

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Fusae Takaki

"I thought to myself, this is what you call death. I'm not afraid to die when the time comes. Well, if I'm going to die I'm going to say my last prayer. And I thought Christian was the easiest way to die, [say] 'Amen' and that's all. But I said 'Namu amida butsu, namu amida butsu' [Buddhist mantra] three times. Not one time, you know, I said it three times. When I said the third one my body went up [to the surface] and I looked around, 'Ah, I can see by myself now, I'm up now.' So I swam."

Fusae Tanaka Takaki was born May 28, 1923 in Hilo. She was the youngest of four children born to Eijiro Tanaka and Kura Hano Tanaka, both immigrants from Fukuoka Prefecture, Japan. Eijiro Tanaka worked as a stone crusher, stevedore, and merchant marine. Her mother sold lunches and snacks from her car near Coconut Island and the Hilo wharf area.

Takaki was raised in the Shinmachi district of Hilo, home to a large portion of Hilo's Japanese population. She remembers the many games she played with neighborhood children, movies, and helping her mother in the family garden located across the Wailoa River and accessible only by rowboat. Her mother sold vegetables to neighbors and stores.

Takaki attended Waiākea Kai Elementary, Hilo Intermediate, and Hilo High schools. She was forced to drop out after her sophomore year to help her parents make ends meet. She began working as an assistant to Dr. Sadaichi Kasamoto and remained there until 1980.

Tragically, both Takaki's parents, a niece, and a nephew were killed in the 1946 tsunami. The family home as well as its entire contents were destroyed. Takaki and her mother held onto the bed as the wave came, but she eventually lost her grip. She was swept away from the house and engulfed in water, but managed to swim to safety.

Takaki, who married Mitsuo Takaki three months after the tsunami, was provided housing in former U.S. Army barracks located in what is today Ho'olulu Park. The Takakis, who raised two daughters, lived in the housing for approximately four years.

The oral history interview was conducted in her Hilo home that she has lived in since 1960.

Tape No. 29-2-1-98

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Fusae Takaki (FT)

Hilo, Hawai'i

March 4, 1998

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Fusae Takaki for the tsunami oral history project. The date is March 4, 1998 and we're at her home in Hilo Hawai'i. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay Mrs. Takaki, why don't we start. Why don't you tell me, first of all, when and where you were born.

FT: I was born at Shinmachi in May 28, 1923. I had two sisters and one brother and they all were born in Shinmachi.

WN: You said Shinmachi, what was Shinmachi?

FT: Shinmachi is *atarashii machi*.

WN: New town.

FT: Yeah, new town.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: Okay. Tell me now something about your father and mother, what they were doing, what kind of work.

FT: My father [Eijiro Tanaka] was a stone crusher and a stevedore. Once before he was also a merchant marine. My mom [Kura Hano Tanaka] was---once she had been ice cream woman that use to drive a car and go down the wharf and also Coconut Island to sell ice cream [and] lunch. And you know, we had three girls, none of us can drive. Mom used to drive. It's a shame. My mom used to go. She had lunches, she had ice cream, she had shave ice, everything. I don't know how long she did that. But she said she had always money to spend. A guy in Waimea said, "Don't get the *o-kazu-ya* [i.e., a sit-down restaurant] and then pay rent. Best thing is to get one eating wagon, lunch wagon, ey, you make so much money." What he does is cook at home, take the lunch to an industrial area or something, sell it all.

WN: What kind of things did she make?

FT: My mom?

WN: Yeah.

FT: She used to make sandwiches. I don't remember *musubi*.

(Laughter)

FT: I know she had candies, but sandwiches was the most. I could remember her making *o-kazu* but mostly candy, ice shave, and pastries like *anpan*, doughnuts. She never carried soda water, I don't think so. Well, I was at an age I was enjoying all those things but my sister hated that, going [with] that wagon and sell those things. (Laughs) So, I don't actually remember what they had.

WN: What did you do to help?

FT: Eat.

(Laughter)

FT: Being the youngest of the family.

WN: You were the last, the youngest, the baby?

FT: Yeah, baby, so I guess all I did [was] eat. I know they had ice shave, ice cream, and candies. She never carried any fruits. I think that's about all. I wish I can ask my sister. (Chuckles)

WN: And where did she go with the car, or the truck?

FT: She goes to Coconut Island. Then she goes to the [Hilo] wharf because there were working people. So they must have some kind of lunch besides the sandwiches she was selling, yeah. But I wouldn't think of eating old *musubi*. (Laughs) If I had eaten *musubi* I would remember and what she had with that but I don't remember that.

WN: And while your mother was doing this your father was working as a [stone crusher] and stevedore and so forth, who did he work for?

FT: Was it the Matson Company? I really don't know.

