

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
with
Shigeru Miyasato

August 12 and August 19, 2007

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The 1930's and 1940's was a time that sugarcane and its production became a major part of the Hawaiian Islands. The sugarcane plantations were certainly a large part of life in an area of O'ahu known as 'Aiea. One man who lived and worked hard at this plantation is Shigeru Miyasato. His spoken memories bring alive what it was like to be a plantation worker at this time. Shigeru actually continued to be a plantation worker through the early 1950s. His work and life at the plantation, although extremely harsh (especially by today's standards), is reported by Shigeru to be something endured for his family. At age eighty-eight, Shigeru feels fortunate to continue to reside at his 'Aiea plantation home. (Lynn Miyasato Sari)

Field worker at Honolulu Plantation

A.C.: Tell me what you paid \$12 for?

Shigeru: My laundry and they feed me, one month, except Sundays, was off. So Sundays, they asked me to chop wood for them, for their home. I had a place to stay. Then they do my laundry. They had a family furo. Clean up first. That's how I got to chop wood [to boil water]. I bring home pay, \$46 a month. When I do work hard, what I said, I was the hardest worker. The most I made was \$74! That's plenty. Once a month, I go home, Kalihi, where they (his mother and siblings) all would stay. That's why, I'm lucky I'm alive now, if it wasn't for that (job). I worked hard, hard. I worked hard.

A.C.: How did you start working?

Shigeru: Well, we were living on Robello Lane where they had a soda works. Robello Lane in Palama. I figured I like find a job so I got myself shoes. I wear the shoes. I went to Hawaiian Pine where they hired people. Was mostly ladies over there. I don't know what kind of jobs. "You looking for job?" They told me, "Too small." So, the same day, I went to 'Ewa Plantation. I didn't know where to get job. So I went there. They didn't hire me. And then, I went to the next plantation, O'ahu Sugar. That's a big plantation. I don't know. They didn't hire also. So I came to this plantation. Honolulu Plantation. Or they called 'Aiea Plant. Anyway, they hired me. Ho. I feel happy. Next day, I (find) place to stay and eat. You know, laundry. So, right down here, Onaga. Yes, they take me. I pay \$12. They Okinawan people, so you can imagine, same (food) live and board Okinawa, yeah? They were old-fashioned. I remember the children still yet.

Takayesu. Shizuko, the older sister. They were raising pigs (but not at the house). Those days, they were particular property-wise. So that's how I make my life. But, to get a job, 'Aiea, I was so happy!

A.C.: What was your day like when you worked?

Shigeru: I walked up (to) the Mill, get up. Where the old building get. Plantation sugar mill. Before that, they had a place that [issued] you tools or any kine tools. They board you---they had about five, six trucks to haul (inaudible) out to the cane fields. No more sitting room. All stand up. I carry hoe. "Where you got your hoe?" Everybody like got the best hoe, you know! You just take the hoe. And they out in the field. We were cutting grass, you know. Waimalu. We used to go way out there. (Hoeing) Weed. Of course, had somebody that walked staff [measured] and by so many feet, you get paid by that. For the day. And then, you work hard, you make plenty. Dollar one day. I know, one time, when I worked here, my wife told her friend, "Oh, I remember that." My wife told her friend (who lived) on Liliha Street.

Lynn: That was decades later. You were so happy about getting the job in 'Aiea because you came from Big Island and they didn't pick you because you were small because you were how old?

Shigeru: Fourteen. (He was born in 1919.) They just said, "Oh, we're hiring." That's all. When they said that, if 'Aiea Plant never hired me, I don't know where I stay now. 'Aiea was my savior. Oh yeah. (When asked by A.C. if he signed a contract, he didn't remember.) I only know, I was hired. The fellow who took charge of me was Kaniau Evans [worked in the plantation office]. When it come payday, once a month, they like to know where you stand in line, up in the office. When you get paid. When we got paid once a month. Then they made union, I think, we were the last one, the plantation. We got twice a month pay. We get money.

Lynn: He actually came from the Big Island. You should tell her about that. His father died.

