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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Richard Kosaki (RK)

Honolulu, Hawai‘i

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

WN: Okay, we left the last time talking about resigning as vice president for academic affairs. Let me just start by asking you, when you took the job in 1974 to work with Fujio Matsuda, did you see it as a temporary appointment?

RK: Well, I see all administrative positions, especially so-called high positions, as temporary. I don’t think there’s anything close to tenure in those positions. So any administrative task that I take on, I don’t think, should last more than five years or a little more than that. I think new leadership would be nice. That’s one of the reasons I left the community college position after we got started. I thought I’d stayed there long enough to lay the groundwork, but others can take over. [Fujio “Fudge” Matsuda] asked me to serve, and inasmuch as he said he wasn’t that familiar with the university because he more recently had been with the state government as the head of transportation. He thought I was familiar with the university generally, [and] it would be helpful. I told him at that time probably no more than a year or two that I’d like to go back into teaching and he honored that commitment. So he wasn’t surprised that I was going to leave after the second year, although he said I could stay on. At that time, too, Fudge inherited a university which was on a plateau. With Hamilton, it was taking off; with Cleveland it was up and down. In a way, the state government was looking for so-called stability, so things were pretty much status quo. I think Fudge was a good manager in that sense. So, in academic affairs, there weren’t too many exciting things. They were monitoring large initiatives and it was difficult to make any changes. The university is like a dinosaur and it’s hard to change. The big joke is if the Edsel (were) the university department, it would still be here.

(Laughter)

It is one of the most, I found, the most difficult things to change. Even little things, you try to make little changes, but every one was a struggle. But it was not a time for any major changes, although I did want to see a change in some of the undergraduate programs. I thought that the undergraduates were spending too much time on campus. I wanted them to have a tighter program and to get out sooner, and I was in favor of looking at the programs. In some fields like engineering, I think there were 130 credits that they needed. I said we should have a limit of 120 credits because a few credits didn’t make that much of a difference in one’s education. But even those ideas were difficult to have considered. It was a period of very little, I think, movement. This was not only locally, but nationwide, too.
WN: Did that factor into your decision though, to eventually leave in ’76?
RK: Well, I always wanted to go back into teaching, so that was a good time for me to go back into teaching.

WN: And yet, vice president for academic affairs is the number-two person on campus, or in the system?
RK: Supposedly, yes.
WN: Okay.
RK: It was a good experience and I could see the whole campus, especially the natural sciences, the research areas, in which I wasn’t as familiar and to see the whole picture. From the position also, because I handled community colleges and we were getting into a statewide system, to get an overview, I think was very good for me.

WN: And this is preceding the chancellor for UH Mānoa.
RK: Then I went back into teaching for a couple of years, I thought I’d stay there. Then I got a call and it was again Fudge Matsuda, at his urging pretty much, that when Marvin Anderson became chancellor at Mānoa—Mānoa chancellors had come and he was the sixth chancellor or whatever—but when Marv was appointed, he again asked me to come back. And I was hesitant, but Fudge also was there to twist my arm and saying again because Marv Anderson’s background, he was the dean of the Law School and only recent, not too long in the islands. So Fudge thought it’d be helpful for someone like me who had a long history with the campus, you know, to help Marv, to be the vice chancellor for academic affairs, and Marv gave me a pretty free hand.

WN: You went back to teaching. You were there for eight years actually, ’76 to ’84 as professor of political science. Well, did you enjoy that? I mean, seems like that’s what you were working toward and then you’re going back, and you go back in 1982 as administration. In other words, what did you want to do at that time?
RK: I thought I liked to do more teaching, per se, and not get involved in the faculty politics. Previously I had been very active—faculty senate and so forth. I think I was able to do that. One of the things I enjoyed was, the department eventually assigned me to be the undergraduate advisor and that was a position I really enjoyed. Getting to know most, if not all, of the political science majors and I tried to streamline the advising routine. That was a job I enjoyed doing as undergraduate advisor. I taught courses and I thought I had a few excellent courses. The course that I taught that was most popular was Hawai‘i State Government and Politics. When I look back, many made it into the state legislature, like Tom Okamura, and some of the more recent ones, I’m trying to think of their names, the one from Wahiawa.

WN: Bobby Bunda? Ron Menor?
RK: The younger ones.
WN: Hagino? Gerald [Hagino]?
RK: I knew the brother [David Hagino] at the university, but many of them made it into the legislature. One of the fun courses I taught was constitutional convention sort of a course
dated before the constitutional convention was held. And I found that several of the students who took that course—I had about sixty in class I think—several of them ran for the con-con and three or four got in, including the youngest one. I can’t think of her name, but she was the youngest delegate.

WN: Which con-con is this?

RK: This is about the nineteen—when was the con-con? Somewhere in that period.

WN: Okay, anyway. (Pause) What was the . . .

RK: The other thing that I was working on, was trying to start or revive the public administration program. Earlier I thought that was one of our most successful programs and we had some very successful graduates like Hideto Kono, Dewey Kim, George Steppe and others, and I thought it was a good program and tried to revive it. I must say, most of the department were not very sympathetic, but eventually we did get a program going in public administration.

MK: And this program was at an undergraduate level or a graduate level?

RK: We tried to get a master’s program in public administration.

WN: When you say “revived,” that means it was in place before that?

RK: Oh yes, we had a very strong program in my earlier days in the department, when I first joined the department, we were very strong in that area. We had a master’s program, but somehow it disappeared and we tried to revive (it). I think it’s now back on its feet, but I don’t think as strong as it was before.

WN: In Hawai‘i state and local politics, was there a strong interest back then on the subject?

RK: Oh yes, it was one of our more popular undergraduate courses. That’s one course where several non-majors would come in. It was kind of a fun course to teach. I tried to enliven it. I tried to schedule it in the afternoon, Tuesdays, Thursdays, for over an hour. I would periodically bring in public figures. We talked about the legislature process, I’d bring in a couple legislators, lobbyists. When we talked about the judicial system, I had no trouble finding at least one justice or judge to come to class. (Judge) Walter Heen was also one of my students earlier, and he was one of my better lecturers. Walter’s very bright and tends to tell it like it is. What I found interesting was, I used to call people, labor leaders, for example, or others, people connected with, say, HGEA [Hawai‘i Government Employees Association]. I don’t know whom I called, but so many of them would read the textbook. They asked what the textbook was, read the textbook, and practically gave a lecture. So I try to talk to them before that. When this pattern occurred, I tried to get a hold (of them) before (class), and I said, “Look, we just want you to talk about experience and talk about what you think it is.” Henry Epstein, (from the) UPW [United Public Workers], was around the most successful, he was bright and he was, you know, almost eloquent and he just told it like it was. He was very effective. When I taught public administration I had problems when I brought in the people from the city and county or the state to talk about how they ran the so-called civil service system. So many of them were so textbookish, which was not what I wanted because that was what the students were getting from me. So that course was fun to give. During the sessions, I could give assignments in which they could go down to the legislature and have observations or some of them would serve as interns.
MK: You know, you mentioned that there are some legislators or con-con members who had taken your course, and I notice that there are quite a few people that go into politics with a background in political science. What do you think politicians or politicians-to-be can gain most from having a poli[tical] sci major, a poli sci background?

RK: I guess it can be of some help if a student is initially interested in politics, and some of them are, it’s easy to so-call teach them or they’ll learn more because they’re interested in the subject. If most students were interested in what they’re taking, they’d learn. If you look back, we take a course because it’s a course, we want to get credits, and we’re not really interested in the subject matter unless we get a very stimulating professor. So that’s good so that they can learn more, teach themselves. And, of course, it’s good to know about (government), especially if you’re not going make them a lawyer. Because a lot of them then go to law school and then they go into the legislature. But I think it gives you more, if you have beyond an introductory course, you can get more about the government. You can learn about the civil service system, the history, and so forth. You can take a course in the legislative process and so on. Although I must tell you that more than one student, after I’ve seen them in the legislature, would candidly say to me, “Hey it’s not what the textbook says, it’s not what you people lectured us on. It’s a little different.”

(Laughter)

You don’t quite get the inside story. One of the students who got into the constitutional convention later was still a student after the convention, came back to class, and so I had him do a paper on his experience at the constitutional convention. It was an excellent paper I wish I could have had it published. I couldn’t because he had real names as to all of the shenanigans that were going on. He sat in and he said, oh the horse trading, and this and that, and he recorded this. But with all the names in it, you couldn’t publish it at the time. But he did a very good job of observing the dynamics.

