

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Herbert S. Nishimoto

"I was on the Waipunalei side of the Laupāhoehoe Point already, on the deep side. I would say about, maybe hundred yards out already. That's how fast the current took me that way. Then I found a log and a mattress. I saw a duck and a centipede on the log. I was afraid of the centipede (chuckles) more than anything else. . . . I found an axe handle so I killed the centipede first thing. And the duck and I shared the log. With lots of debris, I gathered as much wood around me for floatation. . . . With the axe handle as a hammer, I gathered debris to make a makeshift raft. Then I saw a shark, you know, coming around, so I got scared. So I start putting the lumber under me, even with the nails poking my stomach and my feet, trying to keep afloat. . . . I found a bottle of Crisco and an apple. I ate all the apple. It was kind of brownish but I ate all except the seed and the stem. I ate the core, too. And the Crisco bottle I found floating. I rub that all over my body."

Herbert Sadamu Nishimoto was born June 15, 1929 in Ninole, Hawai'i. He is the youngest of Senichi Nishimoto and Misano Masukawa Nishimoto's five children. Immigrants from Hiroshima, Japan, Senichi and Misano Nishimoto ran a small grocery store in Honohina, a town resided in by workers of Hakalau Plantation Company and their families.

When not helping his parents in the store or working for twenty-five cents a day at the sugar plantation, Nishimoto spent his boyhood swimming and fishing in the nearby streams, pig hunting, and participating in sports leagues organized by the plantations. He also tended the family garden, poultry, and livestock.

Nishimoto attended John M. Ross School, Hilo Intermediate School, and Laupāhoehoe High School, graduating with the class of 1948. He was finishing up his sophomore year when the 1946 tsunami swept across Laupāhoehoe Point on the morning of April 1.

Nishimoto was swept out to sea by the tsunami. Surviving first on a makeshift raft he made from debris, and later on a raft dropped to him from a rescue plane, he spent the night in the open ocean. Battling fear, hunger, thirst, exposure, fatigue, and an occasional shark, he and two companions drifted for miles. They were rescued the next day near Niuli'i, South Kohala.

Nishimoto's extraordinary story has been documented in newspaper articles, books, and videotape.

Nishimoto, a veteran of the Korean and Vietnam wars, retired after twenty-seven years in the U.S. Army. He lives in 'Aiea, O'ahu with his wife, Jessie Moriyasu Nishimoto. They raised three children and currently have seven grandchildren.

Tape No. 29-36-1-99

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Herbert S. Nishimoto (HN)

'Aiea, O'ahu

March 12, 1999

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

[NOTE: Also present at the interview is Jessie Nishimoto (JN), HN's wife.]

WN: This is an interview with Herbert Nishimoto for the tsunami oral history project on March 12, 1999, and we are at his home in 'Aiea, O'ahu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Herbert, let's start. First of all, can you tell me when and where you were born?

HN: I was born in Ninole, Hawai'i. It's about twenty miles north of Hilo. Five miles south of Laupāhoehoe.

WN: What was your father doing in Ninole?

HN: My father [Senichi Nishimoto] had a store, Nishimoto Store. My father passed away in August, 1940. Then my oldest brother, Yukio, took over the store.

WN: What kind of store was that?

HN: A real general merchandise store.

WN: Groceries?

HN: Groceries, clothing, foodstuff, canned food. Those days we didn't (sell) too many (fresh) meats because a lot of people didn't have refrigerators. So we sold a lot of fish, dried fish, codfish, that's about it.

WN: Was it in the plantation area?

HN: No. It was right next to the plantation, outside the plantation. They had a plantation store (in) Honohina, which was about four miles away, I'd say.

WN: Did you help in the store at all?

HN: Me?

WN: Yeah.

HN: I worked in the store. I helped deliver bread and (other groceries) in a truck. And we'd go out up in the hills [on the] plantation road to the different homes. Delivered rice, chicken feed, scratch, barley, and all that. We used to deliver. From Ninole, Kahuku, and we'd go to Kapehu. So we had what, total from one end to the other end, you talking about seven miles.

WN: Where did you get the bread from?

HN: Love's Bakery used to deliver. They used to deliver from Hilo in the morning and people would take orders so we'd deliver. And the bread is mostly to the Portuguese families. The local people (Oriental) didn't eat too much bread those days.

WN: Did you take orders, too? Did you go around taking orders?

HN: When I deliver (I take orders as well). And if they order one bag rice, I used to carry the hundred-pound [bag]. For a fifteen-year-old, I was carrying the rice up the house, scratch feed for chicken, they all have chickens, carried it up to the house because they lived on the hill. I'd take orders, "What do you want?" And they don't pay cash. End of the month we give them a bill and they'll pay us then. All cash.

WN: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

HN: I had four brothers and two sisters.

WN: And you were the, what?

HN: Youngest.

