

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Minoru Hinahara

"We had about fifty homes in the [Crater] Village. And one side, half of the village, one side is Filipino, and one side is Japanese. Relations between the two nationality was very good. No more problems at all. . . . We were quite good kids as far as today's standards because we didn't have anything to do. Not too many things to play with. But for my case, if I had a chance, I'd go to the [West Maui] Mountains by myself. Way in the mountain, go pick pepeiao, and then warabi."

Minoru Hinahara was born in 1924 in Crater Village, a remote Pioneer Mill Company plantation camp. His parents, Kunitaro and Fusayo Hinahara, were immigrants from Hiroshima, Japan.

Hinahara attended King Kamehameha III School up through the eighth grade. He then dropped out of school and began working for Pioneer Mill Company as a contract cane grower. After two years, disillusioned with plantation work, he left for Kahului and attended carpentry school. He eventually worked for E.E. Black contracting company.

Hinahara was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1944 and served three years. He was attached to the 10th Army, 27th Division on Okinawa.

Following his discharge, Hinahara eventually returned to Lahaina and worked for Pioneer Mill Company as a tractor and haul-cane-truck driver. Still discontent with plantation life, he moved to Honolulu to work at various jobs. In 1970, he started his own contracting business.

Until his death in 2003, Hinahara lived in Honolulu with his wife, Sumiko, whom he married in 1947. The couple raised four children.

Tape No. 39-1-1-02

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Minoru Hinahara (MH)

April 16, 2002

Mānoa, O‘ahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Minoru Hinahara for the Pioneer Mill oral history project on April 16, 2002, and the interviewer is Warren Nishimoto. We’re at his home in Mānoa, O‘ahu.

Okay, Mr. Hinahara, today we’re going to start from the time you were born and then we’re going to try to work our way up through Pioneer Mill days, living in Crater Village, and then growing up and working on the plantation. So the first question I have for you today is when and where you were born.

MH: I was born in Lahaina, Maui, 1924.

WN: So you say “Lahaina.” Where in Lahaina?

MH: Lahaina, Crater Village.

WN: That was like a plantation camp?

MH: It’s a plantation camp right above the [Crater] Reservoir right across Lahainaluna School. Two valleys across. And this includes a Japanese[-language] school. We had Japanese[-language] school building for the Japanese people.

WN: Was it only for Crater Village kids?

MH: That’s right. We had a teacher from Okinawa. One of my male teachers was a lieutenant in the Japanese submarine corps, I guess.

WN: I guess the navy.

MH: Navy.

WN: Let me back up little bit. You were born in Crater Village. Tell me about your parents. Where are they from? What’s their background?

MH: Yes, okay. My parents were immigrants from Hiroshima, Japan. My father [Kunitaro Hinahara] immigrated to Hawai‘i all by himself. When my father was working for Pioneer Mill, he wanted a bride, wife. So they call it “picture bride.” And through this picture bride, my mother [Fusayo Goto Hinahara] came to Hawai‘i through immigration.

After you get cleared by the immigration, they resided in Lahaina. My father worked as a ditchman, distributing water to the various fields that needed irrigation. And then also fertilizing, like that.

WN: He was the ditchman.

MH: Ditchman for the plantation for this particular area. Hundreds of acres. And they had huge ditch. There's a taper because the water flows. You know, gravitational. And then they had gates far apart [which releases the water to] irrigate. The sugarcane was harvested once in two years.

My father and mother raised five boys and two girls. Being poor, my sister, the second sister, worked as a maid for the Buddhist temple, Jōdō-shū [i.e., Lahaina Jōdō Mission]. My oldest sister worked in the plantation for a couple of years, and then she got married to one of the men [working] in Lāna'i, [Kaumalapau] Harbor. He was a crane operator loading pineapple as well as import goods. My oldest brother became a mechanic. He was a journeyman mechanic and he fixed all these trucks that go to the harvesting field where the crane loads the raw sugar[cane] into the truck, and then take it out to the mill.

As for myself, I did contract work for the plantation. This contract was for two-year crop, give and take a month or two, because of the sugar content in the stalk.

