

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Hayato Okino

*"[Our building] was demolished. Nothing left. We had a lot of mufflers and pipes. We had about 300, 400 pipes and mufflers. They were all washed out about 200 feet up the road. And then the building that we occupied, nothing left. And we had a big safe. Oh, weighed about 300 pounds. Small, but olden days, the safe is thick, eh? We couldn't find our safe. And we had lot of things inside there. . . . Later on, one guy said, 'Hey, there's one safe way up down the road,' about 200 or 300 yards up the road."*

Hayato Okino was born August 18, 1912, in the Waiākea Town section of Hilo. He was the fourth of five children of Shimakichi Okino and Tsune Hamasaki Okino, who both immigrated to Hawai'i from Japan in 1901.

Okino attended Waiākea Kai, Hilo Junior High, and Hilo High schools, graduating in 1932. His first job after graduation was an auto parts salesman for Ruddle Sales and Service in Hilo. Twenty-three years later, in 1955, he started his own auto parts business, Automotive Supply Center. The building was complete destroyed in the 1960 tsunami. Okino eventually relocated his business to the Hilo industrial area.

An eyewitness to the 1923, 1946, and 1960 tsunamis, Okino is retired and currently lives in Hilo. His wife, Ritsuko Kadota Okino, whom he married in 1940, died in 1992. Okino raised three sons and has three grandchildren.

The interview was conducted in Okino's Hilo home.

Tape No. 29-47-1-99

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Hayato Okino (HO)

Hilo, Hawai'i

May 10, 1999

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

- WN: Okay. Let's begin. This is an interview with Mr. Hayato Okino, Hilo, Hawai'i, on May 10, 1999, and the interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.
- Okay, Mr. Okino, let's start. I'm going to ask you your first question. And the first question is, when and where were you born?
- HO: I was born [on August 18, 1912] in Waiākea town, next to the Hilo Electric Light, [Co.] plant. There used to be a big camp there.
- WN: What was the name of the camp?
- HO: Kanai Camp.
- WN: Kanai?
- HO: Yeah, the reason they get Kanai Camp because they had a store. Kanai family had a store. And in the back—I don't know if they owned it, but they had a big camp. And that's where I was born and raised.
- WN: Who lived in that camp? Mostly Japanese?
- HO: All Japanese. They had about fifteen families. They were all older generation, eh? And then this fella. . . . You know the street by Waiākea Fish Market?
- WN: Suisan [Company, Ltd.]?
- HO: Yeah, by Suisan. That's Lihiwai Street, see. All around there they had, what you call, stores and restaurants. That Kanai Camp was located, right now, you know, on that Banyan [Drive] golf course [i.e., Naniloa Country Club], right across from that [Suisan Company, Ltd.] fish market? Number fourth or fifth hole, you know, golf hole, right there. [Kanai Camp was located at the present site of the fourth or fifth hole of the Naniloa Country Club.] You know, you can just imagine, now, in the small area there were all triplex houses. You know, one house with three rooms. And one family lived in each room. And then the houses, they have iron roofing, no ceiling. So when it rains, gee, it makes a lot of racket, eh? And those days,

used to rain like hell, (chuckles) you know. Oh, lot of rain, see.

And then the floors were one-by-twelve [boards]. And the walls were one-by-twelve. And the walls, because you get one-by-twelve, they get cracks, eh? They had a batten, that's why, a piece of board, so the rain no come in. The lumbers were all rough lumber. So what they did, they had wallpaper. They used this fish paper, [used] to wrap fish. (Chuckles) You know, about two feet by three feet, eh? That's what they used. I remember, every year, Japanese New Year's, before New Year's, what they do, they get a bucket, they put starch and they mix with the hot water. And then we get a paint brush, you going (chuckles) put on the wall. We stick that wrapping paper, that fish paper we call that, see? And then we just put 'em on.

WN: Oh, and the thing last for one year?

HO: Usually. The kids, sometimes, they poke the finger in the crack, eh? We were told not to. But usually New Year's, before New Year's, put new paper. So the wall is—you know, get about five, six layers of paper thick because, yeah, you cannot take it off, right? So we paste on top of that, see?

WN: You paste it from the inside?

HO: Only inside. Because it's rough lumber. Well, the [units] were only one room, eh?

WN: How big was the cracks?

HO: Oh, maybe about. . . . Because, you see, originally, they put the lumber together, eh, close. But as they dry up, they open up. So the cracks be about maybe, about three-eighths of an inch or so.

WN: Oh, yeah?

HO: Yeah. And then on the floor, they had *da kine* mattress, the *goza*. You know what's *goza*, eh?

WN: Yeah.

HO: They put that. They used to come in a roll, see? So every year, you know, Japanese style, the olden days, they want to start the year right, so they. . . . We take off the old mattress, and then we put new one. They come in a roll. And then we put tack—nails to hold it down.

WN: And you said three families lived in . . .

HO: Yeah, one . . .

WN: . . . each room [i.e., unit]?

HO: Not duplex. Triplex, they call it, eh?

WN: Triplex, yeah.

HO: And then the houses there, the room's only big room.

WN: How big was the room?

HO: Oh, maybe about—not too big—maybe about this big, about the [size of this] kitchen.

WN: Oh, this room and the kitchen?

HO: Yeah, yeah.

WN: Oh, maybe about, what, twenty feet by twenty feet?

HO: Yeah, maybe about that. And then, that time when we stay, get *da kine* netting. Because plenty mosquitoes, eh? So, they hook up [the mosquito net] on a corner, you know. And then you sleep inside there so the mosquitoes don't bite you.

WN: Oh. And how many of you were living in that house?

HO: My house, at that time, I had—wait, eh—my sister, my brothers, another sister. . . . We had five in the family.

WN: Five? Plus your mother and father?

HO: Yeah, plus—well, my father [Shimakichi Okino] died when I was two years old. In the olden days they had lot of sickness. Not like today. My father died of typhoid fever. Because they had lot of mosquitoes. When I was two years old [in 1914], he got sick with typhoid fever and he died. So my mother [Tsune Hamasaki Okino] was a widow for a long time. And then years later she got married to another fisherman, a bachelor. They had three girls. When my mother died in 1940—she died of cancer—so my stepfather went home to Japan. But the trouble is, he left the kids in Japan. He came back by himself. He couldn't stay in Japan. You used to to Hawai'i, in those days, things in Japan were hard. Not like now. In the olden days, they were getting hard time, so he just came back. He left the kids with the grandfather.

WN: You mean the three girls?

HO: Yeah, three girls.

WN: You have three [half] sisters?

HO: [Half] sisters.

WN: And then those two boys—you and your brother?

HO: Yeah, my [full] brother and I. We had sisters, eh?

WN: So your father was a fisherman?

HO: Well, in Japan, he was rice dealer. He lived in Hiroshima. I understand right off the coast of Hiroshima there's an island that's part of Hiroshima. They call that Nihojima.

WN: Nihon . . .

HO: Niho.

WN: Nihojima?

HO: Yeah. *Jima* means "island," eh?

WN: Right.

HO: And he was a rice dealer. One day when my mother and he went go around shopping, when they came back, the house had burned down. My grandmother, my father's mother, she started a fire to cook whatever it is. But they used to burn wood, eh? And instead of getting the pots with the food, put 'em on there and then start the fire, she had the empty pot in the hand and she started the fire. So naturally the thing got so big, eh? The fire. So when my father and mother came back, that thing was burned down, the building.

So she had a brother in Pa'auilo. Pa'auilo Camp.

WN: Pa'auilo?

HO: Yeah, Pa'auilo plantation [i.e., Hāmākua Sugar Company]. She had a brother. You know, in the olden days, people from Japan come to Hawai'i, earn money, and they go back. So they [HO's mother's family] came to Hawai'i and they landed in Lahaina [Maui]. They told me that--don't know the name of the boat, but Lahaina was the main port, those days. They landed in Lahaina. From Lahaina they rode a boat, interisland boat, I forget the name, now. And they came to Waiākea town, see. Waiākea was a big town, those days. And they came there. But he didn't have job, eh? So he [HO's father] went to Pa'auilo because my mother's brother had worked for Pa'auilo plantation. He was there for about couple months. He didn't like those plantation jobs. So he came back [to Waiākea] and he became a fisherman. So the idea that when they save money, they going back to Japan. But they never reach Japan. My mother wanted to go home Japan. So I told her, "When I graduate from high school, I'm going to send you to Japan." She didn't. She got cancer of the stomach and she died.

