Ronald Takahata was born in Kealakekua, Kona, Hawai‘i in 1925 to Moyo and Yoshio Takahata, immigrants from Japan. About five years later, Moyo Takahata passed away.

Yoshio Takahata, originally from Kumamoto-ken, Japan, was a storekeeper. Over a number of years, he owned general merchandise stores in Kealakekua, Nāpo‘opo‘o, and Hönaunau, Kona, Hawai‘i. His family, like many others in Kona, tended coffee lands.

Yoshio Takahata, a leader in the local Japanese community, served as liaison between residents and the Japanese consulate. He also greeted visiting Japanese navy ships.

By 1941, his family included Haruko (second wife) and six children.

In early 1942, Yoshio Takahata was removed from his home and incarcerated at Kīlauea Military Camp. Later, he was moved to the Sand Island Detention Center and various facilities on the U.S. Mainland, including ones in New Mexico and Texas.

The Takahata family, too, in 1943, was removed from Kona and incarcerated at Jerome War Relocation Center in Arkansas. Just before the Jerome War Relocation Center was closed in 1944, Yoshio Takahata rejoined his family. The Takahatas were then moved to Heart Mountain War Relocation Center in Wyoming.

After a few months at Heart Mountain, Ronald Takahata gained release and went to Chicago, where he found employment and married a Jerome internee, Asako Kawamura.

At war’s end, Yoshio Takahata and family returned to the islands. He operated a store in Hilo for a while, but business declined. Unable to find other employment, he became a dishwasher.

Returning to the islands with an infant in 1946, Ronald and Asako Takahata settled on O‘ahu.

Ronald Takahata worked for various painting contractors and Princess Ka‘iulani Hotel; Asako Takahata retired as a University of Hawai‘i secretary.
MK: This is an interview with Ronald Y. Takahata. This is session one. It’s January 23, 2013. We’re in Kāne‘ohe, O‘ahu, Hawai‘i. The interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

We’ll start the interview. We’ll start on one easy question first. Like what year were you born?

RT: Nineteen twenty-five.

MK: Where were you born?

RT: Kealakekua, Kona.

MK: You know, when you look back on your childhood, first of all, tell us about your mother Moyo Takahata. Tell us about her.

RT: I don’t know anything about her actually. I don’t even remember her face. We didn’t have a relationship because she was in the hospital all the time. Meantime, she was getting babies. Those days, they say children were the treasure. Because the way they used to think, the olden people actually. When the kids grow up, they’re going to help them. You know, that’s the kind of attitude they had, those days. So they always used to say that, “Our children is our treasure.”

MK: At the time when you were real small, when your mom was getting sick and in the hospital, how many kids were there?

RT: In our family?

MK: Yeah.

RT: With me included, five. But maybe the youngest one came a little afterwards, yeah? I’m not too sure about that.

MK: Your mother, was she island-born or Japan-born?

RT: Japan-born. They’re both Japan-born, I think.

MK: Your mother passed away when how old were you?

RT: Maybe five.
After your mother passed away, your father remarried? And who became your stepmother?

Haruko.

Haruko, okay. What do you know about the stepmother?

Well, she’s only about thirteen years older than I am, you know. So my older sister and she was so close, age-wise.

Was she Japan-born or island-born?

No, Haruko is local-born.

When we first met you this morning, you were telling us what happened to you when your mother died. So when your mother died, what happened? You went from family to family . . .

I was sent to our cousin’s family. My mom’s sister’s place. But as I said, my cousin kick and bite me all over the place. So she [RT’s aunt] said she couldn’t take care of me. She was afraid he was going to kill me. That’s the way he was, you see. Jealous, yeah, because . . .

You folks used to fight a lot?

No, he just attack me.

Picked on you?

Yeah, yeah. Because I guess he didn’t want his mother to pay attention to me. He wanted the attention himself, right? That’s how children are, yeah?

Mm-hmm [yes]. So you went from that relative’s house to . . .

My uncle’s place in Ka’u. This time, my sister and I, the youngest sister Teruko, we both went there. We enjoyed ourselves there, though. The only thing I remember, we used to go into the sisal field. Used to have a sisal field. Used to have plum trees, like that. She and I used to go and play around all over the place. Pick a plum and have dinner. I mean, if you eat dinner, just snack like that. We used to have lot of fun. We grew up together. The only thing I regret is, we didn’t keep up afterwards. I had to come back, you see, because school. I was going to be six years old, I was going to school, so I came back to Kona. But my aunty, she didn’t have any children. She wanted to keep Teruko. So my father said, “No, no, no,” but she insisted. And then maybe he figured, they didn’t have children, so they would care for her. So he said okay, I think. I didn’t have any contact with her until—oh, when was it?—after we came back from the Mainland, I think.

So your early childhood was not the usual childhood, yeah?

No. Even my sister tells me, “You had the hardest time growing up.”

So Teruko ended up staying with your relatives in Ka’u.

Just like she was adopted by them, something like that.

Then your older sister Sachiko . . .

Mieko, oldest in family.

Mieko. Where did she end up going?
RT: She went to Hilo. Well, you know, my father got remarried.

MK: Now, I’m curious about your father Yoshio Takahata. Where did he come from originally?

RT: Kumamoto, Japan.

MK: What do you know about your father’s early life in Hawai‘i?

RT: Gee, that, I don’t remember. We hardly talk about those things. Those days not like now. It’s more open today. Those days, so busy, and he was the busiest man, too, so.

MK: You were saying your father was a businessman. What kind of business was he in?

RT: Well, he’s grocery store, store business.

MK: When you were small, where was that store?

RT: Kealakekua. Where I was born, I think. That’s the place I was born.

MK: What kinds of items were in that store?

RT: All general, food. Almost everything. Rice, and all the canned goods, all kind of stuff. Regular grocery store.

MK: And fresh produce, too?

RT: No, we didn’t have produce. I think those days they didn’t sell produce. You grow your own.

MK: So mostly canned goods, packaged goods?

RT: All kind of stuff.

MK: Last time we were here, you were telling us the stores in Kona were a little bit different, yeah, how they worked out with the coffee and everything.

RT: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MK: Try explain to us again.

RT: Well, I’m not too sure, you know what I mean. I’m not actually sure, but I know what they used to do was farmers come in Kona, then they want to buy a coffee field, they want to go into the coffee business, so they... Those were depression days, don’t forget. So they make a deal with my dad that they want to borrow money to buy that acreage or borrow money from the bank, anyway. Then my dad would cosign for them. But by doing that, he’s hoping to have business with them. Because in Kona, when you’re a farmer, they don’t have any income, during the coffee season. So my dad takes care of them as far as eating and food like that. They buy. All charge account. Then at the end of the year, when they sell their parchment, you know, coffee, and then they get the money coming in, then they settle everything once a year, like that. But then, he cosigned, couple of them had hard time. Depression days, what are you going to do? So they ran away during the evening. So my father got the land. But land wasn’t worth anything those days. Today, big money, coffee. But those days was nothing. So the bank came after him. He couldn’t do nothing. He had to bankrupt.

WN: So your father loaned...

RT: Not money, no, the bank. He cosigned, see, at the bank. That person runs away, my father’s liable, right? Because he cosigned it.
WN: Right.

RT: So couple of them ran away, so the bank came after him. He tried to raise the money, but no money those days. This is 1929–1930’s, depression years, huh? So he had to bankrupt. Then he opened another store in Nāpo’opo’o.

WN: Nāpo’opo’o?

RT: Yeah. But that wasn’t too good either. So we moved to Hōnaunau. So there he began to pick up his business because my dad was a hard worker. That’s why he had no time for the children, too. You cannot blame him. Those days, we were so poor, everything. Main thing, he have to make money to feed the family.

MK: I’m curious. Did your family also have coffee lands that you folks worked in?

RT: No. Before my dad went bankrupt we had few for a while. But we didn’t work on it. We had Filipino workers like that. That was the Kona style. They used to hire Filipino pickers. We had for a while, but those days coffee farm is nothing. Then the war [World War II] came. But every season, coffee season, we used to go out and pick coffee for other family that wanted workers. So we used to do that.

MK: So you went out, pick coffee for . . .

RT: Yeah, every summer.

MK: . . . for other families, though?

RT: We didn’t have much.

WN: Do you remember how much you got paid?

RT: Gee, how much a bag was it? I’m not sure though, I forget what we used to get paid.

WN: So one bag of cherry coffee was how heavy?


WN: Okay. So then you got paid by the bag?

RT: Yeah, by the bag, how many bags you picked.

MK: What did you do with the money?

RT: Well, we got to give it to my family, right? You know, those days, everything you make is going to the family. Especially those days, no more income. Especially when my dad got interned, no income, so we had to work. Whatever we did, we had to share with the family.

MK: When you were small, growing up, where was your home?

RT: Since I got six years old, age of six, then I went home to Kona to go to school, right? Mostly with my whole family, same family.

MK: And the house was where? The house that you lived in.

RT: I told you that we had bankrupt and couple of more. So three places we lived.

MK: Okay, so you moved first Kealakekua, then Nāpo’opo’o, then . . .
RT: Hōnaunau.
WN: So your father had three stores. Three different stores, three different times.
RT: Yeah.
WN: What store do you remember the most?
RT: I think I remember the first one most, you know. Those days, well, being a businessman, he sold everything. So what I remember, every afternoon, after school, coming home from school, I go raid the candy area and take some candy that I want. Go to school with my friends and share the candy. That’s why I remember that store the most, I think.
MK: So the house was attached to the store or nearby?
RT: No, separate.
MK: Separate? But nearby?
RT: Which store you talking about now?
MK: Kealakekua one.
RT: Kealakekua one, yeah. The store used to be on the roadside and then we were in the back with the long steps and go down.
WN: Had steps that connected the store to the house?
RT: No, not connected to the house. Steps in between anyway, and you had to walk on the cement walk and go to the home.
MK: Then what do you remember about that Kealakekua house? What did it look like?
RT: I remember. You know, like that green stained wall and white trimming. That’s about it. Those days, they were about the same. Every house was about the same. Most of them built by Japanese contractors, right? So their style, you know, their architecture, going to be about the same, more or less, anyway. Nobody can spend too much money, so you got to get as cheap as possible, right?
MK: Then that Kealakekua place where your store and house was, who were your neighbors?
RT: Oh, chee. What I remember is, our store was here. The family next to us—I think their name was Kawaguchi. Then there was the Hawai‘i Coffee Mill across the road. The Hawai‘i Coffee Mill, they used to call that. Then right (next from the mill) was Morita family.
MK: So when you folks were living over there, what did you do with like the neighbor children . . .
RT: You know, that’s the part, I hardly remember. Although I used to go across the street where Hawai‘i Coffee Mill used to be, and there used to be a family, Morita, over there. I used to go there and ride their tricycle. They always let me ride because they know I was lonely. So they took good care of me to let me ride their bicycle. I used to walk—quite a bit to walk. But those days, walk was nothing. Once in a while I used to walk home from Hōnaunau to Konawaena High School. I used to walk home. That’s a long way.
WN: That’s a long way.
MK: Then when you were like a small kid in Kealakekua, what did you do for fun?

RT: Nothing. Actually nothing. As the day comes, you do whatever comes your way. We used to play sport—football and all kind of stuff, but I’m so clumsy come to sport and singing like that. So no chance. Because like football, I got no brains, so stupid. We used to play football, used to get rocks all over the place. Like give ‘em fly tackle, I miss the guy and hit my leg and hurt myself, like that. I figure, ah, no sense I play sports because I’m so damned clumsy. I’m going kill myself this kind of way.

(Laughter)

WN: What about peewee? You played peewee?

RT: No, no more such thing, those days. The organizer, too, is only school. That’s about it.

WN: What about things like fruit trees? Did you go get fruit from the trees?

RT: Yeah. The house that was right across us, they had rose apple and mountain apple, I think. Yeah, mountain apple. So we used to pick it. It’s all coming down from the. . . . When season time, over flow, right? Just fall. That’s what we used to do. We used to pick waiawa (in the forest). They call us to get waiawa. What else used to do now? Ichigo, you remember ichigo? Strawberry?

WK: Strawberry?

RT: Yeah. That red one like that? They used to have another one—pohā, we used to call that. That stuff and waiawa. That’s about it.

WN: What was your favorite? What fruit did you like the most?

RT: I used to like the waiawa. Stringy, but it’s okay. I used to like it.

MK: Then were there other areas stream-like areas or beach-like areas that you folks used to go?