Shigeru: My mother had just had surgery. Honolulu. We had a close friend here. We came in a small boat "Huumula". We stayed on the boat long time. When you lie down to sleep, the wave go this way, you could hit other side. You actually rock. Sleeping on the deck. But the captain was in the hold. I reached Honolulu Harbor, in the morning. Dark in the morning. Reached the harbor. We stayed Nuuanu. Nakamatsu [family].

A.C.: Where you called a field worker when you worked here?

Shigeru: Over here. I don't know how they described. Over here, what you do, that's what you get. Your pay is. Yeah. And then, I worked hard. You go to a better job

if you're big. You know. I was small, yeah? Was up to the foreman to select where to put you. One was David Espinda. He was a nice man. Lunchtime. When we ate. He liked Japanese food. But other than that (lunch time), you cannot stand up. "Hey, what you doing there?" Only one guy no can do that. Minao. Once in a while, he smoke. Anytime you stand up, ho, that's a rest. And when come Saturday, tomorrow was Sunday, you're so happy. You're going to get rest. I still remember.

A.C.: How long did you work until lunch time?

Shigeru: When they tell "lunch time," that's our only time to relax, rest. No such thing (taking breaks to go to the bathroom.) They don't have bathroom. You just make right where you are.

A.C.: You're bending the whole time. Hoeing.

Shigeru: Impossible for you to stand up. Very, very impossible. No can. You cannot stand up. That's why I'm here today. I remember how hard I worked. So I was crazy enough to tell my daughter, "Okay, I come down [to this interview]."

A.C.: What other jobs have you had? (Lynn, his daughter, calculated that he worked eighteen years for Honolulu Plantation.)

Shigeru: I worked sugarcane over thirty years. 1941. Then the war break out. So, we used to camouflage all the house, so Japanese no bomb the house. Camouflage all the roof. Only 'Aiea. That's how I follow up my painting. Yet, I didn't know how to paint good. I went to Honolulu Painting as a first class painter. (He worked six years for Honolulu Painting) I went to school custodian. I stayed quite a while. That's how I got my HMSA. I made my twenty years.

'Aiea in the 1930s

A.C.: Did you have to go to the ('Aiea) stores and use credit between pay checks?

Shigeru: No. The only time when come pay day, we used to go down Tachino Store. Buy ice cream. We sit down and eat ice cream. That's the only time. You cannot afford to buy this anytime.

A.C.: How much was ice cream?

Shigeru: Was cheap, very cheap.

A.C.: Is there anything you'd like to tell me about your work?

(He talked about working in the fields with Filipino workers came from Pearl City and

Honolulu. They lived in the Filipino boarding house.)

Shigeru: Filipino. They stayed in the Filipino Camp up there. They come down, right below the Mill. All the way down, they had Puerto Rican Camp. Above, there's a hospital. Long hospital. Wooden hospital. Has graveyard. Below, they had a store. But now, coming to that, they moved the hospital to this side. New hospital. Plantation hospital. I remember. My wife's sister was a nurse, taking care of the people. There was a couple of those girls. They were hired as a cardinal, wore yellow clothes. Not regular nurse. Take you upstairs. They had beds, you know. The lower part was where the patients come in. You wait for the doctor to check you. (The name of the hospital was) South Shore. We had two doctors, Dr. Chandler and Dr. Memore. Dr. Chandler does all the surgery. The other one (with the cemetery) was closed. That was closed before (Kamehameha) highway came up, I think. I know when the highway came up, they dug some graveyards. (He didn't know where they moved the bones.) That I don't know. The main, the only graveyard the plantation had, is that one. I think people going there yet. Still. (Questioned about its name) Plantation cemetery. (Questioned if he knows anyone buried there) All I know is plantation labor.

A.C.: Was there a road that went down to the depot?

Shigeru: There was not car road. They had a railroad going, eh. Had Chinese store there.

A.C.: Was there a plantation road that went down to Watertown, Halawa?

Shigeru: Yes. You mean to Watertown?

A.C.: Was there a road that was near the depot?

Shigeru: The only thing that I remember was train tracks. No truck hauling. No car road.

A.C.: Do you remember the Chagami fishpond?

Shigeru: Well, I heard about it. Filipinos were there too. They used to make fight chickens there. That's what I heard.

