

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Sadako Suzuki

"We couldn't save anything, and when everything was kind of settled, we went to look at our building . . . nothing we could recognize. . . . The warehouse roof was flat. We found some cash that we had there, but nothing else. After the tidal wave, we thought—I said, 'Gee, what we going to do?' But my husband, he had a very strong mind so he said, 'We'll run the business from our home at 'Iolani Street.' So the farmers came and they helped us build—we had a four-car garage, next to that, they built that building, temporary. And then we had a refrigerator in there. . . . Like the packaged goods, we ran from our downstairs. Everybody helped, my children, our friends, they came and helped. So that's how we started all over."

Sadako Ishizaki Suzuki was born August 29, 1929 in North Kohala, Hawai'i. Her father, Sahichi Ishizaki, was an immigrant to Hawai'i from Japan and was employed by Kohala Sugar Company. Her mother, Itoyo Takatani Ishizaki, was born and raised in North Kohala.

When Suzuki was eight years old, she, her older sister, and two younger brothers were orphaned. The children were taken in by a Daikawa family in Hilo and eventually came to live in the Waiākea district of the town. Suzuki, from the age of ten, did household work for different Hilo families.

Suzuki attended Waiākea Kai Elementary, Hilo Intermediate, and Hilo High schools. While still a junior in high school, she began working for the Suzuki family, who owned a small vegetable and fruit store in Waiākea. Suzuki remembers packing produce for shipment to Honolulu and performing clerical duties.

Suzuki married Henry Suzuki, a son of the business' owners, in 1951. The 1960 tsunami completely destroyed their place of business and its contents. Two members of the Suzuki family were killed. Determined to continue, Suzuki and her family ran the business from their home. Eventually, with help from the Hawai'i Redevelopment Authority which was established to aid individuals and businesses displaced by the 1960 tsunami, the business relocated to its present location in the Hilo industrial area.

Suzuki, her husband, and three of their four children continue to operate the business, Hilo Products, Inc., a wholesale produce company.

Tape No. 29-24-1-98

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sadako Suzuki (SS)

Hilo, Hawai'i

July 22, 1998

BY: Nancy Piianaia (NP)

NP: Hello, this is Nancy Piianaia and it's July 22, 1998, and I'm interviewing Mrs. Sadako Suzuki at her family's company, Hilo Products, [Inc.].

Thank you, Mrs. Suzuki, very much for taking the time to talk to me. Perhaps we could start by your telling me when and where you were born.

SS: I was born in North Kohala in Kohala Hospital. I cannot remember too many things [about my early childhood] because we were so busy with my mother being sick and we had to take care of my brother. He was born and my mother had, I guess. . . .

NP: Complications?

SS: Yeah, uh huh. Because we used to live in the country where there's no doctors. Hospital was too far and being by ourselves, you know, we didn't have the facilities to take care of her. So I think that was the main reason we didn't get her to the hospital in time. So, she ended up in a hospital in Honolulu. And we didn't get to see her.

NP: And how old were you when this happened?

SS: I was about six.

NP: What year were you born and what date?

SS: I was born on August 29, 1929.

NP: Right [before] the depression.

SS: Yes. (Chuckles)

NP: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

SS: I have one sister above me and two brothers below.

NP: One older sister and younger brothers?

SS: Yes.

NP: How about your parents? Could you give me their names and when they were born or where they were born?

SS: Well, my mother [Itoyo Takatani] was born in Kohala and my father [Sahichi Ishizaki] was born in Japan. We didn't have a good relationship with my grandparents, I don't know why. But he was born in Japan, and came here as an immigrant.

NP: Did he work on the plantation, your father?

SS: Yes, uh huh.

NP: Do you know which plantation that was?

SS: Kohala Sugar [Company]. He used to be the guy that opened the flumes. In Kohala, they gave him this job where he goes and cleans the flumes.

NP: So the cane could come down and . . .

SS: Right, uh huh. So at one point I remember my brother followed my father to work. He was in the [irrigation] ditch and we were so worried. It was good thing that they didn't let the water out before we found him. (Chuckles)

NP: Yeah, he survived?

SS: He survived, yeah. [But] my father passed away when we were real young so I don't remember him.

NP: How old were you when your father passed on?

SS: I'm not sure. But I think after my brother was born, I think.

NP: Did your father die before your mother?

SS: Yeah, my father passed away before my mother.

NP: So it was all within a short period of time. Could you give me the names of your mother and your father?

SS: My father's name was Sahichi and my mother's name was Itoyo.

NP: And their last names?

SS: My mother's name was Takatani before she married. And my father was Ishizaki.

NP: Do you know where in Japan he was born? And what about your mom's family, Takatanis?

SS: They're [Takatanis] from over here. I don't what prefecture they were [from originally].

- NP: Was she [second] generation? Did her parents come from Japan?
- SS: Yes.
- NP: So you were born in North Kohala and you spent the first several years of your life there until your parents passed on. And then what happened?
- SS: There was this lady, (Miss Jane Hill), she was principal of Girls' School (in Kohala).
- NP: Kohala Girls' School?
- SS: Yes. And I am not sure how she had found out that we were living by ourself. And so she took my brother and took care of him while we went to school. But in that time she said we not supposed to be living by ourselves. She said we should go to our grandparents' house. So we went to our grandparents' house.
- NP: Is that the Takatanis?
- SS: Yes. My grandmother was (chuckles) a strict lady. But my grandfather was so lenient, he was really good to us. But she held the whip. And she used to let us go, my sister and I, we used to go down the gulch and get the grass for the pig, the *honohono* grass. And Miss Hill came to see us one day to check up on us. She said, "Oh, girls are not supposed to be doing these things." So she said if they cannot take care of us under their care, she said maybe we should find somebody else. So that's how we met Mrs. Beaver. And she looked after whatever—I guess to bring us into Hilo. But until we came to Hilo it was hard because we couldn't get all of us together [i.e., the children were separated]. My youngest brother and my brother below me were sent to [live with another family]. They cried and they couldn't handle them so they said they cannot take care of them. We didn't want to be divided because all this time we were together and . . .
- NP: You only had each other.
- SS: Yeah. So we went on a hunger strike and we went downstairs and we didn't come out. So she said, well, if it's going to be like that, maybe not. So that's how we all got together.
- NP: Oh, you had lots of strength, didn't you?
- SS: (Laughs) So that's why . . .
- NP: And then you [all] went to [live with] the Daikawa family [in Hilo]?
- SS: Yes.
- NP: Do you know how they found the Daikawas?
- SS: Oh, Mrs. Beaver, she knew somebody who would take us in, but not four at a time. Because my parents had two boys, so it was hard. And she said, oh, in this case she didn't want to divide [us]. So that's how we. . . .

