Tape Nos. 23-31-4-93 and 23-32-4-93

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Kazue Uyeda (KU)

July 23, 1993

Honolulu, O'ahu

BY: Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

MK: This is an interview with Mrs. Kazue Iwahara Uyeda on July 22, 1993, at the Center for Oral History office, in Honolulu, O'ahu. The interviewer is Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

Okay. To start today's interview, we were just talking about how big the original 'A'ala Rengō building was. Can you tell me how many businesses occupied the building after they moved it to Pālama?

KU: That building was occupied by probably eight stores. From the Waikīkī end, the first one, was Tanaka Grocery Store, but they retired and went back to Japan, so Uyeda Shoe Store took over (that location). The next store, was Tamane Shirt Maker (where) Mr. and Mrs. Tamane used to take orders for (men's) shirts. Next to that Tamane was Machida Drug [Store, located at 528 North King Street]. And next to Machida Drug, I remember it as Tanaka Sewing Machine Shop. Then came Arata Jewelry Store. (They were) watchmakers (and) repaired watches and (clocks). Next to Arata was a tire shop, (operated by the Fukuda family). Probably next to that was a Chinese furniture store. The last one, at the corner, was Tung Chung Tong, a Chinese herb store. So that means that there were about eight businesses there. They were all well established and (doing quite well).

MK: And where in Pālama was that building?

KU: (Well,)---would you know where Nisshodo Mochi Shop (used to be)?

MK: Mm hmm [yes].

KU: (Next to) Nisshodo [then located at 425 N. King Street], there was (a) service station called Fujinaka Garage [at 429 N. King Street].

MK: Oh.

KU: (Then passing an alley next to the service station stood our building that I had just mentioned and which housed about eight stores.)
MK: So the old ‘A’ala Rengō [building] . . .

KU: Oh! Oh, there was Pālama Music Store (there too). (They) did (very well). (In 1940, aside from sales of phonograph records and small musical instruments they sold the largest volume of appliances and the owner Mr. Morizumi was awarded a prize, a free trip to Japan.)

MK: And that Pālama Music Store was also in the old ‘A’ala Rengō building?

KU: (Yes, that’s right. And it was owned by Mr. Morizumi.)

MK: And how long were businesses active in that building?

KU: We were all there till 1957 (until) we were evicted. O‘ahu Railway Company, who owned that (property) decided to demolish (the) building because it was getting old.

MK: And now, just changing the subject, we’re going to continue from the last time. I know that when you were small, you attended Royal School Annex, Kauluwela School, Ka‘iulani School and Central.

KU: Yes, that’s right.

MK: And then when you completed your schooling at Central, you went to Japan in 1932. Why is it that you went to Japan?

KU: I had no special reason. My mother said, “Would you care to go to Japan and go to a school in Japan?”

I thought, well, it’s a pretty good idea (laughs). I didn’t feel (any) resentment or anything. I guess (in) those days a lot of children were accompanied by their parents and went back to Japan to study so I thought (it would be sort of) interesting (chuckles). Besides, I had a place to stay with my grandfather or my aunt who lived in Hiroshima. So I just said okay and then decided going. My mother took me and my younger sister (Sumiko—who) was about (five years old). The three of us went back during the summer.

MK: And do you know what was in your mother’s mind to ask you to go to Japan?

KU: I guess she felt that girls should be more feminine, you know.

(Laughter)

KU: (In those days we were more tomboyish and ran around so she figured that it might be a good idea to send me to Japan to learn some manners and become a little more ladylike and also further my education.)

MK: And you were saying in those days there were other children who were educated in Japan.

KU: Mm hmm.
MK: Were there some children from the 'A‘ala Rengō families, also, sent to Japan in those days?

KU: (Yes, the oldest daughter of the Komeiji family, Kiyoko. She attended a school Tsurumi Girls School in Yokohama.)

MK: Oh.

KU: (Oh yes, another one was Atsuko Kobayashi. She was the daughter of the Kobayashis who operated Kobayashi Dry Goods Store. Although her parents came from Yamaguchi, she attended Yamanaka Jogakkō in Hiroshima.)

MK: How about boys, like the Kawanos and the Satos?

KU: (Yes, I think the oldest son of the Kawano family—Tetsuo-san went to Japan after finishing elementary. Then later on the second son Hideo-san also went to a school in Hiroshima. From the Sato family the oldest son Robert went to Japan after finishing high school here.)

MK: And when your mother said, “How about going to Japan?” how did you feel about being prepared for a Japanese-language school?

KU: (I can’t remember. At that age I guess I was really carefree and didn’t have much to worry about. And I had a cousin Yasuko-san who was born here and had gone to Japan when she was very young and felt that we could become good friends. So I suppose that made it easier for me to make up my mind to go.)

MK: And then up to that point, how much Japanese-language education had you had over here?