RT: No, no. Because the beach was way down. That was Nāpo’opo’o side, Hōnaunau, or at least the ocean side. We were up in the mountain like on the main highway.

WN: They had rivers, streams?

RT: No.

WN: No more, yeah, Kona.

RT: I don’t think get river, stream. No river, anyway. Stream, I’m not too sure. But they used to go ditch, I know. Ditch.

WN: Oh, oh.

RT: Yeah, yeah. It’s like a stream, but it’s a small one. When heavy rain, the water goes over there, go down. We used to call it “ditch.”

WN: What did you do in the ditch?

RT: Maybe looking for fish like that. But hardly get fish, yeah? So what we used to do when we were young kids, we used to walk down to Nāpo’opo’o side. Then there’s a coffee mill down there, I forget what the name was.

WN: Captain Cook, huh?
RT: Captain Cook, okay. Was it Captain Cook down there?
WN: Nāpoʻopoʻo? I think so. I’m not sure, but . . .
RT: We used to go there to catch mosquito fish.
WN: Oh, yeah, medaka?
RT: Yeah, medaka. They used to have the big tanks, so we used to go catch the fish there like that. I know I grew up that way, anyway.
WN: I know Kona, they had lot of water tanks, catchment water. Did you folks have?
RT: Yeah. Because that’s the only thing we had. No more city and county water like that. All just catchment, you know. So in our case, we used to have only one. So when we didn’t have enough, when drought time, no rain, then we had to ask friends, yeah? They had quite a bit of tanks. They had to wash coffee like that, so they have to have water. So I’m not sure how many they had, but quite a few. So we used to go and haul from there to home. They were good friends with my dad, so they used to give him, or share.
MK: You know, you were saying, you would have to haul the stuff over, what kind of transportation?
RT: We had truck. My dad was a businessman so we had a family truck. We had a truck and we had a station wagon.
WN: He’s young, so you don’t remember the mules, too much, then, huh?
RT: Donkey?
WN: Yeah.
RT: Oh, yeah. Coffee field, you work in coffee field, you need a donkey.
WN: Okay, so you did use donkey in the field?
RT: Oh, yeah. After you pick the coffee, you had to carry the bags to certain area. Small as I was, the hundred-pound one, I used to carry. Oh, yeah.
WN: Ho. And load ’em on the donkey?
RT: Well, no. Then the owner is the one that comes and pick ’em up. He count how many bags you pick, so he gotta keep track of what you did. So that’s what they used to do. The donkeys are strong, you know. They’re stronger than horse. Small as they are, they’re very strong. Get a lot of stamina. So that’s the reason they crossed the horse and [donkey]. They get the mule. The mule is strong, big like a horse, but stamina-wise, cannot beat ’em. But then donkey was the main transportation for everybody.
WN: Did you ride donkey?
RT: Yeah. Used to get some fun, like riding horse. Only the saddle is not the regular saddle. Wooden saddle. They make it like that, back and front.
WN: Oh, around the X? Cross? Oh, wooden saddle.
RT: Wooden saddle. You hardly saw anybody with the regular saddle. Because no more money, eh? I mean, all of them, they make their own, yeah? (Walking was the) transportation. Not many people had cars. Only guys with money.
WN: So did you ride donkey only in the coffee fields when you’re working?
RT: (No. Although I did ride one couple of times.)

WN: You didn’t go school with the donkey?

RT: No, no, no, no, no. That’s a no-no.

MK: But you mentioned, though, your father had a truck?

RT: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: That truck was mostly for what kind of use?

RT: For business. His business. When we moved to Hōnaunau, my uncle made the deal for him with the—there was a politician named [James C.] Campsie, I think his name, in Ka’u. So it’s plantation—I mean, Sugar Mill 1 or 2, if I’m not mistaken.

WN: Yeah, I think he was a Hutchinson—was it Hutchinson Sugar [Plantation] Company or couple of those down in Ka’u, huh?

RT: Anyway, he made a deal with this person to buy things from. Because he had this business, this guy, this person. So my dad used to get it wholesale from this guy. Every maybe once a week he used to go to Ka’u to pick up all the stuff. Then brought it home, then sell it retail, right? That part, I give him lot of credit.

MK: Did he ever go to the coffee farmers and go take orders like chûmon, or coffee farmers just come by themselves to the store?

RT: Sometime chûmon. Most time, they come to the store.

MK: They come to the store?

RT: Yeah, yeah.

MK: So the truck was mostly to go pick up goods?

RT: Yeah, yeah. Pick up goods. Sometimes they’ll buy, but they cannot take it home. Well, if they don’t have a donkey, my dad used to deliver, too. Everything you got to do, just to stay alive. So they do everything like that.

MK: To run this kind of business, were you involved in the business? Help at the store?

RT: No, no. I’m too young.

MK: Too young?

RT: All we do is come in their way. We were kids, so.

MK: So even when the store was at Nāpo’opo’o or Hōnaunau, you didn’t help in the store?

RT: No. All I help is eating candy, yeah?

(Laughter)

WN: Did your siblings, brother and sisters, help in the store?

RT: I don’t think so.

WN: What about your stepmother?
RT: She did. She did help. She was a good seamstress too, stepmother. She used to like to sew. So she used to make our trousers, like that. So did my wife, you know. My wife used to be like that, too. She used to sew. All my trousers like that, shirts, she used to sew for me.

MK: Like for you and your siblings, what kind of chores did you folks have? You folks didn’t help in the store, so.

RT: No. Nothing. We didn’t have no chores.

MK: No chores?

RT: Because probably my sister folks used to help in the kitchen. Wash the dishes, that kind of stuff. But being a boy, we didn’t do anything to help. Not in the house. Anyway, maybe because of that, now I’m too particular with cleanliness and all kind of stuff. I’m too particular. So my wife used to get mad at me, too. Since we got married, cleaning house was my job.

MK: Oh! (Chuckles)

RT: Yeah, her job was to cook and wash clothes. The other side, I clean the house, clean the bathroom. That was my job. That’s the way we work it out, yeah?

MK: But when you were a kid, you didn’t do those things?

RT: Okay, we go talk about that later on. Your father being a businessman, what do you remember him doing in the community, especially with Japanese people? How active was he?

RT: My dad was an educated person, too. Those days, while he was in Japan, he was educated in Japan. I think he went as far as maybe eighth grade. I’m not sure how far he went, but he was an intelligent person. So they all used to come to talk to him. Whatever business they had with the [Japanese] consulate or whatever they had to do, they used to talk to my dad about it. He used to help them out like that. He was what they call community leader those days. Like a politician, but what they get paid is sake. You do everything for them, and then no more money, so what he do is they get party and sake, drunk. Get drunk, come home like that. That was the politician of those days.

MK: So Kona Japanese, they’d come, talk to your father, get advice, maybe. Your father would do some paperwork like with the consulate?

RT: Mm-hmm [yes]. He was their contact with the consulate. Japanese ship used to come—training ship—used to come in. Community leader, so they go out and visit them. Meet with them. That kind of stuff, he used to do. That’s the reason why, I think, he got interned.

WN: How was your father’s English?

RT: Not good. But at least he understood, you know.

WN: And what did you speak to him?

RT: Japanese.

WN: You spoke Japanese?

MK: Then you mentioned that your stepmother, though, was Hawai‘i-born and she helped in the store, too.

RT: Yes, I think so. And she was a seamstress, too, so she used to sew for people like that.

MK: So her languages were what?

RT: English. Mostly English.

MK: Okay. I was wondering, was your father a member of organizations in Kona?

RT: He was chamber of commerce. I mean, just like chamber of commerce kind. All the businessman.

MK: Chamber of commerce, yeah.

RT: That kind of group used to have.

MK: How about kumiai?

RT: Tanomoshi kind of stuff?

MK: Tanomoshi, he did tanomoshi?

RT: I think so. I think all the Japanese people . . .

MK: Kenjinkai? Kumamoto . . .

RT: My dad was more on the—he liked to teach kendō. He wasn’t trained for kendō, you know, but by reading, he used to teach us. We used to have an older person. His name was Shikada. Shikada-sensei. He was the kendō teacher. So through him, we learned how to play kendō.

MK: Where did you folks practice kendō?

RT: Nāpo‘opo‘o Japanese School, you know, the school. The hall, like that. When we were in Hönaunau, there used to be a clubhouse kind of stuff, like church kind of stuff. We used to go there and practice.

MK: Then when it came to like church or temple, which one did you folks participate in?

RT: We weren’t that religious. Whenever we had funeral, we go. Just—but, more or less, Buddhism was our religion. Because all the funerals used to be Buddhist. Marriage used to be Buddhist, those days. So, well, more or less, we lean toward the Buddhist.

MK: How about things like Bon dance?

RT: Bon dance, yeah, we used to have Bon dance every year.

MK: Okay. Since your father was kind of educated and really active in the Japanese community, was he also active in like Japanese[-language] school PTA?

RT: Yeah. Usually he used to be the president for that area. They had Japanese[-language] school all over the place, so. He used to be active, very active.

MK: You mentioned you had Japanese[-language] school ten years?
RT: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: What Japanese[-language] school you went to?

RT: First, I went Nāpo‘opo‘o when we used to live in Kealakekua. You know, from Kealakekua, Nāpo‘opo‘o School, long walk to Japanese school. Captain Cook Store used to be that junction over there? You folks know Kona?

WN: Yeah.

RT: Okay. You folks from Kona?

MK: No, no.

WN: The junction is as you heading south after Manago or before Manago Hotel?

RT: After.

WN: After Manago Hotel. Oh, okay.

RT: They go like that and then there’s a road come down Nāpo‘opo‘o way.

WN: Oh, to go Nāpo‘opo‘o? Yeah, yeah, down. So how long a walk was that?

RT: Oh, quite a while. Quite a while. I don’t know how—actually, we never keep track of how many miles, but there’s quite a distance, you know.

WN: Yeah. Downhill most of the way.

RT: But, you know, we go, bunch of kids, so you get lot of fun, playing and go around like that. Go through the coffee fields.

WN: So when you lived Kealakekua and then did you folks move to Nāpo‘opo‘o?

RT: Mm-hmm [yes], Nāpo‘opo‘o.

WN: You were still going same school?

RT: Yeah.

WN: There’s only one school?

RT: I forget already. But the Japanese[-language] school was below Nāpo‘opo‘o School, so you have to go that way, though.

MK: So you went Nāpo‘opo‘o Japanese[-language] school?


(Laughter)

But, you know, like my family, my oldest sister was really good in Japanese school. They say she used to come in top ten. My brother was very good in Japanese. I told you when the war started he went into military intelligence. Then my sister is pretty good, too. Not as good as my older two, but she was pretty good. She used to come in number three in the class. Like me, I used to come home, bottom of the class. I just tell my dad—I used to
come home, show him my report card—“Ey, look that.” Of course, I’m talking in Japanese, now. “Look that. Look my grade.”

He looking. “What is this!” he says.

“Look, look. Good, hah, number three, number four.”

He said, “This no good.” It’s from the bottom, number four.

“Oh!”

(Laughter)

He used to encourage me to go to school and study, but I don’t know.

That’s the worst thing, you know, to lose your mother. At least you know when you young and you get hurt, when you say, “Oh, itai, itai, no,” she can soothe your feeling. I never had those things, no.

MK: Hard.

RT: I had a hard life, you know. I’m not kidding, too.

MK: And then you had many [half-sisters and half-brothers].

RT: Yeah.

MK: So when your stepmother came into the picture and her children came, in the family, then it was your sister Sachiko, you, and then your [half-]brothers, Ronald . . .

RT: No, I’m Ronald.

MK: I mean, Albert, Edwin, . . .

RT: Edwin, Jane . . .

MK: Jane, and Stanford.

RT: Yeah.

MK: That became the family?

RT: Yeah.

MK: By the time that war came, that was the family?

RT: Yeah.


RT: Konawaena.

MK: Konawaena.

RT: Those days, up to sixth grade was elementary school. So from seventh to twelve was the high school.

MK: And up to sixth grade, where did you go?
RT: Nāpo‘opo‘o.

MK: Nāpo‘opo‘o. If you look back on those first six grades of school, what sticks in your mind about going to Nāpo‘opo‘o School?

RT: You’re going to laugh, but to me the best thing was . . . . To me, the most important thing the school taught me was how to brush my teeth. It sounds stupid, but why I used to enjoy it was, when they teach you, the teacher tells you, “Okay, put toothpaste on. Brush your teeth.” Then she sing for us, “This is the way we brush our teeth, brush our teeth, early in the morning.” So I used to enjoy that. At least, somebody paying attention to me. Even though the whole class, but I felt, well, little bit for me.