WN: Oh, the youngest.

HN: And I had one half-brother. Same father, different mother.

WN: Where was your father from?

HN: Hiroshima, Japan. And my mother's the same.

WN: Tell me something about your mother.

HN: My mother [Misano Masukawa Nishimoto] was born in Hiroshima. She came when---my father was initially married to my mother's, I believe, aunty or cousin. And she died. My half-brother, Earl, the oldest one, was small, so, you know those days, mail-order brides, so to speak. And I guess he wrote a letter and the cousin came down and married my father. My mother, when she got married she was eighteen, I think. And they had a store, worked in the store and she used to work at a Portuguese house, you know, like a maid. That's where she learned to cook Portuguese bread and Portuguese-style cooking. And she was a good swimmer. We used to swim in the river there, and we would give them all different names; Jackson Pond, John Vierra Pond,

Old School Pond, that's where I learned how to swim.

WN: Which river was this?

HN: Nīnole (Stream, Waikaumalo Stream, Nīnole Stream, Waiehu Stream, and Manoloa Stream). And as I got a little older, about fifteen, (I was a Boy Scout and took swimming seriously). I used to go down (to Waikaumalo Stream where) the river was (flowing) kind of fast. So I'd take out the rocks and plug onto the lower side so it gets a little deep and (reduced the flow). Then I'd swim. We didn't have time clocks. (I would) take the alarm clock over there. (WN chuckles.) Took my alarm clock, you know, the Big Ben alarm clock. And I used to swim (against) the current. I used to swim, first five minutes. Then later on, I was going about fifteen, twenty minutes. And I'd take the rock off on the lower side so the current got stronger, it's a lot stronger. I was swimming against the current (for about) twenty-five minutes steady. (This method, I built my swimming stamina.)

WN: So you wanted to swim competitively?

HN: I don't know. Country boy, what do we know about being competitive? (WN chuckles.) But I read something at that time, to become a good swimmer, you have to swim against the current.

WN: Yeah.

HN: The flume was too shallow. That's why even people older than I was, three or four years older, I used to outswim them, outdive them. And some of the ponds were fairly deep, fifteen, twenty feet. When we used to play tag they'd (have a) hard time catching me because I (could dive deeper and) stay down longer [and] swim faster (than them).

WN: I know a lot of plantation boys like Keo Nakama, they used to swim on the . . .

HN: In the [irrigation] ditch. I don't know where I learned that, you know, swim against the current, (and) you (become a) strong swimmer. So I started.

WN: How old were you when you started swimming like that, you know, training type?

HN: I would say fourteen (or) fifteen, somewhere about there. We used to go spear fishing. (On the) Big Island, it's all rough waters. We talking about, five-foot wave, that's calm. And those days we didn't have any fins. And the kind of goggles we had, just plain regular bamboo goggles. I was a good diver, I was diving (in) twenty-five feet (deep ocean).

WN: Twenty-five feet is . . .

HN: Deep.

WN: Deep.

HN: And even now, I can go twenty-five feet, thirty feet.

WN: Besides diving and swimming, what did you do to have good fun as a kid?

HN: Kids, we used to play ball, softball, baseball, and basketball, and volleyball, too. I was too short, you know. Basketball was fairly good. Most of the kids then, if you're five [feet], eight [inches], you're center already, you know. Five [feet], six [inches], you're center, you know. (WN chuckles.) And so we used to play with the plantation league. And that's about all our entertainment was, really. Oh yeah, we used to go pig hunting, go fishing (in the ocean or) go (to a) river and catch 'ōpae. (Sometimes) we'd go camping. (Every so often) I look back and reminisce about my young days, you know. We had a lot of land in the back, (at least one-half acre). We used to raise a lot of our own vegetables. We had pigs, we had cows, (and) lot of chickens. At one time, we had about four hundred chickens. So in the morning, I was up early. And my mother always told me I'm a horse. I get up early (and) I'm up galloping. I'm up about four o'clock. I wash my face and I'd go down feed the chickens, grass to be cut for the cow, (and slop for the pigs).

WN: You also told me you worked plantation?

HN: Yeah, plantation. Cutting cane, (planting and fertilizing cane, poisoning the grass).

WN: Which plantation was it?

HN: Was Wailea [Milling Company] plantation first (and later) [it was merged with] Hakalau [Plantation Company]. In those days, we used to work (for) twenty-five cents a day.

WN: This is during summer vacation or . . .

HN: Yes, summer vacation. Then when [World] War [II] came we had Victory Corps, we'd work Friday, Saturday, at the plantation.

WN: What did you do on the plantation?

