

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: June Mitsuko Shigemasa

"The first thing that told us something is happening is this Filipino man apparently was running up Kumu Street. And he said, 'Ay, the wave come, though.' That's what he said. . . . And then that's when the water started to come onto the street, and the water churning into the seam between our wall and the floor. It was just coming in and just uprooting the house. . . . My husband pulled me back and we were going to run to the front bedroom, but the front bedroom was full of water. So we went into the back bedroom and the water just kept on coming in and filling up the house, filling up the house. We jumped on the bed, and it was getting higher and higher and so we went on the bedpost. We had an old-fashioned bed that had a bedpost. So we hung onto that. Then my husband said we got to get out of here."

June Mitsuko Odachi Shigemasa was born September 27, 1935 in the Shinmachi district of Hilo, Hawai'i. Her parents, Kinzaemon Odachi and Kameki Tsuno Odachi, were immigrants from Japan who came to Hawai'i as Tenri-kyō [a Buddhist sect] ministers. Shigemasa, her parents, and siblings lived in a two-story house on the temple grounds. She was attending nearby Waiākea Kai School when World War II broke out.

Following the Pearl Harbor attack, Kinzaemon Odachi was arrested by the FBI and interned at Santa Fe, New Mexico. Like most Buddhist ministers, Kinzaemon Odachi was a leader in the Hilo Japanese community and was suspected of being an enemy alien. After his departure from Hawai'i, Mrs. Odachi was given the option of being closer to her husband on the Mainland, though not at the same camp. The family left Hawai'i and traveled to Jerome, Arkansas, where they lived in an internment camp for Japanese Americans. They later were moved to Gila River, Arizona internment camp. Shigemasa, her mother, and siblings spent the duration of the war at Gila River. Tragically, Kinzaemon Odachi became critically ill and died in Santa Fe. His wife traveled to Santa Fe and brought his ashes back to Arizona.

Shigemasa and her family returned to Hilo in November of 1945 and resumed life in Shinmachi. Five months later, trauma struck the family again. On April 1, 1946, the tsunami crashed into their house and carried it into the Wailoa River. Shigemasa, her mother, and siblings managed to escape from the house and swim to safety. The family was housed in former U.S. Army barracks located where Ho'olulu Park is today. Her mother was forced to go on welfare, while Shigemasa and her siblings worked as housekeepers.

Life eventually returned to normal. Shigemasa graduated from Hilo High School in 1954. In 1956 she married Susumu Shigemasa. The couple was living on Kumu Street, in the Kimiville section near downtown Hilo, when another tsunami hit Hilo in the early-morning hours of May 23, 1960. Shigemasa, her husband, and young daughter were at home when water from the tsunami filled the house. They eventually escaped from the house through a window and swam up to the roof. Susumu was able to locate a board on which they climbed and drifted to safety.

Shigemasa recounted these harrowing tales in her 'Iwalani Street home on land acquired via a low-interest loan offered to survivors displaced by the 1960 tsunami. She and her husband

operate a small retailing business from their home. They raised two daughters and have two grandchildren.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

June Mitsuko Shigemasa (JS)

Hilo, Hawai'i

December 2, 1998

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with June [Mitsuko] Odachi Shigemasa on December 2, 1998. We are at her home in Hilo, Hawai'i. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, June, good morning.

JS: Good morning.

WN: Let's start. First, if you can tell me when and where you were born.

JS: I was born on September 27, 1935 in Hilo.

WN: What part of Hilo?

JS: Right in the Shinmachi area. I was born at home because my mother had a midwife. And I knew her name and I knew of her. I didn't know her personally but I knew who she was.

WN: The midwife?

JS: Midwife. Makinodan.

WN: Makinodan.

JS: Mrs. Makinodan.

WN: Were all your brothers and sisters born with her?

JS: I would imagine. Because just below myself is a brother, just one more. And I'm sure all (other siblings) were [born] at home.

WN: You said Shinmachi. What was Shinmachi?

JS: Shinmachi was an area that, I guess, immigrants settled, which was located between Wailoa Bridge and Hilo town, between those two geographical areas. And it had

homes, businesses, a movie theater, all kinds of stores, tailors, retail stores. Oh, and I think there was a *furo-ya*, too, over there, from what I hear people talk about. But I was so young, I don't know exactly, specifically what was there. But I know that that area was full of activity with businesses and residential.

WN: And how did it differ from, say, downtown?

JS: I think because of [the] residential [area in Shinmachi].

WN: Oh, I see.

JS: Yeah, I think so. However, [in downtown Hilo] people did live up above their business so the difference would be that [in Shinmachi] the residents was separated from the business. I know that [in downtown] people used the live up above the [S.] Hata business. They had a residential upstairs and so they lived up there and the business was down on the ground floor.

WN: So downtown part, people lived above their—you're saying that the difference between downtown . . .

JS: Some of them.

WN: Whereas in Shinmachi, what?

JS: It was residential [with wooden homes]. I kind of remember the [Royal] Theater being there because we had to walk a distance. But it was a mixture of residence and businesses.

WN: What did the residences look like?

JS: (Chuckles) Well, for one thing, they were really closely located. I mean, you could just look out the door and there was your neighbor right there. And I think they were more—not barracks—but a dormitory style of residence, I believe. I think people who are older can describe to you more in detail how it was structured. But of course, there were not individual homes that we have today here where we live. They were more in clusters. And we all know that people tended to stay together, culturally, ethnically, nationalitywise. So there were a lot of Japanese in this area here.

WN: Would you call them tenements?

JS: I guess, yeah.

WN: And they were wooden structures?

JS: Mm hmm. Mostly I think they were wooden.

WN: So tell me about your parents. Where were they from?

JS: Both of them are from Japan and they came together with (one) daughter. And they

left two sons in Japan, too. I don't know exactly where the location [is], but they left two sons in Japan. And upon arriving in Hawai'i, they had (two) more daughters and one son who was the youngest. The oldest daughter (died in Japan as a toddler). And so there remained three daughters and one son.

WN: What number are you?

JS: I am the third child, girl child. So that's why my name is Mitsuko. But in actuality, there was this deceased child so I'm actually the fourth daughter. But I suppose because I was born after that infant or toddler died, I became the third daughter. So that's how I got my name, I understand. The other two [older] brothers—one went to the Philippines for the war [World War II], and we understand that he died there. The other one died of tuberculosis, we think, in Japan. So out of the seven children, we have just four living.

WN: So you never really knew the two oldest brothers?

JS: Older brothers, no.

WN: And the two other sisters, too? One died.

JS: Yeah, just one older sister and the two brothers. I believe they did die—I don't know even when they died. I may have been not born or I may have been born, I don't know. Because a lot of things, details, we don't know because our parents are gone. Maybe they told my older sister, I don't know, but I was too young to comprehend all this. So there's just four of us left now. Three girls and a boy.

WN: What kind of work did your father do?

JS: My father [Kinzaemon Odachi] was a Tenri-kyō minister; so was my mother [Kameki Tsuno Odachi]. But my father was a head minister, so he had the responsibility of running the church.

WN: And where was the church?

