

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Violet Okino Hirata and Takeshi Hirata

"Well, we went the next day to look around. . . . I found part of my room standing. But they didn't let us stay enough to pick up whatever I had. That's the sad part. I had quite a bit of things on the shelf that I could see but I couldn't get it. . . . It was all stolen after that. They chased us off because dangerous. They said, 'That's going to fall,' and all that stuff. . . . The thing was, we had my grandma's ashes in the house, too, so we had to hunt for that. So it was [found] in the back section, by the [Hilo] Gas Company. We found her, all right. Then we looked through the rubbles, but whatever you found was all [covered] with oil and everything. We didn't have much clothes, too. We couldn't find all our belongings. Whatever washed out, dishes and everything, was in the riverbed. We didn't recover that much."

Violet Okino Hirata was born September 29, 1925 in Hilo. She was the third of seven children born to Yoshio Okino and Masako Kayano Okino, who owned and operated Okino Hotel on 482 Kamehameha Avenue. The hotel was started in 1913 by Yoshio's father, Yoshimatsu Okino, an immigrant from Japan.

Violet Hirata grew up in family quarters in one section of the hotel. Along with her two older sisters, she helped her parents in the hotel dining room, serving food to customers and clearing tables. She also helped take care of her four younger brothers. She attended school until her sophomore year, when she dropped out to help her parents in the hotel.

Okino Hotel was demolished in the 1946 tsunami. Hirata and the family managed to escape the waves by fleeing in back of the building--away from the ocean--toward the Hilo Gas Company gas tanks. Her brother, George, became trapped in the debris and was later rescued. A guest of the hotel died that day.

Hirata's parents later built another hotel on Kino'ole Street, which they operated until 1959. Hirata eventually worked as a hairdresser, and later, for Western Auto. She retired in 1989. She and her husband, Takeshi Hirata, whom she married in 1949, raised three children and currently have five grandchildren.

Takeshi Hirata was born February 8, 1921 in Waiākea Homesteads. His father was employed by Waiākea Mill Company. Hirata attended Waiākea Waena, Hilo Intermediate, and Hilo High schools, graduating in 1939. He then began working at a carpenter's apprentice.

During World War II, Hirata volunteered for military service and was a member of the 232nd Engineers and served in France and Germany. After his discharge, he returned to Hilo and began working as a carpenter and maintenance worker for Hawai'i County.

As a county employee, Hirata was assigned to one of the crews responsible for cleaning up debris from the 1946 tsunami. After the 1960 tsunami, Hirata worked to construct replacement portable buildings.

Mr. and Mrs. Hirata were interviewed in the Pacific Tsunami Museum.

Tape No. 29-46-1-99

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Violet Hirata (TH) and Takeshi Hirata (TH)

Hilo, Hawai'i

May 10, 1999

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

[NOTE: Also present at the interview is Barbara Fujimoto (BF), VH's and TH's daughter.]

WN: This is an interview with Violet Okino Hirata [and Takeshi Hirata], on May 10, 1999, day after Mother's Day, and we're at the Hilo Pacific Tsunami Museum, in Hilo, Hawai'i. And the interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Mrs. Hirata, good morning.

VH: Morning.

WN: You can tell me first of all when and where you were born.

VH: In Hilo.

WN: And what's your birth date?

VH: September 29, 1925.

WN: And where in Hilo were you folks living when you were born?

VH: On [482] Kam[ehameha] Avenue. My father [Yoshio Okino] had Okino Hotel, right across the Cow Palace. That was American Factors [Ltd.] before.

WN: Where were you folks living?

VH: Right there, in the hotel.

WN: Oh, in the hotel. What part of the hotel were you folks living?

VH: In the living quarters. We had living quarters of our own and we used to feed the hotel people lunch and dinners and all that. So we used to do all the hotel work.

WN: So, when you say you did a lot of hotel work, what is that? Like what?

VH: Well, we always had live-in ladies that used to cook and take care of the hotel, cleaning the hotel. After that, customers go, and we had to clean all the whole place and help the ladies.

So after the war [World War II], we [stopped] feeding people, and all that. Until then, until the tidal wave we did most of it. I mean, we had the hotel, but (closed the dining room).

WN: So, after the war you gave up the restaurant?

VH: (Yes.) We didn't feed---before then we did all the preparation of food and all that. Serve the people.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, sorry, little interruption there. Tell me a little about your father.

VH: Well, he was a ball player (about 1915). And he used to do (sumo) wrestling. He loved his fishing.

WN: And he was nisei, right?

VH: Yes, he's a nisei. Born in [1898].

WN: And where was he born?

VH: Right in Hilo. The hotel [on Kamehameha Avenue] was built in 1913. But before then, Grandfather [Yoshimatsu Okino] had another one on Front Street, but I don't know what year that was built. And then they built this big one in 1913.

WN: And who stayed, mainly, at the hotel?

VH: We had all different customers. We used to have---month to month, we had salesmen that came from Honolulu, and different tenants. We had some boarders that worked in Hilo. So they boarded there and they went to work. So we had quite a few of them boarding, regular boarders. And they had [base]ball teams coming. Or, Fourth of July, they have [sumo] wrestlers coming in. The group comes and goes. We were very busy.

WN: And they came mostly from Honolulu?

VH: Honolulu, and other islands. Until the wartime [World War II], they all [came at] different times. Mostly Fourth of July, though, those wrestling and all that. Baseball was different season. I couldn't say when, I forgot.

WN: And was mostly Japanese staying in the hotel?

VH: Most of the time. No, wait, sometimes mixed group. I mean, we don't see the groups, so I don't know. We used to serve the meals, too.

WN: And then who started the hotel? Was it your father or your grandfather?

- VH: Grandfather built it. Grandfather died when he [VH's father] was nineteen, so he [VH's father] had to take over that. Grandma [Waka Okino] died later, but he was nineteen only when Grandfather died.
- WN: Tell me about your mother.
- VH: My mother [Masako Kayano Okino], she was born in Pāhala. So, she married my dad.
- WN: So she helped in the hotel too?
- VH: Oh, yeah, she was busy with the cooking and all that with the ladies. And [we] had my aunt living with us when we were young to help my mom. So, besides the ladies that work with her, we had one aunt, older aunt that stayed, and then the younger one came in and stay, take over after that. We were lucky.
- WN: And what was it like growing up around that area, in the hotel?
- VH: Well, we had seven of us, three girls and four boys. So, kept us pretty busy. My brother Harold was the youngest, I mean, we had to watch him, because Mom was so busy. They're getting to each other all the time, the four of them. (Laughs)
- WN: Yeah, because you folks [first] had three girls and then four boys.
- VH: I'm the third. The boys used to get into each other. We used to take care, most of the time, Harold, too. He was the youngest.
- WN: How many years apart are you and Harold?
- VH: He and I are ten years' difference. She was too busy to take care of him, so most of the time we had to take over. Of course, he nagged for the mother, but she can't be with him all the time.
- WN: What kind of work did you do in the hotel?
- VH: All kind. We helped the ladies, and clean the tables, and serving, and everything else.
- WN: So, you worked mostly in the restaurant part?
- VH: All around. Then upstairs, where they needed help. Then I helped them around, (cleaning the hotel).
- WN: How many guests rooms were in the hotel?
- VH: We had, let's see, twenty-something on the top floor, and then four on the third floor. We used to have parties on the third floor when we were young. They had different parties. Used to be a big place.
- WN: So, people stayed at the hotel, and then they could eat, and they had like, parties . . .