WN: So you had a two-year contract. So you were employed by the plantation, but you didn't get paid by the hour?

MH: We were paid by the hours. Only thing is, you benefit because you getting paid [hourly, as well as getting a] certain percent by the tonnage. You get your contract. Whatever percentage made. So on the average . . . (MH coughs.)

WN: Let's take a break.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

Okay, you were talking about the contract work.

MH: That's right. When the plantation came to mechanization, everything changed. The machine took a lot of the jobs away.

WN: When was this?

MH: This was way back, about 1960, I think.

WN: After the war [i.e., World War II]?

MH: After the war.

WN: This is after you came back to work on the plantation [in 1949]?

MH: Because they had trucks, cranes. Before, they [used] all cane knife to cut the cane. Now, since mechanization, they had cranes pick up all the cane.

WN: The grabbers?

MH: Yeah. So that saved a lot of labor and time.

WN: So when you were on that first two-year contract, how old were you? Were you still going school?

MH: No. As I said, we were poor. So from [age] fourteen, we worked plantation already.

WN: Full time?

MH: Yeah, full time.

WN: So what was your last year of school? What grade? Well, fourteen, you were about eighth grade, maybe?

MH: Yeah, eighth grade, fourteen.

WN: Because [King] Kam[ehameha] III School ends at eighth grade, yeah? Did you graduate eighth grade?

MH: Yeah. And then from there on, others went to Lahainaluna [School].

WN: I see, and you didn't?

MH: No, I didn't because I was poor. As for me, my thinking was different, I guess, because I hated plantation life.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, I just want to back up a little bit and have you talk a little bit about Crater Village. What was it like growing up in Crater Village?

MH: Okay. Our life in the plantation village is just like any other village. We had our tennis court. We had . . .

WN: Tennis court? You had a tennis court?

MH: Yeah, we had—plantation [owned it]. And then we had a Japanese[-language] school. As you know, it's not like today. We didn't have anything aside from baseball and basketball. But we had one or two boys start training for boxing. But I guess the camp was small.

WN: How small? Like how many . . .

MH: Fifty homes. We had about fifty homes in the village. And one side, half of the village, one side is Filipino, and one side is Japanese. Relations between the two nationality was very good. No more problems at all.

WN: Were there Filipino kids there?

MH: Yes. I used to love Filipino food. At times, they [i.e., families] call us to have dinner [at their homes], and one incident—this is funny, you know—one incident, they called us to have dinner, and this is the camp style of living. You get together, we enjoy. It so happened, oh, they were cooking good food. So we sat down in a chair. They had the old-

style plantation table. And we started to eat. Oh, it was delicious. So after we ate, you know, it's oily on your hand so we went to wash our hand at the sink. Here on the sink, facing us, is a chopped head of a dog that we ate. Nobody knew. So that was our life in a plantation. Eating dog.

WN: Do you remember how the dog was prepared?

MH: Oh yeah. I know had lot of peas. That's about it. But was delicious. They're good cooks. Once a year, they [Japanese] call *shōgatsu*, New Year, we had two sides making good food. So the whole night was activities, eating, going from various house to house.

WN: Did you go to Filipino houses, too?

MH: Oh yes. We had whole-night session. And then we also had dancing, *bon*, and this is all Japanese. *Bon* dancing, Japanese[-language] school recital, playing firecracker. We were quite good kids as far as today's standards because we didn't have anything to do. Not too many things to play with. But for my case, if I had a chance, I'd go to the [West Maui] Mountains by myself. Way in the mountain, go pick *pepeiao*, and then *warabi*.

WN: What did you do with the *pepeiao* and *warabi*?

MH: The *pepeiao*, one time, my neighbor and I went up to the mountain, way inside. Good thing we had big bags. The *kome* bag they call that, rice bag, before, 100 pounds. We struck our luck because it so happened this tree fell down, rotten. The fungus, the *pepeiao*, start growing and clinging to the tree [trunk]. This happened to be a *kukui* tree. If it's healthy, get more liquid inside. If there's [too much] sun, it dries and has 50 percent less weight. But at that time, when we picked this *pepeiao*, was heavy. Both of us picked a bag full, each. And then we took it home. My mother will wash it and dry it. I don't know if she marketed some but we had so much *pepeiao*, *warabi* in the forest.