Well, actually I don’t know how you prepare for politics. I think the same as you prepare for life in general. And I think in teaching, it’s really a people business. That’s what administration is, even in the university. It’s how you treat people, how they regard you. That basically is it. And for politicians, that’s very important. Although one of the things I remember in one of the courses, for some reason we got hung up on this politician’s image and his real self, so to speak. Oh, I know, we got started with how politicians can be classified in different ways. There are some who are very popular with the public like a John F. Kennedy in the Senate. He walks into the senate chamber and the galleries go agog, but on the floor they ignore him. So he has his outside so-called power, but the inside no. Someone like Lyndon Johnson may not have been popular with the public, but he’s the guy with the power inside. I said once, so let’s look at our state legislature and try and see whether you can classify on that basis. And it was an interesting task and they pretty much agreed that someone like, they said, [Neil] Abercrombie at that time was an outside person, more so with television. Television people love Neil—I saw him this morning, but I didn’t have a chance to say hello to him—because Neil Abercrombie is eloquent. He’ll speak on any topic and as the TV man said to me, “And boy, he knows what sixty seconds is.” And Neil was the most popular. But you have someone like Mamoru Yamasaki of Maui, quiet, but (in) a powerful position. He finally got to be chairman of finance, way and means. He does his homework, liked by everybody, makes no flowery speeches, he doesn’t cater. Maybe some people think he can’t, but he’s a pretty effective speaker if he wants to be. But he smiles, gets along with people, and does his homework and gets things done. Basically, it’s a people business.

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WN: Seems like you enjoyed the undergraduate teaching experience. How would you compare that to graduate teaching?

RK: Well, graduate teaching has its rewards, too. I've had some very good graduate students. One of my last years of teaching, most promising was Roland Kotani. Roland was an excellent student and he did some beautiful papers for me. We were sort of looking forward to—I thought, gee, I'm going to retire soon so he could take my place. He was working towards a degree. Of course, he got involved in politics itself, but he could teach my course. When I retired I told him to go through my library, pick out whatever books he wanted to. He didn't take very many, but he took a few.

There were other graduate students. I had at least one graduate seminar usually in politics of Hawai‘i or public administration, and there were some excellent students and some good papers. Just the other day, well, this was an earlier time, but just two days ago I got a call from one of my former students, Chieko Tachihata. You know Chieko? Retired as a librarian. She was asking me about the whereabouts of another student who was doing graduate work, who was undergraduate here but also did graduate work. She wrote a master's thesis on the Hawaiian Homelands in the early beginnings and this was written in the '50s, Marilyn Voss. Her name, she was Marilyn Mitsuo, Marilyn Mitsuo Voss, she was married. She got married to Steven Voss. Both of them were very brilliant students. Marilyn was outspoken and very liberal, but she was a very bright student. Chieko said people are still asking, still reading her master's dissertation, and somebody wanted to get in touch with her. I've lost touch with her. Last I knew, this is some years back, she and Steve were teaching in some liberal arts college in the northeast. But there were other graduate students, and you have these seminars, you get to know them and it's very, very, fun.

WN: Seems like you enjoyed the undergraduate teaching experience.

RK: Well, teaching in general, but I think—now they're making up for it, but I think a large university like University of Hawai‘i does not give enough attention to undergraduates.

WN: Right.

RK: You can get lost here and that's too bad. The graduate students, we find a place in most departments for them. Even like a place I went, University of Minnesota, one of the largest. As a graduate student, I thought I had a lot of attention. But undergraduates are just, you know, like mass cattle. They're anonymous and so forth, and that's too bad because there are many promising ones. Each one could be helped. In the department they told me if I wouldn't mind doing the undergraduate (advising). I really wanted to. So that was very pleasant responsibility.

WN: Your career sort of is reflective of your support of undergraduate education, you know, to the community colleges and so forth. Why did you leave that in 1982 to go back into administration?

RK: As I said, Marv Anderson became chancellor. At one time Fudge said, “Maybe you should be chancellor,” and so on. But anyway, Marv Anderson became chancellor, so then Marvin and Fudge came after me to “go help.” And here again, I thought I'd be there for a couple years only. Marv did stay for, I think, a couple of years and he left. But at that time, I think the general consensus was we don't need the chancellor's position so I became the last acting chancellor. I think, as I noted in my farewell note, farewell from
the acting chancellor, this was December of '85, I said that, “Nineteen eighty-five has
been a significant year for the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. After December 27, the
office of the chancellor will no longer exist.”

WN: What are your personal views on the chancellor system? Do you think it was a good
thing?

RK: It could be a good thing. It was done on the premise that the president of the university
had too much on his hands. He had a large system, the community colleges wanted
attention, and so on, and he has to pay a great deal of attention, the president, to the
public, be involved in fundraising, and things of that sort. And didn’t give him enough
time to administer a very large complex campus like University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.
And if nothing else, that someone should be in charge of the, at least (the) academic
programs. But, of course, you can’t separate the academic from the financial. If you don’t
have the money, you can’t go on with the programs. But from the very beginning, Harlan
Cleveland began this arrangement. He was the president and he appointed as chancellor,
Dick Takasaki, who was his vice president. And I think I had said this before, but I
remember Dick Takasaki, in one of this first memos to the president was, “Okay now
what are my duties and responsibilities? I wonder if we can spell this out.”

And Harlan, who believed in creative ambiguity, dodged the question, and said, “Well
work it out as we go along.” More or less.

So (in) that position, Richard Takasaki stayed for a year, Wytze Gorter had it for two
years, Doug Yamamura was acting and then he became chancellor for, I think three
years. Howard McKaughan was acting, then Durward Long came for two years, then
Marv Anderson was interim and then he took over for two years, and then I came on for a
year and a half as acting. That was the end of it. As I said in my memo, “This move to
eliminate this position of chancellor has been advocated by the recent occupants of the
chancellor’s position who have found that the authority and staff provided that office do
not match its duties and responsibilities. This may partly explain the fact that seven
individuals have served that position in its fourteen year span.”

But, you know, they’re wrestling with this question again. It can work, there has to be
someone who more directly works with the Mānoa programs and Mānoa faculty and
students. But a lot depends on the president. Here again, we go back to it’s a people
business, so it depends on the personality. I told Al Simone when he became president,
this is when the position was abolished and he agreed that it should be abolished. Al was
kind enough, he wanted me then to move in and become the vice president for academic
affairs. But I told Al, I think I’ve had enough of administration and I was going to retire
soon anyway. But Al did offer me that position. But I said to Al, “You know, problem
with that position is, if the football wins it’s yours, if it loses it’s mine.”

(Laughter)

It’s not a happy arrangement.

WN: Did you feel that the chancellor had the, you know, what’s the word—the responsibility,
did they have any kind of authority?

RK: Ah, no. It was always fuzzy authority, and I remember couple incidences where a dean
would come to me and discuss something and he didn’t like the decision I made. He’d
trek over—it only took a few minutes to get to the president's office—and I may or may not be overruled. On one occasion, I was asked to change my decision and I don't think that's the way we should operate. Maybe we should mutually talk things over, but some decisions have to be made much more quickly, and so the chancellor should have some authority. In the last days of administration when I was a chancellor, it was difficult, but here it was a period of declining resources statewide, and so the emphasis was on program—what we'd call them—program reviews.

WN: Right, right.

RK: Program assessment. When I look back, we spent so much time and effort and this was before, I think most of the secretaries were on computers. God, the reams of paper and reports we submitted. I think I stacked them up once it was almost six feet high. And what did it amount to? Hardly anything. Because I found that we professors are very good at rationalizing positions. I figure when a program came in with a very heavy, thick report, they were being very defensive, but they were very skillful, too. When push came to shove, a lot of it went outside the university community. You get calls from legislators and parents and others saying, "You can't do that to that program." As I said, university's a dinosaur, it's hard to make change. Even there was one program that we all thought should be abolished, but I think to this day it may still be there. It's so difficult.

WN: I think those days they called it a "hit list." I think the media called it that.

RK: It's difficult to execute that, even if you have a list.

MK: What was it like working with Al Simone?

RK: Al was fun. I mean, you know he had a lot of energy and liked to talk. He was, in some ways, easy to work with. I really didn't work too long with him because I was opposition for a little while. I think because he was vice president for academic affairs when I was the chancellor. When he became the president, I no longer was on campus.