JS: The church was right there in Shinmachi. We lived in a two-story house and I believe it became a three-story because during the war, they dug a [bomb] shelter. I remember going way down deep. I don't think it was a fantasy, I think it was in there. That's why I wanted my sister to come here [for the interview]. She says, "No, I can't remember. I can't remember." (WN chuckles.) But I know for sure it was a two-story because the top floor was the church, the sanctuary area, which had large stairs going up. Very large, about twelve feet long, at the entrance to the church. In the basement was our living quarters and the kitchen area. I am pretty sure they built it themselves with the help of the church people. And I'm sure we had a landlord, though. I was trying to find out all these years who owned the property. And it was a Caucasian person that owned all that area. I need to find out again and write it down again after I hear the name.

WN: Was it Hitchcock? Because I know there were a couple of—there was three sections of

Shinmachi. And then there was one Caucasian man named Hitchcock or something—I think it was Hitchcock who owned one section. [The individual who owned the *Ni-ku*, or second section, of Shinmachi was named Bradshaw.]

JS: Oh, is that right? Is that including land and dwellings as well?

WN: I think so. Well, people leased.

JS: Leased.

WN: I think they called it *Ik-ku* or *Ni-ku* or something like that. You never heard that? Yeah, I think I have that from someone else. I'll let you know.

JS: Oh okay.

(Laughter)

WN: So what was it like growing up on the church grounds?

JS: We grew up on the church grounds and I have vague memories of playing around the house. Playing marbles and running around and things like that. I remember walking to school because the school was in Waiākea town, and that's pretty far. Maybe like about two, two and a half miles. So we had to walk there.

WN: This is Waiākea Kai [School]?

JS: Waiākea Kai, yeah. And so it was quite a distance, but it's nothing compared to what other kids had to walk. Like my husband had to walk three miles one way and three miles back. He has a history of his own, living in the country. I think country people have a lot more stories to tell. Somehow, in the city, you're limited to activities and things that you do. But my husband comes from a family of eight children and he has lots of stories to tell, too. In fact, we just had a Shigemasa family reunion in Kona and so some of this all came out.

WN: Oh, he grew up in Kona?

JS: No. He grew up in Nā'ālehu. But I would say as a child, we played indoors as well as outdoors with neighbor children. I was so young when I left. But I remember being very close to my father. In fact, I was like a pet. That's why they ended up calling me *baby-chan* for the longest time. (WN chuckles.) And when my older siblings would get naughty, my father would get so upset. We used to have a post that held up the whole house, and he would tie them up. Of course, then, he didn't tie me right? So I remember him doing that. And I was just standing next to him as innocent as ever.

(Laughter)

JS: But I was his pet.

WN: What kind of a man was your father?

JS: I remember him as a man of great stature because I just have this feeling of leaning on him and being protected by him. And because he was regarded [by] church people as the head minister. Even as a child, I think, there is some kind of presence here, a person that you would respect and honor and to a certain extent fear, I guess, for being authoritative. But other than that, I think loving enough. I don't remember a lot of hugging, and of course that generation didn't do that a lot. But I felt protected. That's what I felt. I felt protected.

WN: How about in terms of religion? Was it a very religious upbringing that you had?

JS: Religious in a sense where our daily routine was focused on the religion. They chanted early in the morning and they chanted in the evening and we were expected to sit there and participate and not carouse around while the chanting was being done. Prayer was in the morning and then in the evening. But I was too young to realize that the religion had any bearing on your life. And so, being that young, you just went with the flow, I guess, not being really able to understand everything. At that age, I think all what you need is love and being secure so that you know that you're going to be taken care of.

WN: What about your mother?

JS: My mother was a very quiet and gentle person. And I grew to love her after my father passed away. I grew to love her very much. I became very, very close with her. I'm pretty sure I caused her anguish like any teenager does to their mother. But I regarded her as somebody real special. I missed her for the longest time after that. When I married, she was still alive. But she died before I had my first child. And then it was an adjustment for me to not have my mother. That was really an adjustment.

WN: You were married in '56?

JS: [Nineteen] fifty-six.

WN: She died in . . .

JS: [Nineteen] fifty—um, wait a minute now. I got married in '56. Nineteen fifty-eight. She died in '58.

WN: So was she the one that did the housework and cooking and so forth in the family? Or were there others?

JS: Mm hmm [yes]. Well, prayers on church service days, the members would come and of course, she did a lot of the cooking and planning, I suppose. And shopping and planning and cooking and made sure that things got done. And I'm pretty sure she had to care for her family as well as doing this. Of course, I was young, so I don't remember my father doing any of these domestic things (WN chuckles), probably not.

(Laughter)

WN: I know I asked you before but maybe you can remember a little bit more what you did

as a child to have good fun. I know you said marbles. Anything else?

- JS: Playing with siblings, I think, more. I was a girl so maybe we played dolls and I remember playing with paper dolls. I didn't have a lot of toys like a lot of people our age. We just made do with what we could, what we had on hand. In fact, somebody at the office was going to put some games together that we used to play as kids. I hope he does because I think it's good to leave that behind with our children. Hopscotch and *kampyo* [JS means *kamapio*], you know, the stick that you hit and then you have to run a distance before this stick lands somewhere or—I mean it was a stick like a broomstick, dowel shaped. And they would carve it in such a manner that it would be pointed on two ends. And they would get another stick and they would hit it. And that stick had to travel a distance and you have the chance to run to the base or whatever it was. And just things that are made at home.
- WN: Interesting, you called it *kampyo*.
- JS: *Kampyo*—I think it was. . . . *Kamapio*. *Kamapio*.
- WN: Yeah, *kamapio*, okay.
- JS: Yeah, yeah. My husband would know more about that.
- WN: Yeah, you know, a lot of old-timers say *kamapio*.
- JS: They mention *kamapio*.
- WN: So when you said *kampyo*, you know, *kampyo* is the food, yeah.
- JS: The food, that's right. *Kamapio*.
- WN: If you called it that it would have been interesting.
- JS: You didn't eat it, no. You wouldn't eat it.
- WN: Because on other islands, they call it *pee-wee*, you know.
- JS: Oh, is that right?
- WN: Yeah. They describe the same game but they—I know on O'ahu, the kids called it *pee-wee*. So I guess it's *kamapio*, so maybe they changed it to *pee-wee*.
- JS: Oh, *pio*, *pee-wee*. Oh. *Kamapio*, yeah. And run master. You don't need anything for run master. Jacks. Oh, I remember playing with jacks because my father stepped on some and he picked it up and he threw it out of the house and we would have no jacks after that. He was rather strict. Which was good, I think. (WN chuckles.)
- WN: And most of your playmates were Japanese? All of them?
- JS: In fact all of them, yeah. There's couple families that I remember that I still see off

and on and I know that they were my neighbors. In my mind's eye, I can see, oh yeah, the Nirei family and the Murata family. The Murata family had tons of children. And then the Nirei, not so many, but they were very close, and we became very close family friends. I used to go with one of the Nirei girls to—she worked for *Haole* homes to clean and wash and iron. But she used to take me with her all the time. And that's how I got my name, June, because these *Haole* people could not pronounce Mitsuko. They had dubbed me June and that stuck ever since then. So it's not a legal name, it's just like a nickname. But that has stuck. And that's how I got it, from this woman that used to take me. I still see her around. She's a Mrs. Medeiros, and I see her off and on shopping. We'd see each other and I think both our minds flash back to the early days. I know her brother, and he's not well, though. I'm pretty sure he would have some stories, too.

WN: So what was school like?

JS: Well, school was really hard, I think for us. For me, too. I don't think it was me but it was my older sister that ran away from school more than one time. (Chuckles) But school was kind of hard because, being away from home and structured and being amongst people that you don't know. I don't have too much recollection about that. Probably I did go to kindergarten and then we left. Where the Waiākea Settlement building was, that's where the kindergarten was, I think. So a lot of the school days, I don't have much memory of that.