WN: Did you do that a lot? To go and . . .

MH: Well, the home get little bit food. Then we go. And mangoes, we had so much mangoes. Also mountain apple, but way in the [West Maui] Mountains.

WN: How far up would you go?

MH: Oh, two-and-a-half miles. And then mangoes was about a mile. As you know, in Hawai'i, Lahaina is noted for clean, tasty mangoes.

WN: I didn't know that. Lahaina, is this Hayden? Or what kind mango?

MH: Common.

WN: Common mango. Okay.

MH: Yeah, we didn't care for Hayden.

WN: Okay, so Lahaina Common mango is well known?

MH: Oh yes.

WN: Oh, I got to try it.

MH: Try, if you can, get hold of Spanish mango.

WN: Spanish mango?

MH: Yeah, try. That's one of my favorite. I was the monkey. A tree can be this big, a mango tree. Diameter.

WN: Like three feet? Four feet?

MH: Oh, six feet across.

WN: Six feet across.

MH: That mango [tree] is still there. And then I climbed that.

WN: How high up?

MH: Way up. As high as mango, you know, bring the rope. Most of the trees are about this because they grow . . .

WN: Two feet in diameter?

MH: Yeah, two feet in diameter. I know the valley, the trees, the guavas, so whenever I go pick, usually some are slower than the others, but I know exactly what tree produce good mangoes. Guava, too. They had this sweet guava, big, and they had this sour-sweet guava, pink, and my mother used to make jelly with that.

WN: What did she make with the mango?

MH: If early part of the season, if your knife blade can go through the seed, she could make mango seed. My mother used to make good mango seed. You know the *li hing mui* you eat?

WN: Yeah.

MH: The taste, there is a recipe for the mango seed. They call it Five Spice, all China made. And that's the one we make. Very good.

WN: The mango seed has to be kind of soft?

MH: Well, it's matured, but as long as the knife can go through it.

WN: I see.

MH: We have a chopper. We made our own chopper with a cane knife. Peel it, cut it, dry it. Take a lot of time. Some, I think my mother used to sell. I'm not sure.

WN: She used to put it in bottles?

MH: Yes. Bottles. And then [with] some we made *tsukemono*.

WN: *Tsukemono*? With mango?

MH: Yes.

WN: Wow.

MH: But we don't eat with the rice. Only eat that for chaser, like that.

WN: Oh, like pickle?

MH: Yeah, *daikon* pickle.

WN: I see. And what kind mango would you use for that?

MH: We only had Common mango and Spanish mango. But Common mango was all over. Then, the Fleming mango orchard, that is how we got these Hayden mango. So I guess the Hayden, the color, you know the red, people accept. Because people like the color. Not like the green, the color of the Common. So the taste shifted to . . .

WN: Hayden?

MH: Hayden mango. And then had another one that could have marketed. I had it planted here, you know. I kind of forget, but anyway, it didn't go so well because people accept Hayden more than any other mango, and we had all kinds of mangoes. All kind variety.

WN: So when you were living in Lahaina, you used to get Common mango. Whenever you would see a Hayden tree, that was like rubbish?

MH: Yeah, we better bypass.

WN: But had more Common than Hayden trees?

MH: Oh, maybe a thousand times.

WN: How about now? Do you know if the mango trees are still there in Lahaina?

MH: Yes. But you got to get your plantation permit because you don't know who's raising *pakalōlō*. So it's dangerous. Even today if I go, I know what tree is the best because I've been there every year.

WN: So when you would go to get mango, how heavy—how much would you bring back?

MH: About fifty pounds.

WN: Fifty pounds? You carried the fifty pounds?

MH: Yes.

WN: Hoo! And you would get ripe kind or half-ripe kind?

