

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Minerva Saiki Hayakawa

*"[My uncle] called me up. He went down. . . . They told him before he reached the spot, 'Everything's gone,' they told him. So then he called me and told me the damage. . . . So we went down, look. . . . But you know, when you walk down there and look at all the things, you know, 'God.' Still, what you going to do? But you'd be surprised, you know? How the people, when you have things like that happen, how they all come and they ask if there's anything they can do to help you. And like some of our suppliers on the Mainland ask if they could send you some merchandise and stuff like that, so people are real kind in that way."*

Born August 21, 1913, Minerva Kiyoko Saiki Hayakawa was the fifth of eight children. While still a young child, her father, Takaichi Rupert Saiki immigrated with his family to Hilo from Hiroshima, Japan. He attended schools in Hilo, worked at the First Bank of Hilo, and eventually, in 1913, started Hilo Rice Mill, a grocery importing and wholesaling firm.

Hayakawa's mother, Mary Forbes Saiki, was the daughter of Thomas Forbes, Jr., a former sugar plantation engineer, and Emele Kamaka'o'umi, a native Hawaiian from the Big Island. The family lived on Piopio Street when Hayakawa was born; they later moved to a home on Waianuenue Avenue.

Hayakawa attended Hilo Union School, Hilo Intermediate School, and graduated from Hilo High School in 1931. She attended and graduated from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in 1934. She returned to Hilo in 1936 and began working as a clerk at the family's Hilo Rice Mill, which was located on Kamehameha Avenue.

In 1937, she married Hiroshi Hayakawa. The couple lived in Pāpa'ikou.

At the outbreak of World War II, Takaichi Saiki was interned on the U.S. Mainland. In his absence, Minerva Hayakawa assumed management of the company, eventually becoming president.

The oral history interviews were conducted at the Hilo Rice Mill, today located on Po'okela Street in the Hilo industrial area. The business was relocated there after the 1960 tsunami destroyed the building. The 1946 waves caused some water damage to merchandise, but miraculously the building survived. Her brothers and daughter, Naomi Hayakawa, are also active in the business.

Tape No. 29-6-1-98

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Minerva Hayakawa (MH)

Hilo, Hawai'i

March 13, 1998

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

[NOTE: Also present at the interview is Naomi Hayakawa (NH), MH's daughter.]

WN: Okay, let's begin. This is an interview with Minerva Kiyoko Saiki Hayakawa on March 13, 1998 and we're at her business of Hilo Rice Mill in Hilo, Hawai'i. Interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Minerva, what I want to do today, as I said off tape, is to have you talk about your early life growing up, little bit about your education, little bit about your parents, and then get into the 1946 and 1960 tsunami experiences. And this time though, I don't want to get into the [World] War [II] period, I want to save that for the next time.

MH: (Laughs) Next time? Very optimistic.

(Laughter)

WN: Well, that's what I was saying, more incentive for you, you know? You have to stay healthy for the next time.

(Laughter)

WN: Okay, Minerva, why don't you start by, you can tell me when and where you were born.

MH: I was born in Honolulu, August 21, 1913.

WN: Okay, how come you were born in Honolulu?

MH: My mother had to take my older sister to see the doctor down there and I came at that time which was really earlier than the regular nine months. So I was born down there instead of over here.

WN: And where were your parents living at the time?

MH: Here, in Hilo.

WN: What part of Hilo?

MH: On Piopio Street. Behind the Japanese temple. (Laughs)

WN: Oh, which temple?

MH: Meisho [Daijingu Shinto Temple]. My mother owned the land over there so they were renting it from her, I mean, lease maybe, I don't know.

WN: Why don't we start by, if you can tell me something about your mom, what you remember about your mom.

MH: Well, my mother [Mary Forbes Saiki] was half Hawaiian and half Scotch. She lost her mother when she was very young so she was sent to Mauna'olu Seminary on Maui and that's where she got her education. Then when she got through over there, she went to [Territorial] Normal [and Training] School in Honolulu and she became a teacher.

WN: Where did she teach?

MH: Oh, right in Hilo. At the Hilo Union School and she taught at Waiākea Kai School. Was mostly those two schools, second grade, third graders.

WN: Did she tell you anything about her background?

MH: Not really, because she was not with her family. She was in boarding school so she doesn't talk too much [about them], and they didn't have a big family. She had one brother and one sister; the sister died very young, when she was about eighteen then she passed away. So that left her with only one brother.

WN: You said her father was Scotch? You know how and why he came over here?

MH: I don't know. I think he was an adventurer.

(Laughter)

MH: I know he came out of New Bedford, Massachusetts, my grandfather [Thomas Forbes, Sr.]. But why, I don't know. He ran away from home. I guess he wanted to seek his fortune. (Laughs) But anyway, he landed in Hawai'i and he married this Hawaiian woman [Emele Kamaka'o'umi] so therefore my mother was half-half.

WN: Did you ever meet your grandparents?

MH: My grandfather lived with us for a while after he was retired and whatnot. He lived on the Mainland for a while and he wanted to come back here, so he came back and he stayed with us.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

MH: You see, my Hawaiian grandmother, we don't know her, never did. But my Scotch

grandfather, he lived with us for a while after he had retired. He worked for the [Waiākea Mill Company] plantation, he was an engineer on the plantation. But then he married this woman, his second marriage, and they moved to the Mainland but then he got a divorce so he came back.

NH: His second wife was Portuguese.

WN: Okay, so a little bit about your dad.

MH: My dad [Takaichi Rupert Saiki] was born in Japan but he came with his parents to Hawai'i as a young child and he went to the Hilo Boarding School and Hilo Union School but that's as far as he went. I don't think they had high school and intermediate schools at that time. But his mother worked for the plantation manager and so the plantation manager wanted to send him to the Mainland, to school, but his mother didn't want him to go. She felt he was her only child and she didn't want him to be that far away and on his own. So instead, these *Haoles*, the Kennedy family, they controlled a lot of the businesses. They didn't own them, they had a piece of the pie and whatnot.

WN: Kennedys?

MH: Kennedys. So then they put my father to work in the bank. Was the First Bank of Hilo at that time. So he worked there all his life.

NH: He worked there until he got interned [during World War II].

MH: Yeah, during the war he was interned and so. . . .

WN: Yeah, you can, Naomi, feel that you can always join in, you know. You don't have to talk softly either.

(Laughter)

NH: No, I'm telling her he worked there until he was interned, and after he was interned then he came to . . .

MH: Yeah, but he didn't come [to the family business, Hilo Rice Mill] and work, he came to read his newspaper. He used to come and every morning he used to walk around town, stop and see all his old friends and chat with them. Then he'd come back to the office and read the paper, then was time to go home. (Laughs)

NH: He always used to look at the accounts receivable and go, "Tsk, tsk, tsk." He'd make remarks about accounts that owe us money but didn't pay.

WN: That's when you were running the business? Okay, well next time we'll get into your father, the business, and so forth. I want to talk about you growing up as a little girl, what kinds of things did you do to have fun?

MH: Well, we had a large family, six girls and two boys. And my mother owned a piece of property right behind the Meisho church. So we lived behind there, and as far as land, I mean,



she had several acres up there. We could play anywhere in our yard, but we could not go out of our yard. If anybody wanted to play with us, they'd come and play at our house. We were living in Piopio Street, but actually the neighborhood wasn't that good. So she didn't want us to be outside, like that. She didn't want us to go out to other people's homes unless [they were] friends that she really knew, then she would take us to the friend's house, you know, and then we'd stay there and she'd come and pick us up certain time to bring us home. And being that we had eight children and she was teaching school, she couldn't do the washing and the house cleaning and taking care of the kids and all of that, so we always had maids. So we never had to do too much as kids, but as we grew older she would assign us chores. This week, your turn, you set the table. And you, in the kitchen, you help maid clean the vegetables. (Chuckles) Stuff like that. We had to do our share, but easy things, you know.

WN: Were all eight of you in the house at the same time or did the older ones get married and move out?

MH: Yeah, they did, I mean, when they got married they all left home, but up to then, we all lived [together].

WN: So you were telling me earlier that your mother was strict?

MH: My mother was strict.

WN: In what other ways was she strict?

MH: Well, [certain things had to be] just so. I mean, we were kids but we didn't use paper napkins, we used cloth napkins. That kind of stuff and everything, "Please." But we didn't have to eat everything on the table, we chose what we wanted to eat. She'd say, "Okay, now what do you want?"

And then we'd say, "Oh, we want this meat, we want peas, we want some rice."

And then she'd say, "Well, what about this?"

"Nah, I don't want that." And you didn't have to eat that. She was very strict in some ways and yet in other ways, she was lax. I mean, like letting you choose what you want to eat.

Most [mothers say], "Give me your plate," poomp, poomp, "here."

(Laughter)

WN: And she had someone, a maid cook?

MH: Well, one time we had a Korean cook, a man. And every afternoon he used to take off. He would prepare everything for dinner but he wouldn't cook it. And then he'd feed us lunch and then after that he'd take his shower. He had a Panama hat, he used to put it on and he used to go downtown. (Laughs) But he had to come back in time to get us dinner. And that's all he did was cook for us.

WN: Did other people in your neighborhood have maids too?