WN: They had Interisland Steam[ship] Navigation Company.

FT: Yeah, Interisland Steam Navigation. I know he was a merchant marine. And then they had the stone crusher where the Glover is. You know where Glover's is?

WN: No.

FT: That stone crusher they call that. They used to call that stone crusher but that's Glover's concrete. . . . Anyway, they have hollow tile, anything to do with the house they have it there. So all the old Japanese people used to go and use the hand tools and they used to crack all the

rocks.

And when they were working at the stevedore those people had nothing big things [i.e., machinery or heavy equipment] that they can use so they had to carry the sugar on the back. That's why Mom used to always say, "There's an ambulance going, I wonder if Dad is not hurt." You know. Wartime [World War II], you know what my dad folks used to do? They go on the bus [to go] home but they had to be really careful because the MP [military police] will catch them. One time Dad got caught by the MP and he [MP] started to look at his [FT's father's] lunch, if he had something else in there. They couldn't use anybody else [besides the Japanese stevedores] to carry the sugar. I'm sure that was it because otherwise they wouldn't let Japanese go to the pier side.

WN: Where did you folks live?

FT: Shinmachi. You see, we used to have [three sections in the Shinmachi district in Hilo, called] *Ik-ku*, *Ni-ku*, *San-ku*. That means group one, group two, group three. Okay, now, [section] one [i.e., *Ik-ku*] used to come from where Hilo Theatre was. Then further down there's a camp, our camp. They used call ours *Ni-ku*. So *Ni-ku* used to be [where the] middle of the park that they have now, you know the park that they have [today]?

WN: Yeah [Wailoa State Park. The Shinmachi district was located where Wailoa State Park is located today. The area was converted to a park after the 1946 and 1960 tsunamis destroyed the housing and business district of Shinmachi.]

FT: Yeah, the middle part would be our *kumiai*. And then *San-ku* used to be more on the [Hilo] Iron Works side.

WN: Oh, Hilo Iron Works?

FT: Yeah. That place was all—most of them were Japanese.

WN: In *San-ku*?

FT: Yeah, *San-ku* yeah. There was one Chinese man that all his life he made pants and he was a tailor. And he'd sit and he sewed pants, then people used to go over there. And that was towards Iron Works. Then you come down the Iron Works, that used to be *Ni-ku*. Then they used to have Kohashi *no tempura-ya-san* [i.e., Kohashi Fishcake], Hilo Transportation [Company], and there were several small stores. They [Kohashis] go house to house to house or go to the plantation [housing area] and they used to sell [fishcake].

Then when I was twenty-three they had Kokusui over there where they used to make shoyu. The day that I was in the tidal wave [April 1, 1946] I was [about to leave for] work. We had to pile 500 [bottles], you know the kind one-gallon [bottle], wash that, sterilize that. And we had to line up all. The way they used to do it, smart you know. They get the bottle, get the thing, and then they line it up like this so five layers and then that's 500 gallons. So you know, I always think to myself, good heavens [I wasn't at work, and] those [glass bottles] didn't [cut] my throat. You know when you think about it: 500 [bottles], where did it go? All the shoyu was brewed and ready to put into the [bottles] on Monday, April 1.

WN: How far away was your house?

FT: Our house was the first from the [shoyu] brewery.

WN: Oh, so you were right next to the . . .

FT: So when the wave hit we were hit directly and there wasn't anything left. When I realized I was swimming, I was already by [where] the tidal wave monument [i.e., the Shinmachi memorial in Wailoa State Park, built to honor those who died in the 1946 and 1960 tsunamis] that they had built, that's where I was. And that's quite far, you know. One wave just hit us. Mama and I, we were in the water already. Then we were covered up with houses, all pieces of houses right above my head. I was buried, I saw Mom swimming, I looked in the back and Mama was swimming. She told me when she was in Fukuoka she used to go out swimming so she knew how to swim. So when I look at her I say, "Oh Mom, you all right. Keep on swimming and we'll be okay." But as soon as I thought of that we both were buried underneath the wreckage of the buildings all in pieces. And I thought, I hope Mom didn't get hurt. Because you die if you hit [your head] and you unconscious, there's no way you can get up. So I said, "I should go to Dr. [Sadaichi] Kasamoto's office," it's a hospital. And I said, "If I go over there, somebody will come, anybody, Mom or my sisters or anybody, will come. So then we won't be lost."

So I rushed and I was heading for that doctor. Boy, had so much people injured I didn't have time to think about my family. Then once in a while I helped the doctor bandage or suture because I used to do that all the time. When he has to suture, I help him. I used to be a helper to him. So I help him and then some people say, "Oh, I'm so cold, may I have hot water?" Then we had to get *shichirin* and have to make charcoal to keep them warm. So I kept on doing that and then once in a while I go into the bathroom and I just give a good yell, you know? And then I wipe my tears and I come back and take care of the patients. We had four rooms so some of them we left in the room, and then I go over there and help them, give them something to drink.