MH: We get the half-ripe and ripe. But it won't squash. We know what kind to pick because the overripe falls down. So whatever on the tree is what we picked. The ripe one. Just right for marketing or whatever. But we usually consume. We ate our own mangoes. And at times, we take friends over, too. Because Common mango, oh, everybody crave for it. Even today.

WN: You said your mother, with the Common mango, made the mango seeds with the Chinese Five Spice. And then she would make mango pickle?

MH: Yes. Even my wife makes here, pickled mango, sometimes.

WN: What else? Anything else with the mango?

MH: No, that's about it.

WN: Your mother would put it in bottles for at home and for selling, too?

MH: Not for sale.

WN: Give to friends?

MH: That's right. Plantation life, my father used to raise all kind of vegetables. As you know, he was a ditchman. So alongside the ditch he used to plant *goma*. Sesame seed.

WN: He planted sesame seeds?

MH: Yeah.

WN: And how would it grow?

MH: It grows just like . . .

WN: It's like a plant?

MH: Yeah.

WN: Oh, I've never seen a sesame seed plant.

MH: Plenty seeds. Was about three feet [tall].

WN: That's how you would get sesame seed?

MH: Yeah, after, you know, the part you dry. You put it out, dry it, and then put 'em in a package and hit it.

WN: Oh, that's how the seeds would come out from the plant.

MH: Uh-huh [yes]. And corn, cabbage, potato.

WN: What kind potato? Regular potato?

MH: Regular [Irish] potato. Spuds. You know Easter lily? He grew the best lily [in the] entire—at that time it was territory [of Hawai'i]. We used to sell it to Iwamoto Flower Shop. Used to be school days, take it down to Iwamoto. And that one pod, the size was about this big.

WN: Three inches across?

MH: Yeah. The stalk had thirty-three flowers.

WN: One stalk?

MH: One stalk. Thirty-three flowers. Right here, you only get six. Thirty-three, imagine. I still remember, because he [grew] the best Easter lilies.

WN: So it's all along the ditch?

MH: Oh no, this is our garden.

WN: Okay. So he planted in the backyard?

MH: Yeah. And as you know, our camp is such that everyone is friendly. So we could go anywhere and enter any home because it's all unlocked. We don't have such thing as robbery like that. When we don't have any fruits, we go down the neighbor banana patch. And you see, get so much banana, the banana start falling down, right? You cannot go and market it because no more value. We cut the banana, the whole bunch, and put it under the *koa*. And then every after school, we go and [retrieve the bunch]. And fish, oh, so much fish.

WN: Where did you get fish?

MH: You know the [irrigation] ditch my father . . .

WN: Yeah.

MH: Yeah, that ditch was almost horizontally, except it's tapered because of the gravitation, the flow. Anyway, at that time we had *funa*.

WN: *Funa*?

MH: *Funa* is goldfish. Hawaiian goldfish. And if you know how to prepare it, it's one of the best-eating fish. That's why the Hawaiians used to put those fish in the taro patch.

WN: How big was the *funa*?

MH: About this big.

WN: About one foot?

MH: Yeah, some come one foot. But I think about eight inches the best.

WN: And what color usually?

MH: Oh, black.

WN: And it was freshwater, yeah?

MH: Freshwater. Ho, that good eating.

WN: How did you folks catch it?

MH: Net.

WN: What kind net? Regular kind net?

MH: Regular net we had. We made those nets.

WN: Oh yeah? You made your nets?

MH: Yeah, I still can make nets.

WN: What kind material do you use to make the nets?

MH: Linen.

WN: And then you make it and put it on a stick?

MH: Yeah, put it on a wire, they call it. I still can make those nets. Surround net.

WN: You mean throw-net kind?

MH: Yeah, throw-net.

WN: You used to make that, too?

MH: Yeah. Today they imported. The ditches get so much algae, they call that *limu*. So thick. The plantation had hard time because the flow of water, it drags because the algae holds back the water. So one thing they did was import tilapia. That was way back.

WN: The tilapia would eat the algae?

MH: Yes, the *limu*. This lady used to have. You know Japanese, funny, you know. Superstitious people. You know the *koi*?

WN: Yeah.

