

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Bunji Fujimoto

*"And on a Monday morning, was April 1, we got on the bus, same as usual. As we hit the cliff above Laupāhoehoe where we could see the [Laupāhoehoe] Point, the guys in the front of the bus started, 'Eh, no water in the ocean, no water in the ocean!' They all excited. I said, 'What, no water in the ocean?' 'April Fool's', we're saying. We always sitting in the back, 'April Fool, April Fool!' 'No,' they said, 'not April Fool.' They kept insisting, so we looked out, and sure enough, we saw the water pulling out. So we looked, and okay, it's funny, but nobody knew what it was. It was unusual, something different."*

Bunji Fujimoto, the sixth of ten children, was born March 22, 1930 in Nīnole, Hawai'i. His parents, Saiji Fujimoto and Ei Sorakubo Fujimoto, were immigrants from Hiroshima, Japan. Saiji Fujimoto was a laborer and independent sugarcane grower for Wailea Milling Company which later (1944) merged with Hakalau Plantation Company.

As a youth, Fujimoto helped his father in the sugarcane fields. His chores at home included cutting grass for livestock, feeding livestock and poultry, and tending the family garden. Living in an isolated area, one of his favorite recreational activities was riding the cane flumes.

Fujimoto attended John M. Ross School until grade seven. Beginning with the eighth grade, he attended Laupāhoehoe School, graduating in 1947. He worked for the plantation during school vacations. In 1949, he began working as a field worker for Hakalau Plantation Company. In 1951, he began his forty-one-year career in the crop log laboratory of C. Brewer Company. When he retired in 1992, the company was known as Brewer Environmental Industries.

Fujimoto was interviewed in his Hilo home where he has lived since 1972. He and his wife, Matsue Uratani Fujimoto, raised two children.

On the morning of April 1, 1946, Fujimoto and his two brothers boarded the bus which took them to Laupāhoehoe Point where the school was located. After noticing the ocean receding, the students were let off the bus near the school grounds. Bunji stood in relative safety in the school playground. Toshiaki, his younger brother, who like many other students ran up to the water's edge in curiosity, was swept into the ocean and perished.

Fujimoto, who has collected photographs relating to the tsunami and Laupāhoehoe's history, volunteers his time at the Pacific Tsunami Museum.

Tape Nos. 29-22-1-98 and 29-23-1-98

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Bunji Fujimoto (BF)

Hilo, Hawai'i

July 10, 1998

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: Okay, let's get started. This is an interview with Bunji Fujimoto on July 10, 1998, and we are at his home in Hilo, Hawai'i, and the interviewer is Warren Nishimoto. This is for the tsunami oral history project.

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

BF: I was born [on March 22, 1930] and raised in Ninole about twenty miles north of Hilo. I went to John M. Ross School in Ninole up to the seventh grade, and from eighth grade on, I finished intermediate, high school at Laupāhoehoe [High and Elementary School] (in 1947).

WN: Tell me something about your father. What was he doing in Ninole?

BF: My father [Saiji Fujimoto] was a [sugar]cane planter, and he used to work for the plantation also. He came from Japan in 1905 to work in the sugar industry.

WN: What part of Japan did he come from?

BF: Hiroshima, Japan. And from the little I recall, he said when he first came, part of his duties was to clear the forest so that the plantation can plant cane. So he used to go do that besides the regular raising of sugarcane.

WN: What company was this for?

BF: This was for Hakalau Plantation Company. Also, from about 1920, I believe, a company called Wailea Milling Company was formed in that same area so a bunch of them moved over to Wailea Milling Company, and that company was in existence until about 1944 or 1945, I think it was. And the changing times kind of made it difficult for them to keep going, so they merged with Hakalau [Plantation Company].

WN: So Wailea Milling Company was in Ninole area?

BF: Ninole up to Wailea. That's close to Hakalau, yeah? They were kind of mixed up, those two plantations. They didn't have the whole territory exclusively. When I grew up, those two

companies were intermingled within the community, Wailea, Hakalau and Nīnole, all the way up Nīnole.

WN: Was your father one of those independent cane growers?

BF: Yes. He used to raise cane. When I was growing up, in my younger years, probably a young teenager and earlier, all the way through to when I was a young man, he used to raise about twenty-five to thirty acres of cane. So we used to help, all the children, not only the boys. Both the boys and the girls used to work in the cane fields during the weekends and summers and stuff. Also, when we were old enough, we started working for the plantation, primarily harvesting cane. In those days, child labor laws were kind of lax, so we used to work when we were about maybe eleven or twelve, cutting cane, harvesting cane. I wouldn't recommend it to anybody.

(Laughter)

WN: So in the beginning, when you were small, you worked for your father? When he had his own . . .

BF: Yeah, we used to have our start working for our father. Doing *hō hana* work.

WN: Did he pay you?

BF: No, no. (WN chuckles.) Part of our upbringing. I don't think he was ever in a position where he can say I'll pay you so much a day. All of us in the plantation community took it as our, I guess our growing up, of chores that we are expected to help out.

WN: So besides helping out in the cane field, what else did you do around the house to help out?

BF: We had animals. We had a horse. I vaguely recall having a—in fact I knew we had a cow for milk. We also had a couple of pigs there, so part of our chores was to cut grass for the horse and the cow, and feed the pigs. We had chickens also, ducks, hens and stuff, a good-sized vegetable garden, backyard, so we used to help in those areas, too. I don't know how much we can help, I won't try to guess, but we did our share, anyway. We were, I guess, farm boys, we had our own chores that we needed to do.

WN: And you were number six of ten children?

BF: Yeah, well, I'm not sure exactly because several of my—I was told—several of the older ones died before I was born. I don't know them. They were as babies up to about two years old, three years old. Those days, [when] babies were born, [many] died. So from the ones that I grew up with, I'm number six out of ten. The second of four boys and six girls.

WN: What did your house look like?

BF: It was a wooden-frame house, nothing fancy, just four walls. We had a little shower, we had a separate *furo* in the back; we had an outhouse. The only indoor plumbing, if you can call it that, was in the *furo* and kitchen. But facilities as far as toilet goes is [in an] outhouse outside.

WN: Cooking with what? Kerosene?

BF: Cooking was kerosene and firewood. Both. We didn't have electricity where I was raised. We were kind of off the beaten track up in the hills, probably a mile and a quarter or so off from the main highway where most of the homes were. I don't know when my father built that place, but we were away from all the conveniences or whatever. No electricity, no telephones out there, so we have to make do with whatever we have. Was primarily kerosene and firewood. We used to go out down to the edge of the streams and cut the 'ōhi'a logs for firewood, stack it up, and chop it. There was a [cane] flume, fortunately, that passed right by our house, so what they used to do when the flume wasn't being used, my father would say, "Oh, let's go up, we need to go cut firewood today." So we'd go up in the bushes and cut firewood close to where the flumes are running, carry the chopped wood down to the flumes and flume it down to our house. (WN chuckles.) Stop it there, and then we'll store that for maybe—the firewood—probably a year supply or so at a time.

WN: That flume was, what, permanent?

BF: It was a permanent flume. The sugar companies had their permanent flumes and temporary flumes. Temporary flumes were the ones that were put in the fields directly to flume the cane to the permanent flume. So right in front of our house, we had a (permanent) flume.

WN: That was the main flume?

BF: Yeah. In our area.

WN: And how far was it from the place where you cut, down to the mill?

BF: Down to the mill from our house was, I would say about five, six miles, maybe. It was a long ways. The mill was in Hakalau down in the—Hakalau Stream down at the bottom. And our house was way up in Ninole *mauka*.

WN: And then the flume went all the way down from five or six miles to the . . .