WN: So you went to kindergarten, you didn't go to Waiākea Kai at that time?

JS: Not at that time. Just in kindergarten. So not too much memory because I was so young.

WN: Okay, so when the war came, that changed your life quite a bit, yeah?

JS: Yeah.

WN: Can you tell me what happened?

JS: Well, I don't even remember my father being taken away. Probably he was taken away when we were asleep.

WN: You were like seven, six or seven.

JS: Six, yeah. And I kind of think that he was taken away without our presence or without us knowing it. However, I do remember these two Caucasian men coming to the house and asking my mother if she would like to be with her husband, through my older sister interpreting, and of course, she said, "Yes, I want to." And then I remember my mother was busily, with the older children, packing things. Because I remember the house being very sparsely—you know, with furniture or belongings. And then the next thing I remember is that I distinctly remember riding in the [U.S.] Army truck and going over the Wailoa Bridge. That's all what I remember of that, from the house to the harbor. Then the next thing I remember is I got terribly seasick. It took us five days from Hawai'i to get to the West Coast. And I was literally seasick for five days. I

can remember the smell of the ship. If I go visiting on a ship that's in the harbor today, when that smell hits me, boy it can just bring back that memory. And I remember laying down like this, oh my heavens, how long is this going to last, when will it end? I was very, very, very ill. The seasickness just overwhelmed my memory and that was it, that was all of what I could remember. So my siblings, I think, were able to kind of play around and it was really miserable. And not only miserable because I was seasick, but miserable because of being uprooted and not knowing our destination. Japanese would say—how do you say, Japanese word that really just was overwhelming. *Nakasenai* [*Nasakenai*], that word. As young as I was, and frightened too, yeah. I don't know about what my two older sisters would say, though.

WN: Or your mother.

JS: Yeah, my mother.

WN: Yeah, I know you're only six years old, so I guess I can talk about sequences or what was the next thing that you remembered about that experience?

JS: Well, then after that I remember living in barracks and going to school there, too, and playing with friends, and sleeping in the barracks and going to the mess hall to eat and watching my mother take her turn working at the mess hall. My mother was a very quiet person, and very—I don't remember ever seeing her exuberant or jubilant. She was always so quiet and stoic. I remember it was hard for her. The older ones had to watch the younger ones and she had to take her turn at the mess hall. And she was not a very sociable person so she didn't mingle with the others. I think we kind of took after her a lot, except for the sister above me. She's more social than we are.

(Laughter)

JS: She [JS's mother] was really quiet and stoic, that's what I can remember her as.

WN: Do you remember seeing your father?

JS: No, we never laid eyes on my father. And then the next thing I knew, they were rushing around to get my mother to Santa Fe, New Mexico from Arkansas or Arizona. I can't remember what state we were in [at the time]. But he became very, very ill when he was interned at the camp that held only the men. And it took what I would describe as red tape to get my mother there before he actually passed away. She took my oldest sister and my younger brother, I think, with her and left two daughters: myself and the one right above me, with friends. I would say she was gone about four or five days. But unfortunately, by the time she got to the camp, he had died. I have a picture of his funeral. They had him cremated and had a service there and she brought back the ashes with her when she came back to Arizona.

WN: You folks were in Arizona?

JS: Arizona, yeah. Gila River. And Jerome, Arkansas was the state that we went to.

WN: Where did you go first?

JS: You know, I don't even remember. I can't remember what state we were at.

WN: But your father was at . . .

JS: Santa Fe, New Mexico. That's where the men were. And he became ill—not for long. So I'm sure he could have been ill when he was at home here. And stress, yeah. Frightened and scared and whether he was going to see his family and what was going to happen to them. The medical care in the concentration camp, of course, I'm sure was limited. I don't even know what medical facilities were available to them. I know it was very little, because [knew of] this woman who had a younger brother who had a very high fever in the camp. They could not get medical care and it affected his brain. He can sustain himself but he could not develop to his capacity. So he did menial jobs. I see him off and on. I think he's retired from being a grocery boy. I remember his sister telling me that the medical facilities were—I don't even know what word to use. Bad, non-existent, or what. But my father was supported by people in the camp and they kept vigil over him until he passed away. Mr. George Hoshida was the one that took really good care of him. That's Sandra's father. So till today, we're very good family friends although separated by distance.

WN: Do you remember Gila River or Jerome in terms of landscape?

JS: Well, the landscape was pretty much the same in the desert, and you lived in barracks. And dry desert land. We made our own games, too. We entertained ourselves and went to school. I don't remember how long we stayed in Arizona and how long we stayed in Arkansas either. Then, just before we came home, they shipped us to Washington, the state of Washington. I guess that harbor there was designated for us to get on the ship and then to come home. It was really, really cold, I remember when we got there and, I mean this structure—it looked like a barrack, too. It was a structure and it was so cold. No heating system, nothing. My mother just carried only the necessities, so it was a real small amount of luggage.

WN: Do you remember getting seasick coming back?

JS: You know, that's the strangest thing. Going over, it was so embedded in my mind that coming home, I don't remember coming home. But I knew that we were going home. There was some lightness to it when you know you're going home. The anticipation is different going home. So I don't remember being seasick—just going over.

WN: So you were about six years old when you went, and coming back you were how old?

JS: Turned seven, or seven and a half.

WN: Oh, so you were there for about . . .

JS: About two years. I was going on eight [years old]. So when we came back, coming back and going to the school system was traumatic, too, again.

WN: Why?

JS: New school, new faces, new friends.

WN: This is Waiākea Kai?

JS: Waiākea Kai, yeah. I was left behind two grades. Introvert, yeah. Not being able to express myself and being in a new school, not a very outgoing child so I was held back two years. I caught up a little bit so I was advanced one grade. So actually I'm a year older than my classmates.

WN: Do you remember other children who went to the camps from Hilo and then had to go back to school?

JS: A few, but not close enough. We were real close to the Hoshida family. That was it. Because none of the parishioners, the church members, I don't think to my knowledge, went.

WN: And when you came back, you folks lived in the same place?

JS: Yes. Somebody must have come to get us and we situated right there in that same house. So that was in November 1945, we came back. Went to school, got adjusted. And I remember speaking so well the English language and I remember being made fun of because we spoke so well. Just like *Haoles*. But boy, we lost it (snaps fingers) like that. We went back to pidgin real fast. I recollect that.

WN: I didn't ask you. What was school like in the camps?

JS: You know, my memory of school those times that I was there is vague, too. I must have gone through amnesia, but I remember sitting in class participating somewhat. I remember being real shy. And just a regular school, going and coming home and playing after school. I know some people have much more vivid memories than I do. But that's what I can remember.

WN: And you made friends there with some of the children?

JS: Yes, yes, a few.

WN: Do you remember them being from Hawai'i or being from the Mainland?

JS: A few being from Hawai'i and I'm pretty sure most of them were from the Mainland. Because my neighbors didn't go. None of my neighbors went. It was because my parents were involved in this religion that they were taken up, you see. So none of my neighbors went. And we never knew the Hoshidas until we were ready to go. We met them at the post office building. Here was this mother with a big stomach carrying a child and somehow we were drawn together. So my two older sisters, being older, went to this woman that had two little ones and with her big tummy, we just was gravitated to go and help this lady and be with this lady that had her children. And we became friends since then. And they were the closest of all the people that we ever met, the Hoshidas.

