

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Masuo Kino

*"The wave flipped me over and carried me toward the lava rock wall that rimmed the school. I recall telling myself, 'Gee, I'm going to die. I'm going to hit head first into that rock wall and I'm going to die.' But miraculously part of the wave that preceded me, smashed into the wall and broke it up. So I went flying through the wall, not headfirst into a stationary wall, but I was rumbling along, rolling along with all the rocks. . . . All I know is I was under tons of water and I was getting hit by all these rolling rocks and debris, and I couldn't breathe. I was sixteen but I guess I knew what mortality meant."*

Masuo Kino was born April 2, 1929 in Kahuku Mauka (near Nīnole), Hawai'i. His father, Kenkin Kino, was a laborer and independent sugarcane grower for Hakalau Plantation Company. His mother, Makato Inamine Kino, was a housewife who raised five children of which Masuo was the youngest. Kenkin and Makato Kino were immigrants from Okinawa.

Masuo helped his father and mother in the sugarcane fields. Living in a very rural area, the family survived with no electricity and plumbing and relied on poultry and livestock for food and other necessities.

Kino attended John M. Ross School until grade eight, when he began attending Laupāhoehoe High School, graduating in 1947. He then moved to Honolulu to attend the University of Hawai'i, earning a bachelor's degree in sociology in 1951, one-year certificate in social work in 1952, and his master's degree in social work from the University of Chicago in 1956.

Returning to Hawai'i, Kino worked for the Maui branch of the territorial DPW [Department of Public Welfare] as a child welfare worker. In 1958, he returned to Honolulu and did some child protective service work for neglected, abused and abandoned children. In 1959, he began his career in the field of vocational education with mentally retarded citizens. At the time of his retirement in 1987, he was rehabilitation facilities specialist for the state Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Kino lives in Kāne'ohe, O'ahu with his wife, Alice Kaneshiro Kino, whom he married in 1955. The couple raised two daughters and have three grandchildren.

Kino shared his 1946 tsunami experiences in an oral history interview conducted in his home. Kino remembered getting off the bus at Laupāhoehoe School on the morning of April 1 and immediately running to the seashore to witness the receding water. The wave swept him inland toward the school grounds. He tumbled beneath the water but managed to grab a branch, which prevented him from being carried out into open ocean.

Tape No. 29-11-1-98

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Masuo Kino (MK)

Kāne'ōhe, O'ahu

May 22, 1998

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: I'm interviewing Mr. Masuo Kino for the tsunami oral history project on May 22, 1998. We're at his home in Kāne'ōhe O'ahu and the interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay Mr. Kino, why don't we begin. First off, if you can tell me when and where you were born.

MK: I was born [April 2, 1929] on the Hāmākua Coast, a place called Kahuku Mauka, which is really a string of half a dozen homes over a stretch of about a mile and a half. Our post office (address was) Nīnole, so that's why I always say I'm from Nīnole, Hawai'i.

WN: Tell me something about your father.

MK: My father [Kenkin Kino] was a very quiet man. He was a meticulously honest man. He worked hard, he died early. He came from Okinawa along with (two) brothers. He was somewhat educated; he could read and write well. I guess what I got from him was some sense of ethics, of right and wrong. But I think my mother (had a stronger) influence in my life. (Laughs)

WN: What kind of work did your father do?

MK: He was a sugar plantation (field) worker. Really laborer type, not working in the mill or in some semiclerical position, (but cutting) cane, fertilizing cane, poisoning (weeds), plowing, and so on. He (also) leased maybe twenty acres from the plantation. (The arrangement appeared to be) sharecropping. So the family got involved in the care of the field, and when the field was cared for pretty properly, then he went to work for the plantation. But I think he always was poor. He (said he) always (harvested) when the price of sugar was (low).

WN: At what sugar company was this?

MK: This was Hakalau sugar company [Hakalau Plantation Company], on the Hāmākua Coast.

WN: And you said the family got involved in the tending of the sugar. Were you involved at all?

MK: Yes, I can remember as a twelve, thirteen year old, maybe even earlier, helping my father and

mother tending the cane. Like (*hō hana*), *holehole*, some fertilizing. You carry a big (burlap) bag, fill it with fertilizer and you walk the rows and you spread it out. So I was a very---not atypical. I mean, it was a typical thing that people of my age in that area did, which is work in the sugarcane fields.

WN: And your mother, tell me something about her.

MK: My mother [Makato Inamine Kino] was also from Okinawa. I'm quite sure she was a picture bride. They probably knew each other's family back in Okinawa. She was unschooled, but was very intelligent and resourceful. She was tough; she had strong ideas about things and I think she prevailed most times over my father. (Laughs) I think she was a great influence on me, and I'm sure, my brothers and sisters.

WN: When you say "tough," what do you mean?

MK: She was resilient, handled stress pretty well, gave us some sense of what is right and what is wrong. Although my father did that, too. (That is, told us to) work hard, be honest, give a full day's work, study hard. I'm sure that's not any different from many other Japanese and other immigrant families, too, for that matter.

WN: Was she the stricter one compared to your father with you folks?