WN: I'd like to get into asking you about 1984 when Simone became president and according to the media it was after Cecil Mackey and so on, it became a two-person contest between Al Simone and yourself. What are your views on that process or whatever happened?

RK: I really don't know whatever happened. I get different stories of how the regents were split, but I think Al had the inside track with the regents. He was closer to most of them than I was. And I think there was, this was to succeed Fudge.

WN: Right.

RK: I guess, and there was some feeling that, hey not to have—Fudge and I both Japanese-Americans and we both, not only McKinley High School graduates, we're classmates. We'd been classmates since the seventh grade and some people thought that wasn't going to be a change, although I think some of our approaches are different. So there was that element, too, and Al was very attractive in his way. Whereas Fudge was not as outgoing, Fudge was a very nice person, calm, and he was always in a good favorable mood, etcetera. He was good for the time, as they wanted stability and everything else. Al was more of a live-wire. He was very active. I don't mind even if I said he was loquacious sometimes. But people wanted that change I think, too. They don't think Kosaki for Matsuda was going to be that change. I don't know, you have to ask the people who
know. I get stories indirectly about this, that, and so on, but I don’t know what really was the story on that.

WN: I read once where, you said that Kosaki has the support of the Mānoa faculty, and somebody said that’s the kiss of death (laughs).

RK: Yeah.

WN: How do you feel about that?

RK: Yeah, Haunani Trask came to hug me. And Neil Abercrombie. And somebody told me, “Oh, I know why you didn’t get it.”

(Laughter)

But, that may be, there may be some truth to it. Although in the earlier occasions, what I’m hearing now is, I wasn’t known downtown, like Fudge was known downtown. And the search people, especially per se the professionals, not the university, said the university president should be someone who was respected and known downtown. Well, I’ve done very little with the business community. I knew the politicians, but not the business community. And the Big Five people. Some of them knew me later, Harold Eichelberger and Herb Cornuelle. But in my earlier days, I had no social, least of all social, but hardly any professional contacts with them. And you need some. In many ways, the president’s job is a political job. So you need someone who is you know known in the political-economic world.

WN: Well some of the other names that came up . . . .

RK: And there is some truth to also what you’re saying that, UHPA [University of Hawai’i Professional Alliance] came out for me, the faculty union, and that sometimes becomes a negative.

WN: Being Mānoa chancellor, did this presidential selection issue have anything to do with rivalry between Mānoa and, say, the community colleges? Did you get any of that?

RK: Not at all. Actually I was on good terms with Mānoa. The one constituency which I didn’t know as well and some of them openly told me they had doubts were some of the people with the research institutes, especially the natural sciences. They thought I wasn’t favorably inclined to research and I was too much (for) undergraduate education and (with) fervor.

WN: I know you mentioned that as a drawback to when you were in line for president when Fudge was named, but did the same issues come up . . .

RK: Oh, yeah. I think was more so later. Maybe they thought as chancellor of Mānoa I didn’t pay enough attention to the research people. And I got some of them mad by saying, “Well, you’re big boys, you shouldn’t rely on the state for funding.”

Because some of them said, “Oh, like University of California.”

You don’t blame them, all the universities try to emulate the so-called well-known universities that are models, if not Harvard or Stanford, it’s Berkeley or UCLA [University of California at Los Angeles].
I said, “I understand in Berkeley, the state of California puts in very little money from the state itself into research. The research boys go out and get (their) own money from the federal government, from large corporations and engineering firms and so forth.” And one of them didn’t like my saying so.

WN: You talked about being political. I remember in the list of candidates on which you were on the list well as Cecil Mackey was on the list, but also two other local candidates. Neil Abercrombie was on that list and Mary Bitterman was on that list, two very, very, political downtown-type people. So you know, there was this.

RK: That’s not surprising. And Mackey was an interesting choice. I got to meet him after he was appointed, but I really didn’t get to know him.

WN: Can you talk a little bit about what you think you could’ve done or would’ve done had you been named president in 1984?

RK: Oh, I don’t know that I could have made that many changes, but I just suspect I would try somehow try to get Mānoa to do a better job on undergraduate education. The problem of community colleges’ students transferring to Mānoa shouldn’t be a problem at all and I would really come down hard on that. On the matter of undergraduates, I think what I would strive for—maybe it’s an old-fashioned idea—but try to get the students to be more full time on campus by more attractive residential development and commercial towns right around the campus, have a really campus town. I think Mō’ili‘ili is a bit too far, no one wants to walk more than a block these days. And try to get the community more involved in it.

But also I think we try to decentralize more in terms of giving each campus more leeway as to what they want to do, because I really—they may advocate a different class schedule, different schedules for them. It’s difficult now, with all the faculty being in one union as to how you work out the details. Because I think some community colleges would profit by having, instead of a semester system, a quarter system or a ten-week system or whatever, because a lot of their work is in training, even have different programs. I notice now that the department of education has schools on different schedules. I would try for less uniformity among the campuses, and get each campus to do more of what it wants to do, and therefore you need to have strong heads of campuses and give them, I think, a lot of rope.

Mānoa is still the center and Mānoa is so complex that it’s really one that’s difficult to lead, or I don’t think you can, you can govern it. But you have to keep on top of it to see that resources are provided, not equally, but to the deserving things. I know it’s difficult game because nobody wants a cut. But it doesn’t make sense to keep everything the same.

WN: What about the issue of autonomy?

RK: I’m glad you brought that up because you’re talking about from the legislature, the governor, state government in general.

WN: Similar to what we have now.

RK: I think that’s important because in many ways we’ve been trying to get the university to be more so-called autonomous, although autonomy isn’t quite the right word because nothing is really autonomous. But I know what you mean, be more independent in a
sense. I think it's a good idea, and it was when I was acting chancellor that we got an accreditation visit from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges [WASC] and we got socked when we were put on probation. What was it called [warning]? Not on probation, but we got cautioned and they came down on us saying, "You don't have enough autonomy." That the legislature butts in too much. Somebody said that I welcomed that. Well, maybe I did.

WN: Welcomed what?

RK: Having that accreditation come hard on us. Because I said (it) was a factor, the legislature and the governor, in many ways—and not only that, really it's the budget bureau—had too much control over what we were trying to do and that wasn't healthy for (the) university. In other words, oftentimes when (an) accreditation team comes, and I'm well familiar with accreditation because I served for I don't know how many years on both the senior commission and the junior commission of WASC. I knew what the procedures are and I knew most of the characters involved. But when they came down, I agreed with them. Because a lot of the time, accreditation you're on the defensive, you're trying to put on your best face and saying, "No, this is correct." No, you're doing it the right way or this and that. But I agreed with them that we were suffering from this lack (of autonomy). We're too closely tied in with the state government. It wasn't just the legislature, the governor, it was the budget bureau. With all (these) requirements, bureaucratic requirements, and so on. So I thought it was healthy for us to get a wake-up call. I didn't cause it because I can't tell the accreditation team what to do, but I didn't disagree with their finding. We got socked with a—what was it? A caution or . . . I should know because there's a term, it's not quite probation, or maybe it was (a warning).

WN: Censureship?

RK: No, that's not a word we use, but anyway. It was sort of saying not everything is hunky-dorry and we put a big question mark on you, and we're coming back in two or three years to see whether you have done anything about this very crucial problem and it's over with. And the problem is what you consider to be autonomy.

SIDE ONE

SIDETWO

WN: Well, it seems like there were a lot of layers of bureaucracy and the chancellor's office was, you know, maybe indicative of that. Would you say the chancellor's office at Mānoa had a different role than, say, the chancellor of community colleges?

RK: Oh yeah, slightly different role. Because the chancellor of community college when I was in a similar position was first created as a vice president for community colleges. It was an administrative position, but I didn't directly handle students, or in fact, the teaching faculty—this was done on the individual campuses—and was more handling the development of all the campuses. But the Mānoa chancellor works directly with the faculty, almost directly with the students with the programs that affect students directly. The chancellor of community colleges is more strictly administrative in that sense of being more bureaucratic.
Although, having said that though, when I think back, as vice president for community colleges, it was a fun job. The community colleges weren't that complicated. Programs weren't as diverse as Mānoa and the faculty wasn't as large. And I remember I prided myself on knowing the names of almost every faculty member on all the campuses. I remember I talked to President and Mrs. Hamilton in having—I said you have cocktail parties for faculty at Mānoa, why don't we have one for the community colleges? They readily agreed and we had a great party. In the beginning, partly, it was a morale booster for the community colleges and I stood in line with President and Mrs. Hamilton. [Virginia] Ginny Hamilton told me later, “My god, Dick, you know the names of all these people.” At that time I did know. I especially got to know the janitors and custodians on the neighbor island campuses because I’d go out to neighbor islands and I’d often have to stay overnight. After three o’clock, nobody’s on the campus but the custodians and me, so we had a great time.

