

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Susumu "Peanut" Sodetani

"I kind of felt sad in a sense, you know, that the company I worked for, actually about forty years if I didn't stop the first ten years, you know. Then thinking back all the guys you work with, different jobs that I working, too, and all that going to be pau, you get a kind of sad feeling like."

The oldest of five children born to Magoichi and Mutsumi Sodetani, Susumu Sodetani was born in 1916 in Wailuku, Maui.

At the age of four, the family moved to West Maui; first to Waine'e Camp (a.k.a. Lahaina Pump Camp), then to Front Street in downtown Lahaina, then, in 1925, to Chapel Street in Lahaina. Sodetani attended King Kamehameha III School and completed the ninth grade at Lahainaluna High School before dropping out. His father died in 1927 and Sodetani needed to work to help support his mother and four siblings.

Sodetani was fifteen in 1931 when he began working for Pioneer Mill Company. His first job was as a rodman in the engineering department, surveying fields before cane was to be planted. His subsequent jobs included: carpenter, steam plow operator, and blacksmith.

In 1940, Sodetani got the opportunity to increase his pay by moving to O'ahu to become a federal civilian defense worker, helping to construct the massive Red Hill Underground Fuel Storage Facility. Three years later, in the midst of World War II, Sodetani returned to West Maui and began a second career with Pioneer Mill Company. For the next thirty-five years, he worked in the sugar mill as a centrifugal operator, oiler, and maintenance worker. He also was active with his labor union, the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union.

Retired since 1978, Sodetani lives in Lahaina. His wife of sixty-one years, Mary Kaumeheiwa Sodetani, passed away in 1996. The couple raised four children. At the time of the interviews, Sodetani had ten grandchildren and fifteen great-grandchildren.

Tape Nos. 39-12-1-03 and 39-13-1-03

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Susumu "Peanut" Sodetani (SS)

Lahaina, Maui

January 30, 2003

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Susumu "Peanut" Sodetani for the Pioneer Mill oral history project on January 30, 2003. We're at his home in Lahaina, Maui, and the interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Peanut, let's begin.

SS: All right.

WN: My first question to you is, when and where you were born?

SS: I was born in Wailuku. My birth certificate says January 25, 1916, so I guess I have to go by that because it's on record. But my mother told me that I was born on the 16th of January 1916, the year 'Īao [Stream] had a flood. And my aunty and three cousins drowned in that flood. That's my uncle's first wife.

WN: So they drowned on January 16, 1916?

SS: Yeah, 1916.

WN: Oh, that same day that you were born.

SS: Yeah, that morning, because those days when you were born, you don't go to hospital. They had midwife coming up and my mother was expecting her to come up and she waited and waited and found out later on that 'Īao flood, that she died. I think it took a day or two before they found her body and all that.

WN: So your birth wasn't recorded?

SS: Yeah, at that time. So when they record my birth at the bureau of whatever, they recorded January 25, 1916. My kids celebrate my birthday January 16.

(Laughter)

WN: But on your birth certificate it's January 25.

SS: January 25, yeah.

WN: So how did you know this story?

SS: Through my mother. And I kind of doubt that they knew, but you know, *The Maui News* print out the hundred years, [i.e., *The Maui News, 1900-2000: 100 Years as Maui's Newspaper*]. And not too long ago, I saw in the paper that on January 16, 1916, 'Īao [Stream] flooded and there were eight or nine people killed in the flood. So, I figured what she told me was right. [At least twelve people were killed and thirty-four homes were destroyed in the flood.]

WN: Yeah. Oh you were part of history from the day you were born then.

SS: Yeah, because you know, even at that time 1916, '17, '18, she used to tell me about what she called Spain *kaze*, which was the—I was reading about that flu after I grew up, and they call that the Spanish flu [epidemic]. Throughout the world, millions died. [The Spanish flu epidemic of 1918 killed half a million people in the United States.] And she told me she had me in bed, and Japanese come up and say, "Oh, how your baby doing?" or this and that. But they don't come in the house, afraid of either spreading sickness or getting the sickness. And even at that time she told me, "Oh, lot of friends and people in Wailuku that they knew died from that. They call it Spain *kaze*. Japanese word of saying, Spanish flu."

WN: So you said you were born in Wailuku?

SS: Born in Wailuku.

WN: What were your parents doing in Wailuku at that time?

SS: My father was a finish carpenter. You see, his father, my grandfather in Japan, was a what they called a "*tōryō*." He always said *tōryō*.

WN: *Tōryō*?

SS: It's just kind of some boss man [a master carpenter]. And he used to give out carpenter lessons where young ones come to the house and they stay over a year or so before they learn the full trade. And I guess my father was one that picked up the trade pretty good because my uncle, the older brother, the one that lost his wife in the 'Īao flood, used to say, "*Magoichi niwa kanawan*." And I used to tell my mother, "What does he mean by *kanawan*?"

Said, "He cannot beat your father in carpentry work."

So, when they built the first Kula Sanatorium, she told me that they had stayed up at Kula for a whole week. Weekend, they come back. But then the interior work all was done by your father and working outside was your uncle, so.

WN: Your father name was Magoichi?

SS: Magoichi.

WN: What was your uncle's name?

SS: Shinkichi.

WN: And who was older?

SS: Oh, Shinkichi was older. Yeah, my father was the younger one.

WN: So they actually learned carpentry from your grandfather?

SS: Grandfather, yeah, he was the, I think, boss man.

WN: But your grandfather was always in Japan?

SS: Yeah, he was always in Japan.

WN: So when you say "finish carpenter," what is that?

SS: Well, more like cabinets.

WN: Oh.

SS: Furniture. It's precision work where squared out everything, nice finish. When we moved over here [Lahaina] back in 1920, he came over because the manager of the plantation, this Pioneer Mill here, was looking for some carpenter that can do finish work. In other words, make furniture for him at that time. Sears Roebuck or Montgomery Ward, or whatever, ships don't come around here and he can't get the kind of furniture that they wanted. And so actually, he was recruited here by one of his—Toshikiyo was a supervisor in the carpenter department who recommended to the manager about my father.

WN: Toshikiyo?

SS: Yeah, Toshikiyo. He was a supervisor in the carpenter department for Pioneer Mill Company. And he recommended my father, and so the manager got in contact with my father. He [SS's father] was working as a carpenter for Kahului Railroad [Company] at that time. Then that's the reason why we moved over here in 1920, and he worked for Pioneer Mill Company.

WN: So he came when you were four years old . . .

SS: Yeah.

WN: . . . to work for the plantation manager.

SS: Well, actually, for Pioneer Mill Company, but . . .

WN: For the company?

SS: Yeah, but the work that he performed when he came here was mainly [making] furniture for the manager. Those days, managers had, you know, lot of range of power. They were just scary.

WN: So your earliest recollection of being around was in Lahaina then?

SS: Yeah.

WN: And Wailuku?

SS: Yeah. In Wailuku what I remember most was doing *kolohe* things, you know. (Chuckles) I always got spanking from my mother and she always was saying I can never learn, never listen. Those are the things I remember. But, you know, one thing I remember, I used to go to that, there was a flume, water flowing over 'Iao. And from where I live, right by the iron bridge, I used to walk to there and sit on one of those boards running across and put my feet in the water there and paddle. People see me, they let my mother know about it, and boy, she come over there and get me. And going home, I get it on my butt.

(Laughter)

I just can't forget that. I used to wonder why, you know, why. Of course, later on I find out that if I did fall in, well, I didn't know how to swim and that's it.

WN: So this is a wooden flume?

SS: Yeah, it's a wooden flume and that water still goes across that 'Iao Valley. [In December last year], I was watching that water flowing right next to the [Wailuku] Hongwanji [Mission] church. And I was thinking, that's the same water flowing when I was four years old. You know thinking back, by god, I am going eighty-seven, and I thinking of my fourth year, what I was doing. You know, and I start thinking of staying at that iron bridge; my father coming home with rabbit food, he had some rabbits. And then goldfish, I remember, it wasn't the regular gold, it was a big-bellied fish. I know had white, red, and black. Real pretty, you know, and I used to sit there and just watch those fishes. I don't know what he used to feed 'em but he probably knew how to feed these fishes. The rabbit, well, he used to bring home weeds for the rabbit. All those things, I remember, before we moved over here.

WN: Do you remember or know where you lived in Wailuku?

SS: Yeah, it's right next to the iron bridge.

WN: Oh, you folks lived over there?

SS: Yeah, I lived there. The top was street level. Yeah, from the street they had a sort of veranda-like and you step and you come into the house. And downstairs, that's where we slept, just below there. And right next to that, they had a barbershop, Fukutomi, or something like that, barbershop.

WN: Wow, you remember way back . . .

SS: Yeah, four years old and a kid. And I guess I remember because I think of those things all the time, that's how I never, you know, whether it was a licking that I got or . . .

(Laughter)

WN: Plus you were the oldest, so you're probably the only child, you know, at that time, yeah?

SS: No, when we moved over, she [sister] two [years] below me, so she must have been two years old, I think.

WN: So when you moved to Lahaina, where did you folks move to, where did you live?

SS: That's right back of the Lahaina Hongwanji [Mission] church right now. And number of times when I had my car serviced I walk up to that area, and that place is still vacant, you know. I don't know why, maybe somehow somebody who own that place gone and they can't get that land or whatever. But I remember the homes. The people that lived there, next door to where we lived, was Shintaku. And other homes where Onishi, Hamai. Toshikiyo was that supervisor for the carpenter department for Pioneer Mill. Manriki, Sato, and one family that had their house right on that bridge, Michibata.

WN: So where is the Hongwanji?

SS: Hongwanji is on Waine'e Street. You're coming in from Shaw Street, before you hit Prison Street. The church is on your—if you come down from Shaw Street and Waine'e, it's on the left side. It's between those two streets.

WN: So where you lived was it a camp? Was there a name for that camp?

SS: Well, no, I can't recall of any name at that time. I know we lived there for twenty-two years, I think. I was six. When I was age five, going to kindergarten, the kindergarten teacher was a Miss Manriki. And that family lived there. I remember holding hand with her and going down to the kindergarten. Kindergarten was located on the corner of Dickinson and Chapel Street, now it's called Luakini and Dickinson. Right on that corner there was a big building, it's a parking lot now. But used to be the kindergarten there. And Mrs. Robinson was a wife of a guy who was running a gas station across the teachers' cottage of [King] Kam[ehameha] III [School], was a teacher there, I think. And Miss Manriki was one of those teaching, going down.

WN: So kindergarten was separate from Kam III. Kam III didn't have kindergarten?

SS: No, that was, I think, kindergarten for Kam III. Because when going into the first grade, age six, yeah, we all lined up and going march to Kam III where we attended first grade.

WN: How far was your house from Kam III School?

SS: Oh when we went to Kam III, I was living at the mango stand.

WN: Oh, Front Street?

SS: Yeah, Front Street. We moved to Kam III. So, I would say, from there to Kam III School would be about, maybe, a thousand yards. Somewhere about there, I think.

WN: So you moved from the back of Hongwanji over to the mango stand?

SS: Yeah, mango stand, Front Street. I probably was seven, I think.

My grandpa, my mother's father, he probably was working in Sacramento as a farmer or something. 'Cause, later on in life, I looked at my father's checkbook. He had the address of my grandfather in Sacramento. My father knew how to write and all that, I think he went through night school. He [father] came to Hawai'i in 1904, during the Russo-Japanese War. And my mother didn't tell me anything, but I sort of had things together, they probably sent him over not wanting him to get into the Japanese army. I think that

was the reason. So in 1904, he was on Maui for—he got my mother over in 1915—so eleven years, he stayed over.

WN: You said your father came probably to avoid the draft . . .

SS: Right, Russo-Japanese War, yeah.

WN: And your . . .

SS: My mother didn't say so, but that's what I thought, you know.

WN: And your mother's father was a farmer in Sacramento.

SS: Yeah, must be a farmer. From the old wharf going out to the main boat—the main boat was *Mikahala*. I don't see that boat anymore, *Mikahala*. And we just get onto that ship, there's a big opening, steerage, you go inside there. But I know I went up the stairs and ran over, and they had to go all over the ship look for me. Thinking that I fell off the ship or something. I come back, I get lickings.

(Laughter)

WN: This is not the trip from Wailuku to, I mean . . .

SS: From Lahaina to Honolulu.

WN: Oh, that was later on?

SS: No, this was when I was age six or seven, I think, so probably was about 1923, I think.

WN: Where were you going?

SS: They probably had the communication where my grandfather was coming over [from Sacramento], going back to Japan, and so from Honolulu I think they communicated. The only thing I remember, we stayed at a Japanese hotel, then driving to the pier. And at the pier they had a gate where those that departing will be there also. But before they go, they stayed on this side greeting the guys that was seeing them off. That was the first time I saw my grandfather here. I remember his straw hat, and a suit, and a gold chain around like this, and the words that he used to my mother at that time, ducked the head and said, "*Ōkiku natta no*," saying, "Grown up to be a fine young lady," or something to that effect. Even at that age I was thinking, he probably left Japan when my mother was a young girl or something like that. Whether they separated or divorce or what, I don't know. My mother never tell me anything like that, but now he was on his way back going home.

WN: Was he ever living on Maui or was he in Honolulu?

SS: My mother?

WN: Your mother's father.

SS: No, direct from Sacramento coming in, I think, yeah. So he wasn't living in Honolulu.

WN: So how did your mother find her way to Maui?

SS: From Japan. She was what they call picture bride, and I know she used to tell me, before she come over she had to stay with my grandma for six months, I think. Go through the housewife chores and whatever. And if my grandmother approved, then she would be sent over to Hawai'i to get married to her son.

WN: So this is the Haioka family?

SS: Haioka yeah. Even that name, you don't see.

WN: First time I heard that name.

SS: Yeah.

WN: Haioka.

SS: How about Michibata, you heard that name?

WN: I heard Michibata, but I never heard Manriki. Never heard that name before. Toshikiyo, too, I never heard Toshikiyo.

SS: Toshikiyo's wife was the daughter of Michibata. And they had one boy there, I know we used to call him Mike, he worked someplace in Honolulu, I think, later on. And I got to meet him, oh this is way back when I used to take active part in ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union] union affair. We go down for conventions. During the early period, I got to meet this guy Mike Michibata.

WN: Okay. So growing up say, you know, in Lahaina, Front Street, what did you do to have good fun as a kid?

SS: That's when I used to play with more the Hawaiian kids. They are James Lindsey, Tom Lindsey, Dallas Kalepa. They used to have what we call 'aka'akai, it goes up just like cane, sugarcane. It's a weed, grow tall, but then below that is a swamp land, water. But you can run on it because that thing is covering the water. We used to play cowboy-Indian in there. I was the smallest of all these guys and that's why they call me "Peanut." Age seven, I think yeah, that name stuck right through. Yeah, right though.

WN: Were you the only Japanese boy?