MK: She was more involved in child care than my father. My father was a fairly distant figure. My mother was the one who cared for us regularly, and if we got out of line she disciplined us and so on. But, I don't know, in the country we didn't need much discipline. After five, six, you were on your own, you went to the rivers and caught 'ōpae (and 'o'opu). Went into the (gulches to) pick mountain apples, wild passion fruit, and guavas. So, discipline was very minimal. We just went on our way. (Chuckles)

WN: What about chores?

MK: Well, we had a vegetable garden and I guess that was about it. We watered it and dug it and so on. We had some chickens. I don't know whether we ever had pigs, but I know we (once) had horses. But by the time I can remember we had no horses. Of course, making the *furo*. That was one of my jobs that I inherited from my older brothers and sisters.

WN: How did you make the *furo*?

MK: Well, we always got old scrap lumber from the plantation when they were fixing the (sugarcane) flumes nearby. We'd pick up (the discarded pieces and) bring (them) home. Then you start (with) newspaper (or bagasse) and you would kindle (the fire). And if you had some sweet potatoes you (would) throw (them) in the (hot) coals, too. (Laughs) Generally, that would be after the fire (had died down).

At one time Dr. Satoru Izutsu [professor of public health and psychiatry at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa] and I were working (on a statewide) mental retardation (planning) project. And as we analyzed my life (we concluded that I had) a very deprived childhood.

Well, I didn't know that I was deprived. We had no electricity, our drinking water came from

our roof [i.e., catchment], and water (for other purposes) we siphoned off a little stream (nearby and from the cane flume). So when I look back, it was physically quite poverty-stricken. But everybody was about the same, so we were pretty happy about (life in general). I think as you get older you realize, oh they have this and we don't have that. But at that time I didn't feel very much different from other children in that area.

WN: So tell me something about the area and who else was living there.

MK: Well, our nearest neighbor was about maybe 100 yards away, a Japanese family. The next one was another Japanese family, about quarter mile away.

WN: This is Okinawan or *Naichi*?

MK: *Naichi*. We were the only Okinawans around there. And then another half a mile up the road there was another *Naichi* family, another half a mile couple of more (*Naichi*) families. So we were kind of strung along this road, very isolated. Whereas at Kahuku Camp, a camp of (a dozen houses, the children had lots of playmates) and they had electricity, of course. So they were the Kahuku Camp people and we were the Kahuku Mauka people. We were the hicks.

(Laughter)

WN: What was the dividing line between Kahuku [Camp] and Kahuku Mauka?

MK: Well, I guess (the around-the-island) road. If you (went) up the (unpaved) road the first Kahuku Mauka family was about a half a mile up from the main road. So that really divided the [Kahuku] Camp people and the people who lived in the [Kahuku] Mauka area.

WN: And everyone pretty much lived the same way, you know, collecting rainwater and making their own *furo* and so forth?

MK: Yes. In Kahuku Mauka, that was the way. In Kahuku Camp, (they had indoor plumbing and) they had a community *furo*. (I believe) they had people assigned to make *furo* on a rotating basis. So, in a sense, Kahuku [Camp] people had more modern facilities, were more organized. We were pretty much on our own.

WN: What was your house like?

MK: My house was an old house. One living room, one bedroom, a kitchen, a dining area. We had a separate *furo* and (laundry structure) and an outhouse. We (also) had a horse barn used for storage. We had a pretty (high) underhouse where we could hang our (work) tools and our raincoats, or *kappa*. And my brothers did some carpentry there. Not much different from the other houses, although the other houses (could have been) more substantial houses. A porch, a small yard, chickens, and so on. By today's standards, quite primitive.

WN: And you're the youngest of five?

MK: Yes, I'm the youngest of five, two brothers and two sisters. And by the time I (was in the intermediate school grades, all) of them were gone. So I'd say from about eighth grade on I was the only child at home with my mother who was widowed by then.

WN: How did your family get things like supplies and things?

MK: Very interesting. There was a plantation store in Honohina, and once a week, this (salesman came) with a truck, and he took our orders: cans of corned beef, or rice or chorizo or whatever. And then the following week, he (would) deliver (them) and you (would) order again. For medicine, (another) very interesting (arrangement. A salesman would) come around once in three, four months, (leave a paper sack) with all the (different types and amounts of) medicine. Then three (or four) months later he would come back and see what had been used. He charged you for (what you had used. He would then refill the packet.)

The plantation also gave us bagasse in bales. But we had to carry it out from Kahuku [Camp] to our homes. You get a long (pole, tie the bagasse to the pole), and two people (shoulder the ends of the pole. The bagasse) was used to start the *furo* (fire).

We cooked by kerosene. The earlier (years, we cooked rice in) a *kama* (over a fire. There was a large wooden box filled with dirt that served as a fire pit.) Most of the cooking was done on the kerosene stove. The plantation provided (the kerosene) prior to '46. (It was part of) the perquisites that came with employment at the plantation. [The plantation perquisite system ended in 1946 when the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union organized sugar workers throughout the territory of Hawai'i.]

And the fish man, *sakana* man, came from Hilo or someplace on a schedule. Kahuku [Camp] was a stop so if you wanted fish you'd go down (to Kahuku Camp) and wait for that man. And there was a baker from Honomū, Ishigo Bakery, who came on certain evenings. He sold bread and ice cream. So if you wanted (bread or ice cream), you would make that half-mile trek from my home down to Kahuku [Camp], purchase it, and take it home.

WN: How did you go that half mile?