KU: (Well, in those times the majority of our parents hardly spoke English so we had to speak Japanese at home. And the textbooks that we had at Hongwanji Japanese-language school were of pretty high standard and so after I went to Japan I found out that the textbooks that we were using in Hawai‘i and in Japan were almost about the same and not much difference. Of course, I had to take an exam and then they admitted me into the third grade [of high school] from the second semester.)

(You see,) Japan starts their first semester in April. September is (the start of) their second semester. (But from that semester the Japanese literature started with bungo-tai or the literary style and was it difficult and hard to comprehend! And the grammar, I tell you, it was really something!)

(But fortunately our teacher was very conscientious and nice [enough] to help those like me and some others. He made a special class for us during the Christmas season and conducted classes for a few days to help us thoroughly understand the subject.)

MK: How about other subjects in school? Did you experience difficulty or was it relatively okay?

KU: Another one was (algebra). Oh, I had a hard time. But I had a very nice friend who helped me out, so I still (laughs) feel very obligated to her. Math was really very advanced in Japan.
But chemistry and geometry (weren’t) that bad (as I) started from the bottom (together with the rest in the class). I just had trouble (with the bungo-tai in the Japanese literature class).

MK: And then how was the adjustment from an American-style educational system to a Japanese-style learning situation?

KU: I didn’t find much difficulty because, I guess, I was resolved to (laughs) doing the best I could and trying to mingle and learn their ways of life. I don’t think I (had) much difficulty in that aspect.

MK: And I’m just curious. When I’ve interviewed some other people who’ve gone from Hawaii’i to Japan, they said that because they came from somewhere else, they experienced different kinds of treatment from people. How was it for you?

KU: Oh, no. I was very fortunate. My classmates were really open. And (do) you know why? Because I taught them English (and) in return they taught me (Japanese literature). You know, they were having (a) very difficult time in English, (and so we stayed) after school and (did our lessons together). (Chuckles) I taught them English and then they taught me kokugo. So while doing (this) we got to be very good friends.

MK: I see. So in the prewar days, then, Japanese students were learning English.

KU: Oh, yes. Uh huh. Especially my school being a mission school. We had (several) teachers from the Mainland (and although) English wasn’t stressed, (we did have a few hours of English lessons each week). They had (difficulty) pronouncing, “Bird, girl,” you know. They said, “Gāru [girl], (or) bādo [bird].” (Laughs) Funny, (yeah)? So I would tell them to bring the mirror and (to) follow me (pronounce).

MK: You mentioned that it was a mission school.

KU: Yes.

MK: What kind of religion was it associated with?

KU: (Christian.) A Methodist school [Hiroshima Jogakuin]. (We just celebrated our hundredth) anniversary in 1986. The person that founded our school was Japanese (Mr. Teikichi Sunamoto) but he was assisted by (a missionary, Miss) Nannie B. Gaines. (There were several teachers from the Mainland and they taught English and religion as well as music, homemaking and etiquette.)

MK: So because it was a Methodist school and with some instructors from the Mainland, was it really different, then, from a regular Japanese school?

KU: Perhaps (so). But all the subjects were strictly (taught) in accordance with the Monbu-sho (or the Ministry of Education of) Japan. So we (did have) everything (similar to other schools).

MK: And at that school were there many girls from Hawai’i and Mainland United States?
KU: Yes, there were a few. Not too many, but in my class I had the two Fujiwara (sisters and Higaki-san that had come from the Mainland). I was the only one from Hawai‘i.

MK: And because it was a Methodist school, were you Methodist?

KU: No. We were never forced to (be) baptized. It was all up to each individual. But we (did have) chapel every morning. And, I think, (it was) good influence (for) me (as I learned a lot).

MK: And I know that when you were going to this school, you also had family in the city, yeah? Hiroshima.

KU: (Yes.)

MK: At that time, where were you living?

KU: (I stayed with my great aunt who lived in Hiroshima City. She was like a grandmother to me, really caring. I had to catch the streetcar every day to go to school and on the way passed the Hiroshima Exhibition Hall which is now a memorial of the Atom bomb—called Atomic Dome.)

MK: [The site which later became a memorial.] Memorial?

KU: (A) memorial. I passed there for five years, every single day.

MK: And since you were far from home, far from Hawai‘i, how much communication was there between you and the family you left behind in Hawai‘i?

KU: Oh, my mother used to write me practically every week. When it got delayed, I felt so lonesome. (Laughs) I (really) used to look forward to her letters (to be informed on) what was going on in Hawai‘i.

MK: So during the time you were in Japan between 1932 and 1937, what sorts of big news did you hear about Iwahara Shōten or ‘A’ala Rengō, between those years, if you can remember.

KU: Oh, (really) nothing much. Things were (rather) peaceful, I guess. (Occasionally,) my mother would let me know (who) had gone to Japan or (who) had gotten married (and) things like that. (While I was away, Ohta-san’s parents got married.) (The ukulele player Ichiro or Herb Ohta, his mother was a sister of Mrs. Kawano and his father Mr. Sadaichi Ohta happened to be a close friend of the Uyedas and since the Kawanos and Uyedas were calabash relatives the two families decided to match them up and that was how they got married.)