BF: All the way down. A long ways. When we were kids, we were constantly told, "Be careful when you cross the flumes, if you fall in the flumes, the water is strong enough, it'll take you down." And we had a neighbor of mine—there was another place where we had to cross the flume when we were going to school. Somehow, she slipped and she fell into the flume. They caught her about a mile or so down in the next station. See, when we were kids, they had this telephone system along the flume so the so-called people who used to watch the flow of cane—called the flume watchman—used to be able to monitor the flume. If there was a jam someplace, they would let the next station know to stop the fluming up *mauka* where they started. We were in the situation as I remember going to school, this girl fell into the flume. We couldn't catch her, we were little bit too small. We called the station down below—we used to play around with the phones all the time, eh. (WN chuckles.) Called the watchman at the next station and tell him, "Eh, there's a girl coming down. (WN chuckles.) She's down in the flumes, she cannot get out." They caught her at the next one.

WN: She was okay?



BF: Yeah. Was frightened but was nothing, obviously.

WN: So when you say "cross the flume," what do you mean?

BF: We had to walk over the flume. The flume is open, open flume. When it was being used, they had to leave it open otherwise the cane coming down sticking out would get stuck on top of anything that's on top of the flume. But when the flume was not being used, they used to have a plank kind of thing put together, makeshift footbridge to go over the flumes. But then there were times when they would take the [footbridge] off because cane came down.

WN: And how wide was the flume?

BF: Right at my house, if I remember, I would say probably about a foot and a half.

WN: Oh, that's all?

BF: Yeah, and then as you go down, there used to be another main flume, bigger flume—they used to get bigger as you go down closer to the mill because there were branches from different flumes going into the big flume down below.

You know, one of my nephews, when he was about, oh, not quite ten I guess, came to visit one day and somehow fell into the flume. And that particular day, there was a lot of water in the flume 'cause I guess it was kind of rainy season. Had to go down, grab him. He was about a hundred feet down or something. He couldn't get out by himself. Fortunate enough, you know, that place wasn't that steep yet so I managed to grab him out. Every now and then, he still reminds me about it. (WN chuckles.)

WN: And so you said it's a foot and a half [wide] and sort of a V shape.

BF: V, and the bottom was made in a V. But on the main flume, they used to have a little molding so it was flat a little—maybe about three or four inches.

WN: Oh, flat on the bottom.

BF: Flat so you could walk inside.

WN: So like a U, then?

BF: Yeah, yeah. Almost, but not really. As you go down to the big flume down below, they're probably about, I don't know, I would say three, four feet wide and then the bottom was wider, too.

WN: So the only way you could get across from one side to another is to go over the plank or jump over?

BF: Yeah. Over, or if it's one of those flumes on a trestle, you could go underneath. There's some places where the [the flume] crossed [someone's] little garden or something, a trail was underneath, you walk underneath. Or some other place where you cross the gully, they had walking footbridge on the flume itself, so walk on the footbridge.

- WN: But the one by your house was directly on the ground?
- BF: Directly on the ground. And the pathway to our house went right over the flume, right through the flume—I should say, right through the flume. But the flume was right in the middle of the pathway to our house. So anybody who came to our house had to go over the flume.
- WN: So mostly they just step over . . .
- BF: Yeah, step over the flume. Oh, and we had a footbridge (over the flume) most of the time because that flume wasn't used except when they were harvesting cane above our place.
- WN: Could they turn the water off and on from up above? Or was water constantly going down?
- BF: No. There were times when they turned it off for repairs, like that. There were places where they could cut off the water completely and run the water to one of the temporary flumes in the fields.
- WN: And there was a reservoir up there?
- BF: No. The water came from the stream. The streams were running constantly, and they're still running today as far as I know. They'd tap a place where the streams are running, and start the flume from there, way up, as far up as they can go.
- WN: And what were the flumes made of?
- BF: Lumber. I think they mostly used Douglas fir, I guess, and the posts and the trestles, a lot of them were either soaked in creosote—creosote is a preservative—or they used to use redwood as a foundation lot of the time. They last much longer than the Douglas firs. Of course, creosote lumber were under permanent flumes obviously, but they were in place for a long time.
- WN: I didn't realize they were wooden, I thought maybe they were galvanized iron or something.
- BF: Well, the only—I guess after the war [i.e., World War II], they started using aluminum flumes. But that was mostly the portable flumes in the field where they used to move them from one place to another all the time.
- WN: You ever kept any of that?
- BF: No.
- (Laughter)
- BF: Not that I remember. I figure, they were using one-by-twelve lumber and stuff, not quite thick.
- WN: So when you went with your father to do the firewood, what did you use to stop it right there?
- BF: Just probably nail a crosspiece across the top of the flume, put a wooden stick, like a crosspiece right into the flume in the water. Everybody used to do that. We'd flume a whole

bunch of firewood down, just dump it out next to the house, store it.

WN: Did cane get stuck a lot along the way?

BF: Yes, that's why they had the watchmen. I used to do that, too, in the plantation, flume the cane down. Some of us, when we'd get a little tired, we'd dump a lot of cane. Supposedly, the cane was tied in bundles. [We were] supposed to take off the leaves and tie the [cane] together [in] bundles. Oh, we'd just throw in the [loose] cane, (chuckles) before you know, that [watchman] say, "Stop, there's a jam down below."

WN: So how do they fix the jam?

BF: They had to pull [the pieces of cane] out. The one that we threw in is not the tight-packed bundle. The cane is all kind of loose so the water go through, eh? So they gotta stop and pull it out one by one until they get the jam going. Some of the jams was huge. That's when the jam was in the bigger flume down below. I don't know how they would fix that jam. I never really thought about it till you started asking.

WN: I think only Big Island they did flumes. Yeah, because of the slopes?

BF: Yeah. Right, right. The slope and the water. Gotta have the water. The other islands, all [cane was transported to the mills by] railroad. Even here, some of the lower places, they'd do railroad, all in the coast. I don't know about Hāmākua side. They probably had railroads. They didn't have constant running water—needed a lot of water to run a flume.

WN: So ten children living in a house, plus your parents. I mean, how many were in one room?

BF: I think, from my recollection, the girls were in one room and the boys were in another, and the little ones were with the parents in another room. We had three rooms where we could sleep, as far as I can remember. Plus the cooking area, the kitchen and dining area.

WN: What type of person was your father?

BF: Kind of quiet. He liked to read a lot. He never said too much. Some guys tell me, I kind of took after him for a while, but now I don't know. (WN chuckles.)

WN: What about your mother?

BF: My mother [Ei Sorakubo Fujimoto] was a housewife. She did the chores around the house, take care of the babies, stuff like that. She was the second wife. My father's first wife died in childbirth when one of the children was born. Old style, you know, they need a wife. I think they had a second or third child. He needed somebody to take care of the children, so he sent home to Japan for, I guess the—my mother was the younger sister.

WN: Of the one that died?

BF: Yeah, yeah. Keep it in the family. Was probably about a thirteen- or fourteen-year difference in the age, and she was seventeen or eighteen when she came. She tells us later on in life, you know, after my father had passed away [in 1963], she wasn't really looking forward to

coming. Especially a young girl, you know, this age. My father was in his thirties already. Oh well, I guess it's kind of what they called that obligation or whatever eventually caught up with her and she had to. . . .

WN: And she's from Hiroshima, too?

BF: Yeah.

WN: So you said that you folks were kind of isolated up there.

BF: Yeah, we were.

WN: Did you folks have any neighbors or playmates at all?

BF: We used to have to go walking all around to play with anybody. When I was real small, my closest neighbor was about a quarter mile away. The youngest in the family was about ten years older than me. We used to walk a lot, go to neighboring camps and down to the community and stuff for play and whatever. I don't remember too much about my real young days. When the war [World War II] broke out, I was eleven. I remember going to a neighboring village, they used to have the visiting [i.e., traveling] movies, the old Japanese kind *benshi*.