(Laughter)

I tell you, I found them, especially on Maui and Kaua‘i—we didn’t have Hilo at the time—on Maui and Kaua‘i they were the most devoted members on the campus. I remember telling the faculty, “Boy, if you people were as dedicated as your custodians, we would have a great school.” Yeah, that was fun to get to know them, real people.

WN: You know, in 1982, I found an article that was written about you, and in it you stated that faculty morale was at it’s lowest that you’ve ever seen. I don’t know if you remember making those comments, but this is when you recommended like a faculty club, putting park benches, rather than concrete . . .

RK: Oh, yeah, yeah. I thought we were at low ebb. Oh, yeah, I remember I made some of these wild statements in a talk before the faculty or somebody, I don’t know. We were campaigning, I guess, we were asked to campaign for the position, the UH forum.

WN: Chancellor, yeah?

RK: Mm-hmm.

WN: So this is when you were in the running for chancellor.

MK: You mentioned a faculty club, replacing the concrete benches.

RK: I went back to teaching and I, in a way, got more—well, this, we really get involved. So often in Bachman Hall you can sit there and not meet, except for angry faculty and certain deans, you never get to see anybody. You get to see outside people, but you don’t get to see students and so forth. I used to try to make it a habit at least one afternoon every week to walk around campus. But anyway, when I got back into teaching, I thought when I got to become a faculty member myself, I was amazed at how dispirited the faculty seemed to be. Partly it was function of size. We had grown so large, (like) large cities, and you get to be impersonal. When I was active in the faculty before, that was maybe twenty years before we had a smaller departments, we knew each other. We’d go to coffee together, we’d socialize in the evenings, but I found this pattern not to be true anymore. The new faculty, partly, they said, because they don’t live close to campus, they have to live in housing far away. Probably because they were more discipline-oriented and they were more interested in doing their research at home or in the library, and they were more interested in impressing their professional colleagues in the same
discipline elsewhere than trying to impress the rest of the social science department, or the rest of the natural science department, and so on. I found there wasn’t that cohesiveness.

The students themselves were more apt to, you know—whereas as a student, I stayed on campus, although I’m told it wasn’t typical. Most of the students were not staying on campus. They’re running off to jobs all over, or going surfing or whatever. So I thought that was not an ideal situation. On top of that, I found the physical facilities—I was back in the classroom and some of the classrooms in Crawford Hall, for example, I found to be awful. Broken chairs, dirty walls, blinds that didn’t go up or down, and so I made a statement. I remember getting a call from Phil Koehler, who was a former student of mine, and a military person who was then in charge of physical facilities. He was mad.

He said, “What are you talking about?”

So I said, “Come on up. I’ll show you what I’m talking about.”

He told me, “What would be ideal?”

I said, “Ideal would be air-conditioned rooms, to have them looking nice.”

Anyway. I thought the campus ambiance was terrible. It wasn’t conducive to helping the morale of the faculty or the students, and it wasn’t conducive to learning. Yeah, I got some calls from the administration after that.

(Laughter)

WN: You also advocated putting park benches rather than concrete, you know.

RK: Yeah, I thought there should be places where students—this is a commuting campus, and special facilities ought to be set up so students can stay on campus. We didn’t have a very effective student center. We built a student center and I must say taking some of the planners over to the old Willows restaurant I said, “This is the kind of thing we need.” But look what we got, a concrete monster. So I wanted the ambiance that student and faculty could sit and have coffee, or to, you know, just talk under the trees and so forth, and have comfortable benches, not hard concrete. But that never quite materialized. One of the first things I did as chancellor was hold a contest in which I asked departments or clubs—and I’m a firm believer that students should join organizations and work with, get to know other students with like interests—and challenge them to beautify the campus. Some of the clubs did. I think there was, I don’t know whether it was chemistry club or someone who won the prize and did a beautiful job of planting and getting benches around a certain place, but I don’t know if that was kept up.

WN: There was talk, I remember reading about turning College Hill into a faculty club. Was that before the presidents were using that as a home?

RK: Yeah, there was talk later, but College Hill was interesting in that Tom Hamilton, who was used to having a president’s house, went around the neighborhood, saw College Hill, which was called College Hill because it was really O‘ahu College, Punahou. The Athertons were there and he got to know the Athertons. Tom was a good talker and talked the Athertons into donating it, presidents’ home, which I think was a terrific move. Some of us wanted a faculty club. Yesterday I saw Vince Peterson at lunch. Vince is one of the old faculty members retired, and he says, “Oh, what happened to our efforts to get
a faculty club?” I still have a card. Some of us put some money down, we tried to buy College Inn, on the corner of university and what is it?

WN: Dole Street.

RK: Yeah, Dole Street. And we didn’t have enough, I guess. Later on, I remember with Dean Contois, who was my academic officer, vice chancellor, we tried to get a house, but we just couldn’t find the person to provide the money, the funds necessary. I don’t know, now they tell me faculty clubs are passé, and many campuses are giving them up. The new faculty, as I said, and I don’t know, don’t seem to care for faculty clubs. They have interests elsewhere, and after all you can sit home and email and talk to anybody. You don’t have to pay dues every month. Anyway, it’s a different ballgame now. So I don’t know whether the faculty club idea would work, but I’d still like to see someplace—especially as I get to see a lot of my retired faculty friends. Of course, now I see them like I did this morning at the services for Joanne Stauffer. Old faculty who’re remaining and talk about getting together. And some of them do get together from time to time. There’s a small group. And it’s interesting that all over—my friend in Colorado told me about this they call ROMEO, Retired Old Men—excuse me, but most of them are men, Retired Old Men Eating Out.

(Laughter)

So they’re called ROMEO clubs. There’s one in town. But, you see, if we could have a place to go to it’d be nice. And what I would advocate is not a faculty club, but a university club and we’d have interested members of the community also come in. The businessmen, there are a lot of retired businessmen that do a lot of reading. Herb Cornuelle is a good example, as a guy that took the Publishers Weekly and read it and you know, New York Times Book Review, and so forth, kept up. It’d be interesting to have him. A lot of lawyers in town who’d like to discuss current events or Shakespeare or whatever and it’d be good for the bonding of the university and community. After all, this is a state-land grant and we should be concerned about the community at large. And we can learn and benefit from that interaction. So a university club would be ideal. If I had money I would love to have set something up. Atherton House, in many ways, is good, the location, the dormitory rooms could be used, you know, for friends of faculty who come in who also want to discuss other than the weather, football, but we even didn’t discuss football. It would be fun, but we never quite pulled it off.

WN: When you were the consultant to the master plan in 1990—this is after you were in the state government—are these some of the things that you advocated?

RK: In some ways. The report, again, puts heavy emphasis on undergraduate education. That learning is not a spectator sport. I think we put down that you got to—we were asking the faculty to do more interactive learning. Engage the students in the learning process, which, by the way, was something really stressed in the report that was put out years ago by Ken Mortimer when he was at Penn State. He headed a national commission and they did a report which impressed me very much. I knew some of the committee members and, I forget what it was called, but their major point as far as I was concerned was they’re saying that we should change our teaching methods, put the emphasis on learning, which is something that was picked up much later, by especially the community colleges. And that to be effective, learning has to be active. It’s not a passive thing, you don’t sit there and get facts. You got to have facts come alive by seeing the significance, by engaging in an activity, by doing research, by actually doing something about the
knowledge that you have. And I think more and more that should be the case, I think education has to change its methods, especially now as we get a more diverse group. We don’t just get the so-called nerds, those who do well in paper tests, which is not a good indication as we’re finding out more and more, that that SAT [Scholastic Aptitude Test] does as much harm as good as a recent book points out. So we’ve got to (change) our (teaching) methods. We try to point to that.