MK: Well, there was a dirt road on one (side of the gulch) and there was (an unpaved) road (on the other side). But it was dark like heck (at night) and there were certain places where we were told (were haunted). But we got used to it. In retrospect, a nice quiet, (safe) walk. But I must say in Kahuku Mauka, we didn't have time to run around at night. We all studied, and by kerosene lamp, too. And we produced pretty outstanding scholars, at least in the local schools. About four or five student body presidents of Laupāhoehoe High School came out of Kahuku Mauka. (Perhaps) parents had more control over us, more influence over us, and as I said, we studied (hard). And it was expected that you study and do well in English [territorial public] school as well as in Japanese[-language] schools.

WN: I was wondering, you know, you folks were the only Okinawans in the area. Did you folks do things together, was there a community at all?

MK: No. Of course we were the only Okinawan family in that [Kahuku] Mauka area. There were Okinawan families in (Kahuku) Camp. And my mother was closer to the Okinawan (families) at the [Kahuku] Camp than the *Naichis*. But there was no organized thing for the Okinawans. I can't recall whether there was anything organized for the Japanese. Insofar as the plantation, (they) gave us (a bag of candies, nuts and fruits at) Christmas through the schools, and at the end of the harvesting season (took us) to Kawaihae for an overnight camp. Hakalau Plantation [Company] was not as progressive in terms of caring for the social (and recreational) needs of

the people as I listen to my friend from Waipahu. At Waipahu [i.e. O'ahu Sugar Company] they had playgrounds, a gym (and organized sports). Well, maybe in Hakalau itself (there were) parks, a gym and so on, but we were on the fringes of Hakalau plantation so we had no organized programs.

WN: So what did you do? I know you told me earlier you did some things like fish for 'o'opu and so forth, but what did you do to have fun as a child?

MK: I was a shadow to my brother who was (five) years older than me. And he loved to (fish and) shoot birds with his BB gun. So I just followed him and we would go down the rivers. There was a big river (nearby with) lots of 'ōpae and (river) 'opihi [*hīhīwai*]. (Another river had) 'o'opu. Go swimming, make rafts out of banana trees or hau trees. I remember following another older person who was very good in agricultural things. He would (surgically remove) the testicles (of chicks) to make them fat or whatever. And I'd go follow him (to a lot of places) because he was in great demand.

But there was much work to do in my father's leased (cane field). And school. (Until the seventh grade there was Japanese[-language] school too. That pretty much filled up the day.

WN: So you went to John Ross School?

MK: John M. Ross School, elementary school.

WN: And where was that?

MK: This was between Kahuku and Honohina. It was about two miles from my house. In those days, my god, some of the (children) walked three, four, five miles to school. For the (children) in the mauka [area], it must have been about five, six miles round trip. And nobody felt it was inappropriate. That was everybody's expectation. Then the Japanese[-language] school was not too far from John M. Ross School. I went there till December 6, [1941] and on the 7th we had the bombing [of Pearl Harbor, signaling America's involvement in World War II], and that was the end of our Japanese education.

WN: So your classmates at John M. Ross were mostly from Hakalau . . .

MK: (No), from Honohina, Kahuku, Nīnole, a little bit beyond. First to seventh grade, I don't know what the (enrollment) was, probably 300. A very nice, small school.

WN: Ethnically what was it mostly?

MK: It reflected the community. Very heavy Japanese, some Filipinos, a few Portuguese, maybe one or two Chinese, and one or two Koreans. But predominantly Japanese, and the Filipinos were beginning to have families, so there was a number of them. I suppose that was pretty much the mix along the Hāmākua Coast in the sugar plantations. Oh yes, maybe a few Puerto Ricans. And no *Haoles*. Well, the *Haoles* were the plantation managers and supervisors, and I don't think their kids ever went to (the public) schools. Maybe they went to boarding schools in Honolulu [or Hilo] or elsewhere. But we were all products of public schools along the coast.

WN: Were there other Okinawans at John M. Ross?

MK: Yes, especially from Kahuku (Camp), and a place called Camp Four, or *Yoban*. Then there were a number of Okinawan families like Tamashiro, Maedo, Yamashiro, Hamadon, and so on. I wasn't very conscious at that (time that) I was an Okinawan and somewhat different. I'm (sure) my father and my mother felt some of (the differences). My older brothers and sisters may have felt it. But I just felt I was Japanese or I was local, and I was a fairly good student so I didn't feel much of any (difference or) discrimination.

During the early war years, there was some discrimination as Japanese. We had this agriculture teacher in the sixth grade. He (was appointed as) some kind of warden so that he could wear a red band on his arm. And he always used to threaten us and say, "If you don't listen to me I'll send you to the concentration camp." And we were not sure whether he really had the power (to do that).

But I think because we were (a small), close-knit community, I don't think (the war) changed the relationships that much. There was still Peter Agliam, Filipino boy, a good friend of mine, and Bunji [Fujimoto] of course, was Japanese. But I didn't feel very much a separateness from the *Naichis* or from the other races. In that sense we were spared much of the discrimination. Maybe in Honolulu there was more. But I never felt very strongly that I was an Okinawan (or that) I was not supposed to be as good as any other person. I did know that [Kahuku] Mauka was pretty strict *Naichi* people. I mean, they came from the old country and they had strong ideas about (being Japanese. Their children) married (only) into the *Naichi* families. That I was conscious of in my early teens. But (I strongly believe) that they treated me as the Kino boy, (and not as the Okinawan boy).