That, and the other one was Nāpo‘opo‘o School. I like to talk. I used to love to talk. Anyway, she says, “May Day program”—May Day program every year, right?—she tells me, “You know, Yoshiki,”—my name is Yoshiki, Japanese name. She said, “You know, you like to talk so why don’t you sing for me?” Boy, as soon as I open my mouth, “’Nough, ’nough, ’nough, ’nough!”

(Laughter)

I couldn’t carry a tune. Really come to that kind of stuff, I get no ability. That, sport—I was clumsy. I was like that all my life.

MK: Who were some of your teachers back at Nāpo‘opo‘o? Would you remember?

RT: Yeah. There used to be—Mrs. Gaspar used to be the principal, I think. Miss Wells. Mr. Kamaka? Yeah, Kamaka. Mrs. Goto, but what was her name now? I forget her name now. Quite a bit from there. But the teachers teach so many. Nāpo‘opo‘o, that kind of school, so. It was enjoyable, but yet I hardly remember those days.

MK: Then you remembered the names of the teachers.

RT: Yeah, some of them, I do.

MK: How were the teachers?

RT: How were the teachers?

MK: Yeah, how were they? What do you think of them?

RT: Good, but some were strict. One teacher especially. This is what my sister told me: when you were naughty, put your finger out like that and they get that pointer. You know, the stick to point when you have a lesson? (Sound of rapping.) Whack.

WN: Wow, they do on the finger?

RT: Yeah, yeah. It hurts, you know. So you know you not supposed to do what you doing. So it’s a good way. Those days different from today. The way they train you. They had so much authority as teachers.

WN: Did you get whacked a lot?

RT: No, no. All I know is, when Japanese[-language] school, if you naughty, the teacher make you go in the front of the class and sit down like that.

WN: Oh, you mean, sit down with your [knee bent, legs under the body]—oh, seiza style.
MK: Oh, seiza.

RT: This way, this way.

WN: With your . . .

RT: Not five minutes, you know, but at least half an hour, you sit like that. When you move little bit, the teacher come and give you a good kick. Back to the same position. So that was the discipline. That’s the way they used to be, Japanese[-language] school. The teacher over there used to be Ishida, I think. Ishida-sensei, used to be, I think. Now, Hōnaunau was Goto.

WN: The Japanese[-language] school, who was running the Japanese[-language] school? Was it the church?

RT: No. I think the community itself.

MK: When we talk with nisei people, they tell us in Japanese[-language] school, they would be taught shūshin, morals, ethics . . .

RT: Yeah, shūshin is what would you call that in English?

MK: Morals, ethics, how to live or . . .

RT: We did so many kind of stuff, those days.

MK: How did they teach you like shūshin? Lecture to you or . . .

RT: All through books, yeah? They read the books.

MK: Through the books?

RT: Yeah, through the books. They read and then after, we get discussion like that. Used to be that. But those days, the teachers used to be powerhouses, you know. You naughty, boy, they can do whatever they want with you. You complain to the parents, the parent tell you, “That’s your fault, that’s why get a whack like that.” Today, you whack a kid, the kid going complain to the parent, the parent going complain to the school, complain to the principal like that. No such thing in those days. Everything the teacher do is right.

MK: After sixth grade at Nāpo’opo’o, you went Konawaena?

RT: Konawaena, yeah.

MK: What do you remember most about Konawaena?

RT: (All I remember my days at Konawaena was the friendships I had with two guys. Whenever we had free time we were always together. One person’s name was “Osa” and the other was Harry. This was mostly at school. I lost track of Osamu after I started to volunteer for things not connected to going to school. I was told that he became very successful and that made me very happy because he was a great guy. As for Harry we met again when I got the job at Sheraton [Hotel] and I started working at the maintenance department where he worked also. It was great to see him again and to work in the same department. Another person that I remember from Konawaena was Hajime. He was a swell guy and we were friends there. And he turned out to be the foreman at the Sheraton for the department that I worked. He turned out to be the person that got me the job there. This tells me how good it is to have great friends. These are the friends I remember most from my days at Konawaena.)

MK: I was curious. You know, in your family, your oldest siblings, they went high school, too?
RT: Yeah, they all go to high school.
MK: They all finished high school?
RT: Yeah.
MK: So you folks didn’t have to quit school or anything. The family could have you going to school?
RT: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [yes].
MK: How about other families that you folks knew. The kid going to school or. . .
RT: Yeah. Most of them.
MK: Most of them went?
RT: Mmm. I think if they could afford it, they used to go. Because they encourage you to come to school, the teachers.
MK: When you were going high school, what classes did you like the best?
RT: Nothing. I didn’t get to study. That was my fault. I didn’t want to study. I just got a passing grade and that was enough for me. That’s what I did.
MK: At that time, what thoughts did you have about the future?
RT: Actually, I didn’t care what happened to me. That was my attitude at that time.
WN: You went to English [public] school first and afterward you go to Japanese[-language] school?
WN: Which one did you like better?
RT: About the same, yeah? Japanese[-school] was enjoyable, too, as far as playing. English [public] school, the same thing, too. I think about the same.
MK: When you went high school, were you active in any extracurricular activities—clubs. . .
RT: I told you doing sports so clumsy, I don’t want to make fool of myself, you know. So I never did enjoy that kind of stuff.
MK: So no sports?
RT: No sports.
MK: No clubs?
RT: No. One year, a teacher of mine, her name was Mrs. Smith, I think she was the only teacher that sort of give me attention. She tells me, “You know, Yoshiki, you love to talk, yeah?”

I said, “Yeah, I like to talk.” I say, yeah. You know why I want to talk? I get attention. I was always reaching for something there.

But then she says, “You know, what? Why don’t you take up debate?”
So I look at her, I said, “Me?”

She said, “Yeah. Don’t worry. I’ll help you.”

And that was the year that the war came.

MK: Oh.

RT: So I didn’t get to do those things, but . . . Then the war came. Those days, volunteer was so important. They told us to volunteer for CCC camp. You know what CCC camp? Civilian Conservation Corps.

MK: Yeah.

RT: Those were created by [President Franklin] Delano Roosevelt, yeah? Depression, after that. So we volunteered because we thought, don’t have to go to school, you get the credit for the year, school, yeah. So volunteer for that. Afterwards, that thing turn into . . . CCC camp, they eliminated it. It came—what did they call that?—Corps of Engineers, I think. So we worked at the Saddle Road. You know, Pōhakuloa? We were on the road crew, you know. Small as I was, I used handle small buster. You know, tok-tok-tok-tok-tok-tok. We used to do that. We took part in building Saddle Road. That was the war years, yeah?

WN: So you were junior year when the war broke out?

RT: Forty-one, so, yeah, I think so.

WN: Forty-one, so the war break out, so then you . . .

RT: See, I was supposed to graduate in ’43.

WN: I see. So did lot of you folks do that? Join CCC?

RT: Yeah, some of us did, but they all had to repeat. That promise [of school credit for CCC work] was made by [school officials but it was not kept]. We didn’t go to school so we didn’t get credit. So we had to repeat.

MK: When you were in the CCC, what did you folks do?

RT: Work in the forest, plant trees and stuff.

MK: This was from before the war or after the war started, you did this?

RT: After the war.

MK: After the war started?

RT: Yeah. That’s when they told us if you volunteer, you get that credit kind of stuff.

MK: Okay.

RT: Civilian Conservation workers. They used to have that camp. Just like military, same thing. You get in the morning, you go up and have calisthenics, have breakfast, everything timed. You got to eat certain time.

WN: So did you do it with your friends? You had friends, you folks all went together?

RT: Yes.

WN: Oh, was that good fun?
RT: Good fun, good fun, yeah. Good fun.

WN: When you went school, you know, when you were going to start the debate, that was because of the coffee schedule?

RT: Yeah, yeah.

WN: I’m just wondering if you can think back, how did you feel when war started and you couldn’t participate in this [school] debate?

RT: We were picking coffee that day. Coffee season, so we were picking coffee. Late afternoon, coming home, I think a policeman stopped us and told us Pearl Harbor was attacked. But to me, I didn’t think much about it, you know, really. Lot of people at the end, they said, oh, they would visit that and all kind of stuff. But to me, I didn’t know what to think actually.

MK: Then when you got home . . .

RT: Nothing changed. Same thing. Just kind of rural community. Not like city like that. Maybe city, would get gathering up and stuff. But they didn’t have those things, those days. Not when I was there anyway.

WN: Did your father say anything?

RT: No, he never said anything.

WN: So I guess my original question, you were going to start on the debate?

RT: Yeah, supposed to.

WN: So how did you feel? Do you remember, were you sad when you couldn’t participate in that program?

RT: No. As I say, I just go for the ride like, you know. Because I didn’t care to study. Actually I didn’t care for school, to be truthful. I didn’t care. Whatever I end up being, that’s what I’m going to be anyway.

WN: But you would have done the debate?

RT: If, I think so, yeah. She was the only teacher that encouraged me. So I might have done it.

MK: You mentioned, so December 7, you folks were in the coffee lands picking coffee. Then on your way home, a policeman told you what had happened at Pearl Harbor. You went home. Then in the next days and weeks coming back, what differences, if any, anything you notice in the community or in your family?

RT: No, nothing changed (for me but community got more careful what they said or did).

MK: Nothing?

RT: Of course, but there was a family living above us way in the coffee field. The guy, he went sort of crazy. So that, I remember. He didn’t want to join the army, you see.

MK: I see.

RT: That’s the only thing I remember.

MK: When we interview people in different areas, sometimes they tell us, oh, yeah, after the war started, we started hearing about people being pulled in. How about your family? Did you folks hear . . .
RT: Well, we talked about it. We figured Dad going to be pulled in one day. But, you know, strange part is, as active a community leader he was, he wasn’t pulled in that day. Maybe about two, three months later he got pulled in. That was when I was working at CCC camp. Kilaeua Military Camp. And that’s where they were interned—Kilaeua Military Camp. But I didn’t go to see him either. I could have gone, but I didn’t. I don’t know why.

MK: But when you were up there, did you know that your father was over there?

RT: Yeah, I know he was there. But I don’t know why I didn’t go see him.

MK: What did you think or feel that time when you heard your father had been pulled in?

RT: No, but we expected that already. People, real community leaders, that night they got pulled in. December 7, that night they got pulled in. They would say they told them, “Pack some goods. You won’t be there too long.” Yeah, but some people they didn’t see their father for year and a half like that. They didn’t know where they were. Because they had lot of camps. Like Big Island was military camp, Kilaeua. Over here [O’ahu] they had Honouliuli, that kind of stuff.

MK: So your family did hear about other people being pulled in.

RT: Oh, yeah.

MK: Were some of them good friends of your father?

RT: Well, I would think, doing business, so I would think they were. But most of them got pulled in is community leaders, right? Either that or you were a bon-san. Lots of fishermen got pulled in, too. You know why? Fishermen, they figure they go out to sea. They go out to sea, maybe meet the enemy, give them information. That’s the reason why lot of fishermen got interned, too. (That’s what I heard.)

MK: So you folks were kind of expecting.

RT: Oh, yeah, for my dad to get pulled in, yeah.

MK: Were any preparations made knowing that oh, most likely, your father’s going to be pulled in?

RT: What can we do, though? If you have discussion, for nothing. You can’t do nothing.

MK: Would you remember how your stepmother reacted to all this?

RT: She just accepted it. But she hustled for all kind of stuff, too. Because people owed us money, that kind of stuff, too. She tried to collect, too. Because no money, eh? But she did her part, I think. She did her part.

MK: When your father was pulled in, you weren’t there.

RT: I was in CCC camp.

MK: So what did you hear about how your father was pulled in? When, how?

RT: Gee, I don’t know. There used to be some Japanese police officers. Most of them say, “Sorry I got to do this to you.” But their instruction was to pull them in, right? They only doing their job. So, that’s the way it went. You know, it’s not like today. Today, you get together and argue about it. Those days, no. They figure what can they do? They cannot do anything. Make a fool of themselves or get themselves more in trouble. Because the Japanese people were really hated those days, you know. Really.
MK: So your father was pulled in and taken to KMC. When he was taken to KMC, how did your family manage?