- NP: And Mrs. Beaver worked for the . . .
- SS: Oh, the welfare.
- NP: The welfare, okay, okay. And the Daikawas agreed to take all four of you. That was wonderful for you, that that happened.
- SS: Oh yes.
- NP: Are your brothers and sisters still alive?
- SS: Yes. I have my sister, she's working for me. And I don't know if you know Hilo Dry Goods?
- NP: Yes.
- SS: Well, she used to work there but they closed, so she's here.
- NP: Good. And her name is?
- SS: Mazie.
- NP: Mazie, that's right. And your two brothers?
- SS: Are James and Mits.
- NP: Okay. And they are also living in Hilo, are they?
- SS: No, my brother Mits is in Maryland and my brother James is in Honolulu.
- NP: When you moved from Kohala to Hilo, let's say you were about eight years old, would you say?
- SS: Right, yeah, uh huh.
- NP: And then eventually, within maybe six months to a year, could you say you moved in with the Daikawas?
- SS: Yes.
- NP: Where did they live, and what was it like where they lived?
- SS: Well, the home over there is not there now because. . . .
- NP: The '60 tidal wave?
- SS: No, it's long before. Kentucky Fried---not Kentucky Fried. What that twenty-four hour. . . .
- NP: Tell me where the location is and maybe . . .

SS: Oh, it's near the airport.

NP: On the main highway?

SS: Yes. Ken's Pancake House [i.e., Ken's House of Pancakes, on the corner of Kanoelehua and Kamehameha avenues].

NP: So it was in that area?

SS: Yes. And over there was all bushes because they didn't have Kanoelehua [Avenue at that time] and all that so we used to have fun there. Because my parents [the Daikawas] were good and we used to go and cut firewood because we used to make Japanese-style *furo*. So we all used to go and cut the guava tree and it was like a picnic. And my mother used to make lunches and we used to go in the bushes, cut the. . . .

(Laughter)

NP: So how many kids were you altogether with their family and yours?

SS: Well, at first was just Paul and Stanley. And after that, we had Roy, Carol, and Gaylord [a child who stayed with the Daikawas for several years]. So eight of us kids, plus my grandmother. So it was fun. I guess it's not like now, you don't have fun doing other things, right? But they made it fun. So it was nice.

NP: How did you all sleep? Because eight kids, that's a lot.

SS: Well, my father was a good—I guess, he used to say he's not a carpenter but he used to makeshift the rooms, divide it into. . . . My brother Paul used to sleep with my grandmother. And then we divided the room so we had one double bed for my two brothers. And my sister and I, we used to sleep on the floor. So it was okay, we didn't mind. (Chuckles)

NP: That was the way people lived in those days.

SS: That's right, yeah.

NP: You didn't have to have a special bunk bed or your own room.

SS: That's right.

SS: And what did Mr. and Mrs. Daikawa do for income?

SS: I think my grandmother used to work. She used to work at Suisan. And she used to work for, when they had the cannery. I think the cannery was first or I don't know, anyway. Suisan was a brewery.

NP: What kind of brewery? Sake?

SS: Sake, yeah. And then they turned it into one tuna-packing factory. And my father used to drive bus and my mother was a housewife. She used to take in laundry during the war [World War

II]. She took in laundry for the navy. I guess mostly navy and a few army personnel that used to come over.

NP: Did you help her with the cooking? With kids and stuff?

SS: We were still kind of too young to do cooking, but she used to let us do the laundry. Because before, I don't know if you remember, they used to boil the clothes. So we used to scrub that because the navy clothes is white, yeah?

NP: Oh yeah. That's a lot of work for you.

SS: Yeah, so we used to do that and . . .

NP: Would she have to starch them, too?

SS: Uh huh, right.

(Laughter)

SS: Yeah. So that was, I guess everybody pitch in so nobody had complaint.

NP: Did you have gardens to grow your vegetables and things like that?

SS: My grandmother used to do that. So we didn't . . .

NP: She was very resourceful. Now was this Grandma Daikawa?

SS: Yes, uh huh.

NP: On your [adoptive] father's side.

SS: And she worked at the factory and she used to always buy material. She goes in town and buy materials. So she always used to ask, "What kind color do you want?" So I was more—I'm like this today, but I used to wear more of that darker clothes. I'd be in real blue or grey or whatever. So she used to buy something that's more colorful.

NP: To make you wear?

SS: Yeah.

(Laughter)

SS: So I used to keep all the material and [she would] say, "Don't keep because you have to use it." And each time, I guess you would get used to it.

NP: You mentioned, when we were doing the pre-interview, that you took jobs from when you were very young. And one of them was sewing.

SS: No. When I was ten years old. I started to pick *lei* flower. You remember the cigar flower and

the Ōla'a Beauty?

Then i started to work for Mr. Sekido. He was single when he started his business. He had orchids, well, for a while anyway, not too long before I started there. And [he] was my parents' friend. So I'd say, "Oh, if you want me to do," I guess his laundry and whatever. And then he went into orchids. From the flacks [i.e., flats] he made his own plants. And from the flacks I used to take it out and put it on the *hāpu'u*, block *hāpu'u*, and with the tweezer you go and plant. So that was one of the things I did. And he went into *lau hala*. So we tried *lau hala*.

NP: And you learned how to do that?

SS: Yeah, it's a . . .

NP: Did you do it from the point of picking it onwards?

SS: Yes. Somebody used to go and pick it and another lady and I used to boil it in the sulfur. And after you boil it, you dry it. After that, you roll it and rubber-band it and leave it for a while and let it stand. Oh, before we do that, we have to take all the thorns off. And so after that you stretch it and you have this thing about the size of one inch or quarter inch or half an inch. And you strip it. So then after that I learned how to make (chuckles) a product.

NP: What did you folks make?

SS: First we started with mats. We didn't get into hats but we made purses.

NP: You really acquired a lot of skills (SS chuckles) from. . . .

SS: After that, he lost his place in the 1946 tidal wave, so for a while . . .

NP: Where was this located near?

SS: Oh, this one was right after you pass the [Wailoa] River bridge. You know, all the homes that was there, they lost most of them.

NP: This was in the Shinmachi side?

SS: Right, right, uh huh.

NP: Beyond [i.e., north of Hilo] Iron Works?

SS: Yes. Then he didn't have anything to do for a while. Then in between I'm home, helping Mom do whatever. Then he asked if I can go and—because he started one chicken farm. So we went into chicken farming and so . . .

NP: Where was that located?

SS: This one was Waiākea Uka. I'm not sure right about where now because it's . . .

NP: But it was up, it wasn't in the Waiākea area?

SS: No. Then he had a chicken farm, we planted tomatoes, planted cucumbers, and so on. Guess that was---we had scolding and everything because we couldn't keep up with the chicken and the cucumbers. Tomato wasn't as bad but cucumbers, you know, it grows.

NP: Now, this is still Mr. Sekido?

SS: Yes. So I guess you get used to it and it's not as bad. But he said he's going to retire, so. Because he was married and he had his wife and his daughter. So he retired, because he married when he was old already.

So anyway, it's junior year, I had to look for one job. Told my mother, "Oh, I'm going to look for one job." So I went to Skipper's Cove.

NP: Where is Skipper's Cove?

SS: Today it would be before you get to [and across Kamehemeha Avenue from] the Waiākea Settlement clock. They had a restaurant there and he said, "Oh, you can come tomorrow if you are willing to work."

I said, "Well, I'm willing to work."

So he said, "Okay, you come in tomorrow."

I went home, I was happy. "You know what, I found one job."

And then my grandmother said, "What? Where are you going to work?"

So I said, "Well, I'm going work at Skipper's Cove."

So my grandmother said, "What is it?"

I said, "It's a restaurant."

She said, "No."

You know, during that time, [there were] still soldiers [in Hilo]. So she said, "No ways you going to work that place."