SS: My next-door neighbor, Ota family, that's Yukio Ota, we used to call him "Beans." Yeah, he was a year older than me. He was the only one, I think. Yeah, we used to play over there.

WN: So there were a lot of Hawaiian families living down side . . .

SS: Yeah, Hawaiian families living there. Then the Farden family used to live just across the street, maybe fifty yards down. They lived near the seashore. And across, they had Seong family, they had a big yard. During my seventh grade, she was my teacher. Even at age seven or eight, I used to play around with Rudolph Farden and we used to run around in his house. They had a two-story home there, the Farden home. I think the most noted one in that family was Irmgard Farden, who taught hula and entertained and all that. Then there was brothers, Carl, Bernard, Rudolph, Buddy Farden, that's the four boys in the Farden family. Then Margret, Maude, Diana, Emma, Irmgard, and Edna Farden. Yeah,

just about, they are all gone already. I think only Edna and Buddy I think, left. They are all gone.

WN: Irmgard just died yeah, not too long ago?

SS: Yeah, Irmgard died recently. I think it was last year, I think, she died.

WN: So what was it like? I mean you just about grew up on the beach then, the beach was right there.

SS: Yeah, beach was right there, yeah.

WN: So did you do a lot water kind of activities?

SS: Well, those days you don't have any clubs or anything. And even swimming, I learn how to swim myself down there. This guy, my neighbor, Beans, he knew how to swim. So he told me, "You go in and dog swim, you know, just like how the dog swim." And he said, "You kick, kick, and keep on going 'cause if you stop you gonna sink."

(Laughter)

And I did, lot of times, I drank lot of salt water, you know, I go down. But then you keep on going and once you get the knack, that's it. Like I think the beginning, you kind of panic so you just go, go, but then once you get the knack of it, you don't have to go that fast. So all these, all, I learn by myself. Later on you start to bring up your arm and get out and swim, so, yeah. There was one of the guys, Tadao Fujiyoshi, the father had a honeybee farm. [Their house] was on Shaw Street and in the back he had this honeybee farm. And he had another farm out at Kahana and he had a Model-T truck. You know, Model-T, you get three pedals. The first one low, the second is reverse, the one on the right is brake. But the one on the left, half way to make it neutral, you press your center, you reverse. (Laughs) Yeah.

WN: So didn't have any gear, yet.

SS: No, no gear. This one Model-T Ford.

WN: Did your father have a car?

SS: No, like I say, he died age thirty-eight. From there we moved to Chapel Street, now Luakini Street. We moved there when I was eight, nine. And ten, that summer—well before that, the house that was next to ours was a Book home, that's a German. They had a big family and a . . .

WN: What was his name?

SS: Book, B-O-O-K.

WN: Book.

SS: Yeah, it's a German guy, I think. Mr. Book died a week before my father died. Funny, yeah? I mean, you know, when I think back, all those things, there's some kind of connection. And of course, I think I told you where my uncle wanted me to come Ha'ikū that summer to work on his chicken farm that they had. Oh, I don't know how many

chickens, but he wanted me to go down the gulch, pick up *honohono* grass, mix up with feed, and feed the chickens, take care the chickens. Soon after school close, June, I went down. And then a week before July 19, my father sent mail to my auntie that he wanted me to come home. But I told my auntie, "The understanding was, I stay until school start. So end of August I go back." Then she told me, whatever my parents say, I have to obey. He wants me to come home, "You have to go home." Oh, I grumble at her, but still I came back home. A week after that, he had that accident and he passed away.

WN: You were how old?

SS: Ten, ten and a half.

WN: Nineteen twenty-six?

SS: Yeah, twenty-six. He died July 19, 1926. Incidentally, when I had my bypass surgery it was July 19, 1993, and I thought, "By god, I think he wants me to go join him." Same date, funny, yeah?

WN: Uh-huh [yes].

SS: You know, a lot of stuff, I think back, things happen where I don't think science can explain those things, and no more answer, funny.

WN: What kind of chores did you have around the house? What did you have to do around the house?

SS: They had plants in front of the house. And then back of the house, the plantation sort of gave us approval to plant whatever we wanted. So I did most of digging weed, plant eggplant, even head lettuce, carrots, *daikon*, boy, all the vegetables we had. So vegetables, we didn't have to buy, you know. Of course, this was more later on in life, but my mother really used to get after me. So regardless I was ten, eleven, or twelve, I used to do a lot things. Even getting up—she was asthmatic—I had to get up and get my sister below me up. Even today, we talk about the old days. I say, "No more stove." We boiled hot water with firewood. Firewood, we had a cement stove like. Make hot water, I don't know, they don't have that nowadays, but it's like instant coffee. Take a spoon of that, sugar, milk, and hot water. You go out, buy bread at Masuda's, ten cents a loaf of bread. They slice it for you, and if you want butter, half that, they put butter; half of that, they put jelly. For ten cents. That's what we used get for breakfast.

WN: Where did you get it at, what store?

SS: Masuda [Grocery].

WN: Masuda?

SS: They used to have a bakery and the other half was dry goods.

WN: This was on Front Street?

SS: Front Street, yeah. Right next to where Burger King is now. And where Burger King is was the Furtado house.

WN: Furtado?

SS: Furtado, yeah. The old man Furtado was the butcher. My mother sent me down for, she didn't like meat or anything like that. It's always fish, always fish. Or if we buy hamburger, just quarter hamburger. Quarter hamburger, you get enough to mix up with onions and whatever. But she wanted fish. Fifty cents, you get good-sized fish, come home. But vegetables, and we had chickens.

WN: You folks had chickens?

SS: Yeah, lots of chickens. So eggs, we never used to buy, oh boy. (Chuckles) And rice was 100-pound [bag] for five dollars, I think, at that time.

WN: Where did you get the rice?

SS: Either from Nagasako or Tabata.

WN: Stores?

SS: Yeah. After my father died, the income was down where can't pay bills all the months. So you know, it adds up, but they gave credit. So later on in life I really patronize that [Nagasako] Store.

WN: Did they deliver or . . .

SS: They deliver, yeah. Those days, what Japanese used to call *chūmon-tori*, they come around and take order, and the next day they deliver all that. Now days you go down and get what you want. (Laughs)

WN: So you folks raised all your vegetables, you folks had your own chickens, eggs, what else did you folks, you know, have at home?

SS: That was about it I think, yeah. So you know . . .

WN: You didn't have pigs?

SS: No.

WN: So you said that you had open fire for the stove.

SS: Yeah. You get those old dry lumber and like the hardwood, that's *kiawe*, algaroba tree. Those trees, even when my father was living, I used to help where you saw 'em in three parts, three sections. Then you chop it up, then used that as a stove [fuel].

WN: What, the stove was made of like iron?

SS: No, it was made of concrete cement . . .

WN: Oh.

SS: Yeah. It had two open spaces where you can make two different things can be cooked. And that's in the house you know.

WN: Was inside the house?

SS: Yeah, we had a separate kitchen. It was a long building, and a partition there, and you had a sink and your stove there. And next side is the dining room where my father had long table and two benches across. He even made a—we call it icebox. You buy five cents ice one day and inside here, he had it all nailed with a—it wasn't a sheet iron, it was some kind of a leaded sheet, that goes in to keep the cool in.

WN: The ice went inside the box?

SS: Yeah, you put one chunk ice inside, and whatever. That was our refrigerator. (Laughs) But I guess, you know, the cooling, it's not like refrigerator you have today. You buy a block of ice, I don't know what the temperature in there would be. But we survived though.

WN: Let me turn the tape over.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay, so the kitchen was sort of separate from the house?

SS: No, it's not separate from the house, it's together with the house. It's a long building tied up to one house.

WN: What about bath?

SS: Bath was the old-style, what we call *furo*. The tub was made out of redwood. My father made with redwood. The covering below that was sheet iron and it has an opening where you burn wood, so you get hot water. Then the cold water pipe is there. The water is hot, you turn your cold water to adjust that water. You do your washing all outside.

WN: Outside the tub.

SS: Yeah, then you get in the tub and warm yourself up. My mother always used to say, "Don't get in that tub without washing yourself with soap. Rinse yourself before get in."

WN: So you folks had your own *furo*?

SS: Yeah, we had our own.

WN: You didn't have the community *furo*?

SS: No. The community *furo*, they had those steam plows—different community bathhouses—where that steam from the steam plow would heat up that water. It's a big tub between *kane* and *wahines* and really heat up all that. But I never did get into that tub even when we moved up to Waine'e, Lahaina Pump [Camp]. I built my own bathhouse. So I had the main, same type of *furo*. My brother made that. He attended vocational school after eighth grade, and then he went into carpentry. So when we moved up there, that was after I got married it was still the kind you heat up the water, and you wash outside, then you want to soak in the water, you get in.

WN: In your day, you know, you said you had a sheet metal underneath and a fire underneath that. How do you keep the floor part from getting real hot?

SS: Well, what do you mean floor part?

WN: The bottom of the *furo* is metal . . .

SS: Yeah, it's copper metal.

WN: Copper metal.

SS: Yeah.

WN: So when you step and touch the copper, it's not real hot?

SS: Oh, okay, yeah. I make with redwood, it's a strip maybe about one by two-and-a-half inches or, and then long way across, and then bottom of that you put one strip across there. Nail all the strips and then that board goes down the bottom. So when you get on you don't get on that copper [flooring].

WN: Oh.

SS: Yeah, that copper [flooring] strip would be hot. But with that wooden [strips] . . .

WN: Now where do you sit?

SS: Yeah, you sit on that wood . . .

WN: Sit on that wood?

SS: Yeah, sit on that wood there.

WN: Oh, the wood was like raised . . .

SS: Yeah, it's raised above that . . .

WN: Okay, I see. (SS laughs.) How wide was the wood, you said?

SS: Let's see, about two-and-a-half, three inches wide, but it's all in strips.

WN: Oh, okay, okay, I see.

SS: So you have space in between, maybe about an inch, inch-and-a-half space in between.

WN: Oh, I see.

SS: So you can sit down, yeah. And when the fire going you can feel that heat, yeah, good feeling.

WN: Whose job was it to tend the fire?

SS: When we moved up there, it was mostly my mother. My mother used to do that. But I used to cut up all the woods for her. She even used to cook the rice [over open fire]. She

didn't want the rice cooked on the kerosene stove. I had to make one [wood-burning stove] next to the bathhouse, where the washing sink was. I had to make a special place there. She put that, what Japanese call *kama*, yeah it's a cast-iron pot, with a wooden [lid], and she cook the rice there. She used to make it little bit over-cooked, where my oldest daughter, that two girls they still remember, after she take out the [burned] rice, what we call *koge*, they put salt on 'em, and they used to chew on that.

WN: So Front Street, you cooked open fire?

SS: Yeah, open fire.

WN: The *furo*, open fire. When you moved to Chapel Street, was that still open fire?

SS: Open fire, same thing, yeah.

WN: And then when you moved to Lahaina Pump, was what?

SS: We had the kerosene stove.

WN: What about the *furo*?

SS: Yeah, *furo* was same thing. They had community bathhouse, but I made my own so. . . .

WN: I see.

SS: My mother never did like to go to community bathhouse.

WN: Because by the time you went to Lahaina Pump, that was more a camp, yeah.

SS: Yeah, it was a camp.

WN: Whereas your other places you were kind of . . .

SS: More independent, yeah.

WN: . . . more independent, I see. So after your father died, did you folks have to move?

SS: No, you see, through the insurance coverage, she was entitled to a free home, free firewood, free medical for life. But the payment that we had from the insurance company at the time was ten dollars for each child until they reach the age of sixteen. And at that time it was four of us and my youngest sister; my mother was pregnant at that time. And that was July, she [sister] was born in January. And so in paying the ten dollars per kid, they didn't give her anything, saying that only the ones that were living. So the net amount that we were receiving was about thirty-eight or thirty-nine dollars, somewhat like that.

WN: This is from the plantation?

SS: Yeah, for the month.

WN: But they kept giving you folks housing.

SS: Mm-hmm, yeah. When we were living down in [Lahaina] town, plantation was paying that rent. It was private, then so they wanted us to move to up Lahaina Pump, so it's [owned by] Pioneer Mill. So they didn't have to pay whoever owned that property down on Chapel Street.

WN: Chapel Street was private?

SS: Yeah, private, somebody held.

WN: Plantation paid for it?

SS: Yeah, they were paid.

WN: They wanted you folks to move to company housing.

SS: Yeah, that's right. So 1935, we moved up. That was October, I think. Yeah, we stayed up there exactly twenty years before we moved here.

WN: When you moved from Lahaina Pump how would you describe the differences between living in a place like Lahaina Pump compared to Chapel Street and Front Street?

SS: One way was, see, living down in town, even at that time, people live more independently, I think. But when we move to the camp, you socialize more closely, something like even if next-door you just like family, you know. Whatever you get, you used to share; whatever they had, they used to bring. And it was real family-kind type of a place. I used to like that. I was playing basketball [living at Chapel Street]. Then when we moved up there [Lahaina Pump Camp], they put up a senior team. I still played basketball up till '38—'38 plantation senior team where we took the Plantation League champions. The Plantation League at that time consisted of Pioneer Mill, Wailuku Sugar, HC&S [Hawaiian Commercial & Sugar Company]—that was Pu'unēnē. And Pā'ia was Maui Agricultural [Company]. That time they were still separate. We took the champ '38. Commercial [League] was under Maui County and Kahului Railroad and they had two more outfits, I think. Commercial champ, Plantation champ, we played off at Wailuku gym. We came out winner. That year, we had a tournament down at 'Ewa gym, we represented Maui.

WN: Oh, this is on O'ahu?

SS: Yeah, on O'ahu.

WN: 'Ewa, O'ahu?

SS: Yeah, 'Ewa gym. It was [called] Tenney Gym. Recently I went there, I think two, three years back that gym was still there. But last year, I went there look and they said somebody burned the gym down.

WN: Oh.

SS: That Tenney Gym.

WN: I remember I played in that gym.

SS: Oh yeah?

WN: Yeah.

SS: Yeah, we played there, '38. Chinese was the good team from Honolulu. They beat us, they took the championship. Yeah, that was back in '38.

WN: So in '35 when you move to Waine'e, Lahaina Pump, were your neighbors more Japanese?

SS: Yeah, just about all Japanese.

WN: As opposed to when you were growing up in town, your friends and neighbors were Hawaiian.

SS: Yeah, more Hawaiians. They had some Japanese, too. Yeah, the one in town, Businessmen's League, Nobu Matsuda coached that team. And three years, we took championship. There was another team from Keawe called the Monte Carlo, we were called the Boyfriends. Three years, they couldn't beat us. Yeah, and this Keawe team, that's Sueto's brother . . .

WN: Oh, Hayashida?