WN: The reason why I asked about school is that you said that you came back and you were sort of talking proper English when you came back. So many of your playmates must have been from the Mainland.

JS: They must have been, yeah. Because I remember speaking very well.

WN: You speak well now.

JS: Well, I try to.

(Laughter)

JS: It's like when my nieces and nephew come from California. Their mother was born and raised here but then they were all born up there, so when they come here, they talk like Mainland people. And that was almost like a stigma. So I remember losing it real quick. Trying to acclimate, I think, and trying to fit in, I think we did that.

WN: So do you remember, did your mother continue to be [Tenri-kyō] minister?

JS: Yes, she had the responsibility of carrying on the church.

WN: Did she take over your father's position or anything?

JS: Yeah, she did. I don't think it was much of a choice. I think she was expected to, and she became head minister then. So she had to do that.

WN: Do you remember any other changes coming back? Like was the house different or the church different or anything like that?

JS: No. Just that my father wasn't there. There was an old man that kept the sanctuary for them. The house was still intact coming home and it was only several months after that then the tidal wave hit. So I think trying to acclimate, that was traumatic, too, you're making that transition. So I don't remember really playing outdoors. Because of that I try to make sure that my grandchildren have memory lanes. I think that's so important. My husband has more memory lanes than I do, the way they played and how *kolohe* he was and I think we really need to document these things. Because after a while, you forget, but he had vivid memories of how life was with him. There was no disruption for him, I think.

WN: Did you sense any [changes] in your relationships with the friends that you had before you left? Did you have to explain why you were gone? Do you remember doing anything like that? Did people ask you about what your experiences were like? Do you remember anything like that?

JS: I don't remember but I'm assuming there was some dialogue about that. I mean as a child, you would be curious, where did you come from, where have you been. I'm sure there was. I don't remember specifically any dialoguing that took place but I assume there must have been. That we were different because of the way we spoke. But after all, children adapt, so I'm pretty sure we adapted. My two older sisters

would probably have more detailed things to say about that.

WN: I think, though, that your age [at that time], six, seven, you know, it's a real impressionistic age.

JS: Yes.

WN: You're not aware of the details, but you felt it, right?

JS: Oh, yeah, I did. I still do.

WN: Okay, so then you came back in November of '45, went to school. Did you just go right back into school?

JS: Yeah, mm hmm.

WN: Oh, they held you back two years first?

JS: Well, they didn't hold me back, but I was enrolled two grades lower than what my age, so they didn't hold me back. I adjusted and then was able to catch up one grade. So one class grade behind my classmates. I felt stupid and dumb.

(Laughter)

WN: You weren't teased or anything?

(Laughter)

JS: I'm pretty sure I was teased and I thought, ho, I must be so dumb, yeah, not being able to catch up. Because I know others caught up. I didn't.

WN: See, at that age, something small like that you laugh at, but at that time, that's a big thing. (Chuckles)

JS: Oh yes, knowing that your classmates were younger than you were used to bother me. But as you get older, oh heck. Then I started meeting people who were, for some reason or another, sick that got left behind at home and same age as I was, one or two people. So it was really no big deal being older than your classmates.

WN: Okay, so November 1945, you came back and life was coming back to normal.

JS: Yeah, I could see my mother struggling to maintain the church, though, financially she struggled. I'm pretty sure she struggled. And it was even harder after the tidal wave. There was no money, absolutely no money. So we did go on welfare.

WN: After the tidal wave?

JS: Yeah. There was no money to be had. So we worked. The older girls worked as housekeepers. I remember working, cleaning house for a schoolteacher, washing,

ironing, cleaning, help with cooking. Whatever meager wages we earned, we gave it to Mother. So I did that for quite a while. I learned a lot. How to clean house and do things like that. But my mother was forced to go on welfare because there was just no income.

WN: Okay, well let's get into the tsunami. This is '46, so you were about ten years old?

JS: Eleven years old.

WN: Tell me what happened.

JS: All of a sudden one morning, it was seven o'clock and we were up getting ready for school. At the same time parishioners came to do the morning prayer. All of a sudden there seemed to be a kind of excitement around the neighborhood, and the word tsunami was heard. People that were there ran home and my mother started to get us all together.

WN: Did you know the word tsunami at that time?

JS: No, I don't think I knew. Definitely I didn't know because she was corralling us to go up in the upper level [i.e., second floor] because it's higher, fearing that if the water comes, if we're higher, we'll be safe, right? Well, before I went up I happened to look through the basement door and I could see this roll of water coming. And still I wasn't scared, not experiencing anything like that. So what I did was shut the door and I made sure that—you know this so-called lock, right? This slab of lumber that we had and you're supposed to do like that and it locks the door from anybody coming in. Well, I did that. Then I went up the stairs and my mother just held us right in front of the altar and just huddled together, the four or five of us, my mother and the four children. Then the wave came and the water just took us here and there and I thought we went out into the bay. But my sister says, no we didn't go out into the bay. But it sure felt like we went out into the bay. Eventually, we went right into the Wailoa River. The big house just went up and up and up and up. And then we got to the end and we decided to get off of the house because I think fear of crashing into the (embankment).

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

JS: So we were instructed to get out of the house. We swam up there. My brother was younger than I was and he kept on, I remember, going down, and we kept on pulling him up. And he went down, pulling him up. Then we tread water and we went to the embankment and we walked through these bushes, which is the Wailoa State Park right now. And from there, somehow we ended up at again the Hoshida's relatives' home and we were housed there for, I don't know, as long as they could keep us. Then they opened up these barracks that were situated—I guess during World War II. That's right where the civic auditorium is today on Manono Street.

- WN: Is that Naval Air Station?
- JS: No, it wouldn't be naval air. No, it was army.
- WN: So Manono.
- JS: Manono. On Manono Street. Manono and Pi'ilani. Where the [Afook-Chinen] Civic Auditorium is there [today] were these . . .
- WN: Ho'olulu?
- JS: Ho'olulu Park. That's where they put us. It was a public bathroom, public wash area, too, I remember. And eventually, they built a toilet for each barrack unit. So we lived there for quite a while. You know we went to school from there, too. To Waiākea, we walked. And in fact, we graduated from Waiākea Intermediate School from there.
- WN: So backing up just a little bit. First tell me where your house was in relation to the river. How far was it from Wailoa River?
- JS: Our home was in the back. The river goes this way and it goes up gates, you see. So my home was—you could see the river. It's almost like right in the backyard.
- WN: And as the river starts . . .
- JS: Turning, curving, yeah.
- WN: And it goes in the back of Shinmachi.
- JS: Right, right, right, right. Over there. And so it wasn't very far but it seems like [the house] didn't just land in the river. It made its movements and through the window I could see other buildings going and it was just very chaotic. And it landed in the river and so we floated.
- WN: The house landed in the river?
- JS: Yeah. The house went into the river and we just went like this.
- WN: Wow.
- JS: Yeah.
- WN: You said you saw the water coming, the wave coming.
- JS: From Kam[ehameha] Avenue.
- WN: Now how far was your house from the water itself? I mean you folks weren't right on the main street?
- JS: No. We were on this side of Kam[ehameha] Avenue.

WN: *Mauka.*

JS: *Mauka. Mauka* is mountain, right?

WN: Yeah.