- MH: No, not when we were young, later on we moved out of that area because you know, the neighborhood wasn't that good. We used to have a lane that was right next to our house and all these hoodlums used to use that to go down to the Wailoa River. They used to go swimming and fishing and stuff like that. But real bums, so we moved out of there. As we grew up little bit, my mother said, no, she didn't want us [to stay there]. We had six girls and whatnot and she says, "And those hoodlums walking down the lane right next to the house? Better move out of here." So we moved out of there and we moved up to town.
- WN: What nationalities lived in your neighborhood?
- MH: Japanese mostly, there were few Portuguese. In fact, there were few Chinese.
- NH: Got to be Hawaiian.
- MH: Yeah, had some Hawaiians, we had Tutu Kaole over there.
- WN: Tutu Kaole?
- MH: We don't know if she was our real relative or not, but it was Tutu Kaole.
- WN: Was your house any bigger than the neighbors'?
- MH: Let me tell you something now, we had two houses, and you know, as far as acreage, land, and what, we had several acres. But we had two houses. One house was a complete house, had bedrooms and bathrooms and kitchen and everything. The other house didn't have kitchen. It was bedrooms. We slept in that house (chuckles) and we ate in this other house. So we were kind of living in two houses at the same time.
- WN: How far away were the houses from each other?
- MH: Oh, not too far, maybe from here to that.
- WN: About twenty feet?
- MH: Yeah. But I think we were the only people who lived like that. (Laughs) It was good fun.
- WN: So you said that you folks couldn't go out too much, you folks had to stay and then your friends would come over. What would you folks do?
- MH: Oh, play *pio*, play whatever it was in season, you know, bean bag certain time and you play jacks certain time and other times, top and whatever was the fad.
- WN: What is *pio*?
- NH: *Kamapio*.
- MH: You don't know that?
- WN: That's the one with the stick?

MH: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

WN: What was it, *kamapio*? You know why? Because people from other places, other islands, called it "peewee." Do you ever call it that?

NH: No, but this, *kamapio* was two sticks, right? It's not with the ball, you know.

WN: Yeah, right, right, right. Why don't you describe what *kamapio* was.

MH: One shorter stick . . .

WN: About six inches long?

MH: . . . and one longer one.

WN: About twelve inches long?

MH: And the short one, you [sharpened] the two edges. Before you hit that stick, you got to say, "*Kamapio*." If you don't say, "*Kamapio*" you lose it. So you say, "*Kamapio!*" Then you hit that stick. You know, you take the shorter stick and you hit it with the long stick. And they would be out there, the other guys, trying to catch that stick. It was kind of dangerous (WN chuckles) but when they catch [the short stick, it was their] turn to go hit. Then, if nobody catches, it falls down over there. Then you go over there and you take the stick that you used to hit [and measure how many stick lengths the shorter stick was hit].

WN: Oh, okay. You measure?

MH: Yeah, but everybody had his own way of measuring, you know? So if you make like this [lay the long stick closely end to end] you have plenty [stick lengths].

(Laughter)

MH: If they catch that stick, your turn *pau*. So the next person, the guy who caught that stick, is his turn. But because the ends were sharp, and there you are trying to hit that stick, and then everybody trying to catch, was a little dangerous, no? But we survived so it was all right. And the thing is, you hit the stick and then if nobody catches, then you go with your longer stick and you measure how far [the shorter stick traveled].

WN: How far you hit it? Yeah.

MH: But [before all] that, you hit the end of the pointed stick [which is on the ground] and the thing flies up. And you see how many times you can hit the stick [in the air], you count. I forget how the pointing is. But the last [hit in the air] you would hit [out to the field] because the farther you hit it, you measure from where you hit it to that place [it lands]. So if you stretch your stick out long, you know, you don't get too many [stick lengths]. But if you make it short like this, well, you know, [you can lay the stick] plenty times. So the one who had the most [stick lengths]. well, you won, yeah?

WN: And then the more times you hit it in the air, how does that help you?

MH: You just like multiply.

WN: Oh, you multiply. So if you hit 'em like three times up in the air, and then whack 'em, and then you measure 'em, and then, say it's ten stick lengths, you go ten times three? And so thirty is your. . . . Is that right? Oh.

MH: We used to play all kind games. We used to play *pio*, and we used to draw that circle and steal stones. You know steal stones?

WN: No.

(Laughter)

MH: You put stones in there.

NH: We used to play that.

WN: Oh, did you play *kamapio*?

NH: No. Used to play steal stones, though.

MH: See, you draw a circle and you put some stones in there and you have . . .

NH: Two teams.

MH: Two teams, yeah.

NH: And one circle.

MH: Yeah. And this was my circle and that was her circle but you have teams, see? So you going out and you going try to steal the stones from the other guy and bring them back. But some of your teammates have to stay back and watch because they have to guard that stone. So they go over there, try (MH makes noise by slapping her hand.) (Laughs)

WN: You hit their hand?

NH: No, if you get caught, you came their prisoner, right?

MH: Yeah, and then you had to go to prison.

NH: In the jail. There was another circle like that was the jail, then they had to rescue.

MH: They had to go over there and rescue you. That's the only way you could come out of jail. But we used to play all kind.

WN: You had a line, right? And so this is your team on one side and your team on this side and then, okay. Yeah, we played that. We didn't call it that though.

MH: Well, *kamapio* it was to us.

- NH: No, but that wasn't *kamapio*, that was steal stone.
- MH: Oh, steal stone, yeah. And had some of the kind games we used to make up our own, I don't think anybody else had. We used to, you know, they used to smoke tobacco in that bag, yeah?
- WN: Oh, Bull Durham.
- MH: Bull Durham. But we used to save the Bull Durham bags, and you stuff 'em with grass, and then you hit.
- NH: You throw it to hit the other person.
- WN: Oh, you throw it at people? You used that for beanbag too?
- MH: No, beanbag was beanbag. And jacks was jacks. And knife was knife. (Laughs)
- NH: Yeah, we used to play with knife. (NH laughs.)
- WN: Did you have a big yard?
- MH: Well, if we didn't have enough of our own yard, we used our neighbors' yards. And they had, on both sides, they had big yards. Of course the old lady would come out, music teacher below us.
- NH: When you were [on] Waiānuenu [Street].
- MH: Yeah.
- WN: You're on Piopio?
- MH: Yeah, when we were real young, but after that we moved up to Waiānuenu.
- WN: Do you know about how old you were?
- MH: Oh, I don't know, but. . . .
- NH: Were you in grammar school, or intermediate?
- MH: No, no, no, was not intermediate, was way before that.
- NH: Was grammar school because you went to Hilo Union.
- MH: Yeah, but we went Hilo Union no matter what, we went where Grandma [i.e., MH's mother] taught.
- WN: Oh, I see.
- MH: So she teach Hilo Union, we all go Hilo Union.



WN: Did you have your mom as a teacher?

MH: Yes, second grade.

WN: Ah, how was that?

MH: Bad.

WN: Why?

MH: Because I felt she didn't treat me fairly. I figured, if that kid could get an A, why couldn't I get an A? I wasn't as stupid as them. (Laughs)

WN: Did your sisters have her, too?

MH: No, I don't think so.

WN: Oh, you were the only one?

MH: Yeah, she taught the second grade, that's why and . . .

WN: Oh, they were older already?

MH: Then when I went to fifth grade, I had my aunt.

(Laughter)

WN: How was she?

MH: Well, she was strict, but she was fair, you know? I tell my mother, "Oh, no matter how hard I work, you don't give me an A."

"Well, you know you can do better!"

"Oh man!"

WN: Oh, sounds tough to have your mother and your aunty.

MH: Yeah. It's hard, I guess it's hard for me, it's hard for them too, you know. But we survived.

WN: So you know, your mother, you know, she was part-Hawaiian and had maids, she was very strict with you folks, and she was a teacher. Tell me a little bit about your dad. What kind of a person was he?

MH: My mother was very strict and she was not this kind that created a lot of fun, you know. My father was just the opposite. Oh, you went anyplace with him, you had a good time. (Laughs) You got anything you wanted; Ma, oh no. But him, he didn't care, he broke all the rules. When we were in intermediate and high school like that, Hilo in those days, there wasn't anything to do nighttime. So we chanced, we asked them, "We can have our friends come

over?"

"Yeah, sure, sure. Have them come over."

Then maybe we'd be playing cards then he would say, "You kids want to eat saimin?"

"Yeah, but where the saimin?"

"Oh, never mind, come, come." Pile us all in the car, we used to go down Shinmachi and they used to have those little wagons on the street. All us over there eating saimin. (Laughs) And you know, like, he would take us to all the parades, and after that you go watch horse races. In the night, take you to fireworks, Sundays they had fireworks down Mo'ohau Park, he'll take you down there. Fourth of July parade we had to go, so he was the one who took us around. All the fun part was him. My mother was the stern one, the one that you mind your manners. So in a way it was good.

WN: Good balance, I guess.

MH: Yeah. You knew what you were supposed to do and not do, and stuff like that. Whether you did it or not, well, that was something else. But at least you knew what was right and what was wrong. But all-in-all, I think we had a very good life, all of us, eight kids.

WN: Tell me a little bit about Shinmachi, the saimin carts. How did that work?

MH: They would have, this guy would have a small vintage store, hardly anything in there. But over the weekends, I don't know if he did it during the week, I doubt it. But weekends, they had this little cart, the wooden cart, that he would park outside on the street, off the sidewalk. He would have boiling water in there. In that small little store he had tables, if you wanted, you could go in and eat at the tables, but we didn't. We just sat in the car and he would bring the stuff. We would eat the noodles. So we would go, if we in our pajamas, we wouldn't change, we'd go in our pajamas. (Laughs) We stay in the car and eat our noodles.

WN: Would you eat standing up?

MH: No. In the car.

WN: Oh, you eat in the car.

MH: Or if you too uncomfortable, he had a small table, maybe two small tables that you could get out of the car and go inside and eat. But we never did, we just ate in the car. But my father would do things like that, you know. "Oh, you folks want to go eat saimin? Let's go!" Go out.

NH: Tell about the time he had the car where only two people could sit and everybody had to take turns riding.