WN: What about your parents, did they speak a little Okinawan to you or anything like that?

MK: Yes, it was a mixture. Mostly they spoke Japanese to me, plantation Japanese. Because Japanese was not their native tongue that they grew up in, but they had picked up enough. My mother, once in a while, would speak Okinawan to me, mostly when she was (angry) or exasperated with me or something. So the language at home was Japanese basically. The plantation kind that was liberally sprinkled with Hawaiian words and English words and so on.

WN: What about food?

MK: Much vegetables. We raised vegetables: *daikon*, *gobo*, *na*, cabbage and so on. And neighbors were pretty generous. When they had a big crop of something, they'd share. Heavy on the vegetables, very light on the meat. Sometimes fish, lots of rice. Again, not very much different I think from the diets of the people at that time. Sardines, chorizo and corned beef were pretty basic (staples). You could go into the (gulches) if you were energetic (and harvest) fern shoots. We had a big bamboo (grove) next to our washhouse, *furoba*, and we harvested (bamboo shoots). And a lot of fruits around the place: avocado, mangos, oranges, (bananas). By today's standards, very (simple) kind of food.

But when you look (back), you are glad, in a way, (that) you went through those experiences. My kids grew up with ample food, ample clothes, a nice house. But I think it enriches you that you've gone through (such a childhood). You reflect, not with bitterness, but (with appreciation) for those (experiences). I'm glad I was born there, went through so-called

deprivations (but still) went on with school.

WN: But sometimes you think, "How the heck we got through all those years?"

MK: Yes. (As the cigarette commercial says), "You've come a long way baby."

(Laughter)

MK: Even today, (after) I jog, come back (home and) just open the water and the hot water comes streaming through and I think, gee, back then you don't do that. You got to fire up the water—well, first you have to fill up the *furo* with water and then fire it up. Now what a convenience. You just open the faucet and nice hot water comes out. It may seem kind of trivial, but I appreciate that.

WN: Being the youngest were you the last one in the *furo* every night?

MK: Generally, because my father wanted the *furo* real hot. Whereas if I would go in I'd dilute it and make it kind of cool and he didn't like that. And I don't think my mother was so deferential to my father in the sense that he had to eat first (or he had to go into the *furo*) first. But just by practice he took a bath first. He came home dirty and tired from the fields, and he deserved to be the first and really soak up. (I can't recall in what order my brothers and sisters went into the *furo*), although I'm sure we fell into (some sort of) pattern. But I do remember that I was supposed to go in when I could make it cool.

WN: Okay, so then you went to John M. Ross School from grades one to seven and then you went to Laupāhoehoe?

MK: Laupāhoehoe[hoeh] High School, which drew students on the Hilo side from Honohina all the way to Laupāhoehoe, and from Laupāhoehoe on the Honoka'a side up to 'Ō'ōkala. And the next high school beyond the Hilo side was Hilo High School and beyond 'Ō'ōkala was Honoka'a High School. So we were one of two (high) schools on the Hāmākua Coast.

WN: So what was it like moving from John M. Ross School, where you more or less know everyone, to Laupāhoehoe, which covered a broader area?

MK: It was a big school as far as I was concerned. At John M. Ross—I don't know if we had any A and B classes. In Laupāhoehoe[hoeh] you were grouped, (for example), 7A, 7B, 7C. The A class always got the brighter guys and the C got the slower guys. Again, the mix was the same, predominantly Japanese, some Filipinos, part Hawaiians, so you felt comfortable. The teachers were pretty much in tune (with us) except for the brand-new ones that came from Honolulu to do their couple-of-years stint. They brought their city ways, which we didn't quite appreciate sometimes. But it was a pleasant school. Again I was a fairly good student so I didn't experience any difficulties.

WN: What were your favorite subjects in school?

MK: I liked to read at that point. I read a lot and I was praised for that. And make book reports (which the teachers) used as examples of how you're supposed to make book reports. (Ancient) history (was also very) interesting. (But the history teacher was also our counselor



and had a "plantation mentality.") She was a plantation supervisor's wife. (In counseling sessions) we talked in terms of high school and [eventually] working for the plantation. She never aspired us to, "Hey, you want to go college and do something different?"

Except when we finally got a Mainland teacher. She didn't know any better, so she inspired us. She would say, "Hey, try it." And I still feel very grateful that she inspired me. And she and the principal got (a four-year) scholarship (to the University of Hawai'i) for me so that I was able to go to college. Otherwise I'd probably be on the plantation, maybe driving a truck or working in the fields or something. But as you look back, we were in a kind of a paternalistic (society). "We are educating you for the plantations," sort of (mentality).

WN: So the teachers that had that attitude, education for the plantation, they were the more local? Were they local teachers?

MK: Yes, local *Haole* teachers. They were the ones (with) that kind of attitude. The Japanese, Hawaiian teachers from O'ahu (and the Hāmākua area), I (don't) think they shared that (attitude). But the school counselor influenced us in terms of occupational selection and selection of courses. She was very strong in terms of you growing up and work for the plantation. And some of us weren't quite sure that was what we wanted to do. And then she retired and this new teacher came and inspired us, and (I believe) she was responsible for a number of us going to college. Probably our class, more than any other (previous) class, proportionally, went to college. And I'm pleased with that.