JS: Not the ocean side. We were across Kam[ehameha] Avenue and then this side. Oh, [many] yards [from the ocean]. Our house is way in the back [i.e., inland] because it was close to the [banks of the Wailoa] River. But I saw that wave coming.

WN: What about the buildings that were in front of you folks? Were they coming toward your house or were they . . .

JS: By the time we went up[stairs], we didn't visually see anything coming towards us because we went up in the altar area. We just huddled there and we could see through the windows what was happening. And just the tremendous amount of water. It's amazing we didn't drown. I remember being there in a huddle right in front of the altar. We knew that we had to get out from this structure, fearing, I think, because it can crash into another building or the embankment. So we got out there.

WN: How did you get out?

JS: Seemed like we climbed out the window. Yeah, climbed out the window, tread water and then we went into the embankment and (held on to) the grass. Then we went on land. I remember there was this boy—in fact, he was Nishimoto, he was stark naked and he went kind of with us. Somebody gave him clothes after a short while later.

WN: And once you got into the river, was it really turbulent, too?

JS: Yes, just going, just going—very turbulent, yeah. Because it pushed this big house. This was a big house, two-story structure. It got knocked off its foundation and it went into the river.

WN: And there were other houses in the river, too?

JS: Yeah, lot of debris and houses. Just vaguely, my memory is at—our focus was us and how to get out, and what to do.

WN: So, in essence, though, once you left the house, you folks were kind of separated?

JS: From who?

WN: From each other?

JS: Oh no, no, no, no. We were together. We were all together.

WN: You were treading water.

JS: We were treading water, small distance, and then we did it together. My mother took

all of us. So we stayed together, and then we were—I don't even know how we got to this home that helped us out by taking care of us for a while. And then I don't know how soon even they opened up these barracks.

WN: And you all knew how to swim?

JS: I'm not a good swimmer. Just dog swim, I think. Maybe my older sisters could swim better than I could. I'm not a good swimmer, so I tread water. One of the activities—going back—was going across Kam[ehameha] Avenue and swimming for hours on end at the bay.

WN: The ocean.

JS: In the ocean, yeah. That was one of our pastimes, that's right. We would stay there hours on end playing and we would cross Kam[ehameha] Avenue and go home.

WN: Did you folks do any activities in the river?

JS: I don't remember. No, not in the river. In the back of our house used to be like a sidewalk and we used to play a lot over there, I remember. And that's a hopscotch time, yeah.

WN: Okay, what about sounds? Do you remember any sounds?

JS: Yeah, the roar of water rushing, tremendous amount of water. Almost like a locomotive engine or the roar of a jet. Just roaring noise. Created a very loud noise just coming and coming.

WN: What about smell?

JS: I can still smell the river water when I go to Wailoa State Park. And then when my husband used to fish, when he would bring home mullet from the river, I would recognize that mud smell. I remember that. Other than those two smells I can't remember anything else.

WN: What were you wearing at the time? You were ready for school?

JS: I believe pajamas, because it was seven in the morning. It was kind of early. I don't remember what I was wearing. And I don't remember how we got to that house and I'm pretty sure people gave us clothes, because we lost everything. [Nineteen forty-six] was just total, total devastation. Nothing to salvage.

WN: You remember your mother telling you anything, explaining to you?

JS: No. My mother was very nonverbal. But her gentleness was her body language. Her stoicness and her body language. That was her message to us. She never wanted to talk about things in the past. Maybe if I were older, I would have asked her more things. But being younger, yeah, kind of let the older ones take care.

WN: So from that time, treading water was your last recollection?

JS: Yeah.

WN: Until you got to the housing, the barracks.

JS: Yeah. I remember staying in this home. I know, at that young age, the fact that these people welcomed us and provided us with shelter, I had a sense of appreciation at that age. Wow, these people were actually strangers, just relatives of our good friends, and yet they were able to take us in, and they were willing to take us in. So at that age, I didn't express it but I had that sense in me that, how nice and how appreciative I was that people—I guess that's how you learned, yeah? When you go through something like that and people help you, and as a child, you remember it but you don't express it. Maybe my mother did say oh, you know how fortunate we were able to stay. These people were so kind. But today, I make sure that I express these things to my children and to my grandchildren. You have to. How else are you going to learn? But I knew at that age that these people sacrificed their privacy to house us. I don't know how long we stayed there before we were relocated.

WN: So the first place you stayed was at these people's house?

JS: Yes.

WN: Or at Ho'olulu?

JS: No, no. There was nothing because this was right after the tidal wave. I don't know how soon they were able to get the Ho'olulu barracks ready for us. And there were many people; it wasn't only us. That kind of ease and apprehension when you see others in like situations. We all got to do it all together and make do.

WN: Do you know how long you were at Ho'olulu?

JS: Ho'olulu barracks. Oh, quite a while. Let's see, graduated from Waiākea High School at age—I was fifteen. So five years.

WN: Waiākea Intermediate, you mean?

JS: Waiākea Intermediate, yeah.

WN: How old is—oh fifteen.

JS: Ninth grade.

WN: [Nineteen] fifty[-one].

JS: Nineteen fifty[-one], yeah. So it went up to ninth grade. Four years. Because I remember taking pictures—I loaned this man to make copies and I better ask him for it. I forgot already. But I remember being in the graduation. White dress and taking pictures. So we stayed there till graduation. Then after that, we moved to a home right

in Waiākea on Kainehe Street. Kobayashis were our landlord. And we would be able to house there. This man that rented his home to my mother was one of the parishioners. So they were willing to build a house with an altar, Kainehe Street.

WN: So your mother was still the minister. But there was no church anymore, right?

JS: No. They used to come, though. You know in Ho'olulu housing, my mother had to put up an altar. So parishioners came. I remember it being so crowded and yet faithfully she continued the religion, continued her ministry and performing the rituals, morning and evening. People would come and she would minister to people. See, this religion is basically made up of people who are seeking healing. Could be mental, emotional, but it's a healing thing. So that's how people sought the religion out. Of course, any religion, when you're in need of any kind of spirituality, you would really put emphasis on wanting to find something for solace. But it was people who were ill that used to come a lot. My mother would pray over them, focusing specifically on the illness and her chanting and all that. And so in Ho'olulu housing there was an altar there and then when we moved to our home in Waiākea, they built the altar in the house. And she was fortunate because one of the parishioners was a member that owned a house.

WN: This is in Waiākea town?

JS: Waiākea. Not the town itself, but where Banyan Drive is. You know where the golf course is?

WN: Yeah.

JS: Right over there. Then I was married and then—(footsteps sound in the background) can you stop, that sounds like my niece, I think.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, where were we?

JS: Where were we?

WN: Yeah, you were talking about Waiākea, the house and set up the altar and so forth, so you were living over there, yeah?

JS: Yeah, yeah.

WN: And then you got married in '56?

JS: Mm hmm [yes].

WN: So when you got married where did you live?

JS: In a room in the basement of the [Waiākea] house.

WN: What year did you graduate from high school?

JS: [Nineteen] fifty-four. And my mother died in 1988, I mean 1958, sorry. So the funeral was held right there at the house because that was a chapel and that's where they usually have funerals. Those days, mortuaries were not available. Not like today, there's a chapel there and everything. So funerals were held at home because the home was a church. She died January, '58, and Junette [JS's daughter] was born in September of '58 so I barely kind of knew that I was expecting. I was feeling ill—what's wrong with me? And I used to sleep like Rip Van Winkle, oh just sleep, sleep, sleep, and then realize, oh! Expecting. Yeah.