END OF SIDE ONE

(A.C. suggested that Lynn ask the questions.)

Honolulu Plantation in the 1930s-1940s

Lynn: Going back to the plantation, what time did you wake up in the morning?

Shigeru: Oh, mostly all dark. Dark in the morning. You mean, from Kalauao? Higa house. I somehow take care of sugarcane hoe. I walked to the mill. Ten minutes. They had a whistle. I didn't hear it. There's no such thing as when to start work. When they said, "Oh, seven thirty, time to quit," no such thing. When they tell you, quitting time, no such thing. I remember. But I never owned a watch. (Lynn said he still doesn't own a watch.)

Lynn: What kind of skills did you do?

Shigeru: Cut grass. Pile cane. Drive a tractor. Better paying job. Drive tractor. Then I went to (O'ahu Sugar), I was a cane loader. Open the hopper. You know the one that you're looking (at a photograph)? Cane crop. Has a hopper. That's all.

Lynn: Driving a truck?

Shigeru: Tractor, not truck. Tractor. There's a chain, all chain. Yeah. Chain loading. Something like this. I came to cane loader. Loading cane on a truck. Not a truck. They had a box kine. Lumber. This side's all open. Loading cane, inside there. When not busy, two, three drivers, sit together, talk story. (inaudible) That's how I came, loading machine. Yeah, yeah. That is hard job. For you got to load the cane on the hillside. Where you go. You cannot get the stuff. There's another machine (inaudible). Uphill, the machine. The machine went "clunk-clunk-clunk" up the hill. You gotta make sure run it on the hill.

Lynn: Did you ever have an accident happen to you?

Shigeru: All small kine problem. I think.

Lynn: You mention about buying ice cream. Was that your single days?

Shigeru: Sunday afternoons.

Lynn: When did you get married? You were about how old?

Shigeru: Yeah. I was working. There was matchmaking. Well, my relatives' father lady. My wife's from Heeia happened to come here. They brought her to my house. "Okay. I like you. You like me." (I was) About twenty-eight.

Lynn: You were in that house now. What about the house?

Shigeru: Well, I lucky to have to have the house. I was boarding house. below the fields. Used to get train tracks. That's where I was staying, small house. I worked my

way up to cane loader. John Nakano was right here. Up here. Used to get one gym. Japanese school. So, John Nakano, he was a carpenter boss. "Miyasato, I have two houses opening. So which house?" I would rather take above. But no car. So, good thing I take the lower. Where we stay now. When plantation, when O'ahu Sugar took over 'Aiea. I don't know how much. But I get that house since I was a cane loader. If I wasn't a cane loader, I don't know where we would be now. I think I worked hard. Try all my best possible. Became a cane loader. So, off-season, cane loader go all over the place. Well, (inaudible) like it to go there and help the carpenter to (repair) the water pump. The carpenter said, "Alright. Pull up the rope." I pull up. John Nakano saw me. Said, "Miyasato, I have two houses opening." I think that's why. The situation. The (previous) house was too small. I very lucky. I'm very lucky all around. On the job, yeah. I'm really lucky. (I have a place) To eat. To sleep. Onaga (referring to first boarding at Kalauao) (Tape stops)

Honolulu Plantation Company and Oahu Sugar Company

Shigeru: All the pictures of 'Aiea. Sugarcane. All O'ahu Sugar used to haul. Aiea was sold off. Right after the war, the military took all the places in there. They were slicing the land. So, this plantation jobs was going to fold up. Nothing for land.

Honolulu Plantation in the 1930s-1940s

A.C.: Did you work in all the fields—Hickam, Kalauao, Waimalu, down the fields, down in the valleys?

Shigeru: All the fields you know. All the fields, I work. Well, this is not too far. (inaudible) But this way. Where the Kelly's Coffee Shop is now? The sugarcane run all the way to there. And this way. Watertown. All was sugarcane. We had three trains to pull all this cane. Where they pulled the cane to the mill. One came from Waimalu. We had Aiea (inaudible). The Puuloa is a bigger train. Pulled a box train. Is loaded up to the mill.

A.C.: Plantation work—was it Monday through Friday?

Shigeru: Day and night, it used to go. Cane, around, around. But I work in the mill too, see? The mill, you work twelve hour day. I used to get paid seventeen cents an hour. In the mill. I didn't stay there too long. Too long, yeah. They called it the 'raw sugar.' With a stick, you would rub, strain the raw sugar. Because the machine stuck, yeah? Cannot push it. So you got have with a stick. That sugar mostly come from Waimanalo. We have box, boxcar. And then they unload them over here. I did it with a bigger fella. His name was Ray Fukunaga. They carried two bag one time but. They unloaded. They washed it. Raw sugar. To refine it.

December 7th 1941 and World War II

A.C.: What were you doing December 7, 1941?

Shigeru: You mean the outbreak of the war? It was a Sunday morning. Cleaning the house. I heard all airplane flying over. So, I thought that was Germany. Not that was Japan. Japan attack Pearl Harbor, not German. So, from the store, what we can't cook, (we) ransack all the cracker, bread, everything you don't have to cook. I still get car that time. Went up the heights. We stayed up there. Were all stray bullets coming. And during the night, we had to stand by guard too, with a pick handle. We didn't know. All the Japs. We didn't know where they are. How they coming. So, Japanese army airplane.

A.C.: When did you go back to your house? The next day?

Shigeru: Not too long. They sent some guys to go Sand Island to fill in sandbags, which I did. Sandbags for use in the walls. You gotta sandbag. They figure the Japanese coming yet. I passed by where later I see plenty buildings all with holes. I see airplanes going down over here. All coming down, yeah. The night too. Shooting the stray bullets.

A.C.: Did you see any shrapnel in the mill?

Shigeru: Only one hit the boxcar for the mill. Manuel, Portugee foreman. He was the foreman. He cried because the bullet hit the boxcar. Made a hole, eh, the stray bullet.

A.C.: What did you do during the war?

Shigeru: Well, I worked Oahu Sugar for a while. (After the war broke out) And then, you got to work nighttime somewhere. My brother-in-law. He's working for Honolulu Painting you see. He asked me, "Why not work for Honolulu Painting? And maybe become first class painter." I wasn't. I was only camouflaging all the 'Aiea roofs. We got to camouflage so the Japanese soldiers' airplane no recognize the houses. We used to paint all camouflage green and gray. All. We used to paint all the house windows black, so they cannot see the light in the house. We used to paint all black, yeah.

A.C.: That was after hours?

Shigeru: Plantation working days.

Marriage and Family

A.C.: In 1943 (actually 1947), you got married? That's when you were twenty-eight years old.

Shigeru: In those days, when you're twenty-eight, you're sort of too old to get married you know. Today, even forty you young yet! I was looking for girl to get

married. One guy in the truck said, "Eh you! You (inaudible), you too old already!" But, lucky my wife came along! Good wife, you know. Hard-working. She's so good. Good cook. She's smart too, you know. The family's all smart, you know!

(Lynn says they're related to the Chagami family by marriage.)

Shigeru: But I think, that's why I get two smart girls. Yeah! Lynn and Nancy. Yeah. But I want to live as long as long to see my own granddaughter's daughter enjoy, and I like my daughters live long. I like to live long too. I want to be fair to my wife.
(end of tape one, side two)

END OF SIDE TWO

A.C.: Today is August 19th (2007). It's 9:15 A.M. and A.C. Ching is here with Shigeru Miyasato, Nancy Miyasato and Lynn Sari at the 'Aiea Intergenerational Center.

World War II

Shigeru: (Inaudible) (conversation in progress about serving in the U.S. military as a Japanese-American in World War II) in the army. He died. 'Aiea. But those people born there, because, (inaudible) we live (inaudible) we still on the fence, and we're waiting for, which side is winning the war! We're waiting to step in. That they called us "traitor." That's why lot of Japanese boys want to (inaudible) to! I did too, but I was cane loader, so (inaudible) I had transferred twice, yeah.

A.C.: So the name again. What was that name again?

Shigeru: Mitsusaka. He was plantation sugarcane foreman. He was one of the smart Japanese in 'Aiea. Mikasa. Daniel. Jack, too, was one of the smart men.

A.C.: Did they gather people together at the mill? Or did you do it off time?

Shigeru: The only time we get together when we volunteered already. Went to Roosevelt High School auditorium. They took our picture all with no clothes on.

A.C.: What?

Shigeru: With no clothes on. They took our pictures. [Photographs were taken by the U.S. Army Signal Corps]

A.C.: They wanted to see how strong and healthy you were?

Shigeru: That I don't know. But they took our pictures with no clothes on.

A.C.: And hundreds of you? Thousands? How many people?

Shigeru: Volunteer? I think almost all 'Aiea! And the boys were, after what happened, feel sad for them. That too many died in, from 'Aiea. Yeah. In the proportion, hardly white. 'Aiea was one, the most unlucky people died.

A.C.: Well, those are only Japanese-Americans, you know. On the plantation, other, you know, ethnic groups, but only the Japanese could join the 442nd (RCT).

Shigeru: Yeah. Because on account of Japan attack Pearl Harbor. They like the Japanese (Japanese-Americans) to show we're not from Japan. We're for America. That's what we did.

A.C.: After the bombing, people who worked at Pearl Harbor had to go work. For the mill, did people have to go back to the mill to work?

Shigeru: Right after the war (started), we all worked for the army to volunteer to shovel. Sand Island, to assemble the cement sand bags. For the service men. The buildings I see had lot of holes.

A.C.: You could see the big holes from the bombs and the firing?

Shigeru: Yeah. When I was down there. I see it. But you could not roam anyplace. Yeah.

A.C.: Lot of soldiers with guns and--hmm.

Shigeru: At that time, ah, we had three can stand by, who used to guard all the pump area. All the important parts of 'Aiea. We stand guard. Night time, we go to the electricity office, and then they, from there, they tell us, where you go, where you go. Yeah. And I can stand by if the Japs is going to come around.

A.C.: So you to guard the pumps?

Shigeru: Night time. Go down to the plantation office. Go there. Stand up. The labor to work.

A.C.: But night time, martial law?

Shigeru: We cannot go out. That's the reason, we really can't go out.

A.C.: Because people could shoot you!

Shigeru: Well, that's your hard luck! Nobody would take a chance to go out night time. In fact, about here (pointing to a map) Pali Momi. We had a "nigger" camp. Soldiers. Lot of them ... All black people. All was at that time.

A.C.: Was that the first time you saw (black people), so many of them?

Shigeru: Yeah.

A.C.: So they had camps there, after the war started.

Waimano Home in Pearl City

Shigeru: You know today I came here. I'm old already, yeah. I don't somebody can tell all what of Pearl City sugar mill, I mean, sugarcane. All. I know all (of the fields).

A.C.: From the mountains to Moanalua Road.

Shigeru: The sugarcane was. It had the people, the "no brains" people.

A.C.: Oh. Waimano Home road. Waimano Home!

Shigeru: Waimano. How they say there? The girls (inaudible) spit and throw at us.

A.C.: Oh?

Shigeru: Yes. And at one time, we were up in the mountain, to clean the tunnel and the ditch. We passed the Waimano Home, ah, the boys....We passed and they all come and yell at us. Sad that they're living (there) now!

A.C.: The buildings are still there. But they're not surrounded by sugarcane. (Lynn mentions there were over a thousand living there, but now the residents are in the community.)

Camps in Honolulu Plantation in the 1930s

Shigeru: In Waimalu, they had a big stable camp! Big stable camp. Horses and mules.

A.C.: Today, I can't tell where Waimalu Stable Camp is. Can you tell?

Shigeru: If I go from here, I cannot tell. But if I ride a car and see the road, that's how I can tell. They had Filipino camp. I think, one kitchen, one bedroom, the size. And this side was Japanese people here... Filipino on one side. Japanese on the other. Same size (house). Only one people I know the name. Okino used to live there. He work plantation. He died. Nearly too bad. Kind of sad now. In the mill all the time. All the time working. That's how hard, plantation was. I used to make \$46 working plantation.

A.C.: And you worked sunrise to sunset, six a week?

Shigeru: That's true. Six days a week. People can work as hard as me. I work hard because we had seven boys and one girl. I go there once a payday. I bring home \$46 (as a fifteen year worker).

A.C. So when you had your day off, and you got paid from the Honolulu Plantation. Your family had moved ---

Shigeru: No. We all moved together. I told the reason why. My sister. My brothers and sister. They were about to send to Okinawa. Cannot take care of all that children. In the meantime, my mother was in the hospital. I don't know somehow, Filipino hospital. That was all before I came here.

A.C.: How did you go between Kalihi and 'Aiea? Did you walk?

Shigeru: Wait for the bus.

A.C.: In front of the store? Or down at the depot?

Shigeru: The bus. In order to go to Kalihi, I get to go to the bus station...Then you come back.

A.C.: What were they doing, your brothers and sister?

Shigeru: They were young...Only me work. (recalls again, the Waimano Home children.) They shout. They run to the fence. They yell at us. At night, when we used to harvest the cane, you used to hear them crying. That's why, the mind, to do things like that. They cry. But, today, they don't have that kind of people around. Boys' home. Girls' home. (Discussion about mentally challenged people in the community)

A.C.: Tell me more about Waimalu Stable. That was a big camp. Because it was a pump camp? A reservoir?

Shigeru: They got to take care of the mules. There were a lot of mules. Below there was a pump. Pump the water up the hill.

A.C.: The mules for used for?

Shigeru: Pull the sugarcane.

A.C.: No railroad cars there? That was later, later on.

Shigeru: Below. They had a pump. People there. Johnson. Had small children. Across, this side. Japanese people. Nishikawa? Nobunaga? I know several names. Minoru. Something. At that camp.

A.C.: So were the people at one camp, socialize and mix with the people with the next camp?

Shigeru: No. And then, as you come this way. They had a Stable Camp. 'Aiea Stable Camp. Uh, Joe Ornelles. He was, take care of all the horses. There used to be all horses over there. All the horses.

A.C.: Ornelles? The Stable Camp was right in the middle of the sugarcane field. It was before the...

Shigeru: The war.

A.C.: The clinic...

Shigeru: Along side small stream. I mean, Kalauao (stream). And then, as you come toward the 'Aiea way, Halawa. Chinese people living.

A.C.: Halawa? Was it called "Pake" Camp?

Shigeru: No. Way, way. "Pake" Camp sounds more better. Everybody call "Pake" Camp. They had small reservoir over there.

A.C.: They say "Pake" Camp is where the ('Aiea) intermediate school is now. It's above, near Halawa side. Was it a big---how many houses in "Pake" Camp?

Shigeru: I think only two houses. Only the Pake! I see the small house. The floor was all dirty, dirt. Not, no—

A.C.: Not wood. That makes it different.

Shigeru: Same with Waimalu. One kitchen. One bedroom. Waimalu.

A.C.: Did the plantation have a camp in Waimalu Valley where the piggeries are now? In the back of the valley? Above Stable Camp, in the valley, not in the mountains. Did the plantation have a camp back there? Along the stream?

Shigeru: Only thing (inaudible) called Halawa. And then, all these houses. People lived there. But nice. Nice houses.

A.C.: But Waimalu was Stable Camp. Sugarcane and um--?

Shigeru: Yeah. (Inaudible) It also has a small camp. Stable Camp. One Chinese lady used to own store over there, yeah. But, she don't like the Japanese, the Chinese lady. China made a war with Japan. Japan made a war with China. She hated that. But she liked Okinawa. I'm Okinawa! (inaudible) "I like you, you Okinawa!" But she didn't like the Japanese. Japan fight China.

A.C.: Bitter, yeah.

Shigeru: In that camp, they had a Fujikawa. But that way, they had all the small (inaudible) cane field. They cut them. They bring them to the stable to feed the horses. That was an itchy job, to cut them. Itchy. They load it on the truck.

A.C.: How long did you work before you got promoted? Better paying job? You know. You told me last time, the foreman said "Miyasato, come, come."

Shigeru: Water pump. Before I get my house right now. (inaudible) I don't remember but I was a really hard worker. Cut grass and that. I went to more money making job, so I went to pile cane. Pile cane, they used to pay by the tonnage. Every pile you make, they put your number. The bad part is sometime somebody take your pile. And they put their number!