- VH: We had big parties, weddings or whatever, parties, on the third floor when we were young. That kept us busy. So we used to have somebody to come and cook, too. They used to have a Mr. Izumoto that used to be a cook, and they need to hire him for the big parties.
- WN: Mr. Izumoto?
- VH: The old-timer. But we always had live-in girls that cook and help my mama.
- WN: Those girls were from Hilo?
- VH: All over, whoever is. We had them while we were growing up. We had several [different girls]. We always had somebody at the house, besides my aunty.
- WN: Now, I know you worked hard, but what did you do to have good fun as a child growing up around there?
- VH: Not too much of a outing. (Laughs) We couldn't go. It got so busy. Once in a while, we used to go to shows, but not that often.
- WN: Where did you go to the shows?
- VH: Yamatoza [Theatre], Palace Theater. Then Hilo Theatre came up. From '39 to '40, I think, the [construction] boys used to live in [the hotel] and work and come back, have their meals, like that. I don't know how many of them stayed but I know a bunch of them [were] Honolulu boys or whatever, (chuckles) I don't know who they were. They stayed quite a while while they were building the Hilo Theatre. I forgot what year it was completed. I think, '39, '40, I think.
- WN: Just before the war, then.
- VH: (Yes.) Hilo Theatre was a popular theater. So we used to go there quite often. My mother loves Japanese shows so she goes to Yamatoza [Theatre] on Mamo [Street].
- WN: Yamatoza?
- VH: Yamatoza. (Yes,) she used to love those Japanese (movies).
- WN: That was on Mamo Street?
- VH: (Yes,) Mamo Street. There used to be---what was the other theater? Mamo Theatre, no? Mamo Theatre, adjoining that. But more Japanese shows at Yamatoza.
- WN: And the Hilo Theatre had English shows?
- VH: Yeah, Hilo Theatre was English. And Palace Theater. But what they used to do was when you have a Japanese show, they bring in these posters, so they give their best to her, so we used to go more Japanese shows. (Laughs) Because she used to love her Japanese shows. If she had the time to go [out], evenings.

So growing up was no fun. You can't go out too much. Can't play like others.

WN: Why, because you folks were so busy?

VH: Yeah, because we had all the boys to watch over. My parents were always busy.

WN: And when you helped in the hotel or the restaurant, did you get paid?

VH: Oh, no. We don't work for pay. It's your family business. (Laughs) You don't work for pay. So you just pitch in, whatever you can, and that's it.

WN: And you're the number three girl. So what did your two older sisters do?

VH: Well, the oldest one [Hiroko Okino Omura], when she was sixteen, she was a sophomore yet, she went Japan with my aunty. So she lived about four years in Japan. She was away. And the second one [Ruth Okino Nakamura] was home, she was working in town for Judge [Harry] Irwin.

WN: Oh, this is Ruth?

VH: Ruth. She worked quite a while, and then she went to Honolulu. Then she used to do my father's paperwork, and all that. Accounting stuff. So she was busy with all of the paperwork, too.

WN: So your two older sisters—one went to Japan, one went to Honolulu—and you stayed in Hilo?

VH: Yeah.

WN: So would you say that you were the one that worked, maybe, the most in the hotel?

VH: Well, we had to keep up with the family. (Laughs) But we had help, so not that bad.

WN: So, try tell me how a hotel operated in those days. I mean, for example, how were the reservations taken, and things like that? Or did people just come in?

VH: Oh, they call in, or they come in. If you have the big group, then they call in and make the reservation ahead of time. So you know, more or less, how many coming and going. But the others---the Honolulu salesmen used to come monthly. We used to have regulars that used to come from different companies. Those days all the salesmen used to come in, go out around the island. They make all their round on the island. Met quite a few of them.

WN: So, salesmen from Honolulu . . .

VH: Yeah, Iida Shōten, and all that, the big companies used to send in these workers. I forget the other stores, but I remember the man from Iida was the . . .

WN: Who was the man from Iida? That's my family, you know.

VH: Who? Iida's?

WN: Yeah.

VH: What was his name? I forgot his name. So long ago already.

WN: What was the average length of stay for, maybe, one guest?

VH: Depends, though. I don't know about that hotel part.

WN: I mean, they didn't just come for one day.

VH: Some do. Come and go, and, like I said, the [construction] boys, some boarded right through while they were working. But the rest, the guests, I mean, you don't contact them. So I don't know all that, amount of days they staying, and all that. But salesmen come and go too, so depends how long they work in town, if they going around the island. Then they come and go, and then they go home, and come back and go home. I don't know how many days they stay around.

WN: What kind foods did you guys serve in the restaurant?

VH: Oriental (food).

WN: Mostly Japanese food.

VH: Mostly Japanese food, on trays. Different varieties.

WN: Did *Haole* people stay at the hotel too?

VH: I guess so, I don't know the hotel part. My dad used to take care all that, so about the hotel I don't know.

WN: And you folks had to clean the rooms every day?

VH: Oh yeah, when they go out, every day. So the girls [cleaned] every room. Whoever comes and goes. It was a full-time job for them besides cooking.

WN: Was there a bar too?

VH: No, no, no. Then besides that, we used to have all the truckers, truck drivers, too. They had all the truck drivers that come to eat lunch. From different districts. We had Pa'auilō, Honoka'a, Kohala. Then Kona, that Mr. Uno used to come with the bus. I mean, not bus, but station wagon. He'd go there every other day, comes and stays. Then Mr. Murota, from Hilo, used to travel between days, every other, from Mr. Uno. That's why we had Mr. Uno at the hotel when we lost him in the [1946] tidal wave.

WN: Mr. Uno?

VH: Sadao Uno. He stayed with us quite long.

WN: So, you said your hotel had three stories? And the first story was . . .

VH: The ground floor was the kitchen, where we served. And the left side was the living quarters.

WN: Oh, for you folks.

VH: Yeah.

WN: Did you have your own room?