HN: Oh, all kind. First, what you call day work, during the summertime, we'd go down with hoes, plant sugarcane; after it's plowed, the mules come down and drop the bundle of seedlings of cane. We throw it on the ground (in line and) with the cane knife (cut) it, (to about two-three feet length). It's a back-breaking job. And we plant the cane (using a hoe). Just throw dirt on the cane after it's cut. Then after it's grown, then we used to go with the sickle, lay the grass down so (other workers) would come poison the grass. Then I did poisoning, too, you know, with a five-gallon tank on your back. We'd pump (the arsenic poison to) kill the grass. Fertilizer, I did just about all that. We had sugarcane land, too. We had about 8, 8½ acres.

WN: Oh, you mean your property?

HN: Yeah. Our family. Oh, my father was gone then so my brothers, my mother, [and] I used to help.

WN: So you contracted with the plantation?

HN: Yeah. We raised the cane and the plantation would (harvest, grind,) and buy the sugar from you. And that time, the deal was, I think you get the fertilizer from the plantation. Even the poison. It was all manual labor. Lot of work but lot of fun, though. You know, keep ourselves busy.

WN: Your brothers did that, too?

HN: Yeah. All of them did. Of course, I left Nīnole in 1942. I went to Hilo Intermediate School. I went (two) years over there then came back to Laupāhoehoe. My brother went in the service, 442[nd Regimental Combat Team], in '43, April.

WN: So before you went to Hilo Intermediate in '42, where did you go to school?

HN: John M. Ross School.

WN: John M. Ross.

HN: Till seventh grade. Then from there, I went to Hilo eighth (and ninth grade).

WN: Hilo was the only school available to go intermediate?

HN: No, they had Laupāhoehoe.

WN: Oh. So what made you go to Hilo?

HN: My sister moved to Hilo, so she needed somebody to stay with her. So I stayed over there. I was more like a, what you call, independent guy. I just didn't care, you know. Not didn't care, but—even just when I went in the [U.S.] Army. My mother [asked] me where I was going, I said I'm going to Honolulu. My sister lived in Honolulu.

WN: This is after '51?

HN: Yeah, it was '51 when I went in the service. I was in the army. Next thing, I wrote a letter from Kentucky, I was in jump school, down there, parachute school. I was going to go to the University of Hawai'i. Then this friend of mine, I met him in Hilo in Mamo Chop Suey. I don't know how come I ran into him. And we were at a chop suey place. We were having a few beers. And this recruiting sergeant came in down there to buy plate lunches. I guess they were working, they were recruiting people so they're busy, so I guess they were working on Saturday. He bought plate lunch. We told him, "Eh, Sarge, pay for our chop suey, you know, we're going to join the army." No, first we cussed him, "Eh, we want to join the army."

"Eh, you guys, go join, you guys young kids yet. Good, you know."

Then we told the guy, "Eh, if you come down, pay [for] our chop suey, we going to join the army."

"You sure?"

"Yeah."

So he came down, joined us. We had a couple of beers. I went home and Monday morning, I went down and, you know, this was the latter part of August. I was getting ready for the university. So I'm fishing, came back, wash my throw net, cleaning 'opihi. I was going to eat breakfast 'opihi, you know, breakfast. In fact, my mother tell, "Eh, Herbert, there's a Hawaiian man out there with an army car." Those days they had that, you know, that greenish, OD [olive drab] color, you know.

"Army guy?"

"Yeah, the Hawaiian man out there."

"Eh, Nish, come on in, we going."

"Going where?"

"You said you going volunteer."

I say, "Aw, no."

I look in the back, my friend is in there, "Eh, c'mon, let's go."

You know, that's the kind of character I was, I guess. I said, "Okay." I went upstairs, grab my duffel bag, go in the bathroom grab my toothbrush, shaving kit, you know.

"Where you going?"

"I'm going downtown." I was sworn in. (Chuckles)

WN: Spur of the moment kind of thing, yeah?

HN: But the army treated me well because I have a good retirement, you know. But I can't complain, if I were to live it over, yeah, I would probably do the same thing. I had a good life.

WN: I was wondering, when did your parents' store close?

HN: They just closed it about two, three, years ago.

WN: Oh two, three years ago.

HN: Yeah.

WN: Oh, run by your brother?

HN: My brother and (his) wife.

WN: Oh, is that right?

HN: My brother, after that, he worked for city and county, then he wanted to run the store. And then he get a tax break and all that. And then probably the wife, to get social security. So he worked. 'Cause he's what, eighty-two, eighty-three. Maybe longer than that. [HN addresses JN.] Mom, when did Nishimoto Store close? About four, five years ago?

JN: Think so.

HN: Yeah, maybe about four, five years ago.

WN: Oh, that's terrific. I thought it closed long time ago, you know.

HN: And people had painted that store, some artists, you know. Around there, painted the store.

WN: Oh you mean a picture or a painting of the store.

HN: Yeah, it's right up there on the wall. And my nephew got it, Bobby. He went to Mountain View, I think, he seen it.

WN: Oh, what do you know.