MH: Oh yeah. Well, you know we had eight children in our family. And one time, I don't know what got into his head. We always had to have big cars, like we had a Hudson, that seven-seater, you know. Because too many kids. At one time we had that. At another time, we had a racer but only two people could fit in that racer. (Chuckles) So what do you do with the eight

kids? Everybody wanted to go for a ride. So he used to take turns, "Okay, you two, get in there." He would take us for a ride, not too far. Just go ride around, turn around, come home. "Okay, you two get out." Two more go in. (WN laughs.) He would go again until he took all of us. But those are the things that no other father would do. You know, who's going to take two by two? But he used to. He was the fun guy. My mother was the disciplinarian.

WN: So your father was originally from Hiroshima?

MH: Yeah.

WN: Yeah. How was his English?

MH: Fine. He went to Hilo Boarding School.

WN: Oh, okay. He came as a young boy.

MH: Yeah.

WN: Did he speak Japanese to you at all?

MH: No. When we were little we knew Japanese because we had Japanese maids and like that. But as we grew older we just forgot it because we never used it.

WN: So what was school like besides having your mother, you know, as a teacher. Did you enjoy school?

MH: Yeah. I don't know, sometimes I think we had preferential treatment. (Laughs)

WN: Oh yeah?

MH: You know, all the teachers, they know that my mother is a teacher in the same school and I think we got away with some things. (Chuckles) But it was all right.

WN: When people ask you when you were small, "What's your nationality?" What did you say?

MH: Japanese, Hawaiian, *Haole*. They look at us, they go, "Where the *Haole*?"

(Laughter)

WN: Do you think people treat you differently [because] you're not full Japanese or full Hawaiian?

MH: No, no, because we were so much better off than most of the other Japanese children. Because they were plantation, all of them plantation. You know, they didn't own businesses and stuff like that. So we, financially, were way better off than any of them. I remember that we used to have these kids from 'Amaulu and they used to eat rice balls. Every day they had rice balls and, I guess, little bit *okazu*, I don't know, because they would sit by themselves. And they used to wrap their food in newspaper. So you know how some of the print comes off on the, you know. But I guess they had no other paper. And then they used to hold the paper up like this and eat.

WN: Hold the paper up?

MH: Yeah, the newspaper. You know, hold . . .

WN: Why did they do that?

MH: Because they didn't want us to see what kind of lunch they had.

WN: Oh, so they would sort of hide the rice ball.

MH: I don't think it was the rice ball so much as the rest of the food, you know? I don't think they had too much on the *okazu* side.

WN: And what did you folks have for lunch?

MH: (Laughs) My mother used to make potato salad and sandwiches and all that kind of stuff and she'd put 'em in bowls, regular bowls. Didn't have plastic in those days so you bring dishes and you had to bring home that thing. Oh, boy! (Chuckles) But we had better lunches than anybody else. But we used to share, you know, we used to ask those kids, "You folks want?" And we used to give. That was when the schools didn't have cafeterias. But after, you know, when we were still in grade school, they started having cafeterias. Of course, plenty of the kids couldn't buy cafeteria food. Some of them did. You miss out. (Laughs)

WN: Sounds like you had good lunch. What was a typical dinner at your house?

MH: Well, all depends, if you having chicken you either had roast chicken or you had fried chicken. But you had rice or potatoes. You know, you had one starch, rice or potatoes. But you had to have vegetables, salad. And a cooked vegetable and dessert. And of course we had some kind of beverage.

And in those days, they used to bring in *Haole* schoolteachers from the Mainland. They were short, they said they didn't have enough teachers. And I don't know, my sister, the younger sister, she was always underweight, always. And they used to have the card, you know, they weigh you and stuff like that and the white card is overweight, blue card is when you little underweight, red card, you way underweight. My sister was always a red card. She never got anything else but a red card. And one of the Mainland teachers went and told her, "You better go home and tell your mother to feed you better because you always underweight, always underweight, red card." And the principal of the school was a *Haole* teacher, a very good friend of my mother's. In fact, her sister, the principal's sister, was our dressmaker. So my mother went to school and she went and told the principal that the teacher had told the kids, her kids, to come home and tell her she better prepare better meals and whatnot. Now the sister who was a dressmaker, when she used to come to sew for us, she would come to the house and she would eat lunch with us, so she knew what kind of food we ate.

When my mother went back and told the principal what the teacher had said, boy, she called that teacher in, she says, "Don't you ever tell any of these children to go home and tell their mother to feed them better, because they're one of the best-fed kids in this town."

(Laughter)

She says, "I know, because my sister goes over there to sew for them and she eats with the family." (Laughs) She got a good scolding, this *Haole* teacher from the Mainland, oh boy.

NH: But when you folks were growing up, you never ate Japanese food too much, it was all *Haole* kind food, yeah?

MH: Yeah, because we had Korean cook and then we had Portuguese cook and all like that, and once in a while we would have Japanese.

WN: Did your mother tell them what to cook, do you think?

MH: Yeah, mostly. But then if they could cook something Portuguese style, they say, "Oh, you don't want me to make it this way?"

And so mother, "Yeah, okay, okay, try it."

NH: But I mean, was mostly *Haole* food, no? Not Japanese food.

MH: Oh yeah.

WN: Did the maids and cooks live there, at your house?

MH: Depends, some did and some didn't. Some just came in the morning and left after dinner. But we had a few of them who lived at the house.

WN: What did you like studying at school?

MH: I didn't like studying, period. (Laughs) Oh, I don't know. I liked math. I hated history. I always felt why should I go to study all of that and memorize who did what and when and whatnot. If I want that information I can just go pick up the history book and open the page. I don't have to put it up here [i.e., her head]. So I didn't like history. But math. And science, depends what kind.

WN: What, you like life science, biology-kind science or physics-kind science or chemistry?

MH: I liked chemistry but I wasn't very good at it because I was afraid to light the Bunsen burner. (Laughs) Good thing we worked in pairs, you know? So my partner always lit the Bunsen burner. (Laughs)

WN: When you were a little girl, did you have any idea of what you wanted to be?

MH: My father worked at the bank and I . . .

WN: What bank did he work at?

MH: Well, first it was the First Bank of Hilo. Then, but later on, that was taken over by Bank of Hawai'i.

WN: I see.



MH: I always kept saying, "I'm going to be a cashier, I'm going to be a cashier." I think that's the only word I associated with the bank, cashier. I don't think I really knew what it meant, but you know.

WN: So you went to Hilo High School?

MH: Yup.

WN: How was that?

MH: Was all right. School was no problem.

WN: Apparently you did well enough to go to the UH [University of Hawai'i], yeah?

MH: Yeah, but you don't have to do too well to get in there.

(Laughter)

WN: Well, lot of the girls or women your age didn't go to college, and you were able to go.

MH: Well, my father gave us a choice. You didn't have to go to the university if you didn't want to, but he wanted you to have more education than a high school diploma. So if you wanted to go to commercial school, fine, you go. There was only one sister who did not want to go to school, but all the rest of us went.

WN: So was it your father the one that was giving you these choices about school, or your mother?

MH: My father. I'm sure my mother wanted us to go too because she herself had gone to normal school, you know. But it was my father who was more anxious that we go.

WN: So you moved, in the meantime, you moved from Piopio to Waiānuenue?

MH: You know where the [Hawai'i Public] Library is? Right . . .

WN: What was it like over there?

MH: Oh, we had *Haoles* living across the street, we had part-Hawaiians living above us, we had *Haoles* above that, we had the judge live at the corner of the block and so on, you know.

WN: So it seemed like it was a higher-income area.

MH: And the kids were all decently dressed, decently brought up. Some of them, ai-yai-yai, the kids in those days, I guess both parents had to work, some of them. Because our house was always full of kids, you know, bring home, "I going bring home my friend, you know."

"Okay."

Friday nights, oh, how many friends, playing cards. So we had a good life.

WN: Okay, so 1923, you said that, I'm sorry, 1936, after Hilo High School, after the university, you started working Hilo Rice Mill.

MH: I did social work for one year in Honolulu.

WN: Oh, was that what you majored in?

MH: No!

WN: Oh, what did you major in?

MH: Business. (Laughs)

WN: Oh, business. So what kind of social work did you do?

MH: Well, you know, in those days they had FERA [Federal Emergency Relief Administration], government agency. And so people come in, they needed help, we would not give them cash, they had to go and put in so many hours on [a] project. So we would set up a budget for them. If you had lot of dependents, you worked every day, forty hours a week maybe. If you only had one or two children, well, your budget might be less than the next guy. So I did one year of that. Then I said, "Aw, the heck with this, I'm going home." So I came home.

NH: Didn't Grandpa used to tell you to come home?

MH: Right along he was telling me come home because I was the only one away.

WN: Let me turn the tape over.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: So you didn't enjoy working there?

MH: I didn't like that work. You know, to me, the questions you have to ask them, you pry into their affairs so darn much and everything else. I [thought], doggone it, if somebody ask me those same questions, I'd tell them where to go.

(Laughter)

WN: You mean like the questions I'm asking you now?

MH: Yeah!

(Laughter)

WN: Oops!

MH: But you know, I mean, we had to make home calls, go visit where they lived and how they lived and all, I didn't like that.

WN: Did you always have in mind that you're going to come back to Hilo?

MH: I figured eventually I would get into business.

WN: I'm wondering, did you go away to university to study business with the idea of eventually working for Hilo Rice Mill?

MH: Still at it [working at Hilo Rice Mill], don't know when to quit.

WN: So you started in 1936 at age twenty-three. What did you do?

MH: What did I do? I did everything under the sun. I packed *iriko*, you know *iriko*? Used to come in big boxes, I don't know, fifty pounds or what. I packed *iriko*. Plus I worked in the office too, paid the bills and sent out the statements and all that kind of stuff and did most of the book work over there. But the spare time, anything that had to be done. Even I used to put wine. (Chuckles)

WN: Wine?

MH: Wine used to come [from Japan] in these big kegs and you have to bottle the thing, you know. I was in the basement bottling that stuff. So you ask me what I didn't do would be easier.

