Sunday, go to church every Sunday. If we didn't go to Sunday school, we cannot have lunch, we cannot do anything. If we go to Sunday school, come home and have lunch, then we can do whatever we want. Otherwise, she [EM's mother] was very strict about being Christian. They were Buddhist, though.

MK: But in your free time, with your brother and sisters, what did you folks do for fun?

EM: Oh, for fun?

MK: Yeah.

EM: Oh, we would play ball, we would go swimming, and then climb trees. Oh, I used to love to climb trees. I planted an avocado tree when I was ten years old, and three years later it was fruiting already. I used to put a box over there, an apple box, and I used to climb the tree. When I get upset with my sisters or they get upset with me, they come after me, see. I go on the apple box and then I climb. They cannot come up. But you know what, because there's avocado growing, I go shake, and then it hits their heads so they don't come.

(Laughter)

I was a real rascal, you know.

MK: You were.

EM: My oldest sister was quiet, yeah. And my sister, the social worker now in 'Aiea, she was quiet, too. I think I was spoiled by my father. So whenever he came home, I was good girl.

MK: You know, because you were the number-three child, did you have to baby-sit the younger ones?

EM: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Sometimes when they don't go to sleep, I would pinch them and make them cry. And they would yell. Ooh. Then my mother come in and say, "What happened?"

"They just don't want to sleep." Then, she would pick them up. I was a little rascal, yeah, yeah.  
(Laughs)

MK: Did you have to like *onbu* [carry babies on her back] and . . .

EM: Oh, yeah.

MK: . . . change diapers?

EM: Oh, yes. Maybe I was, what, eight, seven, eight already. She didn't go out to work, but she was busy washing, ironing. Oh, and she had some Filipino clothes that she had to contract [to do laundry]. So in a week's time, she gotta wash and iron—that's what she did extra.

MK: There were lot of things to do, yeah?

EM: Oh, yeah.

- WN: I was wondering, you were the *luna*'s daughter . . .
- EM: Yeah, yeah, *luna*'s daughter.
- WN: . . . and I was just wondering, how your house, your folks' house, compared with the workers' houses?
- EM: Oh, big difference, yeah. My father had everything, the plantation had . . .
- WN: Was there like indoor toilet or anything like that?
- EM: Oh, yes. You know, he would get everything, whatever he wanted. Like, we had a bathhouse outside. So the Filipino man, Sunday, would come and saw, chop, and then pile it [i.e. wood for the *furo*] up real high. All of that was paid for by the plantation, because he was the *luna*. Yeah. My father had a good contract. He had the most workers in Kohala, one group.
- MK: Would you remember what kind of acreage he had, how much land he had to take care of?
- EM: Oh, quite a bit. I hated it when all the cane fields are tall and ready to be harvested. Sometimes, the Filipinos, they get upset by being pushed to do this, do that. They go late at night—twelve o'clock, something—they put the fire on acres. And there's always a Chinese watchman over there—we used to call him "Poka"—he would ring the milk bell, or something, loud.
- MK: Alarm.
- EM: Then my father, he would talk to the men. My father always had a horse, see, and he'd be the first one to get there. And he go see where he should put the break, so it [i.e. the fire] won't stretch all the way. So that's why I used to worry when there was a fire. Because one time, our dog went with him and got burned. That's why I used to worry about him all the time after that. Yeah, my father did a lot for the company.
- MK: Because he was the *luna*, were there any times where the workers got real upset with him or you folks were worried that something would happen to him?
- EM: Some Filipinos, yeah, I was worried about. They don't want my father tell [them] to do this, do that, you know, always getting on some workers, so I would always worry about that. Nothing happened. (Chuckles) You never know.
- WN: You mentioned the *furo*, the bathhouse. Did your house have its own *furo*?
- EM: Oh yeah. Outside.
- WN: But just for your family?
- EM: Yes. And when I was in high school, my father built it inside the house so we don't have to go outside. They built it for him inside the house.
- WN: Were you folks one of the first families to have electricity, running water, things like that?
- EM: Yeah, yeah. We had inside the house.
- WN: Were you folks like first ones?

- EM: Yeah, yeah. My father was everything first.
- MK: You know, you mentioned that your father had a car.
- EM: Oh, yeah. I remember. I used to drive Ford Touring to begin with. (Chuckles) You know, Ford Touring?
- MK: Wow.
- EM: Yeah, I drove that when I first started. I was fifteen. My father had Ford Touring, so I used to drive that to school. I'd take my younger sister and my classmate, who lived close. So I would pick up those two and go to school. Everybody see me coming. Nobody drove to school at that time but I was the first one. They said, "Oh, look at her coming."
- MK: Who taught you how to drive?
- EM: My father. We went to park in Kapa'au one afternoon. I got in the car, and then he sat next to me, and he told me to go start out. I went down to the baseball park, slowly, slowly, slowly. I think I went about five times. And then he said, "Okay, now, you're going to back up." I was afraid, but he said, "You gotta learn." Then he showed me how to back up. Two days I learned to drive, and one day to back up. And then I got the license. (Chuckles) I was fifteen, yeah. So my father and I, we were the only drivers at that time. So I used to take my sister, Kay, to school with me, and then a neighbor—she was my classmate. I charged her twenty-five dollars a month to drive her to school with me. (Laughs)
- MK: So when you drove the car to school, where did you park the car?
- EM: In the school. Yeah, they let us park. Not too many kids drove, anyway.
- WN: You know your classmates at school, or some of your friends, they were mostly the workers' kids?
- EM: Oh, yeah.
- WN: How did they treat you, being the *luna's* daughter?
- EM: Oh, we were all good.
- WN: Oh, they didn't say anything like, "Oh, that's the boss's daughter," or anything like that?
- EM: No. I wasn't showoff or anything, so we got along real good.
- MK: But because you're the *luna's* daughter, did your father ever tell you folks, "You know, you folks are a *luna's* daughter, so you better do well. You better be good."
- EM: That was for sure. He was a strict father, even with my brother. He [EM's brother] was raised in Okinawa, see, by the grandma, so he was spoiled. He won't go to school some days. My father finds out that he didn't go to school. He sits him in the parlor on the floor, talk to him, and then just slap him this way, you know. My father was strict. We never got hit, only my sister—Leslie's mother—used to get spanking because she answered back. We knew better not to answer back, or we were going to get it. (Laughs)
- MK: I see.

- EM: Claire's mother was next. She was a good girl, and she had the best grades, her mother. She's smart in school. She was good. But my sister, Leslie's mother, was the rascal. She would answer him back.
- MK: And then when he's talking to you folks, he speaks in English or Japanese or . . . ?
- EM: Japanese. So I went to Japanese[-language] school for eleven years. I had to. He wanted us to go learn Japanese.
- MK: And I know that you went to 'Āinakea School.
- EM: Yes, grammar school, then to Hala'ula, and then to Kohala High School. After Kohala High School, I came here, went to Cannon's [i.e., Phillips Commercial School. EM later corrects herself.] over here.
- MK: You know 'Āinakea School, you said you went there two years?
- EM: Yeah. They only had two years—first and second grade—and then we had to go to Hālawa [School] from third grade.
- MK: What do you remember about 'Āinakea School?
- EM: Oh, I remember we had to bring our own lunch. Lunchtime came, we would sit under the big mango tree or pine tree and eat down below. That's really stuck in my mind. Yeah, we had to do that. After two years, we had to go to Hālawa [School]. That's when they had the cafeteria. I remember I was six or seven, and the Chinese cook made me the chef there one day. "Shigeno, I want you be the chef tomorrow for the whole grammar school."
- I said, "What?" She found out that I cook. I love to cook. So she chose me. So I went home, I said, "*Okāsan* [Mother], I have to cook tomorrow for the whole school—" first and second grade, you know. "*Chee*," I said, "what shall I do?"
- She said, "Oh, I know what, you go make chicken *hekkā* [sukiyaki-like dish]." (Chuckles) So I found out the ingredients, and that night, we had chicken *hekkā* at home, so I know how to cut the vegetables and everything. The next day, I stood on the apple box and had the big pot like this, you know. I had to cook for the whole first and second grade. Never forget that till today. That was a good experience. I don't know why she chose me. I was the only one who did that in the second grade. Maybe she figured I can cook, I think.
- MK: That was at Hālawa School?
- EM: Yeah, Hālawa.
- MK: And then, to go to Hālawa School, how did you go?
- EM: We walk. We walked to Hālawa School, from Kohala. I don't know how many miles, maybe three-quarter mile. Walk and go back home.
- MK: And what do you remember about your classmates? Who were the kids that all went to Hālawa School?
- EM: Oh, we got along. We walk back and forth. My best friend was Shigeko. I was Shigeno; her, Shigeko. The mother stayed at home and got the Filipino clothes to wash. And the father used to

work for [plantation manager] Mr. [George C.] Watt, at that time, as a dairyman. He used to milk the cow and sterilize it. That's what he did every day, seven days a week.