WN: The narrator.

BF: Yeah, silent movies. We used to go see them, I don't know how often, several times a year, I guess. We used to walk through the sugarcane field paths and stuff. When I was smaller, I believed the automobile road was made to our place when I was about ten. Until then, we didn't have (an) automobile road or truck road. Everything used to come out by either [horse]backs or pack mules. We used to walk from the trail going to school and all, mile and a quarter, mile and a half, to John M. Ross School. Obviously in the wintertime when the days was short, had to leave real early. My older sisters tease me, "Oh, we had to carry you, you wouldn't move." (WN laughs.) When I was about ten, I remember the county built (a road for vehicles). It's a homestead area, so for the homestead. At least we had a road, there was a better road we could walk, but nobody could afford a car then. We didn't have a car until I was out of high school, our family. (It) must have been just before the war probably (that) I had an uncle used to work in Moloka'i in the pineapple fields. He decided, by the time he came, he had couple of children, they decided to come back to work in the plantation. So he rented the house next to us. Had couple of neighbors.

WN: What about, were there stores nearby?

BF: No. The closest store was probably 2, 2½ miles away.

WN: How did you folks get your . . .

BF: Wailea Milling Company used to have plantation stores, those days. Plantation stores would take orders from the workers, what they want—the ones that couldn't go to the store. And then I don't know how they shipped it to Ninole from Wailea, probably by train, I don't know, I would imagine. And then they had the plantation pack mules—there was a mule team assigned



for hauling goods and stuff for the workers that lived away [i.e., the outlying areas]. They used to bring, the pack mules, rice and [other] staples. . . . No such things as fresh meat and stuff because it wouldn't last, you know. We didn't have icebox. They couldn't bring ice anyway until later on when they made the road. Then we were able to (cook) with kerosene. I don't know how they used to cook before that, I was too small, I don't really remember. Anyway, they always had a wooden place to make a fire in the house. They used to call it *kudo*. You familiar with that?

WN: Yeah. And fresh things like vegetables . . .

BF: Most of it was raised in the backyard. And there were some neighbors that we exchanged stuff. If you had surplus, you take 'em to a neighbor way down the road.

WN: What about chickens and stuff, did you . . .

BF: We had our own. We raised our own chickens. Later on, we had ducks, we had rabbits.

WN: For food?

BF: For food. But the rabbits didn't last too long. (Chuckles) You know, you look at the rabbits when you're young, when you're children, to kill the rabbit is not that easy. Easy to raise, you know, you have a pair of mature rabbits, you have a whole bunch of little ones in no time, and they'll be ready for eating within six months. When came time to slaughter them, (chuckles) my father had to take 'em away. They were good.

WN: You folks had pigs, too?

BF: Later on, we had pigs couple times. Not too often.

WN: So the things you got from the store, the delivery, it was like rice and things like that?

BF: Rice, shoyu, miso, (and some canned goods and dry goods). Miso, I think, they used to make. After the road was built, peddlers used to come. The store peddlers, the fish peddlers, and so on. Made it a little easier to get some of the other things. But I know they used to make their own miso, and I seen the tofu thing to grind the soybeans for tofu. It must have been when I was very small. They used to raise their own soybeans and whatever vegetables you can think of.

WN: Was your father always an independent grower, do you remember? Or was he also employed by the plantation?

BF: He was working for the plantation also. Raising cane was a side business.

WN: Oh, so what did he do on the plantation?

BF: I know he used to go harvesting, you know, hand harvesting. (He) used to go flume cane. All (strictly) labor kind of thing. We used to do the same thing later on, I think. Oh, that man used to work real hard compared to us. (WN chuckles.)

- WN: Before I get into your work, I wanted to ask you, what did you do to have good fun as a kid?
- BF: Among other things, we used to go swimming down the stream; the streams were always flowing. We used to catch 'ōpae in the stream. Another stream had 'o'opus. We used to go fishing with a pole. We used to go to a camp to play with some of the other boys. The closest camp was probably a mile, mile and a half away, but we used to walk and go. The plantation village used to have a gym and little small ball field and stuff like that. So we used to play whatever we could scrounge, among other things. We used to make our own fun and go where the fun is. We couldn't really play around our house. We started climbing trees and stuff.
- WN: Did you play *pee wee*?
- BF: No.
- WN: You didn't play?
- BF: No. We used to play softball in school. I never played baseball (until later in our middle teens). They used to call it *hardball* those days, yeah? They used to have those local leagues we used to play, high school. Even basketball, this was in our early teens, we used to go up to Hakalau. That's quite a ways. We used to go down to the main highway, the plantation trucks would pick us up and take us to the gyms in Hakalau to play basketball, and something that resembled basketball, anyway. (WN chuckles.) But basically, it was a homemade kind of thing, community against community kind.
- WN: So what was your community actually? Nīnole?
- BF: Nīnole. We were kind of right at the edge of Nīnole, right across Honohina. We had ways to keep ourselves occupied.
- WN: Okay, so how old were you when you first started working, I mean, actually for pay?
- BF: I would imagine, I must have been eleven or twelve. Those days, you need a *bangō* to work in a plantation. A *bangō* is a number that they assign to every employee. At fourteen, you could get, I guess, a student *bangō*. Before that, we used to work cutting cane, harvesting cane, but on a contract, piecemeal basis. We use to use the father's number of the *bangō*, so whatever work we did, stayed under (my) father's (*bangō*). And they would pay him. At fourteen, we got our own *bangō*. Somehow, the Wailea people, mostly started out cutting cane. They didn't have enough harvesters. Some of the other camps, like that, they had *hō hana* gang and stuff like that. The only time we did that kind of work was in the off season when they weren't harvesting at all, then they would offer us some other work, then we'd go. But all through school years, we were cane cutters. That's primarily piecemeal work, so they pay for whatever you do.
- WN: You get paid by what, the bundle?
- BF: Bundle. Later on, by time.
- WN: But those days, did they burn cane?

BF: Oh yeah.

WN: You guys cut from the burnt cane?

BF: If they could burn. Sometimes, depends on the weather, if they didn't have control, they couldn't burn.

WN: And if they didn't burn, what did you do with the leaves?

BF: Just throw it away on the side.

WN: You still have to take the leaves off?

BF: Yeah, supposedly.

WN: More work then, huh?

BF: Yeah. But the reason I said "supposedly" was people who'd been cutting cane had a way of sneaking those into the bundles. So later on, they paid us for net cane. (WN chuckles.) When net cane, they would tare every so many bundles, and make a tare and use that as an average. So if get 10 percent rubbish in there (tare), they take away 10 percent of the wage. When they were paying us by the bundles, it had to be a net of, I think, was sixty pounds per bundle. And after we finished harvesting, we had to carry (the cane bundles) to the flume, close enough to the flume so the flumers could flume it. Most of us, we were too small to carry a sixty-pound bundle, so what we had to do was open up the bundle, split it in half.

WN: So who actually tied it, you folks?

BF: Yeah. Whoever does the harvest and cutting. String the tops of the cane, just tied it together.

WN: How much you got paid per bundle?

BF: I really don't remember. Just pennies anyway. (Penny or two.)

WN: But somebody was there to keep track?

BF: Oh, yeah. Each crew had their own—I guess today you would call them crew chief. I don't know what they used to call 'em then, contract man or whatever. He used to keep tabs. If he had ten people in his crew, he keep track of everybody's amount they cutting. Later on, they started working by tonnage, they had to figure out how much tonnage each guy had every day and turn that in. So the guy was responsible for getting all the weights in from the guy who used to scale. And they had it ready by the next morning so he could turn it in.

WN: How many bundles you think you could do in one day?

BF: High school, I could keep up with the men anytime: 200, 250. Sometimes on a good day, when they had nice harvesting conditions, maybe more than that. Two hundred was a good number. If you can manage 200 sixty-pound bundles . . .