(Laughter)

WN: So at that time, Hilo Rice Mill, I guess, was always wholesaling, where you buy things in bulk from Japan?

MH: Japan. I think the duty was high, if it came all packaged [individually]; I think that we had to pay more duty or something. So to get away from that, they created one job to go fill in.

WN: And where was Hilo Rice Mill located?

MH: Right across Mo'ohau Park [on Kamehameha Avenue, near Ponahawai Street]. And the tidal wave took it.

WN: Well, I said earlier that I was going to skip the war period, so 1946, tell me about what happened that day.

MH: You mean the tidal wave?

WN: Yeah, '46 tidal wave.

MH: Oh, which one was that? The one that took place . . .

NH: The one [when]we were [living] in Pāpa'ikou.

MH: So we didn't know until the next morning.

NH: No, you didn't know—well, when you were coming into town it was taking place.

MH: There was a girl who we used to pick up on our way in. We were living up Pāpa'ikou. So every morning she would wait for us and we'd pick her up and bring her into town. And then when we picked her up, she says, "Oh, I think there's a tidal wave going on, the ocean is acting funny."

And when we got to town, before we got into town, the cop says, "No, you can't go here, you got to go up. Tidal wave."

WN: So you were trying to get—oh, you were living in Pāpa'ikou, you picked up somebody, and you were going into town. Where were you headed?

MH: Downtown, to Hilo Rice Mill.

WN: Oh. (MH laughs.) What about the person you picked up, where was she going?

MH: I used to drop her off right in town and somebody else would pick her up and then they would go to their destination.

WN: So you don't really know what happened as far as the waves are concerned. You saw the waves?

MH: I ran away from the wave. See, that was in the morning, just about when the people were going to work, so when I reached town and the cop said, "No, you can't go down here, you going have to use the upper road." I went across town on the upper road. And then I saw my employees at the corner, standing over there, so I parked the car and I went there.

And then they tell me, "What we going do?"

I said, "I don't know, the cop said cannot go down there, take the backroads." I came as far as I could and so I said, "Well, we just hang around here and see what happens."

So we were standing at the corner over there and talking and waiting. And we waited and we waited and nothing happened, so we said, "Ah, let's go down, I think *pau*. No more tidal wave already." We were walking down to our store, we almost got there. "Coming!" And then when we looked up at the ocean there's this black mass just coming, you know? We didn't look a second time, we turned around and ran up the hill, Ponahawai [Street] hill. But, oh man . . .

And there was a railroad track that was right next to our place. But you know how the ties are, the spacing is kind of odd, yeah? You know when you take a step, you either this side of the tie or you that side of the tie, so when you want to run on that thing, it's a queer space like that. Oh, and me trying to run up the hill on that thing.

WN: On the tracks. Because the tracks went along the waterfront.

MH: The waterfront.

- WN: And then it turned [toward *mauka*], yeah?
- MH: No, but then this one---they had one [that ran parallel to the] waterfront, then had one at right angle [perpendicular] that used to go—it wasn't used for long time—but it used to go back up the hill.
- NH: And used to go to the gas . . .
- MH: Yeah, and the [Hilo] Gas Company was right behind us so they used to deliver the tankers over there and like that.
- WN: So you folks were running toward *mauka* on the tracks. How come you ran on the tracks?
- MH: Because that was the nearest way to get going up [the hill] instead of sideways [i.e., parallel to the ocean]. (Chuckles)
- WN: You couldn't go like off the track, on the side the track, and go running?
- MH: No, because some [sections of] the track, get nothing underneath, only the braces. No more ground. I mean, maybe have to cross the stream or something. But anyway, there I was on the track running up and that voice, "Come on! Come on!"
- WN: So when you saw that black mass, I mean, was it really close or. . . .
- MH: Well, [Hilo Rice Mill] was located right on Kam[ehameha] Avenue, the *mauka* side though. And at Mo'ohau Park right across, the black mass was right hitting the land already. So that wasn't too far, you know. That's from Kam[ehameha] Avenue down to the beach, the ocean.
- WN: So you running, now did the water catch up to you?
- MH: Oh no. Oh no! (Laughs) But when I got at the top of the hill, I was so tired I just squatted right on the side of the road and I sat over there. (Laughs)
- WN: And your home at that time was Waiānuenu, oh no, I'm sorry, Pāpa'ikou.
- MH: Pāpa'ikou.
- WN: So your parents weren't in any danger?
- MH: My parents, they didn't live over there. My parents lived Keaukaha.
- WN: Your parents were living Keaukaha at the time?
- NH: So actually we didn't know what happened to them.
- WN: Yeah, how did it affect them?
- MH: Well, actually nothing to their own place.



- NH: Because they had this bomb shelter in the front, big bomb shelter which was like a huge—it was in a hole. In this big depression that they had built this bomb shelter during the war and the water went inside there. Because you know, they kind of lived across the street from the ocean, the water went inside there. But what happened was the road got washed away so they couldn't come out. So who went . . .
- MH: Uncle Tak.
- NH: Oh, yeah, my uncle had to go with I don't know who, and they had to go in the rowboat across where the road was washed away to go get them and bring them out.
- MH: All kinds of things we went through. (Laughs)
- WN: So you ran up, you're at the top, could you see anything from up there?
- MH: You see everything from up there. (Laughs)
- WN: Yeah, so what do you remember seeing?
- MH: I didn't see very much after that. I just sat over there and after that time I think I wasn't even looking at that thing. Oh, boy. But when you see the—nothing left.
- NH: That time was, the building was [still] there [i.e., not washed away by the wave].
- WN: How soon after did you go down to the Hilo Rice Mill to see? When did you feel safe to go down?
- MH: Well, you really don't feel safe. You go, but you had one eye on the ocean. And you leave the doors and everything open so you can just go.
- WN: So you went down and what did you see?
- MH: Well, which one we talking about?
- WN: [Nineteen] forty-six. This is the one that your building was okay, right? It wasn't destroyed.
- NH: Yeah, all the water went in the basement.
- MH: Yeah, one [year, the water] went all in the basement, [another year,] the whole thing went. [The 1946 tsunami caused some water damage to Hilo Rice Mill; the 1960 tsunami destroyed the entire building.]
- NH: Yeah, that's 1946. So what was it like?
- MH: Well, the water went into the building; we were not flat on the ground. And [the water was] maybe about this high from the floor.
- WN: About three feet high?

- MH: Yeah. So in order to clean up that mess, we had to take everything off. So we touched every case that was in that warehouse.
- WN: When you say basement, that means there were two levels? Two floors?
- MH: Yeah.
- WN: So everything in the basement was soaked. What about the second floor?
- MH: Well, the second floor, that's the one that had about that much.
- WN: Oh, second floor was three feet high? So basement was totally damp, or flooded, so you had to take everything out.
- MH: But I tell you though, I don't know which tidal wave or which what, but give the union guys credit too though.
- NH: That was 1960.
- MH: Yeah, but that's why I'm telling you, I don't know which one, but the union, every time the union on one side and we on the other side, yeah? We [Hilo Rice Mill] were not unionized, but you know, as the businessman is always on one side, the union the other side.
- WN: So after '46 when your place got flooded and you took everything out, and then so how soon after that could you go back in business?
- MH: We were back in business almost immediately because we had some stuff on the way.
- NH: Nineteen forty-six is when you had to clean up that place. We weren't out of business, we just cleaned it up.
- MH: See, I'm getting all mixed up.
- WN: Yeah, maybe '46 little bit too long ago, yeah?
- MH: Yeah.
- NH: Nineteen forty-six was when the sand went into everything and you had to clean up that building but you guys never really closed.
- MH: The humbug thing was you had to move every single thing.
- NH: But you didn't really close.
- MH: Well, we had stuff all over the place too, as things came in, you know.
- WN: The building was made of wood?
- MH: Mm hmm [yes].

- WN: And you were saying that your building was one of the few buildings in that area to survive that '46 one?
- NH: No.
- WN: Oh yeah, there were others. I know Okino Hotel [next door] was destroyed, yeah?
- NH: Yeah.
- MH: And we were right next to them.
- WN: Why do you think Okino Hotel was destroyed and you folks weren't?
- MH: I don't know.
- NH: Well, for one thing, the building [Hilo Rice Mill] was set further back, right? I mean, wasn't right on the road [i.e., Kamehameha Avenue], you know. I mean, there was a parking lot in the front. So the building was not right up to the street, it was set further back, whereas Okino Hotel was right up on to the street, right?
- MH: After that, we put up the building in front and we were renting it out to other people.
- WN: Now, the Cow Palace [i.e., American Factors Grocery Warehouse] was right in front of you folks?
- MH: No, Cow Palace was down.
- NH: Was to the side [on the ocean side of Kamehameha Avenue].
- WN: Cow Palace was to the side?
- NH: I mean, in front, but off to and diagonal, yeah?
- WN: Okay. So you folks were back in business right away?
- MH: Yeah, not full-scale, but you know, as the stuff was coming in, everybody need merchandise. So you sell what you have and wait for the next batch to come in. But the government, which one, the government . . .
- NH: Nineteen sixty.
- WN: Yeah, let's talk about 1960 then.
- MH: Oh, any one to me, it's . . .
- WN: Yeah, it's hard, yeah?
- MH: Yeah, I cannot say this was this one, and this one was that one, and that one was this one.

WN: The '60 one was at night, yeah?

NH: Mm hmm [yes].

WN: Where were you when that one hit?

MH: Home. (Laughs)

WN: This was in Pāpa'ikou?

NH: No.

WN: Oh, where were you living?

MH: Punahale Street, by the jail, just below it.

WN: Was that in the danger zone?

MH: No.

WN: Oh, okay.

NH: But that one, we had warning, so.

WN: Yeah, well, what kind of warning did you have?

NH: Civil defense had warned us.

MH: Down Chile had earthquake, and if it comes, it'll be about certain time. So you take out all your cash and all your books and you know, have your trucks and all the cars and take them out and park them on the hill someplace.