Then one time somebody came with a dead body, wrapped in the sheets and [said], "*Me no sabe ma hea put this.* (I don't know where to put this.) I bring here."

I said, "Oh no, don't bring here, this is hospital." (Laughs)

But the Filipino man said, "I don't know what to do."

So I said, "Okay, then you leave 'em on the stairway." And I look at the [dead] boy and I say, "Oh my god, this is Hayashida boy." The Hayashida used to---you know where the Suisan [Company, Ltd.] is?

WN: You mean now?

FT: Yeah.

WN: Yeah.

FT: Across the [Wailoa] River there used to be a camp, imagine they had a camp there. There

were people living underneath, what I mean is, you know, they were able to build home. So there were people living there. Then the place is high end little bit. You come to the sand beach . . .

WN: Across from Suisan, across the river?

FT: No, over there is water and the people used to live on this side. And then you go the other way and there's a way to go up to another camp. They even have *furo-ya* over there. People used to go take a bath. Just like the *onsen* that you see in Japan. That's why the camp people used to go over there. At the end of the houses Kitagawa had his garage [I. Kitagawa & Co.]. They used to pump gas and I guess they used to have garage [i.e., repair service].

(Dog barks. Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, let's continue then. Let me pull you back little bit. I want to cover a little bit about your life before the tidal wave and then we can get into the tidal wave. And you were talking about your mom and dad. And your mom was, I guess, a business person and your father was a stevedore and merchant marine. Tell me something about Shinmachi itself, like who lived there mostly? You said that you lived in *Ni-ku*?

FT: *Ni-ku*, yeah. Anyway, Shinmachi was all Japanese. And we always used to—like they go netting, they catch fish, we share. Everything was shared that way. And there were a lot of people that used to play *hanahode* [*hanafuda*]. Five cents, ten cents kind, *ne*.

WN: Oh, *hanafuda*?

FT: Shinmachi *wa* that kind people got plenty *atta*, *no*. And how they have money I can't understand how they find the five cents, ten cents.

WN: Well, what did people do for work?

FT: *Nani mo shinai no yo*. (They didn't do anything.)

WN: All kinds?

FT: We were always told to go to the garden, pull grass. And me, I had the bunch of flowers for *hotoke-sama*, I used to put 'em in a basket and I used to go house to house and sell. And New Year's we used to sell *mizuna*, *araimo*, you know all those things we used to [eat] during the holidays.

WN: How did you get the *mizuna* and the *araimo*?

FT: *Mama ga* plant (vegetables).

WN: Oh, she had a garden?

FT: Yeah. *Are ga* how many acres *mo nani mo nai* but *daibun atta yo*. (It didn't amount to acres, but it was quite large.) We used to have quite a bit you know. And we used to sell to the neighbors, used to sell the vegetables [to] Hilo [Products]. Yeah, we used to sell our

vegetables there and that's how we used to have [a] little money.

They used to have a place just like toilet. Because we used to have river in the—on the river they used to have one house built for toilet.

WN: Oh, outhouse?

FT: Outhouse, yeah. And those things [waste] used to float in the river. And kids used to swim.

WN: You mean the toilet used to go right straight into the river? (Chuckles)

FT: That's how it was.

WN: So that's how you folks—you folks had your own outhouse?

FT: We had our own bath—toilet in the house.

WN: Oh, in the house, flushing . . .

FT: That was Kitagawa's rent house. So I don't remember going into that outhouse in the river, maybe we did when we were little children. So we all had moved to the Kitagawa's and Kitagawa's used to have bath, used to have tub, and we used to have toilet. So we never did [use the outhouse] after that.

WN: So you rented from Kitagawa?

FT: Yeah, fifteen dollars. I think that was the most that they used to pay, fifteen dollars. But we had to work to pay the fifteen dollars, you know, when you think about it.

WN: Tell me something about your house, was it a cottage?

FT: It was a cottage. We had two bedrooms, we had a bathtub, we had a toilet, and then we had a living room. And the houses was not eaten with the termite, we didn't have many repairman come and fix the place. I never saw a repairman come to the house to fix our house.

(Laughter)

FT: Isn't that something? You know, [when] I think about it.

WN: Was made of wood?

FT: Yeah. And then one-by-one kind of board on the floor. And then we had *goza*. We used to change *goza* every two years, the whole house.

WN: *Goza* or *tatami*?