VH: Yeah, when we were older. Younger, it was all lined up. Beds was lined up. Just like a dormitory.

WN: And then did you folks have your meals in the restaurant?

VH: Well, we eat family meals later, when they're through serving the people. So lunchtime is busy, so after they through with serving all of them, then we have our lunch. The family.

WN: So what was school like for you?

VH: Well. (Chuckles) Not that exciting.

(Laughter)

WN: You went to what school?

VH: It was Hilo Union [School], [Hilo] Intermediate [School]. But I didn't finish [Hilo] High School. My parents didn't have workers already, so I quit [school at tenth grade] and helped them. After the war started, we didn't hire any girls to help, so I stayed home with them, to work with them. Wartime is hard to keep anybody at the house. We didn't have the regulars come in and going, so. . . . Tenants come and go, but then it's not the regulars like before. Wartime, all *pau*. We didn't have those regulars, we didn't serve meals, so we didn't need that help.

WN: How come you folks didn't serve meals?

VH: Wartime?

WN: Yeah.

VH: Too much trouble. You had to hire help again, so, we didn't serve meals too much already after that.

WN: So the girls that you folks hired—your father hired—before the war, so you're saying that when the war came, they found other jobs?

VH: Or they got married, then they leave, like that. They come and go.

WN: So during the war it was only you and your father and mother?

VH: Mm hmm [yes]. We didn't have working girls.

- WN: So how did you feel about having to leave school?
- VH: Well, just stay home, and work with them.
- WN: Was that your choice, or was it your parents'?
- VH: My choice, mostly. I wasn't a very good school student. (Laughs)
- WN: So during the war, weren't there a lot of soldiers and sailors around Hilo?
- VH: Oh yeah, they come and go.
- WN: Did they stay at the hotel?
- VH: Yeah. But the MP [military police] used to check on them all the time. Always they had regular check-up. They bring in girls and they walk the girls out. Yes, we had those. We had all those problems, too. We always had MPs in the middle of the night, tramping in and out.
- WN: So wartime must've really been different for you folks.
- VH: Oh yeah, yeah. But good thing he [VH's father] looks like one Hawaiian, so they come and go and they say, "Oh, the damn Japs!" And we Japanese. We used to hide around, he's in the front. He really looked like a Hawaiian. That way, we pass, you know, for island people. They saw him Oriental maybe they think something.
- WN: Scary.
- VH: Yeah. Scary, you know. We didn't stay in the front, mostly he was at the front. We, you know, around. We didn't have too much problems.
- WN: So I guess the salesmen stopped coming during the war.
- VH: Once [war] started, nobody came. We didn't have them around. Everything changed. The pressure wasn't there for my mom, maybe, cooking, everything. We didn't have that.
- WN: Did your father say anything, like it was, maybe hard to make ends meet during the war, or anything like that?
- VH: No, that part I don't know. They had problems with Grandma when she was around. She used to witness people's loaning, [i.e., vouching for lendees] whatever, and gave a cross [cosigned with an X] to pay off the loans back. So much trouble with all the papers that she gives. Cross here and cross there. She gets to be witness. So they were younger, they were struggling to pay out for Grandma. Almost went bankrupt.
- WN: So people paid---you could just stay and they'd give credit if you were a regular customer to the hotel?
- VH: I don't know how that work out, though. They come and go. That part, I don't know too much.

- WN: Did you folks have something like a garden, or something, in the first floor?
- VH: No, we had a pond. He loves fish, so we had a big area with fish pond. We used to raise his *koi* and all that. We had fruit trees in the back. Not too many garden things. He had pets, chickens and whatever. In the back area---he had a bigger area in the back. Chickens and rabbits, I think he had. I forgot already.
- WN: Was that your job, too? Take care of the . . .
- VH: No, no. I didn't take care of that, I didn't take care of that. We did the fish pond, though. We had to go scrub the ponds and all that for him.
- WN: (To BF) Did you have some questions about the early days in the hotel?
- BF: (To VH) Well, I wanted to find out, when you were just at home, in the wartime, what about the boys? What did they do? Because they were younger, right? Did they help out too, because they went to elementary school or intermediate? Did they help out?
- VH: Not very much to do, those days. They were growing up. But wartime, nothing much to do. They just go school and come back.
- BF: What about to maintain the building? I thought it was so interesting in the summertime, you had to go downstairs and . . .
- VH: Our summer job was to preserve the building. We had to go paint the posts. You know, basement, underneath. It was all sand. So we used to go with the paintbrush and paint whatever he used to---what was that?
- BF: Tar or something.
- VH: No, oil. Some kind of diesel oil. I don't know. Forgot. But that was our job, crawling under and then painting all the posts. It was only low like this.
- WN: Oh, that high? About three feet high?
- VH: No, basement.
- WN: Oh, that kind basement.
- VH: Basement, with the stone base. What do you call that, diesel oil? What you call that oil? Amazing, you know, it held with that. So we go from the front end to the back. That was our summer job.
- WN: Took you all summer to do it?
- VH: (Yes,) practically. Harold remembers that too, he had to go crawling, too. He was small, but to help us around. That, we did every summer. But pretty good, though. It stood up till '46.

- BF: Did Grandpa [Yoshio] Okino, during the war, what about his sports, his. . .
- VH: No, he didn't play sports too much already.
- BF: He didn't play once the war started?
- VH: In the [19]20s we were young, so he went to the Mainland to play and all that. He did wrestling in between and after the baseball. We used to go hopping around with him too. See the wrestling. We went as far as Pāhoa, and we saw sumo. He used to love his sumo. Baseball, he played many years, but. . . .
- WN: They still had baseball during the war?
- VH: No, no, he didn't play. Oh, [VH corrects herself] he played with the *makule* team. We have pictures of that.
- WN: Well, why don't we get to April 1, 1946. So, what were you doing, when you first heard about the tidal wave?
- VH: That was 6:30 in the morning, we found out that the water came into the house, and my mom was calling us to put all the things from the floor to the tables. So we cleaned the floor all off from the water.

Then somebody yelled that the ocean is funny, so we ran across to Mo'oheau Park. We all ran across and we watched the ocean. It went up and down, lapping up the coconut tree. So I said, gee, funny, yeah, how many times we—I don't know how many times we watched.

Then somebody yelled, "I think we better go home, it's funny already, the ocean." So we ran home. It was behind us already. My dad closed the door. It's about nine feet high, that door. [But] it fell down, and he was only about three feet from that door. Luckily, he was a good runner, so we ran to the back of the house. We had, you know, a long building, so we ran. And in the meantime, the thing [came] crushing down. So Harold [VH's youngest brother] and I was in the back wing. In the meantime, my sister was calling for him [VH's father], because she was trapped in her bedroom. So he went to pick her up, help her out, and then he went to look for my mom. She went, ran up the stairs to the second floor. Then she and Mr. Uno ran. Mr. Uno was ahead of her. But she---we have a laundry table that [we] pile the laundry for the laundry man to pick up. That was empty, so she held on to that. So she went down with the building. My dad found her. They all went to the---there was a neighbor's mango tree. They all went to that to climb up.