WN: So you did all that? Took the cash out and took the trucks out?

MH: Yeah, and all our machines. You know, your calculators and that kind of stuff.

WN: Your forklift and things?

NH: We didn't have forklift at that time.

MH: Yeah, because we had wooden floor. But my accounts receivable, that's what I got. (Laughs)

WN: Accounts receivable?

MH: Payrolls, never mind.

(Laughter)

MH: Let them come chase.

- WN: Okay, so you took what you need, yeah?
- MH: What I could.
- WN: How did you feel at the time you doing all that?
- MH: You know, you have to feel out, if it hits, it hits, if you lose, it's not only you, it's everybody else, too, so okay, what are they going to do about it?
- NH: But it was something that they did not only that time because all the previous times when there were warnings before that, they had kind of gone through the drill, you know, of taking the stuffs out.
- MH: The merchandise, we never tried to take the merchandise out. Because it's just too much and then you take them out and what are you going to do with it, you know? Where you going put it and all like that. So we just left the merchandise.
- WN: Did you have it insured?
- MH: No more tidal wave insurance.
- WN: You couldn't get like flood insurance or anything like that?
- NH: Well, I think you could, but so expensive.
- WN: So you took everything, where did you bring it? You brought it home?
- MH: What?
- WN: The cash and the. . . .
- MH: Yeah. But you know, with us, we don't keep too much cash anyway because every day we go to the bank. Even over here, every day, you take the cash down.
- WN: So when did you find out about the damage?
- NH: Uncle went first, yeah?
- MH: Yeah, he called me up. He went down, on his way down, they had to park, you know, the cops wouldn't let them go all the way down so they had to park up and then when he went down, they told him before he reached the spot, "Everything's gone," they told him. So then he called me and told me the damage.
- NH: Because Grandpa was there, right? At our house.
- MH: So I said, "Oh, okay, we're coming down." So we went down, look.
- WN: So the thing was gone?



MH: Oh, you could find a can of MJB coffee on the street and something else over there and something else way this side. What you going to do though? Once, I wouldn't let one *Haole* lady get away with a can of coffee. I was over there and it's all stuff spilled all over the place. In the middle of the road. And she's coming, she and her husband are walking down, looking at this, looking at that. And then she picks up a can of coffee. So I just told her, I said, "Would you please put that down?"

And she says, "What did you say?"

I said, "I'm asking you to put that can of coffee down."

And she says, "Well, why should I?"

I said, "Because it belongs to me, not to you."

She threw the can down. (Laughs) I mean, I knew I wasn't going to be able to salvage all the stuff there, but the idea of her just going over there and, you know, helping herself. I was so mad, I see, here, everybody else hurting and she's over there trying to see what she can get out of it. But of course, I was also told that the cops were carrying plenty things out by the case. (Laughs) Hard time, eh?

WN: Could anybody go? The next day, could anybody just go or did they have . . .

MH: Well, they tell you not to, the cops, they tell you not to go, but you go to these other place and you squeeze and you go down, you know? You can't keep them out.

WN: So when you say your place was destroyed, I mean like all the walls and everything were washed away or was it all collapsed?

NH: Washed away.

MH: I don't know, I think washed away.

NH: Washed away.

MH: But we had, no, I was thinking because we had concrete basement.

NH: Yeah, the basement, but the walls were washed away.

WN: Oh, so all what was left was the concrete basement?

MH: But you know, when you walk down there and look at all the things, you know, "God." Still, what you going to do? But you'd be surprised, you know? How the people, when you have things like that happen, how they all come and they ask if there's anything they can do to help you. And like some of our suppliers on the Mainland ask if they could send you some merchandise and stuff like that, so people are real kind in that way.

NH: People ask, yeah? About if they could—they kind of knew how much they owe even if they didn't have enough.

- MH: Yeah, they asked, you know?
- NH: So they would see if they could pay.
- MH: But that I knew! (Chuckles) I took that. So all my books and things I had.
- WN: People who owed, you knew?
- MH: Yeah, but even the regular financial statements and whatnot, you know. All that, I had.
- WN: So did you folks give each other breaks, you know? If people owed you money, if they were a victim of the, you know, if they lost their . . .
- MH: No, because we could hardly buy anything locally.
- NH: No, he meant if people that were in the tidal wave lost their business and they owed you money, did you kind of give them a break?
- MH: I don't know how we arranged that, but there wasn't very much that we lost. I'm sure we must have lost some, but. . . .
- WN: So how did you folks clean up?
- MH: You know, they sent the bulldozers in, (MH makes sweeping sound).
- NH: Did you pick up any of the merchandise that was around? Take them to our house and wash?
- MH: We had some that we had taken out over there. But no place to put all that much merchandise.
- NH: Wasn't our house the washing center?
- MH: Yeah, our garage was full.
- WN: What would people wash over there?
- MH: Some of the canned goods. If you don't wash them right away, you know, all that salt water and you, everything else, so we put them in the garage, shoot them off with the hose . . .
- NH: So what they salvaged.
- WN: So you could salvage individual cans and things?
- MH: But you know, you're not going pick up any old thing. Some stuff not worth picking up, you might as well go look for the expensive kind stuff and pick those up if you can.

(Laughter)

WN: Never mind the MJB coffee, yeah?

(Laughter)

- WN: So you said that the union [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union] really helped you? In what way?
- MH: The union called and they came to ask if there was anything they could do, you know. Not so much physically as at the legislature. See, they were calling a special session of the legislature so then they asked us, that they were going to have a meeting and if you wanted to go, and tell them what kind of stuff that we needed, what kind of help. So I was thinking, was nice of them because we never did have anything to do with union so they weren't obligated to us, we weren't obligated to them or anything like that. But you know, to just from their side, offer to help and see what they could go to the legislature and ask for and like that. So we talked about it. Then the union guy called me up, the boss, and he says, "I'm going down to the legislature to see what we can get and this and that." So he says, "If you want to come down, they're going have a hearing, so, you go down and say what you have to say." So I went down but, eh, that guy was real nice. When I went to the legislature, the guy was sitting on the front steps waiting for me. Then he says, "Okay, we go in and I'll introduce you to some of the people."
- NH: [Senator William H.] "Doc" Hill.
- WN: Oh, Doc Hill was at the legislature. So this man you're talking about was George Martin? So was it only you that went?
- MH: No, had somebody that, who was it? Some other [business people], not too many people went though. But when you think of union, us, we antiunion, yeah? (Laughs)
- WN: Business, that's why, yeah?
- MH: We on the other side. You know, but in a crisis and stuff like that, I mean, for them to even offer, you know, "We're going to the legislature, what can we do to help you," and all this and that.
- WN: So can you remember what kinds of things they were done to help you folks?
- MH: It had something to do with taxes, I think.
- NH: Tax credit?
- MH: Yeah, I think that was the most important thing.
- NH: Land?
- MH: They opened up this area for the tidal wave victims.
- WN: Oh, this industrial area here [where Hilo Rice Mill is located today]?
- MH: Yeah, yeah, all the plant area. So if you owned the property where you were and you were willing to give it up, then you could buy land over here. If you were leasing over there then they would lease you land over here. You know, if you were leasing, they wouldn't sell you this land in this area.

- WN: Because you owned the property on Kamehameha Avenue, you were able to buy this property here? I see. At a special rate?
- MH: I don't know if it was special rate, I guess must be. I think cheaper than other people were getting it.
- WN: I guess because the government took over that land because of the . . .
- NH: They had one redevelopment agency. . . .
- WN: Yeah, yeah. HRA [Hawai'i Redevelopment Agency] I think.
- NH: Yeah.
- MH: Yeah, what is HRA?
- WN: Hawai'i Redevelopment Agency.
- MH: (Laughs) I don't know.
- WN: So, for example, what other businesses relocated over here?
- NH: Kitagawa.
- WN: Kitagawa Motors [I. Kitagawa & Co.]?
- MH: This Veteran's [Produce].
- NH: Well, there was a blacksmith next to us, Mr. [Hisagoro] Yasukawa, he lost his business. Ikeda, they had Ikeda Shoyu [Ikeda Soda Works and Shoyu Factory], they were in Waiākea town, yeah?
- WN: So in the meantime from the time of the tidal wave to the time you opened over here, what did you do?
- MH: You go put your stuff in somebody's gym like up the boarding school or some other vacant someplace. They find some of the big boys like [Hawai'i Planing Mill, Ltd.] and whatnot, they were using that, what's that auditorium?
- NH: Civic.
- MH: Civic.
- WN: Oh, the [Afook-Chinen] Civic [Auditorium]?
- MH: So depends how much space you need and whatnot and they would find.
- WN: So you were able to actually keep the business going at these temporary locations?
- MH: Of course, you don't have all the stuff that you normally would carry and like that, but. . . .

NH: We had SBA [Small Business Administration] loan.

MH: Yeah, SBA.

WN: SB—oh, Small Business [Administration]?

NH: Owed our life to that. (Chuckles)

WN: Must have been what, low-interest loan?

MH: Yeah, but I don't know how low it was.

NH: Half a million, yeah?

WN: Half a million dollars?

MH: The bank wouldn't have loaned us that kind of money.

WN: So you received help from the union, the legislature, Small Business Association, HRA, to actually help you get back on your feet?

MH: You'd be surprised the way the people would all offer, "There anything we can do to help you?" But as I say, you know, when the union will call you up and say, "What can we do for you?" Not for me exactly but for all us people. When we go to the legislature, if we went, what would we [get]? Nothing. If the union goes, they can get plenty.

NH: Actually, the legislators from Hilo were really helpful.

WN: Like who was that? Doc Hill?

NH: Who else was there besides Doc Hill?

MH: I don't know.

NH: Was Stanley there at that time?

WN: Stanley [Hara]?