WN: So this was a teacher from the Mainland who . . .

MK: Yes. When I was a junior, there was a teacher shortage, so they recruited people from (the Midwest and East Coast). They were *Haoles* and yet very approachable. They sided with us sometimes when we had problems. I remember one time I was a school newspaper editor, and one of my best friends wrote a piece that (made) fun of the plantation system. And he got called in to the principal's office because this particular woman whom I said was the wife of a [plantation] supervisor felt that was not the proper kind of article to go in the school paper. This Mainland teacher really fought for us to keep that article in the paper. Whether it was a good article or not, she felt it was important for us to express ourselves. And I think they brought a new kind of thinking into (our) school, or at least in our (class). And I'm thankful for that. Prior to that, (our image of) *Haoles* (were that they) lived in big plantation houses, they rode around on horses and in trucks and wore pith helmets. So it was quite a (new and refreshing experience). Our class has fond memories of the *Haole* teachers who came from the Mainland. Some of them died in the tidal wave, so maybe [we] remember them even more fondly.

WN: What was it like during the war, going to school?

MK: Well, we worked on Fridays and Saturdays (in the sugarcane fields) as part of the war effort. There was no Japanese[-language] school. And for a while they said, "Don't speak Japanese. It's un-American to speak Japanese." But I didn't feel the curriculum or the teachers were too different except for the one teacher I mentioned who kind of harassed us. We carried gas masks and some of the people built bomb shelters.

And my father in his wisdom said, "Nobody's going to bomb one house in the middle of the

cane fields so I'm not going to make any bomb shelters."

(Laughter)

**MK:** (Some of) the (families) in Kahuku Camp made bomb shelters in their chicken coops and near their garages. But we in Kahuku Mauka never built any shelters. And that was funny when you look back. It was normal, going to school. There was (gas) rationing but we didn't (own) a car so we didn't feel it. We didn't drink so we didn't feel the liquor ration. I'd say it wasn't that different, as I recall.

There was (once a rumor that the United States government was) going to evacuate all (the Japanese) to California. But it never came to pass because I guess if you evacuated all the Japanese [in Hawai'i], who would (be left to) work in the plantations? So that ended that.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

**WN:** Okay, we'd gotten to 1946.

**MK:** Uh huh.

**WN:** You were going to Laupāhoehoe School.

**MK:** Laupāhoe[ho] High School.

**WN:** Tell me about that day in 1946.

**MK:** Of course it was April 1 and my friend tells me it was a Monday. And it was a kind of rainy, (overcast) day. As I told you earlier, I was sixteen and I was a junior in high school. As usual we got on the . . .

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

**WN:** Okay, you got on the school bus. . . .

**MK:** And took that forty-five-minute ride or so to the school. And I think there's significance that we were the first bus because the first bus starts from the farthest reaches of the school's boundary and comes in first. And then there's a second bus that goes not as far and picks up the second batch of people. So we were on the first bus. Honohina people, Kahuku people, Nīnole people, (Maulua people). So we were at the school maybe like 7:15 or so. As we came down the cliff road to Laupāhoehoe High School, we saw rocks that normally were only partially exposed, but [were now] fully exposed and reefs that we never see, exposed. And everybody was really excited, "Hey, this looks real fun." And as we came down that road the county workers working on the roadside stopped us. They warned the bus driver that (the sea) was very dangerous or something to that effect. But that made us more interested, and as soon as the school bus deposited us at the school entrance, most of the boys took off down to the

seashore to see what was going on. And this accounts for (the fact that) many of the people who died (or were caught by the wave were) from Honohina and Nīnole. I (believe this was true also of the people on the) 'Ō'ōkala first bus. We were the first students at the (seashore).

WN: So the people on your bus were from Kahuku Mauka. . . .

MK: Honohina, (Kahuku, Kahuku Mauka), Nīnole, Kaiaakea, Maulua.

WN: So after the road worker person said this is kind of dangerous the bus kept going anyway?

MK: Yes, we were maybe three-quarter miles from the school.

WN: This was still on that winding road from the main Belt Road going down [to Laupāhoehoe Point]?

MK: Yes, much like the old Pali road [i.e., Nu'uānu Pali Drive, on O'ahu], hugging the cliff in and out of gullies. I guess (the county workers) were concerned that (the sea) was very unusual and we should be cautious. I guess some people were, especially the girls. They went to look (from a) distance. The boys went right up to the ocean to watch this strange phenomenon.

WN: So what exactly did you see when you first got to the ocean?

MK: Well, there's a little inlet over there where people launch boats and if it's really calm, you can swim in there. And there's a little knoll above that and we were all standing on it, maybe a dozen and a half of us. And we could see a canoe floating (aimlessly). The Akiona family that lived on the point had a canoe house. Apparently an earlier wave had demolished the canoe house. (The sea) was fairly rough and muddy, but not that unusual for that time of the year. The exposure of the rocks and the reefs were sort of unusual. I remember walking around and looking around and at a certain point, the waters began to recede and it literally went uphill. And it withdrew or receded, I can't say for sure, maybe a quarter mile, half a mile out. The ocean bed became exposed. I was probably the only one who went down into the ocean where the inlet was. I walked around for a minute or two looking for anything of interest. I didn't find any, so I came back up on the knoll and (joined the other boys still standing there). Maybe five, ten minutes (later), the water was out there and then it began to return as a (huge) wall of water. It wasn't a beautiful wave like you see (in surfing magazines). It was just a wall of gray, black water. And as we just stood there and (watched) it get bigger and bigger and closer and closer. When it was maybe about 150, 200 yards away, (everyone realized that we were in grave danger). We took off. Some people made it to the higher ground at school.