"Well, if I cannot work there," I said, "I going work someplace else." So my mother, she felt so bad, I guess. Because I went to look for one job and here, you know.

NP: You found it and you were so happy.

SS: Yeah. (Chuckles) So she said, "Well, anyway. Well, [I'll help you] look for something that you can go and work." So she went to [Hilo Products].

NP: Was this before the tidal wave?

- SS: Yeah. Before the '46 tidal wave. So anyway, she said, "I found one job for you. Do you want to go?"
- I said, "Well, anything I can do." So the lady was nice. I don't know if you read the paper, Mrs. [Fusayo] Ito. She was on the screen.
- NP: Oh, the famous lady that was carried off to sea [in the 1960 tsunami].
- SS: Yeah, uh huh, yeah.
- NP: And she worked there?
- SS: She used to work there. She was really nice, and she taught me whatever I needed to learn.
- NP: And this was the Suzukis' old place?
- SS: Yes, uh huh.
- NP: Can you tell me where it was located?
- SS: Yeah it was between, oh maybe about here, the Skippers Cove was, and Hilo Products was on . . .
- NP: Was it *makai* side? Or *mauka*?
- SS: *Mauka* side [of Kamehameha Avenue].
- NP: *Mauka*, so it would be over. . . . And it was called Hilo Products?
- SS: Yes.
- NP: Was Cafe 100 near?
- SS: Right next. [Hilo Products, Inc. prior to 1960 was located on Kamehameha Avenue, just south of the Manono Street intersection, in Waiākea town.]
- NP: So you were a junior in high school when you went to work Hilo Products. And your husband-to-be was away at that time?
- SS: Yes, he was in the service. And he came back, I think, in 1945? No, he missed the tidal wave. Oh, he was discharged in '45 but he was on the Mainland so he couldn't come back.
- NP: What did he do during the war?
- SS: Oh, he was in the service. He was in the medical side. He used to, what you call, do all the. . . .
- NP: Like a medic? Someone who is . . .

- SS: No, he wasn't a medic. He used to make all the paper work. I don't think he was qualified [to be a medic], you know, because they put him there.
- NP: Do you remember which group or battalion he was in or what regiment?
- SS: Oh, I'm not sure.
- NP: And where did he do his service? Was it in Europe?
- SS: No. I'm not sure where he was. Three different places so (chuckles) I'm not sure where.
- NP: So let's go backwards a little bit because I just about have you up to the point of the tidal wave. Can you tell me about going to school in Waiākea, where you lived, what it was like, and where your school was?
- SS: We lived not too far from the school. It's walking distance and we. . . . Like, my parents used to live on this side and the school was on this side.
- NP: Almost across the street.
- SS: Almost yeah, but they had this train track and all kinds of, you know, other things.
- NP: And the name of the school was?
- SS: Waiākea Kai [School].
- NP: What was the school like? What kind of memories do you have?
- SS: Well, I have good memories of all the classes that I went to. The one that I remember the most is my fifth-grade teacher. She was kind of elderly lady and I don't know, because [I] used to like the elderly people. Because being from that kind of upbringing, I guess. But she was a very nice lady and she used to always help me with my school work, whatever, if I don't understand things, you know. She won't tell you, "Oh, you do this, this," and they just don't explain. She shows you how you have to do it. She was a nice lady. And I think the cafeteria was very good. So we had a lot of fun going to school. I used to like school.
- NP: The teachers were mostly what nationality? Or were there all kinds?
- SS: Oh, we had all kinds. Mrs. Watson was my fifth-grade teacher. We had Mrs. Yamamoto. I can't remember all but there was Mrs. Corpuz, and. . . . Not sure.
- NP: Did you play with the kids from Waiākea? Would you stay in that area and play?
- SS: I think right before, everybody used to get along and you play with everybody and you try to be part of that. I guess it wasn't hard.
- NP: Would you go down into Waiākea and play a lot? Were there favorite places that you remember around like the ocean and near?

SS: No, not too much. My mother used to take us to Reeds Bay and we used to—oh, this was maybe about fifth grade and she used to take us swimming. And I found out that my mother used to swim.

(Laughter)

SS: The only one didn't learn how to swim was my sister. We didn't go too much out of Waiākea.

NP: Was the Ice Pond there back then?

SS: Uh huh, with the bridge.

NP: At that time there was a railroad bridge that went across?

SS: Right, uh huh, yeah. So we used to go, all my brothers and I, when we were older. We used to go and pick the *limu*. You know the green *limu*?

NP: Uh huh. People still do that thing.

SS: Oh really? Oh.

NP: What would you use the green *limu* for?

SS: My mother used to dry it and she used to make it with shoyu. The dry ones she used to keep it for a while and the fresh one she used to put shoyu and eat that with the rice.

NP: It must have been delicious.

SS: Yeah. (Chuckles) And we used to go swimming. I don't know if you know the Okinos. They used to own that pond.

NP: Where was the pond?

SS: Hukilau.

NP: Oh, by Hukilau.

SS: They used to own that. They didn't have all the buildings but they had their house over there. We used to go over and swim in their pond because they had the fish, yeah. So, we catch the fish after they sold the place.

NP: Sounds like you have some good memories of those early days. Despite the sadness of losing your parents and finding new parents.

SS: Yeah, so was, I guess, you know, no complaints.

NP: After Waiākea Kai School were did you go to school?

SS: Hilo Intermediate. And Hilo Intermediate was kind of, you know, we get to know different

people. All your classmates won't be there, you know. But I think I had good memories of. . . .

NP: Now, didn't all your classmates go with you to Hilo Intermediate?

SS: Uh huh, right.

NP: Or was it just because the school was much bigger?

SS: Yes. So we only had a few of my friends there and I think maybe it's good that you make new friends. So I think I had good relationships with all the students there. I have no regrets. I used to like Mrs. Leroy. She passed away.

NP: When you went to Hilo Intermediate, how would you get there each day?

SS: Oh, we used to catch the bus. So we used to catch the bus and we used to walk home or we'd catch ride.

NP: What kind of bus was it?

SS: It's that sampan bus.

NP: Oh the sampan, great, great. Would it come by your house or where would you be picked up?

SS: No, we wait more by the street, further down.

NP: Across the street.

SS: Yeah, uh huh. And we used to catch the bus and go home. But we used to walk home sometimes. Because you need the money.

(Laughter)

NP: Do you remember how much it cost to. . . .

SS: I'm not sure how much it was.

NP: And coming home, would you go through Shinmachi?

SS: Yes, uh huh.

NP: Would you walk down Waiānuehue? Or what was your route to get home, usually?