NH: I know Doc Hill was there.

WN: So when did you rebuild over here?

MH: I don't know.

NH: Nineteen sixty. . .

WN: Must have it someplace.

NH: . . . one or two. Not too long after.



WN: Oh, not too long? And then you built this building?

NH: This building. Not that building in the back, this building.

WN: So you been in business for how many years?

MH: Since 1913.

WN: Nineteen thirteen. So this building is as old as you.

MH: No. (Chuckles)

NH: No.

WN: I mean, this business is as old as you.

MH: Yeah. And that's old, you know?

(Laughter)

WN: Okay, I'm going to . . .

MH: But you know, really, you don't know how kind people are until you get into some kind of disaster like that, you know. Some of them can't do very much, but the fact that they even offer, you know.

WN: Did you feel differently toward the union after this or toward other people after this incident?

MH: Well, you know, I really never had too much strong feelings about the union like that because we were never involved with them, you know. So, but then I was thinking, if we were, we would have been on opposite sides. But you know, for them to call up and ask, "What can we do, we're going to the legislature, what can we do? Oh, maybe you can use this. Oh maybe some of you people come down, you know, we'll be stronger and we rate better with the rest of the legislators, you know?" They nice, they call you in, ask you questions like that. But really, they all had that attitude that they want to help you. So when it come down, basically mankind, they real kind. (Laughs)

WN: Okay, I'm going to turn it off. Thank you very much.

MH: Okay, you're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 29-7-2-98

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Minerva Hayakawa (MH)

Hilo, Hawai'i

March 24, 1998

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

WN: This is an interview with Minerva Hayakawa on March 24, 1998, and we're at her office at the Hilo Rice Mill in Hilo, Hawai'i. The interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto. Also present at the interview is Naomi Hayakawa (NH), Minerva Hayakawa's daughter.

. . . [Last time we discussed] your early life, your education, growing up, the kinds of things you did as a girl and you know the family life that you had in Hilo, and then we got into the 1946 tsunami and we got into the 1960 tsunami and we ended sort of to the present time. But what we didn't cover last time was your father's life, what you know about what your father experienced and sort of leading our way into World War II, and what it was like for you and for the business, and what you remember what your father might have gone through. And then your daughter. So today, we'd like to start by having you tell us what your father's name was.

MH: My father's name was Takaichi Rupert Saiki.

WN: Mm hmm.

MH: You wonder where the Rupert coming from. (Laughs)

WN: Yeah.

MH: He was born in Japan, [in Hiroshima-ken in 1884,] but he came with his parents and they worked on the plantation. But his mother was a maid in the manager's home. So, my father kind of went in and out over there. So, he picked up a lot of things from just the contact he made with the family over there. He went to school over here. He went to Hilo Boarding School, Hilo Union School. And then he went to work for the bank. It was the First Bank of Hilo at the time. And later on it was taken over by the Bank of Hawai'i. So he worked over there right until the war came. Well, when they picked him up [interned him], well that was it.

MK: You know looking back. What do you remember being told about your father's background in Japan?

MH: Very, very little because he came over as a young child. So, he didn't know too much about . . .

NH: You know that he came from Hiroshima.

MH: Yeah. (Chuckles)

NH: And then the mother and father got divorced didn't they? Or what was the scoop?

MH: I don't know. I not sure whether they got divorced or one of them—no . . .

NH: No.

MH: The mother did. I guess they must have gotten divorced after they went back [to Japan]. I don't know.

NH: Your [paternal] grandfather had one junk shop.

MH: Yeah. My grandfather was here, of course. So, that's how my father came. But when he went back he had one of those secondhand stores. (Laughs). All junks in that store. That's what my mother told us. (Laughs)

WN: So, your grandfather, them, came to Hawai'i from Hiroshima to work on the plantation. And then your father was a young boy when he came along . . .

MH: Yeah, he was young. So, he was educated over here.

WN: Did your father ever tell you why your grandparents went back to Japan?

MH: I don't know. Was it to get divorced? I don't know.

(Laughter)

NH: I have no idea.

MH: We don't know.

MK: And then you mentioned that his mother was working in a manager's house. Who was that manager?

NH: Kennedy. Mr. C. C. Kennedy.

MK: And what was the name of the plantation that he worked on?

MH: Waiākea Mill [Sugar Company].

MK: And then your father's father—what kind of work was he doing at the plantation?

MH: I don't know. I don't know. Maybe *hō hana*, I don't know. (Chuckles)

MK: And, you know, you mentioned that he went to Hilo Boarding School, then he went to Hilo Union [School].

- MH: I don't know whether Hilo Boarding had all the regular teaching or whether he just stayed there and then went to Hilo Union School. Because they were very close, you know. The schools were. You could almost look into each other's yards. But I know he was at the boarding school for a while. But he did go to Hilo Union School. But I think Hilo Boarding School was more really a boarding place.
- MK: And then you mentioned that he was working for the bank. What kind of work was he doing at the bank?
- MH: Well, when he was hired at the bank—I don't know, I guess, regular clerk or something like that. But by the time they picked him up [in 1941] he had a much better job. (Laughs) What was his title? Assistant cashier, something like that. I don't know. He had advanced quite a bit.
- NH: When the Japanese businesses wanted to borrow money from the bank, they all—they would go to see him, you know, to try to get the loans.
- MH: So, all these Japanese business people, when they went there, the rest *Haoles*, huh? They had one or two tellers, but so they would have to go see my father. And he would try to arrange for them to get loans.
- MK: Was it because of his language abilities?
- MH: Yeah. Because he could speak both English and Japanese. Most of the people on the plantation couldn't. It was only Japanese.
- NH: Even the Japanese business people at that time.
- MH: Yeah.
- NH: A lot of them didn't speak English.
- MK: And then you mentioned after being with the Bank of Hilo, he got involved with the Hilo Rice Mill.
- MH: Not after because Hilo Rice Mill was started in 1913.
- MK: Oh.
- MH: He didn't work for Hilo Rice Mill. He just got it started, you know, with some of his friends and some other business people who wanted to open up. . . . You see, in those days, if you brought in the rice from Japan, you had to pay duty on that rice.
- MK: Oh.
- MH: If you brought in the rice in the hull, then I think the duty was much less. That's how we got Hilo Rice Mill. So, they used to bring the rice with the hull on and we used to mill it over here. But later on, they found out that they could bring it in from California, so then they stopped importing rice from Japan and then they brought the California rice in. That was already milled. So, we didn't need that mill anymore, but

we kept the name mill, but we haven't had a mill for a long, long time.

(Laughter)

MH: One school, the teacher came down, she wanted to bring her class down and I said, "What for?" I said, "We have nothing for them to learn."

"How they mill rice?"

I said, "We don't have anything."

(Laughter)

WN: So he [MH's father, Takaichi Rupert Saiki] was with the bank and he started this Hilo Rice Mill with this group of Japanese businessmen at the same time. He was doing two things then one time?

MH: But he spent his whole day over there [at the bank]. (Laughs) He would only come over here to look at the accounts receivable and discuss. (Laughs)

WN: And who was the one who was in charge of the day-to-day running of the . . .

MH: Uh, we had Mr. [M.] Kasamoto—no, we had a Mr. Tanaka. He [Mr. Tanaka] was from Japan. But he also went back to Japan after spending, you know, quite a number of years here. Then we had Mr. Kasamoto after that. Then he was interned. The war came around. So since I was around, well, I was shoved in over here.

MK: You know you mentioned that the [Hilo] Rice Mill in the beginning brought in rice, then milled it. But as time went by, what did the Rice Mill get into?

MH: Wholesaling. When we were bringing in stuff from Japan, we brought in Japanese merchandise, too, in those days. Mostly the plantation people, they used to ask for a lot of things we couldn't get or grow around here, so we used to import can goods and the dry things, all the *irikos*. I know 'cause when I first came to work, I had to go pack the *iriko*.

(Laughter)

MH: Came in bulk. (Laughs)

MK: What other things did you folks import from Japan? *Iriko*? Japanese can goods?

NH: *Ume*.

MK: *Ume*?

MH: Oh yes, *ume* and *rakkyo*.

NH: *Rakkyo*.



- MK: Tea?
- NH: Green tea.
- MH: Yeah.
- WN: Green tea?
- MH: All kinds.
- MK: And how would it work? You have your Rice Mill over here, importing goods. What was there in Japan?
- MH: We had a buyer in Japan. He had an office in Japan. In fact, that fellow that I knew—they must have had another guy before him. But, this guy [Mr. Tanaka] had come over here from Japan and he was managing the company for a while. Then he wanted to go back to Japan. So, when he went back to Japan, he went into our Japan office and he used to do the buying. And make, you know, arrangements for shipping 'em out and all of that.
- MK: Those days, Hilo Rice Mill is importing goods, then selling the goods. To what types of persons or businesses . . .
- MH: To the retail stores. We were wholesalers, so we sold to the retail stores. And of course, the restaurants and later on the hotels and hospitals.
- WN: Was it just in Hilo or was it islandwide?
- MH: Islandwide. We used to send island-to-island, but we only had this one—wasn't even this building—we only had one outlet, one building, warehouse. Used to send 'em out by truckers, Kona, all over.
- MK: In those days, were the retailers predominantly Japanese or of all different ethnicities?
- MH: No. The Japanese sold mostly Japanese goods. And then these other *Haole* stores, few Chinese merchants.
- MK: And I was wondering, when did your dad [Takaichi Rupert Saiki] marry your mom [Mary Forbes Saiki]?
- MH: Nineteen seven [1907], I think.
- NH: Must be before then. Nineteen five or six [1905 or 1906].
- MK: Nineteen five or '06? What have you heard about how they got together?
- MH: Well, through old man Kennedy [C.C. Kennedy], I mean, you know, the [plantation] managers.

NH: Must be through the Napiers?