WN: So you graduated '54, did you work?

JS: Yes. I worked [for] Dr. Yamanoha, medical doctor. I worked for him. And then I went to vocational nursing school on O'ahu for a year and I got my licensed practical nurse trade and then I came back. Then I got pregnant. (After I had Junette) I never went to work because no baby-sitter. And nurses had to work all kind of shifts, so I gave that up. I just did private duty before Junette was born and that was it. And then I stayed home.

WN: How many children do you have?

JS: I have two.

WN: Two . . .

JS: Two daughters.

WN: Okay, so let's talk about 1960.

JS: Okay. Nineteen sixty, we were living at 77 Kumu Street in the bayfront area, which presently has all the soccer fields. My grandson practices [soccer] right near where we used to live. So I take him to the bridge over there and say, "You know, Trevor, Grammie and Grampie lived here with your mommy right here on this spot here." Because our house was so easy to be located because it's right where the canal is.

WN: Which canal?

JS: Um, there's a name for that canal.

WN: Oh, okay.

JS: You know which canal. But the bridge is there. And it's right behind Goodyear Tire right now, Kumu Street. And so then I would show him the mango tree that Grampie put us up on with your mommy. So in 1960, that's where we were. On Kumu Street.

WN: Was that considered Kimiville?

JS: Yes, yes, yes. That's where Kimiville was. Right behind us was Kimiville.

WN: Oh, so you weren't renting?

JS: No, this was a private home. Our landlord lived behind us and so we were renting his home. And let's see. Oh, we had to move from Waiākea because I was going to have a baby and we needed a house and so we looked for a home and that's where we found this house on Kumu Street. That's where I had Junette. We lived there for a year and eight months and that's when the tidal wave hit. The day that we got the warning that the tidal wave was going to hit, we kind of prepared ourselves. My husband [Susumu Shigemasa] reversed the car [into the garage] so that we could just jump in the car and head right out. But in the meantime, my sister-in-law needed a drive home so—I had just learned how to drive so I went into Robert's Bakery, picked her up and I took her home. I came back to Kumu Street and didn't know how to reverse, right? So I just went head first in. So much for preparation.

(Laughter)

WN: Now, what time was it when you got the first indication or warning about a tidal wave coming?

JS: Oh, that was about maybe about eight o'clock at night.

WN: Oh, eight o'clock at night.

JS: Yeah, this was at night. That's why he prepared the car that way. But nothing happened. We were waiting and my sister-in-law needed a ride so I went to get her and take her home.

WN: You don't remember warnings that day? They didn't have warnings that day?

JS: There was warnings that day, during the day. [Apparently, there was only one warning prior to the 1:05 A.M. tsunami. JS is referring to radio reports and reports from other sources throughout the day.] I guess it was still lighted when we got the warning. We were listening to the radio. Then the radio said that we were okay and that Kona had just a little bit of a rise in water, like maybe a foot or foot and a half or something like that, which was okay. And so we kind of relaxed a little bit, I think. And then, yet, I was apprehensive. Then all of a sudden, I would hear this, I detected this noise, this really roaring noise. And I said, "You know, I think the wave is coming," I told my husband. In the meantime, my husband was watching the canal recede, come back, recede, come back. He got his fishing flashlight, looking in the canal and the fish jumping, whatever. And then I kept on telling him that, "You know, I think I hear this noise and it could be the wave coming."

"No, no, no, no. It's not going to reach up here. It's not coming. It's not coming." Already the warning is all *pau* and we would be okay.

WN: Was the receding of the canal unusual?

JS: Yes, yes. Down to the bare. The first thing that told us something is happening is this Filipino man apparently was running up Kumu Street. And he said, "Ay, the wave

come, though." That's what he said. And we saw him running up Kumu Street. And then that's when the water started to come onto the street, and the water churning into the seam between our wall and the floor. It was just coming in and just uprooting the house. I was ready to take off [via] the back door, and my husband pulled me back and we were going to run to the front bedroom, but the front bedroom was full of water. So we went into the back bedroom and the water just (kept on) coming in and filling up the house, filling up the house, filling up the house. We jumped on the bed, and it was getting higher and higher and so we went on the bedpost. We had an old-fashioned bed that had a bedpost. So we hung onto that. Then my husband said we got to get out of here.

WN: Was the house moving by that time?

JS: Yeah, it was moving all over the place, and crackling. That was just about the time when the HELCO [Hilo Electric Light Company] plant just (JS makes exploding sound), blew up. We realized that we could not stay in the house so then he [Susumu] looked for a window and dove underneath. He broke the screen and then he . . .

WN: He dove underneath in the water?

JS: He dove underneath, just dove because this was all water, if you can imagine. He found a window, and then he broke the screen and told me to go out first. So I went out first and then he got Junette and he said, "Daddy's going to close your mouth and your nose, so you hold your breath. We're going under water." And she just held her breath, that kid. He dove under the water with her, through the window, and we were just hanging on to the eaves of the roof. And so he said, "Stay here." Oh no, before that he hoisted Junette up onto the roof because he needed to get his hands free to go look for a way out or whatever. So he hoists her up on the roof and that's when she gave a big scream. She thought we were going to leave her up there, I think. And then I held her up there. I don't know how I did it though. Then he hoisted me up so we both were on the roof, and he came on the roof, too. And right on the center of the roof the TV antenna was there. So he—you know the *bakajikara* comes out, yeah, he remembered just pulling on that TV antenna wire and tying both Junette and I to the antenna, securing us.

In the meantime, he went out to look for a way out. Well, he didn't know that I had this claustrophobic fear of perhaps if we're tied down to this antenna, should another wave come or back wash, and if the house goes this way, we're going to be underneath, right? And we certainly can't escape that way. So I untied it and we just hung onto the antenna with her in my arms. Then, here he came with this whole wall. You know, Kimiville had homes that were made with Canec and pressboard or whatever. I mean this whole big side of the wall, he came. So we got on that and he tried to tread water and the darned thing wouldn't move. So he said, "Stay right here." So we stayed on that big board, and he came with a much smaller piece of wood where he put Junette and myself on, treaded water, and then we went to this (mango) tree that is still standing there [today]. He put us up on that (mango) tree. When we went to that tree, there were already two men up there, and we knew those two guys. One was our landlord and one was his brother-in-law. We stayed up there and he [Susumu] told me, "Stay there" and he's going to try to get a way out.

In the process of trying to find a way out, he found neighbors that he helped, two older spinsters who were schoolteachers. Couple of them he found in shock, not being able to move. I don't know how he helped them get to safety. He helped another pregnant lady. And people that he knew, he came across and he helped them, and then he came back for us. Who helped us from way up to Kumu Street to Kilauea Avenue were these National Park rangers. They were dressed in uniforms so we knew who they were. They came to get us. I think they carried Junette and helped us through all the rubble. It was pitch dark and we were just practically treading water there, but we were able to put our feet on the ground through the rubbish. And then we were taken directly to Hilo Hospital at that time.

The next morning, we had to apply for a permit to go down to where our house was to go and salvage our things. There were already looters around. My husband tried to convince the police that our house was there. He even took out his wallet, I think. He had his wallet in his pocket. And, "This is my address, 77 Kumu Street." But we had to still go back to the police station and stand in line to go get a permit so that we can go into this devastated area.

WN: This was the next day?

JS: Yeah, the next day.

WN: So, when you [had to leave the house because of the rising water], the roof eave was there already?