SS: Yeah, the older brother. He was one knuckle-head guy, but he was a good player and he ran the team. But three years, they couldn't beat us. And one of the guys that was playing on the team, two years ago he died, we used to call him "Jiggs." He used to come here every Friday. He used to take two cans beer, we used to *talk story*, talk of the old days. He used to tell me, he say, "You know, Peanut, when you guys beat us we walk home and whole way George grumbling how we can't beat this Boyfriends' team."

(Laughter)

Yeah. This Jiggs was a good player, too. He was one of the forwards for Monte Carlo team. "Somehow," he said, "you guys."

"Yeah we were just a little bit faster than you guys."

And you know, many times I think back, boy, we didn't practice plays or anything, just automatic how we used to maneuver. This one guy I talked to you about, we used to call him "Tamago." Yeah, he is a year older than I am. He is in LA, he's in a home now from what my brother told me. He was a guy that—those days, you know, after you made basket, you come to center and you free-toss the ball [i.e., jumpball]. And every play we won toss up.

WN: So when you moved to Lahaina Pump, you got more involved with the plantation-kind recreation, basketball, things like that?

SS: Yeah, after that '38, I quit, I hang up, and then that's when I went into baseball. That's when I worked up at the Kahoma Shaft [Pump] for Pioneer Mill. I was working daytime until the guy who was operating night was transferred to a job checking the water meters and all that. And so they put me night shift, operate the steam plow.

WN: Before we get into your plantation, I just wanted to ask you about school, what school was like. First, you went to Kam III School . . .

SS: Yeah, Kam III School.

WN: How was that?

SS: You want me to go from first grade? I was in Mrs. Mookini's class. Second grade I was in Mrs. Freitas's class. Third grade, I was in Mr. Oliver's class. Fourth grade I was in Miss Martinson's class. Fifth grade was Miss Lily Apo. Later on, she became Mrs. Almeida. That's when I was kind of *kolohe* kind of guy. I used to get beating from her where, "Susumu, take out your hand now," and with the ruler she, edgewise (slapping sound), ho, that thing sting.

WN: Right on the palm. What kind of things did you do to get beaten like that?

SS: (Chuckles) *Kolohe* time, wind his hair with string, tie down to the bench. Then he'll get up, yahoo!

WN: You were sitting behind him?

SS: Yeah. (Laughs) Maybe, that was one reason why, eh, fifth grade. Sixth grade I was with Miss Kwok, Korean teacher, later she became Mrs. Tagawa. And seventh grade I got a little more serious in my lessons. Miss Seong, I was 7-B, and half the school year, she said, "You don't belong here, you go into 7-A." And I went into Mr. Leong's class, and this teacher liked guys who stand up in class and recite poems and all that. And even for assembly. I think he wanted to test me out on one, was it "In Flander's Field"? Friday assembly—Thursday night, he said, "Susumu, I want you to memorize all this and get up at assembly, and no books, you gotta remember all this. Will that be a problem for you?"

"I don't think so." Yeah, I went through all that night. Next day, I go all through. He shook my hand. He thought I wasn't able to do it, you know. And many years after that I think to myself, how come I can remember so much things at that time and today I can't remember, I forget, you know. I think brain really go down the hill that fast. I mean even to myself, I felt amazed, you know, how I can remember things, you know. But. . . .

WN: What was your favorite subject in school? What did you like the best?

SS: More studying of different countries. Even eighth grade, I *kolohe*, too, but I know the teacher really commended me on, I gave a report studying about South Africa, the Kimberley Diamond Mines. Read all about that and made a report from that. She said she learned something about diamonds from my report, you know. I like read all about different countries, that's why I subscribe this [*National Geographic*. Those things, for me, good fun, I like that. But one year high school, and my mother tell me, "You got to work because no more income."

WN: Did you go Japanese[-language] school?

SS: Yeah, I did. But Japanese was only one hour a day, you know. After public school, you go school one hour a day. Amazing thing, even Japanese, like *kana* and then the other *kana* like, I remember all, even today. But the *kanji*, the character words, the easy kind I remember, but some words hard. That's why I watch Japanese show, and like "Soko Ga [Shiritai]," they put on Japanese word, and I look the word and I wonder, I try to go next line, *pau*, I forgot. Kind of, you get all frustrated, you think what the hell, what is wrong, you know, but I guess that's old age, yeah.

WN: Were you *kolohe* in Japanese school, too?

SS: No, not that bad. I remember that Kurakake, he was a strict, strict teacher.

WN: What did you enjoy more, did you enjoy public school or Japanese school?

SS: Public school more, I think, yeah.

WN: So then you went to Lahainaluna [School] for one year, ninth grade, yeah?

SS: Yeah 1930—1931. See, I was living down Chapel Street, I walk all the way up [to Lahainaluna]. Took me about forty-five minutes, I think, go up. The first thing I do is go up, study. The first period I had was study hall, so.

WN: So by the time you're going high school, did you have an idea of what you're going be or what you wanted to do?

SS: No, not exactly though. I like travel, but no more money. (Laughs) So I was thinking, oh, the best bet was follow up with my father's footsteps, be one carpenter, I think. Be finish carpenter, working into trade. Then . . .

WN: Did you want to graduate from Lahainaluna?

SS: Yeah, I did want to, but my mother was hardheaded and won't give in. I used to tell her, "You can borrow the money and make me finish school." No. But I had opportunity to finish up. Even after I got married, I wanted to get the high school diploma. My wife graduated at Kam[ehameha] School, she was Hawaiian, like I told you. So I told her early part—they hold our classes up in Wailuku, Kahului, or somewhere—and I wanted to attend school. But she don't want me to get out nighttime, I think, you know. We argue on that though, but finally I gave in. That's how I gave up everything.

And at another point earlier, I wrote to ICS [International Correspondence Schools], and I took some lessons and tests, and all that. And then I was going to continue to finish up high school through that correspondence course. But I was so involved in basketball, so I quit. They had a guy from that school come over and he came talk to me. He said, "You making good grades, Sodetani, continue." But basketball was in my head number one. So I didn't continue. Well, that was all my fault. But later on, I felt, I could have, I should have. That was all.

WN: So you finished ninth grade.

SS: Yeah, I finished ninth grade.

WN: And that's when your mother said that you had to quit school and go work?

SS: Yeah, I had to quit, yeah.

WN: Did you argue at all?

SS: Yeah, I argued with her, but no can win my mother.

WN: Plus, you were the oldest, yeah?

SS: Yeah, I was the oldest. So you know, it made me think, too, you know, what she said. She had a point there, but she was not considering anything about my future. She was a gambler. She played that Japanese cards, and she play whole night sometimes. And she was asthmatic. I know, our younger times, my sister and I had to go down and get the Dr. Tofukuji, who used to come up. And I think to relieve the breathing, they gave some kind hypo and right away. But prior to that I can see she suffering. She get hard time breathing, but after giving that hypo she just sound off and go to sleep. I used to tell her that it was her own fault staying up night and playing cards. But, you know, Japanese, first generation, they don't want your kids to talk back to them. I used to say some things, but a lot of stuff I used to shut up.

WN: Well, your father had died by then yeah?

SS: Yeah, he was gone already.

WN: The oldest son, must have been rough, huh?

SS: Yeah, it was rough, really, because you know. . . . You want me to go into when I started work, Pioneer Mill, no?

WN: I have one more question, did your mother work at all?

SS: No, she didn't.

WN: For money, I mean.

SS: No, she didn't because healthwise she was a weak woman, I think. That's why, even in her younger days, I don't think she attended school too much. Maybe that was a reason why she didn't think much of education. I mean, I'm coming to my own conclusions, thinking along that line. This is all hindsight thinking.

WN: Okay, so 1931, age fifteen, your mother tells you you have to quit school and go to work.

SS: Yeah.

WN: What did you do?

SS: I worked for Pioneer Mill Company as a rodman in the civil engineering department.

WN: How did you get the job?

SS: I applied for Pioneer Mill work, and then they, I guess, check up my age and whatever and felt that maybe that job would suit me fine. They placed me at that time in the engineering department. Surveyors were James Greig and Tateishi. Tateishi, he was a surveyor from Japan, first generation, and Thomas Yamada. Yeah, those three were the surveyors. Rodman, I started up there like—guy in the home up in LA now. He went through high school, the one we used to call "Tamago." He was in the survey department, too. And another guy, Miyabara, we were all rodmen. Go out, they take the acreage, hold up the rod, sixteen-, eighteen-feet rod. Way back, they used to plow the field and lines coming down the planted cane in short different rows. But then when we were [working], they changed the system where the cane was planted in long lines. So most of that job went to this Thomas Yamada, I think. With the level, we hold at fifty feet to give the required number of inches. Oh that surveyor go by tenths. But when came to one foot, it's

the same size, yeah one-tenth. So many tenths, so many fifty-feet drops. We hold the rod, then he read up or down, move, put in the pin there, go down. Work at that, and then after we come back, they go in the office. We go down to the pin shop, it's a two-story building. Upstairs, the guy do the printing, blueprint, or whiteprint, or whatever. We stay down below and we cut out the pins that we go out and survey, put out the pins.

WN: The pins?

SS: Yeah pins, we shape out of lumber.

WN: So you're actually laying out the field?

SS: Yeah, when they plant, you move, they give the drop, how much you go down so much, okay, put your pin. You go another fifty feet, so they know how the water flow each fifty feet, how much flow you get going down.

WN: How much did you get paid for that job, first job?

SS: Ninety cents one day.

WN: Is that same as what the men were making or . . .

SS: No, the men make, I think, dollar quarter or maybe, some, two dollars.

WN: But you had a *bangō* and everything?

SS: Yeah. You want my number?

WN: Yeah.

SS: Fifteen twenty-one [1521], that was my number.

WN: Was that your number all the way through?

SS: Yeah, through plantation.

WN: You retired in 1978, you had the same *bangō*?

SS: Yeah, same *bangō*, 1521. But . . .

WN: So even when you left during war to go Honolulu, and you came back, you had the same *bangō*?

SS: Yeah, same *bangō*.

WN: Oh.

SS: They gave me the same *bangō*. My *bangō* in Red Hill was 14071.

WN: Fourteen zero seven one.

SS: So I must have been the 14,071 guy at Red Hill hired.

WN: Wow.

SS: Wow, you know, yeah, that was a navy job down there in . . .

WN: I'll talk to you about that later. But okay, ninety cents a day, and where did your paycheck go, or where did your money go? To your mother?

SS: To my mother. You work twenty-five days a month, sometimes twenty-two, twenty-three dollars, or something like that. 'Cause twenty days, same thing, eighteen dollars, right? Then you work twenty-five days a month, and that paycheck all go to my mother. And at that time she used to give me maybe three dollars. For the month now, this is all cash money in here.

WN: So how long were you rodman?

SS: Maybe one, two years I think, and then they sent me to construction. That's when I mentioned to you they [Pioneer Mill Company] purchased Olowalu Plantation. And then going out there and put up all the stone walls on the side of the reservoirs, which they used the water for irrigation. And those were all cut stone. And in between spaces, you put cement in there to hold the water in the reservoir. And I did operate the cement mixer, they wanted me to operate that. They gave me more pay on that, about two dollars fifty cents [\$2.50] or something, making all those concrete ditches, slope it.

WN: So it would be two fifty a day?

SS: Yeah, two fifty a day that was, yeah. I think that's why my [annual] income come to three hundred-something dollars pay, I think. It wasn't steady work. Maybe a few months you work that kind of job, then you back and you get. *Chee*, that was '32, '33, '34, '35. Yeah, construction work outside, then . . .

WN: So this was when the Pioneer Mill took over or bought out Olowalu Plantation . . .

SS: Yeah.

WN: . . . so they had a lot of work.

SS: Yeah, work out there, I think.

WN: I see.

SS: I think even at that time, the railroad was extended all the way out to Ukumehame, I think. Those days, even hauling down the cane was all through railroad. Thirty-seven or '38 [1937], they had a Filipino strike, you know, and that's when we were sent out to work in the field. Yeah, I remember, what you call *hāpai kō*. You know, they had those cane cars where the two sides, hinges, can be dropped down. And then you roll up the cane up to certain level, then you close the side, then you get a plank. And then, it's a two-by-eight [foot] plank, I think, with strips in this so you get a grip on 'em. And then we grabbed that cane on your shoulder, walk up [the plank] there, and dump it in [the cane car]. Yeah, those were all the field workers. And during the strike, the Filipinos all went on strike. So then, guys like us, some go out after they burn cane. They cut cane, they pile up. Then the other group come get the cane, load on this [cane car].

WN: So you carry the cane on your shoulder . . .

SS: Yeah, on your shoulder.

WN: Then you walk up the plank . . .

SS: Plank.

WN: . . . and dump it into the cars.

SS: Yeah, dump it into the car.

WN: How did you like that work?

SS: It's hard work. Yeah, I'm telling you, it's hard work. But you know, you young so, you're in the twenties, you know. At that time I thought, this isn't for me. But, I figured, oh, maybe we here just because of the strike. Maybe after the strike, you know, we go back to our jobs or something.

WN: Is that what happened?

SS: Then that's what happened. The strike didn't last too long because, I mean, at that time, you don't think about you being a scab or strikebreaker or anything like that. No knowledge of that sort of thing. Until we got involved in '46.

WN: So the '37 strike, you remember [seeing] like picketing or anything like that, for '37?

SS: No, I don't remember because I think the Filipinos, they had some, you know, some protesting. But I don't know, my feeling at that time was, I not doing anything wrong. I don't know why, you know.

WN: You didn't have any understanding . . .

SS: Yeah, yeah, I didn't understand . . .

WN: . . . of strike . . .

SS: Yeah, I didn't understand. Later on in life, I realize, yeah, what we did was wrong.

WN: (Chuckles) You folks were scabs.

SS: Yeah, we didn't realize—I don't think the others realized, too, you know, yeah. It wasn't too long, you know, I'm not sure, I know, '37 or '38, I'm not sure what year.

WN: Yeah, I think it was '37. [In April, 1937, several hundred members of the Filipino organization, Vibora Luviminda, staged on Maui what was to become Hawaii's last racial strike.]

WN: We can take a short break?

SS: Yeah.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 39-13-1-03; SIDE ONE

WN: Okay, so after you worked the carpentry, you told me that you became a steam-plow operator.

SS: Steam plow, yeah.

WN: How did you learn how to operate a steam plow?

SS: Good question. (WN laughs.) The blacksmith up there, he operated the steam plow. So he called me up, and he told me how to make the fire, check your water in there. Always number one, see that you have enough water. When you ignite that fire, you have steam, you light your cord with kerosene or whatever, throw in little of that crude oil, and then the adjustment of the steam. So once that fire start get going, then, see, if you got black smoke coming up, that's when you burning too much oil. Cut down on your oil. Then if you make the adjust right you get light smoke come up, you get good fire. And see that you get enough water all the time. Without water, (claps his hands) bang. That was important.

WN: So how often you had to add water?