RT: I used to work at CCC camp already. So CCC camp deal was, I think we used to get paid, I think, twenty dollars a month or twenty-one dollars a month. And so much used to go to the family and so much to you. So whatever money we used to get, they get through my work. I don’t know how my mom used to manage, but the part is, she applied for welfare. At that time, some girls, they working for the [welfare office]. Kind of made her feel shame. Because say, “You Japanese. You no shame?” For welfare stuff. My mom said, “What can I do? We don’t have money.” But then she gave up because the way they talk to her—the workers. That’s what I heard anyway. My sister told me that. She said, “Mom tried, but they talk to her so badly that just like shame.” You Japanese, you can do that kind of stuff. So she gave up applying.

We had that coffee farm picking money. But when my mom went to ask them for the money, then they refuse to give her the money. Because you know why? When we moved to Hōnaunau, this person that we worked for [had] loaned us some money. So she says, “We loaned you folks some money. If you folks go to the Mainland, how we know we going collect the money?” So she refused to pay us the money. That, I think, was really wrong, you know. I don’t know. But they didn’t pay us for what we did.

MK: So that family had a loan from your family?

RT: No, no. My dad got the loan from that family. They figured if we went to the Mainland, they didn’t know what was going happen. So they figure they wouldn’t be able to collect the money, what my dad owed them. So she refused to pay.

MK: For your labor?

RT: Mmm [yes].

MK: I see. So your stepmother, she tried to collect debts owed to the store. She tried to get welfare, but she gave up trying to get welfare. Your family tried to get payment for the family-labor picking coffee. The family got some money from your work with CCC.

RT: (My older brother worked as a carpenter or helper so he helped too.)

MK: That was about it. Oh, boy. Then during that time when your father’s detained, how much contact?

RT: I don’t think they had much contact. I mean, once in a while get a letter. Write a letter kind of stuff. That’s about it, I think.

MK: Nobody from the family went to go talk with him at the camp or take something to the camp?

RT: No, no. We didn’t. Because far, right, Kona to Pōhakuloa. I was there, but I didn’t go to see my dad. I don’t know why I didn’t go.

MK: By that time, okay, it’s known to the community that Mr. Takahata, Takahata-san is in the camp. He was pulled away. How were you folks treated? How was your family treated by community.

RT: No difference.

MK: No difference? Nobody stayed away or avoided being with you folks?

RT: Gee, that, I don’t know. Because we were kids, so nobody bothered us, that’s why. But I don’t know about my mother, though. I don’t know. I doubt it, though. I think small community so they know each other. And what can you do, yeah? He got pulled in, he
got pulled in. Because they knew that community leaders were all getting pulled in and my dad was one, so. Automatic, that he going get pulled in one day.

MK: And the store was still operating? It was still operating . . .

RT: No.

MK: . . . when your dad was taken? Pau?

RT: No, no. When he got taken, then they started to make some kind of arrangement to what we going to do with the store now. Since my dad owed this person the money, I think the government approached him and they made it into a post office.

WN: Oh, so the government took over the store.

RT: No, not the government. The person that my father owed money to. He’s the one. He’s the owner now, so he can do whatever he want. But I’m thinking it was a lease, so. Anyway, he took over and that was the end of it.

WN: I was wondering because post office is federal government, so I thought maybe.

RT: No. I don’t think so. They must have approached this person that my dad owed money to. And maybe he figure it’s a good deal for him. At least he bring back part of the money that my dad owed him, so.

MK: So, no income from the store, then. There’s no store.

RT: Closed, yeah. But then, before my dad got pulled in, lot of his friends came to our house and told my dad, “Bring all the stuff that you don’t want the government to see what you have.” My dad had a six-shooter, samurai sword. So this person took it all way in the mountain and buried it. So I was told. They were nice enough to help him stay out of more trouble that what he was in already.

MK: So all the kendō equipment, the six-shooter . . .

WN: Samurai sword.

MK: Were there anything else buried like Japanese writings or photo, paintings?

RT: I don’t think so. I don’t know that kind of stuff.

MK: But this friend took the stuff and . . .

RT: Buried.

MK: . . . buried it.

WN: I’m wondering, the man that your father owed money to, was he issei, first generation, or . . .

RT: First generation.

WN: So he was from Japan?

RT: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: That’s the one that took over the store . . .

RT: Property.
MK: . . . property and made it into a post office.

RT: Whatever deal he made after that is up to what they wanted.

WN: So this is the Hönaunau store?

RT: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: What’s there now? Do you know? Is it still the post office?

RT: Gee, I don’t know. The last time I went there, it was a post office. But I haven’t been there long time, so I don’t know. Maybe it still is.

WN: You mean, you know before you going Hönaunau, and then you make this hairpin turn to go down to the City of Refuge . . .

RT: Yeah.

WN: Right as you going down, there’s a post office right there.

RT: (That’s not the one.)

MK: Your family didn’t have resources. How did you feel about all this?

RT: Make me mad but what can I do?

MK: So your father taken to KMC. What happened to him after KMC?

RT: I don’t know where he was sent to. They were sent to New Mexico or was it Crystal City, Texas? I’m not sure which one, you know. I think New Mexico, he went first.

MK: Santa Fe?

RT: Santa Fe, yeah. Then from there they went to Crystal City, I think. Then from there he came back. Nineteen forty-four, he came back to camp.

MK: He came back to. . . . Where did he . . .

RT: Jerome.

MK: He was at Jerome, too?

RT: He came at the end.

MK: At the end?

RT: Just before they closed that camp, 1944.

MK: I see. Wow. You didn’t see your father long time.

RT: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: So your family’s on its own. Your father’s in camp. What do you know about the decision to go to Jerome? I mean, how did it come about that your family ended up going to Jerome?

RT: We were sent there. We had no choice.

MK: Was it like an order that you folks. . . .
RT: You go there.

MK: . . . Takahatas, you got to go to Jerome?

RT: Yeah, yeah. Most of them went to Jerome. They used to intern people by the batches. So our group was assigned to Jerome. Some were assigned to Topaz, Utah. And another one—which now? I know there was Tule Lake, too, so.

WN: Some went Crystal City, huh?

RT: (I don’t think families were sent there.)

MK: Family camp, yeah.

RT: So many different, so.

MK: Yeah. So you folks were just told . . .

RT: You were talking about no income, yeah? My brother used to work. My brother used to work, so probably he helped them, too, my family, my mom. I think he helped them, too. He used to work as a carpenter, or helper, so he’s making some money, too. So I think he helped them.

MK: How about your stepmother’s side family? Because she was island-born. She had family still?

RT: Yeah, yeah.

MK: How helpful were they?

RT: I don’t know.

MK: Because she had small children, yeah, that time.

RT: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: So your family was just told, “You folks . . . ”

RT: Me, no. Sachiko, yes.

MK: You had choice to stay or go?

RT: No.

MK: Sister had choice to stay or go?

RT: (Yes. Sister [Sachiko] said she was going because of the children, who needed her. I was so glad to hear her say that because if she was not going I would surely miss her.)

MK: Did you know like where you’re going to go or anything like that?

RT: That, I’m not sure. Must be because you know why? Like we could take some things with us, so they gave us the big boxes to put our goods in like. So anyway, when we from Kona, they told us to go to Hilo. So we went to Hilo. We stayed a week or not a week maybe. Almost a week, anyway. To get on a ship to go to Mainland. So I don’t know. Lot of things, I don’t know, you know. Because that’s a family decision, so it was left up to our stepmom, yeah? She was the one making all the decisions.

MK: How much time did you folks have to get ready to go to Hilo?
RT: I think we had enough time. Enough time to pack and everything. They give you notice way ahead of time. That's one thing they did right.

MK: Then when you folks went Hilo, where did you folks stay?

RT: With our relatives.

MK: Oh. So you folks still on your own then. Going from Kona to Hilo? You folks had to find your own transportation, find your own place to stay in Hilo?

RT: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: Then from Hilo, came Honolulu?

RT: Mm-hmm [yes]. On the *Humu*—I don’t know which Inter-Island [ship] we came from. Not *Humu’ula*, I think *Waialeale* or what? *Waialeale*. They used to have a steamship *Waialeale*, yeah? *Humu’ula*. I think was the *Waialeale*, I think.

WN: This was who? Was your stepmother, Sachiko, you, who else?

RT: Albert.

WN: Albert. Okay Albert was about six years old, seven years old.

RT: Albert, then came . . .

MK: Edwin.


WN: Edwin was five.

RT: And came Jane.

MK: Jane.

RT: And then came Stanford.

WN: Stanford was a baby.

RT: He’s was a baby.

MK: Born 1940, yeah?

WN: Wow, so Sachiko going was a help for your stepmother.

RT: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

WN: That’s a lot of children.

RT: Even at home, she used to help so much with the kids, you know.

WN: Four children.

RT: When you get children every year like that.

MK: Plus, you figure, Albert, born 1935, he’s only six years old. Edwin, five.

RT: They all toshigo, that’s why.
MK: They’re all young kids.

RT: Our family, all the girls’ names end with “ko.” And the boys, we’re all “Yoshi”—start with “Yoshi.”

MK: What was Jane’s Japanese name?

RT: Yukiko.

MK: Yukiko? Okay.

WN: So you were saying that Albert and everybody, those are your . . .

RT: Step.

WN: [Half-siblings]. So your full sister was staying back. She didn’t go.

RT: Yeah. My older brother and my older sister. And the young one, Teruko. She didn’t have to go because she was with my uncle folks.

WN: I see. Okay, got that.

MK: Okay. So you folks were in Hilo, then you folks went Honolulu.

RT: Immigration station.

MK: What was that like, being at the immigration station?

RT: No difference. Same thing. But to me, I tell myself and I tell my friends, I don’t think we were treated right by the Red Cross. But some people say, “No, they treated us good.” But you know why I say that is because when we were there about three or four o’clock in the afternoon, I think, they gave us sandwich to eat. So we figure that’s kind of early, we going get dinner afterwards. No, that was our lunch and dinner. That’s why I was kind of sour with the Red Cross. But then some people say, “No, they gave us this and that.” But I don’t remember that kind of stuff. So I could be wrong, too. But that’s why, Red Cross, I don’t give them donation. Never did.

MK: I know some people, they said something about Red Cross gave them some cold-weather clothes? Would you remember getting anything like that?

RT: I don’t remember that. I thought all the winter clothing we got for us in camp. That’s the way I remember. I could be wrong. That was long ago. I don’t remember.

MK: Or it could be that different people had different experiences with the Red Cross. Could be.

RT: Maybe, maybe.

MK: But you folks were at the immigration station. I was curious, what were the living situation like? Family could stay together or you folks separated by age? How did it work?

RT: No, I think we stayed by family, if I’m not mistaken. I’m not sure, though. So long ago.

MK: This was about Christmastime, you went? About when did you go?

RT: (Rustling of paper.) What’s the question now?

MK: I was wondering, when it was that you were at the immigration station?
RT: When?
MK: Yeah, when you were in Honolulu? Oh, so you left Hilo Christmas eve?
RT: Christmas eve.
MK: Oh!
RT: And we reached Honolulu Christmas day.
MK: Was there a Christmas for you at immigration station?
RT: No. Maybe they had Christmas tree, I don’t know. Wasn’t interested, those days. Then we got on the *Lurline*.
MK: So two nights at the immigration . . .
RT: I think it was two nights. Some people say it was one week, you know. I don’t think so. Because it’s different, what island you come from. I thought was two nights.
MK: Then after staying, you think, about two nights at the immigration station, you got on the *Lurline*?
RT: Mm-hmm [yes].
MK: What was that like for you?
RT: Well, that’s something. You never can ride *Lurline*. But luxury liner, we going up there. Wow. But you not sure where you going.
MK: But even if it’s luxury liner, you’re not in the luxurious quarters, huh?
RT: No, no, no.
MK: Where were you folks?
RT: Was a cabin. But I think some people got the better unit to stay in. All depends, I guess. All I know is, coming back, I remember what happened. But going, I’m not too sure.
MK: Where did you folks end up? You went Honolulu to . . .
RT: Oh, San Francisco. There we took the ferry, went to Oakland. Then at Oakland, we caught the train. Five days, five nights, I think, stay on the train. Then we reached Jerome January 5, 1943.
MK: Wow. You know, you’re a teenager, you grew up in Kona. Was that the first time you ever left the Big Island?
RT: Yeah, first time.
MK: What did you think? San Francisco, Oakland. What was your impression?
RT: Oh, especially when we went to the San Francisco, that bridge, wow. Never seen things like that in my life. All high-rises and all that kind of stuff. You come impressed, yeah? You know, you just sleepy. You know, in Kona, you see nothing. Real country, that’s why.
MK: How about the people? Now you’re seeing more *haole* people, other people. What did you think?
RT: For a while I hated the *hakujin*, *haoles*, you know. Because the way, when I saw them treating the colored people like that, so badly. Lot of time I thought, what’s the matter with these guys? Then these colored guys used to be real nice to us. All my experience, in Chicago, or when I was in Sikeston, Missouri, they used to really take care of us. Whenever we want information, never go to the *haoles*. We always go to the colored guys. Ask for directions, like that. Real nice guys to us anyway.