I tripped in the tall grass and the bushes. (I grabbed whatever I could.) The (wave) flipped me over and carried me toward the lava rock wall that rimmed the school. (I recall telling myself), "Gee, I'm going to die. I'm going to hit head first into that rock wall and I'm going to die." (But miraculously part of the wave) that preceded me, smashed into the wall and broke it up. So I went flying through the wall, not head(first) into (a stationary) wall, but I was rumbling along, rolling along with all the rocks.

WN: Could you touch bottom?

MK: No, I couldn't. But I figured I was pretty close to the school ground, I mean the school park. I

wasn't high on the wave; I was on the bottom of the wave and I don't know how high the wave was above me. My friend Seiki (Oshiro) claims it was (over) fifty feet, I wouldn't know. But all I know is I was under tons of water and I was getting hit by all these rolling rocks and debris, and I couldn't breathe. I was sixteen but I guess I knew what mortality meant. (Laughs) I said (to myself), "This is it, I'm going to die." And then, miraculously, by the wave action or something, I popped up to the surface of the water, took a breath, and looked around. I was about halfway across the park. And then I saw my good friend, Yoshinobu Sugino from Honohina. He (surfed by) on a piece of lumber. I don't know where he got a piece of lumber or how he got on it. Then, next thing (I realized was that I was approaching) the [school] agricultural farm which was maybe five feet (higher than) the school (park) ground. (The farm) had fencing (around it) for the pigs and the chickens. I said (to myself), "Oh, I'm going to get caught in all those wires and structures and I'm going to die." But again, miraculously the wave was high enough that I floated over the aggie farm instead of through the aggie farm. At that point I saw a (brother) of my classmate, Leslie Fujiwara. He was on a tree. I don't know how he got to the tree, but he was (hugging) on to this little mango tree. And then (I reached) this (stream) bed, which is normally dry, or just a trickle. But that day it was a big river of water flowing down to the ocean, and I was swirling around, and (desperately) trying to grab hold of branches, trees, whatever I could get hold of. But I was just grabbing on to the tips (of the trees). Guava trees there were maybe twenty, thirty feet high. So I'm that (high above) the ground. I said (to myself), "Gee, if I float down to the ocean I'm in big trouble because I would be in the open ocean." And I knew the Hāmākua Coast is not a beach. It's just all rocks.

Finally I (got a good grip on a) guava branch. Strong enough—I held on hard enough that I stopped my movement of flowing to the (ocean. The water slowly receded and) I slowly reached the ground. This was probably 100 yards from the seashore.

WN: Hundred yards inland from the seashore?

MK: Yes, yes. So I was almost there. And when I reached firm ground, my first thought was to take off to higher ground. So I started to move about, and three boys came out of the bushes. I don't (recall) in what order now but one was Herbert Tolentino from Nīnole, one was Masao Ishikawa from 'Ō'ōkala, and one was James Kawahara from (Waikamalo). And so the four of us, all beat up, bruised, cut, and so on, (staggered) out of the tall grass and guava (trees). We (eventually) reached the school. And I can't recall this part but my good friend and classmate Seiki Oshiro, who had outrun the wave across the park, told me my first remark to him was, "Seiki, I no *make* yet." (Chuckles) (According to Seiki), I repeated (these words) several times with great enthusiasm and great elation.

After (reaching the safety of the school building), I remember going down to the tennis court area. I saw a few (stranded) fish, (but I had no reason to pick them up. Then it occurred to me that I should get some) medical attention. I don't know whether there was an order or advisory, but all the students were walking up the road (that connects) to the around-the-island (road. Many of us) were walking toward the plantation hospital, which was about three miles away in Pāpa'aloa. I don't (recall) how I finally got there.

I (do recall that) I wasn't seen. They said, "We're too busy. We have too many people so go home." I didn't get treated; I came home. I didn't have any severe injuries, just a lot of bruises and cuts all over my body, my head, my arms, legs. And I recovered nicely eventually. But

that was the day.

WN: Did you see any destruction of buildings?

MK: Well, by the time I came out of the wave, the teachers' cottages along the seashore were gone or jammed in (the aggie farm) area. The (industrial) shop, which was a pretty huge two-room building, had been just literally lifted and moved maybe fifty, seventy feet and broken up (severely). I don't think I was looking at buildings. . . . And there were many people floating around me as I was flowing toward the ocean, but I can't recall who they were. (Perhaps) people like Herbert Nishimoto or my good friend Yoshio Awakuni, who floated out to sea and got saved. I know people were around me, but except for the ones I named, I can't recall their names (or their faces).

WN: The teachers' cottages were the nearest structures to the seashore?

MK: Yes, there was this huge park and then a line of coconut trees and the teachers' cottages. They were maybe, what, six feet, eight feet above sea level. They were the first houses on the seashore. And there was the Akiona house up on the point. They were also pretty close to the ocean. My goal was to get to higher ground so I didn't really survey the area.