So anything you want to know about Waiākea town? Waiākea town was a big town. What I mean, populationwise. In Hilo, Hilo was hardly anybody [i.e., residents] living down there. They had stores, though. But Waiākea, it's a big [residential] town.

WN: Waiākea had homes and stores?

HO: Yeah, they had stores. On the main street, you know, that street right there.

WN: Kamehameha Avenue?

HO: Yeah, yeah, Kamehameha Avenue. They had lot of stores. And Cafe 100 was one of them, see. Cafe 100, years later, he [the owner] went to the war, eh? AJA [Americans of Japanese Ancestry], eh? I think when he came back, he took over one of the restaurants. And he got caught in the tidal wave, so he moved to the present location. Yeah. Miyashiro, eh?

WN: Richard Miyashiro. [A member of the famed 100th Infantry Battalion in World War II.]

HO: Yeah, yeah.

WN: So, what was it like growing up in Waiākea as a kid?

HO: Well, we hardly went out. We stay in the camp. Nowadays, kids, they travel. They go downtown. Those days you stay most of the time in the camp. And then I remember the first time I came out from the camp, I went—used to be the wharf. You know, the pier? Concrete pier.

WN: By the harbor, by the docks?

HO: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But before, that place there, that pier was way inside. Wooden pier. And then had a roof, though. And then, some boats used to park there. And if you look close, Coconut Island, eh, right on that area, you'll see a big pillar. What I mean, about this wide and then about, on top, about five feet high. You see two [pillars] there. Made of concrete and rocks. From there, they had a wharf. See, the wharf used to be there, see.

WN: Right near Coconut Island?

HO: No, no. You know right where the guys *stay* fish, eh? You know? Right on the righthand side. You see the pillars there. They had a old wharf. And the wharf was made of—the post was all wood. You know, *da kine* telephone pole? And then, it was covered with copper sheets. And then, with copper nails, eh? And when they moved the wharf to the present wharf, they tore down that thing, the old building, and they dug out all the posts, and then they had to sell that. It's just lumber. And people used to buy those things for use around the house.

WN: So, you said a lot of the Waiākea town people were fishermen. Was it all Waiākea town or was it only Kanai Camp?

HO: All Waiākea town. I would say about 65 percent were fishermen from Japan. You see, the part is this: in Japan they were not fishermen. They were mostly farmers and whatnot. They came to Hawai'i, they became fishermen, they came to Hilo. They had about. . . . I have a picture here. (HO gets picture.) That's the old Suisan.

WN: Yeah, the old Suisan.

HO: Yeah, that's the old Suisan, but . . .

WN: Oh, yeah.

HO: . . . before that, they had another smaller [branch of] Suisan. And then I understand my wife's father, Kadota, he was the first manager of the company.

WN: Yeah?

HO: Yeah. Iwaichi Kadota. He was the first manager of the company. But he died of tooth infection. When he had a infected tooth, they go to the dentist and they pull the teeth, but that's when it got infected. And he died, see. And after he died—he was the first president of the company. And the second president was. . . . I forget his name. That's another guy took

over. And then the third president was Matsuno. Rex Matsuno's father. Rex Matsuno's father is related to my wife. He got married to Nishimura girl. Nishimura used to be a big family. Oh, they had about ten kids.

WN: What kind fishing did they do? The kind go on the boat . . .

HO: On the boat. All boat.

WN: *Aku* kind?

HO: They had two fish markets. You know the one they get a fish market at Suisan now? Down there, they used to get one fish market, Hawai'i Fishing Company [on Lihikai Street]. That is the smaller company. They had three *aku* boats. Between fifty to fifty-five. Fifty-five feet long. They had three. First of all, they go out to breakwater, inside the breakwater. They anchor the boat, and what they do is, they burn [a light]—they right in the water. So all the *nehu*—you know what's *nehu*, huh?

WN: Oh, *nehu*, yeah, the bait fish, yeah?

HO: *Nehu*, the small mosquito fish. They come. And then they get big net. They have a big net. They catch the *nehu*, and they put in the box. They keep it alive, see. And then, early in the morning, before the sun comes out, they go out to the [open] ocean. And they don't use the *nehu* for [hook] bait, you know. That's only to spread around to keep the *aku* floating [near the surface]. About three, four feet [below the surface], all, they swimming, eh? They throw this bait, to keep that thing [i.e., the *aku*] up [near the surface]. Then they, with a long bamboo pole, they catch the *aku*, eh?

WN: They don't even put bait on the pole, yeah?

HO: No, no, no bait. But, see, what they had is a hook. They made locally. And on the hook, you know the chicken feather? Chicken feather, below the feather, there's one, more like plastic like.

WN: Yeah, sort of the stem of the feather?

HO: Yeah, yeah. That thing there, eh, they tie 'em onto the hook. Now, the hook don't have any barb. And they tie it onto the hook and they split it. And then they use that for catch the *aku*.

And Suisan fish market used to be further up. Between the present Suisan, and they get a bridge, near? Between there, Suisan *stay* up there, see?

WN: Oh, yeah? Oh, further toward Honoka'a side? From where it is now?

HO: Houselot side, yeah. You know, you get a bridge now? Between the bridge and the present Suisan, right in between, they [used to be]. And that's the one you get, you saw the picture here.

WN: I saw in the picture?

HO: Yeah, yeah.

WN: Oh, oh.

HO: And Waiākea, over the bridge . . .

WN: That's the Wailoa River bridge?

HO: Yeah, this the Wailoa River. Yeah. Now, this the Suisan, see, over there. And this one here, the bridge used be, maybe like this. And then, the bridge, it's made of lumber—I mean, across, you know, where the car drive, made of about three-by-twelve. And it was only wide enough for two cars can go. One coming out, one going the other way. And then, on the side, they had about six inches raised, where the people [i.e., pedestrians] should [walk]. More like a pathway for people.

WN: So, you talking about the Wailoa River bridge?

HO: Wailoa River bridge. And they had one further down.

WN: Yeah, the Wailuku [River], you mean?

HO: No, no, no. On the [Wailoa] River, they had three bridges. This is the one that now they get a cement bridge, Kamehameha Avenue now.

WN: Right, right, right.

HO: There was one on this side.

WN: You mean *mauka*?

HO: Towards the ocean. As you got to Suisan, in the back, you see one—where this road higher than the Suisan. Where the Suisan they get refrigeration, well, used to get another road. And that road came from Kitagawa, see. [I.] Kitagawa [& Co.] used to be across from the old [Hilo] Iron Works now. And right from there, that thing was joined. So they had a bridge there. Same like this [present] bridge. Just like this bridge.

And further down, almost was the ocean, there was another bridge. Yeah, that bridge was a railroad bridge. Because the wharf used to be down, that place there. But from Shinmachi, there was a railroad. To go over the river, they had a bridge, see. And then they go over the bridge and then they go to the wharf. From there, they moved the wharf to Kūhiō Wharf. They call that "Kūhiō Wharf" because at that time, Prince [Jonah] Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole—he was a real prince, see—he took off to Washington.

WN: Oh, yeah. He was delegate to Congress, huh?

HO: He had no power, no vote. Only to lobby. And then during his term [1902–22], they moved the wharf to the Kūhiō Wharf, the present wharf. And that's when they named the wharf "Kūhiō Wharf" in honor of Prince Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole.



Yeah. So that was a very small wharf. And the behind used be a bay. They call it "Kūhiō Bay." Now, I see plenty barges and stuff. And this is the—you know, the road that go to Keaukaha, you ever been inside there [i.e., Port of Hilo]?

WN: Yeah.

HO: Yeah, inside there, used to be a big bay. They had the wharf here, so that's a bay inside there. And I remember the first plane that came to Hilo, about 1923, a guy by the name of Ralph King, he's from Honolulu . . .

WN: How you spell his name?

HO: K-I-N-G. Ralph. Ralph King. He brought the first airplane to Hilo. It was a seaplane. You know, get pontoon underneath, eh? And then, he used to park behind there, see? Because they used to give plane rides there, and then he used to park there. And you know how much a ride? Ten dollars a ride. But people, they stand in line to ride. And the plane, you pay ten dollar, inside was a biplane, you know, the kind with the two wings. You know, the old style.