FT: *Are wa goza* because cheaper, yeah. *Tatami dattara are ga* thick, eh? (That was *goza* because cheaper, yeah. *Tatami* that was thick, eh?) That's why *goza* we used to have and then we used to change every two years, New Year's. And then we have *zabuton*. And people used to sleep

on the floor, but we used to have bed. We had two bedroom.

WN: You folks had bed?

FT: Yeah, we used to sleep on bed. That's why [during the tsunami] Mom told me hold on to the bedposts, then at least we be floating. But we didn't float at all. But did you know some kids, the next neighbor, they used to have camp bath washtub, one, two, three, four, about ten to each. So this side people used to take their laundry and have it washed into the tub. In the tub, some kids went in there and they got saved because the tub [floated] just like a boat. And our rowboat, lot of people was saved, they went on the boat.

WN: On your boat?

FT: Yeah. And then that kept floating and floating so they got saved.

WN: How come you folks had a rowboat?

FT: To go across the [Wailoa] River. To work in the garden.

WN: Oh, your garden was across the river.

FT: Yeah, because otherwise we have to go all the way [around]. So Dad used to make the boat. And we have bamboo [pole] and then we pull. You have to know how to pull that thing because otherwise the boat goes 'round and 'round and 'round.

WN: So you used the pole that goes along the bottom.

FT: Yeah, but you have to . . .

WN: Not oars . . .

FT: . . . go sideways. You got to catch the pole right on the end so the boat go straight. If you put the bamboo outside of the boat, the boat go 'round and 'round and 'round.

WN: You put the bamboo right next to the boat?

FT: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

WN: Into the water?

FT: Then we used to row.

And you know what we used to do? From one end to the river we used to call Mom folks, "Okāsan, tonight we go movies." By the time she say yes we're gone.

WN: On the boat?

FT: No, on the land. You know, this side is Shinmachi and this side is Wailoa. And she's working but we got to get permission. So we used to yell, "Okāsan!"

WN: Across the river?

FT: "Movies *iku del*" *yuttara*. ("Going to the movies," we'd say.) By the time she say no or yeah we gone.

(Laughter)

FT: That's what life was over there.

WN: So she was working in the garden over there.

FT: Yeah, yeah.

WN: I see.

FT: "*Okāsan!*" *yuttara*. But she would come near to *da kine* so if she want to know what we want and then we want movies. No other things that we'll ask her.

WN: Where did you go see movies?

FT: They had Royal Theatre . . .

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, so like what kind movies did you folks see?

FT: Oh, they used to have *Flash Gordon*, all those good ones, can't forget that. *Flash Gordon*, *Superman*, and they used to have *Titanic*, you know the one that . . .

WN: What movie's that?

FT: They had the old-time *Titanic*, *Gone with the Wind*, all those things we used to see. But those good ones they used to show at Hilo Theatre. That's where that Piopio Street is. That's a little different. You take the Piopio Street and you go way down then that used to be a kids' playground. They used to have basketball and all that. They used to have a big gym over there.

WN: On Piopio?

FT: On the main road, Kamehameha Avenue. They used to have boy's club and right across they had the Hilo Theatre. How much used to pay? About twenty-five cents or so, yeah?

WN: Did you go to Hilo Theatre, too, for movies?

FT: Yes, yes.

WN: And what kind of theater was Royal Theatre? Was it not as good?

FT: Free theater. If you go little late they put you inside free.

WN: (Laughs) Had seats or you had to sit on the floor?

FT: They had seats, they did. The only [theater] that didn't have was Kona. One time I went to Kona and stayed there for a while. Said, "Oh we going to the show." And I just wonder how far is that. We left two o'clock in the afternoon. We reached there just enough for the movies to start. So you can see how long we walked.

WN: In Kona?

FT: Kona. Kona was walk. So when you think about [how far] Kona people [walked], Shinmachi was nothing. (Laughs)

WN: So did you folks go to downtown Hilo a lot?

FT: Yeah, we used to walk.

WN: Or you folks stayed mostly in Shinmachi?

FT: No, we had [S.H.] Kress store, then Boston Store, and that shoe shop. You know, that stores was all lined up in Hilo. And then on the other side used to be train track so we used to take train and then go to Hakalau to go to a plantation store to buy things on Saturday.

WN: How come you had to go all the way to Hakalau plantation store?

FT: Because they were much cheaper. How much we used to pay? We used to go every Saturday—mostly Saturdays we used to catch the train.

WN: So, at home your mother raised vegetables and she also sold snacks to people. What kind foods did you folks eat at home?

FT: Well, they call it *okara* but eh, that thing was good though. We had enough vegetables because we had in the garden. So onions and *makina*, and we used to have cabbages, string beans. So we had enough to eat. No more welfare. No more such thing as free food. You share whatever you have. And like us, we used to sell *makina*, this much in a bundle is five cents. And then my dad used to have in the field big *takenoko*. He used to take care, used to sell for \$2.00, \$2.50. Then they used to buy.