WN: So from the time you went to the boat-landing area, you walked around and that's when you first got swept. From that point to where you ended up, how far would you say it was?

MK: Four hundred yards maybe.

WN: So you got swept along the . . .

MK: Yes. Laupāhoehoe (Point) is a peninsula. I was swept from one side, the Hilo side, clear across to the Hāmākua side, and then flowed down toward the ocean. It's hard to figure out how (long I) was in the wave. Probably not more than four or five minutes.

WN: The force of the receding wave, I know some people were caught in that, but you were able to hang on? Is that why you didn't get swept out to sea?

MK: Well, all I know is there was one (big) wave. As I said (earlier, the water receded out toward the horizon). Some people (told me the wave) came back on three sides of the peninsula. I don't know, I was under tons of water on the Hilo side. The force of the wave pushed me across the park, and possibly, if there was a wave from the front of the peninsula, that [wave] lifted me up to the surface so that I could take a breath, and figure out where I was and what's the next danger.

Some people (also told) me, "Oh, you must have been saved because you knew how to swim." I (knew how to) tread water; I knew when (to breathe and when) not to breathe. But the wave just pretty much carried me where it wanted to (take me). So swimming (skills) may have helped but it wasn't that you could consciously swim to a point to save yourself.

WN: So you walked up, you didn't get treatment from the hospital, so you went home. You remember what happened from there?

**MK:** I don't know how I got home. Whether I hitchhiked or the (school) bus came by. But I got home, and my mother was home. And she was shocked because I looked like I had taken a swim in my clothes. I literally had done that. Hair all dishevelled, cuts and bruises on my face and arms. And I was thinking about it the other day. Today a mother (in a similar circumstance) would hug the child (and cry). I guess being Japanese, she just said something to the effect that she was happy and relieved that I was safe. (As I recall, she) didn't express much emotion (outwardly). But that was the way we (generally) handled our emotions.

(In the days that followed), people were still floating out there. Some got saved. (Information) started to (trickle) in—who's missing and whose clothes were found and so on. It was kind of a grim period for a couple of weeks.

**WN:** Before I ask you about the aftermath, one more question. You know, people were saying that there were three waves or four waves, do you recall more than one wave coming in or was yours just that first wave and you got out?

**MK:** Well, apparently there was a big wave, but not the biggest one, that broke the canoe house.

**WN:** Oh I see, so by the time you got there, there was already . . .

**MK:** Yes, some waves. I was reading [newspaper columnist] Bob Krauss's column not so long ago where he (mentioned) secondary waves as being very dangerous because the first may not be so powerful. As far as I know there may have been several in the early morning hours but the one that hit us was the big one and that was the end of that. The seas were still rough after that, but there was no other surge. The sea was rough and I don't know in what direction it was flowing, but I know some people got swept out and they were floating out there on debris and trees and so on.

So it was a unique experience. (Laughs) In a sense I was born again; everything after '46 is bonus. Sometimes I think that way because there was so many ways I could have died in that wave. If the rocks had hit me a little harder, or I had lost my consciousness. Even if my head had bobbed (above) the water I wouldn't have breathed and I'd probably just kept on flowing to the ocean and end up in the ocean. So I think a bunch of us share a very unique experience.

**WN:** So what was it like—when did you go back to school?

**MK:** I would say about a month later. This was in April. I remember going back to school and trying to pick up the pieces—maybe it was sometime in May. I remember writing a brave editorial (in the school paper) about (why we should) carry on and continue our education. And then June came and we finished school.

The following year we went back to the same school. I guess the wheels of the legislature (started to) turn slowly and eventually a new school (was built). But we graduated from the [original] high school at Laupāhoehoe Point [in 1947].

**WN:** So the buildings were pretty much intact still?

**MK:** Yes, the shop building was hoisted up somehow and put back on its foundation; the teachers' cottages were demolished and never rebuilt. (The surviving) teachers went to some other

schools' cottage to live. I can't remember whether some of the teachers (chose not to) come back. Some of the students either at the end of the year or the following year transferred to other schools because they weren't with us in the graduating class. In those days many students, especially girls, after tenth grade (would drop out of) school. They would work in the plantation or in the plantation hospital or someplace. So it was not unusual for a student to drop out after the eleventh grade too.

WN: Were there any memorial services or anything like that? Do you remember coming back?

MK: I can't remember. I don't think we had one. Our class of '47, which graduated the following year, whenever we have reunions in Hilo, we always take flowers to the memorial (at the Point). Stand around for a while and take pictures. In a small school, you knew (all the students in your class and) most (students) a grade above you, a grade below you, so-and-so's brother, so-and-so's sister. All the names (on the memorial)—there's twenty-four names—except for a few, I knew them personally or as so-and-so's brother, so-and-so's sister. As I said (earlier, the students) from Honohina and Nīnole, the ones who died in large number—we went to John M. Ross School together.

WN: Okay, did you want to add anything more about what you remember about the tsunami?

MK: No, I guess that's about as vividly as I can recall. Prior to the wave, during the wave, and after the wave. I'd say as far as the experience itself, that's about it.

WN: So you graduated in 1947.