WN: Yeah, yeah.

HO: And then, you can seat only two people. The pilot in the front or the operator, and another passenger can ride, see. And he pay ten dollars. And you know what the plane did? Along the breakwater—it was a seaplane [so it would accumulate speed] along the breakwater, and then it go up. Thing take about, maybe about fifty, hundred yards before you go up in the air. And they go circle the Hilo town, about two times. Way up, eh? And then take you back, takes about fifteen minutes, ten dollars. And yet people used to ride because that's the first time they go ride one plane, eh? But now, nobody imagine a plane would be so common. (WN chuckles.) And those days, they used to travel by boat, eh?

WN: So, as a kid growing up in Waiākea, what did you do to have good fun?

HO: We played marbles, or we play *mamagoto*. You know what's *mamagoto*? That's slang for just like housekeeping. And then we used to play marbles. Play marbles. We were confined to the camp.

WN: So how many children had in that area, in your camp?

HO: That camp, they had fifteen families.

WN: Fifteen families? Oh, and they all had kids?

HO: Oh, you know, those days, most families had about between four to ten [children]. The biggest family at that time we hear was Matsubara. You heard about this Matsubara family? Bert Matsubara. And they were saying that's the biggest family [in the camp]. They had ten in the family. (Chuckles) All the people living Waiākea town, most of them, they had about four, five kids. But those days, no such thing as birth control, anything like that. But you know, nature is marvelous. They don't have birth control, but the ladies were not too fertile. They don't use birth control. But they don't get kids every year. Nature is real marvelous. Because they not healthy, eh? So most families, maybe about every two or three years they have a

child. And most families, as I said, they had about four or five. Some of them were about eight or nine kids.

WN: So had lot of kids in the neighborhood then?

HO: In the neighborhood, well, you play with the same-age kids. They used to start working early in those days. Because people hard up, eh? In fact, my brother started at the age of twelve, he had to work.

WN: Working where?

HO: He went to work for. . . . In town they used to get one place they call Volcano Garage. And this company, that's a big company. They occupied about four acres. From Kamehameha Avenue to the canal. You know, they got a canal there. It's a big, big building. You can see all the iron roofing, eh? And he went to work there, see, when he was twelve years old. And then, from there he followed Ruddle, Al Ruddle [of Ruddle Sales & Service Co., Ltd.]. He was from the. . . . During the First World War, Al Ruddle was in England. And as soon as the war ended, he [went] to California, and he worked there. In California, they had a Ford Company. Ford Company's originally in Dearborn, Michigan. They moved a man by the name Bullwinkle to start a company in California. This fellow, Bullwinkle, started working for the company, Ford Company, and he started in Richmond, California, I understand, a small place. And this Al Ruddle, as soon as the First [World] War ended, he came directly and he worked at the Ford Company for a while. And then from there, he heard about Hawai'i so he came direct to Hilo. And then he worked for this company called Volcano Garage.

WN: Then eventually he [Ruddle] started his own company?

HO: Yeah, you see, Volcano Garage was owned by mostly plantation people, the Scotchmen. They were the owners. This was a big company. This was the only [auto sales] company. And they used to say, Volcano Garage is the biggest automotive company west of the Rocky Mountains. They used to say that, see? And they used to sell all kinds of cars—Ford car, Studebaker, White truck. This was the only garage, see? Big garage. And most of the owners, shareholders, were plantation Scotchmen. When the manager went to the Mainland—I forget what his name now—and he died on the Mainland, he got sick. So Ruddle was shop foreman. Instead of promoting him to be the manager, no, they promoted some plantation people. So Ruddle got mad. He quit there and he started his own business. That's why he [started] Ruddle Sales & Service Company, [Ltd.]. Now Ruddle Sales is Okinaga Auto [Service, Inc.]. You know Okinaga?

WN: Okinaga Auto? Yeah.

HO: Yeah, that is originally Ruddle.

WN: Oh, yeah?

HO: Yeah, yeah. And from there, after the tidal wave, they move up.

WN: They got hit by the '46 tidal wave?

HO: Yeah, '46 tidal wave.

WN: Yeah, Ruddle used to be on Kamehameha Avenue, huh?

HO: Yeah, Kamehameha Avenue. And then, at one time, they [were on] Ponahawai Street, I think. They had about ninety-four workers. That's a big company. But after the tidal wave, '46 tidal wave, that thing got all damaged. So temporary, we moved out to St. Joseph's School, next to St. Joseph's School. They stayed there. And later on . . .

WN: Who *wen* move? Ruddle? You're talking about Ruddle?

HO: Yeah, yeah. I worked for them, see?

WN: Oh, you did work for them?

HO: Yeah, when I graduated from Hilo High School in 1932, I went to work for Ruddle. My brother was working for Ruddle. He was the parts department manager, see.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay. Still talking with Mr. Hayato Okino on May 10, 1999. Okay, so you said your hangout was the turntable. I mean, I'm sorry, the. . . .

HO: Yeah, inside the camp.

WN: You were talking about Mr. Alameda. He never rested one day.

HO: Yeah. People used to talk about him. He was a blacksmith. In the olden days, they didn't have welders. Nowadays, they get welding machine and they weld 'em. Those days, the blacksmith, he pound the two matching joints together. And they used to say he never did rest. And every Saturday, no work, he used to go one store. Taniguchi Store in Waiākea, you know. He buy a bottle of (chuckles) wine. Every [Saturday] morning. And then [with the bottle in] newspaper, I mean paper package, you can see him walking home, you know. Every Saturday. And they used to brag about him that he never did rest one day for about twenty-five, thirty years.

WN: So, when you say you used to hang around the [railroad] roundhouse, what did you folks do?

HO: Well, roundhouse, we didn't go in—we didn't hang out too much. Around, we play. But we passed there. You cannot stay around there. More on the---towards the river, get plenty railroad tracks, see. Oh, they used to be full of cars, you know. All around there we used to go walk around there. But we no can hang around there too much because they chase us out, see. Because dangerous, eh, for kids.

But I spent most of the time in Waiākea Kanai Camp. And then when I was about nine years old, that's the first time I went to the wharf. That time, the wharf, we call it the "old wharf," they weren't using the wharf already. They had moved the wharf to Kūhiō Wharf. So this side had an empty wharf. Nobody stay there. And so, we used to go, hang around there once in a while. But our folks didn't want us to go there because dangerous, [if] you don't know how to swim, eh? So, they tell us, "Don't hang around by the wharf, dangerous."

And then we moved to a house—you know where the [Hilo] Electric Light [Company] plant is now? Right next to that. The camp, see, that Shipman Camp? From there and they dig one road there. Between the park and that place, lot of people lived there, you know. We was living there, see. So, practically, I used to spend my whole time in the fish market. You know, when I was a kid, Saturdays after Japanese-[language] school, we go over there, hang out. So we know how to clean the fish, *aku*. One day I was cleaning the *aku*. And one fisherman—his name was Ito—he saw me. “Hey, where you learn how to clean?” Well, I watch the fishermen clean *aku* so many times, I can clean blindfolded. He was surprised. He said, “Hey, you smart to clean *aku*.” Tell, “Where you learned how to clean that thing?”

“Well, I watch the fishermen clean,” eh? And we were kids, we nothing to do, we just sit down and watch them do.

And then, right next to that HELCO plant, right next, they had a big ice plant. Because those days, fishermen used lot of ice. The ice were twelve inches wide, two-and-a-half feet high, three feet long, weighed 300 pounds. And we used to hang around inside there, see. We go and see the ice plant. And nighttime, we hang out all around. That’s where we spent our nighttime.

WN: So you moved from Kanai Camp to near the ice plant?

HO: No, we moved to Imamura house, on Kainehe Street. We stayed there two years, and then we moved back. . . . By that time, Kanai Camp was gone already and they had a Shipman Camp. This guy Shipman, he used to be a county treasurer, one old man with white hair. He leased the land back there. He put up plenty rentals, duplex houses. You know, the houses all secondhand lumber. And duplex, so get two houses [in each two-story structure with] about three rooms [each, and] one family living in [each house]. So they used to get about fifteen families there. But we didn’t live there. Right next to it, my brother had bought one old house. Until my junior year, I was there. I went to live with my brother. My mother died and my stepfather went to Japan with the three . . .