HN: So he gave all us, all the Nishimoto family, one picture like that.

WN: Oh, that's nice.

HN: Yeah.

WN: Okay, so what kind of student were you at John Ross School?

HN: What do you mean?

WN: Were you a good student?

HN: (Yes), rascal. (Went) to (English) school, and after that, to Japanese[-language] school until World War II started.

WN: So you went to John M. Ross. Then you went (two) years at Hilo.

HN: Hilo Intermediate.

WN: What made you come back?

HN: (Pause) My sister, then, moved (pause) gee, that part is kind of shady. I don't know. I didn't think I was lonesome because I had friends over there. And I was mostly on my own. I had a bicycle, if I want to go to my friend a mile away, I'd ride the bicycle, go down. No, perhaps, I kind of longed for the country life.

WN: So you spent (two) years in Hilo, eighth grade. And (tenth) grade you came back to . . .

HN: Laupāhoehoe.

WN: Laupāhoehoe School. Was it a pretty new school at that time?

HN: No, Laupāhoehoe was an old school, (located at Laupāhoehoe Point).

WN: Oh, it was an old school. You mean high school and . . .

HN: From elementary to high school, (with a) student body total, (about four) hundred.

WN: Okay, well, let's get into April 1, 1946. Tell me how did that day start out for you?

HN: Okay, well, thirtieth of March, (Saturday) we had the sophomore picnic at Laupāhoehoe School and we spent the (weekend) there.

WN: Thirtieth, thirty-first?

HN: Thirt(ieth). And thirty-first, (Sunday) we stayed there to go spear fishing. And I brought pork and beans 'cause that's what we used to eat. So (we) had bread. We lived on that and some [of] (the) fish we'd cook on the beach. We stayed at the empty teachers' cottage there.

WN: Wait, before—first of all, you were staying at teachers' cottage.

HN: Yeah.

WN: Which cottage was this? Whose was this?

HN: There (were) about (four or five cottages belonging to the school). The first one was the four *Haole* teachers, single. Miss [Marsue] McGinnis, Miss [Dorothy] Drake, [Helen] Kingseed, and one more, I think.

WN: Johnson?

HN: (Miss) Johnson.

WN: Fay Johnson.

HN: (Miss) Fay Johnson. I'm the last one seen her alive, I think. And then Nakano family [lived in the next cottage], Mr. Peter Nakano. And had one more, and the other cottage was the bachelor cottage. And there was an empty cottage. We stayed in an empty cottage back there. There's about four or five cottages.

WN: So Frank Kanzaki was staying with you?

HN: (No. Mr. Frank) Kanzaki, and (Mr.) Fred Kruse was (in the) bachelors' (cottage). They stayed

in the third (one), I think. But anyway, in the morning about seven o'clock, Daniel Akiona, (who) lived out on the point by the bay, came running down and he says, "Oh, Mr. Kruse, Mr. Kanzaki, tidal wave! Herbert, tidal wave!" I was up already (and) was in shorts. I put my blue jeans on, no shirt. And barefooted, I got out and I followed him (running) toward the point.

WN: How far from the cottage to the point did you go?

HN: Ah, cottage to the point, maybe a hundred fifty yards. We got to the point where the monument is. I look---when we were running, we could see the reef. And then when we got there, we see the wave slowly filling up (the bay). The first wave I've seen, (filled up) the bay area, then receded. (I saw the reefs, which normally would be in ten feet of water.) Then the next wave came in, (tore an) old shack (which housed a) small canoe. Part of the wave came over the knoll over (the road), went into the school (yard). So at that time, we started running toward Akiona's house.

WN: The teachers' cottages were still up?

HN: Yeah, they (were) still up. The teachers' cottages were (on "stilts" about seven feet above the ground and located across the road from the Akionas).

Then Akiona said, "Let's go up the house." We (ran) up (to his) house. Behind the house, they had a dog. So Mrs. Akiona was letting the dog go and she was telling, "Eh, you folks, go away, dangerous, go away, you boys."

And one of the girls, I thought was Betty Uchima, came down. And she said, "Mr. Spencer says, you folks get away from here, it's dangerous." And (I saw) Mr. Spencer (taking his) horse and a cow (up) to higher land area. (At) Akiona('s backyard I could) see the reef (sticking out) and we (saw) the wave coming in again. Akiona's house was surrounded by a stone wall and I (saw) the wave hit the school ground, (which is) a little bit lower. Then I (saw) this girl, a Japanese girl (with glasses hit by the wave). I think that she was adopted by (a) Portuguese family.

WN: Oh, yeah, yeah.

HN: Tell me the name, I would know.

WN: [Janet] DeCaires.

HN: (Yes,) DeCaires, this Japanese girl. The wave hit over there, so I (said), "Daniel, I'm going (to) dive across (the road)," you know, because we're up high. Jump down in the water and grab the girl and run in. (But the current) was too strong, the wave was still coming (in).