MH: No, the Napiers were Scotsmen.

NH: Then how come Grandma was good friends with the Napiers?

MH: Because they were on the same plantation, the Scotsmen.

(Laughter)

MK: So, through the Kennedys?

MH: Because my grandma, she worked for the Kennedys in the house, you know, as maid.

NH: And your Grandpa Forbes was working in the plantation.

MH: Yeah. But I don't think they even knew each other. Grandpa Forbes, he worked as—he was engineer at the plantation.

WN: Oh, this is Thomas Forbes?

MH: Thomas Forbes, Senior. So, we had Thomas Forbes, Junior, too.

(Laughter)

MH: And my Hawaiian grandma, I don't know. She was gone by the time we came along, so we don't know her at all.

WN: You never knew?

MK: So, you think it's through the Kennedys.

MH: Well, because they were around. You know, the kids, as kids did, they playing around over there and whatnot. Or something.

MK: You know, later on when the children were born, yourself and your older siblings and your younger ones were born, what was your dad's role in the family?

MH: My father was the one you had a lot of fun with. My mother was the disciplinarian. (Laughs) She was very strict. Very so-so about everything. Now, my father, he was the one who would take us like Fourth of July, we always had a parade in Hilo. So, he'd take us to the parade. After the parade, we went down, they had boat racing. The afternoon, they had horse racing. In the evenings, you had fireworks. Well, we went to every one of those.

(Laughter)

MH: So, it was a very busy day from early in the morning to late at night. But he was that kind, you know. He took---later on when we were older we wanted to go to basketball

games, he would take us. My mother stayed at home. She didn't want—the parade she used to go to, but like sports, she wasn't interested in sports. So, he was the fun guy.

When we were going to intermediate school, my sisters were older, so they were in high school. And if we wanted to go swimming in the morning—and we lived on top of Waiānuenuē and the swimming, you had to go Coconut Island. He would take us. "Okay, you kids get up early. If you want to go swimming, you get up early." The next morning, we all up, ready to go. He take us down there. That's a school day now, you know (laughs), so before school started, we had our swim. (Laughs)

The kids used to come to the house weekends, Friday nights, Saturday nights, play cards. He was right in there playing cards with our friends.

(Laughter)

MH: Ten o'clock already, "Don't you think it's time for us to go eat some noodles, *udon*?" There used to be that wagon—they used to have that little wagon on the side of the road.

"Okay, all you, jump in the car." Go down there. Eat *udon*. So, you know, we had a good life.

WN: How was his English?

MH: My father spoke English very well.

WN: It was more than just pidgin English . . .

MH: No, he never spoke pidgin English.

WN: Is that right?

MH: Never, ever.

WN: And he spoke English to you folks. Did he speak Japanese at all?

MH: No, but when we were little we could because we had maids. The maids were always Japanese, you know. From hearing them speak and like that, we would pick up some.

NH: And from the Arakawas.

MH: Yeah. And then we had a family of very good friends [the Arakawas] who used to speak Japanese. They had their grandma with them, so they used to speak Japanese to them and we'd pick up some. But we could never speak Japanese well. It was just pick up. But my father could speak Japanese. He could speak English. He could speak Portuguese. He knew some Hawaiian. So, when he and my mother wanted to go out date, when they had dates, go movies and all us kids stay at home. As soon as we hear them talking in Hawaiian, we say, "They going out tonight."

(Laughter)

- WN: And what about your mom now? She spoke mostly English?
- MH: Yeah.
- WN: And you said she could speak Hawaiian.
- MH: Yeah.
- WN: Could she speak Japanese or did she know any Japanese?
- MH: Oh, just a few words, but she could never speak Japanese.
- MK: You know when your mom and dad got married, [your] dad is Japanese, your mom is *Haole*-Hawaiian.
- MH: Yeah.
- MK: How did people react?
- MH: I don't know. They never came out and said anything about it. But I'm sure they must have been a big. . . . (Laughs)
- NH: I always tell her, "Ho, Grandpa and Grandma, they caused a scandal, yeah? They got married."
- (Laughter)
- MH: We don't know. They never ever said anything like that. But to myself, I was saying, "You know, I don't think the Scotsmen like that idea." (Laughs) But since, my mother worked for the plantation manager, they got away with it (Chuckles).
- MK: And then you know, with your dad being bilingual, knowing English, knowing Japanese, what was his role in the community?
- MH: He was up there. He used to be president of the [Hilo] Japanese Chamber [of Commerce]. Anytime the *Haoles* want something done, they would go see him. And he would have to go and approach all the Japanese merchants, you know, get them together, stuff like that. He was very important in that way, you know, getting between the Japanese and the *Haoles*.
- MK: How about in, say, Japanese Hongwanji or other Japanese clubs or. . .
- MH: My father was not [Buddhist]—he was Christian.
- MK: He was Christian.
- MH: In Hilo Boarding School they were Christians, eh?
- MK: How active was he in the Christian church?

- MH: Well, when he was growing up, he used to go Haili Church. He used to go quite faithfully, but when he got through with that, he wasn't going to be bothered with church. (Laughs)
- NH: Because it was not a Japanese Christian church he was going to. It was Haili Church which is predominantly the Hawaiians. I mean, Haili Church was started by the missionaries, the Lymans.
- MK: But he was active in the community sort of . . .
- MH: Well, I think it was more because of his job at the bank, you know, when all of these guys wanted to borrow money they had to go see him. I think because of that more than anything else.
- MK: During the 1930s, to what extent was he involved with Japan?
- MH: I don't know. But every time the Japanese boats came in, you know, the naval thing, he was the last chamber president and whatnot. He had to go take the captain to go up see the volcano and they would have to go out to dinner that night and they had to go entertain them, and that kind.
- MK: How about travel to Japan?
- MH: He went several times. And he took my mother, couple of times he took her when he went.
- NH: His father was still alive.
- MH: Yeah. So, that was why he wanted to go back to Japan to see his father.
- WN: So, when you say he was "up there" in the Japanese community was it mainly through the [Hilo Japanese] Chamber of Commerce and through his role in the bank? Anything else?
- MH: No.
- WN: Was he a member of any other organization.
- MH: Oh, I don't know those organizations. I know he said he had to go to meetings and things quite often, but whether the kind of organizations and whatnot I wouldn't know.
- MK: You know during the 1930s, what did he say about Japanese-American relations, if anything?
- MH: Nothing to us. Nothing.
- MK: So, when December 7, 1941, came . . .
- MH: They went down there. Knock, knock, knock. [MH makes knocking sound.] That evening. And the two guys sitting in the car from the police station. His two good



friends. One was *Haole* and one was Japanese. They sitting in the car outside and arguing who's going to get him [for questioning and internment].

MK: Mmm.

MH: [George] Richardson would tell this other guy, "You go get him."

"I not going. That's my friend. You go."

"That's my friend, too."

So, (chuckles) finally they decided the two of them would go in together. They picked him up December 7.

MK: This was at your home?

WN: Were you home that night?

MH: Nope. I was already married. I was out of the house.

WN: So, you weren't there that night.

MK: So, what did you hear later from your mother and your siblings about that night? Or that day?

MH: Practically everybody was out of the house already, I mean, we were . . .

NH: I think maybe Aunt Machi.

MH: Well, I wonder if she was home, she was in Honolulu in school. I don't know. But we were out of the house already.

MK: So, it was just your mother that—so how did you hear about what happened to your dad?

MH: I don't know. (Chuckles)

NH: That's the story I haven't heard. Did she call you?

MH: I don't know. I don't remember. I know I went down later on.

NH: December 7?

MH: No, the next day. But, I don't know if she called me early or what. I can't remember.

WN: You know, you were an adult at that time. You were married [to Hiroshi Hayakawa since 1937], living Pāpa'ikou, you said, yeah. Was it a surprise to you that your father got picked up? Do you remember what you felt?

MH: I wasn't surprised that they did pick him up. But I didn't think they would—you know.

Because they had already been questioning some people, you know, locals. Before the war actually. The FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] were hauling people in. In fact, even the FBI came to our house, too, out Pāpa'ikou. I think so. They sent that Portuguese guy that used to work for them.

WN: When was this?

MH: Before the war.

WN: Before the war? Came to your house?

MH: We were living out Pāpa'ikou and he came out there. They went around searching people's houses and if you had the Japanese flags and stuff, they took all that kind of stuff away from the people. You know a lot of them you couldn't blame them. They were Japanese citizens. They couldn't become citizens of the United States [of America]. The law just prohibited that, you know. They couldn't become naturalized. It was much later that they could, but not at that time. So, they had no choice, you know. You were an alien. You were an alien, *pau*.

MK: Do you think your father expected to be brought in?

MH: I think so. I think my father knew that if war or anything came around that he would be involved.

MK: Did he in any way prepare himself for that?

MH: No, no, no. He never talked to us, anything about it, that he might, you know. Nothing.

MK: And in those days who were some of the other families whose fathers were pulled in?

MH: (Laughs) Had plenty. Plenty. Plenty.

NH: [Hisato] Isemoto.

MK: Isemotos.

NH: [Mitsuji] Kasamoto.

MK: Kasamoto.

NH: The man who worked for . . .

MH: Arakawas [was interned]. All of those kind of up there [men]. (Chuckles)

NH: But you folks have a list, right, of people . . .

MK: Mm hmm. We have a list of some of those people.

NH: 'Cause I know that the internees that went to Santa Fe, they had a Santa Fe Club after the war. 'Cause when my grandfather died, there was this wreath from the Santa Fe Club. And I was going . . .

MH: We didn't know who the Santa Fe Club was.

(Laughter)

NH: We didn't know who the Santa Fe Club was.

MH: One big wreath. Santa Fe Club. Huh? What is this Santa Fe Club? (Laughs)

MK: And so when your father was interned how did your family manage?

MH: Well, we were all adults. We were all working.