WN: The same garden that your mother had?

FT: Yeah.

My dad, I saw him on the veranda and my dad had the boy [his grandson] in the kimono. He put the kimono and then put obi and he go put the kid inside here, inside his body and then he stays warm, right? And I saw my dad so I said, "*O-tō-san, tsunami ga kiyorude,*" (Father, the tsunami is coming,) I told him.

And he tell me, "What can you do?" And that was the last word. So he was washed away at that time. But he had the boy [grandson] until the end.

The Club 100 people had tried to help my brother look for the body and then one guy said, "Ey, I'm sure there's a smell somewhere around here." And he said, "Maybe your dad is here." And at that time somebody else had [already found them] because it was [at the] undertaker already at the [mortuary].

So they said, "Oh we found a boy and a man and it's all decomposed." So he said, "Maybe you might not recognize but is there any kind of identification your dad had?" And he had a big mole over here and the kids used to touch when they were little children.

WN: Big mole on his chest?

FT: Yeah, black one. So when my brother [saw the mole, he] said, "Oh, that's my father." As soon as said that, the blood came out from the nose.

WN: Whose nose?

FT: My father. And then my brother-in-law, he had an old-fashioned family. The mama and papa used to always talk about those things. When you identify your immediate family, at that time there's always blood drips down. So when the blood drip down, my brother-in-law said, "Ey, that's right, my father used to say that, the blood coming out." And my father was bleeding. But we never saw him.

WN: How many days after did you find?

FT: Three days.

WN: Three days after.

FT: He was on the land. You know, wash tide and maybe got wet and everything. Then the funniest thing is, everything *pau*, I got married—oh that same year I got married because I didn't want to look for place to stay, we didn't have any house.

WN: What year did you get married?

FT: That same year on July . . .

WN: [Nineteen] forty-six?

FT: And after one year I got pregnant. And I said, "You know, I'd like to go back to the garden and plant some vegetables, we don't have to buy. You can give to people." The same place where my father was found I made a garden! And my husband dreaded to go there because that's where they found my father. I picked the exact spot where my father was found. After long years he [FT's husband] told me, "Did you know the place you made garden was where we found your father?"

WN: Oh, you didn't know that at the time?

FT: I didn't know that. But something told me to do something. Then I said, "Well, so many things to be thankful." We went through that kind of stuff.

- WN: So you said that that day you and your mother were at home, inside the house.
- FT: Yeah, we went into the bedroom and then we grabbed the bed. We were [later] found, by that monument [in Wailoa State Park today]. So from my house to there is quite far, you know. It's a different place now. Piopio Street and Shinmachi is two different districts, you know. Now you look at it, "Ey only over here is Piopio Street." To us it was far, we had to walk. You got to walk to intermediate school, we had to go walk to Hilo High School to go school. We didn't have---they used to have bus but the only opportunity we can ride bus is when you sick. So walking was nothing to us.
- WN: So let's go to---okay, April 1, 1946. Were you sleeping at the time?
- FT: No, I was ready to go work at Kokusui. To bottling [shoyu], yeah, because I was working there. So I was dressed up to go to work next door.
- WN: And then who was home at the time?
- FT: Mom was home, Dad, every morning he walks with the little boy so he must have been walking.
- WN: What boy is this?
- FT: My sister's nine months [old] boy. And that's where the boy was, he [FT's father] was carrying until the end.
- WN: So he wasn't at work or anything.
- FT: No, he doesn't work when the boat doesn't come or when they don't have job at the stone crusher, he goes with Mom to raise vegetables.
- WN: So your dad was out with your nephew, your mom was at home. What was she doing?
- FT: Yeah, so she and I was home.
- WN: What was she doing?
- FT: She went to my friend's house, our family friend's house. They used to live upstairs of a two-story building. When she went there she said she saw the wave coming so she went down from the house. She went to my house, she said, "*Tsunami ga kiyoru!*" ("Tsunami is coming!") That was it.
- So I said, "*Okā-san, doshitara iino.*" ("Mother, what shall we do?")
- She said, "*Futari ga bedroom no bed o motte ikō ya,*" (The two of us hold onto the bed in the bedroom and go,) she told me.
- WN: Go into the bedroom.
- FT: Yeah, because *are* mattress *ga* float *suru ka*, bed *ga* float *suru*, yeah. (Yeah, because mattress,

bed floats, yeah.)

WN: So your mother knew what tsunami was.

FT: She saw it. When she was pregnant with me in 1923 there was a big tidal wave but they never made an attempt to make a signal for tidal wave, nothing was done.