MK: Oh, and that’s Herb Ohta’s mother?

KU: (Yes, that’s right.)

MK: So you would hear about marriages occurring. How about the flood that occurred?
KU: (Oh, that flood in 1934 was just awful. My mother told me that the water that suddenly started gushing inside the store became so high that they all had to scramble upstairs. The reason for this unusual flooding was due to the trash and debris that got piled up on the Beretania [Street] Bridge causing the water to flow over into ‘A’ala Park and then gushing into the ‘A’ala Rengō Building.)

MK: So when they had the flood, how much damage did Iwahara Shōten experience?

KU: According to what my mother told me, they had to be closed for over a month. Because the damage was so great and our merchandise (being) mainly hardware, [the hardware] had (to be washed and cleaned and then oiled to prevent rusting). Oh, it was such a big (job). And my mother told me that my father didn’t smile for one month.

(Laughter)

KU: (Normally my father was a cheerful person.) But my mom said she never did see him smile for one whole month (laughs). He was a sour-puss.

MK: And so during that one month when Iwahara Shōten could not open, what happened to the employees?

KU: Oh, naturally, the employees would come and work to clean up. Besides the employees, I was told that a lot of friends had come to help, too. Well, that was about the biggest incident that happened here, I think.

MK: And was everything salvageable or were they . . .

KU: Well, some of them (had to be discarded) . . .

MK: . . . things were a total loss?

KU: Not total loss. I guess, they salvaged as much as they could and (then) they must have (had) a (big) clearance sale.

MK: What did you hear about the other businesses at the time of the flood?

KU: (We) were the hardest hit. (I guess it was due to our location being lower than the other end of the building. Naturally I presume that the majority of the stores must have suffered considerable damage but felt happy to hear there were no injuries or other casualties.)

MK: I think I heard that they suffered some damage but . . .

KU: Not as severe as ours.

MK: Yeah, I heard that Iwahara Shōten . . .

KU: Was the hardest hit.
MK: ... was hit the hardest because of the location and, like you said, the elevation.

KU: (Yes,) elevation. There was quite a difference in the elevation.

MK: I guess, another thing I had heard about from some of the 'A'ala Rengō business people was that their businesses were affected by the depression.

KU: (Yes.)

MK: How about Iwahara Shōten?

KU: I think (I heard) my father saying they (had) experienced some [effects of the] depression, but fortunately, after I came back, the (U.S.) government started putting in more effort (into) the defense jobs (and) so that's when we started (picking up more) business. (We started getting busy from about 1937.)

MK: What was the connection between defense workers and Iwahara Shōten?

KU: (The) majority of (the defense workers were) employed at Pearl Harbor. (So when they returned from work on the train from Pearl Harbor they would just cross the street and come into our store to buy tools.)

MK: I see. And those defense workers, some of them were not Japanese, yeah?

KU: Practically all of them were (not Japanese although some were). But a lot of Mainland guys were here, (to work for defense jobs).

MK: Were those Mainland people also carpenters, too?

KU: Oh, yes. We had a lot of those Haole carpenters and workers coming to the store.

MK: Have you ever heard any stories about how it was serving the Haole customers, the defense workers?

KU: No, we treated them as though (they were ordinary) customers. There was no discrimination or anything (of that sort).

MK: How about language, though. A lot of the clerks spoke mostly Japanese.

KU: No. The clerks that we hired, (most) of them (spoke Japanese but spoke) broken English (as well). But you know (even with) broken English, they (could still) make business (laughs).

MK: So they could manage to communicate?

KU: Oh, yes. Uh huh. That's right.

MK: And then in 1930s—late thirties—relations between the United States and Japan were
becoming more difficult, yeah?

KU:  Mm hmm.

MK:  Did you notice any of that as a student in Japan?

KU:  (No, hardly. Everything seemed quite peaceful then. But after I returned to Hawai‘i in May 1937 there was an incident [Marco Polo Bridge Incident] in July [7, 1937] between China and Japan which later developed into a war. From then on I think relations between Japan and the U.S. gradually started getting bad.)

MK:  I was wondering, why is it that you came home in 1937?

KU:  (Oh, it was because my great aunt with whom I was staying suddenly passed away and my father who had come to Japan persuaded me to accompany him to return to Hawai‘i. Although it was sad to part with my classmates and friends I made up my mind to return to my family in Hawai‘i.)

MK:  Did you have a choice at all?

KU:  No, I don’t think so. My father said, “Let’s go back,” (and so we did).

MK:  And then when you came back in May of 1937, were there any changes at your store from the time you left?

KU:  (Yes,) naturally, there were lots of improvements made. I noticed that everything was far more organized, and it was quite different from the time that I had left in 1932.

MK:  You said you noticed that things were more organized. What was different from 1932?