MK: And so, you had your best friend Shigeko, she was your best friend.

EM: Yeah. She passed away. Now, she's gone.

MK: What do you remember about the teachers at Hālawa School?

EM: Oh, teachers? Oh, I don't know, we all liked our teachers better.

MK: Is there a favorite teacher or a teacher that you didn't like at Hālawa?

EM: No. But I used to like Miss Yap, Chinese teacher. You know why? Because she brings lunch and she invites about three of us to join her for lunch. Three girls, three Japanese girls she would invite to have lunch at the cottage. I'll never forget that, Miss Yap. She was a good seamstress, see, and then sometimes she'd tell the three of us, her favorite, to come school on Saturday so she'll teach us how to sew. But I hated that, though, but I did go.

(Laughter)

And then Japanese[-language] school. Every Saturday we had to go school, about two hours because we go class, and then we had to clean that school. So two hours we were there. And then the Japanese teacher, afterwards, we go to her home, the women only. We sit in a square like that, and then she used to teach us how to sew, Japanese style. We had to learn. We hated it, but we learned how to do it, Japanese sewing.

MK: Did you learn like flower arranging or anything else?

EM: Oh, I took up flower arrangement when I finished high school. I went to class. I have some pictures, though, of that.

MK: You did that, too?

EM: Yeah.

MK: And at Hālawa School, you had your best friend Shigeko, you talked about the teacher, Miss Yap. How about the studies over there, how did you feel about the classes at Hālawa School? How did you do in school?

EM: I liked it, yeah. Every week, one class would perform on Monday morning before we go to class. We would make speeches, sing—by group and all that. Yeah, it was nice. Every Monday, I looked forward to that. Different classes performing, yeah? I don't know whether they do that here, but in Kohala, we did that.

MK: How about special events, like the holidays or May Day? What do you remember about that?

EM: Oh, May Day, we all go to school. We were in grammar school, they had the Maypole dance. We practice before. Then May Day came. All the families are invited. And then we dance the Maypole, until sixth grade in grammar school. I used to like that.

MK: It was a big event, yeah, in those days?

EM: Yeah. It was good. I enjoyed that.

MK: How about like Christmas pageants or anything like that?

EM: Oh, well we were Christian, so every Christmas, maybe, twenty-second, -third, -fourth. Up until the twenty-fourth. We would go to the movie hall in Kohala and perform, singing Christmas songs and play Mary and Joseph. I was Mary one time, the mother.

(Laughter)

Yeah, we were kept busy. We had to go to church every Sunday. My mother was very strict about that. If we didn't go to Sunday school, we cannot do anything.

MK: And then I know that you went to Kohala School after Hālawā School. You went to Kohala School . . .

EM: Kohala High School.

MK: Kohala High School. Now, what do you remember most about your classmates at Kohala High School?

EM: Oh, I don't know, we gotta study. We got there in the morning—eight o'clock school starts—and if we had homework, if we didn't do homework at home, we go early and then do it in the class.

And then I was a senior, and there was a boy—he was a sophomore. He died in Honolulu, though. Every morning when I go to class, he's sitting on my desk, waiting for me. And every Sunday, he would come to the house. Just talk to me, what I did or what he did. They had the Fukada Store in Kohala, Hāwī. So he had money to go around, he had a car already, junior or sophomore. He used to come every Sunday, so my father thought I was his sweetheart. But he's younger than me—we're just friends. But, you know, that's what he thought. So one day, he [father] asked him and he said, "Oh no, we're just friends." (Laughs) So until I left home after high school, he used to come every Sunday. And the parents have the store. They sold everything—canned goods and whatnot. We get along real good, he and I. Then he lived in Honolulu all the time, married. And when I used to come once in a while to Honolulu, I used to go visit him. Then he passed away about two years ago, and he's three years younger than me. I felt so bad. I said, "Eddie, why should you die before me?" I met his wife and the mother, everything. Too bad.

MK: You mentioned that at Kohala School, you had to study. How did you do in school at Kohala School?

EM: Oh, average, I guess. Otherwise, you don't pass. Miss [Edna] Coder was our teacher, very strict, from Minneapolis. Ooh. (Laughs) Very strict, Miss Coder, She never got married. She moved away when she was still single. Very strict, good teacher, oh yeah.

MK: What other teachers do you remember from Kohala School?

EM: Oh, Miss Yap, Miss Yee, and Wakayama—she was my typing teacher, Mrs. Wakayama, from Honolulu. And, oh, Miss Yamaguchi from Hilo. Oriental. All the other *haoles* came from the Mainland to teach. We had more Mainland teachers in Kohala. Mostly Mainland teachers, *haole*.

MK: How did you get along with them, the *haole* teachers?

EM: We did okay. We have to study hard.

- MK: Was it interesting, having these *haole* teachers?
- EM: Yeah, yeah, it was interesting. Did you have any *haole* teachers?
- MK: When I was going, I had a few. But I was wondering, what did they talk to you about, the *haole* teachers? They come from a different kind of place. What did they talk about with you?
- EM: They used to come from Kansas City, Texas, and California. About five, six different states they used to come.
- MK: Did you folks have a chance to talk story with them?
- EM: Oh yeah, we used to have lunch together. We go to the cottage and they invite so many girls at a time, and so we got along real good.
- MK: What subjects did you like when you were at Kohala High School?
- EM: What subjects did I like? Oh, I don't know. Everything, I guess. (Chuckles)
- MK: Was there anything you didn't like, or was too hard?
- EM: I didn't like math. Math, I didn't like. (Laughs)
- Yeah, because Kohala had all kinds of nationality teachers—*haole*, Japanese, Chinese. The only ones we didn't have was Filipino, at that time, teaching.
- MK: In those days, what kind of extra-curricular activities did you participate in?
- EM: Oh, dancing. This was a Hawaiian lady. She used to teach us dancing, ballroom dancing, one hour. That's how I learned ballroom dancing. Once a year, we had ballroom dancing, and we had partners. My partner, from eighth grade, was the same one. He's a dentist is in Kona. I still see him again every once in a while. He got married over here, and I got married in LA. I was going to school there in LA.
- MK: He was your first sweetheart, you said last time, yeah?
- EM: From eighth grade. But my father made sure that when the school day is ended, he's waiting for me. I cannot go with my friends and go with the boys. My father was very strict, a very strict man. They were afraid of him. (MK laughs.)
- MK: You know, in those days at Kohala High School, how about club activities? Clubs, or societies, or anything extra besides classes?
- EM: Oh yeah, we had clubs. And then, of course, lot of church—every Sunday, we got to go church. My mother wouldn't let us do nothing unless we went to Sunday school. And I used to teach classes at Sunday school until twelve o'clock. I taught a year and a half—my senior year—and half of the summer.
- MK: Those days, did you folks have church socials, like get-togethers, or dances?
- EM: Oh yeah. We had all of that.
- MK: How did your parents feel about that, you know, social dancing and parties?

EM: If we came from school, okay. But no other way. If it's for school, yeah. My father used to pick me up at twelve o'clock midnight if I'm at the school dance. One time, Dr. Nakayama, he's still a dentist over there, he had a car during senior year. So he, me, and Natalie Takano—she's a nurse in Kaua'i, now—and I don't know who the boy was. The four of us, after school, twelve o'clock, we got into his car—because he's the only one that had a car—and we went to the beach. We watched the beach and everything. We were there one hour, and came home. My father was waiting for me. He didn't go to sleep. I was one hour late coming home. Boy, when I got in the door, my father was standing over there. Oh, boy. (Chuckles) He came close to me after I got in the house, grabbed me. "Come here," he tell me. Ho boy. He didn't hit me, but he spoke to me so loud that—my mother was in the bedroom—she was looking at me, but she never came out. But Father was getting after me. He pull my clothes and rip my clothes, the one I went to the dance with. Yeah, he was a very strict man. We cannot go out. Senior year, cannot go out with men, no way. (Chuckles)

MK: But it was okay if it was a school event?