- WN: Two hundred, sixty-pound bundles. How many stalks you think comprised one bundle?
- BF: It depends on the size of the cane, the variety of the cane. Some of them were big, some of them were small. The bigger ones, obviously, didn't need as much, and then some canes were easier to cut than others; the skin is harder. The harder ones, those are the ones hard to cut. Some were soft.
- WN: I'm wondering, how far off the ground did you cut?
- BF: Almost down to ground level if you could. They prefer that you cut it down to ground level, but sometimes you cannot. Only inch or two off the ground.
- WN: You had to buy your own machete or they supply?
- BF: You buy your own. You have to sharpen it, carry your own sharpening stone or file to work. And after when you go home, used to have a grinder, grindstone, grind it down, flatten it out at least once a week or so. In fact, I have a same old grinder here.
- WN: Oh yeah?
- BF: Portable one on the table. The farthest one.
- WN: That's electric?
- BF: No. Hand.
- WN: Oh, hand grinder.
- BF: We didn't have electric then, so we used a hand grinder for our tools.
- WN: What about like water and things like that?
- BF: Water, we used to use catchment water for drinking, cooking, and the flume water for washing and stuff. The flume's right next to our house, we used to tap that water.
- WN: But out in the field, what, you brought your own water?
- BF: No, out in the field, they used to have—I guess the gang, *luna* or whatever, one of his responsibilities was to carry a can of water around, get enough water (for) the crew. Would get about three, four gallons. Lot of times, was from the flume itself, the portable flume. Wasn't the best water in the world, (WN chuckles) but then you took whatever. It just go up right through the whole crew. Give 'em a cup. Just a cover with—made like a cup with a handle—cover the can. I don't know if you seen any of those in the cultural center or something.
- WN: No. What, metal can?
- BF: Yeah metal, galvanized.



WN: Oh. And what about lunch?

BF: Lunch, we used to take our own. Probably seen those in the cultural center.

WN: *Kaukau* tin.

BF: Yeah. Two piece, rice on the bottom, *okazu* on top.

WN: So you started at age—by eleven, twelve?

BF: I would say about, before twelve definitely.

WN: So when you got your own *bangō*, you were able to keep the money that you earned?

BF: No, no. (WN chuckles.) Whatever we earned, we never did keep all my money. In fact, we used to give practically all to our parents and they give us whatever we need. I wouldn't say whatever we need, whatever they could spare is what it amounts to. Not like today, you know, you tell your kids to mow the lawn, they tell, "How much you gonna pay me?" (Laughs)

WN: So this was mostly during summertime?

BF: Summertime, Saturdays—lot of times Saturdays and Sundays. When you work on piecemeal basis, no such thing as holiday on Sunday. If you want to go work, you work, it's up to you. But they won't schedule you to work, but if you wanted to go especially if you close to home—if you wanted to work on a Sunday, you could.

WN: But this is not your father's field system?

BF: No.

WN: Plantation?

BF: Yeah.

WN: I see. And then so, tell me about school. What was it like at John M. Ross School?

BF: John M. Ross School, when I started, had seven grades. I believe was something like nine classrooms 'cause just before I started, apparently, they added a couple of rooms because enrollment was increasing. I think had, generally speaking, the same teachers year after year. The teachers used to live in the cottages right next door except for a couple who lived a couple miles down the road. But the principal and most of the teachers from away used to live in the cottages next to the school. We used to have regular basic arithmetic and reading and writing and a little bit of art and drawing. And gardening, among other things. Used to have—I don't know from what grade on, had to go down to help in the kitchen also, every, you know, take your turn in the kitchen. Nobody questioned those things. Today, you can't do that. "How much you going to pay me?" is the first thing. (WN chuckles.) And then you got to pay your kids to go even if they volunteer. I think when I first started school, everybody used to bring lunch; they didn't have a cafeteria. Then, elementary, they built the cafeteria, but many of us couldn't afford the [lunch] especially with four or five [siblings attending] school.

So we used to bring our own lunch, *musubi* and stuff. And couple of times a month, to be on kitchen duty, they'd give us a free meal. That was about the only time we ate school lunch. They taught us all the basics; of course, no such things as computers and stuff like that, but whatever they could.

WN: What subjects did you like in elementary school?

BF: Oh, I always liked arithmetic, you know, math. I wasn't really good at it, but. . . . I liked history, geography. Even today, I like to watch all those travel and history shows.

#### END OF SIDE ONE

#### SIDE TWO

WN: So you said that your home was about a mile and a half from school?

BF: At least mile and a half, yeah. We had to walk.

WN: The school was where? Was it in Hakalau?

BF: No. Nīnole. John Ross School is in Nīnole. And then, of course, they had a playground outside. You looked forward to the playtime obviously. Back then we did a lot of (pickup) sports, softball, and they had an outdoor basketball stand. That's about it, I think, as far as team sports were concerned. They had the swings and slides and stuff.

WN: Did you go to Japanese[-language] school?

BF: Yeah. Japanese school was right across the street.

WN: Right across the street from John M. Ross?

BF: Yeah. Up to December of '41 obviously. I was eleven at the time when the war broke out and that was the end of my Japanese schooling. But in the last couple of years, I didn't do much in Japanese school. (WN chuckles.) We used to play hooky a lot, you know, go swimming down in the swimming hole and stuff.

WN: Japanese school was after regular school?

BF: After, and Saturdays.

WN: And Saturdays, too?

BF: Saturdays, too.

WN: What did you like better, Japanese school or regular school?

BF: Regular school. Like I said, Japanese school, somewhere along the way, I kind of lost interest.

That's why, guys my age, most of them, guys who went to Japanese school religiously, they can read and write and speak better [Japanese] than me. The only reason why we can at least kind of manage to speak in Japanese [is] that our folks were Japanese and they couldn't speak, read, or write English. So we had to speak in Japanese. Sometimes, later on in life, you think, maybe I should have paid little more attention. But it's too late, eh. (WN chuckles.)

WN: Okay, so you went to Japanese school until the war broke out. Tell me something about the wartime experience over time.

BF: Wartime was something—was a little different in a sense that, this martial law for one thing. It didn't affect us too much in a sense that—well, we didn't know any better. Whatever they told us, the military did or the police did, or the so-called local guard guys who were appointed by the police under martial law basis, we weren't about to say, what if or why or whatnot. So we just obey. Among other things, had blackout, which, under today's conditions, I don't think that I'd be able to do it, you know, turn off all the lights every night and keep the house dark. No way.

WN: Unless they got the electric company to turn off all the lights.

BF: Yeah, yeah. That's right.

(Laughter)

WN: Then everybody grumble.

BF: But then even the emergency people cannot operate, eh?

WN: Yeah, yeah, right.

BF: Like in our case, wasn't too bad because we were quite isolated away from the camps so nobody really bothered us, and they not about to come up, couple of miles just to check on two houses. But we made sure we had our windows all covered with denim sheets or whatever—piece of denim, denim shades, I guess you could call them. In fact, [we had] kerosene stove, and gas lamps, so didn't put out too much light anyway. We didn't worry too much about gas rations because we didn't have cars. (WN chuckles.) But for the few families who had cars, it was a hardship for them, ten gallons a month, you know. They were almost in a situation where, being that they had a car, any of the neighbors needed to go someplace in an emergency situation or someplace where they had to go, they look after the neighbors, too. Coming to Hilo once in a while, by then during the war, we had buses running constantly, so you catch the bus in the morning, go back in the afternoon. The railroads were running also. I forgot what the schedule was like, but we were able to go from Hilo to Pa'auilo [on the railroad].

WN: So how often would you go to Hilo?