MK: So, all the ones that were adults were all working? How about your mom?

MH: Oh, everybody. Well, my mother was all right.

MK: Financially how could she manage?

MH: Well, my father had some—no, he had stocks and bonds and things like that. And it was just she and my younger sister, just two of them were home in that big six-bedroom house. (Laughs)

WN: Some businesses were taken by the government. You know, businesses that were owned by aliens. Why is that Hilo Rice Mill wasn't taken over?

MH: 'Cause I was citizen. (Laughs)

WN: Did he make you the boss before he left or anything?

MH: No, no.

WN: So, when December 7 came what was your position?

MH: I was just working as the clerk in the Rice Mill.

WN: And did your father ever say, "Well, you're going to take over." Anything like that?

MH: But when they interned the manager, well. . . . But see, with him they didn't pick him up on December 7. Was later on that they picked him up. So, by the time they came around for him, we kind of expected.

But my father folks, Isemoto, and those guys, they were all December 7 pickup (laughs).

WN: You said Kasamoto was the manager.

MH: Kasamoto.

WN: And you said you were just an employee. So, it wasn't under your name or anything?

MH: Well, I owned a few shares.

NH: Well, maybe because it was a corporation rather than sole proprietorship.

WN: Oh, I see. Oh, so from the beginning it was a corporation, yeah?

MH: Yeah.

WN: You said it was like a *hui* or a group of Japanese businessmen started it. That's probably it.

MK: And then during the war years, where you couldn't get your goods from Japan anymore. What did you folks sell?

MH: American goods! (Laughs) No, we were already selling American goods because all our rice and everything all came from the United States, all from California.

NH: Tell how good it was during the war for you . . .

MH: During the war, you could bring in only certain foods. They would take inventory of all the wholesalers and like that to find out how much of different types of food you had. Then they would make a list of what you could bring in for that month. So, you would write up your order and then you would take it to this agency that they had. They would check and then they'd okay it. Then you could place your order. You were able to get shipping space and stuff like that. Otherwise, no, no. And the government brought in rice and some of the basics, you know, the oranges, apples, rice and stuff like that. Many items they brought in and then they allocated so much to each of us wholesalers so that there would be enough for the people.

MK: Since your father was interned, did individuals or businesses in any way treat you folks differently from before the war?

MH: It all depended on nationality. Now, 'cause in Japanese, you know, they were kind of involved, too, so we got along fine. We didn't have too many *Haoles* around. The worst ones were the Portuguese.

I know my sister was working at the bank and she would have to take some things to somebody down the street, maybe. She walked past—there was a taxi stand that always made some kind of comment. Every day. So she crossed the street just to avoid hearing that. There were a few, but not too many, you know. A lot of *Haoles* maybe that felt, and said among themselves, but then they didn't talk in front of you and make all kinds of cracks. And the Hawaiians—what the Hawaiians care? (Laughs) Anything goes with them.

MK: How about the Japanese? Were any of them fearful of associating with your family or

your business because your father had been interned?

MH: But there were so many of them who were interned. Almost everybody had some kind of relative or friend or somebody who was interned. Among the Japanese, "If there's anything I can do for you, let me know." That kind.

NH: Didn't the Japanese on the plantation kind of just mind their own business on the plantation, you know? They didn't get involved in.

WN: You know, when you said people would make some cracks, what did they say?

MH: I don't know I wasn't the one that they made those cracks at. But, I guess, they always say something, "Yeah, yeah, you know. That's the one her father is interned." And this and that, stuff like that. "Yeah, he was spying for the Japanese."

NH: They used to say if Japan took over, he was going to be the governor.

(Laughter)

WN: Seems like kind of joking, halfway joking kind of . . .

NH: I don't think so.

MH: No, I don't think so. I think that they were . . .

NH: They said that seriously, not jokingly. We think it's a joke that—we know that no way they would make him, but. . . . They weren't joking.

MK: And you know you mentioned that some Japanese would say, "In whatever way we can help." You know, "We would be willing to help you." Would you remember if your mom was ever asked by like a social worker or anyone if she needed any sort of assistance during that time?

MH: No, I don't think so. But after all she only had herself. Now, every Sunday, we used to go down, and the whole family used to go down and have dinner with her. One of us was responsible for the dinner. You cook the food. You want to cook it down there? Fine. You want to cook it at home and take it down? That's fine, too. So every Sunday, we used to get together.

I think she had a maid all the time. During the war so that, well, at least somebody to be with her. And she couldn't keep that house by herself anyway.

MK: What sorts of communication did your mother get from your father while he was interned?

MH: You could write, you know, back and forth. He wrote to us kids and whatnot. But every so often your letter might have a window. If you said something they didn't like, they either scratched it out or they cut a window in the thing. (Chuckles). On a whole, every letter was censored in and out, but, I mean, you could write about the family. You could write about what's going on over here and whatnot as long as you



didn't talk about the war or politics or stuff like that.

MK: What do you remember him writing about?

MH: Well, it was always, of course, he would acknowledge the receipt of the letters that we wrote. But it was always, "Take care of your mother. See that she's all right," and that kind of stuff. He knew we went down [to visit MH's mother] every weekend, the whole family, so you know he didn't worry too much.

MK: What did he write about his own life?

MH: Not too much. I guess if he did, he'd have been censored anyway.

MK: What did he do while he was in the camps?

MH: Well, he could speak English and Japanese both, so he was always in the office every time. So, even after he came back, there used to be *Haole wahines* in the [Santa Fe internment camp] offices, secretaries, and all that kind—they all used to write letters. He got along well with them.

MK: And then you know, when he finally came back, what change was there in the family life with him coming back?

NH: Well, for one he didn't have a job at the bank anymore. (MH laughs.) So, he used to come to the Rice Mill every day.

(Laughter)

MH: And he used to walk around Hilo town every day. Go for a walk from one end of town, come back and in the meantime, he stop at this place and chat with them and go see somebody else and he chat with them. He would come back and read the newspaper and so it kept him busy.

MK: How about the business? What was his role in the business when he came back?

MH: Read the paper. (Laughs)

NH: He was chairman of the board.

MH: He really didn't do anything. He just left it to us already.

WN: And you were president at that time?

MH: Yeah.

WN: By then you were president. So what about Mr. Kasamoto when he came back?

MH: No, when he got let out, he stayed up there. He went to school and he wanted to become an accountant. So, he said that he wouldn't be back. He was going to go to

school and he wouldn't be back right away because he wanted to become an accountant, so he did. Then he came back and some of the Japanese stores, he did the books for them.

MK: So, Mr. Kasamoto didn't come back to his original job then?

MH: Because he didn't know how long he was going to be away and all of that. Besides, he wanted to do only accounting. He came back—and got quite a number of accounts.

WN: Let me turn the tape over.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: Let's see, I have one more question. If you had to think about—you know, you think about those internment years and you think about how it affected your family and the business. What would you say about the internment years? How did it impact you and your family?

NH: Tell how it impacted you about community service.

MH: I won't do any kind of community service. If they ask me, "Can you do this?"

I said, "No." I didn't tell them why, but I felt that my father did so much community work. I mean, half of his life almost was community work. Yet, when he got interned and you know, all the things that people had to say. I said, "That's the thanks you get for doing all that community work? Forget it." I don't do one bit of community work, I just refuse to. I never tell 'em why, but I just say. "Oh no, I'm just too busy I just don't have the time to."

MK: (To WN) You have some questions to catch up on?

WN: No, actually I was thinking about it. But, well, I'm going to turn off the tape recorder. Before I do, do you have anything you want to say? Naomi, how about you?

NH: What do I want to say?

(Laughter)

NH: Well, when I was in high school, I decided I didn't want to come to work here and take over her job because it was too hard work. Every single night she brought home work to do. And so she said, "Okay, you go and be a teacher." I said, "Okay." But then after the 1960 tidal wave, it was even worse, you know. Every single night. (She had to work on) the weekends because she had to do the ordering of the merchandise. She had to price the merchandise. She had to do all the bookkeeping. She had to answer the phones. She had to charge up the merchandise. Oversee the whole thing. And that was just too much. And I couldn't see myself doing all that.

WN: You were saying after the 1960 tidal wave, she worked really hard, yeah, especially.

NH: 'Cause, you know, we had to borrow money? So, you have to pay off all that loan. Basically, she and my dad and my uncle and my aunty had to sign for the loan.

MH: Lucky we didn't have to pay it. (Laughs)

NH: You know what I mean, if they defaulted on that loan. (MH laughs.) Till after you paid off the loan, till about the [19]80s.

WN: Oh, took you that long to pay off the loan?

NH: Twenty years? Fifteen years?

MH: Not twenty years! Man, alive. (Laughs) I don't know how long.

NH: After that loan got paid off, yeah? Things got pretty good. [But] till that got paid off . . .

MH: But you know, we were just talking recently. I was telling her about—after tidal wave about when the union came. You know, you really appreciate it when people come in like that and offer you help and even go to that legislature. "We're going to have special session, what can we help do to help you down there?" Now, this is the union telling us. You know, usually, you're on opposite sides (laughs) fighting each other. Of course, we never did have a union over here. But I thought it was so nice of them to offer.

WN: So, how is business today?

MH: Oh fine, running by itself.

(Laughter)

WN: Oh, Naomi, you said you were going to be a schoolteacher and you became a schoolteacher and you retired. And now, here you are.

(Laughter)

NH: I mean, I come, but I make my own hours.

MH: In and out. (Laughs)

WN: And Minerva, you come every day still?

MH: Oh, yeah. (Laughs) Being that I'm only eight-five [years old], well.

(Laughter)

WN: Well, thank you very much for your time.

**MK: Thank you.**

**END OF INTERVIEW**

**TSUNAMIS REMEMBERED:  
Oral Histories of Survivors  
and Observers in Hawai'i**

**Volume I**

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

**April 2000**