

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Marsue McGinnis McShane

"I was the only one that had film in my camera. . . . So Fay Johnson and I went out on the porch in front to get a picture [of the waves]. Famous last words, I said, 'Well, it's doing it again and I hope this is one of the bigger ones so I can get a. . . .' But, it came and it just kept coming . . . and got bigger and bigger. . . . That was the first time that anybody around us, anybody thought to be afraid. Here we were, landlubbers, and it never occurred to anybody to be afraid. . . . Well, then I dropped the camera, came in the front door, Fay and I, and went to go out the back, down the steps and run away to higher land. But we got as far as the doorway. . . . And I remember looking back toward the front door and the water was just fighting at the windows. It broke the glass, and the cottage went whoomf! And all four of us were there at the back door, ready to go out the door. I remember grabbing Helen Kingseed by the arm, but she was just sucked right away. . . . We were in the water and hanging on to the roof. The roof went down so Fay and I crawled up to the comb of the roof. And it was going like this, like this, and washing up. Just the roof was left."

Marsue McGinnis McShane was born May 15, 1924 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Her father, Ralph McGinnis, was a professor of English and journalism at Miami University in Ohio. Her mother, Erma Koenig McGinnis, was a homemaker. McShane and an older brother were raised in the college town of Oxford, Ohio. She also spent part of her childhood with her grandmother in nearby Covington, Kentucky. McShane attended schools in Oxford, graduating from high school in 1941. She then attended William Woods College in Missouri for two years before transferring to Miami University and earning her bachelor's of education degree in 1945.

Answering a recruiting call from Hawai'i for teachers, McShane arrived at Laupāhoehoe School in September of 1945. She taught art and physical education to students from grades seven through twelve. She and three other teachers, Helen Kingseed of Oxford, Ohio, Dorothy Drake of Columbus, Ohio, and Fay Johnson of Roanoke, Virginia, lived in a cottage on the shoreline tip of Laupāhoehoe peninsula. This cottage, one of three provided by the school for out-of-town teachers, was located several yards away from the school grounds.

On the morning of April 1, 1946, the four young women were awakened by residents who noticed the ocean receding. While the curious women stayed in the area to witness the strange occurrence, a huge wall of water swept them off their feet and into the ocean. Kingseed, Drake, and Johnson were never found, while McShane spent many harrowing hours in the open ocean. She was rescued later in the day by men on a boat. One of the men, Dr. Leabert Fernandez, later became her husband.

McShane and Fernandez moved to O'ahu in 1952, where McShane taught at Kailua Elementary School. In 1954, she taught in California at three different schools. She returned to O'ahu in 1956, where she taught English at Punahou School. After leaving teaching to raise a family, she returned to the classroom in 1968 at Kailua Intermediate School.

Divorced since 1963, she married John McShane in 1969. She raised three children and two step-children.

The oral history interviews were conducted in McShane's Kailua, O'ahu residence.

Tape No. 29-31-1-99

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Marsue McGinnis McShane (MM)

Kailua, O'ahu

January 19, 1999

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Marsue McGinnis McShane for the tsunami survivors' oral history project on January 19, 1999, and we are at her home in Kailua, O'ahu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Marsue, why don't we start by having you tell me when and where you were born.

MM: I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio way, way back in 1924.

WN: What is your birth date?

MM: May 15.

WN: May 15, 1924, mm hmm. Tell me something about your parents, what was your father doing?

MM: Well, my father was a professor at Miami University of Ohio, which predates Miami, Florida by eighty years or something. [Miami University, located in Oxford, Ohio, was founded in 1809. The University of Miami, in Coral Gables, Florida, was established in 1925.] And my mother---they met in college, and my mother became a housewife but I was born in Cincinnati because all my relatives and my grandmother lived in Covington, [Kentucky] and she [grandmother] helped raise me. So when people ask where I was born, [I say] actually, in a hospital in Cincinnati, but I lived most of my time in Oxford, Ohio.

WN: What was your father's name?

MM: Ralph McGinnis.

WN: Ralph McGinnis, and your mother's name?

MM: Erma Köenig [McGinnis]. Her maiden name was Erma Köenig.

WN: How do you spell that? K-A . . .

MM: K-Ö-E-N-I-G.

WN: Oh, okay.

MM: It's Köenig because the Ö is a umlaut.

WN: Oh, okay.

MM: But everyone says "Kay-nig".

WN: Tell me something about growing up. So actually, you grew up in Oxford?

MM: Yes, mostly.

WN: What was it like in Oxford?

MM: Oh, wonderful. It's a beautiful college town, and I went to McGuffey [School], named after the [founder of the] *McGuffey Readers* [William Holmes McGuffey] who's also from Ohio. It was a practice-teaching school, which was really great because we'd get teachers and they had master teachers, so the schooling was really, really wonderful. And I went to all the football games. Our high school football coach was [Wilbur] "Weeb" Ewbank, [who later coached college and professional football] and they call [Miami University] the "Cradle of Coaches." So it was really nice. And then on Christmases and everything, I'd go down to my grandmother's and my aunt's in Cincinnati and Covington across the Ohio River. When all the artist series would come to the university, I'd go to that so it was really a great place to. . . . I used to roller skate on the campus and et cetera.

WN: What was your father a professor of?

MM: English and journalism, and he was the head of the student newspaper and the *Recension*, the yearbook. He did all of that plus teach English 101, et cetera. Living in a college town, my mother, who (had) interrupted her education by marrying—and I appreciate this now—when I was in the fourth grade, she went back to college, majored in math, and got her degree, and I went to her graduation. Now, I'm a member of the American Association of University Women, and I realize what an achievement that was, you know.

WN: How old were you when she got her degree?

MM: I was in the fourth grade.

WN: Oh, I'm sorry.

MM: So how old are you in the fourth grade?

WN: Ten, maybe, nine or ten.

MM: Nine or ten.

WN: Did you have brothers and sisters?

MM: I had one brother who was two years older.

WN: And did you have playmates?

MM: Oh, sure, sure. Very normal playmates. I think it's so much harder nowadays. I mean, I never even heard of drugs. And of course, we ordered gin and tonics when we went out on dates. (WN chuckles.) However, smoking was the in thing, and I never did learn to smoke. I tried because all the movie stars, like Bette Davis and everybody (smoked), and now I'm glad I didn't learn. It was during the [Great] Depression, of course, and only the doctor's son had a car and we walked, (rode our bikes, and roller skated) to school, et cetera. So we didn't have the problems of today.

WN: How did the depression affect your community and your family?

MM: Well, it was hard because a professor didn't make much money, and he used to report the news (of Oxford and Miami) to the Cincinnati papers, to make extra money. He wrote poetry, you know, and things like that. But my mother's father was a meat man. At one time, he had six meat stores in Covington, Kentucky, plus he had a sausage factory, made wonderful sausages. So I can remember my mother driving down to see her mother, and she'd go to his meat stores and we'd have the back of the car loaded up with groceries and everything. And my one aunt—my mother had two sisters and that's all. And one of them was very wealthy, and she used to buy all my brother's clothes. My grandmother used to take me to get shoes and everything. So we really, financially, lived very well for those times. It wasn't hard. But it was because of my [maternal] grandfather, so it's an unusual case.

WN: Besides the university being in that Oxford area, what other industries were there?

MM: Well, as my father said, town and gown. There was farming, dairy, corn, and there were no other industries. Of course there were retail stores and restaurants, the usual college town businesses. One thing unusual is that we were in Oxford, Ohio, college town—and this (chuckles) amazes me when I look back from a perspective of today. Marian Anderson [1897–1993, first African American to sing at the Metropolitan Opera House, 1955] came to sing at one of our artist series things. And when she came, she couldn't find any place to stay because (all hotels) were restricted. She couldn't go to any restaurant because she was a Negro. So where did she stay overnight for her concert? She stayed in the president of the university's house. And I can remember the signs in the restaurants, "We reserve the right to not serve people whom we don't want to serve." And here, this [racism] was never taught in the schools and I didn't really think about this until I got into my third year of college and had this wonderful professor who said that belief in religions and that sort of thing, race, like the prejudice against the Jews and everything, was never taught in the high schools or colleges or anything. This was the beginning of the Civil Rights [movement] and then later on, you learned that in the South, if you were a Negro, you couldn't even go in the library. Can you imagine? Now I really think about that.