BF: In my growing years, was primarily to the dentist or stuff like that. Not to go shopping. Most of us, if you look at people our age, I think we about the worst as far as dental care was. (WN chuckles.) We wouldn't go to our dentist until there was a definite cavity. And lot of guys, I remember, used to have guava seeds stuck in the cavity. That's how big the cavities were

before we went to the dentist. So lot of guys today have bridgework. Unless the parents were really sticklers, most of us had bad teeth, to put it mildly. So we (went) to the dentist in the morning, on Saturdays or summertime, get on the bus, get enough money for bus fare, plus a nickel or dime for lunch, you know, something small. We used to come on our own. There used to be a bus right in Nīnole bus line. (Another) was from Laupāhoehoe. So going on the bus wasn't too much of a problem.

WN: So what was Hilo like during the war?

BF: I don't remember too much about Hilo [during] wartime. Like I said, the only time we [went to Hilo was] when we really had some business to do. I remember, I think that was before the war probably, coming to Hilo High School [for a] 4-H Club [function], or one-night kind, must have been before the war. Stayed in Hilo High School gym for a conference kind of thing, some 4-H Club work. I don't remember too much. Maybe in wartime, we were around the community. The only thing we used to splurge, if you could call it that, was maybe go to a movie on the weekend, Saturday or Sunday. Go in the afternoon. Early afternoon or late afternoon movie, the bus used to come not up to our house, but down to the highway and we'd jump on the bus, and used to take us to the movie. After the movie, bring us back. During the war, we used to do that. The Roy Rogers and Gene Autry and all that kind of stuff. Other than that, there was some fishing too, but then not too much.

What we understood, anyway, was that wartime, the military, they were the boss. Under the martial law, you couldn't say "boo" without having permission practically. They controlled everything from food to gas and whatever else. The laws and everything were under the military. I don't know if they'll ever be able to do something like that in an emergency situation today. Probably not.

WN: What about school? How long were you out of school before you could go back?

BF: I don't remember. What I remember is that we didn't know that war had started until December 8. In the morning, we got up, we're getting ready to go to school. My older brother and one neighbor were going to the Laupāhoehoe [School] so they had to [leave] earlier. As we were leaving the house, they were coming home, they said, "Oh, no school. The war started." The war started? I would imagine we must have been out of school for about a month. Then, of course, when the school resumed, it was under controlled conditions and things like speak English and you got to get rid of—especially us, being Japanese, you have to be little more careful, you cannot do this, you cannot do that. Everything was, you cannot do this, you cannot do that.

WN: Who was telling you this? Your parents or . . .

BF: The teachers, the police, the community leaders or whoever. Whoever knew something.

WN: What about your parents? Did they tell you anything or do you remember them doing anything different during the war?

BF: I don't think it affected them that much, except that, of course, their pride and their heritage was such that must have bothered them. But I was too small to really remember, I think. It affected them, I would imagine, the elderly people especially, in the community. But us little



kids, you know . . .

WN: Yeah, really, yeah. (Chuckles)

BF: Early teens, yeah.

WN: Yeah.

BF: Eleven, twelve, thirteen. They talked about, when the guys went off to war, we used to hear every now and then that so-and-so got killed or he got wounded and stuff like that, you know, somebody in the community.

WN: So you went to John Ross School until what grade?

BF: Seventh grade, 1942. The war started when I was in the last, you know, seventh grade at John M. Ross.

WN: Oh, your last semester of John M. Ross. Last year. And then fall of '42, you went to Laupāhoehoe?

BF: Laupāhoehoe.

WN: So what kind of a change was that, Laupāhoehoe?

BF: It was a bigger school, for one thing, older kids. Like anyplace else, you go up the ladder. At John M. Ross School, seventh grade was the highest. So you figure, oh, we the big shots. It's a term you can use, but then that's the way you always feel when you go in something new. You work your way up and then you got to go right down to the bottom again. But that didn't bother too much because we met a lot of new people all the way from 'O'ōkala, Laupāhoehoe, Pāpa'aloa, Kapehu School. John M. Ross, Kapehu, Laupāhoehoe, and 'O'ōkala. There were four schools that fed into Laupāhoehoe Intermediate and High School. Whole bunch of new people and kind of get brand-new (feeling), kind of in awe. Coming from the smallest part of—John M. Ross and Kapehu were about the smallest schools. But then, you get into it. Kids, generally speaking, tend to assimilate very easily.

WN: How did you get from your house to Laupāhoehoe?

BF: We used to walk down to the highway down the road, the old road anyway. Catch the bus and the bus take us down to the school.

WN: How long a bus ride was it?

BF: About ten miles or about half an hour. They had to make their stops and the old road was like a little lane. If you tried driving when the [new] road is being maintained, you can see what it was like. Used to do that every day. Get on the bus. To walk that mile and a quarter to where we caught the bus took us at least half an hour.

WN: Oh, from your house to the main road?

BF: You can imagine, we used to catch the early bus. The early bus comes, I would say, six-thirty. Seven o'clock we were in Laupāhoehoe. To catch the six-thirty, we had to leave home before six and walk down. Six o'clock it was dark yet. Rainy days, you carry a raincoat.

WN: And the bus would go all the way down to campus?

BF: All the way down to the old school. And they'd drop us off. Most buses had to make a second trip back to the closer areas. They'd take two loads.

WN: Oh, one bus would take two loads?

BF: Yeah. They come, they drop the [first load of students off at the school]. They used to call it the "early bus" and "late bus."

WN: Well, let's get into that day: April 1, 1946.

BF: Okay.

WN: Okay, and I assume it was a just a normal day—started out to be.

BF: Well, was normal except that I believe we were coming off spring break. One week, yeah? And on a Monday morning, was April 1, we got on the bus, same as usual. As we hit the cliff above Laupāhoehoe where we could see the [Laupāhoehoe] Point, the guys in the front of the bus started, "Eh, no water in the ocean, no water in the ocean!" They all excited.

I said, "What, no water in the ocean?"

"April Fool's," we're saying. We always sitting in the back. "April Fool, April Fool!"

"No," they said, "not April Fool." They kept insisting, so we looked out, and sure enough, we saw the water pulling out. So we looked, and okay, it's funny, but nobody knew what it was. It was unusual, something different. But then we went down to the school, instead of going right into the school [grounds] like we normally do, I think we walked down on the road—there's a monument there—up to about where the monument is [today], instead of going into the school grounds. And then we were watching the waves start coming in, the early ones. And we knew that there was a shower house [other interviewees referred to it as a canoe house] or something down at the point, further out. That's been washed out by an earlier wave. I didn't think too much of it.

Then this wave came in, came right up to the road. The road is still there, right in front of the monument. That was, under normal standards, quite high; it never came up there [before]. But anyway, it came up and stopped. And it started going back out again. So I said, "Oh, I guess that's it." So a bunch of us went to the school; we normally hang out in the morning, just sit down, wait around until school starts. Hardly anybody were in the school grounds, but my feeling was that once you get in school, you shouldn't go roaming around outside school grounds.

WN: So this is still way before school started, yeah?

**BF:** In the morning, yeah. The first wave that we saw was about seven o'clock, the earlier wave that came in onto the road. There were a lot of students out in the park area and out by the edge of the ocean. I think some of them said they went walking down to the shoreline. Myself, I told some people, "Let's go down, take a look." We went down to the middle of the school, the playground, the school playground. We were watching, and so the waves had pulled out, the water pulled out quite a bit, and that preceded the next wave. Again, I wasn't able to see them, but some of the guys close to the edge of the bank were saying they could see fish flopping around in the rocks, where normally there's water. Us, we couldn't see that, but we could see that the ocean was kind of bare. Where there's supposed to be water, you could see only rocks. Then the waves started coming back in after it receded out so much. To me, wasn't anything to panic about because it wasn't a rolling kind of huge wave that you see or imagine later on.