EM: Yeah, yeah, that's right. It was okay. I knew I was wrong for not coming home right after the school dance. You know how the parents are. They love you, that's why they're like that, I figure. (Chuckles) So I would never answer back. But he ripped my dress, though. He pulled me so hard because I won't go. He pull me, and then it ripped. I'll never forget that. I'll never forget that dress. My older sister took up sewing in Honolulu, and she was a seamstress. So she sewed me that prom dress, and I said, "Oh my god, how can I tell her that Father ripped it because I was home late from school dance, senior year?" Ooh! So strict, yeah, at that time. I don't know about your parents, but my father was strict. My mother was easygoing. She better be, because he was so strict.

MK: How strict were they in your studies? If you folks came home with your report cards, what did they expect from you folks?

EM: Oh, he look at it. We better do good. Otherwise, he used to spank us until were senior year. I mean, he would come after us. He would sit us on the living room floor. Sit across from each other. If you answer back. . . . That's why I never answered back. I'm wrong, I'm wrong. (Chuckles)

MK: And, you know, when you graduated . . .

EM: High school?

MK: Yeah. What did you want to do after you graduated [in 1936]? What were you thinking? What did you want to do?

EM: Oh, I wanted to move to Los Angeles.

MK: Right after you graduated from high school, you were thinking about the Mainland?

EM: Yeah. I was the first one to leave Hawai'i in the family.

MK: And then how about your parents? What were they thinking for you, what did they want you to do after you graduate?

EM: My father said—I was going to business school. He said, "Oh, as long as you go to business school, I'll let you go." My mother said, "No, no way." Already marrying age—nineteen or

twenty, like that. But my father said. . . . Everything he says, okay, it goes. If he says no, it don't go.

MK: How come you came over here [Honolulu, O'ahu] to come for business school?

EM: Well, in Kohala, there's no business school—nothing in Kohala. Now it's different. I stayed with my married sister over here.

MK: Why did you want to go to business school?

EM: Well, I gotta take up something, so I thought [if] I went into business school, I can become a secretary. I was a secretary for a *haole* lady married to a Japanese doctor, [A.I.] Shimamura. So I worked with her for a year and a half. Then, you know, Japanese-style marriage proposal comes. I gave up. I told my dad, "Can you send me to LA?"

Dr. [Harry] Urasaki was a dentist in Hilo. His family wanted me to be his bride, but I didn't want already. So I told my dad, "Send me one year away." We went to Hilo, and on the way, I told him, "Oh, I want to go away for a while." I said, "Send me to LA."

He said, "What you going to do there?"

"Oh, I'm going to do something." So I took up cosmetology over there. I changed the subject. I stayed with Harry's sister—she was married—and I went to school from there. And then the war came right away, so I couldn't come home. So I called them and told them, "I can't come home." The war came and then I went to Santa Anita racetrack [Assembly Center] over there, and then we were sent to Heart Mountain, Wyoming [internment camp]. So I was in Wyoming.

MK: Oh, before we get into Santa Anita and all that, I want to back up a little bit, and I want to find out, you know, the first time you left the Big Island and you came to Honolulu to go to business [school] . . .

EM: Yeah, that's right.

MK: . . . what did you think of Honolulu? What was it like?

EM: Oh, town. Like Kohala is country. I liked it. But I wanted to get away after, you know, Japanese-style marriage.

MK: How many proposals did you get?

EM: Seven, at that time, the same time, from Kona, from Pahoa, Hilo, Hāwī. Oh, I said, "No, no way." So I told my dad, "Send me to Honolulu." So I came here and I went to business school for one year.

MK: You know, I think today, we're running out of tape, so we're going to stop now . . .

EM: Yeah, okay.

MK: . . . and when we come back, we're going to continue, okay? (SM laughs.)

WN: Good stuff, that's why.

MK: Good, good, good.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape Nos. 55-13-2-09 and 55-14-2-09

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Evelyn Shigeno Matsui (EM)

Honolulu, O'ahu

December 15, 2009

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

[NOTE: Also present at the interview is SP, Shizue Shimabukuro Palmer, SM's sister.]

MK: This is an interview with Evelyn Shigeno Matsui, session number two, on December 15, 2009, Honolulu, O'ahu, and the interviewers are Michi Kodama-Nishimoto and Warren Nishimoto.

And what we're going to do is, we're going to continue where we left off. So Mrs. Matsui . . .

EM: Yes?

MK: . . . are you comfortable?

EM: Yes, I am. Very comfortable, thank you.

MK: (Chuckles) Okay. So what we're going to do is, we're going to continue from where we left off . . .

EM: Yes, yes.

MK: . . . and we got you up to the time when you were going to the Cannon's School of Business in Honolulu.

EM: Yes. Yeah, that was after high school. Right after high school.

SP: That's not the school. It was Phillips Commercial.

MK: You were going to Phillips Commercial School in Honolulu . . .

EM: In Honolulu.

MK: . . . and I was wondering, how come you chose to go to Phillips Commercial School?

EM: I just, I didn't want to go to university, so I told my dad. He wanted all of us that go to the university, and I didn't want to go. So I told him I'm going to go business school. That's how I got in there. (Laughs)

MK: And how come you wanted to go to business school?

- EM: I had to go to school. My parents wanted the university, but I didn't want to go, so I went to business school. Short way out. (Laughs)
- MK: And when you came to Honolulu, what did you think about Honolulu?
- EM: Oh, I loved it. You know, from country. My oldest sister above me—four years older—she was married already, at nineteen. I came and stayed with her and went to school. I went to business school with her while I was here.
- MK: And where in Honolulu did you live?
- EM: At McCully, yeah? Where did I live?
- SP: Algaroba Street.
- EM: Algaroba Street, McCully, yeah.
- MK: And when you look back on those days at Phillips Commercial School, how was it? What was school like for you?
- EM: Oh, I loved it. *Chee*, it must have been over fifty, I think, the whole class. I loved it. I stayed here maybe a year and a half, and then I went back to Kohala and I worked over there for two years. And then Japanese-style marriage proposal, and then I told my dad, "I want to get away."
- So he said, "Okay, I'll let you go one year, and you be back." I knew I wasn't going to come back, but I promised him that I will come back in one year. Otherwise, they won't let me go because everybody was here. I'm the only one that left early. That was in 1939. So I got there [Los Angeles] and I went to school, I got married and never came back until after the war. (Laughs)
- MK: You know, you said that after you were in Honolulu, you went back to the Big Island, and you worked about two years.
- EM: Yeah, worked about two years, maybe, at the most, yeah. . . .
- MK: What kind of work . . .
- EM: . . . for social welfare. I worked for Mrs. Shimamura.
- WN: So you were a secretary for a social worker, Mrs. Shimamura? You were a secretary for a social worker?
- EM: Yes, yes, yes.
- MK: You know, tell us about the marriage proposals.
- EM: Marriage proposal? Ho, gee whiz, when I already in senior, I had about seven proposals—Japanese-style, from here, there, there, there. So that's why I went. I left. I had a boyfriend in high school—he's a dentist in Kona right now. He was my high school sweetheart. But you know how it is, Japanese style. (Laughs)
- MK: Arranged, yeah?

EM: So that's why I went away. So when I got to school there, I went to—what do you call?

SP: Marinello.

EM: Marinello, [School of Beauty] in LA. And then I finished and I was working, and then the war came and I went to camp. I was there in the camp all those years. I came out of camp, and I came home [to Hawai'i], went back [to California]. I was married already in camp during the war. So I came home for about. . . . Oh, I told my husband let me go for one month, but I stayed here four months. He called me, "Are you coming back or are you going to stay there in Hawai'i for good?" (Laughs)

I said, "I'll be back there shortly." But I had to stay there until Mother's Day was over, so that was another month and a half. So he waited, waited. And when we went back, we started a little restaurant business right away. Small. I'd been in that business all this time. But now, I'm all out.

MK: You know, going back to the time when you first went to LA, where did you live?

EM: East First Street, with the . . .

SP: Did you stay with the Nakamuras?

EM: Yeah, with my friends, Nakamuras. Then I met one Korean girl [Victoria Kim] and then Betty Nitta from over here. The three of us rented a room in a hotel instead of staying with the relatives. So the three of us, we rented at the Japanese hotel. One room—one double bed, one single bed. So the three of us, we lived there over a year until we finished school.