WN: You realize it’s been, this month, seventy years. This month, January, it’s been seventy years since you arrived in Jerome.

RT: Oh, yeah?

WN: Yeah. One five forty-three [1/5/43], this is January of 2013. Seventy years.

RT: So long, yeah?

MK: Wow. You know, on that ship . . .

WN: What is that? I’m sorry.

MK: He has a little timeline.

WN: Oh. Let me see.

RT: You know how I find out all that kind of stuff? In this book. Did people show you this kind of book?

MK: Yeah.

WN: Yeah, yeah, we have that book.

RT: They have all the information here.

MK: On that ship ride, what do you remember most about that voyage?

RT: I know I got seasick. I know that.

MK: You got seasick?

RT: Yeah.

MK: How sick were you?

RT: Not too much. But I had to stay in the room and once in a while go out on the deck.

MK: How was your family managing? All these little kids.

RT: They were managing okay.

MK: They were okay?

RT: Because of my sister taking care of them. They were okay.

WN: Kids from all over Hawai‘i, yeah?

RT: Yeah, yeah. Come from Hilo, Maui, all kind of stuff. I know get from Maui, yeah. Kaua‘i. My wife was from Kaua‘i. Us, from Big Island. I don’t think so, no. We had a lot of fun. That’s why I never think anything. We were enjoying ourselves.
MK: How about guards and stuff, though?

RT: Yeah, but they didn’t bother us. As long as we didn’t open that nighttime like that. That screen [on the train windows], you got to leave it down. They don’t want you to look outside, so. But actually, they don’t have to worry because the train goes all the rural areas. Nothing important. You got nothing in the way. Nothing but mountains and rocks, so actually they didn’t have much problem with us because nothing to see.

WN: Were they nice guys or...? Did they talk to you guys?

RT: Yeah, some guys were nice. Some guys were lousy, but some were nice. You ask them questions, they answer you. Some guys would just ignore you, but that’s okay.

MK: What kind of questions would you ask the guards?

RT: Where were we, you know. How long it takes us to reach there. That kind of stuff.

MK: Where were we, you know. How long it takes us to reach there. That kind of stuff.

RT: Some people say they didn’t know. But to me, kind of strange because all our baggage, luggage were going there. So they should have known, most of them. Well, maybe they didn’t know. I’m not sure. But then. . . .

MK: Yeah. Then like you’re in . . .

RT: Another thing, why I said that, was if we were going to Arkansas, there was Jerome. And there was another camp there, Rohwer. There’s two camps in Arkansas. So we don’t know, maybe which one they were going. That, maybe, they didn’t know. But then I tell myself, cannot be because they should have known. Because how the baggage going to get there, which camp you’re going? Got to go the camp that you’re going, right? Otherwise, you get there and there’s no baggage of yours, luggage, whatever you call it, then you be something. Only your clothing, like that. So I’m quite sure they informed the people. The head of the family anyway knew where they was going.

MK: Then all these young people, they’re with you in one car?

RT: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: And then your family, separate car?

RT: Yeah, yeah.

MK: So during that train ride, you go back and forth?

RT: Yeah. You can go from car to car.

MK: Then how are conditions on the train?

RT: Gee, we haven’t been on a train. That’s the first experience we had, so we didn’t think anything about it, yeah? That’s a long ride, though, hoo.

WN: Now, did you have an understanding of geography back then? U.S. geography? Know where Arkansas was . . . .

RT: No.

WN: . . . on a map?

RT: No. Maybe some guys did. But as I said, I never cared for school, so never did bother me with that kind of stuff.
WN: Wow, so you had no idea then, where you were, or anything.

MK: Then you weren’t supposed to open up the blinds and stuff, did you look outside?

RT: No, you do that, they catch you then. But maybe some guys did, you know. Yeah, when nobody looking. But as I say, we’re in this kind of rural area, there’s nothing to see anyway except mountains, and bushes, and that kind of stuff, yeah? But because of this kind of travel, I saw lot of places, though. All the states. When we were going to Heart Mountain, through Montana and all kind of stuff. Travel. Missouri, we used to go. We see lot of place that I never dreamt I would see.

MK: Could we stop here and then we come back one more time . . .

RT: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: And we go ask you about Jerome and your life after that.

RT: Okay, okay.

MK: And that’s good that you took notes and stuff.

WN: Yeah. So we’ll stop here, okay?

MK: So we’re going to stop here.

END OF INTERVIEW
MK: This is an interview with Mr. Ronald Y. Takahata and we’re in Kāneʻohe, Oʻahu, Hawaiʻi. This is session number two and it’s January 28, 2013.

We’re going to continue where we left off.

RT: We left off what? My childhood, hah?

MK: Yeah, you’re still a kid. We were getting you to Jerome, Arkansas. We talked about your leaving Kona, then Hilo, then you went to the West Coast, then from there you went to Jerome, yeah? When you first got to Jerome, that was January 5, 1943, around then. What did you first think about the place? You end up over there and what did you think?

RT: To be honest, like us, we were from—country kids—we were from Big Island, yeah, Kona side. Real country. So we never think much. You cannot compare with anything, to me. I thought it was same like my home. Nothing. We were living in Kona, we used to go English public school. After English public school, go to Japanese-language school. We don’t have much time to play around like that. But to me, I don’t know. Of course, really cold. That’s the only thing that kind of bothered me, was the cold.

MK: That time when you folks got to Jerome, if you can remember, how did your older sister and your stepmother seem? How did they seem? How were they reacting?

RT: Those days, the Japanese people, they didn’t want to say anything because you open your mouth, you get in trouble. So they won’t say nothing; otherwise, it may get worse. So most of them just accept it. Cannot do anything, right? You open your mouth, you get in trouble. Other nationalities didn’t like Japanese, those days. So you don’t want to say too much. Get trouble, keep your mouth shut. Japanese say, “Shō ga nai,” yeah?

MK: When you folks went, your stepmom, your sister, your younger siblings, how were the living conditions at Jerome?

RT: No difference than Kona. You know, the way we were brought up. So even when we used to work for CCC camp, same thing. You go the mess hall and eat. No more difference, yeah? Actually, for us kind of guys, we didn’t have any luxuries our days. This is 1920s. I mean, 1940s, but started from 1920s. Still wasn’t good anyway. Business wasn’t good yet. So we didn’t feel much difference.

WN: What were the barracks like for you? Was it crowded? What did it look like?

RT: No, there was a room, oh, maybe ten by ten at the most. And there’s a potbelly heater in the room. We had two rooms like that. But like my mother had her children with her. My sister, to help her, they all stayed in one room. So I had the run of my own room like. Because nobody want to stay. Small little kids, then my sister going take care them, so she stayed with my mom.
RT: But it was cold, though. The building wasn’t that good, that kind of barracks. The [tar] paper kind of building. So was okay. Nothing—you cannot compare with any place. We were in Kona, we were getting just as bad time, too.

WN: Had like outhouse outside or outhouse? What did you folks have for . . .

RT: Outhouse? They used to have a big building, laundry room. Actually, in that building used to have a washroom, a bathroom, toilet. All was in the same building. I’m not too sure, now, but I think was in the same building. Like any kind of community latrine, you get maybe four, five, six lined up in a row like that.

MK: You mentioned like it was cold, but you folks had the potbellied stove.

RT: Actually, when we got there, I think following day or so, the government furnished us with what they call mackinaw, and galoshes. I think they provide those things. So it was good. At least you can walk in the snow or mud and don’t get dirty because the galoshes cover the shoes, right?

MK: Then like the potbellied stove, who was feeding it?

RT: We have to do it ourselves. But when we went there, local guys like us, we don’t know how to operate that kind of stuff. But the California people, they were there. They helped us out quite a bit there.

WN: Oh, yeah?

RT: Yeah, the California people, they all in the same situation, so they helped each other. They were nice about it. They used to help us how to start the fire and all kind of stuff.

WN: How did you guys get the wood?

RT: We chopped it ourselves. They used to bring big long wood. So people got to chop it. That was our job, to chop the wood.

MK: Because you’re the oldest boy in your family, what did you have to do to help out?

RT: Nothing. I didn’t do anything.

(Laughter)

I don’t know. Maybe pick up some lumber, whatever. Nothing. Because everything was community stuff. You want to eat, you go to the mess hall. You have breakfast, lunch, dinner, yeah? So actually, they didn’t need my help for anything. Actually [was] like that. My sister used to take care the kids, so. And that, I don’t know what I’m doing if I take care the kids those days. So I don’t think anything different. For me, I’m not talking about anybody else. I’m talking about myself.

MK: But for your sister, looks like she was busy, yeah?

RT: She was busy all the time.

MK: What was she doing with the kids?

RT: What do you mean?

MK: How was she taking care of your younger siblings?
RT: Well, take care. Go out play in the snow like that, she watch them. That was it. Because everything’s community. So if you eat, you’re together. Take a bath, so many of us go together.

WN: Well, Stanford was really young, yeah? He was just a baby.

RT: Yeah, he was a baby.

WN: So I guess had to change diapers and . . .

RT: Yeah, that kind of stuff.

MK: You were saying that you folks would all go mess hall to eat. What kind food did you folks have?

RT: I thought was pretty decent meal. Because you know why? The camp people are the ones preparing the food, so. These guys who worked as cook, waitress, and stuff, they used to do those things. Lunchtime you go there, they’re going to feed you or wait in line like any cafeteria style. That’s what we used to do.

MK: I heard like some moms and dads, they worked. Some worked mess hall, some had other jobs. How about your . . .

RT: My mom worked in the mess hall. My sister, she worked the hospital, I think. She was a nurse, I think, nurse’s aide anyway. We used to have lot of doctors interned too. So there’s a hospital. To me, only thing we didn’t have the freedom to run all over the place, only within that compound you can stay, right?

Of course, we had choice. If you wanted to relocate, you could have. The government pays you your train fare, gives you little spending money. You relocate yourself, wherever you wanted as long as was not on the West Coast. As long it’s not on the coastline, you can.

WN: Do you remember if you, or your mother, or any of your family could actually go get a pass or something and go outside the compound to go town or anything like that?

RT: Yeah, you can.

WN: Oh, yeah?

RT: Yeah, you can. There used to be passes.

WN: Did you go?

RT: No, I didn’t go. But for that, I went Sikeston like that, huh? That is coming . . .

MK: Oh, Missouri, later-on time, yeah?

RT: Yeah.

MK: If you folks wanted to have some items, how would you folks get items? You know, clothing or whatever you folks needed.

RT: I think they used to go order, I think, if I’m not mistaken. Like Sears, Montgomery Ward, I think they used to do those things. We have co-op store, you know. They have a store. It’s a co-op. Post office. We had post office and all the stuff. Really just like any community. Wherever, you know, same thing like that. Got everything.
MK: Then with you folks where you have the young kids, you, your sister, your mom, I don’t know if you know, but how was it in terms of money? Your folks were okay or what to . . .

RT: Cannot do nothing, right? You work, you get paid. The lowest pay was sixteen dollars a month. If you a professional person like a doctor, they used to get twenty-one dollars, I think. Another group would get nineteen. Sixteen, nineteen, twenty-one, something like that.

WN: So your mother made sixteen?

RT: Yeah, I think so. She’s down at sixteen. So they had thirty dollars a month.

WN: You didn’t want to work? Or could you work?

RT: Yeah. I worked part-time lumberyard like that.

WN: What did you do?

RT: I stack up lumber, that’s about it. Watch how many. If you go lower, then you refill it like that. Restock it like that. Only for a while, though, I did.

MK: Because you’re young, were you still going school?

RT: Yeah.

MK: So what grade were you? You try explain to us again what grade you ended up in, in the beginning.

RT: Junior.

MK: You were a junior?

RT: I was supposed to be a senior, I think. Forty-three, supposed to graduate in ’43. Because of that promise that wasn’t kept. All of us, even the people home [in Kona], they had to repeat, too. People went to camp like that. They had to repeat.