**WN:** But you were not at the edge of the water?

**BF:** No, I was in the playground, kind of far away. The guys who were close to the edge of the water were standing there watching. And I guess they realized before us that the wave wasn't normal, was too big. So they started running. Because by then, you could see the waves had hit the bank, and when they hit the bank, it just didn't stop. It wasn't a great big wave, like I said, but just like a force pushing the water behind. It wasn't a rolling kind of [wave] that you could think of. I said, couple times, it's like filling a cup like this, just pour the water in, when you fill it up to the top, it flows over.

**WN:** Ah, I see. It wasn't like the kind wave that you think of, a surfing wave?

**BF:** Yeah, yeah. What I saw anyway, I didn't see the outside, so I cannot say. What I know is that I saw it coming over the bank. And was way over the bank over there, and the bank is a good twenty feet high [i.e., above sea level]. If you ever get down there, look down by the monument. It was over that. So we knew we were in trouble, we better run. Fortunately, we were close enough to high ground that we just turned around and ran. In running, I heard a cracking sound in the back, that was the baseball—we used to call that grandstand, the bleachers. And the big thing was cracking and the thing just collapsed. I remember one face running in front of that, he was one of the basketball players. They used to tease him all the time, big guy, slow, see? But later on they were teasing him. Said, "We never see you run so fast." But he was running, he was making it. That's one face I remember that morning.

The other side of the park, on the lower end, there was a row of teachers' cottages, there were four of them. There was a grove of coconut trees. One of the cottages was smashed into the trees. The trees obviously had to give way. I saw coconut trees falling down. Later on, we found two of them stopped in the far end of the park, up at the edge of the park there was a little rise there where there used to be the school's hog farm, the agriculture class hog farm. I saw the [teachers' cottage coming from the ocean side through the coconut trees]. Those are the two things I remember [i.e., seeing the grandstand being destroyed and the teachers' cottage crashing through the coconut trees]. From then on, I ran up in the school, through the bottom of the building where we had our cafeteria. It was a little high ground. Ran through there. I didn't stop until I got up to the highway above where the present church is.

**WN:** Yeah. Oh, you mean the Buddhist church [i.e., Laupāhoehoe Jodo Mission]?

- BF: Yeah, above there, you know, past the church up on the hill. You could look down. And by then, quite a few people had gone there. Nobody waited down below. They just took off. Then we didn't know how much damage had been done, we didn't know who was where. We knew, obviously, some people were caught in the water. So we started looking around for our family, first of all, because I had two brothers there. My older brother and I, we found each other right away. But the third one [Toshiaki Fujimoto], we couldn't locate him, so we start asking our friends, "You seen our kid brother?" No. Nobody seen him. So, I guess we just came to the conclusion that he was caught in the water.
- WN: Do you know where he was at the time that the wave hit?
- BF: I was told later on, that he was right by the bank with Masuo [Kino]. Masuo was saying that he was talking to him that morning. He saw him [Toshiaki] over there. He didn't tell (me then). Oh, maybe five years ago, one day we were talking about that and he said, "Yeah, your brother was with us." So anyway, that's what happened, as far as I can see.
- WN: The teachers' cottages, was it breaking up or was it coming, lifted whole?
- BF: The whole thing was lifted up.
- WN: All four of them?
- BF: Two of them. Well, I saw only one pick up, as far as it goes, I could see one. On the side of my eyes, running—two [cottages] we never found, so I would assume that when the wave picked it up, it just swept it out and went through the rocks and everything out to sea. And the teachers who were lost were all in the last two cottages. There were a row of four. The first two cottages were the ones that went through the coconut trees through the park, and stuck on the edge of the park.
- WN: Those were the ones that survived?
- BF: Yeah. Those were the ones that survived.
- WN: Oh, I see. And the other two were swept out.
- BF: Yeah, they never found them. One of them had four teachers from the Mainland including Marsue (McGinnis) [McShane] and the other one had two bachelors, men, and that Nakano Family.
- WN: That's the other two.
- BF: The two from the far end. The one that got swept out.
- WN: So Masuo and Peter [Nakano] were in the other teachers' cottage?
- BF: I think Masuo was out by the bank with the students. There was a whole bunch of students . . .
- WN: Oh, I'm sorry, not Masuo, but Frank Kanzaki.



BF: Yeah, yeah, Frank Kanzaki. He was in the [teachers' cottage], him and Fred Kruse. They were both bachelors. They were in, I think in a duplex, and Nakanos on one side, if I'm not mistaken. And they were in the other part of the duplex. [Peter Nakano's wife, Florence Nakano, and three of his children, Stella, Janice and Norman Nakano, along with teacher Fred Kruse, were killed. Teachers Peter Nakano, Frank Kanzaki, and Marsue McGinnis McShane survived.]

WN: And the other one that got swept out, Marsue McGinnis [McShane] was in one. [See interview with Masue McGinnis McShane.]

BF: She was in one of those two cottages that were swept out. She was the only one that was saved from that other cottage.

WN: [Helen] Kingseed, and . . .

BF: Yeah, King[seed], and [Fay] Johnson, and [Dorothy] Drake [were killed].

WN: They were all in that . . .

BF: Yeah. That four were in one cottage.

WN: And you mentioned the grandstand, baseball grandstand. Where was that?

BF: That was on the . . .

WN: Near the ocean side?

BF: No. It was on the *mauka* end of the park. Inside, way at the *mauka* end of the park on the *mauka* Hilo corner, I guess you call it. The south corner, southwest corner of that park. The park is like this. It's right over here.

WN: And where was the school?

BF: The school was right from here, up (*mauka*).

WN: So the grandstand got damaged but not the school itself?

BF: Yeah. It picked up the grandstand. If you can imagine or if you been down there, you see, even today, there's a rock wall over here. The grandstand was right inside the rock wall. The school was at the edge of the rock wall where the wall ends. From here up, it was sloping ground. And there was one wing sticking out like this, and a little further in, there was another rock wall. So the water went all the way through the rock wall and just barely touched the part that's sticking out, but didn't do too much harm. [The water] went up and went through the toilets outside, the boys' and the girls' toilets. And also there was a shop building, industrial arts, shop building. It went through there, went through the lavatory and the toilet walls and everything. Didn't really collapse the toilet because they were kind of bolted down. But tore the walls apart. Picked up the shop building and moved it. The shop building was a classroom; we called it shop class. Teachers' cottages were on a stilts kind of building, wooden frame housing. They were high off the ground.

- WN: So the teachers' cottages were the nearest to the [ocean], yeah?
- BF: Yeah. And there was another private house. Family named Akiona, I think, used to live there. That house went to there. That house went little farther [out].
- WN: I think one member from that family died?
- BF: Yeah, (Daniel Akiona).
- WN: What about the DeCaires family?
- BF: DeCaires family used to live up in Laupāhoehoe, up *mauka*. But they were among the students who came to school early. [John, Janet, and Madeline DeCaires, three children of Antone and Cecilia DeCaires, were killed.]
- WN: So you were the first bus. And then after they dropped you off, the bus went . . .
- BF: Went out back.
- WN: So the ones that were on the second bus were not there?
- BF: Yeah, by the time they came down, the wave had passed already. Usually, they come after 7:30. Second wave came about 7:30.
- WN: And then the damage that you were talking about, was that just one wave?
- BF: One wave.
- WN: Just one wave.
- BF: They had a couple waves earlier which didn't do much damage except for the one shower house. The third wave was the big wave, you know as far as—as we know it. There may have been more than what we know.
- WN: I liked the way you described it. When you think of a tsunami or tidal wave, everybody thinks of a big wave coming and crashing over everything. But when you say it was like pouring over a cup and the cup overflows . . .
- BF: I didn't see what went on out where the wave is. I didn't see that part. But I know from what I talked to others, wasn't a big rolling wave. Otherwise, they would have run sooner, they could have had more time to get away, the ones who were close to the ocean. Because they were the ones that saw it first. I guess must have been pretty close by the time they saw it because most of the guys who got caught were close to the bank right there. The ocean is here; they were right along the edge of the bank. I think Masuo can give you a better description of that than I can. [See interview with Masuo Kino.]
- WN: Well, yeah, he said more or less the same thing. I'm wondering, too, your brother—what went through your mind when you found out that he was missing?