MK: And you said that you went to a beauty school?

EM: Yeah, yeah.

MK: What did you study at the beauty school?

EM: Oh, regular cosmetics, from head to toe.

MK: Everything—hair, face, nails.

EM: Everything, from head to toe.

MK: And after you graduated from that beauty school, what did you do?

EM: The war started soon after that, so I went to Heart Mountain Relocation Center, camp. I stayed there until the war ended. My husband wanted to go into business.

SP: [After being released from Heart Mountain,] you and he went to work at a Chinese restaurant in Hollywood, too. Experience there.

EM: Yeah, yeah. Right away, I wanted experience in a restaurant, because I wanted to start a restaurant business. So we start working. And she [SM's sister] was there with me. She was going to school in, where, Illinois, yeah, and she stayed with me during the summer. So we worked a few months for this restaurant. And she went to Chicago, then I opened the little place.

SP: You opened it while I was there, that summer.

- EM: Yeah, yeah. So I've been in the restaurant business all those years now. (Laughs)
- SP: In 1947.
- MK: In 1947. Now, before we concentrate on that part of your life, I want to ask you about when war came. You know, when December 7th came and the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, how did you hear about it?
- EM: Oh, I felt lost. I called home many times. My mother cried, and I cried . . .
- SP: No, but how did you hear about it?
- EM: Oh, on the news.
- MK: So you heard the news about . . .
- EM: I was so worried. Because I was there alone with a Korean girl from here and a Japanese girl—Nitta, Betty Nitta. The three of us were living in a hotel, and we went to school together.
- MK: So you were very worried when you heard the war stories?
- EM: Oh, yeah, can't come home. So I called right away, because my parents didn't know where to call me. So I called home, because they had a phone already on the Big Island. My mother cried and cried, "Oh, we not going to see you anymore, the war is on." (Chuckles) Yeah, but it worked out.
- MK: So right after the war started, because you're Japanese American, how were you treated in the early days of the war?
- EM: Oh, ordinary. They were nice, very, very nice. The people treated us very good. So, until we were put into camp, I stayed outside, working. I worked in a restaurant so I can at least eat, yeah? (Laughs)
- MK: So the war started, you were able to work in a restaurant, and . . .
- EM: Until we were put away. We went to Santa Anita [Assembly Center] for, what, four months or so, and then I was sent to Heart Mountain, Wyoming after that.
- MK: How did you hear about it, how were you told?
- EM: Oh, it came in the news, yeah, yeah, so we were prepared, the three girls from Hawai'i.
- MK: And how did you feel when you heard you have to be sent to the center?
- EM: We felt good, safe, instead of being outside. So we were happy to go. So I stayed until they sent us out. I got married in camp [Heart Mountain, Wyoming], too.
- MK: When they told you you have to go to the assembly center, what things did you take with you?
- EM: Oh, just ordinary. Maybe two suitcases? That's all. Clothes. (Chuckles)
- MK: And what happened to your other things?

- EM: Oh, we have to leave. We cannot take everything. Only two suitcases, mostly clothes. Then we went to Heart Mountain, where it's so cold. They gave us all one pea coat each. So that was our warm clothing until we worked and made money.
- MK: You know, when you were told that you folks were going to be sent to an assembly center, did you know you were going to go to Santa Anita?
- EM: Yeah, they let us know we were going.
- MK: And how were you transported to Santa Anita?
- EM: Oh, on the bus. Oh, a lot of people on the bus. So it was safe, yeah.
- MK: And when you first got to Santa Anita, what did it look like?
- EM: Oh, racetrack—you know, the track and all that. We used to run around the racetrack outside where the houses were around. We used to play there a lot. Some people took bicycles and things. We used to ride in the camp where we lived, yeah, so it was good. It was really good.
- MK: And try to describe to us where you lived in Santa Anita. What did it look like?
- SP: Did you live in the barracks or . . .
- EM: In the barracks.
- MK: Not in the horse stalls, you were in the barracks?
- EM: In the barracks, they put us.
- SP: Did they use the horse stalls?
- EM: No, they gave us single girls four of them in one barrack, you know, bed. [SM later says at first they were in horse stalls.]
- MK: And what did your barrack look like?
- EM: Ordinary barrack. Just like you seen barracks at the camps, yeah, have you seen? Just like that—plain, nothing.
- WN: How many rooms were there?
- EM: Oh, there's four girls in one flat. And then singles on the side, and then two married couples, and then us four girls in the center. It was really good and safe.
- MK: And what was in your flat?
- EM: Nothing.
- MK: Nothing?
- EM: I mean, we had a heater, because Santa Anita gets cold, and a bed. That's all.
- SP: No dresser?

- EM: Dresser? No, nothing like that. We had to make our own with boxes, apple boxes. (Chuckles) We did our own.
- WN: Where did you get the apple boxes from?
- EM: Oh, they have in camp.
- WM: Like the mess hall?
- EM: We have ten thousand people in one camp, so they had all kinds. They had a grocery store, they had Japanese food we could buy, yeah. So it was really good.
- WN: What kind of Japanese food did you buy, what kind?
- EM: All Japanese food, canned goods stuff. The Japanese people opened in camp during Santa Anita, so it was good. We didn't miss at all, nothing.
- MK: So you had stores?
- EM: Yeah, yeah.
- MK: What other things did they sell in the stores?
- EM: Clothing—you know, blouses and things, sweaters. And then the government gave us pea coats—the heavy navy coat—so that kept us warm. The pea coat is nice and heavy, see, so we wore that in Santa Anita and went to Wyoming with the same coat (chuckles) with earmuffs.
- MK: Did they issue any other clothes to you folks—the pea coat, anything else?
- EM: Yeah, that's about it. The main thing was the pea coat, keep us warm.
- MK: And then when you first went into Santa Anita, how much money did you bring in to Santa Anita?
- EM: Oh, *chee*, you asking me that? (Laughs) I don't even remember how much I had because Dad used to send every month, you know, for rent and school. So I cannot remember how much I had, maybe less than a thousand dollars when I went? And we worked right away in camp. We had to, because the parents can't send you money from here, and we had no other contact.
- WN: When you moved to the camp, you folks were together at the camp, the same three girls? The three of you?
- EM: Yeah, that's right. And we ate at the restaurant; we worked at the restaurant.
- MK: The mess hall?
- EM: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. We never suffered.
- MK: So what kind of work did you do at Santa Anita?
- EM: Oh, in the mess hall, I was the head waitress. All the people came from the block, and then I would see that everybody got a place to sit down. That was my job, oversee the mess hall. So it was an easy job. Every month, everybody got sixteen dollars a month. But being the head

waitress, I got eighteen dollars a month, two dollars more. (Laughs) [SM later says she received nineteen dollars a month at Heart Mountain.]

MK: And this was at Santa Anita or Heart Mountain?

EM: Santa Anita.

MK: Now, at Santa Anita, you folks had a mess hall and you folks would eat over there. So the meals were provided?

EM: Oh, yes, three meals a day.

MK: What kind of meals did you folks have?

EM: Oh, ordinary. Hamburger steak, sometimes Japanese food like chop suey something.

SP: And what about breakfast?

EM: Breakfast? Ordinary breakfast. We lined up all in a row, pick up bacon and eggs, ham and eggs, whatever. It was good, they treated us real good.

MK: And you folks had Japanese foods.

EM: Yeah, yeah.

MK: Who were the cooks?

EM: Oh, in camp. We all stayed in camp. Everybody participated.

SP: Were they cooks before?

EM: Yeah, yeah. And some learned how to cook in camp, too. So it was nice, good.

MK: How about the laundry?

EM: Laundry? We had a laundry room. Big bathroom. Let me see, how many blocks of people went in—ten blocks to one mess hall, one big mess hall. I was in block one, and then block one was in A and B. All the blocks have A and B. And then the number two block, A and B—always, for thirty blocks. It was a big place, over ten thousand people in one camp. So it was just like outside. We had everything there—activity, high school, church, everything, just like outside, so it was not bad. [EM may be speaking about her time at Heart Mountain, Block 1-A.]

MK: And you were saying like showers, bathrooms, how were they?

EM: Oh, a big place. We would all wait to go in turn. But every day, nice hot bath. (Chuckles)

MK: How about washing clothes?

EM: Oh, washing clothes, we had a laundry. We had each, and then we would take turns. It was really good.

MK: How about medical care?