WN: Oh, because of the CCC?

RT: CCC. After that came to be Corps of Engineers, right?

MK: Then you already went some school in Kona. Now you’re going to Denson High School. Try compare. What did you think?

RT: I don’t know. To me, didn’t make any difference. Like me, I didn’t care to study anyway, so heck with the studying. That’s the way I used to feel anyway, so. But to me, I thought the school system was pretty good. No difference than wherever we were, Kona like that. Kona is so much of a country, right? Those days especially, yeah? That’s why.

MK: Like who were the teachers at Denson?

RT: There was a lot of Orientals, Japanese. In fact, internees, lot of them. And they used to get lot of hakujin, too, haole teachers. Like we used to have shop used to be one hakujin. I told you the name was—was it Vasconcellos? I can’t remember. They were two brothers. Then there was a German, I think he used to teach history, if I’m not mistaken. Principal and vice principal used to be all haoles. They used to have all kind of teachers, mixed up.

MK: You mentioned the shop teacher. What do you remember about the shop class?
RT: You know, one thing, I used to like to fool around with wood. So I used to make geta all the time. So popular, you know, make those. Because it’s muddy, eh? So if you get geta, your feet don’t get dirty. It’s higher, right? We used to do that kind of stuff. (MK and WN chuckle). I remember making it, one of the shop administrators, you know. So I remember that. Because somebody asked me to make him one, so I made him one. He was so happy I made him one geta.

MK: How did you know to make geta?

RT: In Kona. Everybody wear geta when come rain like that. So you know how it’s shaped, yeah? So more or less, you figure. There’s supposed to be one hole here—I mean, opening here and opening here. They used to get the cleats, yeah? That’s the way I figure, like that. Nothing hard. You just cut ’em off. Knock off in between, you get two place that stands up like that and the geta is like this, huh? Just the wood, like that. And then put what they call that? The place you put your feet up.

WN: The toe?

RT: Toe in between like that, right? So that’s about it.

WN: What kind of material was that?

RT: Wood.

WN: No, I mean for the . . .

MK: The strap.

WN: The strap.

RT: Strap, we used to use any kind [of material]. I think, if I’m not mistaken, it’s more cloth. That’s the only thing you have, eh?

WN: Yeah.

RT: All you do is do this. Make it angle up.

WN: Oh, twist it?

RT: Yeah, wind it up like.

MK: Oh, wind it up between your hands and kind of knot it, put it in.

RT: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: So who did you make the geta for? You made for the shop man.

RT: Yeah, I made for myself.

MK: For yourself.

WN: Did you keep any of them?

RT: No.

WN: Aw, you should have.

RT: No, no, no.
RT: At least for me. Like my wife, she kept almost everything. All the kind of [written material]. My wife used to like those things. She used to keep all kind of stuff. That’s why, even when we used to get that camp get-together [reunions], then they asked for— they knew she had them—so they always ask if she can lend her that.

WN: Oh, but no geta.

RT: No geta. Geta was over already.

MK: At that shop class, first time you’re taking shop or you had shop in Kona?

RT: When I was in Kona, we had. We had shop in Kona. They used to call ’em vocational education.

MK: Then you mentioned the history teacher. What was the history class like?

RT: Who was my history teacher now? Sometimes it’s tip of my tongue, I cannot remember. That big haole wahine. I don’t remember much, you know.

MK: Not much?

RT: They’re okay, though, as far as the way they teach. Same. Teachers are teachers, right? They got trained about the same way, so. Those were pretty good.

MK: In high school in the islands, you had like extra-curricular activities. They have clubs, they have dances, all kinds of activities. How about your time at Denson?

RT: Yeah, we used to have dances almost every week, I think, school dance, all kind of stuff. You know, those days, some wealthy people got interned. So they (children) brought their phonograph players and the records. That’s why we started to have dances every weekend. We used to look forward to those things. That’s the way I met my wife. That’s the start, anyway.

MK: Where were these dances?

RT: I think at the community hall. There’s a big building, long building. It’s a barracks, but empty. So you set up a chair and we used to plug it in, play the records. Used to get dance, like that.

MK: Besides the dances, what other community activities do you remember were there?

RT: Oh, used to get basketball. We played basketball. Used to have baseball, football, all kind of sports were there. They did almost everything. No difference than outside, I think.

MK: If you were living in Kona, you have things like Bon dance, you have kenjin-kai. You have all the . . .

RT: They had Bon dance over there, too. Make shibai, too.

MK: In Jerome?

RT: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: Bon dance and shibai?

RT: Mm-hmm [yes]. You mean, nobody else told you folks that?

MK: No. Interesting, yeah?
RT: They used to have. Used to make shibai. And like me, damn fool, I used to make naniwa bushi, eh?

MK: Oh!

RT: (Chuckles) In front the crowd and make a monkey out of myself probably. (Laughter)

RT: We used to get good fun. That’s all.

WN: Some people we talked to said that when they left Jerome and they went to Heart Mountain . . .

RT: Gila River like that.

WN: . . . Tule Lake they had Bon dance. But you remember at Jerome?

RT: What about it?

WN: You actually remember in Jerome having Bon dance and shibai?

RT: Yeah.

WN: In Jerome? Okay.

RT: Jerome, yeah. I think used to be, like our block, Block 38 was all empty. So [words unclear]. That’s why they allowed you to make shibai and all kine stuff. [Words unclear] article here. (RT looks for article.) Something, she said. Her name was Morioka, I think. I think she was a nurse. So she said she admire the Japanese people the way they can not think about the evacuation and just live together like normal. She give them credit for that. She said usually people are going to complain, right? Because the old people complained. So two, three guys, I think, they got kibosh for that.

MK: But you remember like shibai at Jerome?

RT: Yeah.

MK: Where did they do the shibai?

RT: Where we used have dance.

MK: The community hall?

RT: Community hall, yeah.

MK: And you did your naniwa bushi over there?

RT: Yeah.

MK: How did you know your naniwa bushi?

RT: Because when we were little kids, there was nothing to do, so everybody making your own story like that. That’s the way it used to be.

MK: Wow. Then the Bon dance, where was that held?

RT: If I’m not mistaken, was in the back, you know. One time, I’m sure, we had ’em in the back over there. Back of our building.
MK: Yeah?

RT: See, I think I remember . . .

MK: Yeah. And you folks made like a *yagura*, the tower and everything?

RT: No, no, no.

MK: You folks more informal without?

RT: Yeah, informal, yeah. I don’t remember seeing that tower, though. Because the Japanese people, really, they do all kind of stuff, yeah? Lot of them, like my father-in-law folks, they used to make all kind of stuff, woodwork. They were good. There were so many nice stuff. They used to call *da kine small kine tansu*, they used to call them. You know what is *tansu*?

MK: Yeah, chest.

RT: Chest, yeah. They used to make that kind of stuff. And they used to go out farming. That’s why, even the Arkansas farmers, they didn’t know how they used to plant and everything grows, you know. They used to come and check, how did farmers get good crop. You know the trouble with these guys, they didn’t think about the irrigation, see. But the guys here, Honolulu farmers and Mainland, too. When they plant anything, you need water. So our irrigation method, they make ditches in between like that. So that’s the way the *haoles* over there learned to farm. They learned the right way.

MK: So in Jerome, what kinds of vegetables or plants were they farming? What do you remember them farming, the ones that farmed?

RT: I think some families, they used to farm.

MK: Cabbage?

RT: Yeah, mostly, I think.

MK: Somebody mentioned . . .

RT: *Uri*?

MK: Yeah. *Uri*.

RT: There was one family that did that, I remember. In the front of the building, yeah? They put that . . .

MK: Trellis?

RT: . . . trellis, and then . . . Maybe get some in the pictures in here, too. (RT looks in book.)

MK: Yeah, the gourds.

WN: Oh, squash?

MK: Yeah.

RT: All kind of stuff. We used to play football like that. Basketball, like that. And this is basketball. As clumsy as I was, they let me play with them. (Chuckles) See, look, that *shibai*.

MK: Yeah, that’s right. People really got dressed up for the *shibai*.
RT: Well, this is all kibei's, most of them. You know what’s kibei? The one that born Hawai’i, went back to Japan to study, and then they came back. We used to call them “kibei.” I don’t think anything different than what we can do outside. Of course, maybe outside was more strict. You have to think of the other nationalities thinking the wrong way, eh? I don’t know if I should say this, but when the war started and used to get blackout—you have to put dark paper on the windows like that—there used to be some Filipino guys—I don’t know if they were treated badly before that—so they used to threaten the owners. “I see your light coming through the window.” So you had to be careful, like that, Japanese. Especially Kona like that, real country, that’s why. Like now, Kailua, that’s all grown, all developed. Not our days, yeah?

WN: What about in Jerome, like the guards? You know, they had . . .

RT: There’s a tower.

WN: . . . guards around, yeah? Were they strict to you folks?

RT: As long as you don’t go out. They kept their places in the tower. They hardly associated with us.

MK: I was wondering, too, some people talk about the swampy area in Jerome.

RT: Yeah.

MK: Did you go in the swampy area, too, as a kid?

RT: Yeah.

MK: What did you do?

RT: Swim in the. . . . There’s what you call, well, I wouldn’t call them “beach.” What you call that? They’re big, you know. Like a stream, you can call it. For instance, like College Walk, like that.

MK: Yeah, Nu‘uanu River.

RT: Something like that. Yeah, like a river, yeah?

MK: So you used to go swim?

RT: Swim. Fish. Whatever you wanted to do, you do. Because usually, it’s way in the South, I guess they figure nobody can run away from there, so they weren’t that strict, yeah?

WN: But those ditches were within the compound?

RT: I think was little out but we used to walk long distance.

WN: You mean, you could go outside the fence and go?

RT: That I’m not sure. I cannot answer that good.

WN: That’s what people say. They can’t remember.

RT: Yeah, we used to go out, though. Bayou, they call ‘em.

WN: Bayou?

RT: Lot of snakes. Ah, what that dangerous snake?
WN: Oh, water moccasin?

RT: Water moccasin, yeah. All kind of snakes. Get the grass snake that doesn’t bite, doesn’t hurt anybody. So the boys chase the girls. Play with ‘em. I think girls they would be so scared, they think they’re going to bite. Actually, nonpoisonous. You see all kind of snakes.

MK: Then some people have talked about like the chiggers. They never had snakes in Hawai‘i and they never had chiggers in Hawai‘i. You know, those little bugs. Were you affected by things like that?

RT: No, never bothered me. When you go Chicago like that, lot of bed bugs. Oh, there used to be bed bugs. What we used to do, we used to put all out and we used to get DDT, used to call ’em. We used to shoot all and shoot the . . .

WN: The mattress?

RT: Yeah, the mattress like that. And of course, bed springs and all kind stuff we used to do. Of course, that’s illegal. Now, you cannot use those things. Actually, I don’t think it was any different from being out. Anyway, for me.

MK: For you. Then in terms of weather, was real different, though.

RT: You get summer, winter.

MK: Tell us about that. How was the weather?

RT: Oh, was cold. Some nights was pretty good. But there’s lot of rain, lot of snow, especially wintertime. But that didn’t bother me. As I say, we had the mackinaw. (RT flips through book.) You get the mackinaw stuff.

MK: So you were supplied with the clothes to keep yourselves warm, yeah?

RT: Yeah. Every person had one. Shoes, too.

MK: And the galoshes, yeah?

RT: Galoshes, yeah. See, this is the kind of barracks we used to live in.

MK: So we’re looking at the Jerome—this is the Jerome Album, yeah?

RT: Mm-hmm [yes], Uri.

MK: Yeah, the uri-batake.

RT: *Uri-batake.* This is the . . . The father used to, I think, according to the story, they used to ask the person who used to plant the stuff—was a person who refused to give them. So they *cockroached* it in nighttime. They go and pick it. They figure since he asked, he not going to suspect him, right? Because he was the one asked for it. So he went in and he actually enjoyed the thing like that.

MK: So in camp, you could eat Japanese foods?

RT: If you can get it in, you can. Sushi kind of stuff. You can. In fact, because all local—our block was all local people, right—so they bring sushi *da kine* stuff. But they have to get the ingredients in, that’s the hard part. But I’m sure some people used to get ’em in through Denver. Denver was a nice place. When the war and they started evacuate the people, the Denver [i.e., Colorado] governor asked them to come live Denver. “This is all open for you folks. Come in, come in.” My brother-in-law, my sister’s husband, their
family moved into Denver. So they don’t get relocated. As long as you were out of the West Coast.