BF: I took it in a sense that obviously, we were concerned. But, you know, the old days, you talk tough, *shikata ga nai*, I cannot help. What's done is done, you cannot do anything about it. That's the feeling. Of course, we had to go home and tell the parents.

WN: How was that?

BF: I don't remember. I don't remember anything after this. I don't know how we got home. I would imagine the bus took us home. We were there for a while, and then we went back down to the school. And after things were settled down, I remember Masuo coming out of the bushes—not in front of the bushes, but the school building—was all soaking wet.

WN: He told me that he was all scratched up, too.

BF: Yeah. He was one person that I still remember—two of them, I think, as far as I know.

WN: Why do you think you went back to the school?

BF: I wanted to see, for one thing, if my brother was there. We went looking around to see if there were any guys, anybody, stuck, or who got caught in the bushes or whatever. I don't know how many of them were caught in the bushes. There were several of them. Other than Masuo, I don't think I remember any of the names. But all I know is that they came out all soaking wet, and you can imagine going through the whole park, you know, in the water, and through the bushes and everything else.

WN: So you thought that maybe there was a chance that . . .

BF: Oh, yeah, yeah. You never can tell, yeah? I think Mr. [Peter] Nakano, too, somehow, he managed to get out, and [Frank] Kanzaki. Plus, they were kind of banged up too, obviously. If I remember correctly, they took Mr. Nakano up to the hospital in Pāpa'āloa. I recall seeing him later, in the hospital room. He had to go down; see if his family was like us. And unfortunately, there were a whole bunch of others involved, so that's one of those things. Hopefully, none of your family or good friends are in there. But if they are, then it cannot be helped.

And the rest of the week, the neighbors, close friends, or relatives, [would] go down to the park area and up on the cliff, looking down, to see if there were any bodies floating up. I think the fifth or sixth day, there was one body that came floating up, found about half a mile down (the coastline). All they could see from the top was a white little speck on the rocks; that looked like a body. Even with telescope they couldn't make out, but look like. They went down, rope, rappel down. The fisherman, they all were carrying ropes. They found out was a boy from 'O'ōkala. Before that, the day of the wave, one of the DeCaires girls, the youngest one [Janet DeCaires], I think she got stuck in the bushes, but she was dead, and they found her. And this other boy, Ishizu's boy [Mamoru Ishizu] that's the other one that was recovered, his body was recovered. Out of the twenty-four [killed], only three of them was recovered.

WN: So they never found your brother's body?

BF: No.

WN: You remember anything about the funeral?

BF: No. We had a memorial service—I don't know if—at home in our house, because I remember one of my neighbors, good family friend—the only thing I remember, somehow, is he borrowed a pen. I had a pen. He was writing in that *chōbo* book. You know the *chōba* book, where you write the names and stuff? I don't know why I remember that, but I remember. Of course, we had a little picture made a couple of weeks later.

WN: You remember your parents saying anything to you about the whole thing?

BF: I really don't remember. I don't remember even talking to them as far as it goes about it. Obviously, we talked about it a lot. I can't recall specifically.

WN: What type of person was your brother?

BF: Rascal. That's to put it mildly.

(Laughter)

BF: Rascal and plenty guts. I always wonder what he would have been like, you know, if he had grown up.

WN: What was his name?

BF: Toshiaki.

WN: So he was the type of person to go right up and watch the wave?

BF: Oh yeah. He would. Of the three of us, he would've been the one to go. He used to like to do all kind stuff like climbing trees. He not only liked to, but he was good at climbing trees. His friends all used to call him "Monkey." We used to climb ourselves, everybody could pick coconuts, but we could barely hang on and push ourselves up. I wonder why, he'd just go walking up. Whenever there was a tree to climb where there was fruits and stuff, they'd send him up. I always wonder. I don't know, maybe he was, sometimes—this is only a conjecture of course, there's no way you can say—but being that the Korean War came after that, he would have been prime to be in the war.

WN: What do you remember about afterwards? I mean, did the teachers talk to you folks about anything, or the principal? How soon did you go back to school, do you remember?

BF: I think we stayed out almost the whole month of April.

WN: And you were a senior, by then?

BF: I was a junior then. I had a older brother [Takeyoshi Fujimoto] who was a senior. We went back to school. Somehow we managed to finish up. I remember the Red Cross coming talking to us, you know. See if anything can be done. What can they do, eh? Of course, just tell 'em, as far as they know, everything had been done, what has to be done. Funeral was taken care of, stuff like that. That's the only thing in school I can remember. I don't even remember who



took over the principal, whether (Clarence Ferdun) was there, whether he finished up the school year or not. He probably did, I'm not sure. [Laupāhoehoe School principal Clarence R. Ferdun left in September, 1946 for a position as DOE field assistant for East Hawai'i.]

We managed to finish up the year. I don't know who it was, [but somebody] was talking about their graduation. They said that their graduation was a little assembly thing [during] schooltime, they called a school assembly, and they had a little program and passed out the diplomas. That class was the one class that never had a graduation ceremony. One of the girls in the class was telling me this very recently.

WN: Okay, so then you graduated from high school, '47, right?

BF: Yeah.

WN: And then what happened after that?

BF: [Nineteen] forty-seven, I was trying to figure out a way for me to go to school, University [of Hawai'i], and then Hilo College [now University of Hawai'i at Hilo] opened up that year. That was the first year they opened. At Old Lyman Hall, they used to call it, up in town where the Boys [and Girls] Club is now. I went to take a full load, used to commute every day from Ninole, got on the bus. By then we had a car, so the days that I had a late class, I used to drive in. It was such a situation that the day class was a math class, which was required. The instructor was an engineer in town because they didn't have a math teacher. It was one class. He used to come after work. So 4:30 we started our class, and got through at 5:30, no way the bus going home. So two of us kind of car pool kind of thing. Finished one year, and somehow, towards the end of the year, I got sick—just final exam time, I was in the hospital for a little while, couple of weeks. And after, I got well enough, went back. Couple of the instructors said, "Oh, we'll let you make up." I managed to get credit for my freshman courses. The following year, they didn't have enough courses for me to go full-time, so I go part-time to school. Every other day kind of thing.

WN: What did you want to do?

BF: I was an ag[riculture] major. It was one of the things that I used to do in high school, and I just continued that. I'd met my wife [Matsue Uratani Fujimoto] the second year. Oh, I stayed out one semester, then the second semester, I went back. But by then, I decided I should go to work. The days when I wasn't going to school, I was working for the [Hakalau Plantation Company], summer job cutting cane. Did that full time after the second year [of school in 1949]. And two years later [in 1951], a [crop log] laboratory job opened up. [C.] Brewer [and Company, Ltd.] decided to open a laboratory within the plantation, Hakalau Plantation [Company], where I used to work. I applied, I got the job. And when I went, there was only one—the supervisor was the only one there at that time. He set up the lab and opened for business. And I was the second guy. Three years later, they found out they just couldn't handle in that particular place so they moved to Pāpa'ikou. (I) stayed there for thirty-seven more years. From '54 to '92.

WN: This is for C. Brewer?

BF: Yeah.

WN: Crop log lab?

BF: That's right. They used to call 'em all kind different names. Administrators, they used to put us under C. Brewer one time—originally, they put us under Hilo Transportation, that's another subsidiary, and then they shifted us to Brewer, and then they put us under Hawaiian Sugar and then later on, to Brewer Chemical.

WN: Today it's called . . .

BF: Brewer Environmental Industries.

WN: So you started there in '51 and you retired in '92?

BF: Yeah. Spring of '92.

WN: Okay.

BF: Of course, in between, had military service.

WN: Where were you stationed at?

BF: The first time—I went twice, see. Right after I got married. I was draft bait by then, I had gone through my physical and stuff.

WN: You got married in '55?

BF: [Nineteen] fifty-five, yeah. Two months later, I was taking basic training. After basic training, I went to Korea. That was after the Korean War. The Korean War ended in '53. In spring of '56, I went there; I stayed there a year and a half. I came home, I had military obligations, reserve obligations, so I . . .

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 29-23-1-98; SIDE ONE

BF: . . . joined the [Hawai'i National] Guard over here. Stayed in the guard ten years. Ten years later, Vietnam. When the reserves were called up, I got called up again. I spent another year in Schofield [Barracks]. By then, my enlistment expired, I came home.

WN: When was this?

BF: Nineteen sixty-nine.

WN: So you never had to go to Vietnam?

BF: No. Well, I was all ready to go, my time was running out, so they just said, "Go home."

WN: Lucky.

BF: Whatever. Actually, my time would have run out the year before we were called up, but after being in for all that time, it's kind of hard for me to say that I going quit now because they going call us up or they might call us up. So I extended my enlistment for another year early in '68, (March). One month later (in May), we got called up. So I put in my last 10½ months in Schofield.

WN: I was wondering, you were right at that age when the Korean War was starting. How did you manage to stay out?

BF: By then, my father had retired. He was in his late sixties already. I was the oldest son [at home] with three younger ones below me still in school. So I got what they called a hardship deferment. When my [younger] sister graduated, my sister kind of took over. But the following year, when my brother graduated, I reported that to the draft board. My youngest brother. And that's in '53; I was twenty-three then. They reclassified me. Then in '54, I went for my physical, then one year later, they called me in.

WN: You said you were the oldest son, but the other brothers, where were they?

BF: My older brother [was] married already.

WN: They were married.

BF: Yeah, he was married.

WN: So you were like the oldest son to your father . . .

BF: Yeah. My older brother, he had a family by then.

WN: The one [who was] one year older than you?

BF: Yeah. He got married early. He had two children by then.

WN: So you have two children?

BF: Two children.

WN: How many grandchildren do you have?

BF: Two. I have two grandsons.

WN: Well, you've been volunteering a lot of your time for this Pacific Tsunami Museum. I just wanted to ask you why you do it.

BF: I don't know really how it came about. I think, gee, we were talking one time and a friend of mine, I think was Bob [Robert "Steamy"] Chow. You probably came across him.

WN: Mm hmm [yes].

BF: The Kress Store building, he [manages it]. I think it was him I was talking to. The next thing you know, somebody says, "Oh, they want to talk to people who had gone through the tsunami or had some experience with that." They couldn't think of anybody from Laupāhoehoe. So my name came up, and somehow, he gave it. They've called me off and on over the years, so I guess my name is on that list. (WN chuckles.) Not only the museum, but others too. But before, Dr. [Walter C.] Dudley, when he wrote his book [*Tsunami!*], he came, too. I don't know how I talked to him, whether here or over the phone or whatever. (After this interview, I recalled that Min Lee, coauthor, came to my home to interview me about the Laupāhoehoe tsunami.) Somehow, I'm mentioned in the book with the Laupāhoehoe people. I guess they have a pool of names. Well, if they need to know. But some people don't want to talk. My older brother, he won't talk unless you ask him directly. But his family, his children didn't know [about the Laupāhoehoe incident] until they were quite grown up already. His children went to Laupāhoehoe School also, later on. He and I talk only---when the subject comes up and you talk directly, then he'll say something, but other than that, he won't talk.

WN: You think it's important to talk about it?

BF: I would think so. If it's just for education purposes. Like now even, there's a generation of people, they talk about tsunami alert, they think it's a picnic or something. They go down to watch and stuff. Who was it, was it [former Pacific Tsunami Museum Executive Director] Susan Tissot was saying something—I heard couple of times, the last big alert they had, they had a couple of hundred people in the water on the shore waiting for the wave to come.

WN: You mean Honolulu?

BF: With the surfboard, out waiting for the wave to come. I don't know if it was here, or—one of the programs I watch. Maybe the one on "Dialog," I think.

WN: Because, when I was—this was, what, '92, I think.

BF: [Nineteen] ninety-two, '94, something like that.

WN: You know, I work at University [of Hawai'i], and then they sounded the sirens and then they said . . .

BF: Everybody go home.

WN: . . . the governor said "Everybody go home." So here we are in a safe building in Mānoa Valley, we get in our car, I pick up my kids at school. You know, safe school, not near the ocean. I pick them up, and then we figure, oh, H-1 is going to be crowded, so we go Nimitz Highway, which is right along the ocean. So here we are, stuck in traffic, right along the ocean, with tidal wave warning. That shows that . . .

BF: I understand was a terrible traffic jam.

WN: . . . nobody knew.



BF: Even here, you know.

WN: Yeah, you folks had?

BF: Guys were going up on Kumuhana Street. You know Kumuhana Street, that's the escape route. I understand that day, it was clogged. The guys live up *mauka*. Both ways, up here and Kumuhana. I remember watching that "Dialog" when they were talking to the civil defense guys. And I guess Harry Kim from civil defense was telling the guy from Honolulu, "You know what would have happened if the wave actually came? You would've been picking up bodies all over the North Shore." What can you do? The guys started blowing the siren, they picked up their [surf]board and went out to sea, waiting out at sea. Laws a little different on O'ahu, they cannot chase 'em out or something.

WN: I don't know. See, that's the thing. The last one [tsunami] was a generation ago.

BF: That's the thing, and after that, you know, all this so-called surfing community really built up, yeah.

WN: Yeah. That's right. I'm wondering now, what you knew about Laupāhoehoe. Why was it that Laupāhoehoe was affected the way it was.

BF: I think it was the direction of the wave. Because it's [Laupāhoehoe's] sticking out, and the waves came from the north.

WN: So in other words, had a point there.

BF: Yeah.

WN: Because this one came from the Aleutians, '46. Whereas in 1960, it came from Chile.

BF: Came from Chile. From the south.

WN: So Laupāhoehoe wasn't affected as much [by the 1960 tsunami]?

BF: No. From what I was told, hardly anything. Or for that matter, all the coastal [areas], Hakalau, Kolekole, you know, the places that were hit hard in '46, didn't have anything in '60. So hard to say. Must have been the direction of the wave. But Hilo got 'em both times. But even Hilo, different areas [were affected], if you think back. See, the '46 one didn't go to Waiākea peninsula, came right into [down]town. Hit the [down]town area, Shinmachi area. But Waiākea (in 1946), the peninsula was spared. [But the 19]60 one went right over the Waiākea peninsula completely into Waiākea town, what used to be Waiākea town.

WN: So Waiākea town as well as downtown [Hilo] for the 1960.

BF: Shinmachi took it both times.

WN: Yeah. But talking to people in Keaukaha, they didn't get it in '60 'cause they are more south.

BF: They're further south, that's why. I keep thinking how come. It must be just the way the wave

came in. The direction, in the different way.

**WN:** Well, I guess they've done a lot of research since then, and maybe the next one, maybe they'll be able to tell us, you know, where. . . .

**BF:** Hopefully, there's no next one.

**WN:** Yeah, yeah.

**BF:** But obviously, you're sticking your head in the sand if you say there's no next one. As (Dr.) Dudley says, "It's not if, it's when."

**WN:** Well, okay, we'll stop now. Thank you very much.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

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**Volume I**

**Center for Oral History  
Social Science Research Institute  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

**April 2000**