So the second day [after the 1946 tsunami] when we were [having a] funeral [for FT's mother and niece], we were way up at Kūkūau. They say, "Evacuate."

I say, "Hell no, I am not going to evacuate because we didn't have enough time to get saved. Now you tell us to evacuate when we're way up there."

WN: This was when?

FT: That was my [mother's] funeral day, that's the second day [after the tsunami] when we were having funeral for my mom [and niece].

WN: So this was how many days after the tidal wave?

FT: Two days.

WN: And then they told you evacuate?

FT: Yes.

WN: During [the] funeral?

FT: Yes. I was mad. How can people be so stupid? Kūkūau [is inland] and tidal wave water how far? Why didn't they do something about it [when FT and her family were at Shinmachi on April 1]? Then we could have been saved. You know what I mean? Somebody told me, "Why didn't you run to Coca-Cola [building]?" It's far.

WN: How far was Coca-Cola from your house?

FT: Gee, from here to way down the other side. How can we run to Coca-Cola plant? I was mad.

WN: Let me turn the tape.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: So your mother---backing up a little bit, you and your mother was home. She was at her friend's . . .

FT: She came home to let us know there was a tidal wave coming.

WN: She told you to go into the bedroom and hang on to the bed. What about your brothers and sisters, where were they?

FT: Well you see, next door was my sister's house, with her two children, she had two [with her] at that time. My father took care the nine months baby [boy]. But [one of the two girls], that three-year-old girl [that died] was with my sister. While the wave came she took hold of the two girls. One girl was hanging on to her neck, and one she was carrying like this. But the most scary thing when you have tidal wave is when the water recede. That wave take you with [it]. So my sister had the girl in the front, holding on, trying not to lose her. But this [other] girl that was holding her neck was choking her so much she thought she was going die from choking. So without knowing, her hand let go. So the wave took the little girl away from her. She said, "Mama! Mama! Mama!" three times but—she could see her but she couldn't do anything. So the girl went with the waves. That girl was [found] on the Sand Beach, you know, by Suisan, we call it Sand Beach, all sand. They looked for her. You know what happened? A bulldozer start to dig. When they dug they saw the little girl. So luckily we were able to have a funeral for her. She had sand all over but at least we found her.

So at that time we had Mom and that little girl's [funeral]. But my sister never saw that, so we never got together and talk about it, especially my sister. They said they dug quite far inside and then they found her body and she was just there.

WN: How old was she?

FT: Three.

WN: So the three-year-old girl and the . . .

FT: [Nine]-months boy was lost.

WN: . . . [nine]-months-old boy died.

FT: Yeah, we lost those two [children].

[The night before the tsunami] that girl, that [three-]year-old girl [FT's niece], she had a towel [wrapped around her] like a nun. She came out, "Uncle, Aunty." And then she came to the door and she looked like a nun. She had the white towel covered and she was smiling. I couldn't forget that. That was the last time that I've seen her. You know, like a nun. And she had a beautiful smile, you know. And I told my husband[-to-be], "Look, look at Vivian, she look like a nun." That was her.

WN: When was that? That day?

FT: That's the night [before] the tidal wave. And next day was tidal wave and she died. That's what I mean, there was so much strange things happen. This lady—now she lives in Kona—she had a clothes line, [and] when the waves was getting high tide, that thing *wen* twine all [around] her neck. She also lost a little boy. She was carrying the boy. She lost the boy because the line was just going [around] her neck over and over and over and over and she couldn't breathe. So she told herself, "I guess I'm going to die." And without knowing she let the boy go so the boy was never found. But how she got saved, when the tide recede, the

clothes line went same time as that. The line got loose on her neck so she got saved.

I thought to myself, this is what you call death. I'm not afraid to die when the time comes. Well, if I'm going to die I'm going to say my last prayer. And I thought Christian was the easiest way to die, [say] "Amen" and that's all. But I [said] "*Namu amida butsu, namu amida butsu*" [i.e., a Buddhist mantra] three times. Not one time, you know, I said it three times. When I said the third one my body went up [to the surface] and I looked around, "Ah, I can see by myself now, I'm up now." So I swam.

WN: So when you were doing, "*Namu amida butsu,*" you were underwater?"

FT: Yeah, I was in the water so I said, "Well if I'm going to die I might as well say my last prayer."

WN: Were you still in the bedroom?

FT: No, I was down at that Piopio Street, by the monument.

WN: Oh, I see you had already . . .

FT: Yeah, I was all pulled away.

WN: The wave had pulled you away from your house.

FT: Yeah, and I was just covered with wood, house wood all break into pieces.

WN: So you were holding on to the bed. So from that time what happened?