And I (saw) the wave come (in the) Akiona house entrance (between) the stone wall. I (saw) the stone wall breaking. Then Daniel said, "Let's go inside my house!" There's a railing so I tried to put my feet on the (porch railing), go in(to) the house. The house used to be a post office, (I believe, and) was told. And it was like a French door, half is door and half is glass. Then I (saw) the house turn(ing) over (toward me). I was afraid my feet was going to get caught, my left foot was on the railing, under the house 'cause the house was toppling over

me. (As) I struggled (to climb over the railing), I (saw) [what] looked like a kerosene stove come in flying through the glass. Quickly, I grabbed my (head with both arms to protect my head area). Next thing I hear are the rocks grinding (and lumber from the house) bumping into (my head). So quickly, I put my arms, both arms around my head. Then all of a sudden, the wave started receding, I (could come up for breath of air).

WN: Where was Daniel?

HN: I don't know.

WN: Oh, you never saw?

HN: I never saw him after that. [Daniel Akiona died in the tsunami.]

WN: Do you know if he got into the house?

HN: He may have because he was running through the front, (and I was on the porch side) of the house. And once (the wall) broke I was dragged, (sucked) out to sea. I was tumbling, so I (held) my hands over my head and I tried to go out feet first 'cause I don't want my head to hit on the rock. I look(ed) back, I (saw) the principal's car (being sucked out to sea).

WN: Oh, this is Mr. [Clarence R.] Ferdun?

HN: (Mr.) Ferdun. I can still picture the brown car tumbling head over heels (toward the ocean). Anyway, (when I was being dragged out to sea) I (saw) this guy Mamoru Ishizu floating on a log. He had my (aluminum) bracelet. The fad was aluminum bracelets; this guy, Henry Matsushige, made (it with) "Herbert" on it with little designs. And I said, "Mamo, eh, go out to the deep, I meet you out there."

He said, "Where?"

(We were fifteen) feet away. Then the log hit the rock and he flew off. That's all I know. [Mamoru Ishizu died in the tsunami.] Then I landed on a rock. Once in a while, I'd look back and I (saw a) schoolteacher, (Miss) Faye Johnson. She had a cut on the left knee, I think. She had a coat over her, trench coat like. Brown, tan trench. I (saw) blood coming out. I can see at a distance. I was thinking, Gee, why don't she run inside? But then I turn around, I (saw) the wave coming in, so I said, "Eh, I got to dive out to the deep." So there's a reef in front of me. I jumped on the other reef, which was only about five feet away. Then my leg kind of slipped—I cut my foot. There was no pain, you know. I see it all white. Then after, I dove out in the water. That's just when the wave was coming, I (dove) on (top) the wave. Then next thing I know, I can feel myself being dragged (by the wave). I say, Hey, do I have enough breath to hold myself? I try to kind of fight it, you know, try to come up. Try to come up for air then go down again, try to go out to the deep. Next thing I know, when I (came) up, I had debris floating around me, a mattress.

WN: How far out were you?

HN: Oh, I was on the Waipunalei side of the Laupāhoehoe Point already, on the deep side.

I would say about, maybe hundred yards out already. That's how fast the current took me that way. Then I found a log (and a mattress). I (saw) a duck and a centipede (on the log). I was afraid of the centipede (chuckles) more than anything else.

(Laughter)

HN: I found an axe handle so I killed the centipede first thing. And the duck (and I shared the log. With) lots of debris, (I gathered as much wood around me for floatation). I stayed on the mattress, didn't hold too long. (With the axe handle as a hammer, I gathered debris to make a makeshift raft.) Then I (saw) a shark, you know, coming around, so I got scared. So I start putting the lumber under me, (even with the nails poking) my stomach and my feet, trying to keep afloat.

WN: The lumber?

HN: Yeah, whatever debris. Then I stayed there and I came across this flooring, you know, T and G [tongue and groove] post. No, when I found the log, I found another log had a rope or cord attached to it. Made it to a point, I tied it (together). Then I found (a) floor. Then I brought (the floor) close to put the log on top. Then I had small lumber with nails on. And I just put it on top the ("raft"), nail(ed) it down with the axe handle.

WN: So you're doing all this while you're on top the flooring or treading water?

HN: On the floor. And I found a bottle of Crisco and an apple. I ate all the apple. It was kind of brownish but I ate all except the seed and the stem. I ate the core, (too). And the Crisco bottle I found floating, I rub that all over my body.

WN: What made you do that?