Another thing that my wife and I worked on. It was an interesting assignment, by the way, as to how we got involved in it. The title of the report we put out was A Statewide Plan and Beyond. The “beyond” meant that the world is changing, we ought to be more global. I wish we had more boldly stated, earlier we had, but we had it muted somewhat, that given the nature of transportation of the world today call it a global world, that University of Hawai‘i should actively attract more foreign students, out-of-state students. We had a policy in which we limited enrollments. We were at a point—the state was worried that too many people were coming Mānoa, that we had to take care of our resident students, and our tuition was low, and we had a—what did they call (it)? Controlled growth. Maybe it had its place, but I think we were way beyond that, and we didn’t change our policies to reflect the changing world. I think what happened is Hawai‘i Pacific University is doing what I thought we should be doing, actively go out and recruit foreign students.

I think Hawai‘i is an attractive place for education. When I was in the governor’s office, I tried to talk them into that, more than sports. Well, sports is okay, it can attract. I said, “In the long run, education has a greater staying power. It’s cleaner in many ways and it’s constant. It’s not just one bowl game here, one golf tournament here. The kids go home and you can have year-round schooling. You can have, in the summers, if you still want to have your outmoded summer session, you can have summer festivals for music or plays. You know, you can introduce kabuki, then to the Western audience and that sort of thing. I thought we should have gone more for having our students meet more foreign students. Have more foreign students come here and not only the students, but the whole community can benefit from it. East West Center is a good example. It’s a shame that the East West Center cut down the number of students in their programs because I thought, I still think, that was the strength and essence of their program.

At any rate, I thought University of Hawai‘i should have done that. That’s why I wanted more dormitories here to house those students, and I didn’t want a dormitory just for international students, but have a mixture. Any dorm would have a mixture of local and so forth because I thought that was part of learning experience, expanding horizons. We never quite got to that point. I wish we would. Even the Mainlanders, not because they can play football or basketball, but heck if they’re interested in Buddhism, they’re interested in Oriental art, Oriental music or Polynesian mythology or whatever, encourage those students to come here to learn. They could come from Chicago, Connecticut, Alabama, so forth. I think it’s great for them to try. By the same token I think it’s great for all students to go out of state. I don’t begrudge a student going out of state for an education, if he can afford it, if it fits his family patterns and so forth.

In fact, I was an advocate of languages. I think language teaching in the American colleges is, on the whole, a dismal failure. I partly base it on my own experience, having taken Japanese, French, Spanish, and not being able to speak well and understand those languages well. We have large Japanese classes and I thought we should have sent them to Japan for a term, summer term, or even for six weeks. I thought they’d learn more Japanese. And not send them to Tokyo or in the big city, but send to more a small,
medium-sized city. I even talked to the language department. What we would do is, in the morning—because they said, “Well, you still got to give them classes.”

I said, “Well, maybe you should give them an introductory course here and then send them for an intensive course in Japan.” In the morning you might have formal courses, but in the afternoon, let them get out and let them maybe take part-time jobs if they can selling things or doing something or working in a restaurant so they have to talk Japanese. They have to understand the language. I said that’s the best way for them to learn, and you talk about the language department always say it’s not just the language because they got to know a foreign culture. I don’t think you get much taking a language course at a university (in) Hawai‘i even if it’s every morning at eight o’clock and they tend to take the best hours of the day. I think if you throw them into a foreign country, they get more of it. There is some expense involved, but I thought most students would somehow work around it in some way. But anyway I think that’s a better way to learn a language. We were very slow in getting into sending our students abroad. We should send our students to Europe as well. Most of our western, US civilization is based on European tradition, and our students get a great deal, especially English majors, by going to England. We finally did get on those programs in a limited way, but I think we should have done it in a bigger way. Come to think of it, as an undergraduate advisor, I was stunned to find that we had students who could afford to and wanted to have a semester abroad and I had to refer them to other universities who had programs because we didn’t have it. Here we are, closer to, it was mainly Japan. So that, coming back to the master plan, we tried to do more of that.

But the master plan, again, we thought we were going to take off. But again, we’re still—the economy turned down and when that happens people don’t—you know, there’s very little room for change. What happens in master plans is when we went around, my wife and I, took us just under a year to do the whole plan. In early stages, we did a lot of talking to faculty, students, people downtown. What is interesting is, as we looked at programs on different campuses and did little writeups and suggested what we might recommend, there’s a great deal of interest and, of course, almost everyone, almost every department, with few exceptions, wanted to keep what they had. The status quo. Some of them, vehemently defending their territories, they didn’t want any, especially if you suggested that this office be abolished, or this program be cut down. That’s where the battle was. Some of it, we muted, I guess. But once it went through, very little interest in following up on. But, I guess that’s human nature. And of course, we had a change in the presidents and so forth, so. So you know, Ken Mortimer came in and he said, he built on it in a way, but, as he should, he had his own strategic plan developed. Before that Al Simone had his own strategic plan. In fact, I think Al’s strategic plan helped him to get the presidency. He worked hard on it, and many people were impressed with what he had to offer.

WN: You talk a lot about your wife Mildred and all the projects that you worked on together. Can I ask you about her role in your career?

RK: She doesn’t want me to answer, but I’ll try.

(Laughter)

WN: To what would you attribute, I mean, how can I ask this?
RK: Well, we've been married for what is it now, fifty-two years? And we were lucky in that we have similar interests, especially in education, although she was more (into it). Her experiences [were] more on the high-school level, but she's done a lot. For quite a long time now she's worked with universities. University of Minnesota gave her many responsible jobs. Anyway, she's interested in education, she's got a good mind. I laugh because when we worked on the master plan, I said, "Here we go again." We had done other consultant jobs before in Micronesia and American Samoa and I say, "Well, I provide the bologna and she provides the facts."

(Laughter)

So we work as a team because she's very good. She taught higher math, she taught—I can't even think of—besides solid geometry, what else? Oh, she had taught calculus. She's very good in math. Her dad was an engineer, and anyway. She claims that when she came to university, oftentimes in high school she was the only female taking the higher math course that the instructor tried to get her out of it. Wanted only boys. And when she came to the University of Hawai'i, she says oftentimes she was the only female taking (math courses), most of the others were engineering (students). And in those days, only men went into engineering. But she says, she had good math teachers at University of Hawai'i like Shigeo Kubo, who more than welcomed her in class and gave her a lot of help. Anyway, she's good in math besides English, and so it's terrific for writing reports. We work, like when we did the feasibility study of community colleges, she helped me because she knew about questionnaires and all those sort of things. She knew about random sampling or whatever we had to do. She knew all the statistics of that time.

MK: The quantitative side.

RK: Yeah, she could do all the quantitative side. Of course, people liked it because she wasn't being paid. But when we took on the master plan, both of us came in as a team. By that time we had formed this little consulting—we called ourselves "educational consultants." But before that, as Dick Takasaki—Dick had her and used her a lot (and) he used to say "Hire Dick and you get two for one." Because she's always been a very good help, but she's interested and, of course, she works harder than I do.

WN: Okay, well, you know in 1987 or shortly after you wrote that memo leaving as chancellor, you left the university and joined the office of the governor.

RK: I was still doing part-time teaching, I think, but the other thing, I got asked by American Samoa to go back to do—I had earlier been to Samoa. Well my contact with them started when I was with the junior college, the community college accrediting team. I was one of the first members to go down when they had a fledgling community college in American Samoa. I made several accreditation visits and I was familiar with the conditions there. Years later they called me down to do a feasibility study. They had a community college and as is so often the case, they wanted to get into a four-year campus. Everybody who runs for governor has a wish list, four-year campus in Samoa. So I was asked to go down, and here again, Mildred helped and we did a report on what it required to have a four year campus. I guess we more than hinted that we didn't know whether they had the resources to do it at that time.

Almost ten years later, just as I retired from the university, I got another call. American Samoa had new leaders, community college had new leadership, and a new governor, and everything else. So, Mildred and I were asked to go down to do another study of
feasibility of having a—well, what we tried to talk them into is that if they were going to
go four years, and their biggest need was in teacher education, maybe to make a sort of
so-called old-fashioned teachers college. And we ended up not quite advocating that
much, but saying that, I guess, our report was something about expanding teacher
educational opportunities in American Samoa. Education was so important, Samoa knew
it. They had to have more trained teachers and what were the best ways of doing this?
They had several programs going, mainly with the help of the University of Hawai‘i.
University of Hawai‘i for many years had sent people down like Frank Brown. In fact
Frank Brown was the one that really urged them to hire us. Frank had recently died
before we got there. Education is important and so we tried to talk to them about ways in
which this might be done. And of course, here again, the major stumbling block, one of
the major stumbling blocks, is a lack of finances.