JS: Yeah.

WN: Was that deep?

JS: That deep, oh yeah. So that's what we hung onto.

WN: And this was all pitch dark now.

JS: Pitch dark.

WN: How did your husband . . .

JS: Well, even if it was pitch dark, there was—you know how sometimes, it wasn't really a moonlight night, but then you could see silhouettes of things. And a lot of people calling for help and yelling. It was really quiet except for all that.

WN: So when the HELCO plant exploded, that's when the lights went out?

JS: Yeah.

WN: Okay, so you went on the Canec board . . .

JS: Yeah, we went on the Canec board, which was too heavy, so he got a smaller board and so we went on that. And we were taken to the hospital right away.

WN: Did you have any injuries?

JS: Uh, my husband, I think he was treated with a tetanus shot because he (may have sustained lacerations while trying to find a way out of all the debris). But both he and my daughter's name was in the [news]paper for treatment [as among the injured]. They didn't see my name so they thought that I was gone, the Honolulu relatives thought. Because this [list] came out in the [*Honolulu*] *Advertiser*. My husband's name and Junette, but they didn't have my name. So assuming that they survived and that's why they were treated, but they didn't have my name, so they thought I had gone with the wave. (Chuckles) And the man that ran up, "Ay, the wave come, though," we saw his name as one of the ones that died. So if he had let me go out, I would not be here today. Because you have no chance (outdoors), you have to stay in the dwelling. Because those that were watching from the [Wailoa] River at the bridge are gone. Some were saved.

WN: So you think because you were in your house, you were . . .

JS: I really believe that. I mean you could go anyway because I mean there were people on our street, Kumu Street that died. This very elderly retired schoolteacher, I think we were running over her body. We found out she was under the *totan*. We were running. She was a very, very elderly woman. Of course, she had no chance. And of course, there was this man that was trying to—he was found holding this child up above the water. Of course, he was gone. Sand all in his throat, just swallowed.

WN: And what about the child?

JS: The child lived. In fact, I'm going through therapy and I saw him at the therapy. I said, oh my gosh, this is the child. Only he and his mother survived. He's always been so thin. I don't think they ever [recovered from] that '60 tidal wave. So right now he's being treated for chronic fatigue syndrome, so he's going for therapy. Skinny, skinny, skinny.

WN: Till now?

JS: Yeah.

WN: To this day?

JS: I don't know. He has never looked healthy to me. I don't know them personally but I know that this is that couple that lived across the street from us. Very, very thin.

WN: What therapy are you talking about?

JS: Oh, I have a frozen shoulder right now.

WN: Oh, it's not psychological.

JS: No, no, no. Not that kind.

WN: Oh, I see.

JS: But I saw him recently at the therapy place. So I figure, oh, this is the boy, poor thing. So anyway. . . .

WN: So at the time that the wave hit and the water was coming in, Junette was sleeping?

JS: Oh no, she was in our arms (all the while as we contemplated a way to get out).

WN: She was about two years old?

JS: Year and eight months.

WN: Wow, to tell her to hold her breath, yeah? (Chuckles)

JS: She was a precocious child, she spoke at a very early age, a smart year-and-eight-months [old child]. Smart enough to be spoken to and to understand instructions. And she never cried. Only one week later, one day she woke up and she started to cry. I couldn't make her stop crying. She'd just cry, cry, cry, cry, cry, cry, cry. So I called up Doctor Miyamoto—he's gone now, but I called him and I said I'm really concerned about my daughter because we went through this wave and she had not cried ever throughout the whole ordeal. And a week later she started crying. And he said, well, you better bring her down. So he checked her up and said, well, you know, let's prescribe a low dosage of barbiturates to kind of calm her nerves. So I was willing. I never even thought about this being habitual or whatever. I said, we need to do something for this child. I can't even remember how many dosages I gave her. Not a lot, maybe two at the most. And she slept and she slept. And I think that was good for her.

So then for relocation now, after the 1960 tidal wave, (we applied for property allocated for tidal wave victims and built our home, where we are today). Couldn't stay with relatives that long, you know. I just wanted to start on my own already. It's difficult, as nice and loving as we all are, you need a roof over your own head. So we applied.

And then Lanakila [low-income housing, where JS's family and other tsunami victims were temporarily housed] had this shower, and while we were at my sister-in-laws, she didn't have a shower, it was just tub bath. So we took tub baths. But when we went to Lanakila, there's this shower. Ho, my goodness, the first time we put on the shower, she [Junette] just screamed. She screamed. So I tell my husband, "Shut the water! Shut the water!" Well, we realized that she was still affected by this trauma. So she never really cared for water, this girl. Never really cared for water. I mean, she'll go in the water, but not a real good swimmer kind. But she survived, I think. But I asked her [today] whether she remembers, she says no, she doesn't remember anything. I guess because she was so young, yeah? Which is good, I think. She's okay today.

WN: So when you went back the next day after standing in line and so forth, what did you find?

JS: Oh, we salvaged a lot of things. We salvaged dressers, a dining room table and chairs; the beds were no good. We couldn't salvage the refrigerator and things like that. But clothing, I remember washing and washing the sand off the clothing. Just washing and

washing and washing and hanging it on the line, stretched out so long. Just rinsing the water, the clothing, everything out, there was so much sand. The pressure of the water is so great that we found soda bottles with the caps on, yet there's sand in them. And this was in the refrigerator.

WN: What?

JS: It was in the refrigerator, door shut. We would find bottles with caps still on but sand inside.

WN: Was there sand in the refrigerator?

JS: Oh yeah. But in the bottle cap, I mean capped bottle.

WN: And the refrigerator was shut?

JS: Yeah. The pressure is just tremendous. The force of the wave and the pressure.

WN: And all your belongings and stuff, was it in one area?

JS: In the house. We lost the front end which was our bedroom. But the dresser had come into the living room. That's how we could find it. Our jewelry and stuff, we couldn't find.

WN: So actually the major structure of the house . . .

JS: The structure was still there. The car ended upright by the house. It's almost like, this is my house, I'm going to stay here. Our station wagon was right next to (our house).

WN: How far had the house moved?

JS: Oh, maybe about half a block. I'll show you a picture after a while. So we salvaged some things and then we got into the line for Red Cross assistance. We were able to get vouchers and we got beds, a crib for my daughter. Because we went to the housing, we didn't need appliances because there was a stove and refrigerator. But I can't remember whether we got—a washing machine maybe we got. So the Red Cross was good to us. But you hear stories and they don't say the same things. So they must have had their own systems. But we were helped by the Red Cross.

WN: And went to, you said Lanakila?

JS: Lanakila, low-income housing. That's right off of Kino'ole [Street]. Between Kino'ole and Komohana, there's this big housing area and many of us were [temporarily] housed over there. And then it came time to pull lots for property up here, so we did. And so we built, owner-builder, it took nine months to build this structure.

WN: When was this built?

JS: Nineteen sixty-one.

WN: Oh, that fast.

JS: Nineteen sixty-two actually, we moved here.

WN: So you drew lots.

JS: We drew lots.

WN: Among people who were homeless.

JS: Yes. Ours was number fifty-four. I still remember the fifty-four.

WN: Out of how many?

JS: There were ninety lots over here. And this is not the only street. Anela has—this is basically all, though.

WN: People on this street?