WN: Okay. Oh, so the place you lived in just before is Yoshida Camp?

HO: Yeah, Yoshida. We called it Yoshida Camp because the man, Yoshida, he was a taxi driver and he had rent houses there. But the land is leased. The land was owned by a Hawaiian guy. He used to own the land and he used to live in a big house. But he moved to Keaukaha, because Keaukaha he get free land, [i.e., Hawaiian homes land]. So he sold that land to the oldest Chock Pharmacy boy—he used to work for American Factors—he bought that place. And then he leased the land. But the houses were owned by the individual. Sekimura family, Yamada family. But the [houses were] so close, the roof—those days, the roof never stick out too far. Only about 2½ feet from the wall. The roof almost touch each other, so close the houses.

And then we stayed there until after my mother died. Meantime my brother got married and he live up Laukapu Street, see. So we went to live out there with him.

WN: So you said that most people who lived in Waiākea Camp were either fishermen or wharf workers?

- HO: Yeah. I would say about 60 percent were fishermen. All Japanese, no Hawaiian fishermen. Today get plenty Hawaiians, eh? Those days, all Japanese. They had one family, Okinawa family, the Taira family. But all Japanese. And fishing business was big business.
- WN: And then the wharf workers were Japanese, too?
- HO: They didn't have too many workers. Because the fishermen, they come back, they carry the fish. And usually, they get to the fish market usually in the mornings. They open about five o'clock. So the fishermen, the ones who go [fishing] nighttime, they make sure they come back before five [o'clock]. And then they bring the fish. They put the fish on the sidewalk. And then the guy that work at the fish market, they put a tag. Piece of tag with your name. . . . You know, [so] that they know it's his fish. Oh, all the sidewalk full, full of fish. That was Suisan Fishing Company. And then later on, where the Suisan is now there, used to get small company, Hawai'i Fishing Company, see. That was another company. But after the '46 tidal wave they were all damaged, so the Hawai'i Fishing Company, they quit the business. And then Suisan moved to that place there. That's where the present Suisan is.
- WN: So, tell me, when you were living in Kanehe Street, I think, there was a tidal wave, huh, 1923?
- HO: Yeah, there was a tidal wave.
- WN: What do you remember about that tidal wave?
- HO: I was living in the Hongo Camp. Used to be in the Hongo Camp. Because Old Man Hongo had his own house. And in this camp, he had a big house, and where he lived he had about three, four rent houses. You know, in golf the course [i.e., Nanihoa Country Club], get mango trees, eh? You know, the golf course, I don't know if fourth hole or what, you see rows of mango trees. But right there, we used to live. There used to be a camp there, we used to call Hongo Camp because this man Hongo had the lease on the land and he had rent houses, duplex. And he had one, two, three, four, five—six duplex. One house, they get two family. And that place was originally started by a Chinese man. He had a small store. And he leased the land, and he got secondhand lumber, he put up all this, and then later on Mr. Hongo bought out the lease. So when I got married, no place to go, eh? So my wife and I rented this place. Thirteen dollars a month. (Chuckles) Thirteen dollars [for] pretty good houses, you know. Old lumber, but they had on the house. And then, so I fix up around the house. Those days, they get Canec. They were selling those Canec cheap. [In] those days cheap like that. So you can buy one [piece of Canec], they used to come about five feet by about ten feet, you can get for, oh, about three dollars. So with that, I put a wall (chuckles) for bathroom, eh? And I lived there.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

- HO: . . . first before I bought this. And then I bought this [HO's present house]. See, Waiākea Houselots was sold in sections. First, Manono Street, owned by the government. And they had

a restriction. The lots were 100 feet wide and 200 feet deep. The restriction was, you had to make a \$500 or better house within three years after you buy. That's the restriction, see. If you don't make a house, they don't give you the deed for the land. And so, they start to build section by section . . .

WN: Over here?

HO: All this. The whole Waiākea Houselots starting with Manono Street. You know, where get the Japanese church [i.e., Hilo Honganji Mission]?

WN: When is this? What year?

HO: About 1922—'21, '22, I think. By section by section, they start to build. And this section [Kanoelehua Street] was the last, all around there.

WN: When did you get married?

HO: I got married on October 22, 1940.

WN: [Nineteen] forty?

HO: Yeah. She [Ritsuko Kadota Okino] was my classmate, see. And then. . . .

WN: So, you're talking about these house lots in 1922?

HO: This house lot, no. They opened up this section about 1941.

WN: Oh, '41.

HO: This section here. This is the last one, see? Before that, they started early. About, I think they started about 1920. Section by section. As they sell the section, they open up.

WN: When did you buy?

HO: I bought in 1941.

WN: Right after you got married?

HO: Yeah, yeah. I got married. And that time was lucky. Because was wartime, eh? So the Portuguese, lot of nationalities, they don't want to buy. They were afraid that Japan going come here. So they didn't buy. So when they auction off here, there were plenty lots left. Nobody—because only the Japanese like buy. To us, we figure like, if Japan come, we Japanese, we get chance, eh? (Chuckles) But the other guys, the Hawaiians, the Portuguese, they didn't buy, see? That's why when they first auction this section lots, people no buy. Then so later on, they auction off again, section by section.

WN: Okay, so tell me about the 1923 tidal wave.

HO: Nineteen twenty-three tidal wave, that morning, Professor Jaggar, he was a volcanologist . . .

WN: Thomas Jaggar?

HO: Yeah, yeah. Thomas Jaggar. And he was authority on tidal waves. Professor Jaggar said [a tsunami would] come [to] Hilo [from the] Aleutian Islands. That place has very active volcano. People used to think he was eccentric. I met him few times.

WN: Thomas Jaggar.

HO: Thomas Jaggar. He was big man, you know. They thought, oh that guy, he's crazy. He started—he made that amphibious boat. You know, during the war, they had the boat that go on the land with the tire and all. He made that about 1927. He made one of those because he used to go Alaska. In Alaska, he got to go in the water and he got to go on the land. I remember well, he wanted. . . . On the boat, see, but he get tires, four tires and a propeller, too. He go on the water, he got propeller. And when he go on land, he go on the tire. But the boat [is low] in the water, [so he can see] all right, it's all open sea. But on the road, he got to see the tire where he's going. So I remember, he wanted one jack so that driver's seat, when he come on land he jack up the [seat] so that he can see the tires. And when in the ocean, it go down, see. And that's when I first met Professor Jaggar. Big man, nice guy.

WN: What did he tell you about 1923?

HO: Oh, 1923, I didn't know him too well. Nineteen twenty-three tidal wave, next to the Hilo Iron Works used to be a dry dock. And this man by the name of Nakamura, one Japanese man, that afternoon, about twelve o'clock, this boy Iwata, he was related to the Nakamura man, see. And he was supposed to give a message to—some kind of message—to that Nakamura man. And this boy Tadao Ito—he just died—three of them were crossing the bridge. And they say, "Ey, Professor Jaggarh"—we used to call him Jaggarh—"Professor Jaggarh said we going get tidal wave today."

WN: How did you hear that, though? [Thomas A. Jaggar, founder and director of the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory, researched that seismic waves caused by earthquakes are transmitted across the world in minutes. On the morning of February 3, 1923, he noticed seismic activity stemming from an earthquake in the Aleutian islands. Jaggar calculated that there was a possibility that a tsunami was generated and possibly headed for Hawai'i. He then notified the harbormaster in Hilo, but was not taken seriously. At 12:30 P.M., the tsunami struck Hilo, seven hours after the earthquake hit the Aleutians.]

HO: He was a volcanologist. Because there was an earthquake in the Aleutian Islands.

WN: Yeah, so what, you heard it---how did you hear it, though?

HO: Well, I forgot how I. . . . They didn't have radio, though, but these two says, "Ey, Professor Jaggarh say going get." Through mouth, yeah? And that afternoon, we cross the bridge, "Ey, Professor Jaggarh say we going get tidal wave this afternoon." And so we went to Shinmachi [to deliver a] package. And from there, we cross—and that street was narrow street, those days. No more too many cars. And then they used to get—you know where they get one highway there [i.e., Hawai'i Belt Road]?