HN: Oh, because I learned that [when] people used to swim, they used to put (grease on their body). So I rubbed (the Crisco) to keep (me) warm, and from sunburn. I stayed on that log for a while. Then I'd say about noonish, I seen these two other guys, [Takashi] Takemoto and [Asao Kuniyuki], a guy from 'Ō'ōkala and the other guy's from Honohina. One of them was on a drum, (fifty-gallon oil) drum. And the other one was on a door. So since I had the log—no, the raft. The raft, initially, I told you I made that apex on the raft. No, I wasn't on the raft, I was on the log when I was making that raft. Then after I found that piece over there, then I got on that, the floor.

WN: How big was the log?

HN: The log was I'd say, maybe about ten feet long, and maybe six or eight (inches wide). And the other one was maybe longer, about twelve feet, I think. And the flooring was about six-by-eight, maybe.

WN: The flooring was what, wood?

HN: Wood. T and G, looks like. And you can see it was upside down. (I) can see the beam (four-by-four). Whatever debris I (found) I put 'em on top (the floor). Then I found a

long T and G and I was tired myself. I seen those two guys so I (tried) to paddle but the current kind of drifted them (away), so I put my T and G to the guy, hold onto it, bring him in on the door. The guy on the drum, I (nailed) the T and G, (and I) was close enough, so I jumped in the water and (brought) him closer, put him on the flooring with us.

WN: How were they? Were they excited or . . .

HN: They were kind of exhausted. Then later on in the afternoon, I'd say about one o'clock, the plane came over, PBY came over and dropped the rubber raft.

WN: What kind of plane was this?

HN: PBY, I think it was a PBY.

WN: PBY.

HN: Yeah, that's the name (of the U.S. Navy) sea plane. (I swam to get the raft closer to the "raft." I) pulled that cord (and) inflated the (rubber raft. We got on the raft and paddled) away from the debris because I (didn't) want the debris to puncture the (rubber raft). So once we got on, (and the aluminum paddles snapped on together), we oared away from the debris.

WN: And you still about a hundred yards from shore?

HN: Oh no, more than that by then. Oh, yeah we were about at least half a mile out.

WN: Could you see land?

(Telephone rings.)

HN: Yeah, we could still see land. Then that afternoon, down 'Ō'ōkala side, (I could see) people drop a rope and waving us to come in, you know, but the ocean was too rough. I don't think the other two guys would have made it anyway. I thought I was fairly strong. So we just oared and oared and boy, I just oared out.

Excuse me. (To whoever answered the phone.) For me?

WN: Okay.

(HN answers phone call. Taping stops, then resumes.)

HN: We just oared out until I passed out (due to exhaustion).

WN: You passed out?

HN: Yeah. I did. The other two guys was gone already.

WN: The other two guys were . . .

- HN: Sleeping. They were passed out. So, (I) made sure the oar was (secured). In fact, I had them under my leg, to make sure in case the wave should turn us, at least I have the oar. Then late at night all of a sudden, everything became peaceful—(no lapping of the waves and the sea was calm). Then I (saw) light (shining from the high cliff). “What happened over here.” Then the light disappeared. Initially when I (saw) the light, I (thought) “Oh, this must be the Honoka’a Landing.” Get bright lights (and) I (saw) the cable. Next thing, it disappeared. There’s an island there, (and) we passed (outside of the) island. The current was taking us out.
- WN: You were actually going north?
- HN: North. And I says, “Aw, shucks. Then that’s all right. I better oar out,” you know. Figure the current was taking us out. So I oared out, further out, in the dark, just away from the light. Then in the morning, we could see the waves (at a) beach. That’s the, what’s that beach over there past Honoka’a. People go down there.
- WN: Past Honoka’a? Waipi’o?
- HN: Waipi’o. I seen the beach. I know there’s a river there. So I figure we’re about mile and a half, two miles out already. The current was (taking) us out, (so thought maybe we are) going toward Kawaihae, (around) Kohala. So I oared out, further out. Then this was about six o’clock.
- WN: Six A.M.?
- HN: A.M., in the morning. Then the current took us going toward Kohala, I guess—and we were daydreaming—then was bringing us to the point right into Kohala, Niuli’i, right in. And I seen the plane flying down way back, about five miles away. The plane was circling and later on we found out that Mrs. Akiona was [floating] on (a) door. The plane landed to pick her up. (The pilot) probably couldn’t see us; we were far (away) and the sun was shining. So I got the flasher, try to flash to the plane. The plane seen it (and) he came over to circle around us.
- WN: The flasher was what, like a mirror?
- HN: Yeah, there was a (metal) mirror inside the rubber raft. Then I (saw) people running on the hillside, bare hill, you know. We were right on the reef first so I started going out. I didn’t want to come in. So I tried to oar out, (and) fighting the current. (The other two lads were passed out.) Finally missed the reef and went out, then I (saw) the river. Then I (saw) these people running down the road, two guys jump in the water to swim out. [According to the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* it was Gabriel and Solomon Kapeliela of South Kohala. HN later said that another person, Ah You Ah Sam, also swam out.] And this was just about 11:15 in the morning.
- WN: How far did they have to swim out?
- HN: Oh, we were close to shore, I’d say about 120 yards, at the most. They swam out and then I started (paddling) in. As soon as they grabbed the raft, the raft turned over. The raft was upside down. So the guy said, “Get on the raft.” So I jumped on the raft. And

the other two guys was nowhere, then they found them. The other two guys (grabbed the) two (lads) and brought them in. I rode the wave right into shore (on the rubber raft).