WN: How far was Oxford from . . .

MM: Cincinnati, about thirty miles.

WN: And Cincinnati is right near the Kentucky border?

MM: It's right on [the border]. Ohio River, you cross the river and you go to Covington, (Kentucky). And Dayton, you know, (of the) the airplane (industry) is not far. Columbus---my father got his master's (at Ohio State) [University] in Columbus.

WN: Columbus is further north?

MM: Yes, it's in the middle [of the state].

WN: Right, right, okay. You were pretty much down south actually, right?

MM: Oh yes.

WN: [Closer to] Kentucky.

MM: South, closer to the [Ohio] River. Right next to Indiana, in fact.

WN: What was school like for you?

MM: Oh, I liked school.

WN: Was it a public school?

MM: No, it was McGuffey, (of the famous McGuffey Readers), which was the teaching school for the university.

WN: Sort of like a lab school?

MM: Lab school, that's the name for it.

WN: And it was run by McGuffey?

MM: It was run by the university—Miami University. And we had, of course, all the professors' sons and everything. But we also had all the farmers' children if they were White. The high school that took Negroes was Stewart.

WN: Stewart?

MM: Yes. But this, of course, never was pointed out to me until I got older and looked back. Very interesting. And I was not good at math or sciences. I remember the worst grade I ever got in my whole school career was in physics, and I was just really upset (WM chuckles) but I managed to get through. My brother, on the other hand, who majored in math—I guess he got all the brains in the family, as they say.

(Laughter)

WN: I'm just wondering, you know, with this influence from [educator Thomas Holmes] McGuffey and the lab school and you know, that there is a very strong educational component over at Oxford, [Ohio] and Miami [University].

MM: Oh yes.

WN: Did that influence you at all to go into teaching, this environment?

MM: Yes it did. Now, (first) I went to William Woods College in Missouri. It was a girls' college and it only went two years. My mother went there and because they had horses there. I was a horse-crazy young girl, and it was difficult because we didn't live on a ranch, my father didn't have money. I loved horses! I don't know why but I did. And so finally, when I was ten, my grandfather bought me a pony and we kept it at the dairy and so forth. Then when I graduated from William Woods right in the midst of the war—I graduated from high school in '41. I had skipped a grade so I was seventeen. And of course, that December, my freshman year of college, was Pearl Harbor. When I graduated from William Woods in '43, I decided I didn't want to just graduate and be educated. I wanted to be something, so I went back and changed to the school of education at Miami and took all of those courses. And in those days, in Ohio, I guess all over, when you graduated from the school of education as a teacher, they got you a job in Ohio. I remember Sandusky, Ohio. I was contemplating that, which brings me to why I came to Hawai'i.

WN: So this is after you finished your degree from Miami University?

MM: Yes. I graduated in '45.

WN: From Miami.

MM: But I signed up to teach in Hawai'i in the first weeks of March '45—the atomic bomb had not been dropped. War was still going on in the Pacific. I saw on the bulletin board, a letter that said, "Teachers needed desperately in Hawaii."

WN: Did they actually use that word, "Desperately"?

MM: Desperately. Desperately. And you were to write a letter [explaining] why you'd want to teach in Hawai'i and your credentials. I wanted to teach around the world and I wanted to get out, and I thought, how wonderful. So I wrote a letter and I was accepted. My grandfather, again, gave me—if you could get your transportation paid for to Hawai'i, then you were all set because you were guaranteed a job. But I had been contemplating [jobs in] Sandusky, Ohio and Parma, Ohio, but Hawai'i just took me by storm. As it turned out, my fellow teachers on the Big Island—two of them were graduates of Miami University and I didn't even know them until we got to Hawai'i. Isn't that . . .

WN: Is that Helen Kingseed?

MM: Yes, Helen Kingseed. You see, after I graduated from William Woods, I went back and lived at home [at Oxford]. I didn't live at a dorm [while attending Miami

University]. I had a horse and eventually, two horses. My college life was riding horses and I just went to classes at Miami. And so I wasn't in any of the school (activities)—I wasn't in a sorority because William Woods didn't have (those). I wasn't in any of the activities at school, I was riding my horse. And Helen Kingseed was the editor of the student newspaper. She was a (BWOC) big woman on campus, because there were no men on campus [because of World War II]. There were just a few 4-Fs. So the classes, there'd be all these women and maybe two guys.

WN: This is at Miami?

MM: At Miami, at colleges all over. Miami had---not Seabees, but the radio school for the [U.S.] Navy there. And of course my brother was early enough to sign up for the V-12 program, become an officer, and he was allowed to finish his education. And then he went on the [navy destroyer—the USS] *Mobile* and (fought at) Okinawa and all those (campaigns) in the Pacific. So I had a very strange—my last two years of college were, you know, not college-fied.

WN: You were a commuter?

MM: Yeah, sort of—I was a commuter (from home), I lived right in the town.

WN: So what was going through your mind when you saw the notice, I mean, what was your exposure or knowledge of Hawai'i at that time?

MM: Nothing. Zilch. Now, one time my mother took my brother and me to Florida and we lived there for six months. She was always taking us places and my brother went to school down there. They wanted to put me in school, but they said, no, I didn't need school because I was just way beyond. Anyway, I lived in Florida and that was my impression of the tropics. Of course, Hawai'i is so different from Florida. For one thing, it has the mountains. Florida is absolutely flat. I'd stand on the beach in Hawai'i and look up at those mountains and I couldn't believe how beautiful they were. I knew nothing about Hawai'i except that I wanted to teach around the world and this was a way. And they said that you'd live on the school campus. That was unheard of; the high schools had living places for teachers? (WN chuckles.) But I would have my housing, I would have all this—oh, it was really very enticing.

WN: Did you go to Hawai'i with the idea that eventually you'd return to Ohio?

MM: No. I wanted to teach and Hawai'i was the first stop. Then I wanted to teach English (in a) school in Japan or South America or France, you know, I didn't want to go back to the same old place.

WN: What in your background or upbringing or education brought you to think this way in terms of wanting to get away or—not wanting to get away, but wanting to go to different places.

MM: Yeah, I did want to get away. See, living at home, my college years were really not what they should have been, you know, where you go to college, get educated and you find your husband and you get married and have children and you go on from there. I wasn't really

career oriented so much. I was a good teacher and I graduated with honors and everything, but I wasn't, "I want to be the greatest teacher, I want to be a principal, I want to teach in college, go back and get my Ph.D. and teach in college." It wasn't that. It was just that what I had was enough to get me into schools to teach around the world. Of course I anticipated meeting the right man. (Chuckles) But I had no idea it would turn out that I would live in Hawai'i forever. So I don't know what it was in my background. I used to go to Maine every summer for seven summers and stayed two months, (July and August), and this was because of my wealthy grandfather on my mother's side. My father's mother and father were farmers essentially, tenant farmers. But they had four children and all of them got college educations. It was really something because they are all really sharp. And one, Ida, the only girl, became a schoolteacher and taught in Alaska. I guess it was sort of inbred.

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay.

MM: My father and his siblings, all four had college degrees. There were three boys and one girl. Ida taught in Alaska. I mean, I guess this idea of getting away was sort of—especially when you're confined during the war and you don't get any travel and you don't have any life, you're just sort of there.

WN: How did your parents react to you going to Hawai'i?

MM: They were all for it. But of course, they didn't know anything about Hawai'i either. I mean, that's what I wanted to do, that was okay with them, so.

WN: Did you have any hesitation or any fears?

MM: No, you see, I signed up in March, war was still going on, but they seemed to be confident that the ship taking me to Hawai'i would be all right. And my brother was in the navy and he was in the battles in Japan and everything, and I thought, well, I would see him before anybody else because I would be in Hawai'i. He would have to go through there to get back to the states. As it turned out, I was the last one to see him because he had to put the ships—he'd go by and go directly to Seattle and put the ships in mothballs up there. So I didn't see him until after he—he was the best man at my wedding. But that was one reason why I wanted to go to Hawai'i because I thought (seeing him) would be great.

WN: And did you---when you were coming over here, did you know where you were going to teach right away?

MM: Well, they said that all new teachers taught on the outer islands and my assignment was Laupāhoehoe [School]. But I didn't know how to pronounce it until I was on the train from Chicago to San Francisco and there were quite a few people there from Hawai'i, young people that had been sent to the Mainland after Pearl Harbor. And this one gal, her (last) name was White, very beautiful gal, and she said, "Oh, you're going to Hawai'i to teach."