SS: It depends. Once you boil out to about 150-pounds pressure, without burning, you got enough steam to lower the bucket or bring up the bucket. That was important because that steam plow was there only for that. The intent was, in place of the elevator, they never have elevator at that time, so you know. So many times, I turn 'em off, I know I got enough for three hours. I check my time before going up and start a fire again.

WN: So where was the buckets of water? You had to go to a certain place?

SS: No, when I say "bucket," it's a hind bucket, about three feet tall, maybe about two-and-a-half feet in diameter. We got a hook. And one-inch cable going up to the tower, they have sheave there, and then run all the way out to the steam plow.

WN: Where was this tower? In front of the mill?

SS: Yeah. The tower, it's a wooden tower maybe about ten-by-ten or twelve-by-twelve, four posts, build up in a angle up there. The shaft going down, it's like I said, 325 feet down. Halfway of that hole there going down is with beams all the way across down. I think that was put there so when they put in the elevator, they work on that. But as of that time when I was working with the steam plow, you get two guide cables, so it doesn't spin around. And man get on that bucket and then give you signal. Three beeps you go down, one beep you stop, two beeps you come up.

What I work on is the paint that is painted on that cable there. While coming up, you get a warning paint, you nearing where you gotta stop, so you cut down on your throttle. The engine is same like any of the locomotors run, even continental U.S.A., or anyplace. It's a steam engine I'm talking about. You get leverage where, you throwing in the front, you use your throttle. And the throttle don't work like gasoline accelerator. You need to get the feel. If you open too much, you won't go at all, and so you gotta release that steam. That's why you see train sometimes, shraaaaaa, you know.

WN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SS: You gotta adjust. If you get it one time (clap his hands), you jack. You need the little touch over there, yeah. But short time, you get over all those things, and you know how to handle. Yeah, I work, just about, that's twelve-hour nights. You go up there five [PM], you come home five in the morning.

WN: Oh, yeah?

SS: Yeah.

WN: Night shift?

SS: Night shift.

WN: And then steam plow means that you are plowing the field?

SS: Well, that was way back in the twenties.

WN: Yeah.

SS: Yeah, before tractor came in. See, they had one steam plow, one side of the field. Another steam plow on the other side of the field. And what they called a plow, it's a four-wheel thing with the plow digging. But the cable of the steam plow is hankered to one end of the plow and the other steam plow, one end of that other plow. So when that plow is pulling to one side of the field, then you give the signal, then the other side start pulling that plow. So it goes back and forth that way and two steam plow moved out. That's why . . .

WN: That's not really a plow on the machine then?

SS: No, no.

WN: Oh, okay.

SS: Yeah, plow is a separate thing. This was how they used to plow all the cane fields before tractor came into play.

WN: So that's what you were doing?

SS: No, no, I didn't work on that. Those were in play, I think, during the 1900s.

WN: Oh, okay. What did you operate then?

SS: The steam plow?

WN: Yeah.

SS: Well, that's the one on the hillside at Kahoma. In place of the elevator, see. They didn't have elevators, so they steam plow you lower and bring up the men that work there. Yeah. At the bottom of that 335-feet shaft, they had two big rooms. And each of the rooms, they have pump installed, big pumps, that pump up the water. And nighttime it goes into the reservoir. Daytime it flows in the ditch and irrigate different parts of the field. The only time the pumps were stopped, when they have lot of rain, then they stop the pump.

WN: Oh, so you actually ran the steam, what did you call it?

SS: Yeah, I call 'em "steam plow," but actually it's a steam engine that, yeah.

WN: Oh, that's why I got mixed up.

SS: Oh, yeah.

WN: Oh, you call it steam plow but it was actually more of a . . .

SS: Steam engine.

WN: . . . steam engine, to pump water?

SS: No, it's to lower and bring up the men from the pump down the shaft.

WN: Shaft. Oh, I see, I see. And what were they doing by this shaft?

SS: You mean, the men that I lower down?

WN: The men.

SS: They watch the pump, but actually once it runs, you know, you don't need manpower down there. But I guess, maybe lubricate. And then they see how everything running, then they come up instead of staying down there. Later on when they put in the elevator, I think it's all automated, so from the top, I think, they operate that.

Yeah, I went there about three months back. I got a truck and told my son to drive the truck, we go up to that place. And my daughter wanted to come along. So we went up and look at that shaft, it was all just like a forest. And of course, the tower there, it's all locked up. But I know the pump run because you can hear the noise. I think it's all automated so they control from on top.

WN: So that was actually like a water pump?

SS: Yeah, it's a water pump to irrigate the fields. Because nighttime, water goes to the reservoir, and then daytime it pumps out. Thirty-seven, '38, '39, '40. Forty, I went Honolulu.

WN: Went Honolulu. So you were doing the steam engine all the way until '40?

SS: Yeah, '40.

WN: Okay.

SS: After Honolulu, you want to come back?

WN: You know what? Why don't we stop here.

SS: Oh okay.

WN: Next time, go to Honolulu . . .

SS: Yeah.

WN: ... and then the rest of your Pioneer Mill.

SS: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape Nos. 39-17-2-03 and 39-18-2-03

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Susumu "Peanut" Sodetani (SS)

Lahaina, Maui

February 5, 2003

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Susumu Sodetani for the Pioneer Mill oral history project on February 5, 2003, and we're at his home in Lahaina, Maui. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

You moved from Lahaina to Honolulu [during] World War II. But before that, I wanted to ask you, you told me that you played paddle tennis . . .

SS: That's right.

WN: . . . in Lahaina.

SS: Uh-huh.

WN: Yeah. And that's eventually how you met your wife?

SS: That's right.

WN: Let me ask you that then. You know, tell me about it, tell me the story.

SS: Well, before going into that, paddle tennis got to be like tennis sport over here. Oh I had a good number of—I think about fourteen, sixteen young ones, all range, teenagers. Well, for one thing, because we can't afford to buy rackets (laughs) we made the rackets in a shape of a tennis racket. Alexander House Settlement got around and heard about this kind of program going on. So they coordinated the program where they had a group playing in Wailuku and a group playing here in Lahaina, going through the elimination series where the top player in the singles will be declared the champion. And then they'll have a doubles team. They'll play all by the tennis rules, and going to the finals, and they would be declared champions. I happened to get into the finals with this Tamago Yamamoto, who was our center on the basketball team, and I lost to him. But in the doubles, we partnered and he and I took the championship in Lahaina. So he was a single's champion and he and I were the doubles's champion. Then going over to Wailuku to play in the championship for Maui we had no transportation. Mr. Geiger, the Kam[ehameha] III School's principal, offered to drive us over and he also umpired the game over there. So in playing the double's tournament, we beat the Wailuku team which was Angel Lee and Kats Hanada. Then Kats Hanada and my partner, Tamago Yamamoto, played in the singles, and Kats won. So Wailuku took the singles and we

took the doubles. And yeah, we were given medals for that. I don't know where the medals went.

WN: How old were you at this time?

SS: I probably was sixteen or seventeen, I am not sure.

WN: It's about 1933, then?

SS: Yeah, '33, I think.

WN: You told me that it's paddle tennis.

SS: That's right.

WN: Why is it called "paddle tennis"?

SS: Well, I guess it's a shape of a canoe paddle or . . .

(Laughter)

That's what we used to call, paddle . . .

WN: You didn't use regular tennis rackets?

SS: No, I never did. I mean, well, like I say we couldn't afford one so—we tried though, but there is a difference. When you playing with a racket, that ball goes faster. Paddle tennis, the ball's dead, more dead, but then we used to drive, slice, drop shots, all kind shots.

WN: So you folks couldn't afford tennis rackets?

SS: Yeah, yeah.

WN: You made your own, out of what?

SS: The paddle?

WN: Yeah.

SS: White pine and redwood. We used to go up to the Pioneer Mill, carpenter shop. And when the bosses not around, we get what we want.

(Laughter)

WN: You got lumber from the carpenter shop?

SS: Yeah (laughs).

WN: And you told me that you folks actually played [against] people that had real tennis rackets.

SS: Yeah. Those days, all guys from more in the higher classes. They wear all white shirt, white pants, white shoes, that was the outfit.

WN: What did you folks wear?

(Laughter)

SS: We wear jeans and barefooted. Yeah. I mean—and it's just that one or two years and that thing died out.

WN: And where did you folks play?

SS: Regular tennis court.

WN: Down right here?

SS: Yeah, down in town right across the armory. There's no armory now. Then, of course, my wife's family, my father-in-law—I mean he wasn't my father-in-law yet—he was a minister for the—they called it Waine'e Church at that time. Later they changed the name to Waiola. At that time we called it congregational but today my daughter was telling me it's under the United Church of Christ, or something like that. And my wife used to come down with a tennis racket. Going over there we used to play, but she never did beat me.

(Laughter)

WN: Now, she's a Lahaina girl?

SS: No, she was born in Wailuku, too.

WN: Oh.

SS: She was born in Wailuku and her family, she was the one that was outside of home most of the time, I think. She was out at the—now it's Mauna'olu.

WN: Mauna'olu Seminary?

SS: Yeah.

WN: Oh, yeah.

SS: And she room and board up there up till seventh grade. And in her seventh grade—or six grade or seventh grade, I'm not sure what she told me—then she goes on to Honolulu in Kamehameha School. She boarded down there.

WN: I see.

SS: Kamehameha School for Girls. The dormitory was down in town. I think down Kalihi area they had dormitory, before the dormitories up at Kapālama Heights was built up.

WN: Right, right.

SS: Yeah, then later on, she moved up there.

WN: Was it across [King] Street from Farrington High School?

SS: Yeah, right across the street, yeah. Every now and then we used to go and she used to point out, "That's my dormitory."

WN: And she was what class of Kamehameha Schools?

SS: Thirty-four.

WN: Nineteen thirty-four?

SS: Yeah.

WN: How did you folks meet?

SS: Like I said, she comes down with the racket, you know, her house is right across the ballpark. She used to come down and I used to go down. And then I used to ask her if she wanted a game.

"You playing with that paddle against my tennis racket?"

"Yes."

(Laughter)

But like I said, she never did beat me. You know, at that age, man, I can just run and run back and forth and give all those shots which—well like today you watch the women play. But at that time they're more Hawaiian-style, no more that whip in their ball. But today, yeah.

WN: So you folks played against each other, challenged each other?

SS: Yeah. Then gradually, you know those days, weekend, they have public dances down the armory. And then at that time was . . .

WN: This is Wailuku?

SS: No.

WN: Oh here?

SS: In Lahaina, yeah. Because the family moved here in—I think they moved in '32.

WN: I see.

SS: So from then on '33—yeah I went pretty steady with her. Thirty-two, '33, '34. Thirty-four, she graduated and she came back here [Lahaina]. Then we used to date more often.

WN: So you were out of school, too, by then?

SS: Yeah, because I was out of school in '30, '31, only one year of Lahainaluna. Then I was working for Pioneer.

WN: Right. So you folks went to dances at the armory?

SS: Yeah.

WN: Where else did you folks go?

SS: Well, mostly tennis court, armory, basketball court, yeah. When she come down the court, she just used to watch me play (laughs). I was skinny at that time, sixteen. She was a big woman. But somehow, like I said, maybe I liked to be mothered, I think (laughs).

WN: You said she was older than you were?

SS: Yeah, she was older.

WN: Two years?

SS: Yeah.

WN: Now I'm wondering, you know, in those days was it common, to have intermarriage between Japanese and Hawaiian?

SS: No. You know, going into my life in that, especially Japanese, see, my uncle, when he heard that I got married to this Hawaiian girl, he came over and he said, "*En o kiro*," like cut off all ties with his family. I didn't say anything, but my mother just bow her head down. Then, that was it. So, number of years, I stayed away from that family and . . .

WN: From which family? From your father's side?

SS: Yeah. In Lahaina, I think had only about five families intermarriage. The first-generation Japanese was really against, marrying outside race. And at that time was Norman Oda. Of course, they married before me and he married Mary Chan-Wa. My wife's sister was married to a Japanese, Masuda. They got married a year ahead of us, '34, I think. And then Shige Nishimura, he was married to Martinson's girl, that's Norwegian-Hawaiian. And his brother, Kiyoshi, was married to a Chinese. Yeah, there was only about five at that time. But, the other Japanese families just like they look down upon you, you know. And although realizing all those things, even at one point my mother used to tell me to get a divorce and all that. And I said "No, I love her, I married her, and I'm not going divorce."

WN: Did you think at the time that you would be confronted with all of these problems when you decided to marry her?

SS: No, I didn't think, you know. I thought, to me, the hell with all these guys, you know. So, that kind of a beating, only I know. You can talk about it and, you know. But later on in life, I look back, just about every one of those Japanese families, they had somebody marrying outside race. I guess today it doesn't mean nothing, but at that time, yeah, you know.

WN: So you more or less stayed away from your father's family side?

SS: Yeah, at that time. My uncle's point was, see, Japanese they have that *kōseki tōhon*. It's a family record. And then my father had one, and it dates back, oh, I don't know, they told me it goes back over 300 years. But the one we had, I know, went back to my great-grandfather. Because I was looking at it—I don't know too much Japanese—but I was looking at it and I see "Matsumoto." And then it changed to "Sodetani." I ask my mother

why the change over there and she said, "Originally Sodetani was Matsumoto, but that great-grandfather, what Japanese call *yōshi* like . . .

WN: *Yōshi*, yeah.

SS: Yeah, you know, if a *wahine*'s family that had no boys, then you marry into that family.

WN: Right. [The male takes the wife's surname.]

SS: Yeah, that's what happened to my great-grandfather. Married, then he carried the Sodetani name, then the next one, my grandfather, became Sodetani, so you know that's how it was. And he didn't want Kaumeheiwa come inside here, you know, it's strictly all Japanese. Well, in a way, you know, I can understand his point. But for me, you know, the thinking is different and I just can't see why he can't understand, but that was it. I guess it's something like today like I get sometime problems with my kids and when they were growing up and I think, "Ah them, what the hell, can't they see what I am trying to point out," you know.

(Laughter)

Then I think back, yeah maybe I was like too, you know. (WN laughs.) So I start, I give little more room and let them do what they like, but I try to put a stop some place, you know.

WN: Right. So your relations with your uncle, was it strained all the way until he died?

SS: No until, I think his, I don't know, eighty-fifth year or something where he gave a party and then he came over and ask me to attend the party. But I hardhead, I didn't want to go. I told 'em I not going. Then she told me that in situation like this you have to go, that's your uncle, that's your blood, that's your father's brother, you know. And so I attended. Even his last few days, he had cancer and I think he died, he reach eighty-nine. He was laid up in the house. I saw him several times when I went up there.

WN: And what about your mother? Did she eventually get over this?