WN: Did you sleep the whole night? Or what was the night like?

HN: Part of the night. Gee, it was just. . . . It's a feeling you have, you know, like (when) you seen a cowboy movie, the good guy is not going to die. (I got) that feeling, you know. (I) had the confidence. (I was) not scared anymore. You get so scared, then afterwards, you not scared anymore. I felt the same, you know, when I was in Vietnam, too. You get so scared, then after that you're not scared, then you start thinking. You know, you might start to say should I do this, it's dangerous. I do this, it's not dangerous. Somehow it just clicks in you. I don't know what you would call it, God's intuition or what, you know. But main thing, I think that being able—lot of people are afraid of the ocean, the deep, you know. And to me, I think that the depth is safer than being dashed on the rocks. You know, people get hurt especially when you're close to shore, the waves dashing, dashing against the rock. I guess this is why I rode out, stay away from the shoreline.

WN: So backing up little bit, when you saw Miss Fay Johnson and you said how come she didn't run out, you mean, she wasn't in the water?

HN: No, no. She was on land, right out say, where the lighthouse used to be. Somewhere around there. It was dry land. She was on shore. [Fay Johnson died in the tsunami.]

WN: And then after you got swept out, how many waves were there after that?

HN: That, I don't know. But after I (got) on the (flooring) out there, I don't know whether that was part of the tidal wave or regular waves, you know. But undulating waves like that, tidal waves, just like dropping a rock in a pond, you know, it ripples. It doesn't just die. At first, initially, it's going to be huge. But then smaller and smaller and smaller. But as I recall, some people said they had eleven waves. I don't know. And (I heard) Hakalau Plantation [Company] was hit on the seventh wave.

WN: Oh, you mean the mill? [The Hakalau Plantation Company sugar mill, located fifteen miles north of Hilo, was destroyed by the eighth wave on April 1, 1946.]

HN: Yeah. That's what I (heard). But I don't know. Because I know when Daniel Akiona came to (awake) me, at least the waves I seen, I had seen three. But at least there [was] one before. Because how did he know [there was a] tidal wave? Because the initial receding and then coming in.

WN: So there were no waves that came in before Daniel came? Was the place wet, you know, the ground?

HN: No, the first wave I (saw) didn't come in the ground.

WN: I see.

HN: Just in the bay, you know, the small Laupāhoehoe bay right behind the monument. It just filled that place out. The second wave a little larger, (tore) the canoe (shack and slightly) went over the crest of the (road and in) part of the schoolyard, because the schoolyard [on] little lower [ground]. And the third wave that I was washed out with, that I know of, was the one that crumpled the [Akiona] house and took me out to sea, or out to the last reef (at) Laupāhoehoe (Point).

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

HN: When I was washed out, when I was on the debris initially, I seen the boat go out. This one, [Dr. Leabert] Fernandez, was out to pick up [Marsue] McGinnis, I found out later. [See interview with Marsue McGinnis McShane for her story.] I waved at him. I seen the guy standing up, you know. But he just went straight on.

WN: This was when?

HN: I would say the early part, I would say about (ten) o'clock.

WN: It's funny because when you put the Crisco on, did the other two boys put the Crisco?

HN: No. They weren't with me. I was the only one.

WN: You were the only one. Because when I talked to Marsue McGinnis, she told me that she saw boys with Crisco on, something white on them. So she was scared of them in the beginning. You know, she was way out.

HN: Yeah, she was out, I would say she was about maybe couple hundred yards, I think. And I think they picked up one more guy on that boat, didn't they? [Yoshio] Awakuni.

WN: Awakuni? Maybe, yeah.

HN: There was a kid on the *lau hala* (tree). I still picture that, kind of like this, you know, standing on the *lau hala* tree.

WN: What about food and drink?

HN: Oh, I picked up a coconut, a dried coconut floating. So I peeled it and we shared the water. Three of us shared the water and we ate the coconut. That's all we had.

WN: And you had an apple, too, eh?

HN: Apple, too. In the morning. Early in the morning, I would say about 7:30. So I hadn't eaten breakfast, you see. That morning, we got up at 7:00.

WN: Oh, you hadn't eaten at that time, yet? You were up, though?

HN: Yeah, I was up.

WN: You were up. Was there anybody else in the cottage besides you?

HN: (Mamoru) Ishizu, the guy that died. I wonder if Wallace Yagi was (with us). I'm not too sure. I don't know.

WN: Was there any time that you thought that you were going to die?

HN: (Pause) No. Well, I shouldn't say you going to die eh, it's dangerous. It's really hard to say whether you knew you were going to die, you know. Because I wasn't wounded. I wasn't hurt. Of course I was scared. But like I say, after you fear, you start thinking of survival. Then you say, wait, I got a chance. Perhaps confidence, I guess, you know. But I wasn't afraid of the water. I was afraid more of the reef than the water. I shouldn't say water, the ocean, I mean. And no thoughts of—you know, people assume it was deep, I'm afraid of shark. Sure, now I would feel that way. But that time, no, until I seen him [the shark], then I say oh, wait, now. Now I got to do different survival tactics, I have to use. Then I started getting lumber under me. So I start pushing my axe handle under. I don't see the shark and I start pushing the axe handle through the waves and splash the water so the sharks don't come around.

WN: So after you were rescued, I mean, after you came in, do you remember what happened after that?

HN: Well, after we got in, the lady covered me with a jacket, you know, a Hawaiian lady over there. I tried to walk up, I couldn't walk. All of a sudden, you're just exhausted. So they helped me up, then they took me to the Kohala Hospital. Then from there, came back home. I was transferred to Pāpa'aloa Hospital (and) stayed there about a week.

WN: One week?

HN: Yeah, about a week, I think, maybe less than that. I had a bruised back. But other than that. . . .

WN: What about the other two boys?

HN: The other two boys, (I don't know). I lost track of (them).

WN: What was your mother's reaction to all of this?

HN: Well, you know, she called the priest, the *bon-san*, to come up to pray. She light the candle. The light went off and then the *bon-san* told my mother, "Oh, your son just died," when the light went off. (Laughs)

WN: When was this?

HN: When I was out, when I was afloat.

WN: Oh really?

HN: Yeah, you shouldn't quote that. Funny yeah, you know, people think that's when his life just expired because the light went out. But some people say, "Oh, that's Herbert!" because they seen me jumping on the (raft). Because I was more kind of the active type.

WN: What was school like after?

HN: Oh, it was okay, you know, it didn't bother me. After that, I used to go fishing myself. Even like Ninole, you need a rope to go down to catch *'opihi* and, I don't know if you're a fisherman or not, to catch *moi*, it's all white water. I used to go myself and throw net. I wasn't afraid. I just be careful, that's it. So it never did bother me.

WN: You know, I mean, it's kind of, it must have been hard to go back to school and everybody talking about it and. . . .

HN: Yeah, at that time, I made my mind up, I said, "Look, the guys died, I'm sorry for 'em." Mamoru Ishizu was a good friend of mine. I (think) about him. Hey, remember this is life, you know. To me, it's survival of the fittest. But if you live, the guy's gone, he's gone already. It's done already, you know. And I think this is my outlook toward life. This is it. My time comes, I'm going. That's history. It's cruel to say that, but that's what I—I die, I tell my wife, "Eh, I don't want the kids come to the grave to put flowers and all that. I'm gone already. I'm history already. Forget about me. Why waste your money and time to come to the grave." That's how I look at it. It's a cold life, but this is what it is. Not only cold, it's cruel, too, but, you know.

WN: Did you feel that way before the incident or how has that incident affected your life?

HN: That, too, and I used to talk about heroic stuff. But in Vietnam, I seen my good friends, my running partner, getting killed. And hey, what the heck. Why cry? You might die. Forget him already. Just leave the body and run, that's it. If he's wounded, you got to run away. Just bandage him and run away, that's it. That's how it is. And that's the facts of life, I think.

WN: So you served in Korea and Vietnam?

HN: Yeah. The Korean War, was mostly peacetime, when I had to go already, when I went in.

WN: You were in the service for . . .

HN: Twenty-seven years.

WN: [Nineteen] fifty-one to . . .

HN: [Nineteen] seventy-eight.

WN: [Nineteen] seventy-eight. How do you spend your time nowadays?

HN: Now I play golf if I can and do other things, (and travel). I'm busier than when I was working because my wife tell me, "Go do this." So I keep myself busy with the grandkids, that's it. And I always believe never leave a stone unturned. I read a story, an article or satire way back. This guy crossing the river, he jumped on the stone, he wanted to know what was under the stone, you know. And he said, "To heck with it, I'll see it next time." There's no next time for that, you know. You might as well do it now while you can. So I'm a curious guy. Like when people talk about oh, I want to see that place, I'll go. No next time, I'll go, you know. Too many of us, "Oh, I want to do that. Ah, it's too expensive, I don't have the time." You can always make time. You know, that's a poor excuse, I think. Sure, expense to a limit, to a certain limitation. But I try to go see places.

WN: Okay, that's it. Thank you very much.

HN: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

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