WN: Yeah.

HO: Used to be railroad track. See? From Waiākea town, that railroad track, and she go all the way to Pa'auilo, see? After we delivered the package, we were going to play at the park. The first thing you know, must have been about one o'clock or one-thirty [probably around noon], the water start to recede. And we see the Japanese old folks, they run to the ocean, they pick up the fish. You know, all depend on how big the tidal wave, see. If the tidal wave's big, you can tell by how far that thing recede, see?

WN: How far did it recede, you think?

HO: Oh, quite a distance, though. You can see all the bottom of the ocean. You can tell by the recession how big the tidal wave going to be.

WN: This is 1923, you're talking about?

HO: Nineteen twenty-three.

WN: You were about eleven years old?

HO: Nineteen twenty-three, I was eleven years old. And that thing going out, going. And Japanese old folks, some of them, they go in the ocean, you know. bottom of the. . . . They picking up the fish because the bottom not [level], and the fish get stuck. I see them. We watching, ey, the Japanese, they run into the ocean and they catch the fish. I was watching. Then I see the wave coming back.

So I ran home, you know. That time, I used to live right next to the ice plant, see. I ran home. I told, "Hey, Mama, tidal wave coming." I knew was tidal wave. They used to get lot of small tidal waves, see. And the best place to watch, if you're a fisherman, used to get all boat [by] Wailoa River. The best place to watch is a river. You can see that water going up. Unless it's a big tidal wave, cannot come on land. You go up the river, see all that. So I ran home. "Ey, Mama, get tidal wave."

So right away, we came to [Waiākea] Houselots. Because they figure safe, see? Richard Nakamura's father's house, we stayed there for about half a day. And that's the time we heard that one fisherman died. His name was Okimoto, I think. He died because the boat was hitching up and down. He was standing in the back and he fell down into the water. And you cannot swim in a tidal wave, eh? And he was the only casualty.

WN: What about the bottom of the Wailoa River, you could see the bottom of the river?

HO: Oh, yeah, yeah. You can see the bottom. Because all the water—all depend how big the tidal wave. Usually, maybe they have some tidal wave that come in first. But so far all the tidal waves I seen, the water recedes first. And depending on how far it recede, you can tell how big a tidal wave.

But the '60 tidal wave was a big tidal wave.

WN: Okay, so was there any damage in Waiākea town from '23?

HO: Oh, '23? Some sampans got damaged. Yeah, only few sampans got damaged. I brought this.



(HO shows WN a picture.) But this is over here, Suisan fish market. Yeah, had all the boats, eh.

WN: So, no houses got damaged, though.

HO: No houses got damaged in the '23. Although some sampans got washed up on dry land. But no big damage.

WN: Okay. The '23 tidal wave. And then you said you got married in 1940.

HO: Yeah, I was living by the golf links, see.

WN: During the war where were you living?

HO: During the war, I stay living next to that [Hilo] Electric Light [Company] plant.

WN: Hongo Camp?

HO: No, no, no. You know where the electric light [company], they get a plant there now.

WN: The what?

HO: Electric light [company]. Electrical plant. Well, right next to that, toward the park, that time they didn't have a road. Now they get a road [Banyan Drive], from there you go right around to Coconut Island. They didn't have that [before]. I lived there for a while. After I moved from Kanai [Camp] I lived there for about seven or eight years with my stepfather and my mother. And when my mother died, my sister and I—my stepfather went home to Japan—so we moved up to the house on Laukapu Street. My brother and his wife were living there. So we moved up there and we lived with them for about seven years. And then, from there, they sold that place.

WN: Okay. You know what? I'm going to stop over here. And then, next time, if I can come back one more time, continue from here.

HO: Yeah, yeah, okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 29-48-2-99

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Hayato Okino (HO)

Hilo, Hawai'i

May 21, 1999

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: Okay. This is an interview with Hayato Okino on May 21, 1999 and we're at his home in Hilo, Hawai'i, and the interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, I want to continue from the last time we were talking. I wanted to ask you a little bit about Waiākea Kai School. What was it like going school over there?

HO: Well, Waiākea Kai School was a big school. In the beginning they started from kindergarten and went up to sixth grade. And then later on they added on intermediate school. Eighth and ninth grade. When we graduated Waiākea Kai School, they didn't have—we had to go to Hilo Intermediate School.

WN: Oh, I see. They didn't have the intermediate by then?

HO: No, they didn't have in those days. So we went to---in fact, Hilo Intermediate used to be Hilo Junior High School. And used to be located across from Hilo Union School. You know where the Hilo Union School is?

WN: Yeah.

HO: Right across. That was a big school because people from all the way from Honoka'a all the way to Ka'ū went to the school, see. And then we had to go to Hilo High School. That's the present high school, but in those days they didn't have the back. Only the main building in the front. So that's a long time ago.

WN: What was going school at Waiākea Kai like?

HO: Well, it was all right. The teachers were nice. The teachers and the students were closer together, see. Very close. In the morning they check your fingernails and your hands, (chuckles) and they check you whether you have handkerchief or not.

WN: I was wondering, what's the border? I mean, kids that lived on the other side of Wailoa River, you know, toward downtown Hilo, did they go to Waiākea Kai School, too?

HO: Yeah, you see, you know the Wailoa River divides Waiākea town [from Hilo]. But originally,

people lived in Waiākea, it was a big, big place. Lot of people live there. By the wharf, they had a wharf, too. You know, where the boats used to come? They built the Kūhiō Wharf.

WN: I think you told me that last time. So, the kids that lived on the other side of the river, did they go to Waiākea Kai School, too?

HO: Yeah, that's right across, Shinmachi. You know, "*shin*" means "new," eh? New Town.

WN: Right.

HO: So, when the Waiākea area was overcrowded, they start coming to [live in] Shinmachi. And they start to move towards [Waiākea] Houselots on Manono Street. And they used to call it "Shinmichi." "*Shin*" means "new," New Road, see? The government made a road, Manono Street. So the Japanese call it "Shinmichi," that means "new road." And that Shinmachi, the other side. But they all used to go to Waiākea Kai School.

WN: So after the '46 tidal wave, you know, that wiped out Shinmachi, did Shinmachi people move into Waiākea town? Do you remember?

HO: Shinmachi people, many of them moved towards town [i.e. Hilo]. After the 1946 tidal wave, Shinmachi was still there. Only some of the buildings were destroyed. And downtown [Hilo] was intact. [Shinmachi and downtown Hilo sustained widespread damage.] So all those people used to go to Waiākea Kai School. Waiākea, and "*kai*" means "ocean," eh? And then they had a Waiākea Waena. And then Waiākea Uka. They used to have a school up there, too.

So we went to Hilo Junior High School and we went to Hilo High School. I graduated from Hilo High School in 1932.

WN: Did you know a lot of Shinmachi people?

HO: Oh, yeah. Oh, we mingle with them because they close by.

WN: But how different were Shinmachi people from Waiākea people? What kind backgrounds? Are they different backgrounds?

HO: The Waiākea people were mostly fishermen. About 60 percent were fishermen or fishing industry—there was a fish market, they had two fish markets. Suisan, you know the one they have now, Suisan? That used to be further up. And where the [present] Suisan [is] now, they had Hawai'i Fishing Company. And they had, oh, a lot of fishing boats. Suisan had two *aku* boats: Suisan number one and Suisan number two. The private fish market used to be Hawai'i Fishing Company, they had three *aku* boats.

The people that lived in Waiākea, they were fishermen or fish peddlers. Or they were working at the railroad. You know, the [Hawai'i Consolidated] Railway Company was a big company those days. They go all the way [north] to Pa'auilo, and they go all the way [south] to Kapoho. Now, next to swimming pool you see one concrete building. And that's where the railroad used to come in and park there. And the trains were big trains, not like the kind they had in Honolulu. The trains they had here were the same size as trains like the kind they have in the Mainland. Railroad was big business. They employed maybe about eighty, ninety

people.

But the main business of Waiākea was fishing. When Waiākea got crowded, they moved over the river and they started Shinmachi. "Shin," New Town.

WN: So Waiākea came first?