SS: Eventually, yeah, but man, she was real die-hard Japan, I tell you. And I used to tell her, "You know, before I leave this house, how you folks going to survive? You don't have any income coming, you know." Although my income was small, still we had food every day, we ate three meals a day, you know. And sometimes she cool down. My wife really took a beating from her, but she [wife] was a real Christian, she never did complain, you know. And then sometimes I tell her, "You know, why don't you open up, you know?" She never say anything bad about anybody. And to tell you truthfully, she ready to kill my mom, you know. I was thinking, I should tell my kids, I said, "You no see Hawaiian take care of Japanese mother-in-law like that, you know." But yeah, she was one saint. That's why it took me a long time to get over. I still can't get over, you know. Funny, yeah?

WN: Get over the whole experience . . .

SS: Yeah, yeah.

WN: . . . of your parents.

SS: But . . .

WN: What was your wedding like?

SS: Wedding? Good question. My father-in-law performed the wedding. I had one guy as witness for me. His name was Mac Yamauchi. He was top athlete, whatever.

WN: Top union man, big union man . . .

SS: Yeah, he was. My wife's witness was her sister, the one married to Masuda the year before. Yeah, that's it. Got married in my father's home in the parlor.

WN: Your father's home?

SS: No, not my—my father-in-law's home.

WN: Father-in-law's home.

SS: Yeah, October 10, you know, we get through, then he tells me, "Son, they have a Maui County Fair going on, why don't you take the car, and take Mary, and get out there and enjoy." That's what I did, you know.

WN: So that was your honeymoon?

SS: Yeah, county fair. (WN laughs.) My kids don't know anything, now they going know.

(Laughter)

WN: Did you go to any house or, you know, hotel or anything like that?

SS: No. I came home and I slept with her that night, yeah, at their house. Boy.

WN: From the time you folks met and were playing tennis together to the time you got married, about how long was that?

SS: About three years. We never did break apart though. You know, lot of times, even my own kids, they go for so long, they break apart, then they come together. But I guess she knew how to get along. I was more temperamental. I say things which I shouldn't say, but we got along. Yeah, we got along, we celebrated our fiftieth wedding anniversary at Flamingo Hilton. And we celebrated our sixtieth at the Nellis Air Force [Base] in Las Vegas. That was our finale, sixtieth. That was October 10. December, we went down to Gilbert, Arizona, where my number-two daughter and son-in-law live. After Christmas, the day after Christmas, she had an attack, first attack. Then she . . .

WN: What year was this? What year, December 26?

SS: December of 1995, yeah. The day after Christmas and then drove her down to Guadalupe, they had a clinic there. Then they check her up and right away they said she had heart attack. Get a ambulance, they took her down to Phoenix Memorial [Hospital]. My son-in-law and I drove after the ambulance went down, then check her all up. (Pause) I forgot that doctor's name, he said, "We can't perform surgery because she is too weak."

I said "Well, what's the alternative?"

He said "Medication, rest."

"That's all?" That's all he can do.

So she was in ICS for about five, six days, then down in the ward for about ten, twelve days. Then she said she want to come home here. And I saw a Chinese doctor and asked him, cardiologist, whether it be okay. And she check her up and said, "Yeah, you can bring her home."

So was February. Prior to that she was going rehab and then February 11 or 12, I think, finally got her on a plane and came home. Came home here and she hug me and kiss me like we were young. She was so happy. Eleven, twelve days, and then (snaps his fingers) gone.

WN: Well, it's good that you were able to get her home.

SS: Yeah. I think she knew. I guess she knew she's not going to be any better. Yeah, because coming home, eleven, twelve days and then she was gone.

WN: Well, you know, you got her home, that's what she wanted to do.

SS: Yeah, yeah.

WN: She showed how happy she was.

SS: Yeah, she was happy.

WN: So this happened right after your sixtieth anniversary in . . .

SS: Sixtieth yeah.

WN: . . . Las Vegas, yeah?

SS: Sixtieth, yeah, because the sixtieth was '95. We got married '35 so . . . Then she had an attack '95 Christmas. In ninety-six, at the Phoenix Memorial, and going through rehab there then, one month, February 11 or 12. I guess even going through rehab I used to take her down to the clinic, walking all through different exercises. I used to tell her, "Hey, Mama, you got to get well, Hawaiians don't die." But, ah, she had a good life. March 6, she would have made eighty-two. I don't know what I am doing, I'm eighty-seven.
(Laughs)

WN: You still look good.

SS: Ah I don't know, by god. Every year I tell them, "After eighty," I say, "Oh this year I going, this year I going, this year I going." Well, I guess you don't go until the man up there says come on (laughs).

WN: That's so, yeah.

SS: Yeah.

WN: Well, you got married in 1935 . . .

SS: Yeah.

WN: . . . still working on the plantation.

SS: That's right.

WN: Then you got married. And then in 1940 then—you were married for five years 1940—you moved to Honolulu. Tell me that story.

SS: Well, before I left, I told my mother, "I work for two dollars a day, twenty-five days, I give you fifty dollars." I say, "I'll do the same [in Honolulu]." You have free house so you don't have to worry." That's from the plantation when my father died, you know, then she was entitled to a free house and all that. But I said, "Your living expense, your food, I'll send you money every month."

So she said okay, I get her approval. Then I got to now talk to my wife. And she was working at that time, I think, part-time down at the cannery, Baldwin Packers cannery. So I talk over with her and she said, "Oh, Honey, you can send me a little."

I say, "When you say 'little,' about how much?" I say, "I don't have job yet, I got to go down work and then I got to support myself. But would forty dollars a month be you can get?" She stayed with the father, that's why.

"Yeah." She said what she get from the cannery, and "what you send," she says, "that would be plenty."

I said, "Okay fine."

Then I told my mother, "I'll send you fifty." She said okay, so I went down work.

WN: How did you find out about the work?

SS: My cousin, that's on my mother side, he was working as a timekeeper up at Red Hill. And when I went down, I called and told him I'll stay with him for about a week or two till I find something. He saw this guy down the shop, Joe Kunane, he was a superintendent. He said he need workers at that time. So I worked down the steel shop, starting eighty cents an hour, and then right through. He say if get two hours overtime and if you don't lay off within a week on the seventh day, you get double time. Oh, I said, "That's a good deal. Yeah, I take that job." Yeah, I work right through. Then . . .

WN: This is in Red Hill?

SS: Yeah, up Red Hill, it was a steel shop, structural steel shop.

WN: This is run by what, the [U.S.] Army?

SS: No, this was a [U.S.] Navy job.

WN: Navy.

SS: Yeah, under the navy. And then there was a Japanese welder from Kohala Sugar Plantation, and I was dead bent on learning how to weld. So I asked him, you know, during lunch period, you can give me some tips and all that. I talked to the superintendent

and he said, "Yeah, go ahead use the machine, whatever," so no problem. I went down Honolulu then. On King Street had a bookstore. I buy several books on welding. It gives you the basics, but [to learn] how to do the job you got to do the work, you know. In one week time, the guy tell me, "Wow, you good." You know, learning that kind of acetylene in no time. Because my heart all in that, you know, so I guess anything, if you do that you can learn fast and I did learn fast. Then offbeat job like welding clips on, they used to assign me to do the job and all that.

And after three months they wanted a guy to go work in the tunnel. They had twenty-four-inch I-beams sticking out all anchored already. And I didn't know what that was for. But they wanted someone to burn holes, put in big shackles, so they could put cable down. Twenty-four down to the winches that later on would bring the platform up while they weld the tank. The assistant superintendent told me he saw two guys and he said they scared. They don't want to because you get one plank and then you get your acetylene torch and you got to burn a hole big enough. And he said they are afraid, they can't do it. I was welding one clips on the hitch line and then he called me one morning, "Peanut!"

"Yes, Wally." *Haole* guy, he's assistant superintendent. He told me, "I have a job for you up there, would you go?"

I said, "What I get for that?"

"I give you top pay."

"You give me top pay? Damn right I go." Top pay was \$1.65 an hour.

WN: Wow.

SS: And then you get two hours overtime, plus you get double time on the seventh day. Man, I figuring how much I making now. Take the job and that's it. "How many guys I get pulling the hose in the back?"

He said, "I give you two guys."

"Ah, one guy 'nough."

"We need two guys go."

So I went up, yeah . . .

WN: Up where? You going up to what?

SS: They have two tunnels, upper tunnel, lower tunnel. And this one, you had to go through the upper tunnel because this twenty-four inch I-beams was all embedded, anchored. Now I think, by god, I making good (chuckles) money, you know. Boy, and I try, even for myself, I really try to save and don't spend any kind way. Yeah so, my mother I send sixty dollars every month, I never missed a month. My wife, I send forty dollars a month, I never missed a month. So \$100, plus I keep myself going.

WN: Where were you living?

SS: I lived with the one that got me the job, that's the number two, his older brother. He stayed down at Citron Street, down by the old [Honolulu] Stadium, backside. I stayed with him for, oh man, maybe about half a year, maybe less, I don't know. Was only he and the wife. Then on Isenberg [Street] they had the dormitory, Mō‘ili‘ili Hongwanji dormitory right across the old Mō‘ili‘ili baseball park. Then my good friend Sharky was staying there, too. He was working Barber's Point. So I said, hey, if they have room over there? He said, "Yeah we get room." He said, "Room with Eddie Yoshimasu." I knew him from up at Ha‘ikū, you know, when I used to go in summer. And he was the one that was taking care that dorm over there. So, he said, yeah I can room with him, so I roomed with him in one corner of the room. And that's how I stayed there.

WN: Where there a lot of Maui people who did the same thing you did?

SS: No. It was only me who worked in structural steel shop, but I knew two other [Maui] guys was working up at Red Hill. They were driving the small train that goes lower tunnel. I don't know what kind stuff they used to take out, but get [train] track. And outside of the track, when they used to take out the dirt and rocks there, they had six-feet-wide conveyer belt running through. Plus they had track going inside. One was Sueto's brother, older brother.

WN: Oh yeah?

SS: Kazu, yeah. He passed away.

WN: Hayashida.

SS: Hayashida, he passed away. And then the other was Beans, Beans Ota, the one where we always used to play cowboy-Indian, like I told you. He was the only other Japanese with me at that time.

WN: Ota?

SS: Yeah Ota. He passed away, too.

WN: Well you figure, you going from two dollars—wait, how much on the plantation?

SS: Yeah, two dollars a day.

WN: Two dollars a day on the plantation.

SS: Yeah.

WN: To \$1.65 per hour . . .

SS: Yeah per hour.

WN: . . . plus the overtime and the . . .

SS: Two hours overtime every day. Plus you get double time, see. So I know for me, \$1.65 was about \$13.65 now.

WN: So you worked ten hours a day.

SS: Yeah, ten hours a day.

WN: And you worked how many days a week?

SS: Seven days a week.

WN: Seven days a week.

SS: Yeah. If you lay off one day, ah, you don't get the double time.

WN: So you work hard, huh?

SS: Yeah, I never did rest, I tell you. My cousin, the one that I usually stay with in Citron Street, every week he rest one day. And then the wife used to tell me that, you know, why don't I rest sometime. I said, "No, I need the money."

"But you're going to get sick." Surprisingly, I never did get sick. I mean, later on in life, I think back, "Ho, I was nuts boy, (WN laughs) my god." All I was thinking about, money, money, you know.

WN: So when you went to Honolulu, what were your thoughts, you know, you coming from a country place to the big city? What could you think about Honolulu?

SS: When you say what was I thinking, I thought that, hey, good to get a car around here and drive around, but I can't afford to do that. Later on, this guy used to pick me up from Kaimuki, he used to stay on 13th Avenue. I mean, how guys tie up together, it's hard to figure out because my good friend, he used to come. He used to drink. Boy, I tell you, he loves his beer and he used to drink. When we're on day shift, he takes me go out with him. And he and another guy from Kāne'ohe. Go out Kāne'ohe pick him up, then I got to stay with him because these two guys they drink. Then I take [one] home, Kāne'ohe, then I take [the other] go home up Kaimuki. I come back, I sleep. Next day, I got to get up early because I got to—that Kāne'ohe I don't pick him up because he get way, he was working machine shop, up at Red Hill machine shop. But this guy from Kaimuki, I got to go pick him up. And no matter how drunk this guy, he never did lay off, too. When I go pick him up, he is ready, then I drive, go work. I mean, I think back of all what I was doing, I think "shee, boy." (WN laughs.) And these guys they drink in the bar and maybe I'll drink at the most one 7-Up and maybe one Coke or something. And then, just listening to these guys talking. I jump in once in a while, but I never take liquor. I was the driver for them and that was only when we worked days.

WN: Yeah.

SS: And this guy, he volunteer for 442[nd Regimental Combat Team] and my friend Sharky, 442, and those two in the same battery, in the 552 artillery.

WN: Artillery, yeah?

SS: Yeah, you know, how people get together knowing each other and all that.

WN: Let me turn the tape over.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay, so can you tell me a little bit or describe that Red Hill [Underground Fuel Storage] Facility that you worked at and what they were trying to build there?

SS: Okay, the main purpose of that Red Hill project was to build underground fuel storage tanks. And that was to store diesel oil, gasoline, or some kind of other oil. And they mentioned that the finished [tanks] got to be 100 feet in diameter. And the height—I know they mentioned 240 or 250 feet, that, I'm not sure. [Each vertical storage tank is 100 feet in diameter and 250 high.] Then the structural steel plates would be welded up. See, like the bottom of the tank would be like a cone.

Then now you need a big opening to drain out whatever contents in the tank. So the [structural steel] plates to be welded were all quarter-inch thickness, quarter [inch] by four feet by ten feet. And see, like the bottom piece going to be like a cone so the edges got to be cut to an angle where even the first layer, when you make a complete circle right around, it's going to meet. And then I was put in there where in the event that some that doesn't meet, then you got to trim it off so that you make it meet. These plates are all cut up in the upper tunnel, outside of upper tunnel. And the degree of that angle are already given to the guys who were cutting those plates. It's cut by oxygen acetylene fuel and the machines are adjusted. They already had a template made out to put out so when you scribed that, that's the angle you follow.

It's all been given by this guy, I forgot his first name, the last name was Yamasaki. He's the mathematician that figured out all these stuff. He was a brains, not Joe Kunane or Wally Hooten. Those guys were the tops guys in the sense where they see that things carried out, but Yamasaki was the brains. So on the first one, he sat down and he sigh. I said, "What's the matter Yama?"

He tell me, "Ah sore head." (Laughs)

I said, "That's why you get big bucks." Yeah, he was smart man.

WN: So he was like the chief engineer or something?

SS: Yeah, he was the guy. Of course, he didn't get the title but he was the guy doing the brainy work. So, after placing all these plates inside, going up, then when you reach that top level, then from there, the other plates come around now all horizontally. Come around on ten feet, well, it wasn't a problem going right around.

WN: It started from the bottom . . .

SS: Yeah, from—coming up.

WN: You said 250 feet?

SS: Yeah, about 240, 250 feet from the bottom . . .

WN: That's twenty-five stories . . .