Samoa itself doesn’t have a thriving economy, so they need outside help and mainly
they’d been living off Uncle Sam. Well, Uncle Sam, in a sense, took over and sort of
forced them into this relationship. So, we also introduced, try to get them to work with,
try to get federal funds. We talked to Senator Inouye’s office, were very sympathetic. In
fact, Senator Inouye has done a great deal in American Samoa. As you leave the airport,
you’re driving down to town and you see a big sign that says, “Dan Inouye Industrial
Park.” But anyway, so we did that study. While I was doing that study, too, I was asked
by the newly elected Governor [John] Waihe’e if I wouldn’t help (by being) a special
assistant. It wasn’t quite full time, it was sort of hazy, but I said, “Yeah, okay.”

WN: You were retired at the time?

RK: I was retired at that time. And here again, I said, “Okay, it’s part-time and do it for a
year.” But as I ended up, I think, staying three years as a special assistant. At first I
handled education, all phases, national affairs, and international affairs. So I went with
the governor to all the governors’ conferences, which was fun. We met [Michael]
Dukakis, and we met [Bill] Clinton as governors. And I also arranged for and went on
trips to foreign lands with him. We went to Japan on a number of occasions, went to
Hong Kong, and Thailand, Indonesia, Taiwan, Korea, and that was fun. John, Governor
Waihe’e, is easy to work with and for. It was enjoyable going.

And the thing I enjoyed working Downtown was getting to know the Downtown mindset.
In some ways, how negatively the university was thought of in terms of, “Oh, you can’t
go there, you can’t find parking to begin with, and all those snotty bureaucrats.” It’s too
bad. So one of the things we did in our study was to say the university—that’s another
thing we stressed—it has to get closer to the community. I felt we were at one time, when
I was a young faculty member and I was called by the state government, the city and
county, the county governments for consulting help. I served on several committees on
the state level, I was on the first ethics commission of Honolulu City and County. But I
thought we had gotten away from the community. And when I went Downtown I really
got it in spades as to how far apart we had drifted. So anyway, so it was an interesting
experience for me to get a Downtown view.

That affected what we had to say in I think one of our better chapters in the university
plan was our—chapter on community relations, how this had to be improved, that the
university was under-regarded, really, by the community. The community really didn’t
know the good programs we had here and some very excellent people. And partly it was
a two-way street. The university itself had not gone out of its way to get the community
involved. This was not healthy. I wish more could be done. Right now Mildred is trying
to work on something along that line, although it started with the threatened faculty strike, which some wanted to help avoid. So she has what they called—it’s called now, “University-Community Partnership.” And these people, bless their souls, about twenty of them, meet every other Monday morning at seven AM at the university campus. It’s community and university folk and talk about what they might do to help the university. But I think that’s something that at the university, everybody tries, but I hope we can make renewed efforts to get better (community relations), and it does help to have a winning football team.

WN: It does (laughs).

RK: Well, go back to—I love athletics, but I’m not a great . . . . I think sometimes sports has diverted too much from the essence of colleges and universities. I remember arguing this with Governor Burns. He says, “We must have a strong athletic program at the university, especially football. It’s not for the university, it’s for the community.” It helps community interest, community morale. You gotta have a rallying point with the community, the community can identify itself, and sports is one of the things in American life that does this, which is true. When I think of my days at the University of Minnesota, my God, when the football team plays, every radio station broadcasts the game, everybody talks about it, everybody in all ages go and see the games. Even in the snow and twenty-degree weather, they’re there cheering the team. So, Burns was right on that score and June Jones proves it, I guess.

WN: I remember when we interviewed Fudge Matsuda, you know, I think one of his frustrations was that he’s heading up an educational institution and he needs to govern accordingly, and yet at the same time you have this different animal here which is athletics, which is for the entire community. So sometimes he felt this, it was a very difficult job for him. And in talking to Fudge and to Simone, some of their most difficult moments as president was trying to deal between these two different entities. Harlan Cleveland, too.

RK: Yeah.

WN: Would you agree with that?

RK: Yeah, it is. That’s why I say, in a way, some people think it’s a blessing, but it’s also a curse, this inter-collegiate athletics. In many ways it’s gotten out of hand—nationally, too. College’s or school’s reputation is based solely on its football team, which is ridiculous and sometimes becomes the tail wagging the dog. Because some of the people who are into sports are so rabid, and they have money, too, and so it makes it difficult to keep the balance. I can sympathize with them. So you know that what’s his name, President [Lawrence] Snyder at one time abolished football. You know that?

WN: Right, I remember that.

RK: Yeah, it was such a headache, and we were losing, we couldn’t support a—this is when we were trying to get into the big time and getting to the big time. So we were scheduling—like Michigan State was a good example. Michigan State, after the war, was going to challenge University of Michigan as a big institution, so they put a lot of money into developing athletics, and got an ambitious coach, and somehow the coach got a very good pipeline to Hawai‘i to get some of our better players, but also used Hawai‘i as a recruiting tool. He’d tell a prospective football player, “Oh, you know next year we’re
going to play Hawai‘i and you can bring your girlfriend with you.” It was a big draw, he said. And, I remember the one year that Michigan State came down, that year they were headed for I don’t know, the Rose Bowl. Anyway, they had Lynn Chadnois was their star player and they beat us sixty-five to nothing or something. Although we had our moments and that’s what keeps things alive. When our football team, I was on sabbatical—for some reason I was driving through the Mainland listening to the game on radio and the University of Hawai‘i beat Nebraska in Nebraska.

WN: Right.

RK: Six to nothing or something.

WN: Right.

RK: We had a good team then. We had this good runner, Skippy Dyer as I recall, and mostly local boys, linemen. Anyway, so we had our days of glory. So, sports, if kept within bounds, I think is great. People love it, and as Governor Burns says, it’s as much for the community as it is for the university. In many ways it’s more for the community. You go to the baseball games for example, you don’t see many university students there. It’s the community people who are there.

WN: Okay, well, after that, serving your three years under Governor Waihe‘e, you became president, senior advisor, with Tokai University.

RK: Yeah, here again it was Fudge Matsuda and Joyce Tsunoda who have good ties with people in Japan, knew about Tokai University coming here. Fudge had met the president of Tokai when he was president. And Tokai University, a private university in Japan, a very large one—second or third largest—had an international reach, mainly in Europe. They had a European center near Copenhagen, a boarding school for Japanese students near Copenhagen, Denmark. Indeed the founder of the Tokai system, his model was a Danish philosopher, theologian [N.F.S. Gruntvig], about the Folk High School, and that sort of thing. And also they had a budokan in Vienna.

Finally decided that maybe they should go to the United States, so they came to Hawai‘i. And I was asked to be a—my wife and I again—to be consultants to what they should do. We wrote a short report primarily saying it was sort of the East-West Center idea on a small scale with an emphasis on students. That they should try to not only send their own students to the United States to learn English, which was more and more the international language, but also that they could have an international college and attract students from other places who also had to learn English. And they liked the idea, they built a very beautiful building, a choice spot on Kapi‘olani Boulevard halfway between the University and Waikiki and not far from Ala Moana Shopping Center, so it’s very attractive, on a major bus line. And it’s an attractive building, in some ways maybe too attractive, because it was built in a sort of semi-residential area next to the huge Marco Polo condominium, I guess—Marco Polo is the largest apartment building here—and next to a park, which is nice, the Ala Wai Park. But the neighbors were afraid, you know, oh, students are noisy and the traffic. I remember being a consultant, I had to go down to see the city and county and tell the council that, no, that most of our students were from foreign countries, that they wouldn’t drive cars, (ha-ha). (WN and MK chuckle.) But, anyway, we had adequate parking places, they weren’t rowdy. But neighbors were suspicious. Even when we started, the inspectors came to see whether we really were a school or not because the building was so attractive. In fact, if you look back, I think it
was one of the reporters who came and interviewed us and said, "Oh, the campus is ostentatious for a campus." That's the word she used to describe it. Because you go in the lobby, looks like a hotel lobby, and all the rooms are air-conditioned. And the dormitory rooms all have private complete bathrooms. And someone said it's just like Holiday Inn. It's an excellent facility. My retort was—maybe I shouldn't have put it this way—but, you know, "We don't have to look like the University of Hawai'i."