HO: Oh, Waiākea town was the original. Everybody was living Waiākea town. From Kamehameha Avenue all the way to Coconut Island. So they used to call [Waiākea] "Yashijima." "Yashi" is coconut, and "jima" is [island]. And then, as I said, they started to move over to the Shinmachi area. After that then Shinmachi got caught in the tidal wave.

WN: Okay, so, you know, the 1946 tidal wave, what do you remember about 1946?

HO: Nineteen forty-six tidal wave . . .

WN: You were working for Ruddle Sales?

HO: Yeah, I was working for Ruddle.

WN: Yeah, what do you remember?

HO: In 1946 I was living down Hongo Camp.

WN: By the eighth hole?

HO: Yeah, yeah. Right by the eighth hole.

WN: So what happened that morning?

HO: Well, that morning, well, I was living there and I worked for Ruddle Sales and Service Company. They had tidal wave that morning, early in the morning. They were all blocked off. Because all the place got damaged. They didn't allow the people to go in. Because they steal, eh? About two days later, they allowed people to go in, but only people that work in the area.

WN: So where was Ruddle at the time? Ruddle Sales . . .

HO: Right across from the park. You where the . . .

WN: Mo'ohau Park?

HO: Yeah, yeah. Across Mo'ohau Park. Right on the corner [of Kamehameha Avenue and Ponahawai Street] there. That's a big company.

WN: And then did that get destroyed in '46?

HO: Yeah. Forty-six tidal wave, that thing got destroyed. The whole building went down. Later on they moved to—you know where St. Joseph's School? They get a park there. Down there they had the army buildings because the army used to occupy here. And when the army moved out,

they had some army barracks.

WN: Yeah, that's Villa Franca?

HO: Yeah, yeah. Villa Franca. Across there's a park now. That's where the army had the barracks, so Ruddle moved into there. And that's where we did business for a while.

WN: But at the time when the tidal wave hit, you weren't at work yet, huh?

HO: No, I wasn't at work. You mean the '46 tidal wave?

WN: Yeah, '46.

HO: [Nineteen] forty-six tidal wave, I was home washing diaper. (Laughs) Doing on my own. My oldest son was small, see. And my wife was pregnant again. So, in the morning before I go to work, I used to—and those days, they didn't have *da kine* disposable kind diapers. You know, all that square-shaped [cloth diapers]. And she was *hāpai*, eh? So, early in the morning, I used to do the washing. I washed the diapers, those are cloth diapers.

WN: By hand?

HO: Oh, yeah, I wash by hand. And then I hang 'em under the house because Hilo used to rain a lot, see? And then later on, I wanted to get a washing machine. But wartime, eh? They were having a war in Europe, and things were getting hard to get. So I had to get one secondhand washer. A guy in Honolulu and his wife had an old junk washer. He brought it back to Hilo, and he fixed it up, and he sold it to me for forty-five dollars.

WN: So did the water come up to your house in '46?

HO: No, '46 didn't come up [to HO's house]. [Nineteen] forty-six more Shinmachi got damaged. But the [1923] time only one man got killed, one fisherman. [A tsunami on February 3, 1923 damaged railroad tracks along the Hilo waterfront and knocked the Wailoa drawbridge into the river.] Because the [fishermen] used park [boats] on the river, and the boat just going up and down, up and down. Those days, they weren't too smart. So, what they do is, when they say going get tidal wave, they tie the boat. And that is the worst thing they can do on a river. The river [level] come up, [and then] goes down. But later on, they got smarter. When they get tidal wave, the boats go out in the ocean. They don't go close to the shore. Way out in the ocean the wave go up and down [but doesn't damage the boats]. The damage is when the boats hit against the rocks.

WN: So, Waiākea didn't have too much damage from the '46 tidal wave?

HO: [[Nineteen] forty-six tidal wave, they hit, but—you seen the picture, eh?—they didn't get too much damage.

WN: But not your house because, what, you lived near to the road?

HO: No, where I lived, you know where the golf link now, down by Naniloa? At that time I was living there. [Nineteen] forty-six tidal wave I was living there, see. And it didn't come up to

there. But 1960 tidal wave, that be the. . . .

WN: Tell me about the '60 tidal wave. Where were you living at that time?

HO: Nineteen sixty tidal wave, I was living up here already.

WN: This house?

HO: No, not this house, the old house.

WN: You consider this Houselots?

HO: Yeah, this Houselots.

WN: Waiākea Houselots.

HO: Yeah, Waiākea Houselots. So, I was living there. And my brother used to live. . . . You know where the Hukilau Restaurant?

WN: Yeah.

HO: Right, next, there used to be apartment there. My brother used to own that—he used to live there. And they had a fish pond. At that time, we had a business on Piopio Street where the county buildings [are today].

WN: Oh, this is when you had your own business, yeah? Automotive Supply Center [beginning in 1955]?

HO: Yeah, yeah, that's right.

WN: Piopio Street?

HO: Yeah, Piopio Street. That time they had a notice that there was a large earthquake outside of Chile. They said that it generated a tidal wave. But we didn't know about Chile tidal wave because during our time never had. We were always afraid of Alaska, tidal wave from Alaska, Aleutian Islands. But we didn't know about South America. So that afternoon, I brought home all the books and ledgers so that in case that [tsunami] comes over. At that time I was living up here already.

WN: Yeah, so you were pretty safe over here.

HO: Yeah, I was safe. But that night, about 12:30 [A.M.] or so, my brother and his family came up to my house. He told me, "Oh, the tidal wave just came."

WN: They had sirens that time?

HO: No, they didn't blow the sirens. [According to *Tsunami!*, coastal sirens in Hilo sounded at approximately 8:30 P.M., May 22, 1960.]

WN: You don't remember any sirens?

HO: No, I don't remember sirens. Because as I said, people didn't think about the Chile tidal wave.

WN: So when you learned it was from Chile, you didn't even worry.

HO: No . . .

WN: You thought only if Alaska, then?

HO: We were always worried about Alaska tidal wave. Because from Alaska, in the Pacific, I hear they get two mountain ranges. And Alaska is right in the way of—in the middle of the range, yeah. And they used to get lot of tidal waves from Alaska. But minor ones, small ones, the wave go up and down. So we used to go out to the bridge and we watch the thing going up and down. But we didn't know about the Chile tidal wave. And they said the tidal going hit about 12:30 [A.M.]. So I was up here. And my brother was still sleeping.

WN: So your brother didn't evacuate [earlier]?

HO: No, they were home. His house was [built] high, see? He had a big fish pond. People, those days, tidal wave, they don't think nothing about tidal wave. Because so many minor tidal waves. And about midnight, he brought whole family to my house. Said, "Hey, the tidal wave came." Usually tidal wave, eh, the first one, first they recede, you see, [and exposes] the ocean bottom, the floor. [Then] all the water rush in, and then they [hit] the shore. He tell me, "Oh, we just had the first wave came in." And he said came up to his house. His house was a high house. He said [water] just came through the floor. So they all came to my house.

WN: About how high was the house, you think?

HO: The basement is about six feet high. And the basement, the concrete, is about four feet from the pond. And then the water came up to the floor of the house.

So he came over. And we had coffee. Early in the morning. He said, "Let's go check the house." We go in there, all the businesses [in Waiākea] were all down. And they had the [Hawai'i] National Guard patrolling there. They didn't want anyone to go in to steal, eh? And while we stay there we heard a lady going, "Please help, please help!" But what can we do? In the bushes, from the front of the Waiākea Kai School nearby where the tidal hit, all got damaged. There was nothing left. And she was swept about 300 yards, and she was in bushes and she was yelling for help. We couldn't go in, because we had slippers. So we went back and we told this guy.

WN: Where was she yelling from?

HO: Inside the bushes.

WN: She was in the bushes?

HO: And you guys couldn't go to the bushes?

WN: We didn't want to go wearing slippers. And the bushes get all, you know, they get all kind guava trees, and. . . In fact, had one railroad track in there too. So we didn't go in. So we went back, we called this Hawaiian guy, part of the National Guard, I think. They were working there. They went in to [help her]. Meantime, we came to my house and went Piopio Street to see what happened to our building, but we couldn't go in. From Kapi'olani School down, ho, the buildings was all down [i.e., damaged]. Oh, the road all full of [debris from the] houses. So we couldn't go in, and it was kind of dark, so we came back [to HO's house]. Later on, we went to--the building we occupied was completely--couldn't find any trace. All the building was on the road. Only thing that was left there was the church. Meishoji Church was there. That church was [built] high. Oh, the road, all the cars, and the buildings!