JS: People who had early numbers, of course went across the street because you can get better view, yeah? So we were already beginning in the hole over here. But I figure, what can we do? We had no choice. I mean maybe if the tidal wave didn't come we would still be on Kumu Street in a rented home. So we're lucky to have—the government sold to us for really cheap, 1500 square feet over here for below [\$]2,000, \$1,978, or something like that.

WN: For house and lot?

JS: Oh, no. Just the property. So we had to make our own loan from Bank of Hawai'i and we were able to build here. And we've been here ever since.

WN: So since '62?

JS: Yeah.

WN: So the criteria for being in the lottery was that your house had to have been destroyed by the 1960 tsunami.

JS: That's right. And thank goodness the criteria was not whether you owned your home or you rented your home. In fact, those days, few people owned, right? So as long as you were displaced by the wave, then you could apply. So the home, because of the type of loan, it was cheaper interest. I think they still have that program today. But anyway, the federal government gave us the opportunity to get loans that way. So we paid it off. So we were fortunate. We were really fortunate. And here we are, we haven't moved since then. (Chuckles)

WN: And when did you have your second child?

JS: Right there at Lanakila housing. Right there, three years later. Suzette was born, my

second one. A third child belonged to my sister, but we raised him, from eleven years old, a son. So we were mom and dad and my two girls are his sisters to him. So we've had an extension of a family. It's been rough but it turned out well. He's a good man today.

WN: How many grandchildren do you have?

JS: I have two grandchildren. Two boys. Whew. One with two *giri-giri*.

WN: Ooh, *kolohe*, yeah?

JS: *Kolohe*. He has what we call *abaremba* episodes where he gets—you know what *abaremba* is? You know, when you rant and rave, *abaremba*?

WN: Oh.

JS: His eyes get red and then it gets filled with tears. Ho, and then he rants and raves.

WN: How old is he?

JS: Three. And he knows when he's having one of those. So when I go to pick him up in the afternoon, "No *abaremba* today, Grammie."

I said, "Wonderful."

"Are you happy I don't have *abaremba*?"

"Yes!"

"Are you sad when I have *abaremba*?"

"Yes." (WN chuckles.)

Goodness gracious, two boys.

WN: I'm just going to change tape and ask you a few more questions.

JS: Okay.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 29-30-1-98; SIDE ONE

WN: Okay, well, I just wanted to ask you about—I mean, you've had a life filled with a lot of trauma.

JS: Yeah.

WN: I mean, I'm sure there are a lot of others. But you have two very traumatic stories concerning the two major tidal waves. And then you have the war experience also. So I'm just going to ask you to talk about or assess your life. What have these episodes meant to you? What place do they hold in your life?

JS: Well, I believe that everybody has a life journey, and it just so happens that my life journey has been maybe not too ordinary. But I know that there are many people who have struggled in their life journey. I think with my experiences, it has made me really appreciate life. Because in 1960, when I thought, well, maybe this is it. So what I did was at the top of my lungs I said, "God, if you're going to save us, you got to do it right now." And of course he saved us and my belief in God has been so much greater, I think. I was born and raised in a Tenri-kyō religion and I have never adopted that religion. I felt that there must be something more than what I've been raised with, so I was introduced to the Christian religion through the Baptist church. I've been a member for thirty-seven years, at the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. And I'm just so thankful that God has spared me through all this ordeal and that I'm able to relate my life story to others so that others can know about it. And to learn that life here on earth is not easy. I think it's made me a stronger person, and able to cope with a lot more. I mean we all survived. Nobody [in JS's family] died in two tidal waves.

Of course, my father, that's the saddest thing. I never got to really know him, dying so young, and not being able to be brought up further with him in this life here. That kind of saddens me, but that's the way things went and you become more adaptable when you face all of these things. Not that I don't get upset over things. I still do. I'm only human. But it gives me real great appreciation for life. Every day is a day that you say thank you, and you have to enjoy it and make the best of it. Whatever way I can is to help other people if they're struggling in any way. I'm pastor now at my church. I have people who have life struggles just like me, and my mission, I think, is to help those that are struggling in life today; to hang in there and things are going to be okay. Things are going to be okay. So I feel that's my mission.

WN: What about in raising your children? How have these life experiences affected you in terms of how you raised your kids?

JS: It hasn't made it any easier. Parenting is very difficult. I see my daughter and her husband struggling to raise their two sons. The ultimate thing is that they're here just for—I read a verse once where your children are just on loan to you and what you need to do is to prepare them for their own future and how to be an asset to society. It's hard work to do that. I struggled with my two girls. Especially the younger one. She gave me challenges. (Chuckles) And then we had this foster child, my nephew, whom we have come to love so dearly. He sometimes thinks about me more than my two girls do. You know, boys are like that, I think. They really think about their mom. He still has his [biological] mom and he regards her as his mother, but we have a special bond. And I hope that I have given them the right foundation and the right path to lead here on earth. And I think both my girls are there for friends who need help. They're right there by them if they need help. My daughter teaches rough kids at Kea'au School and she counsels them. She goes to court with them and she breaks up fights. I always tell her, "If you can help just one child in a school year, that's wonderful," I said. We're all disciples and we

should try to help anybody who comes along that needs help. If I have taught them that, I'm satisfied.

WN: So June, I know that you participated in retelling for the [Pacific] Tsunami Museum about your tsunami experiences. I just want to ask you why do you do that? I mean there are a lot of people who want to forget or who are not interested in sharing their stories. But you are. I just want to ask you, what do you want people to learn from your experiences?

JS: Well, being interviewed like this is a lot of work. In fact, the last time you came, I was totally exhausted that afternoon. And I said, why am I feeling so tired? And I realized that I really had to search my brains and I had to relive everything. I said, ah, that must be it. So once I realized what's happening to me, then I can accept it. And it takes a lot of energy to go back, because these things, you put it back okay. [Something] happened today, we'll move on to the next day, whatever happens, okay, let's go on to the next day. But when you're given the opportunity to bring it all back again to the surface and kind of refresh your memory, it takes a lot of energy. I didn't realize it would do that. It didn't happen with the other interviews, though. But I don't know, somehow with you, I guess maybe because I'm in my own home setting. I could feel really relaxed and really went back.

And why am I doing this? (Laughs) Well, like I said, I'm always there to help people. Like Jimmy Miyake wants to get this thing going for that [Pacific] Tsunami Museum, so whatever I can do to help, I will help you. And so one project leads to another, and it seems like it never ends. Just like in church, my ministry. There's always somebody that needs ministry. So you're there and you do what you have to do. So I guess I feel this is my mission or my contribution to society: to be able to document these things. And it's nothing major, it's just information. I'm not giving any critical statistics or scientific data or anything. It's just my personal experience. And that I can share because I am not educated, and whatever I can share I would share. And I like to meet people. That's another reason why. Doing these interviews, I have met people that I would never meet. And it's been very interesting. So now I have friends here and friends in New York and Pioneer Productions from Britain and. . . (Chuckles)

WN: Oh, they should fly you over there so at least you can get some trips.

JS: Yeah.

(Laughter)

JS: But this is all gratis. We don't expect to be paid or anything. Anything that can enhance historically—I really believe that leaving history behind for the coming generations is so important. And that's the reason I went to two elementary schools to just talk story with the elementary children to make it an educational thing so that children like my grandson won't be there right at the bridge when the first warning siren sounds. And he's the type that would go there. So that was my mission, too, for education, to teach the children what a tsunami is, what it can do, what harm it can cause. Good enough? (Chuckles)

WN: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

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Volume I

**Center for Oral History
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University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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