SS: Yeah.

WN: . . . high.

SS: About, yeah, basing on what, on nine feet per story?

WN: Yeah. Wow, and 100 feet in diameter?

SS: Hundred feet in diameter. So you can imagine you get that tank—they have a tour, you know.

WN: Yeah I'd like to go to that. See . . .

SS: Yeah, I think you can make arrangements, I don't know with who but. [The facility is operated and maintained by the U.S. Navy.] I know on my one trip, my son-in-law wanted to go see. So I tell him, "You know how to make connection?" I don't know where he made the connection, and we were supposed to go. But something came up where I had to come home and then that thing was off. So I'm sure they have . . .

WN: Where do you go in from, though?

SS: The bottom I think. I think from Pearl Harbor side you go.

WN: You go in from Pearl Harbor?

SS: Yeah. I think they have some kind track or something with a small train or whatever to ride.

WN: You go inside the tank?

SS: I think. I don't know if, I never did go inside the finished, you know, so I don't know. But after fifty years, they had a get-together, you know.

WN: Oh yeah?

SS: Yeah, up Red Hill. And my daughter, I don't know, my daughter or my son over here told me, "Hey Dad, why don't you go down?"

I tell her, I didn't care to, but then after I think, ah, I should have gone down, you know.

WN: Well, it's considered one of the engineering marvels of Hawai'i.

SS: Yeah, you know, they don't write about it, but to me that's one of the greatest engineering feats, you know. Because I don't think any other big job like that came up. [For information on the Red Hill Underground Fuel Storage Facility, see <http://www.usskawishiwi.org/Cruises/Hawaii/Red-Hill.html>.]

WN: Is it still being used, do you know?

SS: Yeah, it is being used because the fuel, I think, is being pumped and they have two lines, I think. I don't know how big the pipes are, but. Because I told you about this one engineer, when my daughter was living up Ala Aloalo [Street], he was engineer for Pearl Harbor, and his wife was a friend of my daughter. And I guess my daughter talked to her sometimes about "Red Hill, where my father worked" or something, and she probably talked to the husband. Then he was supposed to go and—must have been after forty years, I think, because he came to the house and he asked me all kind of questions, too. You know, about the tank, how they built, how they weld, and all that kind. He said for

the first time, after forty years, they're looking to inspect all the tanks and where it needs repair, and so he is going to look into all those. But before he go he heard I worked there so, he wanted to have some idea, what we used to do and all that.

In a project like that, there is so many other things to be done, you know, not just go down and make a tank like that. Cut, place, guys setting up, how to get 'em in. Even the big transformers—that was just before the war yet. [Construction of the facility began December 26, 1940.] They digging into the mountain. They had cables. Your heavy lift can go just so much. Now, that transformer weighed tons, how they going put 'em into that mountainside? So, that superintendent used to call me for all kind jobs. When he think that they need somebody he used to call me, "Hey Peanut, go with these guys," you know. So lot of stuff I seen where later on in my life I found out, yeah, it was beneficial. Because I wouldn't have any idea how the hell they did those things, you know.

WN: Now December 7, 1941, what were you doing?

SS: December 7, 1941, I just got through working graveyard shift. Where the houses are now was all parking lot. Our cars were parked up there. They cut down lot of area over there, you know, like going up to your place yeah, from Moanalua.

WN: Yeah.

SS: It was you go up, and turn in parking lot, and had a big warehouse where you supply. And our shop is down in the [Hālawa] Valley, down there. So we come up. When we came up, the skies are all, anti-aircraft, all black all around. That's when my friend, in his coupe, we going, three of us. He say, "Oh these guys, Sunday, making sure all kind racket," you know. We supposed to come back afternoon shift, that's swing shift, four to twelve. So we go all the way home, no problem. I was staying Citron Street at that time. Then jump in bed, then I heard a big bang. Then my cousin's wife say, oh, they had a fire going on. [U.S. anti-aircraft shells landed on various parts of O'ahu.] That was on McCully [Street], that drug store. Oh, maybe about three blocks away, I think. So I put on my boots and I went down, but fire. One lady's leg was blown off. Only garden hose. See, like fire engines, ambulance, were all at either Pearl Harbor, Wheeler [Field], Schofield [Barracks]. No more nothing [i.e. no emergency vehicles were available] in town. Was sad thing that day. Then radio came on, war with Japan. But we went back for our four o'clock shift, then they told us go back, go home. "You get all your pay whatever you want. We not going to cut off anything. And everybody come back and work day shift. We'll do that for one week." So one week, everybody, all the shift guys, we all came back. We work one week, day shift, then after that we go back to our routine, on our regular shifting again.

WN: The fact that you guys were Japanese, was that any problem?

SS: Yeah. We had about fourteen Japanese boys. Most of these guys were welders, they're all good welders, they're all certified. One by one, all were called off to the warehouse office, questioned, come back. I was the only one wasn't called in. I wanted to go up, you know.

(Laughter)

I went to the superintendent's office and I told 'em, "I wasn't called in." I said, "I'm Japanese."

He said, "I know."

They called down who to come in. And they never called down, so you can't go up there on your own. And I waited and, no, they didn't call me in. So I asked the other guys, "What kind questions they ask you?"

The ones that I asked, they say, "Where you born? What school you went?" And of course the last part comes where, "In the event where, you have to go, would you go and serve the United States?"

So, of course, everything was, yeah, you American citizen, you're not Japanese. I volunteered for 442[nd Regimental Combat Team]. Yeah. Three of us. And see, by coincidence, the guy I knew over here, on the last day, he step on a mine and (claps hands together) yeah. He was . . .

WN: Last day of the . . .

SS: The war, yeah, last day of the war. But, you know, during the course of working up there, one week, that smoke that was burning from the *USS Arizona*—not one week, it was almost a month I think, black smoke, right through it. That time, you know, they had MPs going around, especially on night shift, when they tell you "Halt!" you better halt. No second time. They fire, so a lot of guys got shot for nothing.

WN: Yeah?

SS: Yeah.

WN: In Honolulu you mean?

SS: Yeah, in Honolulu.

WN: Did you folks have to have some kind of special ID or anything like that?

SS: Yeah, we have on us.

WN: Badge?

SS: Yeah, badge.

WN: Was it because you were Japanese? Was it different kind badge?

SS: No, you get your picture, everybody had their picture on with their number. So I don't forget my number, 14071. I can tell you I was the fourteen thousandth seventy-one guy that they hired.

WN: You should have kept that badge.

SS: Yeah I should have, I should have. But, you know, war going on. And they carrying on athletic programs, like softball, interdepartment. We took the championship, softball. And like I told you, Joe Kaulukukui was the PR-man up there. Every now and then he used to come down and watch our softball games and all that.

WN: So when did you have time to play?

SS: During the working hours, I go.

WN: Oh (laughs).

SS: Yeah, that's why I told 'em I cannot play, see, I have family to support. And boss Joe said, "No, you get paid for that, just put in your hours."

"When I like go play softball, you going to put in my time?"

"Yeah, you put in your time."

Oh, yeah, then I go play.

(Laughter)

That's why, even baseball, when Joe came hustle up for the team. He told me, "Oh, you get paid, so," you know, then baseball going be more time put in because you got to go out practice. And then working time, you go out play, yeah. I asked him where we going play? And he said, "Well, a field that's across Honolulu Iron Works," I think. He say we play over there, then we play at Hickam, and we play at the old stadium.

WN: Honolulu Stadium?

SS: Yeah. Honolulu Stadium. When I stay down the dormitory, I used to wait for my friend Sharky. Go down old Mō‘ili‘ili Field, bat me balls, pick up balls.

WN: Now you were away from your wife from 1940 to 1943, did you ever go home?

SS: Yeah, I go home.

WN: Oh you did?

SS: Yeah. Every now and then I come home because the early part, '40, '41, I used to come home on the inter-island ship.

WN: Yeah.

SS: You know, *Hualālai* or whatever. And even at that time the booking all pack up.

WN: I bet.

SS: Yeah. Then I used to drop off at Māla Wharf from offshore. Then I'll come home about three days, then go back.

WN: And when the war started, what happened?

SS: War started, yeah, that was back in '41. I think I came back once. Other than that, I came back once on the ship, and then '42, I think '42 or '43 they had planes going, I think. Because I think couple times I land at Pu‘unēnē Airport. Forty-two. I had to come home, check my wife, she was all right (chuckles), yeah.

WN: So you were there until 1943?

SS: Yeah, forty-three.

WN: You know, you're making good money, playing baseball, getting paid for it. What made you decide to come home?

SS: My youngest brother, he volunteer for the 442. My second brother was [classified] 1-A, so you classified as the next group that would be inducted in the army, so she wanted me to come home. I don't know, I make explanation but can't seem to get her to understand. Like I say, I was an obedient damn fool, I came back [to Maui]. And worked for two dollars a day again. You know how would you feel, you making so much money, and then you come back. Of course, with the money I made down there [Red Hill] I didn't spend, I saved. I saved, I think, \$2,600. You know, after the money that I sent to my family and my expenses down there, I saved, that was our bank money, not in bonds. Oh, in bonds I had some money too, yeah. And, yeah, up to about twenty-five, twenty-six hundred I saved on my own down there.

WN: Oh really?

SS: Because I don't drink. I go out with these guys, but I don't spend money. They buy the soda for me, I don't buy nothing. And so my expenses, even down the dormitory, just what I pay for the food and the rent there, which was, I know, very little.

WN: So your mom was actually being supported by you sending money, and also your brothers living here, in Lahaina.

SS: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

WN: Were they working, too?

SS: Yeah, he was the only one, I think. I think he was working, because he went through vocational school after he graduated, that's two years out at Kahului. He learned to be a carpenter. He worked as a carpenter and, yeah, he helped.

WN: So one of them went . . .

SS: Yeah . . .

WN: . . . and the other was . . .

SS: Yeah, the young one was, '43, he was in his senior year up at Lahainaluna.

WN: I see.

SS: So, I think he got his diploma. The day they [i.e., the 442nd Regimental Combat Team] all assembled in front of 'Iolani Palace—that was in 1943, I think, I went there. I went around look for my friend Sharky, then look for my brother, and from there . . .

WN: You said you volunteered, how come you didn't get chosen?

SS: I don't know why. I never did ask why.

WN: You passed the physical?

SS: No, I didn't go. We signed up at the Washington Intermediate [School], down Pāwa'a, is that [near] Pāwa'a Theatre or something?

WN: Yeah, Pāwa'a.

SS: But for me, when I got the paper, why was because I was married then. I had two girls at that time, so.

WN: And you're oldest son, too?

SS: Yeah, I was the oldest son.

WN: I see. That's probably the reason.

SS: Yeah, that was the reason, I think.

WN: You were married, yeah?

SS: Yeah, I was married.

WN: So when you came back [from Honolulu] in 1943, you went back to [working for] Pioneer Mill?

SS: Yeah, back to Pioneer Mill.

WN: Same pay, the day you left?

SS: Yeah, two dollars one day. And the first pay I had, fifty dollars. I never even open, I just throw 'em to my mother. I was still *huhū* (laughs), you know, for come back. When I applied for work, they wanted workers at this centrifugal machines, so they put me there.

WN: This is in the mill?

SS: In the mill, yeah. And that was hard work. It's still, you called that a paddle, it's something like with hardwood. Shaped horizontally with a handle, then come down short way, and then down this way about four by twenty inches long. When the machine stop onto low grade, you have to dig into the sugar, scrape it down, then you revolve your machine, each one, as you scrape down. What you scrape down, that's raw sugar, which we call "number-two sugar." It goes down in the chute, it goes in a tank, then it's pumped upstairs into one of—they have lot of tanks up there, and different tanks hold different—like this one here, number-two sugar. The syrup come in from evaporator, different tank. The molasses from the commercial sugar goes in different tanks, it's all numbered.

WN: Commercial sugar is number one?

SS: Number one, yeah.

WN: And number-two sugar, what did they do with that?

SS: They make it into number-one sugar, after you scrape out. So the molasses from the number-two sugar that you scrape out, that goes in a tank and shipped out for cattle or whatever.

WN: Oh okay. So that's like lesser grade?

SS: Yeah, that's sugar from that just about gone, I think, yeah.

WN: So what's left in the centrifugal? You mean, the stalks or what's left inside, you know, what are you scrapping off?

SS: The sugar. You see, they have a tank, you can call it a tank. It's maybe two, two-and-a-half feet in diameter, and it's a tank. Long one run right above the centrifugal machines. Each one have a chute coming down. So . . .

WN: How many are there?

SS: At that time, maybe about eight I think, low grade. In the commercial, two, four, six, yeah. See, the sugar flows into centrifugal machines going around. Then just as it reaches full, you shut off, then it runs for x number of cycles, you stop, then you start digging through that. And all what you digging to drop into a flume down below. From that tank the pump pumps into the upper tank. Yeah, I work there, oh, maybe seven or eight months I think. That was hard work.

Then they put me to, what you call an oiler. Oiler is to maintain the vacuum pumps. Like when you boil anything you need fire to boil. When you boil sugar, you can't make fire down so you get the vacuum pumps go all day. And that vacuum suck whatever contents you get in there and then it boils. The cullender is one big hole in the center and then [from] the sides, tubes come inside. And outside of the tube they have all steam, steam to heat up. Even the commercial sugar you get number one and number two.

WN: That's like the lowest grade?

SS: No. For the commercial, like I said, number one and number two.

WN: Yeah.

SS: That grade would only be for the commercial sugar.

WN: That's the one they ship to the refinery?

SS: That's the one they ship, yeah.

WN: But the syrup you're talking about, that's the one for the cattle and so forth?

SS: No, that's not syrup, that's the molasses. But molasses form the number-two machine sugar. They call it low-grade sugar. That's the molasses that comes out from a centrifugal machine, they ship 'em out, put in a tank, and go to the cattle. I think they made candies or something, too.

WN: So that's what you do as an oiler.

SS: No, oiler is maintain the vacuum pumps, the crystallizers, see that they have enough oil at all times. And then the vacuum pumps, it's cooled by water so you check up all the time. See how much water going into it, then make adjustments. And then the oils is where you have the arms going, so it's, automatically, the oil drop down little by little. So if the contents get low, you fill 'em up. You check up all that. Yeah, that was oiler job for

maybe three, four years. Then they put me in maintenance. Maintenance only in boiling house.

WN: You're maintaining the boiler house, which is separate from the mill?

SS: Separate from the mill, yeah. Why they call boiling house, maybe everything boiling over there.

(Laughter)

WN: Well, it seems like you were, you know, trained as a welder in Honolulu.

SS: Yeah.

WN: It seems like you—did you seem over-qualified for what you were doing?

SS: (Chuckles) No. Then, see, came into maintenance. Then my welding technique, all that came into play.

WN: I see.