WN: So your building was completely demolished?

HO: Demolished. Nothing left. Well, I mean, we had a lot of mufflers and pipes. We had about 3[00], 400 pipes and mufflers. They were all washed out about 200 feet up the road. And then the building that we occupied, nothing left. And we had a big safe. Oh, weighed about 300 pounds. Small, but olden days, the safe is thick, eh? We couldn't find our safe. And we had lot of things inside there. We search around all the buildings around there. You know where's that county building now, where the Safeway is over there. We had a shop. Oh, completely gone.

WN: Your shop was made out of wood?

HO: Yeah, it [the building] was a blacksmith shop. It was a big building. He was making gussets. But that time already, he was going retire so all his workers were working somewhere else already. And he used to make cane knife. You know, *da kine* cane knife for cut cane. Those are made in Hilo, see.

WN: Oh yeah?

HO: Yeah. And then the plantation people, they come to buy. And then we occupied one section of the building. And we were going to eventually buy the whole building. But good thing we didn't buy it. (Chuckles) If we bought the building, we'd be out of luck.

WN: So, where was the safe?

HO: Later on, we finally found [it]. Oh, the wood [and debris] was all blocking [the road], the houses and junk. And we were looking for our safe, we couldn't find the safe. And one *Haole* guy [said], "Hey, there's one safe way up the road," about 2[00] or 300 yards up the road.

WN: Up what road? Piopio Street?

HO: Piopio Street actually goes to the, what you call, from the service station, it goes down to the tourist center. You know, where they get . . .

WN: Yeah, yeah, the visitor center?

HO: Yeah, they . . .



WN: Wailoa Visitor Center?

HO: Yeah, yeah. Piopio Street is across that side, see. But they had another road. . . . From that service station, go straight, come out to a—you know, there's a service station on Kilauea [Avenue], you know, get a pond there?

WN: Kind of near the new Cafe 100, around there?

HO: Yeah, yeah. Next to Cafe 100, they get one pond there.

WN: Yeah, yeah, right there?

HO: They get the river, stream, and they get a pond. And then, many of our things was washed out to there. So, we can't do nothing. One day we went there, we couldn't go in because so many [debris from] houses, all on the road. So later on, about nine o'clock we went there, and then we couldn't find our safe. And then, all the things from the building—the building was a big building. Completely gone. We cannot find our safe. But when it comes to emergencies like that, people are nice. They help each other.

And then after we moved to . . .

WN: So, the *Haole* man said that got a safe . . .

HO: Yeah, yeah, one *Haole* guy . . .

WN: So how far away was the safe from . . .

HO: Oh, about 200 yards away.

WN: How many?

HO: About 200 yards out.

WN: Two hundred yards! And that safe weighed 300 pounds?

HO: Yeah. (Chuckles) About 200, 250, 300 pounds. The old-style safe, thick, you know, heavy. And then we got the safe [back], that thing won't open. Because [it] got all wet. The tumblers got all wet. We didn't know how to open that thing. (Chuckles) But a guy by the name of Imanaka, he's a smart boy. And he came over and he had to drill that safe. He knows where to drill. You know, over there, tumbler, and over here, lever. You got to know where to [drill]. That boy smart, he used to work for Stationers' Corporation [Ltd.]. They used to sell stationery stuff. So he had to get a big drill. Oh. (Chuckles) After we get inside there, we get a plunger, then open it. But everything was intact.

WN: Everything was intact?

HO: Yeah. But good thing, the day before, I took home the ledgers because they said they going get tidal wave. But we figure, tidal wave never came up to there, see? But just to be safe, that afternoon, about 1:30 [P.M.], I went to pick up the ledgers. And that ledgers had our accounts,

about [\$]25,000. Big money, see. And [if] no more that then hard to collect the money.

WN: Had cash in there?

HO: Oh, the cash was in the safe. Didn't have too much cash. But the ledgers, you know, I'd say about \$35,[000], \$40,000 in accounts, see. If we lost that then we cannot collect. But good thing, that afternoon, 1:00, I took the ledger, I brought it back to up here so that way be safe here.

WN: So you brought the ledgers to your house?

HO: Yeah, that afternoon.

WN: One o'clock?

HO: One o'clock.

WN: That's after you found out a tidal wave might come?

HO: Yeah. Because they had notice that the tidal wave going hit around the Hawaiian Islands about midnight. Because [it's] about 3,000 miles from Chile to Hawai'i. They calculated about somewheres between midnight and one o'clock, they figure the tidal wave going hit here. But we didn't know about Chile tidal wave. So Hilo Bay, Chile tidal wave is the worst tidal wave. You know why? They come from this side.

WN: Came from the [south]east?

HO: That thing [traveling] northwest. Toward the northwest. Then hit the Wainaku side wall. That side high. And that thing hit that side and swung around, see?

WN: Swung—wait. Hit what side?

HO: You know, the Hāmākua Coast? Where Pāpa'ikou [is]?

WN: Yeah.

HO: That area is very deep, see, about . . .

WN: Oh, so wasn't affected because was so deep?

HO: No. See, that thing has a wall. You know, the Hāmākua Coast, you go to Wainaku, you see the peak. That side is too high. So the wave came from the southeast, hit there, and swung around toward this side.

WN: Toward Hilo?

HO: Yeah. It crossed Waiākea side. So that's why Waiākea side was really damaged. The fish market. You know, they get fish market back in there? That was Hawai'i Fishing Company. Completely gone, and . . .

WN: The school, too?

HO: The school didn't get damaged. [Waiākea Kai Elementary School, located on Kilohana Street *makai* of the Waiākea Social Settlement, miraculously survived the 1960 tsunami. However, Waiākea Intermediate School, located across Kilohana Street from the elementary school, was completely damaged.]

WN: Oh, yeah?

HO: Yeah. Waiākea Kai School didn't get damaged. Because it's right in the peninsula. You know where that river on one side and the sand beach, and then you go towards the wharf, the old wharf, and that's Coconut Island. And then there's projection out there. So, the wave hit Coconut Island and swung around to Reeds Bay side. So my brother's house was only flooded. And that morning, early in the morning, when we take a look, the house was still there. It was a big house, three-bedroom house. We look at the foundation, it moved one inch. The thing lifted up and moved one inch. (Chuckles) But the building was intact. Because that side was only the excess flow towards the Reeds Bay.

WN: So, besides the safe, did you save anything else? Find anything else in the damage?

HO: All the pipes.

WN: And the pipes.

HO: We had about 4[00], 500 pipes. All the family come over then we took that to the Reeds Bay, and then we wash it up, and then we oiled it up. Because, otherwise, nothing to sell. Because if you order parts, it going take about. . . . We used to get many of our parts from the Mainland, eh? They take about three weeks. So, meantime, we sold those things. And then, we had a lot of pipes and mufflers. All the friends come over. We wash that thing with fresh water. It had sand, so we got to clean the sand [off the pipes]. And then we oiled it. Cosmoline, heavy grease kind stuff. Cosmoline, they call it.

WN: What do you call it?

HO: Cosmoline. That thing just like grease. But that's made specially for rear end parts. And the army, during the war, they used that a lot. And they had plenty surplus, see. We used to buy that. That thing just like grease. And so we put that thing on the pipes so that no rust.

WN: And so you folks relocated by St. Joseph's School? No, no, I'm sorry. That was Ruddle. What happened after the [1960] tidal wave? Where did you folks move to?

HO: Well, we moved up here.

WN: Oh, Waiākea?

HO: No, no. The industrial area. See, because the buildings all around there were gone, eh? So they started to relocate. The families, they moved to Waiākea Homestead, all that area. They had the land cheap, around \$3[00], \$400 for a plot, eh? That's why they get lot of people living up [Waiākea] Homestead. And then, we relocated up here. You know where Kitagawa is?

WN: Yeah.

HO: One building down.

WN: Is that Kama'āina Motors?

HO: Not Kama'āina Motors. They get one lady running one shop there. And all the people that had land in the tidal wave area, they were given land up there.

WN: These are people who owned houses or businesses?

HO: Business.

WN: Only business?

HO: Only. The people that owned houses, they were [relocated to Waiākea] Homestead.