MK: Earlier you mentioned, okay, you have the guard towers, you have the guards. You know you not supposed to go certain places. How did you feel about that?

RT: As I said, what can you do? Just accept it. No sense you fight about it, argue about it. No sense. Because you can’t do nothing anyway. You know, shee, how come you American citizen, yet they do that to you? But my parents like that, what might they do? That’s the things we used to worry about, wonder. What did they do? But what can you say? You cannot go to the government and say, “Why did you?” You get thrown in jail, maybe. More you open your mouth, more trouble you going to get. So you just keep your mouth shut.

MK: Then all this time when you were in Jerome, where was your father?

RT: My father was in Crystal City [a Dept. of Justice Internment Camp in Texas], I think. But he came after. He came to Jerome. . . . Yeah, Crystal City, he was in Crystal City. Nineteen forty-four, he came back to relocation camp. That was Crystal City. I’m quite sure it was Crystal City.

MK: So 1944 he came to Jerome.

RT: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: While he was at Crystal City, how much contact did you folks have with your father?

RT: Not much, not much. Maybe letters, maybe write letters like that. Maybe my sister did. I don’t know.

MK: Then people sometimes talk about the 442 [RCT] guys coming to visit the camp. What are your memories about their visits?

RT: Oh, was good. My cousin used to come visit me like that. They used to come, I think, for. . . . They had a USO [United Service Organizations], I think, for welcome the guys. They only in touch with Hawai‘i, right. They in the Mainland, so Mississippi. Camp Shelby, Mississippi like that. They used to have one in Minnesota. I think the language one was in Minnesota.

WN: Oh, Fort Snelling?

RT: Fort Snelling, yeah.

MK: Then your cousin, when he would come visit, what would he do?

RT: He used to buy me cigarettes.

(Laughter)

Because I used to like to smoke those days, which I quit about fifty years ago already. But he used to give good cigarettes. Because this cousin of mine, we used to be real close. When we used to be in Kona, every time what he does, mango season, he bring big ones. Then he put ‘em in the locker room. We shared the locker. So he put in the locker and make just like he didn’t know anything about it. But he watch if it’s going to be there or it’s going to be gone. I’m going to take it. He brings it for me, you know. Then he used to tease me like that.

Those days, Kona kind of life was, I don’t know how to say. Not much action. What can you do? Like when you’re a kid, okay, you go to English [public] school in the morning. Afternoon, you go home or you go directly to Japanese-[language] school. The whole day is gone already, right? English school is done maybe two-thirty. It’s one hour Japanese
school or hour and a half. In between you going have opening, recess like. Actually, your
days consumed by going to school, English school or Japanese school.

Really, Kona people, I don’t know they get anything to complain about camp life because
even more enjoyable, life is. As I said, no sense you grumble, if you relocated like that.
What can you do? Nothing. You open your mouth, more trouble you get into.

WN: Who did you hang out with in Jerome? Who were your friends?

RT: Oh, I get lot of friends.

WN: Are they all from Kona or from different . . .

RT: No, no. All different islands. Like my wife’s brother was Kaua‘i. They all come from
Kaua‘i. And some from Maui. Big Island, Laupāhoehoe, that kind of area. Used to get
quite a bit our age. Kohala, like that.

MK: So if you had been in Kona, you wouldn’t have met all these people.

RT: I wouldn’t have seen all the places either. Because we moved out.

MK: Up to that time, you had never been out of Kona?

RT: No, we go Hilo.

MK: Hilo.

RT: Hilo is a big deal, those days. It’s 100 miles apart, yeah? So you go Hilo, you say, “Wow,
Hilo.” That’s a good trip. We used to go Kress Store, like that. Kona don’t have Kress
Store. That was a big, big store, considered to be in those days, Kress Store.

WN: Kress, yeah. You know your uncle who brought the cigarettes . . .

MK: Cousin.

RT: My cousin.

WN: Those were the cigarettes that he got, you know, military issue?

RT: Yeah, yeah.

WN: And he brought for you?

RT: Yeah, yeah.

WN: Oh, okay, I see.

WN: Did you give him anything?

RT: No, I don’t have (anything to give).

(Laughter)

RT: He knows that. As I said, when we were going school, he used to bring mango just to
tease me. We were close, that cousin and I were close. Not the one that used to bite me
now. The older brother. We used to be good friends.

WN: So brother of the one that bit you?
RT: Mm-hmm [yes]. (MK and WN chuckle.)

WN: Somebody told me that 442 boys like to come because had the women there to cook local food.

RT: Yeah, yeah. They used to, I think, order from Denver, too, if I’m not mistaken. Denver was open, see. You request, you mail order. Then they delivered. So they used to do things like that. So they used to like to come to Jerome. And they used to have the USO. So they enjoyed life away from camp. Another camp, of course, but get women and they had dances.

MK: We were told that sometimes the mothers would make musubi . . .

RT: Musubi.

MK: . . . and send them home with musubi for them to share with the other guys. And then last time you said you and your sister went to Missouri for little while. Tell us how you folks did that and how come.

RT: My sister said she wanted to go out and see the place. So she was going anyway. The kids were growing up little bit, too, so she figure, well, didn’t have that much for stepmom for take care. So she’s going out, she told me. So I said, “If you go, I go, too.” So she went as a cook and I as a houseboy. Only, I think, three or four months. Because really people don’t treat you good. You don’t want to stay that kind of place. You cannot go downtown. You go by yourself, they shoot you probably, you know. After, they had another couple, two couples more than us. They all were domestic, too, domestic help. They used to work for doctors, and that kind of stuff. Because they used to advertise for all those people to work for them.

MK: What town was this? The name of the town?


MK: And what kind of family did you work for?

RT: He was a businessman. Big, big house. Nice big house, two-story house. And they used to have a colored guy as a yardman. We were real fortunate because the colored guys used to be so nice. We used to be good friends. So he tell us, “Anytime you folks want anything.” You cannot go downtown. “I know how hard it is for you guys.” Maybe the black, they go, they’re treated bad, but not like the Japanese those days. Japanese, you’re no-no. But he used to tell me that kind of stuff and all kind of stuff he used to do for me. Colored guy. That’s the only way we could stay there.

MK: What kind of work did your sister do for the family?

RT: Cook.

MK: She cooked?

RT: She used to cook.

MK: And what work did you do?

RT: Houseboy. Clean the house. Vacuum that house. Play with the young son. But my major job was vacuuming that house. Big house. Every day you got to vacuum. I’m not quite sure what was our [pay]—fifty dollars? Fifty dollars a month? Yeah, I think was fifty dollars a month. So they used to pay us a hundred-dollar bill. Wow, hundred-dollar bill! The first time in my life I’ve seen a hundred-dollar bill. So they were nice people, especially the wife. She always used to ask me, “Do you drive?”

I said, “No, I don’t drive.”
She said, “You know what? Stay with us for a while and I’ll teach you how to drive and you’ll be a chauffeur.” Drive them around. She was really nice.

WN: She taught you how to drive?

RT: No, because we left not too long after that. She was going to teach me, she said. But I didn’t get that far. We went back to camp again.

MK: This couple, how did you folks end up with the couple?

RT: Those days, advertise, help-wanted kind.

MK: They advertised?

RT: Yeah. Used to come in the camp. That kind of [ad] in the newspaper like that. That’s why, when I was in Chicago, in fact, Birds Eye—the one with the frozen food company . . .

WN: Birds Eye.

RT: . . . they wanted to hire us. I was working at the hotel and they offer us job.

WN: We can talk about that later.

RT: Okay, okay.

MK: So this couple, businessman and his wife, although the townspeople were kind of prejudiced toward Japanese American, this couple was not?

RT: No. They didn’t show any prejudice. They treat us really well.

MK: Again, what was the main reason for you folks to leave that situation?

RT: The prejudice. We cannot go downtown like that. No fun at all. You’re always cooped up in the house, that’s all. On the weekend we used to get together with other couples. But then might as well go outside, see what happens. But then didn’t work out because the prejudice stuff, so we came back.

WN: This was after three months, four months, you said?

RT: About there.

MK: How was it arranged for you folks to come back to camp? Was that okay for you . . .

RT: No, no. You have to put in your request to Jerome Relocation Authority, they call it. They used to have some kind of name. So you have to request and talk to them and ask them if you can come back. Because that situation is prejudice, they let us back in. You cannot have prejudice. They let us [back] in because of that.

MK: Then you came back. Where did you folks live in Jerome?

RT: In Jerome, same.

MK: Same barracks?

RT: Same barracks. Because my mom folks didn’t go out from there.

WN: Still there.
RT: Still there. So we had the two rooms, same thing.

MK: When you folks came back, was your father already back?

RT: No, no.

MK: Not yet?

RT: No, no. Later that year, he came back, I think so.

MK: Then the next place you mentioned that you went to is Heart Mountain [Relocation Center in Wyoming]. Why did you folks go Heart Mountain?

RT: I don’t know why my parents chose that place. You had so many choices. Some people figure, oh, the weather over there is better than—just like Hawai‘i. Arizona is like that. Hot side and also some winter, Arizona. Gila River is down there. I don’t know why, my dad chose Crystal City—I mean . . .

MK: Heart Mountain.

RT: Heart Mountain, yeah. I wasn’t there too long anyway. Maybe a month, little over a month, I think.

MK: How come your stay at Heart Mountain was so short?

RT: Because I found out my future wife was in Chicago. To be honest, too, lot of people going out so I thought, why stay cooped up like this? Because of the reason we’re allowed into camp, they gave spending money. Actually supposed to be one time they going subsidize you for the train fare. But because of that reason why we came back, they paid for another one.

WN: What kind reason did you give to go Chicago?

RT: I just tell them to relocate. That’s all they wanted to hear. They want to get rid of all the Japanese from camp.

WN: Oh, you didn’t have to tell them you have a job or anything like that?

RT: No, no.

MK: So it was not required that you have a job waiting for you?

RT: Not that I know of because I didn’t do those things. I stayed there for a while and never had job. But job was easy to come by because those days they didn’t have much help. Wartime, so most of them go to soldier, right? So.

MK: So tell us the places you worked in Chicago.

RT: I tried it. You know, like Stevens Hotel, I used to be a busboy. I used to enjoy. My wife used to be—what do they call it?—they used to make salad. Their job was that.

MK: Oh, pantry worker.

RT: Yeah. Yeah, pantry worker. I used to be busboy.

WN: At Stevens Hotel? You folks both worked at Stevens Hotel?

RT: Mm-hmm [yes].
MK: That was after you folks were married? At Stevens Hotel?
RT: Yeah, yeah.
MK: How about the early time when you went to Chicago? Where were you working?
RT: I worked for a liquor distributing company. The company was Continental Liquor Distributing Company. That was on the West Side. I’m not sure where every location was.
MK: Wow. Then did you also work in the auto field?
RT: We used to work on the timing gear factory. That was the last place I went to work, I think. First I went to distributing company, but that was so far away from where my wife used to stay. So I tell myself, “I go work where you working.” So I went to Chicago. I mean, yeah.
WN: Stevens?
RT: Stevens Hotel, yeah. Then after that, I thought, ah, I try something different. So then I went to apply for job at timing gear factory.
MK: When you first went to Chicago, what part of Chicago were you living?
RT: Someplace downtown, I remember. Because my friends were in downtown, so they took me in. Put me up for till I found a job like that.
WN: So in those days, going and living in Chicago was different than, say, St. Louis? You said when you were in Sikeston, you guys couldn’t go to St. Louis.
RT: Oh, Chicago wide open. You can do anything you want.
WN: But you didn’t get that feeling. I mean, St. Louis, you couldn’t do that.
RT: No, no. Sikeston, you couldn’t do that. Small town, yeah?
WN: Oh, I see. I see.
MK: Then in Chicago, was there like a community of Japanese Americans like groups of Japanese Americans . . .
RT: No, no, no. They’re scattered all over the place, (maybe except Clark Street).
MK: Oh, they were scattered? You folks were scattered?
RT: Yeah. Like us, we ended up in Stony Island [Avenue], South Side. Right next to the Jackson Park. Then University of Chicago, I think, on the way to our place. I’m not sure, but University of Chicago. I think near University of Chicago.
WN: Yeah. South Side, yeah.
RT: Yeah, South Side.
WN: You said while you were living in Chicago, they were offering jobs to work for Birds Eye?
RT: Yeah.
WN: Where was Birds Eye?
RT: Birds Eye, New Jersey [where Seabrook Farms operated in partnership with Birds Eye].