Walter [Okino, VH's third brother] said when he found out what was coming, he was on the third floor, he saw the wave coming, I heard. But I don't know. He talked about it. But anyway, I don't know how he got out of there too, because Harold and I were in the back wing and we were kind of scared, because the back section was ready to fall, too. Lopsided. And the only thing we could (jump) over to was this shower house that the [Hilo] Gas Company had. Small house, and then only about a foot high off the (gas tank) you know, vent. So we held on to that and I said, "Oh, we better hold to this."

Men at the [Hilo] Rice Mill [were] calling that the wave is coming. My [second] brother

George [Okino] was trapped already on the ground with the lumber. He floated up as the water came in, so he was loose, but [when] the water recedes, then he's trapped again. So in the meantime, Harold and I floated over to the gas tank, near the gas tanks, so we kind of waded over to the tank, ready to climb over. But the meantime, when that flood came through, [my oldest brother] Charles [Okino] drove his car to Kumu Street. [When] the wave recede you could go [i.e., move about]. So when he came back, nothing's left. So he came around to the back side, where there's a road coming from the back between Ruddle [Sales and Service Co., Ltd.]. Then he was there waiting for us, so we came out.

But in the meantime we couldn't find anybody else because they were all in the mango tree. Then after that they came down. Then my dad was trying to get my brother [George] out from the rubble. My brother [Charles] drove us to a cousin's home. That's where we stayed. But George was trapped under for about three hours before they could take him out.

WN: Underneath all the . . .

VH: The rubble. But that's the time we had that shower house, so that thing kind of held the rubbish. That's why he was trapped there, but was lucky he didn't get hurt too much. All bruised, but he was saved afterwards. So afterwards the man told me, "We help him come out." But we weren't around to see that. Thanks to them, he got out okay.

So my sister Ruth and George went to our friend Mr. Taketa's house, and they stayed there, and we stayed at my cousin's house. We stayed about a month over there. [Hilo] Dokuritsu [Gakkō] opened a dormitory for tidal wave people. So we went there. Had several families over there. Luckily that we found---no homes, no houses to rent or anything. That's the closest we could get. Then by the time we were settled there, Mr. Chow was building that house on Kino'ole, and the hotel borrowed that. Started to run that on Kino'ole Street, across the fire station. So he [Yoshio Okino] ran that for about twelve years.

WN: On Kino'ole.

VH: Before he retired.

WN: When you folks---when you say you went to the back wing, was that on the first floor?

VH: No, no, we had the extension on the back, we had two-story extension.

WN: So you were in the back part of the hotel.

VH: We were in the back wing. I mean, the back wing was standing, but lopsided. So we were afraid it might fall on us, but that's the only safest way we could climb over. Something to go on.

WN: So when you waded out---how deep was the water?

VH: Wasn't too deep. But yet all jaggedy, so kind of scary with only rubber slippers. We just have to get out. We were close to the [gas] tanks, so we were ready to climb the tank.

WN: How far was the tank from the hotel?

- VH: Oh, quite a distance, it's in the back side. [Hilo] Gas Company was in the back side [i.e., located behind Okino Hotel].
- WN: And what about the mango tree? Where was the . . .
- VH: It was on the left side. We had (bath)houses on the left side, with all that. That was the only thing standing, and I don't know how many of them climbed that tree. That's what saved them from the other wave that keep coming. I don't know how many came. I heard several came after that.
- WN: People would say that, you know, when the water receded . . .
- VH: We didn't see that. Because we were running from the park. We were watching only the waves lapping up and down the tree. That's about all we saw. Then we ran home. That's the last we saw of the park. They claim that it [waves] covered Mo'ohau Park pavilion, so that's real high. Our house came crumbling down. That's the frightening part, you know, just the explosion and then everything crashing down.
- WN: Were you able to save anything?
- VH: Well, we went the next day to look around. They had us move out, because dangerous, eh? I found part of my room standing. But they didn't let us stay enough to pick up whatever I had. That's the sad part. I had quite a bit of things on the shelf that I could see but I couldn't get it.
- WN: Oh, you never got it?
- VH: It was all stolen after that. They chased us off because dangerous. They said, "That's going to fall," and all that stuff. But we had to go and look for all our things, but we couldn't find too much things. The thing was, we had my grandma's ashes in the house, too, so we had to hunt for that. It was [found] in the back section, by the [Hilo] Gas Company. We found her, all right. Then looked through the rubbles, but whatever you found was all [covered] with oil and everything. We didn't have much clothes, too. We couldn't find all our belongings. So whatever washed out, dishes and everything, was in the riverbed. We didn't recover that much.
- WN: What would you say would be the most valuable thing that you lost?
- VH: I didn't really have that many things. Only personal things. Whatever you had.
- WN: So what did you hear about your brother and how he got rescued?
- VH: Well, this man told me that they were taking him out. My father's friend was looking for a saw to saw him out. But everything's jumbled up, so couldn't find anything. But the boys all around---[Hilo] Rice Mill had a lot of workers, so I guess they came down to help him out or something. But they were up on the top floor, evacuated to upstairs, they say, so they were looking from the window from upstairs. So they called out to my brother that a wave coming, so that time [during the wave inundation], he'd get loose. Then it goes back again, matted up [i.e., he was trapped]. They say about three hours actually, he was under that lumber before they could take him out.