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

- NP: . . . you used to walk home. Would you walk down Waiānuenuē?
- SS: We'd walk all the way down, yes, uh huh. Because my father says you go one way and you don't go any other way. So we used to go Waiānuenuē, go down Shinmachi. Then we stopped across the street because we had a friend there and my mother used to give us extra money to buy soda or whatever. I don't know if you know Taniguchi Store.
- NP: Mm hmm. Mm hmm.
- SS: So, we used to stop there and then cross the street and we used to go home. Other than that we never did go anyplace else. We went home and did our duty, whatever.
- NP: Chores and helping. And then you went to high school at Hilo High School?
- SS: Okay, before Hilo High School it was that tidal wave, yeah.
- NP: Oh, okay. So you were---how old were you when the tidal wave came? About?
- SS: [Nineteen] forty-six, so. . . .
- NP: Seventeen?
- SS: About seventeen, yeah.
- NP: So you were in high school at the time?
- SS: Uh huh. So you want me to go [in]to high school?
- NP: Yeah, talk a little bit about Hilo High School.
- SS: Well, Hilo High School was all right, I guess. Not to mention too much about, you know. But the activities that they had, I used to work with Betty Lou. What was her last name now? She used to always run for something or she used to handle all this activities that goes on. And so I used to help a lot with that but other than that, we used to go home so we can go to work. (Chuckles)
- NP: This was while you were busy working for the Sekidos and . . .
- SS: No, this was after. I was working at Hilo Products.
- NP: Already. Okay, okay. And what did you do when you worked at Hilo Products right before—when you were in high school?
- SS: Oh, a lot of little things. Doing, what you call, packing and daily sales. During the war, we used to do lot of packing of vegetables. We used to ship it to Honolulu. And so we were busy with that.
- NP: Do you have a lot of war memories? Do you remember changes that the war brought about or what it was like in Hilo during the war years when you were in junior high school and high

school?

- SS: No, I don't think---well, we made friends. My mother, I guess because she used to do the laundry, yeah, and we used to have these friends. They'd come over and my mother used to invite them for dinner or things like that.
- NP: Friends would be like what kind of people?
- SS: Oh, in military.
- NP: Sailors?
- SS: Sailors, you know. But I think . . .
- NP: What a kind lady she was.
- SS: Yeah. So, I don't know. We used to enjoy being with them because we didn't have too many friends, because we worked. So my father used to take us to the beaches. We were lucky because at that time my father used to drive bus. So we used to go to Kalapana where people cannot go. Used to be by train, yeah. So we used to enjoy going to Kalapana.
- NP: So during the war could he do that, even? Could he still drive his bus during the war?
- SS: Yeah. So he used to take us to wherever beaches over here. We cannot go out by ourselves so he used to take us, pack lunch, and he'd take us all over just to get us to go out.
- NP: Mm hmm. Just to go for an adventure or just to play. Then the war didn't seem that different for you?
- SS: Well, there was the blackout and my father used to be the block warden and things like that. But other than that, you know.
- NP: Do you remember when the war began and whether people felt fears after Pearl Harbor or does that day have any [re]membrance for you?
- SS: Well, not that---I mean, people used to call you names and things like that. You know, people calling you "Jap" and things like that. But . . .
- NP: Did that happen to you at all?
- SS: I don't really remember. Try to brush it off. I mean, because we're in America, things like this, you can't do anything about it, right? So other than that I don't think I remember too much prejudice. My brother folks used to always play with all these soldiers that came in. Because they used to station in the front of our house.
- NP: Was that the Naval Air Station?
- SS: No, this---well, the Naval Air Station was for the navy, yeah. And then we had another group that took over, I don't know what building was that. But it's a big building, used to be a big

building. And they used to be there.

NP: Was it the Seabees? The men who did all the building maybe?

SS: Maybe, I'm not sure. Yeah, they wear . . .

NP: They were sailors though? Or they had white uniforms?

SS: No, they didn't have.

NP: So this is different.

SS: This is something different. And my brother folks used to go over and play with them so I guess they didn't have no . . .

NP: Prejudice.

SS: Yeah.

NP: They were probably happy to have someone to have a good time with.

(Laughter)

SS: I guess so. But. . . .

NP: So you spent the war years—did you have gardens at the school? Like victory gardens or did you . . .

SS: Mm hmm, mm hmm [yes].

NP: You did things like that.

SS: But most of the guys used to go and work in the garden. We never did go. (Chuckles) So we used to do other things.

NP: Can you tell me, since we have you at the point where you're working in Hilo Products, could you tell me a little bit about the background of the store and how the Suzukis came to Hilo?

SS: Okay, well, it was my father-in-law who lost his wife. And his grandmother—it always comes back to grandparents—used to take care of them because my mother-in-law had passed away when she was thirty-five years old. And they had five children and she took care of them and I think . . .

NP: This was on what island?

SS: On Moloka'i. So anyway, he said that because of the wife passing away and was hard for him, they told him to get married. But he said no, he said he wants to take care of the children.

NP: "They" were his parents? Who told him to get married?

SS: His parents. So in the meantime, I guess, the father had passed away so was just him and his mother. So it's best that they move on and come to Hawai'i and see what they can do. So they met this man, he was a flower farmer and so they came from the same . . .

NP: Prefecture.

SS: Yes, uh huh.

NP: Which one was that?

SS: Niigata. So they met and I'm not sure if he came before this but I think maybe he did come by himself. And so they told him there's a place opening and all these things. So he came and he started with pineapple and *daikon*. So that's how he started. So he said, well, if he cannot make a go of it he can always do something else. But it seems like he really stuck on to that and . . .

NP: When you say he started with pineapple and *daikon*, who did he sell to?

SS: Oh, I think he shipped his pineapple from Moloka'i and then he got his *daikon* over here and that's how he started. And he sold to all the people that, you know, because they didn't have pineapple over here.

NP: He was like the pineapple man of Hilo.

SS: Yeah.

(Laughter)

SS: And he was having hard time and he said the Hatadas helped him. The Hatadas used to sell bread.

NP: The [K. Hatada] Bakery.

SS: Yeah, uh huh. And then so they kind of switched. They bought . . .

NP: They traded.

SS: Yeah. Because they were having hard time. I guess that's why we're good friends. (Chuckles) I mean I didn't know until my children were born but that's what they told me. They said they used to switch. (Chuckles) So I think it was good for him because he didn't have anybody to fall back on.

When I started for him, his grandmother, she was blind, but she used to do lot of things that I think a normal person wouldn't do because the children were young, and she kind of brought 'em up and they worked in the store. And the oldest girl, she got married. So that's why, I guess, with the helping each other, they kind of worked things out. Because I think she married when she was young. So that made it easy for him to run the business, yeah.

NP: Sounds like it might have been a struggle for the first years when he came.

SS: Right, uh huh, yeah. So then [SS's husband's] father did most of the work, I think, because Grandma couldn't see. And then when I got married, she was blind already. So it was kind of hard for me but . . .

NP: Did she stay with you, then?

SS: Uh huh [yes]. I was used to it, I guess with older people. She used to always say, "I don't want to change clothes," this and that.

But I learned through my parents how to sew and all these things, so I said, "You know, I can sew. I'll sew you clothes." I guess because my sister-in-law was young too, yeah. She's I think about two years below me.

And so she would say, "Oh, no, that's okay because you have too much work," and this and that.

So I said that I'll try to do whatever I can do for her. It was so easy, you know, like her clothes is the old [style], right?

NP: The old straight dresses.

SS: Mm hmm, right. So I said, "It's so easy to sew, I'll sew you some." So I had a stack of clothes for her. So after that she was okay.

So six years I think, I couldn't go to work, I had my children yeah. I'm skipping I think. (Chuckles)

NP: That's all right. I was just looking, you were married in 1951 and then Grandmother lived for about six more years.

SS: Uh huh, yes.

NP: Let's go back to—the store survived the first tidal wave, I believe.

SS: Yes, uh huh.

NP: Now, can you tell me some of your memories of the 1946 tidal wave and what you saw and what changed?