WN: Oh, I see. So was that an option for you?

RT: Yeah. But I think that my job was pretty good, so I figure I didn’t want to go. So we didn’t go. They were hustling us, come work for them because they didn’t have workers those days. Hard to find labor. And they understood that at least Orientals were hard workers, trustworthy, so they, more or less, come after you. Was good. Chicago was no problem. You go anywhere you want and nobody bothers you. Only thing, when I used to work at Stevens Hotel, they used to ask us, “By the way, what are you? What nationality are you?”

“I’m a Mexican, Sir,” I tell him. “Hawaiian, Sir.” “Filipino.” All kind of stuff. Our time, nobody said, “Japanese.” So we used to lie to them so much. So funny. But it didn’t bother you actually. They only asked you what you were. What nationality, you were. That’s about it.

WN: I guess just to play it safe, you didn’t say, “Japanese.”

RT: No, no, no. You not going say, “Japanese.”

WN: Just in case.

RT: If you tell them Japanese, then they going to think they don’t want to be served by a Jap. They might come out with that kind of stuff, so you got to keep your mouth shut. You have to think for yourself what to do, what not to do. Of course, you go through all that kind of procedure. You like to go shopping in Sikeston, I know how they think and all that stuff—you think to yourself, “Hey, I better not say this,” or “I better not say that.”

MK: Then in terms of housing, go looking for a place to go live, how was that? Easy, hard, in Chicago?

RT: As I said, in Chicago, you jump on the subway, you take the streetcar, then go to different area. You jump onto one subway, then you go certain area. Then the south, we used to live Stony Island, most every day was going down the IC [Illinois Center] station. As I said, they used to have local and express. Local stopped at every stop. But express, only so many and then important stations, you stop, that’s about it. That’s the way we used to travel.

MK: Then if you wanted to rent—you know, rent a place to stay—how was that?

RT: I had no problem.

MK: No problem being Japanese . . .

RT: Because my wife and her brother were living in Chicago in that area, too. There were people who I thought were nice people. Polish people, they’re nice people. Like Chicago, they get lot of—you get that Italian group, and the Polish group, and German group. They’re groups like cliques, yeah. That’s the way they used to be. But they were all nice, too. They never bothered us at all.

MK: First time for you, yeah, to be with all these different groups—Polish, Italian.

RT: Yeah, yeah. Really, though. But for me, it was a good lesson, actually travel all over the place like that. I tell myself, gee, if you were in Kona, you wouldn’t be able to see all these things. So to me, myself now, good experience, I thought. But as I say, no sense I grumble about being interned. What can you do? Nothing. You be smarter if you keep your mouth shut.

WN: Of the three jobs you had in Chicago, which one you like the best?
RT: I used to like the timing gear job. But then the timing gear, the material they use, strong smell. So when you work that day, when you going home, you smell. That thing goes onto your body, right? That’s what I didn’t like. But I used to like the job. And Stevens was good, too.

MK: Then you were saying something about the draft when you were in Chicago. What happened?

RT: Oh. When I was Chicago, the first time they sent me a—what do you call?—[draft notice to] come in for physical examination for the draft. Then after going through all the stuff, they put me on the scale. I came in one-half pound not enough. You supposed to be 105 pounds. I came in 104-3/4 pounds. Yeah, yeah. That’s why I was called a pound underweight. So one of the doctors told me, “What are you trying to do? Trying to stay out of the service?”

I said, “No. If you don’t like the idea, why don’t you tack on that quarter pound and draft me?”

Another doctor said, no, he can’t do that. And also said, “Don’t let this doctor fool you or bother you. Not everybody can go in the service.”

Look at all the guys was in same group with us. The inspection man say, hard, you know. They all cannot do it, too. They same like me. They come 4-Fs. But was good, I thought, the doctor back me up, so I felt good.

Then the second time I got that notice, I was working for the timing factory. So the boss told me, “Where are you going?”

“I going ask for day off today.”

He said, “Where are you going?”

I said, “I have to go physical exam for the service, the draft.”


WN: And the war is still going on, yeah?

RT: Oh, yeah. The war ended ‘45, yeah?”

WN: So we’re still in 1944.

RT: Forty-four.

MK: Then what were your thoughts, in terms of going into service? You wanted to do that or kind of . . .

RT: No, I didn’t want to go. You know why? I was already married that time. When I was working Stevens Hotel, that’s when my wife and I decided, let’s get married. Because if we go home, we never going see each other again. So that kind of excuse. You’re a young kid, no think. So we discussed it and said, “Let’s get married.” So we got married. Justice of the peace. Cook County.

WN: So you were nineteen at the time, yeah? Twenty, nineteen. . . .

RT: No, I was going turn twenty anyway. But that year, I turned twenty. I was nineteen yet, yeah.

WN: And Asako was how old?
RT: Eighteen.
WN: Oh, you guys young kids, yeah?
RT: Young kids. But then our marriage lasted all these years, sixty-something years.
WN: (Chuckles) Good.
RT: And my son was born in Chicago, too. Nineteen forty-five. We couldn’t come back with people, like my brother-in-law folks. Because they said that a child cannot travel unless it’s at least three months old. So we had to wait until my son came three months old. Then we came back. That’s why we were about, if I’m not mistaken, the last guys to come home, I think.
RT: Forty-six.
MK: Then when you folks came back, where did you live?
RT: I stayed with my in-laws. That’s why I said, my in-laws were so good to me. To me, I felt that they were my parents, my mother and father. My father-in-law taught me to build things. “If you don’t do it, you’re never going to learn,” he said. “Try, try, try.” He always encouraged me like that. They really treated us well. Without them, we wouldn’t be where we are today.
MK: Then the Kawamuras, they settled back in Kaua’i?
RT: No, no, no. In Honolulu.
MK: Honolulu. What did Asako’s father do for a living?
RT: When he first came back, he used to work for sake-ya. Sake brewery. You know where Booth Road is, yeah?
MK: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
RT: He was working over there.
WN: Did they live over there, too?
RT: Yeah. There’s an apartment for the whole place. So lot of guys, they used to pay rent and all, but they had an apartment for them.
WN: So this is Honolulu Sake Brewery & Ice, yeah?
RT: And ice mill, yeah. All together, used to be. As I said, like my in-laws were so good to us, to me anyway. That’s one thing I really appreciated. I didn’t think they going treat me that well.
MK: Mr. Kawamura, what kind of position or job did he have before the war?
RT: Before the war, he was fish market. He had a store in Kaua’i. Fish market.
MK: Fish market. Not fisherman, though?
RT: No, just the market.
MK: Fish market.
RT: Yeah.

MK: And he was pulled in?

RT: Yeah. He’s a community leader, too. He’s an intelligent person, too. Educated, that’s why.

WN: You said you folks came back in ‘46?

RT: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: What about your mother folks?

RT: They came back before me. They came back on the ship before us.

WN: I see. And where did your mother and father and your siblings live?

RT: They went to Hilo. They went back to Hilo. Then my dad opened up a small store over there, too. I say he was going good because the plantation workers used to deal with him, but they start closing down all of the . . .

MK: Plantations?

RT: Yeah, they closed all that business, right? So he start losing his business. He had to close up again. But you know, I feel so sorry for him. For a man who’s educated, who takes care of all kind of stuff, he ended up being a dishwasher. Couldn’t find a job those days. So he end up being a dishwasher till he passed away. My dad, when he passed away, he was sixty-two, sixty-three, someplace around there. Didn’t collect Social Security or anything. But my dad’s businessman all his life, so.

MK: Then for yourself, you lived with the Kawamuras. And then later on, you went out for training, yeah? Different kind of work training.

RT: Well, it just was that, yeah, I had to. Those days, no school or anything, so. You just apply for a job. If they hire you, then you got to learn by doing things.

MK: Oh, learn on the job?

RT: Yeah. Learn on the job. At the beginning, I tried plumbing. There used to be a plumber living in the same building as us, you see, one below. So somebody told me, “Why don’t you apply with him?” So I applied. Then he gave me the job. But then never work out because actually I didn’t care for that job. So he told me, you know what, he cannot use me. Because I no more brains, anyway. He didn’t like my attitude, I guess, yeah? So okay, okay.

Then I think I applied for . . . I remember this was a waterproofing business, painting kind of stuff. We used to use what they call “dum-dum.” Sticky stuff, you know. Once you shoot it on the building, waterproof. But the trouble was, this material, when you lean against ’em, it moves. Inside don’t dry up. Only outside dries up. So it’s a good waterproofing. But then, when you push in, yank at it, it goes, making a mess, eh? He went out of business, too.

But that’s the place I met this Chinese guy. His name was Francis Loo. He was so nice to me. So funny all my life I work with, all the foremen like me. I used to get all the breaks. Other guys used to get jealous. They say, “How come only you get this kind of job, interior job and fine-finish work?”

But I don’t know. “Ask the foreman.”

MK: And then you got into painting?
Mm-hmm [yes]. Because dum-dum, just like painting. We used to use that spray gun. Paint, press’em again, PAW! That thing comes out. So you strip the testing in the bucket. Then after you break that pressure, then you go on the wall. That I used to remember. What he do, the business wasn’t good so he close up.

Then my wife’s uncle, I think, told me, “Why don’t you try painting?”

“I don’t know nothing about painting.”

“Never mind. Try go.”

Those days, they wanted help. So this guy hired me, all right. And on top of that, what was so funny, they used to give me first-class pay. I don’t know nothing. I don’t know because of the connection, eh? So I didn’t last long actually because I didn’t know what I was doing. I tell myself, you lucky they kept you for the amount of time you stayed with them.

After that, I look in the newspaper. Oh, Moriyama Brothers were looking for helpers. So I applied. That was the start of my painting. I applied. Then once I start doing it, I feel, really it’s pretty good job. Pays pretty good too.

Then in the meantime, my wife went to college of business, Cannon’s School of Business. So she came a secretary, too. That’s the way our life was until then. (Chuckles)

Then you retired from . . .

Princess Kai’ulani Hotel.

Oh, from Princess K at the end, yeah?

I worked there eight years, I think.

Wow. Mrs. Takahata worked for the state and retired.

Mm-hmm [yes].

Where did she retire from?

University [of Hawai’i] College of Business.

University, yeah. Okay.

Industrial Relations. They used to get three types already in the building. Industrial Relations. . . . I forget what it was anyway.

(As for my wife, I cannot leave her out of my life story for she is the person that made me who I am today.

Asako did all kinds of work before deciding to go to business school. Once she started, nothing could change her mind. Going to school during the day and working at night. It must have been difficult, but she never complained. It must have been hard work that made her decide to go to business school. After graduating, she applied for a secretarial job at University of Hawai’i. After a while, she got the job. After working for twenty-six years, she retired.

I have always respected and loved her for her good head and guts for her doing whatever she wanted without hesitation. She was my brains as well as my strength. On 7/18/07 she passed away. As for myself, I retired on 4/12/1990.)
Evacuation was a great injustice, a terrible mistake by the U.S. government to put a single group of people (Japanese) behind bars. War was with Germany, Italy, and Japan. But for me, evacuation also was a great adventure that formed my adult life.

As for my son, Wayne, he is semi-retired. (He served in the Vietnam War; Sergeant Takahata when he was discharged.)

MK: Wow. Boy, for a boy from Kona, you really did go all over the place and experience a lot of different things, yeah?

RT: Yeah, all over, different things I did. Lot of travel. When you go from Jerome to Heart Mountain, gee, that’s a long ride, too, train ride. You see all kind of stuff, yeah. Usually get stopover like that, too, certain stations. I learned a lot.

MK: You know, when you look back and you think about the World War II years, how did that affect you, your life?

RT: Didn’t bother me at all. Yeah, I figured if I get drafted, I get drafted. You know, I get no choice anyway. But then the second one, I already had my wife and I had my son.

MK: How about being sent to camp on the Mainland? How did that change your life?

RT: Oh, yeah. Hundred percent. You live in Kona, what can you see? Nothing. After the war, things changed for Kona, too. But those days, was an isolated area. Your neighbors were so far apart. You hardly get together. People maybe get Bon dance, you go together. Japanese[-language] school, that’s about it.

WN: I think he summed it up already.

MK: I think so, yeah? I think we’re . . .

WN: I want to thank you very much.

RT: Oh, you’re welcome.

WN: Really very interesting. Thank you so much.

MK: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW
Unspoken Memories:
Oral Histories of Hawai‘i Internees at Jerome, Arkansas

Center for Oral History
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