MH: You know bathroom concrete? The *sentaku*—laundry tub?

WN: Yeah.

MH: You get two division, huh?

WN: Yeah.

MH: She had full of *koi* in there. With a chopstick, you poke into the throat. And you know the bleeding, she catches the bleeding and she drinks the [blood] for—I don't know what she had, but anyway. And she had another *oke* with tilapia inside. And the algae, the *limu*, you make a ball like this, throw in there. In no time, it's gone.

WN: What's gone? Oh, the algae.

MH: Yeah, the tilapia eat 'em all. So the river get cleaner because of the tilapia.

WN: You know the ditch, how wide was the ditch?

MH: Oh wide. The first one is something like a main road. And then they get the arteries.

WN: Yeah, the arteries going out into the fields.

MH: Yeah. The field that goes as far as, oh, more than a mile, I think. And then the ditch full with water, flowing.

WN: What was your father's job exactly?

MH: He's only with the reservoir to open the main gate. So that every morning they got to time it because certain fields start. So you open it only a little bit.

WN: So they had one gate from the reservoir leading into the ditch?

MH: The ditch.

WN: And then had some more gates that led from the ditch to the fields?

MH: Oh, yeah. Right.

WN: I see. And your father was in charge of certain fields?

MH: No, not the fields. He was just in charge of the reservoir, take care of the amount [of water] going out. Probably, some fields he goes, because depend on the job, too; you know, constant.

WN: So he would let the water into the fields and then stop it?

MH: Yes. All timing, regulation. Regulate the water. Plantation, they had, oh, maybe a hundred mules. Mules is a product of a jackass and a horse breeding. The byproduct is a mule. So the mule, they're strong. They do all the carrying and whatnot in those days until mechanization.

WN: So you were talking about the *funa*, and you catch it with nets, and they were about eight inches long. How was that prepared? The fish.

MH: Oh, just ordinary frying. You put the Wesson oil, you put with garlic. You fry the garlic, and then at the same time you preparing the fish. Scale it, and salt it, and put it in the pan, fry it. More crispy, more '*ono*. Or, you put chili pepper in there. The red, you know, the slim pepper? You try that. Oh, good.

WN: What did the *funa* eat? Did they eat the *limu*, too?

MH: I guess, yeah. They get a lot of algae. Small kind.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: What about tilapia? Did you eat tilapia, too?

MH: Yes, tilapia is good-eating fish. They have it in the market, too. But we get so much other kind of fish to eat, you know. But in the plantation, everybody was eating tilapia, *koi*. But

as far as *koi*, we don't eat because Japanese [were] superstitious. But Japan, you go today, in the restaurant they serve you *koi*.

WN: Was there *koi* in the ditch?

MH: Yes, plenty. Plenty of the red ones.

WN: So out of *koi*, tilapia, and the *funa*, which one was the best-tasting?

MH: *Funa*.

WN: The *funa*. What about the '*o'opu* and '*ōpae*', things like that?

MH: Oh yeah, '*o'opu*' is '*ono*'. But we didn't care. '*Ōpae*', too. We didn't care.

WN: You didn't care for that. So you folks caught fish from the ditch, you folks kept vegetables in your father's garden, what other things did you folks eat? For example, were there delivery men that came from the stores?

MH: Yes. They call that *chūmon-tori*. We had this Nagasaki Store. They sold all kinds of Japanese goods. Rice, *shōyu*, canned goods. Oh, matter of fact, anything.

WN: How far away was Nagasaki Store from your folks' house?

MH: Two-and-a-half miles.

WN: Two-and-a-half miles?

MH: We got to walk down. We were up on a hill.

WN: Crater Village?

MH: Crater Village. So in order to go shopping, gotta walk.

And one year, just to get the jersey, you know the football jersey? Plantations sponsor [athletic teams]. We the crazy kids, you know. Only for get the jerseys now, you got to play on a team. And to play on a team, you got to walk two-and-a-half miles to the park. Malu'uluolele Park. You gotta walk. But we took champion, one year. I was light, only 105 pounds, those days. It's part of the fun we had.