"Yes," I said, "I'm on the island of Hawai'i and I'm at Lapahoho. H-O-E is hoe, I mean a

farm (implement) [hoe].

(Laughter)

MM: And she said, "Oh no, it's 'hoy hoy', Laupāhoehoe, not Lapa, Laupāhoehoe." And that's how I learned to pronounce it. I knew it was on the Big Island—but we didn't call it the Big Island, we called it the island of Hawai'i. But Honolulu was on the island of O'ahu. And I was very, rather ignorant about Hawai'i. I read what they said in the encyclopedia, but they didn't mention Laupāhoehoe in the encyclopedia. (Chuckles) They just mentioned that you raised sugarcane and pineapples and that's where Pearl Harbor happened, et cetera.

WN: So on the ship coming over, do you remember anything, any events?

MM: Oh yes, I came over on the [SS] *Matsonia* and that was (then) a navy ship, a troop ship I guess, taken over by them. It was all grey. We had to wear life preservers the whole time no matter where, whether we're eating, if we left our cabin, we had to wear a life preserver. We had many drills by the lifeboats and everything. In our (deck) were the teachers and the families returning to Hawai'i and so forth, we were in the upper echelons, and in the hold down below, were all these Seabees getting ready for the invasion of Japan. The momentum of the invasion of Japan was still going on because the atomic bomb was just dropped what, August 19. [The first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. The second was dropped on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945.]

I got to San Francisco, where the *Matsonia* was docked for me to go, a week after the big celebration, you know. I always think of that picture on *Life*, cover, of that sailor kissing the nurse. And the streets were still filled with confetti and everything after that and it was really exciting. So the war was over, but not when I signed up to go. So it took I don't know how many days to get over there, but on the ship I met young ensigns and lieutenants that were being shipped to Hawai'i to eventually invade Japan, which made it nice because they came to Laupāhoehoe to visit us and it was really nice for young gals, young teachers, to have all these contacts with naval officers and staff. And Fay Johnson---I don't know about Helen Kingseed—she may have been on the same ship, I don't know. I never did meet her until we were driven to Laupāhoehoe. But Fay Johnson came over on a cement carrier, and on board that cement carrier was one of the Judds, I can't think of their first name. And they used to walk the deck—it was a small ship—walk the deck every day to get some exercise. He told her all about Hawai'i and she didn't know anything about it. She was from Roanoke, Virginia.

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END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 29-32-2-99

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Marsue McGinnis McShane (MM)

Kailua, O'ahu

January 25, 1999

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Marsue McShane on January 25, 1999 and we're at her home in Kailua, O'ahu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay Marsue, last time we left off talking about coming to Laupāhoehoe from Ohio.

MM: Oxford, Ohio.

WN: Oxford, Ohio. And I wanted to ask you, what courses did you teach?

MM: Did I teach?

WN: Yeah, what types of courses?

MM: You mean my first job at Laupāhoehoe?

WN: Yes.

MM: Well, I was a secondary [school] teacher. My major was English and art, sort of a joint major, with a minor in history. But when I came to Laupāhoehoe, I was given all of the art for the seventh and eighth grade. Art craft, they called it. Then I had a high school art class and then in the afternoon, I taught all of the girls physical education. P.E., the high school girls. So I didn't teach English until years later when I taught at Punahou [School]. But it was really different. Yes.

WN: (Chuckles) What was different?

MM: Well, teaching art to these children. They hadn't had an art teacher for a long time. They were seventh graders and of course, getting used to the names and everything. It was really interesting. And my room, do you want to hear about my room?

WN: Yes.

MM: My room at Laupāhoehoe School, kindergarten through high school, was—it had all windows to the right, just solid windows. And when I looked out there was a red hibiscus hedge and

then a little bit beyond that was the cemetery. And in this cemetery was a white horse tethered there to eat the grass and keep the grass down around the graves. Beyond the cemetery was a road and then there was a curve, then the ocean. The ocean and the sheer cliffs and the road coming down and usually waterfalls coming over that. It was the most unusual and gorgeous sight. It was really something, and I'd look out my window and that's what I would see.

WN: You know people have culture shock coming from the—Midwest girl coming over to an island. Was there culture shock for you?

MM: No, not really. I was just ready for anything. As I said, I had experience with Florida, but it was so different from Florida. Of course, it had the palm trees and the mountains. From our cottage [home] where we'd look at the other view, we'd look out across the big athletic field and see the school with the big banyan tree in the courtyard and everything. Above that was a huge gulch. And framed in the gulch was Mauna Kea. And of course, in December, it was covered with snow. So there I was with the ocean crashing behind me and looking up and seeing Mauna Kea covered with snow. It was just absolutely amazing. I thought it was the most gorgeous spot in the whole world. And it probably is.

WN: When you went, did you go with the idea of staying just one year or did you go thinking you'd stay longer.

MM: Yes, I was going with the idea of teaching around the world and of course, when I met the three housemates, they had the same exuberant feeling of teaching. In April, we were going to go to Honolulu to spend spring vacation, but we'd already put feelers out for teaching in South America, teaching in the English schools in Japan. And all four of us were of that thought of mind. We liked Hawai'i and we'd like teaching there but we were trying to keep together and do this sort of adventurous kind of thing.

WN: What about things like the language or pidgin English? How was that with you.

MM: That was—(chuckles) I mentioned the names, the Japanese names. I had Takaki, Arakaki. And then I had Sadao Aoki, who later became very high in education [administration]. But S-A-D-A-O. "How do you say this? Hard *a*?" Then I had a lot of Filipino names—I had [a girl who's name was] Expectation. She was called Expectation, she didn't have any nickname. I had Asencion. I had all of these odd names. I had the [plantation] manager's son. And I had the [plantation] chemist's daughter.

WN: This was at Laupāhoehoe?

MM: This is at Laupāhoehoe. It was just a real mix. Hawaiians, pure-blood Hawaiians. I had the Malani [family] and I remember I had a girl named Mona Malani. Isn't that beautiful? Mona Malani. Well, she was in high school and she was almost six feet tall and very gifted athletically. This big woman didn't fit her name at all, we expected a little. . . . Then we had Kawaihona Laeha, who was part-Hawaiian, mostly Hawaiian. And she was a petite little gal that showed us, or introduced us to the *hula*.

WN: Was she related to one of the teachers? Laeha?

MM: Oh, yes. She was a teacher's daughter. And the names, as I say them, the language was not

really difficult. I always spoke straight to them. I remember being introduced to "*da kine*" and "*puka*." What's a *puka*? (WN chuckles.) I learned very swiftly and they were very happy to have these new teachers. They were very cooperative since there was no confinement—I mean it was beautiful outside all the time and they were very active physically. And most of them came to school in bare feet. Even when I taught soccer, they'd kick in their bare feet. I said, "You gotta have [shoes]." No, no, whammo, they'd kick the ball. It was very, very different. My first year of teaching was wonderful.

WN: Were you homesick at all?

MM: Um, well, I wrote voluminous letters to my mother. My mother and father had gotten divorced late, after the children were grown. I lived with my mother. But I missed her, I wanted her to come out to Hawai'i to see all of this. And I wrote to my father, too. But I really wasn't homesick. As I told you, my last two years of college I lived at home. I missed horses but then later on, the Umikoa Ranch invited the teachers up to ride horseback. One of the cowboys up there took a liking to me so I got my horseback riding. I really wasn't homesick at all.

WN: What about things like the weather, the changing seasons?

MM: No, I didn't miss that. The weather was great. (WN chuckles.) The weather was great. You think about the weather sometimes, later on. You think of fire in the fireplace and the snow and all that. But all you have to do is go back, which I have done, for a week in the winter. And you have to put on your coat to go out and ice is on the—and you have to shovel out the snow, the trees, they're all black. And it's not just that for a month, it's that for five months at least. No, I don't miss it at all.

WN: Tell me something about your living quarters.