- WN: And all the time, did you know he was alive?
- VH: We didn't know.
- WN: You didn't know at all?
- VH: No, until my father and my mother came back to the house. They brought my mom home, like that, to the house, but my dad had to check on my brother. So he was down there looking, waiting. Then they took him [George] to the hospital to check up, because he was—only bruised, so luckily, he was saved.
- WN: And Mr. Uno. Now, where was he when the wave hit?
- VH: That's why, he went up the stairs with my mom, so he was washed off. So I don't know where he was crushed. They found him later. So I guess the family came to claim his body. We didn't know that part. We didn't contact them after that. But I went to see her [Mrs. Uno] way later, but nobody was home at the house. I don't go Kona that often, we went to church service then. His body was buried in Kona. My friend Etsuko took me to the grave because it was close to her father. I put the flowers on, and came home, and went to see the wife. And she said, "Oh, I'm moving out to my daughter's, to Honolulu." So second time I went down, he was taken out [from his grave site], I guess, and she took him Honolulu. So I haven't seen her since then.
- WN: So, he was with your mother (and George) on the second floor (when the building came crashing down), and your mother was okay.
- VH: (Yes), at that time she was washed off, and she was hanging on to the [laundry table] so she was lucky, she (was) okay. She was saved with that, holding on to the table (and, later located George, and Uno man). She had a gash behind her knee that caused an infection, so she had to end up in [Dr. Z.] Matayoshi['s care] but we thought we lost her at that time. So it took her quite long to recover from that infection. Otherwise, we were lucky. We had our lives.
- WN: You were like, what, twenty-one? Young, still pretty young.
- VH: Yep, twenty-one.
- WN: So how did you feel at the time? Was it . . .
- VH: We had to make the best of it.
- WN: Scared, or excited?
- VH: Oh, (yes), we used to have nightmares. I used to have nightmares. Crashing sounds. Scary, though.
- WN: People talk about the smell afterward. What was that like?
- VH: Oh, yes. All fermented. He [Takeshi] was working [for the] county so he used to come around, picking up all that—(VH asks TH) what was that? Barley?

TH: Middling.

WN: Oh, millet. [WN mishears TH.]

VH: They used to have one store on the opposite side [of Kamehameha Avenue, Amfac Wholesale Cash & Carry].

TH: We (didn't) want to carry [the middling] by hand so (we used stretcher).

VH: They used to come with the stretcher and clean it up. But the scary part of that, we were looking for our things, [among] these houses that washed off near our place. We were walking on the platform, and here was a big foot sticking out between the layers, and aah! We walking over somebody! We didn't know. So they came to pick the body up. That's why we said, "Oh, sorry." (Chuckles) Didn't know we were walking over him. We didn't find anything anywhere. It was all a mess.

WN: So you folks were at the [Hilo] Dokuritsu [Gakkō] dormitory. Your father and mother too?

VH: (Yes), we had one section of the dormitory, and another family lived in one section. There's another—they have a wing this way, an L shape, so there was a teachers' main cottage that one family lived, and then Hatada Bakery's [family] lived one section. I don't know where the other family lived. But our side we had two other families. Two families live on one wing. There's a big hall where they cook, so we all had our own unit. But luckily we had one room of our own where we could eat. We had to cook in the open kitchen, but we could sit and talk. Had our own room to eat with, dining room, like. We lived there quite long, until we could rent that Chow building.

WN: How was your father and mother? I mean, how did they take this whole thing?

VH: Well, pretty rough, but, adjust accordingly. Just have to take it. Once they started that other hotel, kept them busy enough. Harold lived with them quite long, until he went Honolulu. He was going to community college. He finished that, and he went Honolulu.

WN: And where did you stay? Did you live in the new hotel, too?

VH: Yeah, we stayed there.

WN: So how different was life in the new hotel, for you?

VH: Well, just have to adjust.

WN: You still helped in the hotel?

VH: No, not much. I used to work out, so.

WN: Where did you work?

VH: I used to work at the beauty shop.

WN: You had your own business?

VH: No, no, no, I worked under somebody.

WN: So that's something you wanted to do?

VH: Yeah, I guess so. At that time. Just to find something to do.

BF: Was that below the hotel, or was it still that other. . . . I can't remember. There were two locations of Fashionette, right?

VH: No, not Fashionette, I worked under somebody else. Globe Beauty [Salon].

BF: Who was the first person you worked for? Where was the first beauty shop you worked for?

VH: Globe Beauty [Salon]. She was Mrs. Imamura. She was across that Kino'ole Street.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

VH: . . . sewing shop. Used to have all that buildings.

BF: Where the Chevron station is now? There was another building there?

VH: (Yes), across the. . . . (Yes.)

WN: How long did you do that?

VH: Quite long.

WN: So you said your parents had the new hotel for twelve years.

VH: He worked there twelve years.

WN: Only twelve years.

VH: Until he [VH's father] retired. Then he moved to Honolulu because (part of his family) were in Honolulu.

WN: Pu'u Panini (Avenue).

VH: See, George was bachelor yet, so they bought the house on Pu'u Panini.

WN: George was the one who was rescued?

VH: (Yes.)

- WN: Did your father want one of your brothers to take over the hotel?
- VH: Well, he was trying to build a new one, actually. He had the blueprints made and everything, but couldn't get all the loan. Too big a loan, so (he gave) up the idea. Luckily, (he didn't) [rebuild]. Rough going because everybody was young. And they were all working people, all right, but young. He couldn't get enough loan to start that.
- WN: Where would this have been?
- VH: The same location. Because we had the lot.
- WN: You folks owned that . . .
- VH: We had owned that. After that they (condemned the property).
- WN: You mean the county?
- VH: (Yes, county or state.) In a way it was lucky, because the boys were too young. If they were working boys, then maybe we could manage, but [the loan] was too (large). Business wasn't that great those days after the wave. If we had a big hotel like that, we'd be on the losing end.
- WN: That was right after the war, yeah? The war wasn't too good.
- VH: It [business] wasn't so good during the war. If you had to build a big one like that, that's big money. Luckily we gave up. We had to just pay off the [architect] for the drawings and all.
- BF: How many rooms were in this newer hotel, on Kino'ole Street, across the fire station? It just was one floor, right?
- VH: (Yes.)
- BF: So is it like, twelve rooms, or fifteen?
- VH: I guess so, I forgot about that. After that, [it was] converted to apartment, I heard. I forgot how many rooms.
- WN: So, the Kino'ole Street was owned by another man, and your father rented the . . .
- VH: (Yes), Mr. Chow. Bob Chow's relative.
- BF: His father? Mr. Robert Chow's father?
- VH: No, no, this Chow is different. Relative, I think. I don't know, I'm not sure. When he built that building, the son had a restaurant. That was good, at least, work to do.
- WN: So from '46 to '58, around that time, is that when he had the Kino'ole Street [hotel], your father? And then after that he retired, your father and mother retired in Honolulu. And you stayed in Hilo?

- VH: (Yes.)
- WN: You folks got married what year?
- TH: [Nineteen] forty-nine.
- VH: [Nineteen] forty-nine.
- BF: How did you folks meet?
- VH: Hmm?
- WN: How did you folks meet?
- TH: Through YBA [Young Buddhist Association] church.
- WN: YBA?
- VH: (Chuckles) We were going Hongwanji YBA, and our relative, Mr. Iwasaki, used to bring them in, he and Koichi, and bunch of them. We used to get together at YBA. Big bunch of girls, and oh boy, plenty boys too. Long time ago.
- WN: So you were working at the beauty shop by then?
- VH: I was still working then. And when I had the children, I quit. When I had Glenn already, I quit working. I stayed home to take care of all of them. I didn't go out to work.
- WN: Glenn was born in 1950?
- VH: (Yes. Takeshi's) mother used to raise flowers and vegetables, so can't be trotting all of them around the yard. (Laughs) So I stayed home to take care of them until Karen was old enough. So, weekends, I used to go to work, at Toshi's.
- WN: What is this Toshi's . . .
- VH: Toshi, Fashionette [Beauty Salon], used to be right across the fire station. I used to work part-time there. [When] they were old enough I could go out.
- WN: Where did you folks live after you got married?
- VH: The house we live in Kawaiiani. Now it's Mikahala Street, but those days was under Kawaiiani.
- WN: Oh, and you folks still live there?
- VH: Oh, (yes), that's his house, he built. After he came home from the service, he started to build his own. Luckily, we have a house.
- WN: So what was it like raising these three kids?