SS: Yeah. Matsuno took care more of the machines and dryer. Arthur King, he work with me, and Takashima, he worked with me. Just about three of us on the maintenance crew. Piping work that need to be replaced or where you have some leak where got to be repaired. We even had one project making a new tank, welding up, and all that. Because they need a spare tank. It was fun.

Then, in the mill, making sugar for about nine months ten months of a year, then they have what they call repair season. Three months was where things must be replaced, new piping to be replaced, or some other things you need welded and fixed up. That's when, that year, they had to replace that cullender, evaporator cullender.

WN: Cullender?

SS: Cullender, that's a big one. The evaporators, pans, all have one, two, three, four different parts; bottom, the cullender, the body, and then the top. So you take off the top, the body, and then the cullender is going to be replaced with a new one, and the new one is all steel. And the one we are going to take out are all cast iron. So the question came up, how are we going to take out that [old cullender] 'cause this is for the first time now, you're going move 'em out. And then Uemura, he is a smart man along the line of [being] good at fixing things and all that. But something like that, he had no idea. Then he ask me, "Eh, Peanut, the boss said they going put in new cullender and we got to move out that [old cullender]. Do you have any idea how we can move that out?"

Then I tell, "Oh, let me go look." Then somehow that idea came to me fast, so I came down, I told him, "Yeah, we can." I said, "You come up." I explained to him that we weld up I-beam this way, going up. And then one other I-beam go all the way up to the end of the building where that area is all open so we drop 'em down, and a truck comes in and they can take 'em. The other one come in, we can bring 'em up the same way, the other parts. Then you go check with the engineers, the trusses is on that building there, we're going to weld this twelve-inch I-beam now. Would the trusses hold five tons? If they say the trusses hold five ton, no worry. Then I said, "So you go check with the engineers and if they say the trusses can hold, then you order two five-ton tackle. Two,

because that cullender is five ton, that's ten thousand pounds, and you have two five ton, you equalize that, easily it will go. No worry about breaking or cannot carry or whatever."

"Yeah but . . ."

"After we get all the parts out, then we come out. Then we get one this way, then the other come around this way, then the other one come in. You got two coming in. See, we put beams over the cullender and then because it's cast iron, we cannot weld. We put rod all the way down, anchor 'em both under there, on top you bolt up, you clamp down. So you don't have to worry about this one going down. Then you weld up, weld up high."

"Oh, can?"

I said, "Yeah as long as the engineers say [it would] hold." So I said, "Can."

WN: Wow.

SS: Yeah that's how. He was happy though, you know, because you as a supervisor, you get responsibility in carrying out work like that. But then if you have no idea how to go ahead and then someone tell you, eh, it can be done. Because he gets the credit, not me.

WN: Hoo, that's very technical.

SS: But, you know, the idea that I had was because I worked with the Red Hill. And I saw how these guys put out the heavy equipment. I was thinking, yeah, these guys get good ideas, you know. That's why I think if you go out and work, I think you can gain ideas, like in everything else, I think.

WN: Right.

SS: Yeah.

WN: Let me change the tape.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 39-18-2-03; SIDE ONE

WN: Okay now, while you were working, 1946 came around, and that was the year of the [sugar] strike.

SS: That was the year of the strike, yeah.

WN: What was your involvement in the strike?

SS: In the strike, mostly I used to go help in the fishing crew. We go out dive, roll out the nets, what we call *hukilau*.

WN: Mm-hmm. This is for the soup kitchen, you mean?

- SS: Yeah, for the soup kitchen. But I tell you, that year I don't think, never again did the 'āweoweo ever come in like at that time.
- WN: Oh, yeah?
- SS: Yeah. Surprisingly. You know, later on I think, "Shee, somebody up there must have been helping us. Because 'āweoweo, I can't recall any time when people were catching so much from out at the Kā'anapali Black Rock. Roll up, yeah, plenty. I mean enough to feed all the families. By god, the fish, 'āweoweo, we used to get."
- WN: You used to catch with the net?
- SS: Yeah, net. Boy.
- WN: Who was in charge of the soup kitchen?
- SS: Soup kitchen, who was the guy? Henry Shim, yeah, he died, too, yeah, son-of-a-gun.
- WN: You know Harumi [Fujii] was involved a little while, huh?
- SS: Yeah, I think, he was more on the technical side, I think.
- WN: Oh.
- SS: Yeah. Harumi. Even Donald [Rickard] guys. Even Tony [Vierra]. Tony was with me in the '56 strike, I think.
- WN: Fifty-eight.
- SS: Fifty-eight strike? Yeah, he was with me.
- WN: Yeah, so '46 strike, how did you get involved or what was. . . . I know some guys went jail, yeah?
- SS: Yeah. That's right. I think was Ichio.
- WN: Oh Ichio ["Hawaiian" Hirata]?
- SS: Yeah, him, and this guy "Impoc" [Hiromi "Impoc" Mishima]. I never see that, only I heard that afterwards they beat up Mike Nelson and—Mike Nelson was an engineer [i.e., management] and the other guy, I forgot his name though. Anyway they were irrigating the fields, and they [strikers] caught 'em in the fields, and they beat him up. [For an account of this incident, where Pioneer Mill Company strikers beat up supervisors who were attempting to irrigate cane fields, see Sanford Zalburg, *A Spark is Struck!* Honolulu: The University Press of Hawai'i, 1979, pp.160-62.] Then later on we had one group who went out Ukumehame and, oh, they had that Ukumehame lower reservoir area full with water. They have one reservoir area down and two reservoir areas on the *mauka* side. But the one, *makai* side they had full water in 'em. Then me and this guy, we went up and let all that water out, flooding all that field down. And I don't know how the news got out so fast, we got caught and then they took us down to Wailuku jail house, courthouse, and I was the first one they questioned. So I said, no I don't know anything about it. I never give him any kind of answer—this detective. "You guys were the one that took off all that water and ransacked the field."

I said, "No, I don't know, not me."

"You were involved."

I said, "No, not me." I never give any answer.

Then he told the guard, one of the policemen, "Get this guy and lock him up in the dark room." So I got locked up, hey, real dark, and then ho . . .

WN: This is in Lahaina?

SS: Wailuku.

WN: Wailuku?

SS: Yeah. I can't see my hand, you know, real dark. And you stay in there awhile, cold place like that, oh you like *shi-shi* [i.e., urinate], and I call out, the guy he no answer. So I let 'em have all on the floor. Then later on he came back, he raised hell with me.

I said, "I called you." I said, "I can't hold any more so I let out." And I stayed there till about four, five o'clock in the afternoon, I think.

WN: Now this was after the guys beat up the . . .

SS: Yeah, after that.

WN: So is this after the strike, the strike was over actually, all over Hawai'i. And this was sort of after . . .

SS: Yeah.

WN: Pioneer Mill sort of dragged on longer.

SS: Yeah, see, the strike actually, the other islands, three months, September, October, November, but we stayed out December, we stayed out four months. Yeah, this happened on the fourth month because then they had the bigwigs from the ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union] come in and, you know, talk with Amfac and then try to settle this in some way. And that's how it was settled up where no charges, no criminal charges against any of the guys.

WN: So after "Hawaiian" them went to the courthouse, you and somebody else went up to the reservoir and let the water . . .

SS: Water all out.

WN: . . . all out. Why did you guys do that?

SS: Well, we want to go back to work, and them [the sugar companies] they don't want to settle. They don't want to settle and then we can't go back to work. And then, hell, if we can't go back to work, well, the hell with these guys, goddamn, we'll make trouble for them, too. That's how me and this guy went. Yeah, we opened up. The intent was . . .

WN: So by opening up, how did that hurt them?

SS: Well, they lose all that water and then you flood up all the cane. Where that would be any good or what, I don't know.

WN: Now when Nelson folks were irrigating, how were they irrigating?

SS: That part, I don't know, how they—well I only heard that they were irrigating, so they got beat up.

WN: I see.

SS: He was a engineer. He and I later on we came good friends, you know.

WN: Oh yeah?

SS: Yeah (chuckles).

WN: So you folks wanted to go back to work, but the company wouldn't negotiate?

SS: Yeah, they never try to negotiate.

WN: You guys must have been kind of frustrated, you know, kind of long time already.

SS: That's why that kind feeling, I guess you got to go through to really understand, yeah. But from '46 strike, well, at least we had the kind pay were you can put away some money, you know. Prior to that, it was just live day by day.

WN: Right. You know, it's almost eleven o'clock. Can I stop here? Is it okay?

SS: Yeah, okay. I have no problem.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, we were talking about the '46 strike. You said that your wife called you a . . . (SS laughs.) What did she call you?

SS: Convict.

WN: Convict? (SS laughs.) How come?

SS: Because they lock me up, but I told her that's not a crime, you know. "Yeah, but the police get you folks and take you up [Wailuku] courthouse and they question you."

Yeah, because what we did was wrong. What we did was wrong, but you see, there is a reason why people do things. And of course I'm not saying what we did was right, but I think many things happen that way, see.

Normally we don't go out and make trouble and all that. But when you out on strike, you want to go back work, you want to get some money, get your family going. And when you can't do that, you stay out because the majority of the guys are out and you can't go trying to get back to work, outside work, or anything like that. And because of these things that bother your mind, you know, you mad with the company now, and you do something that they are going to lose money or whatever. We went out and do something like that, but normally, we don't do things like that.

(Laughter)

Yeah, boy, you get a kick of watching that big water rushing all out, and then I watch the reservoir water coming down, oh boy.

WN: So who actually caught you guys?

SS: I don't know who caught us. Yeah, that's the thing. When we came back to Lahaina, they round us up already, take us down Wailuku courthouse. And I was the first guy questioned, see. But I kept my mouth shut, I said, I don't know, this and that. And naturally the detective question me, then they get all heated up, too. But then the others, they say, "Oh, they [detectives] said that you told them everything." See, you know, how they question, that's how they catch guys, you know. Even if I didn't say anything, they tell 'em that, oh, I said everything, how we went over there, how many guys involved. But I told 'em, "Look, all I did was keep my mouth shut. No I wasn't there, I didn't do anything." And then, you know, they couldn't get anything out of me.

They say, "Oh, we didn't know that."

WN: Oh.

SS: Yeah, but you see that's how detectives, they did . . .

WN: That's how they get you to talk.

SS: They trick the guys, and these guys were, well, I would say not smart enough to realize, you know, instead of believing what the guy say, they keep their mouth shut, they can't pin anything on anybody. Nobody saw us, I don't think so.

WN: So in the beginning they must have been mad at you then?

SS: Yeah.

WN: Your friends.

SS: Yeah. But I keep my mouth shut, so that's true. But that was about the only thing that we did, that I did was wrong, yeah.

WN: So you spent the night in the—no, not the night, but . . .

SS: Not the night. Morning, about nine o'clock up to four, five o'clock in the afternoon, yeah.

WN: Wow, in pitch darkness?

SS: Yeah. It's a weird feeling though. You stay in the room, you can't see anything, you know. And then just stay there by yourself. That's why I think people can go crazy with a weak mind, you know. It's a certain kind of a fear get into you, but I guess I was little stronger than that realizing that, oh shit, this is just one dark old place where—so I close my eye and try to doze off. But cold, eh, inside there.

WN: So did you ever have to pay anything? Fine or anything like that?

SS: No, no, didn't pay anything.

WN: Okay, so after you worked maintenance work with the boiling house, you went over to the cane cleaning?

SS: No. Wakida gang. He [Wakida] was in charge of cane cleaning, but, oh I guess he was ordered to take over our maintenance crew, so he became our supervisor, instead of Uemura.

WN: Oh, okay. Oh, so you kept doing the same thing?

SS: Yeah, just about the same thing. Then he told me, well, "You stay on that side." And then they put up a job application you have to apply for. And that's when they put up that leadingman job, which I applied. And normally a lot of guys applied for the job, but when I applied for that leadingman job, nobody applied, just me. Then Wakida came, tell me, he say, "They want you to take over the job, nobody applied."

I said, "Oh well, doesn't matter."

I was journeyman and then you get leadingman that's grade ten, you get more money over there. So more money, plus more authority. You can sign requisition slips going to the warehouse and get whatever you need to work on and all that. I didn't have to go to Wakida and get his approval, see.

WN: So you get a raise in pay?

SS: Yeah, I got a raise in pay. Yeah, then at that time, Arthur King stayed back in the boiling house gang. I think he and Matsuno and Okamoto. Those three was taking care of the centrifugal machines and all that. But I had a guy from Honokōwai, and I had one Hawaiian guy from the other side. Every time he tell me, "Peanut, Peanut," (chuckles) big guy, Hawaiian guy. Big guy, but talk to me just like I was his father.

(Laughter)

WN: So you did that all the way until you retired?

SS: Yeah, although let's see, under Wakida, even during repair season, the different repair seasons as the years went, we took off number two, number three evaporator, taking out those cullenders. But then already with the first one, even Wakida, you know, he had no idea but he saw all the stuff so, he say, "Oh that's how you got the first one out?"

I said, "Yeah." He look, and he is more mechanical-minded, so quick he can see what we did. And he say, "Oh, you didn't have any problem?"

I said, "No, everything went all right."

He said, "Well, let's go and do the same thing, take off number two, number three."

But at that time we take off number two and the body of number three and the top, see, those were all cast iron material. Cast iron are heavy and you cannot arc weld. Today I think they have rods that you can arc weld cast iron.

WN: Are weld?

SS: Arc weld, it's electric weld, you know. Arc weld is, there's a machine and you adjust to the voltage you want, the type of rod you use, you hit your ground, whatever work you are doing. It's just like electricity. And then when you hit with the rod, you hit an arc, and then that rod would dig into the metal. And as it digs into the metal, you fill out that with the rod, and the flux cleans whatever *pilau* you get over there. Yeah, like if you welding two metals together or whatever.

And now we taking out the cast iron and you are going to replace it with steel. Like the cast iron, when we put back the cullender, which was steel, but the body was cast iron. So to join 'em together, they put in thick gasket and you got to drill hole. And drilling hole would require lot of time. But that number two, number three, when we put in, it was steel cullender and steel body, only the bottom cast iron, bottom, that they left because no problem with that. That's where the juice go down and go down.

WN: You didn't have to replace that?

SS: No, you don't.

WN: That didn't have any problem.

SS: Yeah, no problem. You see, you get the bottom, you get the cullender, you get the body, and you get a top. One, two, three, four parts, the bottom part you leave. Then now the cullender was all steel, the body was steel—and Ted Vorfeld, his father was manager for O'ahu Sugar, Waipahu. Vorfeld, V-O-R-F-E-L-D.

WN: Vorfeld.

SS: Vorfeld, yeah. Every time I say "young boy," because these guys are younger than me. But, anyway, I was thinking, "Ah shit, this are all steel, we can weld 'em up, you know. Why we got to drill?" Drilling takes us four, or six weeks, seven weeks. Drill the *pukas*, it's one-inch *puka*, you know. But then if you weld 'em up it's half the time, you can get 'em done. And I remember, he [Vorfeld] came up, look, and he didn't say anything. He ask me how everything going. I said, "Everything going okay." But I told him, "Hey, Ted, you know, you have a steel body, you have a steel cullender. We have good welding arc rods, why can't we weld 'em up?"