WN: This is barefoot football?

MH: Barefoot. We played Ha'ikū. These guys, they get good foot, on the bottom. They no more the field. All the thing's sharp. You have to play barefoot. Ho.

(Laughter)

We had accidents on the football team. One of the Yamaguchi [boys] dislocated his shoulder.

WN: The team was Crater Village? Or your team was Pioneer Mill?

MH: Pioneer Mill.

- WN: And you folks would play who? Ha'ikū? Who else did you folks play?
- MH: Ha'ikū, Pā'ia. Not too many teams, though. But we challenged, though. They played the other side, we played the winner.
- WN: That's far though. Play Pā'ia.
- MH: Yeah. Plantation, take all the truck. On the truck, you just like one cattle. All planks, and you sitting. Ho. You get injured. You got to lay on the floor of the truck. Ho, that thing, you know . . .
- WN: Bouncing up and down?
- MH: Bouncing up and down. And you know the *pali*? We took *pali* highway. Now it's kind of straight. From Wailuku going to Lahaina [i.e., Honoapi'ilani Highway].
- WN: Yeah.
- MH: Had 124 bends, I think. (WN laughs.) I used to count all the time. Once a year, October, they had this Maui County Fair. That was a big event. We looked forward to the event because, as I said, every one of us was poor, but for that event we saved a little bit. And then fifty cents went far, far.
- WN: So where was the county fair?
- MH: Kahului. And some of the boys wanted to stay overnight. So they go to the beach, bury themselves with the sand. You know, the sand is warm. Overnight.
- WN: And sleep like that?
- MH: Yeah. And they go down the fair, they have the toilet, whatnot.
- And ocean, too. We used to go *lamalama* with the torch. Let's say, one pass about quarter mile, I think. And here we make big bonfire [on the beach] because you could get lost in the dark. So we keep the bonfire. Whoever goes left or right, they could always come back. And only one pass, see about thirty *takos*. So much before. Fish. Hoo, plenty.
- WN: This is what beach?
- MH: By *pali*.
- WN: So besides *tako*, what else did you folks catch when you went *lamalama*?
- MH: That's about it. *Tako*, fish, eel. And what they call this fish? Once a year, it's a season fish. It comes by the schools. It's a type of fish. It's a very good-eating fish, Chinese style. Put some Wesson oil in a small pan, and you fry the fish first. And then as the fish is cooked you put onions on top and the boiling oil with garlic. Put it on. Oh, good eat. Not *hīnālea*.
- WN: '*Oama*'?
- MH: No.

WN: *Halalū?*

MH: No. Ho, when it comes in, even my teacher used to go down. We put eight hooks. Just like Christmas tree. We sit in a car, just like that. So much fish. Only one, two times a year.

WN: How big?

MH: When they come in, small.

WN: Five inches?

MH: Yeah. Forget. That is where the hotel used to be. Kā'anapali [Beach] Hotel.

WN: That's where it is now?

MH: Yeah. There's a small mountain. Used to get a lot of Japanese graves. And then when they start to make resort in Maui, I guess they got to dig all the remains. While they were making the hotel, get the—they call it *akua*. The ghost. Every time the door slams by itself, so the people scared.

WN: Oh, Ka'anapali?

MH: Yeah.

WN: I heard about that.

MH: Get a lot of things, it comes to the mind.

WN: You were talking about Crater Village and you said had fifty homes and half was Japanese, half was Filipino?

MH: Yeah, about there maybe.

WN: Okay. How far away were you from the mill?

MH: Two-and-a-half miles.

WN: So the main town was by the mill area?

MH: Right, right. The town to the mill is three blocks.

WN: What was the name of the main town?

MH: Lahaina town. Front Street. They call that "Front Street."

WN: Oh, okay. Lahaina town. So you folks were kind of isolated from the town.

MH: But we had a lot of very small camps around because the plantation is so huge, there are sections, because the water flow all different. The flow.

WN: So besides Crater Village, what were some other camps?

MH: Oh, get Māhinahina, Pu‘ukuli‘i, Waine‘e, Mill.

WN: Mill Camp?