KU:  (Well, I noticed that a lot of merchandise were encased and samples nicely displayed for easy selection. My father probably had a lot of drawers made to store the stock below.)

MK:  And then you said you noticed it came more busy?

KU:  (Yes, and as I already mentioned about the time I returned in 1937, the defense jobs were being stepped up and so that kept business quite brisk.)

MK:  And then I don’t know if you’d remember but were there any changes in the types of goods that you carried?

KU:  No, (it was) about the same. But, I guess, we had more varieties in the tools, (like) carrying more (machinist’s) tools.

MK:  Then how about prices? Were they any different than what you remembered?

KU:  (Well, there was a gap of five years from 1932 to 1937 so I would think that there would
have been a gradual increase in the prices.)

MK: And then when you look back at the employees, what changes, if any, were there in who worked at the store?

KU: After I came back, I noticed we had two extra employees. Oh, (and then) there was a lady, Isono-san. So all together we had three more extra helpers.

MK: Were they three additional full-time workers?

KU: (Yes,) full-time workers. We never had part-time workers.

MK: And I know that when you came back you were helping more at the store. What was your job at the store when you came back?

KU: I didn’t have any specific job, but (occasionally) I would help with the sales. (My father was very strict about letting the customers know what they had purchased so it was our policy to check each item with the customers. In that way the customers would feel satisfied and we would create better relationships. He also stressed courtesy, by greeting the customers with a smile and not to forget saying, “Hello,” and “Thank you.”)

MK: And when you came back, what was your father’s job at the store?

KU: Oh, my father? I guess, he left most of the buying to the manager, but he was still around. And, I guess, he did some socializing with (some of his business associates).

(Laughter)

KU: (And that’s how he started to learn to golf. Our neighbor Mr. Awamura and Mr. [Hisaji] Onouye of Shimaya Shōten persuaded him and they would go golfing once in a while. But it seems that he still had his heart into business and so kept himself busy at the store.)

MK: So your father was still active on a daily basis.

KU: (Yes, on a) daily basis. (And you know when a big shipment came in my father would remove his shirt to help the other employees, especially Mr. [Takao] Tsuda who was in charge of all the shipments that arrived. Hardware is something that’s really heavy so my father would volunteer helping them with only his undershirt on.)

MK: So like the manager would kind of take care of the buying at that point, but your father was there helping with sales, daily supervision, helping in wherever he could.

KU: Mm hmm [yes]. And at the same time he would go socializing (sometimes). (He also kept busy with activities of the Shōgyō Kumiai or the Japanese Merchants Association.)

MK: So he was very busy in the community—the Japanese community?
KU: (Yes,) I think so. Uh huh. Just like Mr. [Koichi] Iida was.

MK: And then how about your mother’s job at the store?

KU: Oh, my mother helped (with the cleaning mostly). (But her main job was to take care of the meals, planning the menu and going to the market to buy the groceries.)

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: You were saying that your mom would go shopping at the Tamura Fish Market and . . .

KU: (At) Fujimoto Store. (And at the same time when she met some of the neighbors, I guess they must have done some gossiping (laughs) and socializing.)

MK: And I know that in those days the ‘A’ala Rengō Association was in existence. They had a tōban system whereby one businessman would kind of head the association for ‘A’ala Rengō then they rotated to another businessman.

KU: (Yes,) I think that’s what they were doing.

MK: Would you remember about the time that maybe your father was the head of the ‘A’ala Rengō . . .

KU: (Yes,) I remember a few times they (had) come up to our house, (and met and had some) discussions. Then after the meeting, we served snacks and refreshments. I think, (they did that at) Kawanos’ (too). So, I guess, as Robert [Sato] said, they were kind of rotating.

MK: Does your father ever talk about that job, about being head of the association?

KU: No, I guess, the main discussion was for the Christmas illumination. You may not believe it, but, I think, ‘A’ala Rengō was the first organization that (had) started illuminating their building, and even lighted up the trees, (the) monkey pod trees (in) ‘A’ala Park. It was really a big thing. Gradually other stores started to copy (like the) Musashiya area, (and) then later, Chūō-Rengō. But ‘A’ala Rengō was the very first one to start that.

MK: And you remember their meeting about doing the illuminations.

KU: (Yes,) I think so. That was the main discussion (at the meeting,) mainly for the Christmas season.

MK: And I think that someone had mentioned that they remember maybe some discussions about group advertisements, you know, the ‘A’ala Rengō Association.
KU: Mm hmm. I guess (at) certain times of the year they would advertise jointly.

MK: Did Iwahara Šoten participate in the joint advertising?

KU: Of course. They all did. Yes, they all did together.

MK: You were saying that happened at certain occasions. At what times of the year would they have a joint ad?

KU: (Oh, I would say more at Christmas time and perhaps at school openings and when there were some very special events that came about.)

MK: These ads would be in the Japanese[-language] newspaper?