VH: (Chuckles) Oh, they were good.

BF: (Laughs) Oh, I don't think so.

(Laughter)

WN: I'll ask you the question later when she's gone.

(Laughter)

VH: No, they were good. I stayed home with them, so it's easier. Good children. I met Glenn's working guys. Said, "How was he? Was he good boy, or bad boy?"

I said, "Oh, he was very good boy!" (Laughs) This guy coordinates the work with him at the handicaps. I met him, he's laughing. I said, "No, he was good."

WN: How has Hilo changed, you know, since the time you were a little girl, to now? What do you think are the big differences between then and now?

VH: Well, everything's gone, so even when I explain to them, they wouldn't know.

WN: You mean, like, downtown?

VH: The whole downtown is all gone.

BF: You didn't mention before, but when you were younger, before the tidal wave, didn't you ride the train along the coast . . .

VH: Oh yes, we went to Honomū.

BF: . . . to go and visit people?

VH: It goes as far as Honomū side, and you take your lunch, you eat there (at) where they park, and then turn around, and then they come back to Hilo. That was the last ride I had. That was interesting. We were excited to go that kind of ride.

WN: How long did it take you to go from here to Honomū?

VH: I don't know the time. We were young yet.

BF: But you would go with Grandma, or by yourselves, the kids, by yourselves . . .

VH: I think Aunty Ruth and I, and I don't know who else went . . .

BF: And how much did you pay for that round-trip?

VH: I don't know, I don't remember all that.

BF: I just wondered if it's like, ten cents, or—(laughs) they say it's very reasonable.

VH: So, when we were younger, we used to walk that track, too, because my aunty lived across on the Pu'u'eo side. So we had to cross the whole stretch, where the highway [now] is, and you know, you're young, so the space between [the planks], you feel like you're going to fall through. And my dad used to catch fish, so he wanted to give to aunty. Actually, uncle was (brother) of my Grandma Okino, so he wanted to give them fish. So every Sunday, it was our job to go walk across. (Chuckles) So just looking through that track . . .

WN: Oh, so you're over the bridge and the track and the wooden planks?

VH: (Yes), wooden planks, so you had to hop over.

WN: Didn't you think that would be . . .

VH: You would feel that the---so lot of times you would have nightmares that you falling through that, because you're afraid to walk through. So it was a every-week thing that we used to walk across and play at her yard, and, you know. . . .

BF: But what about the train schedule? Did they run weekends?

VH: No, no, it's a Sunday, so no train.

BF: Sunday, no train?

VH: Sunday morning we used to run across.

(Laughter)

VH: That was our job, to deliver, hand deliver. That was our experience, though. But we used to have nightmares, though. I mean, I was young. You could kind of see the water there. You feel like you're falling through that.

WN: So you took one step per . . .

VH: Slowly go and step over and go. Quite a stretch, you know, that track. We did every week, we did that. Because he's such a fisherman, they used to catch a lot of fish. He wanted to give them some, so we used to deliver.

WN: So this is the bridge right now.

VH: Right there, the highway.

WN: Right here.

VH: Right there. Quite a stretch.

WN: That was wiped out, though, right? In the tidal wave?

VH: When we were young, we did all that. That's it.

WN: Anything else? Barbara?

VH: Nothing exciting besides that.

BF: Well, I know she talked about, when we were small, about all the stores, thefts, because of that tidal wave. Because before when you were growing up they have stores all lined up, and there was a beach, and piers, all in the front before the tidal wave.

VH: Across [Mo'ohau] Park had a big pier that they used to go all fishing. We were younger so we didn't go. But they used to have a lot of fisherman on that pier.

BF: So what was directly across the hotel? What do you remember, like, what businesses . . . ?

VH: It's Mo'ohau Park, where the Cow Palace was, and there was a pine grove on the side. But there was a train track that went through to Hilo Rice Mill. Hilo Rice Mill load used to be unloaded there. The train track coming in. Then across the---in the park they have big pier. It was such a good fishing ground. Everybody went fishing there.

So wartime, the boys used to have a machine gun nest over there. We used to go visit because my brothers were interested in army things. (Chuckles) You know, they were young. Most of them were Japanese boys. They used to come take a bath at the house, like that.

WN: Service boys?

VH: Service boys. They had pup tent-looking thing. They used to sleep in there, I guess. (Laughs) The pine grove was around the bend, so they stay on the corner and hide. There's a hideaway they could stay. So they built this tent. My brothers used to go and check on them all the time.

WN: What was Cow Palace?

VH: It was American Factors, [Ltd.] before. Had their business over there.

WN: And then, what, they sold, like, lumber and things like that?

VH: Uh, no, it wasn't lumberyard. I wonder what they sell. What did they sell? Wholesale. All kind stuff, yeah? Lumber was a different section on the farther end. I know lumberyard was . . .

WN: The lumberyard was next door to Cow Palace?

VH: No, no, it wasn't real next door. Farther away, no? Lumberyard. [American] Factors' lumberyard was further out.

TH: By the [Hawai'i] Planing Mill and all that.

WN: Planing Mill, yeah.

VH: Planing Mill was further out. They had lot of business on that area, that's why.

WN: And Cow Palace was concrete?

VH: Solid concrete. Cow Palace and Hilo Theatre was a big building. In between. And then farther that side is the lumberyard. Further down. I can't remember all that already.

TH: American Factors was over there.

VH: American Factors was. Because when we were young, they built a playground jungle gym, and we used to play over there on the small stretch. Then came---wartime, had the army USO [United Service Organizations] right in that small area, they built one USO.

WN: You know, what I'll do is I'm going to turn off this and we can continue with the video [that BF is taking]. So okay, I'm going to turn this off. Thank you very much.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, I'm talking to Mr. Takeshi Hirata. First of all, tell me when you were born.

TH: On February 8, 1921 at Waiākea Homestead.

WN: Tell me something about your parents.