(Laughter)

Thinking about the days when I criticized the university for having poor facilities. Being air-conditioned and everything else, it's, in many ways, too pretty, but it's great. They told me, "Okay, now what?"

I said, "You can't have a university, a four-year institution here, it's too small. It's a nice place, but limited classrooms, limited library, no science facilities, no phys ed facilities to speak of. The best you can do is have a limited so-called liberal arts community college, or that would be the old-fashioned junior college."

They said, "Okay, why don't you start one." So I began. I don't know, I didn't have very many days to plan, but it's just as well. It wasn't a public . . .

END OF TAPE ONE

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RK: If it were a state agency I would think with all the paperwork I would have to do, and go to Downtown, talk to the budget boys, and everything else, and all their permits, whatever, but working with a private institution was much easier and things moved much faster, although I didn't have complete control. I never did because Tokai always had a representative who was so-called above me. They called it Tokai University Pacific Center, and I was running a school within that center. I was starting a limited liberal arts junior college. But thankfully the first person they sent, President Hajime Yano, was a great guy. Very innovative and open, flexible, he had spent many years heading the operation in Denmark near Copenhagen. He was delightful to work with, so I had no problem getting the thing started. Although, you know, I had to work with him, he had to ask permission, and so on. But things moved fairly fast. We got a campus, and six months after they told to start it, we had students. (Chuckles) Very limited number, but mainly coming off the streets. We found a lot of Japanese students here, mostly Japanese rōnin. They were the rejects from the Japanese educational system, but most of them came from families that were wealthy enough—you know the syndrome.

We had an interesting first class. I can see the girl with a nose ring, and the boys with yellow hair, they're surf bums. Very honestly, as one of them said, one of the brightest, "Oh, I got kicked out of the Japanese school system three times, but my father will support me as long as I'm in school, so I'm going to go to your school." Good attitude, but he was one of our better students. He had his problems, but by god, he was a brilliant student. And he (had) very good mind. I had Duane Preble come to teach the art course, retired university art professor. One of the first things he did was he told the class members to do sketches. And this boy, Shingo, marvelous job. So he got called in. "Gee, where did you learn to do this?"
He said, "I never learned anything, first time I’m doing this." It was (a) very interesting first class. Some people may consider them sort of misfits, but they were misfits because, I think, they had too much imagination and good minds, very active minds. Lo and behold, some of them were turned around and graduated from us and then went on to get baccalaureate degrees.

So it was an interesting and, in time, we got students from all over the world. In the heyday, we got students—the biggest contingent, about over half, came from Japan, but we had an extra large group from Korea, South Korea. We had few from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and at one point from Mongolia. And we have very good students from Vietnam, Cambodia, and we even got them from South America, Peru, and Brazil. We got them from Canada, one or two from United States, we even got a girl from Germany. We had a very interesting group. I try to get local students to come in. It was very difficult because our tuition was the same as Chaminade or Hawai‘i Pacific when they could go to a community college for a song. I talked the Tokai into giving scholarships or raise some private funds and so we had a girl from Kailua, although she didn’t stay long with us. And then I recruited a girl from Moloka‘i and that was very successful, a Hawai‘ian from Moloka‘i, who’s now working part-time at Tokai and is enrolled at the University of Hawai‘i now as a pre-med student. So it was a very interesting, I call it, experiment. I stayed for about five years and left. They got their second—and we got accredited in two years, thankfully. And the second accreditation visit took place a year ago and, you know, their accreditation was reconfirmed.

One of the lucky things was, Glen Grant joined us. Glen Grant was teaching at Kapi‘olani, he’s the one who writes all these obake stories and so on. He’s a great teacher. He’s a pied piper and he believes in active learning, and he liked the idea. We started out—and here’s a place where I had more, I thought, say in how we’re going to run the program. One thing I did was, we had no Wednesday classes. I may be wrong, but I’m of the opinion that you don’t do all your learning and teaching in the formal classroom. So Wednesday was a field day, especially as we had a lot of foreign students, I thought they could learn the language and culture better if they got out of the formal classroom. So Wednesdays we started out (with) no classes. The art teacher would say, “Okay, on Wednesday we’re going to the Academy of Arts.” You can’t say “I can’t go because I got to take English,” or so forth. (The) English teacher can take them to the library. Glen Grant, (in) Hawaiian history, took them all over. To see something about Queen Lili‘uokalani’s past or something, he (would) take them down on a tour of all the historic buildings and stuff. When I taught a course, political science, I would take them down to legislature or take them to the courts.

Wednesday was sort of activity day, but gradually that got eroded. As you get the faculty, the faculty all trained in the same way, say, “Oh, no, no.” Especially the language teachers, “We gotta have language teaching every day in the morning.” So gradually, that got eroded and we became pretty conventional, although we’re still at the point where we say to you, “You’re (in charge of your) course.” And most of our teachers had to be part-time, we couldn’t afford (full-time teachers). We only have 100 students on the average. You can’t afford to have—you can have some social science, one physical science, you can have several English teachers, whatever, full time. But you can’t—maybe we had, at most, maybe ten full-time, but you have to have lot of adjuncts. The music teacher, the science teacher, others had to be course by course, (also) a math teacher. And we had some very good ones, especially from the community colleges. But in our heyday, we had about a little over maybe 120 students. Our capacity was 200. We didn’t quite get there, but when we had about a 120, we had a good mix from, as I said, from all areas. It
was very good. But then when the Asian economy turn-down came just about the time I was leaving, we lost our Korean students, for example. Then the Japanese numbers went down. But it was an experiment. I’m glad Glen Grant is still there, he’s running more of the academic programs. And he did some wonderful things, like he would, during the summer, take students on a tour (of the Mainland) for a bargain price. He and his girlfriend would drive their vans and take maybe twelve students or whatever, and take them from Boston to New Orleans. For the students it was a great thing, (for) the foreign students to see America.

WN: Oh, those kinds of tours. I thought maybe you meant...

MK: Locally (laughs).

WN: How did you recruit faculty?

RK: That was a difficult task. Our lucky find was Glen Grant. I think Glen likes it there because he’s innovative, and we said, “Yeah, okay, whatever you want to do.” And he wants to team teach, real team teaching so sometimes he teaches with an English teacher. You know, because you gotta write reports if he’s teaching history of Hawai‘i or American Studies, the English teacher can be alongside, too. And that’s how we wanted to teach. He agreed with me that learning is a cooperative endeavor. When you go out in the real world, they don’t tell you, “Don’t work with someone, that’s cheating.” So we want group activity and people to help each other, and that sort of thing, so it was fun. Although not all teachers agreed. Some of them, especially, I found, the teachers who came from teaching English as a second language, some of their ways were very rigid and they taught out of a textbook. I must confess when I saw that, I say, “Oh my goodness, I can’t learn English that way. I couldn’t even do the fill in the blanks properly.” So anyway, that was an interesting philosophical debate that we had with some of the faculty. Glen on one side and some of them disagreeing. I guess, in a sense, we got it resolved because Glen is still there running (things), more in control and (hired) a young faculty.

So that was interesting. I enjoyed that experience with Tokai. They were very nice to me in terms of showing (me) their campuses all over the world and in Japan and having me talk to their teachers and students. So that has pretty much concluded. In fact, my wife and I just took the prevailing President Yamada and his wife to dinner last night. I just wanted to say to him, “Thank you, we had a good time.” I had an office in there until (now), but I told them that I should leave the campus and I got off their—I was on their board of directors for a while. But they made changes and one of the changes they made is one that they know I advocated from the beginning. And that is not to split the responsibility between the person running the school and the person running the building, so to speak. Especially if the person is running the building, representing Japan and controlled the money, I thought it should be other way around. After Mr. Yano left and other people came in, it wasn’t that easy. There was some tension, which I constantly told the people in Japan, would be removed if one person ran the whole thing and that’s what’s happened now. Now it’s not called it the Tokai University Pacific Center, it’s called Hawai‘i Tokai International College. One president runs it with one board. We used to have two boards before. And I think it’s streamlined and it’s for the better, but I think that’s something that I advocated.