MH: Yeah, Upper Mill Camp, and they had Lunaville. They had all the *lunas*.

WN: Lunaville.

MH: The Lunaville, all Portuguese. Hardly Japanese. Because those days, we all different. But I had classmates from there. Nice people, but still. I think mechanization made the standard of living better than what it was before.

WN: What was school like?

MH: School?

WN: Yeah.

MH: I liked school.

WN: Why did you like school? What were your favorite subjects?

MH: English, spelling. My—I think was third-grade teacher—Mrs. McCallister—called my friend Alec and me “*menehune*” because we were small. And we had cafeteria. The lunches was five cents.

WN: So this was Kam[ehameha] III School?

MH: Yeah.

WN: How did you go to school?

MH: We had this plantation truck. You know the plank, you sit on it.

WN: And that was two-and-a-half miles away?

MH: Two-and-a-half miles.

WN: Now, when did you go to Japanese[-language] school?

MH: After school. After the English.

WN: And where was the Japanese school?

MH: In our camp.

WN: So you would have to take the plantation truck from your regular school [located on Front Street] back to your camp? Japanese school?

MH: Yeah. Every day. Five days a week.

WN: How was Japanese school?

- MH: I hated it. (WN laughs.) Oh boy. I hate it so much. Nishimoto, you go home, you try talk to your mama. I hated Japanese school so much. But I don't know. . . .
- WN: Was it more strict than English school?
- MH: Oh yes. The teacher going pah! pah! at you.
- WN: Hit you where? On your face?
- MH: Face. Yeah. This guy was eating banana. The teacher caught him. Ho, made him stand up and whack him. And this guy was second lieutenant [in the Japanese] navy.
- WN: What was it about Japanese school that you didn't like? Was it strict, too strict, or boring, or what?
- MH: Boring. Because I guess, we all had the future. Our thinking was different, too, at that time.
- WN: What about English school though? What was good about English school?
- MH: I liked English.
- WN: Were the teachers good or anything like that?
- MH: Not all the teachers. As I look back, only had one, two teachers who were really good. The rest of the teachers, they were some kind of part-time teachers. They go to teaching school for a while and they go back. Because they lacked teachers at that time. So they're not as good as the regular teachers that come out of University of Hawai'i. So there's a difference in teaching.
- WN: Yeah. But English was your favorite subject?
- MH: Yeah.
- WN: I forgot to ask you about what kind of chores did you have to do at home?
- MH: Not many things. One is we do the watering, the gardening. Feed the chicken. I think we had, at that time, pig, too. And because I raised a lot of pigs when I came back from the service . . .
- WN: At that time you folks had pigs?
- MH: Yes. I think we had. Because nearly every family had one pig. (Pause) The fruits, the guavas, at that time was plentiful. I used to go my neighbor's house, which was—no, it wasn't a neighbor. End of the camp, this was Filipino camp, but had this Japanese family in that big house. They had so much guavas all over the place. And I used to go pick. We make jelly out of that. But kids today, they don't have the value. They don't appreciate what they have today. That's one thing. I hated so much plantation life. When I ran away from home, my neighbor cried, my mother cried.
- WN: Let me get into that later on. I forgot to ask you about your mother. What was she like, and what did she do?

MH: Oh, my mother was a beautiful lady. Mind her own business. Her maiden name is Goto. She and my father actually got married as a [picture] bride. My mother didn't go out to work because of the kids.

WN: How many were there? How many children?

MH: Altogether, seven. Five boys and two girls.

WN: You're number what?

MH: Number four from the top. My father and mother went Japan when the oldest girl was one year old, maybe. That's the only time. And when they got back, they was rooted to Hawai'i. Nowhere else.

WN: Did she do any part-time work?

MH: Yeah. She used to wash the Filipinos' [laundry]. You see, we had a lot of single boys in the camp. So she used to wash—majority of the housewives used to make some money.

WN: How did that work? They brought it to her?

MH: Yeah.

WN: And then they would pick up?

MH: Yeah. I'm grateful that I was raised in a poor family, but they gave me an opportunity in life.