MM: Oh yes. When we arrived we were met at Hilo. The first time I had been on an airplane. I'd gone up in an airplane once at a county fair but I'd never been on a (big) airplane before. We went on Hawaiian Airlines down from O'ahu to the Big island. As we flew along the Big Island, we saw the cliffs and the water and everything. And finally this little peninsula, "Oh, there's Laupāhoehoe," of course, briefly. Then we were met in Hilo by principals and the teachers who had put us in cars, those of us that were teaching along the Hāmākua Coast, like Pepe'ekeo, Hakalau, [and Laupāhoehoe]. So as we drove along—there are thirty-one bridges. We later counted, and half of those were one-way. And we'd meet a cane[-hauling] truck and we'd go down (and wait). It's just extraordinary.

There were five in our car. When we got to Pepe'ekeo, it was sort of tea time or lunchtime or something. So we went up to the [plantation] manager's house. They were expecting us and we had tea and everything. [The area] was called the Scotch Coast, [because] a lot of the people were real Scotsmen. And then we drove on and they let the teachers out—"This is your school," and so forth. And then we got to Laupāhoehoe and we went down, down, down, down that road which is now closed.

And there we were. The [teachers'] cottage was right on the ocean. No trees in front, it was rocky, no sand. And the waves crashing up and beautiful. And of course, we turned around and looked at the mountains and Mauna Kea. And I thought, this has got to be—it's so wonderful! The cottages were very comfortable. They had four bedrooms with a central dining

room, sort of with an arch and a living room and then a little front porch with big steps going down. They were all up on stilts. And then steps going out the back. The stove was a kerosene stove and (we) had (running) water, of course. The two bathrooms between the bedrooms. But no refrigerator. So we kept our butter, our perishables, in the school cafeteria refrigerator. So the four of us worked out a chart where it was my turn to get the butter, the meat, or whatever. Then also, to put it away at night. And I can remember with the flashlight, crossing that big athletic field, going up to the cafeteria and the lily pond and stream and there'd be all these bufos, big toads.

And anything that went wrong like the light bulb wouldn't work or anything, my fellow teachers that lived down there would come over and they'd bring a ladder and change the light bulb. They were very, very good to us. Another thing was that the mail was not delivered down there. We had to get our mail up at Pāpa'aloa, at the post office up there, which was a little one-room post office with mailboxes. So walking up that hill was good exercise but it took forever. So anyone---like the principal had a car and [so did] others, and we'd always go out in the road and hitch a ride up to the post office. Then walking down was not so bad. All our supplies, there was the company store at Pāpa'aloa, but if we wanted to get curtains or anything, on the weekends, we'd go in to Hilo on the bus. Of course there was the train at that time. And I think Dorothy Drake told about riding on the train. I was going to take the train but I never made it. The others, they said, "Oh, you've got to ride the train, Marsue." But I never got around to riding the train. And it was wiped out by the tidal wave.

So our living quarters were---I had a front bedroom, dresser, nice bed, it was really neat. We did a lot of cooking even though it was a kerosene stove. We had a chart. We'd take turns and, "You're responsible for the supper tonight."

Now, Dorothy Drake taught third grade, elementary school. And Helen Kingseed was an English teacher in high school, and Fay was the science teacher in high school.

WN: Fay Johnson?

MM: Yes. In my high school art class, there were such talented kids. They were so good, most of them. They'd never had any clay work, and I just went all out. I remember when the sugarcane tasselled, that was amazing. December, the whole field was full of these silvery Christmas trees. So I cut them off and had the kids make decorations for the room. It was really quite wonderful.

WN: Now, did you and Dorothy and Helen and Fay all come in at the same time?

MM: Yes.

WN: So you were all in that car.

MM: Yes, there were just the (four) of us left. That's where they let us out. There we were.

WN: And how many teachers' cottages were there [at the tip of the peninsula]?

MM: Well, let's see. Akiona's house was up on sort of the highland, a Hawaiian family. And then there was a little garage where Mr. [Clarence] Ferdun, the principal, kept his car, because his

house was up next to the school but it had no garage. So he kept his car down there. And then next to the garage was our cottage. We were in number one cottage. And then the next one had, four more teachers, the fifth grade, I think, [was] one. Then next to that were the Nakanos and he [Peter Nakano] had his experimental chickens and everything. And he also had three children and his wife was going to have another. Three girls he had. And then next to that were sort of the bachelor quarters. So that's one, two, three, four, and then there was a cottage sort of back off that was unoccupied.

WN: Bachelor's quarters were teachers also?

MM: Yes. Oh, yes. That's where Fred Kruse lived and the man (Frank Kanzaki) that used to have breakfast and his meals with the Nakanos. He rescued the one daughter that survived. He lived there, and then two other men teachers, (I think).

WN: And those, all of those homes were right along the ocean?

MM: Yeah, all up in a line. Do you notice the picture?

WN: Right.

MM: The line. No trees in front. Down at the end, there were a couple of ironwood trees around this empty cottage or house. But no trees in front. There was kind of a little palm tree that was struggling over by the garage. And of course, then there was the road. And the wall, the great wall, Hawaiian lava rock wall. And I don't know when that was put up there, probably when the school was built. Then great big tall palm trees edged this athletic field and all around there. And then of course, up above the Malani's house (were) several houses—the Hawaiian people's homes. Laupāhoehoe used to be, before they built the seawall in Hilo or the breakwater in Hilo, ships used to stop at Laupāhoehoe. You knew that.

WN: Right, yeah.

MM: And it was quite a community then, quite a few buildings. And there's nothing left but the cement [foundations] of where they used to be.

WN: So they shipped things from Laupāhoehoe to Hilo?

MM: Yes, and the passengers got off there and everything.

WN: I noticed there's a boat launch down there.

MM: Yes.

WN: Was that related to the commercial aspect of Hilo?

MM: Well no. They had to anchor out (in front in the ocean); that's why it wasn't very good. (Chuckles) Here was the ocean with no reef or anything and then it sort of went in. And that's why Laupāhoehoe was a stopping off place because it was the only place that went out that was next to—everything else was high cliffs. You couldn't possibly land a boat on either side for miles and miles.

WN: So you arrived in the fall of 1945.

MM: Yes, the first week in September.

WN: And you started teaching at Laupāhoehoe.

MM: Immediately, yes.

WN: Immediately. And then, so in April 1, '46, this is still your first year teaching.

MM: Yes, oh yes.

WN: That's when the tsunami hit. Can you think back now, what happened that day?

MM: What day? You mean April 1? Well, it was the week before spring vacation. Everything was ready for this final week. We give tests, and art projects were due and all of this sort of thing. And it was Monday. April 1 was Monday, of course, April Fool's day. Now, the school day started at 8:00 [A.M.] but the kids began to arrive at 6:30 because that's when their parents were due in the fields and so forth. So they'd drop their kids off or the buses would start arriving, 6:30. And we could hear the swings rattling, the elementary kids and so forth and so on. We were still in our pajamas and everything. We had, at 6:30, say about oh, close to 7:00, we had a whole hour to get ready for school. But we heard this knock on the door. It was Danny Akiona and he said, "Come and see the tidal wave." And we thought, tidal wave?

He said, "Come. Come and see it." So we put on our bathrobes and slippers and went out. My hair, I have horrible hair, was up in bobby pins. I put a scarf around it and went out and we traipsed out there and went up to where the cove was. That's where the monument is now.

WN: And how far is that from your cottage?

MM: Oh, it's about from here to the doorway there.

WN: Okay, maybe about forty feet?

MM: Yeah, maybe a little longer 'cause you have to go down the road. So we stood there and looked. And our vision of a tidal wave was what still today everybody else thinks of: *The Poseidon Adventure*. We thought of the John Hall, Dorothy Lamour movies where they say, "Here it comes. Here it comes," and they climb up a palm tree and all the bad guys are washed out and the good guys climb down and that's over with.

So we said, "What?" So we looked down.

And they said, "See." The ocean sucked out like a bathtub emptying. Then it came back in and it came up a little bit above the high-water mark.

So we looked at that, "That's a tidal wave?" Something's wrong here, you know. We turned around to go back in and get dressed. Then by golly, it sucked out again. And our thought was, being from Ohio and Virginia, well, this must be a twin tidal wave. Two of them. That's very unusual. I have to write about that. But this time it sucked out more and when it came in,

it came in more and it uprooted some *naupaka*, you know these (bright) green plants and everything and washed them up and made kind of a mess there.

And by that time, the kids that were swinging (at the playground) rushed over and they were watching the tidal wave with us. Here we were, with our hair up and in pajamas and everything. Then, after it did it a third time, a triple time, and we thought maybe the next one is going to suck out (more). And the third time, it even washed some fish up into the athletic field. The kids were leaning down trying to catch the fish and everyone was having a field day. Oh boy, isn't this something, you know.