TH: My parents, (father's name, Denshiro Hirata. Mother's name, Maki Fukuda Hirata) well, he worked for the plantation, Waiākea Mill. My mother, she was housewife, working in the garden, planting vegetables. We had two boys and two girls in the family. I myself went to Waiākea Waena School, Hilo Intermediate, and then graduated Hilo High School in 1939. After I graduated, I went work as apprentice in carpentry. And then in (1941), after two years I went to work for defense project. (I volunteered when AJA [Americans of Japanese Ancestry] combat team was formed in 1943 [i.e., 442nd Regimental Combat Team]. I told my brother to take care the parents.)

WN: You were number two boy?

TH: Yeah, number two boy.

WN: Your sisters were older or younger than you?

TH: I have a younger sister, and then my older sister, she's the first one, see. Then my brother, then me. Then after---well, I went to volunteer, and then I came back 1945. I was discharged in November of 1945. Then I worked for [Hawai'i] County in January of 1946.

BF: Can you talk something about your military service? What you were---where you got your training?

TH: (Thirteen weeks basic training, with bridge building, weapons, and equipment training.) So, we went to Camp Shelby, and after training for one year, in May 1944, we were sent overseas, which took us about one month to get to Naples, (Italy).

WN: Oh, Italy.

TH: (Yes), Italy. Then, I was with the company and then went to France. After France had to come back to Italy. Well, I separated, because of my hearing, and then my ear trouble. I was classified as Class B, then separated in France, and then I was assigned to engineer, heavy equipment engineer (company), in France. Then I spent about one month in France, and went to Germany. In Germany, I was with the company not too long, and then the war was over. So I started to come home on May—May 18 I got the assignment to come home. On the way I went to England, then to Boston, then California. Then I reached Honolulu, just before, day before V-E [Victory in Europe] Day parade. Then I had my thirty-day furlough, I came back Hilo. I waited till November to get my discharge. So I came back in Hilo after the discharge and then I worked for the county, January of 1946. Then not too long after that the tidal wave came. (Laughs)

WN: Before you were classified Class B, what company were you in?

TH: Oh, I was with the 232nd [Combat] Engineers, (company which was part of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team).

WN: The 232nd Engineers? Even before you were reclassified?

TH: I was with the [232nd] Engineers, and then I got reclassified and separated from the company.

WN: How did you get into the 232nd? Did you have a background in that kind of engineering?

TH: (No.) When I volunteered, we went Honolulu. Then I had to do tests to see which company [I would be] going in. Since my carpentry background, I guess they assigned me to the engineers. (About eight boys from the Big Island) went to the engineers. And right now, we only have, I think from that group, one in Kohala, and then four of us living in Hilo.

WN: I'm going to back just up a little bit. When you were growing up, what did you do to have good fun, growing up Waiākea?

TH: (Chuckles) No, not much fun, but (played basketball, baseball with the classmates in the camp).

BF: They had the same first grade teacher. (Chuckles)

WN: Not?

BF: Yes.

WN: So you were in plantation camp?

TH: I was at plantation camp with my folks. And after the school then I started working. Our camp living is not much, eh? We had volunteers from the camp, was only three of us [volunteered for military service]. Our [plantation] camp was Camp 2. Because there's a Camp 2, Camp 3, go right up to Camp 8, way up on Waiākea Uka, see. Where the Waiākea Uka gym is at, I think was about Camp 6.

BF: But Camp 2 was off by Puainako right where Waiākea Intermediate is, or Waiākea Elementary

School.

TH: Right now is Wilama Street.

VH: Grandma them raised cane, too, up there.

TH: My father used to lease twenty acres. And then we—me and my brothers—used to, summertime, used to go help him work, you know, planting. It's about all, summertime. You know.

WN: So you worked with your father.

TH: Cane. Just summertime, no? Mostly summertime. When I start getting out from high school, then I started working in carpentry and learning.

WN: How did you learn carpentry?

TH: Well, in high school days, I used to take shop. Two years, I think, I took shop. Then after I graduated, I think, I better start working carpentry. Then when we were apprentices, we live-in kind, see. At that time we learned from the foundation up, so you find carpentry more interesting. From the groundwork up, right up to the building. When I got discharged, I built my own home.

WN: Oh, you built your own home? Oh, boy.

TH: You know, from the GI loan, eh? But the bad time was [1949], they had strike. Big strike. So, (it was) hard to get building material.

WN: You mean the longshore strike?

TH: (Yes,) the longshore. I think can't get any material, you see. So, my house was [built] up to the roof, you know. Those days we used to make with temporary post and up the roof, yeah? Then I got stuck with about three months, before I got any more materials.

So the VA [Veteran's Administration] used to tell us, how come the building. . . .

And so I tell, well, materials was hard to get hold, see? So, it took me almost one year (chuckles) to finish the house.

WN: So, tell me about 1946. What is your experience in the tsunami?

TH: Well, when I started working for county, they put me on maintenance work. Okay, now, '46, I was outside to make railing, (install) guard railing. So that day, that April 1, we went---those days we used to travel on our own, not on company time, so we used to start out early to go out. So we reach over there about, oh, about seven, a little after seven o'clock. One crew was assigned to work up on the high place. You know, this is Hakalau Gulch, with the [sugar] mill, and then the old railroad. Well, the crew up there—I was assigned to the crew on the lower side—the crew up there call us to tell us, "Ey, today the wave action little bit different," he tell me, the way the wave coming in. So we ran up. By the time we ran up, was pretty big

already, the wave coming in. And then, just before that, the mill blew the whistle to let the workers to get out from the building. So, we watched that and then they came out. There was a cable car that go on the side of the building. So they all rode and the thing went up. Then after that they see the big wave start coming in. And then, we watched it.

WN: Now, where were you standing?

TH: Well, right . . .

WN: By the railroad track side?

TH: No, no, no, we were standing right by the roadside on the high place. Then we saw everything, you know, that the water went just shoot from out the flume and just like matchsticks falling down. Then about three coconut trees standing alongside, I saw the water come right up to the nut, and then the trees (didn't) fall down. They keep on standing. Then after that, the boiler tank from the mill I think, the waves start pushing the thing up the river, see? After the (wave) getting little bit low, we went back to the place. One house next to the low bridge, the water went right underneath the bridge, went underneath the building.

WN: Oh yeah?

TH: We was about halfway down, when we was watching all that, see. Then after that, somebody came call us to tell, oh, we better go back to Hilo. Then when we came back, they didn't let us go to the devastated area. But we just standby at our shop. That day we didn't do nothing. From next day, we start cleaning up.

WN: Now, the mill, Hakalau [Plantation Company] mill, was pretty much destroyed, right? Did you see lot of destruction, you know, while the wave was hitting the mill? Did you actually see . . .