Then I think it registered on him and then he said, "I give you answer tomorrow morning." He probably called Honolulu to see, you know, what they think or whatever. Early in the morning, before work, he came look for me. I was downstairs. He said, "Hey Peanut, go ahead weld 'em all up."

"Yeah, okay," I said. "Makes sense."

He shake his head, say, "Yeah okay."

WN: I wonder who he checked with?

SS: I think Amfac engineering, I think.

WN: I see.

SS: I guess, even him, he wasn't sure. And if you said go ahead and anything go wrong, I guess he get boot. This way, I think, he got promotion. And one more point on the

cooling of the vacuum pumps down below. You see, with water, you adjust the water and then water run through and after it cools it, that's it. You wasted water. And at that time I told him, "The water coming out is not hot, it's kind of warm. But then if you put that water into a tank and then add cold water and get a thermometer or something, you can get it cool enough to reuse that water."

That one hit him. "Yeah," he said, "that's a damn good idea."

But you see, maybe for us, we work maybe we can see things like that. And maybe before me, guys see that but they don't open their mouth. And like Ted and I, oh sometimes he pull me outside and *talk story* for hour and a half. And I know why, he trying to get ideas out of me. And I think these two points, then, that's how he, they take him down Honolulu, he got promotion.

WN: To O'ahu Sugar [Company]?

SS: No, it wasn't O'ahu Sugar, I think to Amfac. He work someplace Downtown, I think, I don't know.

WN: But what was his capacity at Pioneer Mill when you were making . . .

SS: He was engineer. I think they had three engineers in that engineering office. I think he came in number two. But then, Wakida used to tell me, normally, even during mill operation, "Instead of you coming every morning to my office and get your work order and all that," he told me to get my order from the engineer. He say he don't want to bother with me, but instead he check on me every day. So I used to go down engineer's office and they used to tell me what they want done, whatever.

WN: Engineers were mostly *Haole*s from the Mainland?

SS: Yeah, they were all *Haole*s.

WN: Did you pretty much get along with those guys?

SS: Yeah, I get along with all of them. Work things were more routine. Like replacing those cullenders and all that. Once you replace one, the road is all made already so all you got to do is follow. And of course, there is danger involved, you know. You can't just go any kind way. You got to work in a safe way. And right through, even the pans, we moved. Number-two pan, I remember, Stokes. Stokes was the head man in the boiling house department.

WN: Stokes?

SS: Yeah Stokes. And he told me, "Peanut, we're going to change the cullender on that low-grade number-two pan. And instead of taking off everything, can you check up the body and slide the cullender out?"

And I said, "I don't know, but maybe I can think about it and if I think that I have something good, I'll let you know how we proceed and all that." And then that one we did on four places. I built a H-iron bar.

WN: H-iron?

SS: Yeah H-iron, it's like a I-beam, the flange, narrow. H-iron, the flange are wider, but the make is similar. The beam, center beam, and the top and bottom, you have the flange. I-beam is narrow, H-iron is wider. Yeah, and with that H-iron, I used that as a post and then use a twenty-ton or fifteen-ton, I forget, it's a floor jack. The kind that carpenters use to raise up a building. I figure if I put four and burn off all the bolts, I got to get wide enough room where I can pull that cullender out now. If, at any time, it hits that and drop, one drop, (claps hands) everything coming down, you know. It was a risky thing, though, but before I went ahead, I talk to him about that. I look at it and I said, "How about doing it this way?"

And he got the idea in his head. "Oh, I think it will work, so go ahead."

Yeah, it worked all right. I mean, you know, lot of time many things that you do, after a person give the idea and do the job and it's done, it looks so simple. But before that, you know, them, they get confused and they don't know where to start. But once they get the idea, I guess that's the important part. And I know how Ted, he got up there and that's why Shige Wakida's retirement party down at Banyan Inn, he came down.

WN: Who, Ted?

SS: Yeah, he came down, he look around, and somebody said, "Ted looking for you, you know."

I say, "Oh."

He came up, shake my hand. So I tell him, "How are you doing?"

He said, "Oh fine." He all right. He never thank me, though.

(Laughter)

But that's how it is, right?

WN: Mmm.

SS: You know. My own cousin, he was smart in a way where by books. So he was principal at Japanese[-language] school and all that. At that time I was strong ILWU man. I used to represent our unit going down Honolulu and all that. And he used to tell me, "Oh, Jack Hall and those guys are nothing."

And then I tell him, "These guys [i.e., union officials], they work on principle, money no mean nothing to these guys. They get money to live by, that's it. But they live on principle, where working for the common laborer." See, they had the brains to push for the [labor] guy because laborers, their knowledge is limited.

Then he tell me, "Why don't you go back school?"

I said, "What I believing in, and what you believe in is entirely different, so we can't get along." I told him that. One, two o'clock in the morning at my sister's house, we arguing, up Liliha.

WN: Up where?

SS: Up Liliha Street.

WN: Oh, Liliha.

SS: Yeah.

WN: O'ahu?

SS: Yeah. He was staying down that lane someplace. But, I mean, these guys are smart, but in a sense where they cannot understand where if you try to do something for other guys. It's for yourself only, you work to bring yourself up there. It's okay, maybe if you believe that and, you working for yourself, yeah, that's all right. But I guess my thinking is different. Although I never get the education, I feel that what I can do on the line, I used to do.

WN: When you working as a part of the union, too, you know, it's, yeah, you cannot just think about yourself and . . .

SS: No, cannot, yeah.

WN: . . . try to upgrade yourself. You got to think of your fellow workers, too, yeah?

SS: That's right. That's why I work as a steward for my department, boiling house, and then I got elected steward council chairman. We get about forty-two stewards. We used to meet once a month, each one bringing up gripes from their group and all that. Here, me, no more school and (chuckles) conducting this meeting and, you know, I making explanation about different sections of our contract. Yeah. (Laughs) My god.

WN: Well, you went to the school of hard knocks.

SS: Yeah, I mean, you know, it's the kind school you go through, you don't forget and when you do something good and come out, you happy.

WN: So you retired in 1978?

SS: Seventy-eight, that year.

WN: So how did you feel about retiring?

SS: Oh, at that time I was happy because I played golf right through, yeah. When age fifty my son bought for me a golf set and told me, "Dad, go ahead and play golf." And age fifty I started to play.

WN: Oh yeah?

SS: Yeah. And that was a reason why I took early retirement, [age] sixty-two. Golf was my game. I was sixty-two and [if I] worked three more years, that money that I make the next three years, it's nothing to the point where, you know, I going to enjoy and all that, yeah so. Then I work for Hugh—I use to play golf, and Hugh used to come back.

WN: Who?

SS: Hugh Menefee. He used to be a real-estate broker. He used to have a office in Honolulu, so every Monday he goes home [to Maui]. They had a small plane from Kā'anapali going out. About three or four guys ride in the plane. And then he told me to work up his yard or house or whatever he want done, he pay me five dollars an hour. "You want to work four hours, five hours, it's up to you." And I used to work four, five hours, then I go down golf. Kā'anapali. We used to pay ten dollars, play eighteen holes at that time. Play four, five days a week, and weekend he wants me to play him. I play him, but he pay my fare (laughs). I work for him and pay my fare for golf.

WN: Good idea.

SS: Yeah, he want to beat me, he can't beat me, that's why.

(Laughter)

WN: What was your handicap at that time?

SS: At that time I split twelve, thirteen.

WN: Yeah?

SS: Yeah. And the lowest I got to was eleven.

WN: Eleven? Wow.

SS: I tried to get down to single field but always sometimes I blow on a hole.

WN: Mmm. So, you know, how did you feel when you heard that the Pioneer Mill was closing?

SS: What do you mean, how I feel?

WN: Did you feel sad, you know, or happy, you know, that there's not going to be any more sugar in Lahaina?

SS: I felt kind of sad in a sense, you know, that the company I worked for, actually about forty years if I didn't stop the first ten years, you know. Then thinking back all the guys you work with, different jobs that I working, too, and all that going to be *pau*, you get a kind of sad feeling like. And plus the guys who are working now [i.e., those recently laid off when the sugar company closed], I guess many of them used to take two jobs. With the hotel going and lot of these guys working two different jobs. So I figured, it's not too bad for them. Maybe few would get rough time, but I think they can get back. Yeah, it was a sad feeling, though, yeah.

WN: So what do you think should be done with all this land up here? What do you think is going to happen?

SS: Well, I think growing pineapple [i.e., Maui Land and Pineapple Company] was a good idea and I think they doing okay. But then, like this area, you don't have rain, so you know pineapple you need rain. Out here, the land is dry so I don't know how long it would keep up. See, mainly it's the water, water problem, yeah.

Well, other than that, to me the rich guys going to look into the land where, they going to build homes, I think. I think it would be homes all the way. 'Cause the land prices over here, you know that, I think I mentioned to you that Kuhua Camp, I didn't realize they were selling for that kind quarter million for land, yeah.

WN: Yeah.

SS: Some weeks [ago] I went up go see "Hawaiian," I call him, he had the gallbladder surgery.

WN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SS: Yeah. Then I asked him how he feels. I tell, "You mind I come up see you?"

"No, no, come, come."

"How much they asking for that?"

He said, \$240,000 (WN whistles).

"Holy cow," you know. I didn't think—that's plantation camp now.

WN: Yeah.

SS: And I don't think the lot even get 5,000 square feet.

WN: Yeah.

SS: Yeah, I don't think so.

WN: And how's the house?

SS: Yeah well, it's painted outside and I don't know how much, you know, they did work on 'em.

WN: I think we have enough, unless you want to say anything more before I turn off the tape recorder.

SS: Let's see, what about. . . .

WN: You don't have to talk about what's in your will.

(Laughter)

SS: What about, what were we talking about?

WN: We were talking about Lahaina, what's the future of Lahaina for you?

SS: Oh. The future of Lahaina is, I guess, tourists. I think people of the Mainland love this kind of places. You know, like Big Island, area is big but they don't have the beaches like over here. You know, over here, the beach, you have sandy beach and they love that. I mean I go walking over here and I meet people from all over. I get to sit down and talk

with them. Even this married lady from up in Minnesota just lately and she running by and she said, "Peanut." And I talk to so many, I forget.

Then I say, "What's your name?"

She tell me, "Mary."

Oh! My wife's name, see. I say, "Oh yeah I remember you. Minnesota, yeah." And then she come and I tell her, "How your kids?"

She said, oh, one is in Beijing, China, and the boy in college, and the girl is out, but she said she not going to get married. And I said, "Nah, she'll get married."

She said, "No, she is not going to get married."

"I know when the right one comes she going get married, no worry about that (laughs)."

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay, you think the future of Lahaina is tourism and housing . . .

SS: Yeah.

WN: . . . and not pineapple.

SS: No, I don't think the pineapple will keep going over here. I could be wrong but . . .

WN: But would you like to see agriculture up there?

SS: Yeah, I would like to, yeah. I think make more sense that way because if they plant pineapple and pineapple keep going, then Maui Pine, they keep going.

WN: Right.

SS: Yeah.

WN: Oh one more thing, what do you think should be done with the mill?

SS: Yeah, good question. You know, what I read, Pioneer Mill, they will dismantle and some sugar company in the Philippines bought that. And then they going ship all that parts there. By the same token, Pioneer Mill, I don't know, I haven't been in the mill since I retired. And one of the guys I work with, oh even Wakida, at one point, I told him I would like to go [inside the mill], if he would. And we talked about it. But then that *bugga*, he died before I can get up there. Then another one that work with me, Samuel Nakamura, I just tell him for we go.

And he say, "Oh, there's nobody."

I said, "Oh, we can make contact and find out, get the approval to go in."

He said, "No, get danger and they said that they don't allow anybody in there."

And I was wondering how the place look like. And last week they had a big fire . . .

WN: Fire, yeah.

SS: Yeah, and my son [a firefighter], was on duty at that time.

WN: Oh.

SS: Then he came to the house and he was telling me what happened. Then he tell me, "Oh, when you was working oiler, you took us into the mill that one night with all the noise going on," he starting crying. And he said, "You had to carry me."

And I said, "Yeah, now you carry me," I said.

(Laughter)

And he said, "Oh, that place is all a mess."

WN: You think they should keep the structure and make something out of it?

SS: Well, as far as the structure, I don't think, you know, already be more danger than anything else I think. Yeah it's—the only thing is go to scrap.

WN: There are some people who think that at least the smokestack should be saved.

SS: Yeah, well, the smokestack is symbolizing Pioneer Mill Company. Because prior to that big smokestack, they had one, two, three, three or four smokestacks coming up from the roof, you know.

WN: Yeah?

SS: Yeah. But then I remember they cut that all down, after the big one was put up.

WN: But the big one was put up long time ago, huh?

SS: Yeah, long time ago. But I don't know how strong, too, yeah. Whether got any steel in there to hold 'em or just break. And if only break, is it going to last for so long. Somebody get hurt. And there's danger involved because this place, the last I remember, I don't know what year we had that big earthquake. Was '36 or '37, I remember, we played basketball up Lahainaluna gym, came down. Of course, I was working construction. And then one of the workers had made party for all the workers that night. So I had about three, four of the boys come down and we joined that party. And while at that party that earthquake came on. You know, had a long table, soda all *huli* off. Yes, hey! One lady say, "Akua."

(Laughter)

I said, "No, no, this earthquake, this earthquake," yeah. And next day they call me up for help the truck load lumber and we went down lumber yard. And I saw some of the sailors, they had submarine out there. And I was asking the sailors whether they were on the ship that night. And they said, "Yeah."

And I said, "How the ship felt?"

He said, "When the earthquake *wen* rock," he said they went down, everybody run up. They didn't know what was causing it. Yeah, then they found out later.

WN: I'm going to turn it off, so thank you very much.

SS: Okay, all right.

END OF INTERVIEW

[Susumu Sodetani wrote the following addition to his life history narrative:]

I once served a one-year term on the Maui County Civil Service Commission. The commission was made up of three Republicans and two Democrats (myself and a Filipino rank-and-file union member from Hāli‘imaile). On all issues debated, the Democrats could never win. One consolation, at least, was that we had a voice on all subject matters.

We would meet once every three months on a different island. Once, after our meeting in Honolulu, we were invited to the governor's mansion for a social gathering. They served *pūpū* and drinks. Because I don't drink, I was hungry. Governor John A. Burns took me to the kitchen. The governor asked a group of Hawaiian ladies working in the kitchen to make a plate of food for me.

Until today, I think Governor Burns was the best governor Hawai‘i has had. His legacy is the working people.

PIONEER MILL COMPANY:

A Maui Sugar Plantation Legacy

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa**

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