SS: Well, we lost some of our friends because they were on the bridge. So we lost a couple of our friends and . . .

NP: What were they doing on the bridge?

SS: They were watching. So when the tidal wave hit, my parents said—oh my brother . . .

NP: This was in the morning, right?

SS: Right, uh huh.

NP: April 1.

SS: April 1. This one was. . . .

NP: Yeah, the '46 was a morning one. Hit early in the morning and then the . . .

SS: [Nineteen] forty-six was—yeah, I didn't even go to school yet. Wait now, I'm getting all confused.

NP: I think it was about somewhere around daylight, 6:30 [7:00] early in the morning.

SS: Wasn't that the '60?

NP: And then the '60 was the night one [1:00 A.M.]

SS: Oh that's right, that's right. Yeah, uh huh. Okay, my brother was going to school because he goes early so they can catch bus with his friend. And he told my grandmother, "Oh, you know, there's that tidal wave," you know. But he tell that in Japanese. Like before, we didn't know what it was, tidal wave.

And so my grandmother say, "Don't you go and tell things like that."

NP: Now, how did he know there was the tidal wave? Did he go?

SS: Everybody was running, you know. So [he] said, "No, it's [really a] tidal wave."

And she said, "It's not nice to tell that kind."

NP: This was all in Japanese?

SS: Yes, uh huh. He said, "No, but it's true."

So then we all ran out to see. But it didn't come toward our place so it was lucky. We saw people had fish in their hand, they were walking down the street. So my brother said, "You see what I mean?"

But had people, they were there. They're picking up fish. They had fish in their hand. So she said, "Oh well, you can't do anything about it, so you wait till things cool off and you see if they need help." So that's about it, I remember.

NP: Later on in the day, then, did you go down to see what happened?

SS: Yeah.

NP: And what do you remember seeing?

SS: Well, it was all mud so we couldn't do anything, so my mother said, "Well, you can't do anything right now, so just leave it at that."

- NP: Had the mud come onto your side of the [Wailoa River] bridge?
- SS: Yes, uh huh.
- NP: Into Waiākea?
- SS: Waiākea, yes, uh huh. So [much] mud that they had to take it out, so she said, "Oh, can't do anything, so wait till people come in to clean." So that's what we did. We didn't do much. But later on, to clean up the place.
- NP: This was at the Hilo Products?
- SS: Yes, uh huh.
- NP: So actually, the water and the mud had come in.
- SS: Uh huh, yes.
- NP: How much damage did it do?
- SS: I think that refrigeration was okay but we had to get rid of all the produce. So I think we had to change whatever had to. So they had to go all over and do whatever.
- NP: What about Cafe 100 next to you, was that okay also? It was closer to the water.
- SS: Yeah, they were. I think was okay. Most of the mud I think, came in. Because we didn't go out that way. We were afraid to go.
- NP: And then how soon was it before you could go over the bridge and into Shinmachi again? You know, after the tidal wave?
- SS: Yeah, you couldn't go.
- NP: For a long time?
- SS: Yeah.
- NP: And so they just had to close it all off.
- SS: Yeah, uh huh.
- NP: And you would go around behind to get into town?
- SS: Yes, uh huh.
- NP: And did you begin--do you remember hearing stories of what had happened then, to Shinmachi and the people near?
- SS: Not too---I mean, we weren't too close with the people over there because Waiākea is one

section. We had, I guess, few of the Shinmachi children come to Waiākea. But not too many, I think, of the older people.

NP: You were really separate communities, it sounds like.

SS: Yeah, uh huh.

NP: And your father's work place, was that all right? What happened to his job with the bus and all?

SS: Oh, my father was okay.

NP: He was okay by then?

SS: Yeah, he was okay. Other than that was all right. Because at that time, I think he was working at Shinmachi, I'm not sure.

NP: That's all right. Let's go on, we'll go on a little bit and we'll talk about your husband-to-be returning and the life that you had before the 1960 tidal wave. Where you lived. Maybe first how you first met and then getting married.

SS: Well, we worked together so . . .

(Laughter)

SS: Well, I was going to school '46, '47, '48. And I graduated '48. And so we were . . .

NP: He was home by then, in '48?

SS: [Nineteen] forty-eight, yeah.

NP: He had come back.

SS: Yeah, mm hmm. And so we worked together and I don't know how soon after but we were—he was the quiet one. (NP chuckles.) And so I don't know. We just happened. One day he asked me if I wanted to go to a movie. And that's how it all started. After that we got married.

NP: Were you married in a Buddhist church or were you married . . .

SS: No, Christian church.

NP: Christian church.

SS: Yes, uh huh. Because my father-in-law was Christian.

NP: Which church were you married in?

SS: I forgot the name of the church.

NP: Is it there now?

SS: No, it's not there.

NP: Do you remember which denomination he was? Baptist or Congregational or . . .

SS: I think it was Congregational. But I'm not sure.

NP: You didn't have a Japanese wedding, you had a Christian wedding. Did you also wear a kimono?

SS: No. A wedding dress.

NP: Did you have a honeymoon?

SS: Yes, we went to all the different islands and we stopped at Moloka'i, visited his grandfather's grave and his mother's grave. So later we brought them back over here. So we can visit them. Other than that, it was . . .

(Laughter)

NP: You went back to work.

SS: Back to work.

(Laughter)

SS: So, well, I had Grandma too, so we were kind of worried.

NP: So she needed you to be there.

SS: Yes, uh huh.

NP: And then where did you move to, or where did you live when you were first married?

SS: Oh, we moved to 'Iolani Street, 9-38 'Iolani Street.

NP: Ah, let's see, where is that?

SS: It's, you know where McGuire Building is? It's on 'Iolani? Okay . . .

NP: It wasn't in Waiākea?

SS: No it was . . .

NP: It was in back.

SS: Yeah, uh huh. Where C. Brewer, you know the building, it's across over there. So we moved there.

NP: Why did you decide to move out?

SS: Oh, because they used to rent that home. Just before we got married they moved, because we needed a bigger house because had my in-laws, my two brother-in-laws, my sister-in-law, and Grandma. So that's why just before we got married we moved there.

NP: It's a real extended family then.

SS: It was heck.

(Laughter)

SS: Even after they got married. We had my sister-in-law living there. And later I had my brother-in-law, they got married and they stayed with me for a while so they had one daughter.

NP: You were never lonely.

SS: Yeah.

(Laughter)

SS: I don't feel I was. But anyway, it was okay. My life, I guess, was meant to be. So always busy.

NP: Did you continue to work all day at the store, did you?

SS: Until I had my two children, my oldest Glenn, and Royden. And after that I started working because Grandma wasn't living already. Being with Grandma, I think they learned a lot. My two children, they took her to the bathroom, they took her to have her dinner so she would go and sit with everybody.

NP: Make sure she was fed.

SS: Yeah, uh huh. So they really learned a lot. Even today, they always, I guess because of that, I'm not sure, but I guess all my children grew up in that way, so they really respect. So I think because of that, we have this family unity.

NP: That's why you've been able to stay together as a family and work in this business.

SS: Yeah, it's surprising, still we always all together, we get along together. And they . . .

NP: I think that's wonderful. I envy you (SS chuckles) for that. That's very unusual nowadays, I think.

SS: I give all my family, my adoptive family, my in-laws, all the credit because if not, I don't think we can do all these things.

NP: So during this period, we're still talking about before the 1960 tidal wave, Grandmother was alive for maybe six years, I think you said. And then your father-in-law was still alive?

- SS: Uh, no. He passed away couple years back.
- NP: After you were married?
- SS: Yes, uh huh.
- NP: And the Hilo Products---sounded as though during the war you had expanded because there was a need for vegetables and fresh produce.
- SS: Uh huh.
- NP: At the end of the war, did you stay at the same . . .
- SS: Mm hmm, yeah.
- NP: . . . amount? You kept on growing? Or where did your market come from after the war?
- SS: Well, we stayed there until 1960 . . .
- NP: Until the---but, before the tidal wave, let's say the war ends and perhaps they don't need the same vegetables in Honolulu.
- SS: But I think with all the growing, it was okay, we didn't have to cut back on lot of things. Because we [had] a small shop to begin with. So before 1960, we still had that store because we just moved in not too long [before].
- NP: Oh, so you built a new store . . .
- SS: Right.
- NP: . . . before 1960. After 1946 it sounds as though you cleaned everything up but . . .
- SS: We stayed there until about nineteen---before 1960. And then . . .
- NP: And you built the new place then?
- SS: Yeah, uh huh.
- NP: What kind of changes did you make when you built the new place?
- SS: Oh, we had a retail store, because the frontage was the whole building. So we made that into a retail store and the upstairs we made apartment like. So my sister-in-law and my sister-in-law's brother lived there. And then in the back, we made a big warehouse. So with that, we kind of was working out okay until 1960 tidal wave.
- NP: Did you have to spend a lot of your money to make this new place? Or did you pay everything off so you weren't in debt?
- SS: No, we didn't spend too much money for the second building. Whatever we had we put it in

the retail store. And then we made the warehouse. Then we spent the money. But because the government gave us this land so it kind of tie into that. So I guess it was okay.

NP: I'm still going to go back because one of the things we wanted to talk about was what was the impact of the '60 tidal wave on businesses. So I'm sort of looking at what—like how many, did you have trucks to take your produce around at that time?

SS: After the tidal wave?

NP: After the tidal wave. So before the tidal wave you basically were in that one store . . .

SS: Right, uh huh.

NP: . . . with the warehouse.

SS: Yeah, uh huh. Well, we had a truck and I think we had another truck that we used to go out delivery. So somehow we kind of. . . . Like the tidal wave, we picked up whatever, we saved it at the other side, the refrigeration, the what you call that?

NP: The storage?

SS: Yeah.

NP: The walk-ins and things like that?

SS: Just the walk-in. So right after the tidal wave, we said we not going stop. We not going stop whatever. We going to keep on working and the produce that used to come in, they brought it in, we fixed the refrigeration and we started working not too long after the tidal wave at our home.

NP: At your home, wow. Just to keep your market going.

SS: Yeah, uh huh. So, we thought, gee, my husband was going to quit. But he said, no, we're going right ahead and try and do whatever we can. I lost my brother-in-law and his two children.

NP: Were they there at the store then?

SS: Yeah, they were living upstairs. Said, well, we cannot do anything, right, because we have to find the body and whatnot. So we didn't do it right away but my husband said it's going to be up for a while. So we can do whatever we can and then we delivered most of the produce that we can. But I'm not sure how long we stayed closed. But after that we had the funeral service, the whatever, because he said he didn't want to close it completely. So the farmers came in and they put the new building up temporary, an open thing. But was . . .

NP: You kept receiving all the produce and sending it out.

SS: Yeah, uh huh. Because I guess it really helped, because if not, I don't think we can continue.

NP: Yeah. And maybe having to work was more helpful than living in that place of grief perhaps.

What I want to do is to talk more about the 1960 tidal wave but I think maybe it would be good to stop here. We've almost been on for almost an hour and a half. And then when I come back we'll focus on 1960 and what you knew about the tidal wave before it came and more about what the effect of that tidal was on your family and on the Hilo Products. So we'll stop for today. Thank you.

(Laughter)

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 29-33-2-99

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sadako Suzuki (SS)

Hilo, Hawai'i

February 2, 1999

BY: Nancy Piianaia (NP)

NP: February 2, 1999 and I'm at Hilo Products for a second interview with Mrs. Sadako Suzuki, talking this time about the 1960 tidal wave.

Thank you, Sadako, for agreeing to give me some more of your valuable time.

SS: You're welcome.

NP: Okay, so let's start talking about the 1960 tidal wave and if you can tell me what you remember as far as the preparations that were made for this tidal wave. Any kind of warning, for example, that you might have had?

SS: Well, the only thing was that we heard the siren, then we heard all the [electrical] crackling sound, you know. My husband said, "Oh, I think it's toward Waiākea town." [The Hilo Electric Light, Company power plant was hit by the 1960 tsunami, causing a blackout.]

But I told him, "We cannot go because it's so dangerous." Like the 1946 tidal wave, people went to look and they lost their lives. So I told him, "We'd better not go." But they'll be in touch with us, in case of anything. But we couldn't go because it was all wiped out. So I don't know how many days later we went to check and. . . .

NP: Had you heard on the radio or

SS: No, nothing. Nothing that I know of. The only thing was the siren and then later, we heard the crackling sounds so I guess the electrical wire as well. So. . . .

NP: So you hadn't had time to prepare your . . .

SS: Nothing, yeah.

NP: . . . the area which you had down in Waiākea.

SS: We lived on 'Iolani Street, so it wasn't too far. So we could hear all this. We couldn't go anyway, they won't allow us in so we waited, I don't know how many days or, you know.

NP: They closed off the whole area? So you couldn't get in.

SS: Uh huh. Uh huh [yes]. And I had my sister-in-law, her family, living upstairs. We figured we have to kind of look for them so we told them, the family and we wanted to go and look for them. But we couldn't get in because it was so devastated. They said it's not safe for us to go. One nephew was saved. One Hawaiian male, we don't know who, just grabbed him by the hair and pulled him up. You know where the station, the train station? They had this cement, I don't know, platform or what. So he was standing over there and then he saw this boy so he said he just grabbed his hair and pulled him up. So he was saved. But I lost my brother-in-law, my niece, and—my sister-in-law was saved.

Then later, because before they moved to Waiākea town they were living with me, they asked me to identify [bodies]. I said, "I don't want to go." But my husband said he wouldn't know, 'cause he always worked, morning till night he worked, so he wasn't too familiar with what they would look like. But the only thing I could remember, he had a big mole on his leg. So I went to Cow Palace to identify.

NP: What was that like?

SS: Oh, after that, for a few days, I didn't have appetite. Just—losing my nephew, my niece, my brother-in-law, it was real, I don't know. I just didn't feel good.

NP: It must have been a terrible experience.

SS: So my sister-in-law was saved and she first went to her sister's place in Wainaku. She wanted to stay with us so we brought her back to our house and then she stayed with me.

NP: What was her name?

SS: Louise [Suzuki] Kimura.

NP: Kimura. Her husband's name was?

SS: Samuel Kimura.

NP: Kimura. And how were they related to you?

SS: My husband's sister. They—her husband moved from Kaua'i and they lived with me for a while. Then when my husband folks, they renovated the building, the upstairs, they lived upstairs, above the store anyway. And after the tidal wave she stayed with me. And she went to school and she went into teaching. Once she was going to school, I took care of her—well, my nephew until she graduated. Because of the tidal wave, she built her own house on 'Iolani Street.

NP: What was her son's name?

SS: Kent.

NP: Kent. Are they still alive now?

- SS: He's alive but she passed away, she had cancer so she passed away. She was a schoolteacher at Kalaniana'ole School.
- NP: Wonderful. She still made a life for herself.
- SS: Yeah, and then she remarried later.
- NP: How old was Kent when he was . . .
- SS: Gee, I'm not sure.
- NP: . . . pulled out of the water? Was he pretty young? Was he small?
- SS: He was young. Oh, maybe about three, four, actually.
- NP: Oh my.
- SS: The girl was baby yet so it was real hard for her.
- NP: There's so much tragedy in this, isn't there?
- SS: Yeah. And my sister-in-law, my husband's older sister, her brother-in-law, his wife, was in the tidal wave. She passed away. The son was saved.
- NP: Were they living in Waiākea?
- SS: In the same—they rented the same upstairs. So they were in the tidal wave, too. We couldn't save anything and when after everything was kind of settled, we went to look at our building, the front was just—the building was old, too, so nothing we could recognize. But in the back, the warehouse was new so it was only couple years since we built the warehouse. so the warehouse roof was flat. We found some cash that we had there, but nothing else.
- After the tidal wave, we thought—I said, "Gee, what we going to do?"
- But my husband, he had a very strong mind so he said, "We'll run [the business] from our home at 'Iolani Street."
- So the farmers came and they helped us build—we had a four-car garage, next to that, they built that building, temporary. And then we had a refrigerator in there and then that's how we started all over. Like the packaged goods, we ran from our downstairs. Everybody helped, my children, our friends, they came and helped. So that's how we started all over.
- NP: That took a lot of courage.
- SS: Yeah, that's why everybody thought, going through the second—because '46, we lost everything except the building. It wasn't our building but we lost everything inside. So everyone thought that oh, we're going to give up. But my husband had real strong mind so he said, "Oh, we'll try and do it from home and if it doesn't succeed, well, cannot help." I guess we owe it to all our farmers and our friends, they came and helped and put the building up

and whatever help we needed. So if it wasn't for them, I think we wouldn't have all of this.

NP: How soon after the actual tidal wave were you able to open up again, do you think?

SS: This was in '60 so this was, oh, not quite two years, I think was.

NP: I mean, how soon after the tidal wave did you begin in your home?

SS: Not too long because all the farmers came. When my husband said he's going try, the farmers all came and they said, oh, if [we] need help, they'll help. So we said we going to try and do it at home. So they kind of—because of the garage and all, we had big garage, so we could get the vegetables and try to get in touch with all the stores. They were nice enough to kind of pick up where we left off. That's why we owe to all the people.

NP: And how—what was the process of coming to this place, where you are now [on Maka'ala Street]?

SS: See, we owned the place that the tidal wave took away [in Waiākea town], so the state had given us this portion of the lot so we can build here. When we first started, we had just this building over here.

NP: How big is this acreage or how much did you get?

SS: I'm not sure.

NP: Is it the same—was it the same size as the one you lost?

SS: About. Yeah. We had two buildings over there, too. We first started with this portion, then we had my two brother-in-laws working with my husband. But my husband had a stroke, 1977. So that's why, few months later, they said they going to retire. So we went to see Mr. Kushi, because Mr. Kushi called us and said, "What you folks want to do? You folks want to sell it? Or you want to take over?"

NP: Mr. Kushi was?

SS: Our attorney.

NP: Your attorney.

SS: So we told Mr. Kushi that we have to talk it over because it's a big thing. My husband cannot do too much already because he had the stroke. He said, "Well, anyway. Think it over." And he said, "You know, I think your family can do it." Because all my children used to come in and help, do all dirty job because . . .

NP: They knew the work.

SS: Yeah. Because like before, we didn't have our refrigerator and you know the old place, they didn't have too much space. So whenever things get rotten, they used to do—so they know how hard it is. When we moved here, they worked hard. My son used to come here in the

morning and my [other] two boys, used to come here work, and they used to go to school, and they worked outside, service station. They took three jobs to try helping out. Mr. Kushi said, "You know, I think your family can do it so if I was you, we'll buy them [i.e., in-laws] out."

We got the kids together. I said, "You know, you folks want to take over this business? Dad and I, we cannot do all this by ourself. You folks willing to work hard, then we'll try and buy them out." That's what we did, bought them out.

NP: That's your family.

SS: It's just our whole family. So my second son---my oldest one, he was in Honolulu. So when my husband had the stroke he said, "Oh, Mom, you want me to come back?"

I said, "Well, you went to school six years to be an engineer so why don't you try do whatever you learn. And if you don't like it, you can always come back because this is our family."

But I guess he enjoyed [his work] so he's still in Honolulu. So anyway, we took over, then . . .

NP: That was in 1977.

SS: Yes. And my second son, he's good in business, so he said he'll build another building. So what he did was put three refrigerators, all different temperatures. So at first I said, "Gee, what you going do with all three refrigeration?"

He said, "Well, there's things that you have to put in colder temperature and there's medium."

NP: You need those different levels of cold.

SS: Different level.

NP: That was smart.

SS: I said, "Oh well. Okay." And we didn't have to work that hard to put things away. Like you can put it up with the high lift. That's what he wanted. So he put in metal shelves where the high lift can go in. So it made it easier.

NP: So you really invested in creating a facility that has lasted you folks.

SS: That's right. So now that we do it for KTA [Super Stores], we do all the KTAs. They order from us whatever they need. So we store for them. Whenever they need anything—because our truck goes out every day, so what we do is, they give us all the order that they want and then we take the order and then make it. Then we charge them for storage and for transportation. So that's how we're making it.

NP: When did your connection with KTA start?

SS: Oh, this is about, I'm not too sure but—my son would know.

- NP: Was it long ago? Before the tidal wave?
- SS: Ah, no this was all after tidal wave. Oh, maybe about—in the [19]70s I think.
- NP: And before then, did KTA just store its own . . .
- SS: Their own, yeah.
- NP: They did their own thing.
- SS: Yeah. So I guess they couldn't order too much. Like now they can order ahead of time so they won't run out. Whatever they cannot get, they ask my son and they order whatever they need. So my son orders, then he gives [information to] the girls where to call and what to order. It's been pretty good so far.
- NP: Around this time with the tidal wave in the 1960s, who were you selling to mostly?
- SS: All the supermarkets, the small stores, the restaurants.
- NP: Like Foodfair?
- SS: Foodfair, KTA, Sure Save.
- NP: Pick and Pay.
- SS: Pick and Pay, yeah. And all the restaurants. A lot of the restaurants.
- NP: And you had---at that time, did you have your trucks that would go out? Or how would you deliver?
- SS: We had all the small ones but they were maybe about two or three times a week. But now we have one truck, that's the big truck. I don't know what you call that, the big one.
- NP: Yeah, with the refrigerator.
- SS: Since we started with KTA, my son ordered that big truck. Then we have two smaller trucks that go out twice a week to the upper side of Kona.
- NP: Kona *mauka*.
- SS: Then one go on the lower side.
- NP: I see your trucks on the highway.
- SS: If they're not courteous, you tell me.
- (Laughter)
- NP: They are. This is a little bit of an aside. Were there restaurants in Waiākea before the tidal

wave?

SS: Yes, I remember one, that's Skipper's Cove.

NP: The one you tried to work at.

SS: Yeah, I tried to work there. There was Richard's place [i.e., Cafe 100, owned by Richard Miyashiro].

NP: Richard's . . .

SS: Yes, Richard's place, Cafe 100.

NP: That was next to you, Cafe [100].

SS: Yeah. And there was another one. Kūhiō Cafe.

NP: Kūhiō Cafe.

SS: That was about the middle part.

NP: Did you supply them with vegetables and produce?

SS: Yes, mm hmm.

NP: So you meant that you lost them as customers when they were destroyed.

SS: Oh, yes. Then Cafe 100 built their own. They lost the new one, they built one behind.

NP: Oh after the [nineteen] forty . . .

SS: Was '46. And then they built one new one and then they lost that [in 1960]. Richard [Miyashiro] was a gung-ho guy so he didn't lose faith and he just . . .

NP: Kept going. And they're still there. Can you tell me a little bit more about the time right after the 1960 tidal wave? How you came to have this place? How do I put it simply, tidal wave happens, you're completely destroyed, and did the government come to you or did you go to the government to ask for help? How did this all happen?

SS: It wasn't right away, but we were going to run [the business] from our home so in the meantime, my husband kind of worked out if they can—what they can do so . . .

NP: Running from your home, would the health department have to approve it?

SS: For one---yeah, they let us do because they couldn't. . . .

NP: They were probably much more worried about all the other problems.

SS: All the other—yeah. I don't know what the situation was but they [i.e., the government] sent

my husband a letter, saying that they were willing to exchange [properties]. Because they were going to make a park over there or something. So they said the only thing they can do is they give us land over here. Just to switch would be the easier thing to do. [The Hawai'i Redevelopment Agency condemned many waterfront properties following the 1960 tsunami.]

- NP: Do you remember the day when you first came to look at this land and what it was like?
- SS: No, I didn't, and I'm not sure if my husband did or what. Because a lot of the people that lost, like the 7-Up [Bottling Company] in Waiākea town. Coca-Cola [Bottling Company], I'm not sure—oh, next door was the candy. You know, Kaneko Jelly Factory. They were running this place until they retired.
- NP: And they also came out of Waiākea?
- SS: Most of this was in Waiākea.
- NP: Hilo Rice Mill?
- SS: I don't know where they were before. [Hilo Rice Mill was located on Kamehameha Avenue, near Ponahawai Street, at the time of the 1960 tsunami. After the wave destroyed the building, the business moved to the industrial area set aside by the Hawai'i Redevelopment Agency. It remains in business today. See interview with Minerva Saiki Hayakawa for details.] Must be that they had lost.
- NP: It would be an interesting story to know how they made the decisions on what land and all.
- SS: I guess because we owned our property over there, they said if you wanted this portion, then they can switch land. So I guess that was the. . . .
- NP: How do you think the tidal wave affected Hilo?
- SS: Well, there's always good and bad. You feel sorry for some people that lost—they cannot get back on their feet. I guess they, because they didn't own their own land or home or whatever.
- NP: Oh, so they didn't get land like this.
- SS: Yeah, mm hmm. For people who had land, like we had, it was kind of—it kind of helped, although. . . . But I feel sorry for the people that didn't get too much. I don't know how, because we don't go into all these people that didn't get whatever to help them. But I think, being Hawai'i, they got some help. As far as getting all the new buildings and things like that, it kind of improved the—I don't know what you can say—looks.
- NP: The appearance.
- SS: Appearance, yeah. Because the place that we rented, the building wasn't that good. Always have to call them to fix this or fix that. That's why the first, 1946 tidal wave, we stayed there but we didn't have enough to go and build one. But my father-in-law had bought this portion of that land over there. That's why I guess we were real lucky to have that. If not, I don't think—it's going to be real hard. I don't think we can have all this.

I'm kind of very, very, lucky for—we had all the people that kind of helped out so. . . .

- NP: When you think back on how you survived and done so well, why do you think that is? What has made your family business successful?
- SS: The first thing I guess the Lord was with us and the people. I guess everybody's hard work because I used to grumble to my husband sometimes, he's not home.
- NP: Never home.
- SS: (Laughs) Never home. He leaves at four o'clock in the morning and comes home about twelve o'clock at night. The only thing he can do is go and check the kids, cover them.
- NP: Was this every day?
- SS: Every day, seven days a week. Even Sunday. I had his grandmother with us, I took care of her for six years. And she passed away at eighty-seven. She was blind and I was taking care of her. That's why I used to always scold my husband. I didn't drive at that time.
- I said, "Come home early. At least Sunday. Few hours okay, take her riding." Because she cannot see but the feeling that she have going out. So I used to scold him. So he used to come home at least for two hours, take her riding. We used to enjoy just the two hours.
- NP: Because you would go along, too.
- SS: Yes. We all go, my children, so it was good. We treasured that two hours. (Chuckles) We used to stop on the road and the kids would say, "Oh, stop here." And they have that air plant, pick that. You know, little things, but we enjoyed. But he really worked hard, he was sixteen when he started going out to sell—peddle the vegetables. Until he had to go in the service. Then my father-in-law couldn't run the business because he was alien.
- NP: Alien, yeah.
- SS: So he [SS's husband] had to take over. It kind of helped, I guess because he [father-in-law] was kind of old already but he had good chance of going to Japan couple of times before he passed away. He had cancer.
- NP: Your father-in-law.
- SS: My father-in-law. Then he was kind of worried about his mother because she was blind. I told him not to worry because we had our business in Honolulu, too. And my brother-in-law used to run it, but he lost everything so my father-in-law called him back here.
- NP: This was a branch of Hilo Products?
- SS: Yes.
- NP: In Honolulu?

- SS: Yes. Honolulu, yeah.
- NP: How many years did you have that?
- SS: Oh, not too long. Maybe about six, seven years I think.
- NP: Was this before the 1960 tidal wave?
- SS: Yeah, mm hmm. So then we called him back and he worked over here but he didn't make too much difference because he used to come in at about three o'clock. (Laughs) My father-in-law used to get so angry with them, but he can't do too much. He was old, and he had his mother, his mother was blind. So he kind of worried more about her.
- NP: He had a hard life, didn't he?
- SS: Yeah, he did because he came from Moloka'i and started this business. But I guess we have to be thankful that he started.
- NP: When did he die?
- SS: He died in (1953).
- NP: So he only had to experience one tidal wave. Because it probably would've broken his heart if he saw what happened to. . . .
- SS: Yeah, I don't think he would want to start all over because of his age, too. But I guess my husband had good head on his shoulders. Let's just start all over. I thought, gee I wonder if we can do it. But after you see all these people come and help, oh, we might be able to do it.
- NP: It must have been so rewarding to have people come and help you start again.
- SS: It was—during dark, day, pounding nails and whatever. The farmers they bring in their product and, "For now, you don't have to pay us." Things like that, we're really grateful. We've been real lucky. (Chuckles)
- NP: Well, it's been a real treat for me to be able to meet you two times and talk to you about this.
- SS: Oh no. I'm glad to see you. (Chuckles)
- NP: Thank you. I think I'll turn this off.
- SS: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

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Social Science Research Institute
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