- EM: Oh, we had the hospital. So if you got sick, they would put us in a hospital, right in camp.
- MK: I was wondering, when you were at Santa Anita, what was communication like? Like, could you get letters from home?
- EM: Yeah, oh yes. And then from Santa Anita, I was sent to Wyoming, Heart Mountain, Wyoming. And I stayed there until the end of the war, and then I got married there, in Heart Mountain.
- MK: And then before we go into Heart Mountain, I was wondering, when you were at Santa Anita, what did you do in your spare time?
- EM: Oh, we played ball. We played all kinds of stuff. People took bicycles, so we rode. I never rode bicycle until I went to camp, so I remember I had all my knees scratched because I never rode bicycle before. My father would never let us ride bicycle, no girls. Only boys.
- SP: Not his precious daughters.
- (Laughter)
- EM: So the first thing I wanted was to learn how to ride the bike so we can go on our own. But I scratched myself, I quit. I couldn't ride the bike.
- SP: Did you do anything else?
- EM: No, I don't think so. We went dancing.
- SP: No card games or anything like that?
- EM: No, no card games. She likes card games, but I don't like card games.
- MK: So you had dances at Santa Anita?
- EM: Dancing, yeah. We used to go dancing.
- SP: I think her social life was better there.
- EM: (Laughs) Big hall, we danced in there. Empty hall. We do whatever we want.
- MK: What kind of programs did they have?
- EM: Oh, singing, speeches. And went to church on Sunday. We had regular church, Buddhist church, all kind of denominations, yeah, so it was really good.
- MK: What kind of church did you go to?
- EM: My parents were Buddhist, but they wanted us to raise as Christian, especially my mother, so we don't know Buddhist church. We all know Christian church since we were growing up. My mother wanted us to become Christian, but they stayed Buddhists until they passed away.
- MK: You know, when you were at Santa Anita, what kind of rules were there?
- EM: Oh, they were strict, though.

MK: Were there curfews?

EM: Oh, yes.

MK: What was the curfew?

EM: Well, by certain time of the night, we all have to be in. Maybe about nine o'clock.

MK: And then when you were there at Santa Anita, did they ever let you go out for any reason?

EM: No, no, no, no way. Only if you had family outside, then they gave us pass so we could go, but never come back—when you go out, you stay out. Once you leave the camp, you never come back. They're not going to take you back. You make up your mind that you're going to leave the camp and be on your own.

MK: That's when you were at Heart Mountain, huh, or Santa . . .

EM: Heart Mountain, and Santa Anita they started that. So gradually, yeah. Because we didn't know anybody outside until we got to know friends. They went out first, and they tell, "Oh, why don't you come out?" Then we'd go.

MK: And then, at Santa Anita, could you have visitors come to see you at the center?

EM: Yeah, yeah, you can. Like if you had *haole* friends or whatever, they used to come and visit. But we cannot go to their place, they come into camp and visit.

MK: And when a visitor comes to see you, where does the visit take place?

EM: Oh, in the barracks.

And we had hot water all the time, so when winter come, we put the hot water heater on and keep ourselves warm. So we always had hot water, and then we had a big bath, public bath, with all the hot water and everything. It was comfortable, really comfortable, yeah. Made it good.

MK: You know, you said that it was comfortable. Were there . . .

EM: I mean, we would expect uncomfortable, you know. But no, they treated us real good.

MK: Were there any things that you thought wasn't so good?

EM: No, not that I thought. I felt like I was safe over there, because I was alone over there, all the family here. So it was good. We felt, I felt safe, yeah.

MK: You know, before you went into Santa Anita, after the war started, but before you went into Santa Anita, were there any incidents or anything that made you feel unsafe?

EM: Yeah, it happened. It happened.

MK: What happened?

EM: Oh, they get mugged, "Oh, you Jap," and, you know, (chuckles) you know how it is. It happened. The Hawai'i boys would never—you know, they fight back. So they were put in camp until they were put away, Wyoming or someplace.

- MK: And I was wondering, when you folks were at Santa Anita, were there rules about what you could have?
- EM: Oh, yes. Very strict.
- MK: What couldn't you have at Santa Anita?
- EM: Oh, I don't know. (Chuckles)
- MK: But there were?
- EM: We cannot have our own party, no drinks.
- MK: How about radios?
- EM: Oh, no, no radios, nothing like that.
- MK: How about newspapers?
- EM: Yeah, newspapers, you can. We can. But no radio, nothing like that.
- MK: And at Santa Anita, what was the security like, the guards?
- EM: Oh, we feel safe. Good, really.
- SP: You had guards around?
- EM: Guards? Oh, yes. Guards around.
- MK: Where were the guards?
- EM: All over the camp. We cannot go out.
- SP: Tosh [EM's brother] come to see you in Santa Anita?
- EM: Tosh, no. Well, yeah, my brother was in Springfield College, and I was in LA. So when the war came, I talked to my parents, and they said, "You get together, and then take care of each other." My brother younger than me by four [years]. So I called my brother in Springfield, Massachusetts. He came, and we had to move from where we were, so I had to give him fare, and then he went back to—where was it? Massachusetts, yeah? He went to school there, so he finished school there.
- MK: And, you know, at Santa Anita, how was it with the guards? How did the guards treat you?
- EM: No, we feel safe. Yeah, we feel safe.
- SP: Were the guards good?
- EM: Oh, they were good. We felt safe. Better than outside, I think, during the war.
- MK: In Santa Anita, there were some Hawai'i people?

EM: Yeah, and then they came to Heart Mountain. Where I came from—Kohala—the Kuritas, they were all in the same camp at the end.

SP: In Santa Anita?

EM: Yeah, they first came, and then we went Heart Mountain or whatever.

SP: They went to Arkansas?

EM: They went to Arkansas, yeah, yeah, they came to Arkansas.

SP: No, but they all came to Santa Anita first?

EM: Yeah, and then they're sent wherever they want to go. So it was good.

SP: I would run away. (Chuckles)

WN: You know at Santa Anita, it was a racetrack, yeah? Did it smell like a horse stable?

EM: Oh, yeah, we had to sleep in the stall.

WN: So you slept in the stall or you slept in the barracks?

EM: The stall, in the beginning, because they had to build gradually . . .

WN: I see.

EM: . . . so it was hard at first. But at the end, it was okay. And then we don't want to come out. (Chuckles)

MK: So in the beginning, you folks were in the converted horse stalls.

EM: And then, hoo, cannot sleep.

(Laughter)

WN: They had beds and everything in the stalls?

EM: Yes. If you were a couple, you get one bed.

SP: How big were the stalls, how large were the stalls?

EM: Depends how many people going to be in one stall.

SP: No, but how big was the room?

EM: Well, like I said, from there to here for two. And then from here to there for a couple. And then one single barrack, double barrack for family, and then another barrack, so three in a row.

MK: So that was in the barracks, yes?

EM: Yes.

SP: The stables?

MK: Before you folks were in the barracks, you stayed in the horse stalls, first, in the beginning until . . .

EM: Yeah. And then we ate out in the mess hall, and took a bath outside. We all have the stall, take turns to go into the bathroom. It was comfortable, yeah. We didn't mind staying in—safe during the war, for Japanese, so we didn't mind staying in camp. (Chuckles) We got all the free food. (Laughs)

MK: And then when it was time to leave Santa Anita, what did they tell you folks?

EM: Oh, that we could go out on our own, but never come back to California. Outside of California, any place. But I stayed in camp until the war ended, because I didn't want to leave. I wanted to come home.

WN: When you were at Santa Anita, then you folks were transferred to Heart Mountain.

EM: Yeah.

WN: How did you feel about that?

EM: Oh, it felt good. We're outside.

WN: No, but you had to move from one camp to another camp, yeah?

EM: Oh, yeah, yeah. But we felt good. I got married in Heart Mountain, Wyoming. They let us go out for a honeymoon outside of the camp. (Laughs)

MK: So where did you get married?

EM: Oh, *chee*, now. Billings, Montana. I've been back one time to see it, Billings.

MK: So the marriage was in a church in Billings, Montana?

EM: No, no. In the [camp] church. The reverend and the assistant came and married us. Just get married, and that's it. (Chuckles)

MK: And for a few days, you folks stayed in Billings?

EM: Yeah.

MK: What did you folks do? You folks stayed in Billings, or you folks came back after?

EM: We came back after two, three days, I think.