FT: Mama and I just hold it and next thing we know we were in the water. In other words the bed meant nothing [i.e., didn't help them]. So she always used to say things like that; you swim and you can save yourself. I still remember that, when Mama used to always say, "*Shinmachi ni tsunami ga attara,*" ("If there is a tsunami in Shinmachi,") she says, "You always remember to swim. You can swim, I can swim." Mom said, "I can swim," because in Fukuoka they used to have a place where they used to swim. In Japan get lots of water. So she said, "There's always chance to survive because you can swim." So that's what I did.

Boy, at that time before my prayer I was really stuck. What else can I do but drink the water and I kept on drinking because there wasn't any space that I could put my face up and take a breath or do something. Nothing, nothing, nothing but water. So I said, "Well, if there's no choice might as well drink the water." And it was kerosene, stinking kerosene dirty water. I had all that time to think about it: ey, this is what you call drowning. (Chuckles) So I said, "Well, I'm going to say my last prayer." So I said three prayers, when I came to, I look, ah, I'm out of the lumber, I can get out now.

Then this Portuguese man, he was down Piopio Street and he saw me he said, "Girl, there's another big one coming! Get out of there!" he told me. "Otherwise you gonna die!"

So when I turn around, oh the big wave coming from [Hilo] Iron Works. So I said, "No, I got to save myself." So I went up and I swim, not too much but—I don't know how many feet I

swim. Then I came to the land.

And that guy said, "Go over the fence." And he and I the only ones there.

So I said, "Thank you, but I'm going around the fence and I'm going go to the hospital." Because that was the same [area], see.

So then that lady down Piopio Street saw me and she said, "*Fu-chan, anata doshita?*" You know, she told me, "What happened?"

I said, "*Oba-san, oh Shinmachi ookina tsunami ga kite.*" I said, "My mom *mo* papa *mo* *shindoru wakaran,*" told her. (I said, "Aunty, oh Shinmachi, a big tsunami came." I said, "I don't know if my mom and papa died," I told her.)

So she told me all in Japanese, "Where you going?"

And [I] said, "Well, I'm heading for Dr. Kasamoto's office."

So she said, "No, no, no, you cannot go like that." She said, "Come, I give you a bath." So she gave me a bath because my hair was stuck with all kind stuff, kerosene and all. So she took me in and then she gave me a bath, I changed my dress, then I went to doctor's office. I was there till ten or twelve o'clock. Twelve o'clock we had one warning, another tidal wave coming.

WN: Twelve o'clock noon?

FT: Yeah, that was twelve o'clock. So all people in Piopio Street has to evacuate so with our—doctor had to evacuate. So he went out and I went out, too. Oh, before we evacuate my sister came, my elder sister came about losing the child. "Fusae, oh I lost Vivian."

I said, "Oh *Ne-san*, no can help. You know, everyone went through that. I think I lost Mom and Dad." And here we was crying, but gee whiz, no more time for be crying because there's so many people there that we have to evacuate. So, we evacuate and went someplace. I don't know where we went, to friend's house, yeah. Stayed there for one day and they fed us. I used to see chickens [in their coop] and I used to say, "You chicken, you're lucky you have a house to live." We don't have anybody, no place to go. We don't know where to go. And that was the worst, most miserable time that we had. But from there on we found houses, stayed one day, one night. Then we had a lady friend that had a friend whose house was empty so she rented that. So we live with them for a while. So each one has to find their own way to live.

Then they found one school at Ululani Street. Dokuritsu Gakko, there used to be nothing but Japanese and they were Christian people. So a lot of people used to go Japanese[-language] school. But we used to go to Ryoshoin, you know Jodō-shū, we used to go Japanese[-language] school there. But there were about three or four Japanese[-language] schools so I guess some of those places they used as a housing for the people that had lost everything. And NAS airport, they used to have army barracks.

WN: Oh, Naval Air Station.

FT: Yeah. So lot of people were housing there. But you know, with all that charity [available] we couldn't get anything because they said we [had] \$800 in savings. Isn't that terrible? We only [had] a gas stove. But [some] people who was on the welfare, they didn't have anything missing [i.e., lost in the tidal wave], but they [received] refrigerator, and they had gas stove or electric stove and everything. They got double bed, single bed. Ey, those people had all the good things. What we had? Straw bed. Because we had \$800 saved. Isn't that something? Sometimes it's not even worth it saving money. We are the same people, we pay tax, we do all that and we still couldn't get anything. We couldn't get anything, we used to sleep on the straw bed.

WN: Where were you staying?

FT: We were living in Piopio Street for three months.

WN: With a friend?

FT: A friend. Then after that they had houses available up at—now where is it? You know where the [Afook-Chinen] Civic Auditorium is [today]?

WN: Yeah.