So we went back to the cottage—the four of us, to get some clothes on. And we looked out our door and saw all this mess, all these plants uprooted and the kids running around. We thought, I wonder if they're going to have school today with all this water rushing in and out and everything.

And we said, "Oh well. Mr. Ferdun is a very staid man, he'll probably have school. But probably we won't have athletics or something." Then I got into, instead of school clothes, I got into blue jeans, saddle shoes, and socks. And a big lumberjack shirt. Like now they call them big shirts but this was a wool shirt I'd gotten in Maine. As I said, I had my hair still up in (bobby pins and a bandana). We said, "Well, if we have school, we'll come back and change."

Meanwhile, and this is interesting, they said, "We ought to take a picture of this mess out here and the kids catching the fish." I was the only one that had film in my camera. Oh, boy, I was so happy about that. So Fay Johnson and I went out on the porch in front [facing the ocean] to get a picture. Famous last words, I said, "Well, it's doing it again and I hope this is one of the bigger ones so I can get a . . ." But, it came and it just kept coming. It didn't crash, it kept coming, and got bigger and bigger. I noticed that Fred Kruse and his science students were out there on the rocks looking at the uncovered (seafloor), the seaweed that was uncovered and he was standing out there. This wave just got bigger and bigger. That was the first time that anybody around us, anybody thought to be afraid. Here we were, landlubbers, and it never occurred to anybody to be afraid.

Now, later on reading that little book called *April Fools [The Laupāhoehoe Tragedy of 1946, An Oral History]*, are you familiar with that? It seems that there were some people who thought, "This is not right." But it didn't occur to us and as I said, Fred Kruse, who [often] went spearfishing out there, there he was standing on the rocks.

Well, then I dropped the camera, came in the front door, Fay and I, and went to go out the back, down the steps and run away to higher land. But we got as far as the doorway, the jamb of the doorway. And I remember looking back [toward the front door] and the water was just fighting (at the windows). It broke the glass, and the cottage went whoomf! And all four of us were there at the [back] door, ready to go out the door. I remember grabbing Helen Kingseed by the arm, but she was just sucked right away.

WN: Sucked out?

MM: Well, it was coming this way [toward land], not out. It was coming this way. And she was sucked down. We were in the water and hanging on to the roof. The roof went down so Fay

and I crawled up to the comb of the roof. And it was going like this, like this, and washing up. Just the roof was left.

WN: So the cottage had actually collapsed.

MM: Collapsed completely.

WN: Because it was sort of built on stilts.

MM: There was no basement. It was built on stilts, high. All the cottages. You see pictures of it. So there we were hanging on to the roof. And I climbed up and sat down on the comb. The coconut trees were—you know how strong they are—were just smashed down. And we went up and by god, it started sucking out again!

I can remember seeing Mr. Ferdun's car, no more garage, was just turning end over end, sucking out, end over end like a tootsie toy. I mean just like nothing. So we were sucked out again and pretty soon—there are big jagged rocks down there. This roof went clunk on these rocks and didn't go any further, the ocean went out further.

So we thought, it's going to tidal wave all day and each one's going to get bigger and bigger. Our only hope was, while it's sucked out, to climb off the roof and in because the next one is just going to smash the roof and everything.

So we climbed off the roof, onto the rocks and we were making our way over the seaweed. We got about as far as (chuckles) that chair and it tidal waved again.

WN: So this is you and Fay?

MM: Yes.

WN: Walking on the . . .

MM: Now, when the roof was sucking out, we saw Dorothy hanging on to the corner of the roof.

WN: Dorothy Drake?

MM: Dorothy Drake, yes. I never did see Helen again. Dorothy Drake, we never did see her again, even when we were stuck on the rock. I don't know. That's the last we saw her. I saw Helen when she was by the door.

So we got that far and it tidal waved again. And that's when I knew I was gone, because I knew the rocks were there, I knew there was no way to wash up. I could feel myself being clunked and turned around and bubbled. But I was a good swimmer, so I took a breath before going down and—why did I do that? These are the thoughts—it just prolongs the agony. I could feel myself being [dashed] on the rocks. I don't know if you've ever been caught the wrong way in a wave and pounded down at Sandy Beach in the sand. I thought, my lungs are going to burst. But just before I did that, bubbles and everything, I kind of came up. I took another breath and went down again. And why did I do that? All these thoughts were going through my head. I knew I was going to die. I don't know whether I should say this in the

interview or not, you don't care what I thought?

WN: No, please.

MM: Well, this is something that was very important to me at this time. And naturally, I don't say much about it because 99 percent of the people are believers and so forth. But at that time, I knew there was no God.

And it was very important to me when I had boyfriends or dates and everything, that they felt the same way. But there were a lot of military men, men we met on the boat, in the navy and the marines who were up there and we had a lot of contact with them. And they'd say, "Oh, you say that now but just wait till you're faced with death and you'll pray, you'll go back to God. You know there is. . . ."

I said, "No." Here I was, faced with death, I knew I was going to die. And I still knew there was no God. And I couldn't tell anybody. That was really one of my main thoughts. I couldn't tell anybody. But then I did come up a third time and I was right by the top of the lighthouse there. And all around me was wreckage of the cottages, just trees and boards and everything. So I grabbed hold of a piece of a house, and I thought, every bone in my body must be broken. But I could tread water and my arms moved. And I said, "Well, nothing's broken, I'm bruised but not broken." And I kind of clung on to this. My one thought, before it tidal waves again, I gotta get out and away from the cliffs. I'm going to be slammed against the cliffs or the rocks again. So I kind of paddled my way and tried to get out. And as it turned out, I did get out, sort of into a stream that was going down this way with all this rubbish and everything.

Then I took stock. The sea was very rough. It was a wild kind of rainy day, but it stopped raining and it was not a very good day. But I remember taking stock. I said I had put on blue jeans, saddle shoes, socks, my hair was up in a hundred bobby pins with a scarf and everything. My saddle shoes and socks were gone. My blue jeans were gone, I still had my underwear. My shirt was open, there wasn't a pin left in my head, the scarf was gone. That was all. Thank goodness I had this big shirt which I buttoned, and I had a brassiere, panties and this huge shirt, thank goodness, wool shirt. And that's all I had. So I was out there in the rubbish. Now do you want to hear all these details?

WN: Yes. This is very. . . .

MM: It's very clear to me. So I was out there with this rubbish and I looked around and took stock that I was movable, everything worked. And I looked up and high on the cliff, Ninole, you know where that is? There were people sort of standing. And I thought, I'm the only one that survived this. I'm the only one out here with all this wreckage. They don't know I'm here. I kind of waved and I knew then that I don't care what happens, I'm going to survive this thing. I knew there was a sugar mill about, what ten miles down the road that came down. The cliffs ended and there was this sugar mill. I said, "If I can make it down there, maybe I can make it into shore," provided it stopped tidal waving. Might be tidal waving forever for all I knew. So I paddled around there and . . .

WN: By paddling, you mean—are you on something?

MM: Yeah.

WN: Okay, you're not treading water anymore.

MM: No, I'm hanging on to the wreckage. And then I exchanged the original boards that were nailed together for something a little bit sturdier. I finally got ahold of a door that wasn't rough and kind of big, so I clung to that and I kind of raised myself up. I got seasick and (it) rained. I thought about sharks and octopuses and things like that. Here I was. Then I thought, with all this rubbish here, they're not going to be able to swim through that. So I didn't worry about that anymore. Then of course, this was 1946, the war wasn't even over for a year. What about all the hundreds of PT boats, what about all the cruisers and the airplanes and everything in Honolulu, Pearl Harbor. There would be a million boats out here but if they only knew I was here.

So I kept (waving) and so you'd think they'd come right away. But an hour went by, two hours went by, no help, no indication anybody knew I was out here. It was very frustrating. While I was out there, I was kind of on a stream going this way and then there was another current sort of going. And I saw, the waves would go down, you couldn't see anything, and then you'd come up—I saw (what) looked like two or three boys on a door or raft or something, and their faces were all white, like their skin was peeling off, I couldn't see very well. And I kind of yelled to them and everything and I don't even remember whether they responded, they were way far away. But that turned out to be the three boys that later washed up at Kohala that were saved. It turned out that they had found a can of Crisco. And to protect them from the elements, they had covered themselves with Crisco. It was very smart. They were high school boys and I forget their names but you probably have the statistics [Herbert Nishimoto and two other students were rescued in Kohala. See Herbert Nishimoto's interview for another account of this event]. I was out there, and hours went by and I said, "There are those three and there's me. They have to come and rescue us or something." Finally, one or two or three o'clock or something, I saw somebody else. And it was one boy hanging on to—I forget what he was hanging on to. But when I'd go up on the crest, we even could exchange words. And we looked out and way out there was this ship. You know, a regular interisland ship. And he said he's going to swim to that ship.

And I said, "It's too far. You can't get out there. They should know we're here, they should come in."

And he said, no, he was going to swim out there. Well, he lost his life, never heard from him again. He's one of the ones who lost his life. Now, why didn't they send help from Pearl Harbor? They never did send any boats, never did. Hilo didn't have a boat floating. Everything was destroyed in Hilo.

Now the boat that eventually rescued me and two others, was a pond boat up at Kamuela, you know, just a flat pond boat. And Dr. [Leabert] Fernandez was the one that felt that there were people out there. So they sent a plantation truck up there to get this boat. They brought it down. The plantation carpenter had to. . . . Then they found someone who had a motor; that boat didn't have a motor. And to get the motor onto the back of this boat, (they had to saw the end off and build a new end for the motor).

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MM: I was told the owner of the motor [David Kailimai] who knew how to run it got in the boat. Dr. Fernandez did in case there was—it was his project and in case someone was injured then he could give them medical assistance. And then there was a Japanese man [Masaru Himoto] that was a very good diver. So in case he had to go under. And then there was the Hawaiian man [Francis Malani] who knew the rocks, knew the way out because it was tricky, knew the ocean side and everything in that (region). It was quite a large boat.

The boat went out about 4:30 [P.M.] I guess, maybe 5:00. Meanwhile, finally, there was an airplane, one airplane. And he was going around like this, and going around. And I kept going like this—(waving). But he didn't buzz his motor, he didn't dip down, he didn't do anything for about, it seemed to me like forever. Finally, he dropped a rubber raft, I guess it was. But it was so far away that I couldn't get to it. But that was the first indication that anybody had ever seen me. Then he circled around and I guess he noticed that I couldn't get to it and he dropped another one. So, I maneuvered around, I wasn't going to let go of my door until I was sure. And I can remember seeing this floating rubber raft thing. And it had a handle on it and it said, "pull." So I pulled and it got up [i.e., inflated] into a rubber raft. So when that happened, I climbed into this rubber raft and relaxed because that was the first time (I could).

It was starting to get dark and everything. All around this rubber raft were pockets. I opened one and it was fishing tackle, (WN chuckles) so I could catch—they think I'm going to catch fish and everything. And I was about to open another, I thought maybe they'd have some water here or something. Then Dr. Fernandez's boat came up.

So they got me aboard this (rescue) boat. Before that, they had rescued two boys, [Ronald Yamaoka and Yoshio Awakuni], seventh and eighth graders. They (had been) hanging on to a *lau hala* tree, which is very porous and was about to sink. So if they hadn't rescued those two boys, they'd probably (have) the fate of the other one that tried to swim out to the ship. One of them had a very serious head injury and his head was all wrapped up and he was lying (down). So they got me into the boat and they had blankets there. At first, they tried to tow the rubber raft along but it was so difficult. And the boat—a wave crashed over and wet all the blankets and everything. And it was getting dark. So they had to turn back with the three that they rescued.

By the time we got back to Laupāhoehoe and inside the cove and landed, it was, I guess something like 7:00 [P.M.], quarter after seven [7:15], 7:30 or something. It was dark. There were people down there to see who came back in that boat, (who) they'd rescued. They put me in a car and put the two boys in another car. I can remember going up that long road, and lining the road were all these parents whose kids didn't come home that day. And they were looking and looking in the car to see who they'd rescued. They took me to Laupāhoehoe hospital and I was there.

WN: Did you know Dr. Fernandez before?

MM: Yes, yes I did. I'd had several dates with him and we had talked seriously about—he didn't

believe in God either. He said, "What? If there's a God, why would he have something like this happen?" And that's exactly my sentiments. But we got along that way very well. We often kidded about—he said that when he found me and rescued me, he said, "Say you'll marry me or I'll throw you back in." (WN chuckles.) So we did know each other but we were not really—I think he was more serious about me than I was about him, because I had these plans to teach around the world. And of course, Dorothy and Helen and Fay, [whom] I was going to teach around the world with, were all gone. So it changed my life. And I fell more and more in love with him and I married him. He had two little boys, three and four, stepsons, which I feel are mine. And I had three more. But that's a true story and I would not be in Hawai'i today if that hadn't happened. I think I would've gone—we would've gone on. Maybe I would've returned, I really don't know, but that sealed my fate.

WN: Tell me something about your three roommates. What, personalitywise, were they like?

MM: Well, as I say, Dorothy Drake, I didn't know her as well. She was an elementary teacher, it was on different hour [i.e. they had different schedules]. But she was quite a good athlete, she knew how to swim very well. And in fact, she'd had dates with Dr. Fernandez before I did. We were invited to all the parties and they gave a big party for us, the plantation. They gave a dance for us, and that's where Bert said he first saw me. But he dated Dorothy [at the time] because I was dating someone else, I forget. But anyway, we used to go to their homes for dinner and they were so wonderful to us. And there were these Scotsmen and I remember they put on their kilts for us and did the dances. One guy, the one who was head of the sugar processing, the raw sugar, played the bagpipes. And of course, the manager's wife and he himself were avid bridge players and she'd give bridge parties. Dorothy Drake didn't play bridge but Helen did. So Dorothy Drake, I knew less about. But she was a really nice girl, very healthy, very strong and a good swimmer. But it wasn't how well you could swim, it's just luck. Like Fred Kruse used to go spear diving there. [He] was a big, handsome, Tarzan type of man but he must have gotten hit on the head. If I got hit on the head like I was on my hip, I wouldn't be here. But my head was intact for some reason.

Anyhow, Helen Kingseed was a Catholic, very—I remember she was very pretty, nice skin, and very intelligent. She was the head of the school college newspaper, big woman on campus, very capable and wonderful.

WN: So you knew of her in college?

MM: Well, no. I didn't notice until—'cause I lived at home, see. But in the *Recension*, there her picture was and everything. She was one of six children, Catholic family. I don't think her family ever got over the fact that she was taken. She was a beautiful girl and had a wonderful sense of humor and smile. She was like all of us, more vivacious.

Then Fay, the one from Roanoke, Virginia, was very pretty and very attractive to men. Very sharp. And she was full of life, too. The four of us went around on a sampan [bus], we went around the island one weekend and stayed at Kona Inn and everything. We were very compatible, as I say.

Helen Kingseed and Fay and I, since we were high school teachers, were on a different schedule from Dorothy. So we were closer, I guess. But all four of us wanted to teach around the world.

WN: Did you talk about going together to teach around the world?

MM: Yes. Yes. In fact, as I said . . .

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

MM: Christmas vacation, we all came up [to O'ahu] and stayed at the only hotel that was open then, it was the Moana [Hotel]. The Royal Hawaiian was built, but of course, it was R and R [rest and recreation] for submariners, you know. So we stayed at the Moana and we had a wonderful time. We had all these contacts with naval officers. We just had a ball as far as dancing and dates and everything. The war was over and it was still filled with military men. They'd taken the barbed wire off the beach.

So we were planning a similar holiday for a spring vacation. We'd made reservations at the Moana again. We were going up there. I don't think Dorothy was going with us this time. It was the three of us, Helen and Fay and I. Dorothy had planned to—she'd filled out the things for teaching in South America and then there was—they needed English teachers for the occupation people in Japan. Those were two possibilities. We were just exploring, this was April 1, we had until next fall.

WN: And I know that you wrote letters to the families of the three girls.

MM: Oh yes. My mother even had saved some about our first—we used to camp down there and Mr. Laeha would bring all this wonderful food and we'd have—the first time we tasted *poi*. We were invited to all the weddings and *lū'aus* in the community. And I can remember seeing Kawaihona dance the *hula* so beautifully. All we'd seen were movies, we hadn't seen any real *hula*.

WN: Now who was this? Who danced the *hula*?

MM: Kawaihona Laeha [Poy]. She still lives there, up in Pāpa'aloa. She still lives there with her family. When I went back for the PBS filming down there, I met quite a few. My friend, Ted Jordan, whose son does work on the volcano that's sunken down there, he came and he told all the people at Laupāhoehoe that I was coming, so they were down there. I hadn't seen Kawaihona for a long time. She has five children or something. (Chuckles) So it was really—they're wonderful people.

WN: So when you got to the hospital, what kind of injuries did you have?

MM: I had taken in a lot of salt water, in spite of my holding my breath. I had thrown up a lot in the waves. I had a huge bruise on my hip and other things. But nothing serious. Just kind of bonged around. But no bones broken and no head injuries. I just stayed there overnight for observation, making sure I didn't have anything wrong with my skull. 'Cause Dr. Fernandez delivered all the babies, set all the bones, took out all the appendixes, treated all the flu, measles, whatever. He did everything and he was a wonderful doctor. (The nurses) used to go up into the field and anybody that was really sick, they'd bring down to the hospital so he could see them. He was a master of taking care of five thousand people so beautifully.

I know they say that, "Oh, the sugar plantation is something like slavery in the South and

cotton fields and everything." It wasn't like that at all. These villages where the workers lived, they each had their own little house. I can remember going to visit some of my students and they'd have orchids hanging from the porch. They'd bring me orchids, cattleya orchids, (at) school. Of course, maybe they didn't get paid enough or something. They worked hard but they had the best—Hawai'i had the lowest infant birth death (rate) in the nation because they had this system. (When the statistics about the forty-eight states and the U.S. territories—not just the plantations—were published, perhaps in a medical journal, Dr. Fernandez and the nurses were very pleased.) Each plantation had a hospital and everything. They were just very well taken care of. And of course, that generation, the children, they all became principals, teachers, governors, legislators, businessmen. You know, the Japanese particularly. And of course, the Chinese had left [the plantations] long ago. So I always feel that the plantations were well run and the people were not slave labor at all, at least by the time I got there. And I got there when they were first unionized [starting in 1945] and they needed to be unionized, I guess, because to take care of the wages. But as far as their treatment was concerned, it was. . . .

See, it's raining that way again. See this is the kind of day (chuckles), you know, rain, sunshine, sea was very rough.

WN: Did you hold out the hope that maybe some of your roommates or others would be rescued later? Was it that feeling that it wasn't over yet?

MM: No, no. Well, later on, there was Mrs. Akiona that lay on the door. She said she was saved because she wore Mormon garments. She'd been through the temple at Salt Lake City. You don't know that story?

WN: No, I don't. Mrs. Akiona?

MM: Mrs. Akiona. Of course, her son [Daniel Akiona], the boy that woke us up, was dead. And of course you know the [Peter] Nakano story. He lost his newborn baby boy. He'd had three girls and finally he had a baby boy. They were so happy. Dr. Fernandez was also the coroner and there was only one body ever found, and the head was just crushed. Some of the regular gauge train cars were never found, either. It [the tsunami] was so powerful. So powerful.

WN: Was Mr. Ferdun's car found?

MM: No, never.

WN: Wow.

MM: But odd thing was, I had my jewelry in my dresser. They opened school May 1 to finish out the year. And I remember [one teacher] was wearing an honorary thing for teaching, I forget the name of the (Greek) letters. A little key that you get. And she was wearing it. I said, "Where did you get that?"

She said she found it down there. Well, I said, "That's mine." And another thing that turned up was a watch my grandfather had given me that had rubies and diamonds and gold. But no bodies were ever found. And of course, I was completely without clothes. I had one pair of panties, a brassiere and a shirt. That's all I had, so I had to be completely outfitted. The Red

Cross was wonderful. They supported the ones that were rescued, they saw that I got clothes and everything.

WN: So all the belongings that were in the cottage were lost?

MM: Everything. My typewriter, everything, except those couple of pieces of jewelry. It was strange.

WN: And what went through your mind as you were writing letters to the families of the roommates?

MM: About this?

WN: Yes.

MM: I know when I wrote my father, he's the one that said, "Sue, you have to write all of this down,"—these things that I've been telling you—"Put down your thoughts, put down everything." My major was English and my father was a writer and a photographer as well as a professor. So I put down everything and it was voluminous.

And he said, "Send it to me and I'll try to get it published in a magazine. This is really an extraordinary story."

So I sent it to (him). He wrote back, [saying] that like the *Ladies Home Journal* or any of these people didn't want it because I didn't believe in God. I didn't pray. God didn't save me. He said, "You've got to change that if you want to publish it."

I said, "No way. That's one of the main things I'm able to tell people now. That's me." "That's I," I should say, to be a proper English teacher.

They sent it back. Thirteen years later, in '59 he wrote to me again and he said, "Why don't you leave the God part out and shorten it and enter it in the contest for the first-person award (given by the *Reader's Digest*)." And that's exactly what I did. You had to have it down to 2000, 2500 words or something. He said, "Leave that out or leave this out," submitted it, and it won the prize, which was considerable. This was in '59 it was published. But by thirteen years later, (the God part) wasn't so important to me.

Of course, my brother had just come back from the war, and he'd majored in geology and math. He came over to be the best man at our wedding and he stayed out in the cottage in back of our house. He liked it so much that he got a job teaching algebra in the high school for a year, stayed with us for a year. And then Bert used to have him scrub in with him and watch the operations, and that's when my brother decided to be a doctor. So he went back to Ohio, took his pre-med, and then he went to Washington (University in St. Louis). He became an orthopedic surgeon. (So his life was changed, too.)

WN: When did you first hear from your parents after the incident? How long was it?

MM: Oh, right away. My father, they heard about it nationwide, it was in *Time* magazine, it was in everything. My father, who was editor of the *Farm Quarterly* at that time, lived in Cincinnati.

They came to him and said, "That's your daughter." And so he had pictures on the desk of me and of my brother with only two of us. So they took both those pictures and when they made the big thing about—at that time, daughter missing and so forth, there was my picture and my brother in it. My father said, "Well, he was good-looking, too." It was right after the war. In many ways it's strange that nobody sent help from Pearl Harbor or anything, sent a boat. It could've maybe saved more lives. So I say, maybe the horror of the war was still familiar.

I went to Europe for the first time, twenty years afterwards, and those countries I went to: Russia and Poland and Czechoslovakia and all—all of those—England, Holland—were just as if the war were yesterday. Takes a long time, as you say, it's been how many? Fifty-[three] years since the ['46] tidal wave. I heard that it had been eighty years since a tidal wave hit Hawai'i and that's why it didn't occur to anybody to be afraid. [Between 1869 and 1945, several tsunamis hit Hawai'i, but only one, in 1923, caused serious damage.]

WN: Well, nothing of that magnitude anyway.

MM: Yes.

WN: I know there was one in 1923 but . . .

MM: Just like the ones we've had. And the one that we had that took a lot of lives in Hilo after this '46 was because of the warning system. I know friends that lived in Hilo. They blew the siren, everybody got out of the way. Then they blew the siren again, they thought it was the all clear [siren] because they'd had so many false alarms. [In 1952 and 1957 three sirens sounded, but in 1960 only one was sounded.] Right here (in Lanikai), a tidal wave is coming, evacuate, evacuate, and they had loud speakers down here. And I'd look out (at) the ocean, but it didn't suck out, I knew it was okay. And if it did suck out, I'd have a half hour to get to higher land so it never bothered (me). I remember putting the silverware in the car and driving up to the Pali because my kids insisted on it. And they'd had so many false alarms in Hilo and this gumped everything up. It was a pretty strong one. What was that? [Nineteen] fifty-two or something? [Nineteen] fifty-four? The one that took a lot of lives in Hilo after the '46?

WN: Nineteen sixty.

MM: [Nineteen] sixty.

WN: Right.

MM: Then they got a, I guess, a man in civil defense that wasn't so trigger happy. And they got warnings and they hear about it and they say it was two inches in Guam or something. So they didn't scare the people all the time. And that's where it is now. It's always the possibility, I guess.

WN: So when you went back, when school started again maybe about a month later, what was that like?

MM: That was terrible 'cause you'd have your class and you'd have these people missing. It was a very sad time, I have the yearbook from that time. But you get through it. And by that time, I was living up in Dr. Fernandez' guest house and I'd pretty well made up my mind to marry

him. My life was all changed. The new teachers that came in to take the place of the others, substitutes, they were all really nice and supportive. But I really don't have very clear images of finishing out the school year, except that it was really sad. I don't remember anyone ever smiling or anything. But (it) was something that had to be done. And of course, Mr. Ferdun left and went to another school. [In September 1946, Clarence Ferdun was named department of education field assistant for the East Hawai'i district]. And we got a new principal. But I didn't teach after that, I was married. But my brother taught in the school up above. They never did reopen the school down below except for that year. [Laupāhoehoe students, faculty, and administrators continued to use the old facilities, which were partially destroyed by the tsunami, until the fall of 1952. That year, a new Laupāhoehoe High and Elementary School, located in the hills above the site of the old school, was dedicated.]

WN: So from May to June, they used the same school?

MM: They used the same school. As I say, I remember that I went to Honolulu to get final supplies for finishing out the art craft thing. I got some clay and stuff, brought it back. But I really have no clear memories of finishing out except that it was gloomy and sad and just something that you had to get through, a necessary thing.

WN: So how long were you in Laupāhoehoe after . . .

MM: We lived there seven years. (I) got married and stayed, of course, in the doctor's house. Gee, I can't think of her name. Her married name was Crabbe, and she lived at Pepe'ekeo, I think. She had a son and we used to get together with our children and so forth. [MM may be referring to Evelyn Crabbe, who was living in a second teachers' cottage in Laupāhoehoe at the time of the 1946 tsunami. Crabbe survived that day.]

WN: Crabbe?

MM: Yes. She was a teacher that was washed up with the cottage. But I really lost track of the other survivors. My life was very full. I had these two stepsons and I was the baby of [my] family so I never—I wasn't a baby-sitter or anything, I didn't know anything about kids, little kids. I always felt I could deal with older kids that knew how to read.

WN: How young were they?

MM: Three and four. He [Fernandez] had been divorced about a year. I had nothing to do with the, you know, that situation. He said it was a war casualty in that his former wife was a gray nurse in the Hilo Hospital during the war. So he began anew. He's quite a bit older than I, thirteen years older than I. But we got along.

WN: When did you go back to teaching?

MM: We moved to Kailua [O'ahu] in '52 because my husband wanted to specialize and become a plastic surgeon. So he took two years of general surgery residency at Queen's [Hospital]. Of course, at least those days, the interns didn't make any money and they lived (at the hospital). But we had a lot of money saved up for this. But in 1953 and '54, we ran out of money, so I went back to teaching. But the only job I could find on this side of the island—Kailua High School wasn't built yet, neither was Kalāheo. The high school was where the intermediate

school is now. The only job I could find was the sixth grade. And I really enjoyed that. I taught the sixth grade. I had two of my own children and two stepsons. He used to substitute for doctors that would go on vacations, like we lived at Wahiawā a month one summer. All that red dirt, our dalmatian was pink when we came back. (WN chuckles.) But that's when I went back to teaching.

Then my grandfather died. He'd left me some money. We had to move to the Los Angeles area because he wanted to be a board man and there were no plastic surgeons here that he could work under. So we moved to Los Angeles area and had my money from my grandfather, inheritance. But then we ran out of money again with four kids, so I taught in California and because I taught the sixth grade here, I got a job teaching sixth grade in El Monte, California, which is near Arcadia. So that's when I went back to teaching (again). I didn't teach again until—oh, yes, I did. When we came back and he was just getting into practice, and our two sons—he'd gone to Punahou [School] and our two sons, my two stepsons, were enrolled at Punahou and if you taught at Punahou, you got a break in the tuition. So I got a job teaching English and art (at Punahou). I taught ceramics and jewelry-making. And I ended up teaching all the art history. I taught summer school. I taught there for three years until I got pregnant with my little one, Holly. Then I didn't teach again until my marriage broke up. Then I went back, taught.

WN: So your marriage broke up around '63, '64?

MM: [Nineteen] sixty-three. The year President Kennedy was assassinated. And I was so fortunate to have my teaching credentials and there are many things that I really liked about teaching. I think I was a good teacher. I wasn't gifted, disciplinarywise. I taught seventh and eighth grade but that was the time when the teachers were organizing. They had to because the janitors were making more money than we were. So they had to organize and become unionized. So what did the DOE do? They hired fewer teachers because they had to pay the teachers (more). So our classes got enormous, just put all the kids in the classes. We used to have a reading teacher for kids that didn't read and I taught the seventh and eighth grade.

WN: This is at Kailua?

MM: Yes, Kailua (Intermediate School). We had seven feeder schools. They'd come in. If somebody didn't know how to read, they were assigned to the (reading) teacher and they had a whole classroom and everything. But after (we) became unionized, they had to pay the teachers a decent salary. We were supposed to assimilate them, (the nonreaders). And so all of us English teachers had, first, one class of nonreaders that we had to go to. I dreaded that. We had a special—they called it the skills lab and I had to go. It was just really (not my forte). So teaching—I was there for twelve years—teaching got more and more difficult. Sometimes we'd have forty in the class, not enough desks for them to sit in, so they finally hired a substitute to take the overflow, (say in October). And sheer numbers did us in. So when I was able to have a bed and breakfast (in my home), I retired at [age] fifty-five. (Teaching) just got to be too much. I couldn't teach the way (I wanted). That was the biggest difference in teaching at Punahou and teaching in the public schools, was the class size. Anything over twenty-five, (Punahou would) hire another teacher. It was wonderful. Wonderful. (Chuckles) And (the public schools are) still having the same problem.

WN: Well, okay. You said that your experience at Laupāhoehoe changed your life?

MM: Yes.

WN: And I know physically you changed your mind about teaching around the world, you got married and settled down.

MM: I got married, took care of the stepsons, I had kids of my own. A whole new life and supporting him in being a plastic surgeon and so forth and so on. So I truly love Hawai'i, I've never had any instances of racial prejudice or anything. I remember my (relatives) were from Cincinnati and everything and they used to be prejudiced against the Jews. And they'd say, "Oh, the Jews have just ruined Miami Beach." And they'd call them kikes and everything. But I never could tell—a Jew (from others). I never did feel that way and maybe it's because my mother and father were very—my mother went back [to school when MM was] in the fourth grade and became a graduate and they were very open-minded. They saw that I knew about the church and everything but they weren't (very) religious. Of course, my grandfather was (unusual)—he was a Catholic until his father died and then he never went back (to the church). I think back now how advanced my mother and father were as far as prejudice itself (of) any kind.

I loved that about Hawai'i, that you could go on (any) beach, the beaches are free [to] anybody. My time in Florida, this beach [is] restricted, this hotel [is] restricted. The way it used to be, subdivisions and everything were restricted. But it never touched me. Actually to this day, I have a hard time with who's Korean and who's Chinese, and who's Thai and who's this and so forth. I remember a Japanese basketball player, he was about six [feet], two [inches], in Hakalau. Big handsome guy and Japanese are supposed to be short and wear glasses, you know, like all the pictures in the funnies during World War II. It was interesting.

WN: As you look back, I mean this was over fifty years ago and so forth.

MM: Yes, and all the trees have grown up there (at Laupāhoehoe).

WN: Did you ever think, "Why did I survive and not others?" Did that ever occur to you?

MM: Of course. Not why, it's just that I did. One reason was, I didn't get hit on the head. Other reason was, I was a good swimmer so I took those breaths. Other reason was, I was lucky.

WN: Do you consider yourself a lucky person?

MM: Oh yes, in many ways. Many ways. Really, just very lucky. You asked that question, why did I survive? Why didn't they survive? Were they bad? No. They were better than I was. I mean, there's no plan, there's just coincidence.

WN: I like your rationality.

MM: That's just the way it is. It's interesting.

WN: Okay, well, thank you very much for your time.

MM: Now can I ask you a question?

WN: Sure.

MM: How did you come to be interested in this oral history thing?

WN: Well, it's always been an interest of mine.

MM: About the past?

WN: Yes. Oh yes. Are you talking about this particular project?

MM: Yes.

WN: The tsunami?

MM: No, about you personally.

WN: Oh, about oral history. Well, why don't I turn off the tape and we can talk. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

**TSUNAMIS REMEMBERED:
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and Observers in Hawai'i**

Volume I

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