SP: You had your honeymoon?

EM: Oh yeah, outside. Honeymoon nothing.

(Laughter)

Yeah, but it was nice. During the war, right? You expect more, but they were nice, the American government. They were all nice. They took care of us. We were comfortable.

MK: You know at Heart Mountain, Wyoming, what did the camp look like?

EM: Oh, *chee*, ten thousand people in one camp.

MK: Heart Mountain?

EM: Yes.

SP: You had barbed wire around you?

EM: Oh, yeah, you cannot go out, all barbed wire. If you wanted to go out, you had to get pass—two, three, four nights at the most, we could go out. So it wasn't so bad. You know, you expect worse during the war. But it was good.

MK: So how did the barracks look like at Heart Mountain? What were the barracks like?

EM: Oh, ordinary barracks, like over here. Just nothing. The whole barrack—two single apartment and one in the middle for the family.

MK: And how about the mess hall at Heart Mountain?

EM: Oh, the mess hall, we had—let me see, how many barracks? I don't know how many barracks we had, maybe we had seven, fourteen, and one mess hall. Block one. I stayed in Block 1-A. We had one mess hall and then—one, two, four—about four apartments or four buildings, you know. And then in one block, we had two mess halls.

MK: And how about your bathroom and shower area at Heart Mountain?

EM: Oh, we had to go outside, public. We had the shower and bath. Yeah, we take turns. We had nice, good hot baths. (Chuckles)

MK: How about laundry area?

EM: Oh, the laundry area was next to the bathroom. All separate, we can wash there. Wait in line if it got busy.

SP: You had washing machines?

EM: Washing machines? Let me see now. No washing machine.

SP: You don't remember hanging up your clothes?

EM: Yeah, yeah. So we used to bring in the barracks and hang clothes.

WN: Now at Heart Mountain, who did you room with, before you got married?

EM: Oh, I first roomed with my girlfriends.

WN: The same girls that were at . . .

EM: Yeah. And then we get married, they gave us one for couple—they gave us one unit.

WN: We better stop.

END OF TAPE NO. 55-13-2-09

TAPE NO. 55-14-2-09

MK: Tape two of session two.

You know, we were talking about Heart Mountain, and I was wondering about like medical care at Heart Mountain.

EM: We had the hospital there.

MK: So at Heart Mountain, did you ever get sick at Heart Mountain?

EM: Oh, I was there with a cold.

SP: Pneumonia.

EM: Pneumonia, I had.

MK: Pneumonia, at Heart Mountain?

EM: Yeah, yeah, so I was in the hospital. They took care of me good.

MK: And when you were at Heart Mountain, is that where you met your husband? Where did you meet your husband?

EM: I met my husband in LA. Yeah, and then we met in camp and got married in camp.

WN: So you knew your husband in LA, but you both ended up at Heart Mountain?

EM: Yes, yes.

MK: Now, at Heart Mountain, what kind of work did you do?

EM: In a mess hall, I was the head waitress over there. I took care of all the people that came. I made sure that they all had seats. That was my job.

MK: And what was your husband's job?

EM: Oh, he work for the trucking company—he drove truck in camp. Maintenance truck. And we stayed in camp. I wanted to go out to Chicago, but my husband didn't want to go. He said, "We're going to stay and come back to LA," because he's always into business, a produce business. So he came back, and he started the produce business.

MK: So he wanted to stay in camp until . . .

EM: Until the war ended [summer 1945], then came back [to LA], and we had the restaurant take-out.

- MK: Oh, okay. Now, when you folks were still in camp, at that time, were you getting mail from your family?
- EM: Oh, yes.
- MK: What did they write about to you when you were in camp?
- EM: Not much mail, because they don't write English. But I went to Japanese[-language] school for ten years, so we wrote Japanese. My father saw that we all went to Japanese[-language] school, so at least we were able to read and write in Japanese.
- SP: But, but did you get mail regularly?
- EM: Yeah.
- MK: How about mail from your sisters or brothers?
- EM: Oh, not much at that time, no?
- SP: We were too young. We were juniors and seniors.
- EM: Just the parents, my mother especially, because out of the five girls, I was the only one away.
- MK: At that time, could your parents send you packages if you needed something?
- EM: No, very seldom, no. (Chuckles) We were able to manage.
- MK: How about at the stores at Heart Mountain?
- EM: We had everything. We had a place to eat, too. And canteen, we buy our own. Everything we had. We had Japanese food, like from Denver they used to send into the stores outside. Then we used to go into the stores and buy our own Japanese food and things like that.
- SP: Could you cook in your barracks?
- EM: Yeah, we could. You know, portable stove.
- MK: What kind of furniture did you have at Heart Mountain?
- EM: Oh, regular furniture if you can afford. It's simple, not heavy like this—rattan and things light.
- SP: You bought your own?
- EM: Yeah, we could, and then we had apple boxes.
- MK: At Heart Mountain, how strict were they?
- EM: Oh, very strict.
- MK: What did they tell you you could do?
- EM: Oh, we cannot go out whenever we want—we had to get pass, every place we went. No outside. Stay in camp, ten thousand people. If you want to go out, you better get the pass first, and get the

permit. And if you were to leave for three days, we had to be back by a certain time. They'd be strict about going out.

MK: And if you went out of the camp at Heart Mountain, where would you folks go?

EM: Oh, we went to Billings, Montana, go shopping.

MK: How did people treat you if you went outside of camp of Heart Mountain?

EM: Oh, they were good. They never bothered us. Even the *haoles*, they never bothered us.

MK: They didn't look at you and think, "Who are you?"

EM: No. No, they never did. They look at you and they know—Oriental. Especially the *haoles*, they knew. They never questioned too much. The people were nice. They were nicer than what we expected them to feel towards us. So it was really nice.

MK: You know, I've heard that sometimes, the people in the camps worked outside.

EM: Oh, yes.

MK: How about you and your. . . ?

EM: My husband went out to work in Billings, Montana. He was out there working with a group, a farm. You know, they make side money.

SP: And interestingly, my sister, Kay, her husband was in Heart Mountain, also. And he used to go out and work in the beet fields on the farm.

MK: And then, how much money were you paid for your head waitress job?

EM: Wait now.

SP: Nineteen dollars, you told me.

EM: Nineteen dollars.

SP: A month.

MK: Nineteen dollars a month.

EM: See, everybody made sixteen dollars. But since I was the head waitress of the mess hall, I got more.

(Laughter)

SP: So you saved all that money?

EM: No.

(Laughter)

Gotta buy. (Laughs) You know women. (Laughs) So it worked out good, worked out good. The American government was nice. They treated us good.

SP: Except that they put you in the concentration camp.

EM: No, this government, we have a good government.

MK: What did you folks do in your spare time at Heart Mountain?

EM: Oh, we go to church, we have meetings, we had clubs. We had meetings, we had dancing. Everything outside, we had.

MK: What kinds of clubs did you have?

EM: Oh, ordinary club like we have outside. You can join anything—Buddhist clubs, whatever. It was just like outside, because ten thousand people in one camp, so there's a lot of people.

MK: You know, I think I read someplace that there were two movie theaters in Heart Mountain?

EM: Yeah, yeah, we could go to the movie theater. We pay our own. It was just like outside, so we didn't mind staying in there during the war. Instead of coming out to strange places like Chicago and everything, so that's why we stayed in camp. I mean, we had to come back to LA, so my husband said might as well stay in camp until the war ended. So we never did go out. A lot of people did though, the young ones, to Chicago and all that. New York.

MK: How come you wanted to go to Chicago?

EM: I don't know, just to get away, to get out. (Laughs) But my husband didn't want to, so we just stayed there.

SP: It was interesting that there were three brothers in camp.

MK: Her husband . . .

SP: Her husband's two brothers. His younger brother. He became a policeman or something.

EM: Oh, yeah, he was the police chief at the camp, my husband's younger brother.

MK: Tell us about that.

SP: They were furious. Tell them about that.

MK: Your husband's brother was a camp police chief?

EM: Yeah, my husband didn't like that. He said, "We in camp. Never mind about telling, 'You shouldn't do that, you shouldn't gamble.'" The friends get together in the mess hall, my husband said, "Forget about those things. You go out [i.e. when you get out of camp] and be chief, I'll be glad to be back, but not over here." But the wife, police chief in camp, she's happy. That's why my husband and the older brother used to go tell her off. "Get out of this system. Just be ordinary. Don't go and . . ."