WN: Oh, 'Iwalani Street?

HO: Yeah, all around there. But they had to pay for it. But small token. Small lots, eh? Maybe \$3[00], \$400. But this section is industrial area. Only people with business. So we were able to get a. . . . We didn't own our business.

WN: You didn't own the land, or anything?

HO: No. If you had the land, you got [land in the industrial area] in exchange. But we had rental, see? So, we couldn't get. But they were leasing the land. We got a fifty-year lease. And we had to borrow the money from the county [of Hawai'i]. That time, we put up a building for \$50,000. That was big money. (Chuckles)

WN: So you were renting at Piopio Street?

HO: Yeah.

WN: So, because you lost the business in the tidal wave, the government opened up this industrial area and let you folks rent here?

HO: Yeah. We had to lease it.

WN: You leased?

HO: Yeah. People who owned land in the tidal wave area, they were given chance to buy their land.

END OF SIDE ONE

## SIDE TWO

- WN: So, after the tidal wave, a lot of Waiākea people moved up to 'Iwalani Street?
- HO: Oh, yeah. Because they were selling land, cheap. All the people from Waiākea and Shinmachi, all, they moved up here. You know when the tidal wave hit, some of the houses [located] way up by—you know, by Hilo Motors [on Kīlauea Avenue]? There, they get some houses. Up to there, some of them came. You know, because of the river. Usually, one good thing with tidal waves now that I know of, they recede first. And then they come with the whole force going up. First wave, not too much. Second and third one get bigger and bigger. Because they get the momentum, eh?
- WN: And then the settlement was destroyed, too? Waiākea Settlement?
- HO: Waiākea Settlement was still there. [The activities building, gymnasium and director's house survived the 1960 tsunami. These structures, however, were eventually torn down as part of the posttsunami redevelopment project.]
- WN: Oh, yeah, yeah. Something else, later on . . .
- HO: Waiākea Kai [Elementary] School was there, too. Because [Waiākea Kai Elementary School and Waiākea Settlement are] right inside the peninsula, so the volume of the wave came up the [Wailoa] River and Shinmachi side. Because that river can take a lot of water, you know. When you get lot of volume can go up, they can spread. But when that thing is confined area, the volume going be the force. So Waiākea Kai [Elementary] School wasn't damaged. They were right on the peninsula. So they wasn't damaged.
- WN: So, actually, when you think about tidal wave, it's more like a flood than a big wave, yeah?
- HO: Yeah, yeah. It's actually a flood . . .
- WN: Just like the river overflowing.
- HO: Oh, yeah, yeah. So if you want to watch the tidal wave, you go to Wailuku River and you go up on the bridge. You know, high, eh? And you can see the river, the thing coming up and going, receding. It takes a while.
- WN: People think of tidal wave as being this huge wave, crashing on, but . . .
- HO: It's a big wave.
- WN: . . . lot of people say it's more like an overflowing.
- HO: No, those are small tidal wave. The '46 tidal wave. In the morning, they said going get tidal wave. So early in the morning, I got my movie camera, I throw 'em in the car. I going take picture of the tidal wave.
- WN: Oh, you?

- HO: I used to take 8 millimeter movies, see? That was my hobby. So they said going tidal wave. So, early in the morning, I drove my car, I went to Coconut Island. I park my car facing out figuring I can jump in the car [quickly and drive away] if my car facing out. And then I go down towards the ocean. I see a wave, ho, ho! It's a big tidal wave! To me, I've seen a lot of tidal wave, but, ho, you know, that mountain! Oh, about fifty feet high, you know, they coming in. So I never mind the picture, I jumped in my car and went home. I told my wife, "Hey, let's get out from here. The tidal wave going hit. The big one coming." So we all jumped in the car, then we came to the Homestead. I stayed at my brother-in-law's house for a while.
- WN: Oh, so this is '46? So you never took any movies?
- HO: No, I just . . .
- WN: (Chuckles) Oh, too bad! Nah, I'm just joking.
- HO: You know, when they get tidal wave, people, they go to the beach, watch. You got to be careful. People don't know, when the wall. . . Usually, they recede first. And by the recession, you can tell how big a tidal wave you going get. And then, the wave start coming up.
- WN: And this one, how far did it recede?
- HO: Oh, it's quite a bit. Because when I was at Shinmachi, a Japanese man, they went in the ocean, the bottom of the ocean. Get fish out there. The fish get stuck. You know, they get small holes. They go down there, catch the fish, take home. But tidal wave is nothing to fool around.
- WN: So, in '46, you knew already, that tidal wave came because had a couple of waves before that? That's when you went down to take the movies?
- HO: Yeah, yeah. We used to see lot of small tidal waves. Because, oh, they said, Aleutian Islands, they had underwater earthquake. Oh, during the year, the small ones, maybe two or three. But we didn't know about the tidal wave from Chile. But when I went to the Lyman [House] Memorial [Museum]—you ever been there? You been there, eh?
- WN: Yeah.
- HO: Well, they get all the records of all the olden days. And about 1820, they had a big tidal wave from Chile. But people didn't know about that. [A tsunami that probably came from Chile occurred in 1819. Thereafter, there were six tsunamis originating in or near Chile before the devastating 1960 tsunami.] Tidal wave from Chile is the worst one for Hilo Bay. Because, you see, they come from this side, hit Wainaku, they hit from this side and they swing around. But we think, "Ah, Chile, nothing. Way down, 3,000 miles away." When got . . .
- WN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Not like Alaska. Alaska right over there.
- HO: Yeah, Alaska used to come all the time, see. But we didn't know about Chile. "Ah, Chile tidal wave, not too strong." And then, that's when they said, "Hey, they get tidal wave from Chile.

They had a big earthquake outside of Chile and it generated a tidal wave." And they said, "Oh, it going hit Hawai'i about midnight."

WN: So, what do you think? You think there's going to be another one coming someday?

HO: Well, I don't know. But they come from, most likely, from Alaska. There's active volcanoes there yet. When they erupt under the water, it creates a tidal wave. But that kind that erupt, you don't worry too much because slow, erupt, eh? But when the bottom of the ocean drop down—they do drop down, you know, because of volcanic action. But Alaska, we don't worry too much. We didn't know about Chile. And then years later we have to go read the books, yeah? Chile is the worst one because right in line. And that thing is right in line with the Hāmākua Coast. It hits the Hāmākua Coast, then it swing around.

WN: So, you know, you grew up Waiākea. . . . I mean, you know, Waiākea, had the Waiākea town, and all this. No more Waiākea town anymore.

HO: Yeah, no more. They moved.

WN: How do you feel about that?

HO: What that means, "how do I feel?"

WN: Do you feel sad that there's no more Waiākea?

HO: Well, yeah, for a while we kind of sad, but you get used to it. (Pause) You know, certain places, as I said, Honolulu, you don't worry about tidal wave.

WN: How about you? Would you ever live by the ocean again?

HO: I'd rather not. And then my brother, he sold that place. Because he had stroke, see? He was paralyzed one side. So he sold that place to the people there. And then those people put up that apartment. He used to like fishing. He used to catch mullet, small mullet, he catch. Because small mullet, you cannot catch. It's against the law. But to stock up a pond, you can, see? So every Sunday used to go around the canal. Plenty, the small ones, see. And then catch them, put away [in the pond]. The pond was full of mullet. About three-quarter pound. And then no more enough food. Mullet eat *limu* as their basic food. And get so much mullet in there, not enough food. So what he used to do, he buy middling. You know, get the chicken feed, he buy by the bag. And then he spread 'em. That thing floats on the water.

WN: They eat that?

HO: Oh, they ate that thing. So when the tidal wave hit there, oh, he lost 'em when the water came over the road. And you know what makes him mad? On the road, where the wave come in and go, all the mullets in the road. You know, the guys, they come, they take the mullets, they go home. They picking up all the mullets. Some people all right, they grab the mullet, they throw in the pond.

WN: Throw 'em back in?

HO: But the other people, you know. They go on the road, they pick, they put in the bag, they take 'em home for eat. That's why, my brother moved to Pana'ewa. Because he get experience. So he bought a place.

WN: Okay. I'm going turn off the tape recorder. So, thank you very much.

HO: Yeah, I hope I've been of help.

WN: Oh, yeah. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW



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