TH: No, not too much, you know. I didn't see too much. Some of the boys was up there. Maybe they the ones that actually sees it. Not too long after that, somebody came. They must have called or something, and they tell us to go back.

WN: So next day you went to Hilo.

TH: The next day they tell us to start to clean up. The first place we went, around Mamo Street, and all around there. Mamo Street.

WN: Try tell that story again about that stretcher.

(Laughter)

WN: I don't know if your voice could be heard [earlier].

TH: We went around the building. First we went up there, you know, without anything. They tell the boys they're going to take away that things. But we cannot grab the thing because all bloated. And so, somebody suggest, "Hey, bring the stretcher, then we go load that thing on and carry 'em out." But not much, you know, because most of the thing was washed away.

WN: What did you put on the stretcher?

TH: This is middling bag. (Chuckles)

WN: But how come you had to save that? I mean . . .

TH: I don't know. What the guy said, just move those things. That was a funny incident.

(Laughter)

VH: We saw them working with that stretcher.

TH: Cleaning up, cleaning up, you know.

WN: What else besides the middling, what else did you carry out, carry away?

TH: Well, I think had plenty canned goods or something was around there too, you know. I don't know where the canned goods came from, but.

VH: They had a lot of stores around too. I don't know what came across.

TH: Because we was all moved around, you know. The next time we work around some different section. Because everybody was in turmoil already.

VH: So the '60 one, a friend passed away, so they were working around, looking for him too, no?

TH: Oh yeah, that . . .

VH: Nakamura.

TH: That was '60 one.

VH: [Nineteen] sixty.

TH: Yeah, I had to go cut up--I was nearby and then they told me, "Ey, come, come," because I had to cut one piece of material from the place to take the body out, see. So I had to go over there, cut with my handsaw and open up the place. I think the week before, we drank beer at this place.

VH: He had the restaurant on (Mamo Street).

TH: He had restaurant. He used to be 442[nd Regimental Combat Team].

VH: Before, we catered food with them. Sometimes dinner before that wave. She's [Mrs. Nakamura's] the sister of Mrs. Miyasato. So they sent the children to the Miyasatos, and then get them away from the building. They got caught in that. . . .

BF: So in 1946, when you were helping clean up then, over here. So, how long were you involved . . .

- TH: Yes, yes, 1960, I think I was 442 [club] president over here. So the service we had with that reverend there—the church used to be next to [*Hilo*] *Tribune-Herald*. Holy Cross. Yeah, they had the service over there. That was sad because the week before, we drink beer together, and then that day, no?
- VH: Richard Miyashiro had his new Cafe 100. New one. And then that went too.
- WN: This was the '60 one?
- TH: That was over in Waiākea Town, eh? Right by Suisan.
- VH: We were supposed to have party that weekend, too.
- WN: So in '46, when you were cleaning up, what was the plan for cleanup? I mean, did you just go walk around . . .
- TH: No. . . .
- WN: . . . or were you assigned certain areas?
- VH: They were assigned, I think. You were assigned to clean up around there.
- TH: Well, actually, assigned, and then we had to move shaking stuff that you had to cut up, or whatever. So we mostly standby. The equipment used to come but certain place, we had to cut or move something little bit just to get the equipment to come in. Just like mostly standby.
- WN: So the equipment, like bulldozers, and . . .
- TH: Right, right, bulldozers. And trucks that come to haul.
- WN: What kind of things did you see? I mean, I'm sure there was a lot of rubble and wood and things like that.
- TH: Well, us was general kind cleanup that's why we tell 'em, oh, come here, come there, you know. Then we used to move around quite a bit. But in 1960, where they had the Waiākea Kai School, we had to dismantle that, and from whatever we can salvage, then we built that Waiākea Elementary School, no? I think we made some portable building. So we took some material from there and then start building. That was the project from the 1960 tidal wave. We built about three portable houses out of all the material that we get from there. Because over there, that building was just flat on the ground, you know, after the wave came. That was a little bit farther in, so, wasn't that damaged by the wave.
- WN: You mean the school?
- TH: That school. So, most of the material can be salvaged and used.
- WN: So your job was to build portables for the . . .
- TH: Portables.

WN: Waiākea?

TH: Waiākea Elementary, I think. I don't know how long they used that place but, you know, after they built that they took off the building. You see, building was shortage that time, so we used to move, you know, put 'em on there, move the building to some other schools. Even Keaukaha, we used to take a couple of buildings from there. We built portable building, (many) portable buildings [were] built. You know, after, Ho'olulu Park used to have plenty—wartime, we used to make portable building and put 'em up, eh? So we used that to make the extra classrooms sometimes. So we used to move that building. That's all was under county. Some even in Keaukaha, just put 'em on the trailer like that, we move 'em like, nighttime, because daytime traffic you cannot. We used to move 'em at night.

WN: So, 1960, you folks were living in Mikahala Street? That was safe area?

TH: Safe area.

WN: So what do you folks remember about 1960? I know that was at night, eh?

TH: Someone said from our kitchen place, you can hear the roaring . . .

VH: I can hear the roaring of the ocean. I couldn't sleep thinking that the wave is coming, and I kept hearing the radio. He was sleeping already, but. I said you know, that wave's sounds, I could hear that thing rolling, coming. So I kept listening. And they say, oh, one foot wave at Naniloa and all that. So I thought maybe isn't that bad. But I heard in the morning was awful, the destruction. I could hear the ocean all through my life, could hear, November and December is the rough month, and you could hear the ocean. So I kept listening, and I could hear that. Scary though, the sound.

BF: But there was a siren, though? Right? A siren, wasn't there a siren system in 1960?

VH: They had a siren warning, early in the evening.

BF: So what time, do you remember what time?

VH: I don't know the time. But they had all that warning. [According to *Tsunami!*, the sirens sounded at approximately 8:30 P.M.] But the Waiākea people, they all thought didn't come, so they went back home. It was supposed to come 1:00 [A.M.] but didn't come. [The third and most destructive wave hit Waiākea at 1:04 A.M.] So it was after a while.

WN: Yeah, I read where they had one warning at 8:30 [P.M.].

VH: I think it was little earlier. They had no *da kine* to go back to where they were. They thought they could see the action. Cost their lives. A lot of them lost their lives on the beach too.

WN: Which, the Wailoa?

VH: The beach, they went to see . . .

TH: Wailoa.

VH: . . . watching all that. I don't know, that's what we heard.

WN: Were you involved in cleanup at all for '60? I know you folks salvaged some lumber for the portables. You were still working for the county at that time?

TH: (Yes.)

VH: (Yes,) later he got into the state.

TH: The reason is, the state used to give county funds to take care of schools and all that. But after that they separated. State used to have their own crew to maintain school like that.

END OF INTERVIEW

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