SP: Snitch on the people.

- EM: “. . . tell the people don’t do this, don’t do that. Leave them alone in camp.” But the wife, big, big chief in camp, yeah? My husband and the older brother didn’t like the younger brother to be police chief in camp.
- MK: Did people get mad at you folks, because your brother-in-law was police chief?
- EM: Sometimes, sure. We got threatened one time, and that’s why my husband all the more hated it. But the wife, big shot, yeah? So they used to get after my sister-in-law, my two older brothers-in-law. “Get out of that kind of stuff. Never mind. After you go out, you be chief, okay. But not in camp, all Japanese.”
- MK: So what kinds of things did your brother-in-law have to watch out for? Gambling?
- EM: Oh, yeah.
- MK: What else?
- EM: Gambling and anything you do wrong, he’d go and arrest, see? You know, when you’re playing cards in the barracks or something, they going arrest. And when you drunk, they go and. . . . My husband and the older brother didn’t like that. “We’re all in camp, let ’em alone. You do something else.” But no, the wife, she’s a big shot being. They all used to argue. (Laughs) They used to tell her off. (Chuckles)
- SP: He was a college grad, right?
- EM: My husband’s third brother finished college in LA, see, so he was. . . . Yeah, that’s why all the more, the wife became big shot. (Chuckles)
- MK: And then, you know, you were saying when you folks went outside of camp to the towns—I think Cody or Powell, the towns that you went to?
- EM: Cody and Powell, two places in Wyoming. Yeah, yeah.
- MK: So I was wondering, how did they look at you or treat you?
- EM: No, ordinary. Nobody bother, yeah. We went shopping, and we would go in the restaurant and eat. They never bothered you. The Americans are good that way. Maybe Oriental, it might be different, they get kind of. . . . But the *haoles* were all good.
- SP: All the Midwesterners up there.
- EM: Yeah, they’re really good.
- SP: Chicago . . .
- EM: So it was nice. We didn’t mind.
- MK: And, you know, like you’re a Japanese from Hawai’i, yeah?
- EM: Yeah.
- MK: How were you treated by the *kotonks*? The Mainland Japanese, how did they treat you?

- EM: Oh, they looked down on us.
- MK: Yeah?
- EM: Yeah, the way we spoke—pidgin. No, they did. (Chuckles)
- MK: But how did the issei—did they like it when you could speak some Japanese?
- EM: Oh, yes. We spoke a lot of Japanese, especially among the *haoles*. When we didn't want them to know, we speak Japanese.
- MK: You know, when you were in camp, did they have any rules about you folks speaking Japanese in front of the *haoles*?
- EM: Oh, yes. Not to.
- MK: Not supposed to?
- EM: Yeah. They saw us that we don't speak Japanese in front of *haoles*. So it was good.
- MK: How did the guards treat you at Heart Mountain?
- EM: They treated us real good. Every time we go out of camp, we had to get pass, and they treated us real good. I was saying, at Heart Mountain, I went to Billings, Montana for four nights with my husband after we got married. The government treated us real nice, the government. Yeah, real good.
- MK: You know, as a married couple, was life better, easier for you folks than if you folks were single in camp?
- EM: No, I think it was the same . . .
- MK: Same?
- EM: . . . in and out. We had our freedom, yeah.
- MK: So the living conditions, the place you lived, still, no difference if you were married or single?
- EM: Yeah.
- MK: Same?
- EM: Felt the same. Good. So we didn't mind.
- MK: And I was wondering, when you folks were in camp, I know that some of the men were recruited. They wanted men to join the 442[nd Regimental Combat Team].
- EM: Yes, yes, yes.
- MK: What did you think about that?
- EM: I think it was good. Yeah, I think that was good.

- SP: But lot of people objected.
- EM: Oh, yeah, they did.
- SP: From camp.
- EM: Yeah, they wanted all of us to be in camp, not outside.
- SP: No, the people that were going to war, the young people. Some boys volunteered, right?
- EM: Oh, yes.
- SP: And the families were all upset.
- EM: Yeah, yeah, the boys from Hawai'i volunteered to go so that the families in Hawai'i would have it easy. Yeah, they were all good. Yeah, we were good citizens.
- MK: What did your husband think when the call came out for soldiers, for people to volunteer? What did your husband think about it?
- EM: Oh, he thought it was nice. Yeah, we wanted to be real good American citizens. Never go with the Japanese, but with this country.
- MK: What did you folks think about the ones that objected?
- EM: Forget about it. (Chuckles) We never bothered. Only a few objected, but most of us, we got together, as a citizen, yeah? So it made it easy.
- SP: Shigeno, when the war ended, how did you feel? How did you find out and what did you do?
- EM: They let us know. We all knew everything that was going on.
- SP: So what did you do? Were you happy?
- EM: Oh, yeah, we were happy, so we moved to LA right away. We didn't go out. I wanted to go to Chicago, because we're young yet. My husband's like, "Ah, we're not going. We're going back to LA," because they were always in the produce business, the family.
- MK: So when you moved back to LA, what did you folks do?
- EM: Well, we moved to LA, and we didn't have business anymore, so we were going to go to San Francisco. But as we were going to San Francisco, on the way, we stop to eat. This old Japanese couple had maybe about two years or one year, they were going to sell. I told my husband, "Hey, I think I'm going to buy over here, see how much they're going to release it for." And I said, "I'm going to start this business."
- My husband said, "It's up to you," because he's not going into the restaurant business. So when we went to eat over there, I asked the Japanese couple, old couple have it already, and that they're going to sell it.
- And I said, "Oh, I want to buy it. How much are you going to sell it for?"

Then she said, “You come back tomorrow.” So I talked to my husband. We didn’t have cash, so I talked to my husband.

“Tomorrow, we’re going to go back to the restaurant, have lunch, and I’m going to talk to the lady, if she can sell it to me.” And then when I went, she was waiting for me.

She said, “Are you going to buy it?” because they were old already, and they were about to retire. And we didn’t have cash, so she wanted almost \$4,000 for the place, a little place. So I went to where they sell the restaurant supplies, McPherson. And told him, “That restaurant there is up for sale, but I don’t have money because we just came out of camp.” And then he looked at me, Mr. McPherson, and he says—only two blocks away from the shop, see—so he looked at me and he said, “I think I’m going to trust you. I’m going to let you buy that place, then you pay me monthly.” So that’s what I did.

SP: That was Johnny’s Shrimp Boat?

EM: Yeah. So we got in, and then pay him little at a time until we paid off. We were there until we moved the restaurant. From there, how many years already? Forty years, forty-one years?

MK: So you opened that restaurant, and what kind of foods did you folks sell?

EM: Oh, regular—hamburger . . .

SP: Well, like I said, in the mornings, I would go at seven, open up, and make coffee and serve breakfast.

EM: You know, hamburger steak, short ribs. I made my own short ribs and I made my own chili—I started the chili from scratch.

SP: Beef stew for fifty cents a plate. (Chuckles)

MK: Beef stew?

EM: I used to go to every restaurant in the neighboring community—the Mexican place, and some other countries. I go eat at all the restaurants and make my own recipe. And every time I let my husband cook, it gets a little bigger, but changed recipe. Every time go, he get mad at me. He said, “I’m not going to cook anymore for you. I’m going to throw the pot away.”

I said, “Go ahead.” But he didn’t. So it took maybe three years to four years before I was satisfied with my own chili.

SP: Those who liked chili loved her chili.

EM: Yeah, I made my own recipe. I never even knew how to eat chili, you know, from here. But that’s why I started to go to that Negro restaurant, Mexican restaurant. I had my own chili recipe. Until today, I have the only one recipe.

MK: Oh, my goodness. Wow.

EM: Yeah, I did. Then, I got so busy that I had to freeze it, the chili base. Otherwise, can’t make it. Yeah, I have to have it instant like this, the base, and then I freeze it. And then I take it out. I got busy.