WN: Now, before you worked contract work on the plantation, did you work out in the fields during school vacations?

MH: Yes, right through.

WN: What kind of work did you do?

MH: Weeding.

WN: *Hō hana?*

MH: *Hō hana.*

WN: How much did you get paid?

MH: Oh, I think about seventeen cents an hour.

WN: For eight hours a day?

MH: Yeah, eight hours a day. We had our gang. And you know, at work, the whole town is in the field, summertime. Acres and acres, you could see the heads, all school kids. Eight hours a day.

WN: So you used a hoe to cut the grass?

MH: Yeah. Weed them. And then after we, maybe my father, put fertilizer. Everything was manpower. And I used to drive tractors, truck, hauling cane. At one time I hauled. Every time you go on a scale, see, when you come in. How much you bring in.

WN: That was later though, yeah?

MH: Yeah.

WN: Okay, you finished Kam III school, eighth grade. Did you want to go on to Lahainaluna for school?

MH: No more money.

WN: Did you want to, though?

MH: Oh yeah, I wanted to go, but where's the money?

WN: What, you had to pay to go . . .

MH: Free, but I don't know, at that time, my thinking. Because most of the boys, they didn't go high school. So I guess you join the gang. But I started to get mature thinking when I quit the plantation.

WN: But before that, how did you get the job for the contract work?

MH: Every family's kids, plantation hired, regardless who. And then be one of the employees, we get all *bangō*, numbers. And then we go out in the field by the truck. The truck take us go to the field. Let's say, the field is divided in four sections. So the section only, yours can be the end. So only two, three miles away. And then we take care the field. The truck come pick you up afternoon and you gotta wait. One, the early one is the last one going wait the longest. Every day we worked.

WN: This is contract work?

MH: Yeah, contract work.

WN: What did you do every day?

MH: Water the field. As you water, you weed, maybe. But like us, I didn't give a damn with the plantation so I just water. Whole day, water.

WN: So, actually, you were given a certain area, and you had to take care of the cane.

MH: That's right.

WN: So that is different when you were a student?

MH: Oh, very different.

WN: Student, you just went out and weeded wherever they told you to go?

MH: Yeah, with the gang. We had *luna*.

WN: Right. But then this one, contract one.

MH: On your own. Even on your own, you have four guys as a team. They all spread out, the four or five. But they do the same thing. And then coming home, the truck pick us up. Every day.

WN: And you got paid by the hour or by the contract?

MH: By the hour.

WN: So what do you mean by contract then? I always thought that contract was you get paid at the . . .

MH: Not the way it is described like now the contract. I make this building, I contract for so much. But no, this contract is this virgin land. They hoe that land, make line, plant the seed. While they doing that, the four of us is selected already, who's going. Because get so much to be done in a plantation. So anyway, a contract, for two years, let's say, you automatically know it's a two-year crop. In other words, you on a salary like but hourly paid. So all you do is take care the field. Watering, weeding. That's about it, I think.

WN: Did you get paid after the cane was harvested, too?

MH: Yeah. That's the contract. After the two years, when they harvest—that's why, you know the stalk?

WN: Yeah.

MH: With the syringe, they suck the juice out, take it to the lab. And if it's ripe, they stop irrigating. So when they stop irrigating, they give order to harvest. And then after the harvest, they give you the amount by percentage, the weight of the cane.

WN: So the better job you do when you taking care, the bigger . . .

MH: The tonnage.

WN: . . . the tonnage, and the more you get paid.

MH: Yeah.

WN: How many in one gang?

MH: Depend on the field. Like ours was three Filipinos, myself, and Masanori Nakamura. So five of us. I still remember the names—Tobias. Joe. He, wartime, this guy, Joe, became a musician in Honolulu. And then the brother was also a musician, too, Molina.

WN: Molina. So that was your gang, yeah?

MH: Oh, and the Filipino, another one, Miguel. Hey, I still remember. (WN chuckles.) Fifty something years. Sixty years, maybe.

END OF INTERVIEW

PIONEER MILL COMPANY:

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**Center for Oral History
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