MK: Right. And upon graduation, as I said (earlier), this teacher and the principal had arranged for a scholarship for me to go to the University of Hawai'i, so I came to Honolulu. I had great ideas; I was going to be a journalist. (Laughs) And then I took English comp[osition] 100 and (realized that there were) so many good writers in this (small) class. That deflated me quickly. So I ended up as a major in soci[ology].

WN: Well, why don't you just tell me briefly, just recount your experience at university and what you've been doing since that time.

MK: Well, I finished in 1951 and by then I had decided that I wanted to be a social worker. So I went to the School of Social Work at university, for one year. In those days a one-year certificate was sufficient to work and to progress. Also, I was tired of school; I (had been) going to school for (seventeen) years. I also ran out of money. So I worked for about three years for the Department of Public Welfare. The department had a program to upgrade people's skills so one could go to a school of his choice and (be paid) a stipend. I chose to go to the University of Chicago's (School of Social Service Administration) because my supervisor was from that school and some of the people I knew were from that school. (Also, my wife's nursing school classmate and friend was working in Chicago.) I spent a year at Chicago and got my master's in social work. And as part of the obligation to having received the stipend, (the department) sent me to Maui where I was the child welfare worker for Maui County.

I came back to Honolulu after a couple of years, did some child protective (service) work for neglected, abused, abandoned children. But that was pretty stressful stuff. So I went to work

for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. They had an opening for a counselor for leprosy patients at Kalaupapa and Hale Mohalu. And although I was scared of the disease, I said it was better than being a child protective service worker. So I did that for a couple of years. Then there was a new program being started for the (mentally) retarded to prepare them for employment. I got into that with my friend, Harold Ajirogi. We did that for about three, four years and then Dr. Satoru Izutsu, who was responsible for a statewide plan for mental retardation, asked me to come over for a year to the Health Department, which I did.

Then I returned back to [Division of] Vocational Rehab[ilitation], went up the ranks as supervisor, administrator, and (rehabilitation consultant). My last job with the state was as a rehabilitation facilities specialist. My task was to enhance the ability of workshops like Lanakila Crafts and Goodwill [Industries] (to provide persons with disabilities) the best service for the least amount of money. That (position) had statewide responsibilities so I did some interisland travel. I retired in 1987. About six months later I took a (temporary) part-time job as a stock clerk at the Rehabilitation Hospital of the Pacific. The person (whom I replaced subsequently) didn't choose to come back, so I was offered a permanent [position]. I stayed there for five and a half years. That (job) was a very eye-opening experience, of being the low man on the totem pole, (of observing) how administrators work and how people in the laundry, housekeeping (and purchasing) departments think and feel. That was quite (a contrast) compared to the time I was involved in writing policies, procedures (and directives) for others to follow.

Right now I am very much involved with my wife in the care of our two grandchildren. It is an enjoyable and enriching experience. I don't think we retire; we just go from one job to another. (Laughs) So, that's our present (job), of raising another generation.

- WN: Do you think it's important for them to know about your experiences with the tsunami, and not only tsunami but your early life growing up poor on a plantation?
- MK: Yes, and I've been meaning to one day maybe jot down some of these places and thoughts. About growing up in the [19]30s and [19]40s in the plantation, being poor but (not knowing) it. I think the tidal wave is a curiosity thing. I think my daughters would be curious to know how I survived it and what I felt and so on. But growing up poor in the plantation (yet ambitious), that might be very interesting to my two daughters and to my grandchildren later on. Which reminds me, I would like to compare notes with other tsunami survivors. Maybe after this project [ends] I could read what other (people told you) because in a sense (each of us) were alone in the tidal wave. Like Marsue McGinnis [McShane] and my friend Yoshio Awakuni who were saved that afternoon or that evening. It would be interesting to read what they went through.
- WN: Well, that's why we're doing this project. It's interesting because you felt alone yet at the same time—and it wasn't only Laupāhoehoe, it was Hilo, it was here on O'ahu, Kaua'i too, Maui. It was a statewide, territorywide tsunami. And so all the experiences are different, I think there's a special emphasis and feelings toward Laupāhoehoe because of the tragedy.
- MK: Large number of children involved.
- WN: As well as Hilo. But like Shinmachi people in Hilo, they have their stories too. They still have their reunions. And so they say the same thing, "Gee, I really want to see what other people



went through, you know, like the Laupāhoehoe people," things like that. So, I think this project will be very unique.

**MK:** Yes, I would love to read about it one day. I think (the experience) enriches your life, it's a unique experience. Not many people go through it and live (to talk about) it. So in retrospect, I'm happy I went through it and survived it.

**WN:** One last question, there's a Pacific Tsunami Museum coming up, which is the reason why we're doing this project. Do you feel that's something that's important for our community?

**MK:** Well, when I first heard it, if it was the same thing, it was to be located in Hilo and feature basically Hilo's experience. So I said, "Well, gee, here they go again. They forgot Laupāhoehoe." But I think it's important to preserve a piece of history of Hawai'i. Not in terms of preventing disaster so much, because nowadays we have such an (efficient) warning system. Not unless you're a fool and you go down to the ocean when the (water recedes). But I think to preserve a part of history of Hilo, the Shinmachi area and Laupāhoehoe Point. I think that's important in our society.

**WN:** Okay, well thank you very much.

**MK:** Thank you.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

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and Observers in Hawai'i**

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