- MK: How come your restaurant was called Johnny's Shrimp Boat?
- EM: My husband's name was John. And I was selling shrimp, so I said, "Well, what shall I name this?" So first, I named it Johnny's Place. And then we start selling a lot of shrimp, so I changed it to Johnny's Shrimp Boat. And then more shrimp sold, yeah? And until—I don't know—forty-one years, I sold shrimp. Forty-one years in LA, I sold shrimp.
- SP: Especially on Good Friday, I used to go and help, because I have never seen people buy so much shrimp.
- EM: Yeah, like Good Friday, I had to have two French fryers outside the building to keep it up, otherwise, I can't keep it up.
- MK: So what kind of style shrimp were you making?
- SP: Like tempura.
- EM: Yeah, like tempura. Individual shrimp.
- SP: You know how they did later? Cut the shrimp in half and they sell 'em as one? (Laughs)
- MK: So you ran the restaurant business. It was you, your husband . . .
- EM: And her.
- MK: . . . your sister . . .
- EM: And then she went to Chicago to go to school, so my husband and I, we kept it up.
- MK: And what about hired help?
- EM: Oh, yeah. We had. . . . When we started, she, and I, and—who was the other lady? The three of us, we started.
- SP: No lady, I don't remember a lady.
- EM: Oh yeah. Anyway, you were going to school to Chicago. That summer, we opened, the three of us. Another sister, was it? Somebody, anyway, the three of us, we opened, because my husband wasn't going to be in the restaurant business. He didn't know how to cook, but he stayed until . . .
- SP: He did all the buying and all that.
- WN: So, when you had the restaurant, that's not the original place that you bought the first time?
- SP: Yeah, that's the one, Johnny's . . .
- EM: Johnny's Shrimp Boat. Yeah, that's the one.
- SP: We had seven stools.
- EM: Yeah. Seven stools. The first place I opened had seven stools, and I kept that for I don't know how many years.

- SP: Yeah. So what happened? You had to sell that and move across the street. Remember you told me about that?
- EM: Yeah, the parking lot, the people who had the building over there, was selling the parking lot to somebody that was going to—Walter's parking lot. So we had to move across. And I was there another eight years, and then he sold that place again. Eight, sixteen years. Then finally, my husband said, "We better buy our own place." So we bought—maybe four blocks down. We stayed there until we moved to Hawai'i. Business was good.
- WN: You know that drawing . . .
- EM: Yeah, yeah, that's the one.
- WN: That's the last one, the last location?
- SP: That was the first one.
- EM: That was the first one, the original one.
- WN: That was the one you bought for \$4,000?
- EM: Yeah, yeah, that's the original one. We stayed there until the building got torn down, and then we got another place to stay.
- SP: But they would experiment. They would stay open late.
- EM: When the bar closed at 2:30 [A.M.], we were till open.
- SP: That's when business was so good.
- EM: Yeah, people come in, yeah?
- SP: So they would, you know, stay open to see when it was the best to stay open.
- EM: It kept me busy, though.
- MK: Was that business in J-town? Was it in Japantown?
- EM: At first, yeah. First Street.
- SP: First and Second.
- EM: First and Main, near the city hall, we were right there. Then I stayed four blocks below, when they sold the property—the first place. So I was there until I moved here.
- MK: And then I think you also said you were involved in a hotel business, too?
- EM: Oh, yeah. I had a hotel business on First and Second, on Main Street. And we lived there, so we can go across the street—you know, restaurant—until I bought a home, maybe—how many years later I bought the home after? Then I bought nine miles away from my restaurant. And I still I had the hotel, so I had somebody—a Japanese couple—run the hotel. And we moved to our home.
- SP: And some of your workers lived there, yeah?

- EM: Yeah. Some of the workers lived there. I let them stay cheap. You know, the single ones. So it worked out good. It kept me busy. (Chuckles)
- SP: So you enjoyed camp?
- EM: Oh, I did. I enjoyed it.
- SP: All my friends tell me they had fun in camp.
- EM: I had fun in camp. (Chuckles) Wherever you go, you make yourself happy.
- SP: Well, kids our age were juniors and seniors in high school, so they always stick in bunches, you know.
- EM: Wherever you go, you make yourself.
- SP: The only thing that bothered me was the barbed wire and the machine guns.
- EM: My parents were worried because I was the first one to go there in 1939. I was the first one to leave Hawai'i. And then the war came, so I don't know. I used to call my mother, and she always used to cry. "When you going to come home?"
- "I cannot come home." The war started. But it worked out.
- MK: It must have been hard times for your mom, yeah, because your brother was also on the Mainland, yeah?
- EM: Yeah, he was going to school . . .
- SP: Well, yes, but they wanted us to get an education. That was their main thing.
- EM: Yeah. Well Tosh was with, what, Washington State? What school did he go to back in the day?
- SP: Springfield College in Massachusetts.
- EM: Oh, Massachusetts, yeah. He was in Massachusetts. Springfield College. So when the war came, my mother wanted him to sell and live with me. So I told him to come live with me. And he came that summer, after the war started. He stayed with me for two months. "Oh, what are we going to do? We got to move out of LA." So he told me he was going back East and go to school. So he went and he finished school over there. For five years, he went to school there.
- SP: He was going to be drafted. So he didn't want to go into the army, so he volunteered for the . . .
- EM: I don't know, he was the first Japanese—Toshio Shimabukuro. He was the first Japanese to be . . .
- SP: In the Coast Guard.
- EM: Yeah, my brother was one of the first Japanese to be in . . .
- SP: She wants to talk about camp.
- EM: Oh.

MK: No. Actually, no, we're *pau*, we're done with the camp section. But, you know, the last time we were here, you told us your father used to bootleg.

EM: My father used to bootleg?

MK: Yeah, and you used to sit on the 'ōkolehao in the car to help hide the 'ōkolehao [liquor distilled from *tí* root] in the car.

EM: Yeah, yeah. Especially when we used to go to Hilo. And their friends . . .

SP: Let me tell you the story. (SM chuckles.) My sister—they used to live in, where did they live, Kalapana? Puna?

EM: Up in Hilo, in the country over there.

SP: Past Hilo. He used to make the 'ōkolehao. And this guy in Hilo used to get it, and my dad would pick it up and bring it to Kohala. Now, the sheriffs knew about it, so they would make their rounds. So he would get a phone call. So he would hide the bottles, because they're sleeping, yeah?

EM: Yeah. I go with my father. It was . . .

SP: Wait a minute. (SM chuckles.) They're sleeping, and they put the bottles between them so they won't find it. Or they'll put it in the bushes—you know, the hedges? (Chuckles)

MK: Oh.

EM: Yeah, and we'd come home about midnight, from Hilo to Kohala, with the whiskey between us, my sister and I, with the blanket on. That's why.

(Laughter)

And then my father was, he was the contractor with the Kohala Sugar Company. So he would give it to the big shots at Kohala, because no more, yeah?

MK: Yeah, yeah.

SP: Or come to the house and pick it up.

MK: Yeah. We thought that was a great story.

SP: I can't believe it.

EM: Yeah, we went through all that. (Chuckles)

MK: Okay. And then another story was that, you know, your father stressed education, yeah? He wanted you folks to get education.

EM: Oh, yes. My father did.

MK: And then another thing is that he wanted you folks to live with the *haole* teachers?

EM: Oh, yeah.

SP: No, no, no.

MK: What was that about?

SP: Okay, on the plantation, because my dad was known, and the *haoles* knew him, we all got a job. We were asked to work for them. So all of us worked as part-time maids. She [SM] only worked one summer for the manager.

EM: I worked for the manager, one spring.

SP: She lived with schoolteachers. They asked for her to come in. A cottage of four teachers. And my *hānai* [adopted] sister worked for the Episcopalian. I worked for the Congregational. During the war, I would go in at 7:30 [A.M.]. We were on shift at school. I worked till 10:30, then fixed my lunch, and I would go to school in the afternoon. And then my younger sister was asked to work for a couple—schoolteachers. So he [i.e., father] believed that we should all go and work—and it was the best thing, too, because you learned to set the tables. . . . So when we left home to go out, when we went to fancy restaurants or anything, we knew exactly what to use. You know, it built your esteem. So it was the best thing. But education was the most important thing to him.

EM: For my dad.

SP: So we were very fortunate. And the Japanese community would say, “Why you educating your girls? They’re only going to get married.” (SM laughs.)

EM: Yeah, but my father wanted all of us to go to college.

SP: He said, “No, in case something happens to their husbands, they have something else to fall back on.”

EM: Yeah, my father believed in girls going to school, to have education, anyway. So he was the one, you know, in Kohala, that was pushing.

MK: Yeah, I think we’re done today.

SP: Well, we had great parents.

MK: I think so.

WN: Thank you.

MK: End of the interview.

SP: Oh, thank you very much.

MK: Thank you, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

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**Center for Oral History  
Social Science Research Institute  
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