KU: (Yes, mostly in the Japanese papers—mainly Hawai‘i Hochi and Hawai‘i Times. It used to be called Nippu Jiji during the prewar days. But as of present Hawai‘i Times has closed and only Hawai‘i Hochi is surviving.)

MK: I see. And I know that when you came back you were working at the store, your father, your mother and other employees. And then your mother passed away in 1940, just three years after you came back.

KU: (Yes.) That’s right.

MK: When your mother passed away, who took on all the duties that she used to take care of?

KU: (Well, I had to do it. For me it was really a big blow and it felt as though the end of the world had come. But fortunately I had [Otoide-san] Oba-san to support me and I felt like she was a second mother. Although she passed away a few years ago I still feel so grateful for her sacrifice and devotion she had given our family.)

MK: So when your mother died, the obã-san and you took over all the meal preparations . . .

KU: (Yes,) that’s right.

MK: . . . and working in the store, cleaning that your mother used to do . . .

KU: That’s right.

MK: . . . and how about taking care of the other children? You were the oldest?

KU: I was the oldest so I had (to do it) with the help of obã-san.

MK: And how old were your brothers and sisters when your mom passed away?

KU: (My brother was nineteen, and sister below him was sixteen and the youngest sister was twelve years old.)
MK: So your mom passes away in 1940, you help take on the duties your mom used to have, and when World War II came, December 7th, what happened?

KU: (Oh, it was just a traumatic happening! It was on a Sunday and on that day we had all the employees come over to make preparations for Christmas. Then suddenly we started hearing news of the attack at Pearl Harbor and you can imagine the commotion that followed. But we kept calm and worked till about 3:00 PM. and after serving an early supper we sent them home. Then at about 4:30 PM. a police officer and another person came to ask for my father saying that they needed him for some interrogation and to bring his coat with shoes as he may not be able to return for a few days. And that was it!)

MK: So when they asked for your father, did you—when was the next time you got word about your father?

KU: (It was in February [1942] that we got the official word informing us that all internees would be shipped to the Mainland and so to get all necessary clothing and other articles packed and to deliver them to the immigration station. Then after a few months later we received a letter from the internee’s camp. Was it in Montana?)

MK: Up until you found out where your father was, that he had been on Sand Island, did you have any idea what had happened to him?

KU: No. But we were told not to worry because (they were going to be interned) and sent to some kind of (internment) camp, you know, but they would be treated decently. So I didn’t have much fear, although (I felt somewhat) insecure. But we knew they wouldn’t be mistreated.

MK: And who was it that told you that he would be relocated?

KU: I think we got official word from the military.

MK: And when your father was at Sand Island, were there any times when you got to see him?

KU: (Oh,) no.

MK: No contact?

KU: No contact whatsoever.

MK: And then in those days when these various Japanese businessmen were removed from their homes, how much contact or communication was there between . . .

KU: The families?

MK: . . . the families—Iwahara family, Iida family, Sato family?

KU: (Yes,) Sato family, Mrs. Sato would come (to comfort me) and would tell us whatever (information) she (had) found out (about what was going on).
MK: And you were only twenty-three . . .

KU: (Yes.)

MK: . . . were you able to kind of seek advice or some help to get more information about your father or to help him get out, or were you able to get anything?

KU: No, (nothing of that sort.) (At that time,) those days, we couldn’t even hire a lawyer. (Mr. Marumoto our lawyer was of no help at all.)

MK: So your dad was removed from his home then taken to immigration station and Sand Island and eventually sent to the Mainland.

KU: Yes, that’s right.

MK: And while that was going on, how did the business survive?

KU: Oh, you know, our business was special because the government considered our business as an essential (one). We had to supply the tools for the defense (workers). And so (we were) treated a little differently from other businesses (and) allowed to operate under government supervision. (But) we had to make a report every week (regarding) the sales and the (purchases).

MK: Were you still getting supplies from the Mainland, then?

KU: (Yes.) I guess, they (had) the merchant marine, (to ship supplies with the aid of . . . .)

MK: Convoy?

KU: Convoy? (Yes, because of that) they were able to ship things from the Mainland (and people were able to survive).

MK: I was wondering because Iwahara Shōten was a Japanese-owned business, did Iwahara Shōten ever have difficulties in getting goods . . .

KU: Merchandise?

MK: . . . from Mainland manufacturers?

KU: No, (I don’t think so). I guess we were doing business for so long (that there were hardly any problems or discrimination).

MK: So it was okay, then?

KU: (Yes,) we were very happy to get in (ample supplies) once in a while. That’s how we were able to survive and support all the employees.
MK: And then in terms of the customers, the customers knowing that your father had been removed, did they still come to you for business or did they stay away or . . .

KU: No, no business was business. People who needed tools or any (other) articles would just come in, knowing that we had the supplies that they needed.

MK: And then your employees, they all remained the same?

KU: Oh yes, they were all very loyal until the very end.

MK: And you know when you mentioned operating under government supervision, besides reporting in sales and purchases, how else did they supervise you?

KU: There were two guys that always came in. At first, the two (stayed all day,) but later on, they took turns and came. One of them was Mr. [Masayuki] Adachi, who (used to be) with Yokohama Specie Bank.

MK: Did they stay all the time?

KU: All day.

MK: Every day?

KU: That’s how they got paid. He was out of a job being at the bank, so I guess they hired him.

MK: So what would he do all day?

KU: They would sit around and do nothing (laughs). I think (they) sometimes check(ed) out the books [i.e., records]. That’s about all.

MK: Every day?

KU: I think they came (every day). But after a while (they stopped coming). In the meantime, I got married, in (1943). The store was closed in (April) ’44 (and) by the end of that time, we hardly had any surveillance, (although) we had to make a report every week.

MK: And then when you mentioned that Mrs. Okamoto and Mrs. Kawano-san, helped arrange your marriage.

KU: (Uh huh) (laughs).

MK: Now, what’s the story behind that?

KU: (I really wouldn’t know exactly how it came about but it seems that Mrs. Okamoto and Mrs. Kawano being our neighbors, casually started discussing about my marriage and decided arranging one.)
(Laughter)

KU: So I had to get in touch with my father, (who wrote me saying that he had to make some inquiries concerning the family background first, you know, even in the internment camp).

MK: Yeah?

KU: Yes. That’s right. Because a lot of them came from Hiroshima and that Tanna area. Mr. Daizo Sumida was one of them, and there were others (came from that vicinity) too. So then my father (consented and said,) “I guess it’s okay.” (Laughs)

MK: So even when he was in the internment camp he had a say then, in your marriage?

KU: Oh, naturally. I would never (have agreed) without my father’s consent and the funny thing is that it (took) such a long time to write and get (a) reply.

MK: I heard, I think, you had mentioned that, there were certain conditions to the marriage that—what were those conditions?

KU: Oh, it’s a wonder you remembered that!

MK: Yeah, what were those conditions?

KU: Well, the condition was that I would need consent from my in-laws to have me go freely to oversee our family’s business and also to check with things concerning the younger members of my family since my father was interned and away from home.

MK: I see. And were you also allowed to help run the business?

KU: Yes, about twice a week, (and at the same time keep in touch with [Otoide-san] Oba-san and my brother and sisters).

MK: So like when you married in '43, Oba-san and your brother helped take care of (your sisters), and who took care of the store with the manager? Your...?

KU: Oh, my brother.

MK: Your brother?

KU: Yes. My brother (Akito) was old enough already to run the business, so he and the manager, Nobuhara-san ran the store. (And,) everybody cooperated with (each other).

MK: And how was business during the war years?

KU: Oh, they were very busy because the war was going on. The defense job was still going (full
(Laughter)

MK: My goodness.

KU: Oh, you didn't know that?

MK: I knew about the restriction, but I wasn't sure how it affected people.

KU: They didn't buy tools, but they went straight to the jewelry store.

MK: Heiwa-Do.

(Laughter)

KU: Heiwa-Do. Well, Heiwa-Do was busy, too, but they didn't carry much, precious stone. They all went to [H.F.] Wichman [and Co.] (or to Detor Jewelers).

MK: (And) Security?

KU: (Yes, and) Security Diamond (too). (It was) at the corner of (King) and Fort (before they moved to Ala Moana Center later on).

MK: So those businesses that really . . .

KU: (Oh, yes.) Wichman (and Mr. George Michopoulos' Detor Jewelers really did tremendous business).
MK: And then I was wondering, too, since you had married and you had a household to run, too. How did the war affect your buying foods and other necessities?

KU: (You know, during those war years for security reasons we all used to buy things excessively, in other words, we did a lot of hoarding, especially canned foodstuff. And to this day I think we still have a bad habit of buying more than what we really need.)

MK: What kinds of things did they have to sell [at Fujimoto Store] during those years? Were supplies . . .

KU: Mainly vegetables and staples like rice and sugar and all those groceries, but they carried more (fresh) vegetables.

MK: Did they have enough to sell?

KU: I guess they were well established so (usually they had enough to sell).

MK: How about the fish markets in those days?

KU: Oh, the fish market? Fish was (very) scarce, but we knew when fish (come) in because (we would see) people from (all over come) running to the fish market. (That's when [Otoide-san] Oba-san would run to the market to join the crowd waving their money to buy fish.)

MK: You know, since you folks knew Tamura-san [a fish seller] from long time ago, did you have an advantage?

KU: No, I don't think so . . .

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 23-32-4-93; SIDE ONE

MK: You were saying that you would go to Tamura fish market when the fish would come in and people would be waving their money.

KU: (Yes,) to get their share of fish. Oh, there (would be such) a big crowd there.

MK: And so when the fish markets did not have fresh fish to sell during the war years, what did they sell?

KU: Gee, I'm not sure (about that as I rarely went to the fish market).

MK: And then how did the meat market do in 'A'ala Market? How were they doing?

KU: I guess, (they may have had some supply trickling in. But what I heard was that the butchers
used to sell to their longtime regular customers only and to those who had bribed them with liquor).

(Laughter)

MK: How about Iwahara Shōten? Did Iwahara Shōten have to bribe anyone to get . . .

KU: No, I don’t think so because our orders were from the Mainland, and we got our shipments directly from the Mainland.

MK: And then, so during those years you were helping some days of the week, you were at Iwahara Shōten. Other days a week you were at Uyeda Shoe Store.

KU: Mm hmm.

MK: Iwahara Shōten continued until nineteen . . .

KU: [Nineteen] forty-four. April 1944.

MK: How did it end? How did Iwahara Shōten come to an end?

KU: (Personnel from the office of the Alien Property Custodian came and closed it. Soon after being vested the property was then made public for bids. My brother tried but lost the bid which I think was a blessing in disguise as the stress would have been much too unbearable for him. After losing the bid, my brother Akito started working for the purchasing department at Dole Pineapple Company [known as Hawaiian Pineapple Company until 1960].)

MK: But your family did try to bid for an extension?

KU: (Well, yes.)

MK: And was there a notice beforehand that this was going to happen that . . .

KU: (Yes,) I think so. It was posted in the newspaper so there were other bidders.

MK: So was there enough time for your brother, then, to . . .

KU: Discuss with the other employees? (Yes, they did that) and put in their bid.

MK: And so when the business was taken over by other people, your brother went to work for (Dole Pineapple Company, purchasing department).

KU: And the rest all had to---each had to find a new job. I felt so sad, (badly). But what could I do.

MK: Did everyone successfully find another job?
KU: (Yes,) they were able to find jobs. Most of them went to hardware stores. But it was hard for them. So I really felt so bad.

MK: And then when the store was taken over by new owners, what happened to it?

KU: Oh, they continued (doing the same but) they changed the name (of the store).

MK: And in the meantime, what had happened to your father?

KU: (My father was already in Japan when the store was taken over. He was shipped back to Japan on the prisoner exchange ship called *Gripholm* which carried internees and prisoners of war back and forth between U.S. and Japan. My father was shipped on the second voyage in September 1943 from New York which took almost three months to reach Japan. They had to go way down south passing Cape of Good Hope and then to Goa, India and finally to Japan.)

MK: And when he reached Japan, what happened?

KU: I guess he went straight home to Hiroshima. (My grandmother was still living then so father looked after her and spent an ordinary life back there.)

MK: And after that, did he ever return back to Hawai‘i?

KU: (Well, yes but it was way later on. My grandmother was still living and it was difficult for father to leave her there. In the meantime the relatives felt that Father should remarry because he was gradually getting old and needed someone to care for him. Fortunately they were able to find a nice companion and they were married in 1960. My father spent several peaceful and happy years with our second mother and in 1967 we were finally able to persuade him and Mother to come and visit us here in Hawai‘i. I’m really glad that both of them had come to meet with all of us children and grandchildren and also his old acquaintances of ‘A’ala Rengō. The ‘A’ala Rengō neighbors hosted a reunion in honor of father when Mrs. Okamoto and Mr. Hino were all still living and active. It was truly a grand and memorable reunion.)

(After enjoying being with the family for about three months they returned to Hiroshima but no sooner had they returned his health started declining and in February the following year of 1968 he passed away with stomach cancer. It was such a shock and traumatic experience for the family to lose such a loving father whose love still lives within us.)

(After my father’s passing, my mother took care of all the aftermath but then in 1975 she asked for brother to come back to Hiroshima to help her with managing father’s estate. Brother Akito and family have since been living there and come visit once in a great while.)

MK: And then, I guess I’m going to close the interview pretty soon, but after your family lost Iwahara Shōten, did you still go to ‘A’ala Rengō to shop or anything?

KU: (Very seldom. But I remember doing some shopping at Asahi Furniture and Sato Clothiers and also at Mrs. Okamoto’s Hawai‘i Importing Co. I also made casual visits to the Kawanos and Awamuras who always welcomed me warmly.)
MK: So when you used to visit these stores what did you notice changing? If you noticed any changes.

KU: (Well, I noticed that trends were changing as time went on with shoppers gradually shifting towards Ala Moana Shopping Center which seemed to affect the majority of businesses in downtown Honolulu. But really ‘A‘ala Rengō had its heyday and flourished for many decades, I must say.)

MK: I guess I'll end the interview here.

END OF INTERVIEW
Listing of Businesses in the 'A'ala Area

By Kazue Uyeda

'A'ala Rengō

Iwahara Shōten - Taketo Iwahara

Sun Loy Dry Goods (Mrs. Chang)

Chinese Restaurant (Carried on by Kojiro Takara who later remodeled it to Star Shoe Store.)

Aloha Curio (Isomatsu Kawano)

Heiwa-Do Jewelry (Fujitani, later Tokuyoshi Awamura)

Chow's Dry Goods (Richard Chow's father. Later Amaguri Taro operated by Kanji Maeda.)

Candy Store

Chinese Tailor (later Okazaki Tailor, then Pacific Woolen, Morikubo)

Kobayashi Dry Goods - Masaichi Kobayashi

Sato Clothiers - Taichi Sato. Formerly Koyama Shōten

Lion Shoe Store - 1) Miyake 2) Nagasawa 3) Matsuda

Hawai'i Importing Co. (formerly Zenichi Fukuda Shōten) Owner: Nakamoto of Hilo. Mrs. Kame Okamoto, Manager.

Iwilei

Okahiro Cyclery - Motorcycles and bicycles. Later Haseyama Tailor.

Restaurant (Chinese)

Hawai'i Woolen Co. (Owned by Tanimuras, Matsuemon and son Motohiro, who later moved to N. King near Maunakea, and then founded the Fair Department Store on Beretania and Fort Streets in 1932, summer.)

Barber Shop (Mrs. Honda)
Tatoo Shop (Filipino)
Asahi Furniture (Risuke Komeiji)
Pool Hall

Queen Street
Nakayama Store
Matsuoka Cafe (later operated Club Hubba Hubba)
City Mill (corner of Queen and Iwilei)

Awa Street
Tasaka Restaurant - facing Pier 16
Tanabe Store - facing Pier 16

N. King Street facing ‘A’ala Rengō
Dew Drop Inn (Chinese operator) - upstairs on 2nd floor Kanaguri Photo Studio and Dr. Kaneo, dentist
Dry Goods Store (Chinese operated)
Chop Suey House (with a large dance hall upstairs.) Later Hawai‘i-ya Hotel and Roosevelt Cafe
Benson Smith Drug Store (corner of King and ‘A’ala Street)

King Street facing O‘ahu Railway Co.
Chinese Butcher Shop (corner of King and ‘A’ala Street)
Darumaya Fruit & Fountain Shop (operated by Tadao Yashima)
Chinese Herb Shop
Tamane Shirt Maker (Kasaburo Tamane)
‘A’ala Street (Diamond Head side)

Benson Smith Drug (corner of King and ‘A’ala Street)

Barber

Pool Hall

Chinese Cobbler

Yoshinaga Store

Restaurant

Kishii Shōten (mainly Japanese groceries)

Barber

Clothes Cleaner

Sakamoto Store

Honolulu-za (mainly Japanese movies)

‘A’ala Shoe (Kenneth Nagasawa)

‘Ewa side of ‘A’ala Street

Chinese Butcher Shop (corner of King and ‘A’ala)

Maeda Restaurant

Ogoso Store

Chinese Restaurant

Ishihara Watch Maker (later moved to Hotel Street near River Street, then to Hotel near Bishop and finally to Ala Moana Center as Hallmark Jewelers.)

Hanaoka Store - Taxi

Yamada Store - Taxi

Barber Shop (Shimomaye, later Takaoka)

Korean Hotel
**Beretania Street**

Kawamoto Saimin Stand (later moved to Mōʻiliʻili at the corner of South King and Hausten Streets)

Restaurant

Saikaiya Hotel

Isobe Hardware

Japanese Restaurant

Sakamoto Mochi & Candy Shop (they used to make the most delicious castella cake.)

Kimoto Store - Taxi

Kobayashi Hotel

Okamoto Store (groceries)

Iha Barber Shop

Nakamura Hotel

Minatoya Restaurant

Yamashiro Hotel

Oshima Drug Store (corner of Beretania and College Walk)

Tanseido Drug Store (corner of Beretania and River)

Sato Watch Maker (next door to Tanseido Drug Store on Beretania)

**Beretania Street on Makai Side**

‘A’ala Shoe Store (Corner of Beretania and ‘A’ala; Nagasawa Proprietor)

Crown Jewelers (Shigeru Shigemura)

Sakumoto Photo Supply Company

Barber shop

Uchima Dressmaking Shop (Toyo Uchima)

‘A’ala Park
River Street

Ohisa Candy Store (corner of Beretania (Makai side) and River St.; later Chinese food, fruits and sundries)

Kaya Restaurant (Japanese meals)

Clothes Cleaner (Kato)

Shimaya Shōten (Onouye family)

Vacant lot at corner of River and Pauahi St.; until mid-1930s (children’s playground)

Takei Dry Goods (corner of River and Pauahi St.; Takei Nekketsu—famous storyteller)

Komeya Hotel

Nakatsu Trunk Store (Luggage Store)

Barber

Watch Maker

Fukuju-tei Restaurant (corner of River and Hotel (Mauka) St.; renowned for its delicious tempura and giant-sized kamaboko.)

Seiseido Drug Store (corner of Hotel (Makai) Street and River St.; manager, Hashimoto Manzuchi)

Barber Shop (Hamada)

Men’s Clothing Shop (corner of River and King streets)