FT: Around there they used to have an army camp [during World War II]. So we lived there for three years, I think, [or] four years. I forgot the name of the place they call that. So they used to have barracks after barracks lined up. And then the screen would be open this much, so on a rainy day, the rain used to blow into our bedroom. We couldn't sleep. But what choice we had? Then individually they started to settle in. So at that time we had house where we lived until I was able to get [a] house. And I watched the hospital. So here I was, still at the doctor's doing. . . . But I'm glad I was able to. That was my life. I had to get up two o'clock in the morning, one o'clock in the morning, sometimes, they [i.e., patients] had asthma, they can't breathe. Ho boy, I tell you.

WN: Where did they find your mother?

FT: The only thing I remember is, "Your mother's body is in the morgue." That's all I know. Whether she was—just like Mr. [Masao] Uchima said, there were a lot of people floating, yeah. She must have been floating as far as that. But, you know that Coca-Cola plant, [it] shook, just vibrated. People were in there. And it wasn't just one wave, so that must have been awful too. But they all got saved.

WN: That was a concrete building?

FT: Yeah, it was a concrete building.

WN: What about Hilo Iron Works? Did people go over there too?

FT: We didn't even—oh, the Iron Works, [the] first wave hit them so I don't think they had even time to think about going Iron Works. Because like Coca-Cola, they had time to think about those things, you can call people, "Come to Coca-Cola," as he [Uchima] was saying, his father had.

WN: Oh, you mean Uchima? [See Masao Uchima interview. He recalls fleeing their Shinmachi home for safety in the concrete Coca-Cola building.]

FT: Yeah.

WN: So they said there were like three waves.

FT: Must have been.

WN: So when your mother---your mother probably saw the first one.

FT: First one.

WN: When she came to tell you.

FT: The very first one she saw.

WN: So when was it when you started to have to swim, was it because of the wave or was it because of the wave receding?

FT: Must have been the wave receding because—or the tide coming up. Because receding time it's very dangerous. You might hit anything. You know what I mean? As I said, clothes wire, you can be choked from that.

WN: Or just hit something, like wood or something.

FT: Yeah. But lot of people had been saved because of the tide coming up. That's why it could be when I was swimming the tide must have come up, loosening up [debris]. So in other words, lot of things was gone so I could see the distance between myself and my mom there. But I wasn't able to go that far. If I had gone, maybe I would have been dead. I always thought that she was hit on the head and she was unconscious because there wasn't anything bruised. My brother said there wasn't anything bruised. But a person can survive any kind of tidal wave if you don't get injured in your head, I think you can. Because our place, you hear all those people, a lot of them had lost their children. That's the area my sister was also living, too. Everybody got scattered. And then the tide is the thing that took them away.

There was a lady from Waiākea, when the tide went up she went to the top of the coconut tree. So she hold on to the coconut tree, she was saved. But when the tide went down she looked down, she thought, "Whoa, how am I going down now?" She was way up there. But somebody went to save her. You see how strange it was? But that's nature's doing. So a lot of people said when they were looking from Pāpa'ikou that area, you can see all the water receding. Quite a bit is gone. So the power they have. The wave hits, it comes to one corner and it hit and then goes back because there's a hill up there, high place. Kamehameha [Avenue] was hit bad because that was a lowland. They had train track, but where was the train?

WN: Yeah, where was the train?

FT: Where was the train? If you were hit by train, you won't be living.

WN: What about the tracks? Did the tracks move? [The 1946 tsunami destroyed the train tracks of the Hawai'i Consolidated Railway, Ltd. The company dissolved soon after.]

FT: Gee, I don't know because I didn't go to the shoreline for about a year [after the 1946 tsunami]. I didn't want to even look at the water. A person thirty years, fifty years [later], cannot forget. It took me one year, almost two years not seeing the sea. As long if I don't see the sea I don't think about it. But when I dream about it, I'm trying to run away, there's a wave coming from behind. And what am I saying? "We got to go higher place. We got to go higher place." That's why I don't get scared because we aiming for the higher place. Those people [who didn't] are just stuck. And is it fair for the children? Right? Don't you think that? We didn't know what to do, to go to a higher place. Nobody talked about it. All they did was [wait until] another tidal wave come, [then] we all die. Period. That's all. The county never think about anything. Because we had one in 1923, when my mom was pregnant. Why didn't they do something then? What's going to happen when there's another one coming? Isn't there anything we can do? Don't tell us to evacuate from Kūkūau at the funeral time. Isn't that crazy? Good thing we have good guy like [Hawai'i Island civil defense chief Harry] Kim. All his life he tried to think of how to save the people.

WN: This is a good place to stop.

END OF INTERVIEW

**TSUNAMIS REMEMBERED:
Oral Histories of Survivors
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