WN: Is the president now local or is the president from...
RK: No, he’s from Japan. And in a way, it follows the pattern of Japanese institutions. Tokai was founded by the Matsumae family and it’s still in a sense a family-run thing, although they do have a board and they develop very well. The person in charge now is Mr. Kiyoshi Yamada, a lawyer by training, very able person. He’s from Japan and he happens to be the son-in-law of the president, but very able. He can handle English language well enough to run the school. And the fact that he has this intimate tie with Japan headquarters helps. He can expedite things because he knows the operation in Japan very well. He’s very able, very smart.

WN: And since leaving Tokai, what have you been up to?

RK: That’s a good question. I’ve been busy enough, so. I get called to meetings like the one in the Justice Department and stuff and I get interviews with people like you. But also, this was through Dan Inouye and my old lawyer friend Francis Sogi, I got talked into joining the Japanese American National Museum of Los Angeles. Margaret Oda was the local advisory council chairman. Margaret is very active, she’s on the board of directors and a major contributor to the museum. But anyway, these people talked me into joining that group and gradually I’ve gotten more involved. So now I’m chairman of the local advisory council and I’m on the board of governors in the national. Dan is the chairman of that, although the really important group is the board of trustees. Most of them are the big donors. They told me now that they sort of reorganized or have a different organization, I’m supposed be the what they call a vice governor, anyway, for Hawai ‘i and I’m supposed to be the local contact. But what is interesting is, a project which started with Francis Sogi, my old classmate and army buddy who became a very successful lawyer in New York and still is, who did a lot of traveling all over the world, especially South America. He used to tell me interesting stories about meeting what they call (the) Nikkei, Japanese in South America, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Mexico, and how similar they are but also how different. So I said to Francis, “I think it’d be interesting to study (those) different experiences, to record them.” He said, “Oh yeah, may be a good idea.”

Francis was one of the early chairs of the Japanese American National Museum, and so he talked them into writing a proposal which he took to Japan to (the) Nippon Foundation and got funded half a million dollars a year. Now we’re going on our third year of that project. I don’t know where we’ll carry it, but I—so from the beginning I got involved in the project and I guess partly out of my relationship with Francis, I was asked to be one of the three senior advisors. The other two are from California, especially Jim Hirabayashi who started the ethnic studies program (and) was a dean at San Francisco State University and a brother of the famous [Gordon] Hirabayashi in the Hirabayashi case. But Jim Hirabayashi is the chief advisor and Lloyd Inui, who was at Long Beach State, ethnic studies, political science, he’s also an advisor. Lloyd is in Long Beach, close to the museum, and Jim’s in San Francisco, but close enough.

They both have been much more active, but the third year they got me more involved. The project director Akemi Kikumura, very able anthropologist and a Ph.D., UCLA, who’s done a lot of writing, acting, a very able person, very energetic, and very efficient. Anyway, Akemi has asked me to get more and more involved, so I go to the meetings and chair a lot of the discussion groups. And for the third year I’ve been given the job of taking this (project) on the road, with the findings we have, and we want discussions. Akemi will tell people some of the interesting findings we have and people are invited to the meetings in Honolulu (and elsewhere). Irene Hirano, the present chief executive
officer of JANM, decided that this is a good project to identify with. Although I must say that some people on the JANM board were not too sure that they should get into the international realm. Part of the, I guess, the objection or the question marks are removed by the fact that we’ve been able to get adequate funding for the project. In fact, the project funding has helped the museum generally and we’ve involved good scholars, observers from different countries, especially South America, Canada. But now that we’re in the third year and you people have been involved with helping in the encyclopedia, that’s going to be published in maybe two years. That’s going to be helpful. And we have an anthology. About twenty of the scholars that we’ve commissioned, all a part of this International Nikkei Research Project [INRP], will have written their essays and we’re polishing them and presenting them to many university presses. At this point Stanford University seems to be interested. So that will go into publication. It’s called, Anthology: New Worlds, New Lives, or something like that, a temporary title. And this other thing that you people work with will be the encyclopedia. So these two publications will be the result of our three years, a combination of about three years of works. And it’s Nikkei experiences in the Americas, North and South. At first we thought we might try to do more whole global, but when we got into it found out that doing the Americas itself was a job because we’re involving four languages—English, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish—and it’s a horrendous job handling all these.

But coming back to my role now. They told me to go around with Irene and Akemi to tell our INRP story, to discuss it with interested scholars and constituents throughout the country and in Japan. Our first foray was to Vancouver, Canada and to Seattle, Washington. Very interesting, especially in Canada where Japanese Canadian National Museum is getting started. They have a National Nikkei Heritage Center, very impressive building right outside of Vancouver. It was interesting to get to meet the Canadian Nikkei and then to meet the scholars. Steve Sumida—of course, they’re from Hawai‘i, but Steve Sumida and Gail Nomura, Tetsuden Kashima, the others from the University of Washington joined us at that Seattle meeting. And we’re asking—not only presenting some of the findings—but asking them to raise questions. What else should we look at? Beyond this, what should we do? And asking for suggestions. My role is to, I guess, I’m called the facilitator for the discussions. And (in) August we’ll be in Honolulu. Irene (and) Akemi will be August 22 and we have a meeting to discuss this. Then in September, middle of September, we’re going to New York City and Washington D.C. to talk to that audience. Every audience is slightly different. Again, Irene, Akemi and I will be making short presentations. I won’t make a presentation, but I facilitate the discussion. So I have that role because then I write reports and engage in the planning process with the other advisors and staff people. So I’ll be going to New York and Washington in mid-September. In early November we’ll go to Japan to talk to the Japanese scholars and to talk to—by that time we hope we have some idea of what else we want to do and ask for further funding from the foundation or somebody else. And talk to the scholars in Japan who are (studying) immigration. And also at that time “[From] Bentū [to] Mixed Plate,” will go to Okinawa. It’s timed with that, so we’ll be going to Okinawa also and talk to the Okinawan scholars, and so that has kept me quite busy.

WN: So much for retirement.

(Laughter)

RK: Well, as our son says, “Mom and Dad, you people are allegedly retired.”

(Laughter)
You know, he finds that, when he looks on the calendar and sees that we have all these meetings and stuff. But it keeps us alive, it’s fun.

WN: Yeah.

RK: So I have to keep on reading and get into new fields, but you know it’s fun to try to keep up.

WN: You know, we’re about ready to conclude these interviews, which started a few months ago. You know, we started from the time you were at Waikiki you know, growing up in Waikiki. I just wanted to, by way of summing up, have you talk about what you learned growing up in Waikiki and what you’ve applied growing up to your career.

RK: I don’t know if we consciously do these things, apply them. I grew up in a nice family and a nice neighborhood. Waikiki in many ways is ideal, not only weather-wise, beautiful weather. We had the zoo, Kapi’olani Park, the Natatorium, the Aquarium and the whole beach. It was a beautiful place to grow up, but also the neighborhood was good. When I look back it was a very cosmopolitan neighborhood. Our neighbors were, you know, we really weren’t a Japanese town or anything else, or Chinese, we were very cosmopolitan. Although when I took a sociology course here, the instructor said the Paoakalani, that’s the Waikiki slum, to which I took strong objection. But it was a lower-and middle-class neighborhood. Some of the Japanese families who lived there, some of them were entrepreneurs and they had their stores. Aoki Store, Ibaraki Store, and the dry cleaning plant, the barbershops, the restaurants—Unique Lunchroom, Blue Ocean Inn—Sano gas station, so they were small business people. But many, like my dad, worked for the hotels. It was a convenient place. Could walk to work to the Moana, the Halekulani, the Royal Hawaiian. My mother did laundry in the neighborhood, most of the customers were just across ‘Ohua Avenue, the Haole side, so to speak. Most of our customers lived there, although some in Diamond Head and so on, walking distance. But as I said, was a very mixed group, so we had the DeFries, the Ornellas [family], the Arnolds, and all the mixtures there, Lorches, and so on. It was a good neighborhood to grow up in. I enjoyed school, Waikiki School, I had great teachers, and intermediate school was good. So I enjoyed school, that’s it, I guess.

WN: You grew up in Hawai‘i and you more or less devoted your whole career to serving the community.

RK: I don’t know about that, I guess I had job offers elsewhere, but I always wanted to stay in Hawai‘i.

WN: Anything [else]?

MK: I think that’s a good ending.

WN: A good ending. Thank you very much for your time.

RK: Oh, thank you.

MK: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW