

INTERVIEW 11a

Kenji Okimura and Mrs. Okimura

Interviewers: Miriam Reed, Lori
Arizumi, Evelyn Trapido

SIDE II OF TAPE---No date

At Okimura home: 3346 E. Manoa Rd.

MR But he said, "Well, if you and Chrissy could get together."
Richard's daughter-in-law. She lives down here somewhere.

Ms O And she's an oldtimer in Manoa?

MR No, it's just things that she has researched or heard from
Richard.

LA Oh, their family was down at Punahou.

Ms O Where did she come from?

LA Her father was Lee, Dr. Lee. He died about two years ago, I
think. He was kind of an invalid there towards the end, but
they lived up on there when Chrissy was going to school.

KO Were you around when Noelani issue was up?

Ms O Oh, yes.

KO That was the time I had to stay neutral, but at the Board of
Supervisors' hearing, I came up for the new Manoa. (School)
Why, because they tried to--the old Manoa, I mean--have those
people below Kahaloa and the Waikiki side of East Manoa, down to
University, to attend the temporary Manoa Housing School
structure. That was unfair, I thought. So we relocated to
Noelani. That was 19__?? But at the present day (1980), I feel
that they should combine and give the University the land for
the law school.

MR Well, I guess that's up to them to decide, by those that have
children that go there, but it seems as though lot of the
children from Noelani come from outside, because I see them

coming up on the bus, and so that means that people in Manoa are being penalized. That's politics, I think. I went there one evening. I didn't know a soul, not one soul, and I thought...

KD At the hearing?

MR Yes. They posted that there was a community--neighborhood community meeting there, and I went there, and I didn't know a soul.

KD I feel that times have changed and they should...

MR And some of the people who were there, they came from Moiliili, and down around Punahou. Maybe there are many empty classrooms this side?

KD At Noelani, too, so they should combine.

? Young Some of those classrooms are being used for research of some kind and educational TV because Public TV and ETV are two separate entities. KHET has their studios down on Dole Street, but ETV part, which is all the daytime programming, comes out of up here, but it doesn't make much sense to have that way up here. They would be ~~not~~ better off even at Noelani or someplace closer to campus where they can get to the facilities.

ET Well, when Manoa people had an issue, they sure get together and those Noelani parents got together as solid as they could.

MR Well, that's how they usually do. For instance, that hillside there, you know first thing we know the whole of that (Joe) Pao "mistake" is all chopped up.

I Did people feel that way about Manoa Housing when it was put in? Did people object to Manoa Housing being there?

KD No, that was just after the war, so the issue wasn't too great then because we had the land available there. (They needed

those homes.)

MR What was the land being used for before the housing?

KO Pasture land, taro patches. Taro patches before they grazed some cows and horses there, so it was...

MR It was all dry land at that time, and most of those people came from out of Kalihi, didn't they? Kalihi and around that...

KO Veterans, too. Takabuki was in there, too.

I Didn't the stream go down on that side, though.

X My father-in-law said that on the other side of our house right above Woodlawn and Kahaloa, there are springs and whatnot there up above us, and the stream went down more toward the mauka side there and joined up with the stream on this side because they used to catch opai with some of the little fish in that...

KO That was I think surplus water that used to run that way. That water was (you know there's a Woodlawn bus turns there); there's a small bridge there. That was the main river going to Manoa Stream in case of rain, and then of course surplus water used to run the other way.

ET I found an old map of Manoa Church and there was an auwai running along the back of Manoa Church, which isn't there anymore.

(MR Yes.)

KO That was for the Mid-Pacific area and the taro patch. They took that from back of Manoa School.

MR It came from by the mulberry. Where the mulberry was, there was a small stream before you get to the mulberry, it was the end of the Lums, that was the drain off from the Lums', you know, stream. It drained off over there, and then went down. You

know, Ah Sim lived over there where Valanika's?? place is, where that big East Manoa where they're building now, you know where the Catholic church comes in like this, there was the water. The river used to come in back there.

KD In back of Ah Chong Store and Ah Yun and then past the Tofu (Factory), in back of Toyo Superette.

I Yes. Down there and then on down, but then it curves back and comes back into Manoa Stream, someplace in back of the University.

KD That water came from Manoa Stream, the main stream and from higher up, it flowed on the side of the Manoa Road, and then cut in down by Manoa School. You see, they have a culvert there, not only for taro patch, but ducks. You know they used to keep ducks.

MR Because we had ducks in our property to eat up the residue of the taro, after they washed the taro, and it had to go down the slide there, and then we had a holding pond, and there was honchong grass there, and the ducks ate off all that little taro sediments, so you wouldn't have any stagnant water, and then part of that water ran into the taro patch and then down into another big stream that irrigated the Lums' property. Then the water ran over and you know the tamarand tree, somebody had a cow over there.

KD Mitsunaga or Yamane. Yamane the first dairy, and Mitsunaga the next dairy, and Sakamoto Dairy was the third.

I Because we--I could run over there and get some milk. We always had those little cans. I guess the lard was what once came in those cans.

KO I think the land was divided in 1868 or so because this Chinese cemetery has 25 acres rented from the Hawaii government.

MR In 1868?

KO That was the mahele?

MR 1846-50 was the Great Mahele.

KO But I heard that it was granted in 1868, and when our parents came here, the taro patches were all owned by the Chinese people, so the Chinese immigrants were way ahead of the Japanese.

I Someone told us that they could tell the difference between the Hawaiian taro patch and the Chinese taro patch because the Hawaiians were big people, so they built the dikes big, but when the Chinese came along, they cut down the dikes because they were smaller so they didn't need as much space. When did your family move into Manoa?

KO Manoa, 1905.

LA That's about the same time that my in-law's family, Arizumis...

KO Arizumi? No, later. They came in later.

LA Charles, Sr.'s parents.

KO Yes, they came in later. Charley was already grown and ready for school when they moved up.

LA But he said that was about 1906.

KO I was born right next door here, and I'm 71 years old, 1908, because Charlie wasn't born in Manoa.

LA No, but they must have moved up here when he was four or five because he started at Manoa School.

KO Because I do remember the Arizumi family was located and that the--you know the property fire station, below that; it was

about there that they were located when they came up.

LA Where the fire station is now. That's why he said he lived right below the school, Manoa School.

KO Next to Manoa School was their home.

I Where the gas station is or little below that?

LA No, on the corner, right across from the Chinese restaurant.

I Wasn't the school also right out at the corner or _____?

LA Of course, the streets weren't like they are now. There was no Huapala Street then.

KO No, it was there.

LA It was there? Just a lane.

KO It wasn't paved. Dirt road.

MR It was just a right-of-way, but you could drive a horse and wagon through there, because that lane went from East Manoa Road along there and then if you just carefully drove over the stream there, you can go past the Lums' place and then get into our property.

LA Yes. Just outside of our property was the Lee Hong family, and that's George Lee, you know Chuk Sin??? and George Lee, and Irene and Arthur and all of them, they were just outside, and then we had Ji-san and there was the grandson, Shuichi. He worked for the Board of Water Supply. His mother's name was Kami. They in fact were the only Japanese family that was there, and across the road was Manuela who made okolehau.

ET How many Japanese families were living in Manoa then, early 1900? Not that many?

KO Early 1900? Usually they...Matsumoto family, they went under the name of Kiyota, came before my dad's folks. They left and

came back.

MR They had the camp that goes down next to where Keama Place is now, and then when they came back, they came mauka of Mary Ann Perry's daughter Evelyn, right next door to Evelyn and the Pee Wee Store, before Lum _____

KO By Tateyama?

MR They had to move, yes. They went in there and that's where they had a camp...

KO Tateyama.

MR Back there. So that was another family.

?? That was in back of Pee Wee Store, eh?

MR Back of Pee Wee Store, and Yuens were on one side of Pee Wee Store because originally, before it was Pee Wee Store, it was Lum Hu Store, and it was across the street from where Manoa Market is now.

MsO I got married and came up here in 1939. You know, this road was a narrow dirt road. I can never forget. The week that I got married and came up here, I had to go to work. No such thing as a honeymoon. I had to work. I drove down that dirt road. After a rain, the road was so slippery. I thought to myself, now why did I get married and come to such a hick town. It was so bumpy, very bumpy, and hardly any homes.

KO We improved this East Manoa Road finally in 1953.

ET When I was pregnant, in 1952, I bounced along that road.

KO Then we got this new road. This is East Manoa Road.

MsO My friends all kidded me. They said (I was born on Kauai, but then I lived in town)--they said, "Oh, a city girl moved up, gets married, and move in the sticks, and right in the back of

her is a Chinese cemetery." Oh, they scared the daylights out of me.

KO Well, up here in the Chinese cemetery, you have the Fongs, the Hiram Fong family, the Chin Ho family, all interred.

ET In the Japanese language school book, it says that in 1942, the government might have seized the language school, but, instead, it was turned over to you and four other men as trustees.

KO My Dad.

I You said then, that after that the building was used as a hospital.

KO Yes, and leased to the government.

KO Of course, at \$1 a year, leased to, and to the fire station.

MsO Then the fire station took over and the long building in the back was a temporary hospital with army trucks and all that.

I Did they use it or was it just there for in case of emergency?

MsO In case of emergency.

I That old fire station, I don't know if anybody has a picture of that, was that a Manoa School building originally?

KO No, it was a language school building.

MR Probably, The Fire Department would know.

MsO Wait a minute, the old building fire station, that was the Manoa School cafeteria.

KO Not that, originally, they were located at the language school.

I I think it was located, yes...

KO During the war.

ET And then in '52 when the school moved up to the new building, then maybe the fire station moved into the cafeteria?

KO Yes. You see, we had a hard time asking them to leave when we re-opened the language school in 1948. They stayed around until

then. Of course, the fire station, I think, they paid more regular rental.

ET Now, what about the other Japanese language school?

KO That was an issue that came up in 1929, and the Japanese community of Manoa was split into two. The original group was supported, led by, by my dad. It was in 1929. The problem was that they wanted to purchase the school property, land, from the Liliuokalani Trust, and there was something going wrong, so my dad contacted the Trust official directly and found many discrepancies in the report they were giving, so one group just left, the group that was embarrassed.

I In 1928?

KO 1929 they were split and they purchased this land from the Magoon Estate, back of this Manoa "chop suey".

I Where the Manoa Valley Church is now.

KO Yes, only a portion of that land, and they built their own school building. Now, in 1929, there was a stock market crash, and that affected the economy of Hawaii '31, '32, and my dad had to mortgage his property, our property, and loaned his money to the language school to keep up the payment for the time being, and in 10 years, they paid up for the land, in 1939. This was an area of about 25,000 square feet.

I You said they bought it from the Liliuokalani Trust.

KO Yes.

I So you think it was Liliuokalani's property?

KO Yes, it was.

MR Now, that Liliuokalani property was the property next door to the language school, that language school that is there now.

That was Liliuokalani, but where the Manoa Valley Church is was from the Magoon Estate.

KD Then when the war broke out, the other language school had a balance of about \$6,000 somewhat dollars, and that was a big figure for a time of emergency, so they just gave up, and Central Union Church took over.

ET Before that, Central Union Church rented the little Manoa church from Kawaiahau.

KD Manoa Church in the cemetery.

MR Hawaiian Cemetery.

I Do you remember anything about Miriam's mother collecting money during the '20s to restore that little church, and Miriam said they took the bell from the steeple and made a lava stone bell tower that's out in the yard.

KD No, I don't remember, but I remember she was an active lady.

MR Actually, what my mother did was to collect more from the haoles up around the dairy, the Cookes, and wherever we delivered poi...

KD One surprising thing is this. The rich people--I don't mean you, but--Richard Wong helped a little in community affairs. Not Y. P. Lum. Not Y. P. Lum, and one time I had an argument with Mr. Wren. He came to our community meeting, half drunk, and started to repeat what he just already said about the Manoa School Cafeteria, about widening University Avenue and Oahu Avenue. I was so irritated, I told him off.

I Good for you.

KD I told him off, and who else. You know Y. P., when we improved the East Manoa Road, I spearheaded one group, Y. P., he just

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took care of his interests, but he wanted the help of those people fronting East Manoa. He had Frank Hustace as his attorney going around to have signatures for a petition. Frank Hustace came and wanted my help, so we worked together, but I asked Frank Hustace, "Do you know how to handle that old fox?" I knew that he had hired his own attorney, but I negotiated with the chief engineer, William Vannatta, and got a reduction for the property owners, only on one thing where he had the discretionary power. He told me so, and it was knocked out at \$34,000. Then, we went again. This time I went with Y. P. Lum and his attorney Frank Hustace. They argued upon no reduction. Coming down the stairs, Frank Hustace knew I got that \$34,000 reduction. "Mr. Okimura, how much reduction are you going to get for us?", he came like that. Then I told this to Mary Ann's granddaughter...

I Marie Souza.

KO Souza. Mrs. Souza. "You know Mrs. Souza, if Y. P. should call you up and ask you for money for his attorney, you tell him to call me up." Sure enough, he called me up after calling Mrs. Souza, and he now tells me, "Oh, we work together." "How much reduction did you get for these people?" "But we worked together", he tells me. "Oh, you have plenty money; you can hire your own attorney, and you pay for it." "Ah, you chicken", and he cut the telephone on me, and that was the end of it. He could very well afford it. For instance, he's got Queen's Surf in Waikiki. When he appraised that property, the government had to pay \$33,000 appraisal fee on his own property...