A.C.: Oh.

Shigeru: That sometime. That happens.

A.C.: Yeah.

Cane Loader at Honolulu Plantation

Shigeru: And then, after (inaudible). After that, I went drive the tractor, you know. That makes line in the field. After (inaudible), they make all lines so the water can, water can out to the line. So I went to that---

A.C.: Sit down job?

Shigeru: Yeah. After that (cell phone rings), I went drive bulldozer. You know, that makes load the cane.

A.C.: Yeah.

Shigeru: So the truck can go through the road. In the cane field.

A.C.: So you're driving the bulldozer to flatten the land, so then the trucks can come in, to put the cane on the ---

Shigeru: The tank (inaudible)

A.C.: Now, when you did this work, you got paid more? Were the hours the same?

Shigeru: The hours same.

A.C.: You start work early and you finish when it gets dark or---?

Shigeru: We all start the same time.

A.C.: Same time.

Shigeru: (inaudible) Cane loading. Cane loading machine.

A.C.: Was that the highest paying job?

Shigeru: Yeah. That's where, that's how John Nakano. Where the Times store is now?

A.C.: Yeah.

Shigeru: Well, before that, was a Japanese school over there. No Times store, but has a pump. And no Japanese school. Just a pump. So, off season, uh, I, we all work the (inaudible) kine job. We're not harvesting, eh? So, John Nakano see me, foreman. "Miyasato, there's two house opening. Which house I want? The house where now I stay, or, one further up. There's another house." But I had no car, too, eh? So I chose the first house, which we're living at right now. Yeah.

A.C.: By that time, were you married, Mr. Miyasato? (Pause) First you got the house, and then got married?

Shigeru: No. I was married.

A.C.: Oh, you were married.

Shigeru: Sugarcane loading machine.

Life in New Mill Camp in the 1940s

A.C.: So where did you and the missus live before you got the house you now live in.

Shigeru: You know plantation? There's a ball park.

A.C.: Uh, the ball park. You mean, the plantation ball park? Or—

Shigeru: Plantation.

A.C.: Uh-huh. Across the street. Where the high school---

Shigeru: Yes. It's right above my house. The train used to pass (inaudible). All train. To bring in sugarcane. And to bring the empties. All to the cane field... There's a two bedroom house. Small. But I lucky, I work. I think I work hard. Just was a family. I try. I really work hard. And I try everything. I try moving up to richest, more pay, you know. At one time, I said I work in the mill, yeah. Seventeen cents an hour.

A.C.: But did you make more money working in the field? Or make more money working inside?

Shigeru: All. In the field. Because inside you make seventeen cents an hour. That's sugarcane.

Refinery work at 'Aiea Mill

A.C.: You said you were mixing---

Shigeru: The raw.

A.C.: The raw sugar.

Shigeru: Sometimes certain raw sugar doesn't do well in (inaudible). There's a hard job. Rotate (inaudible). The sugar comes from Waimanalo Plantation there.

A.C.: Yeah. They bring in the sugar. Hmm.

Shigeru: In a big boxcar. And we had to unload that.

A.C.: This old photo shows how high the piles of sugar were. And this is 'Aiea mill. Is this the way it looked when it would come in from Waimanalo, and it would be harvested?

Shigeru: No. It's (inaudible) to raw sugar already.

A.C.: Oh it's already raw! Oh, Okay.

Shigeru: And it come in a boxcar.

A.C.: Uh-huh. Oh, you mean the, it's already sugar when it came in the boxcar.

Shigeru: This is uh, (Referring to the photo) you know the truck? All the (inaudible) field? Bring the cane? They drop all over here. At one time, I used to work over there. With a crane. I pick up the cane. I used to---where the sugarcane goes up?

A.C.: Conveyer belt?

Shigeru: Yeah. This one.

A.C.: Rolling up.

Shigeru: Yeah, before you enter to---in the mill, where they be crushed with the big roller. The roller is real huge, you know. And they go there. And they crush all this.

A.C.: (Showing more photos) These are old photos. Is there anything you'd like to add, looking at these pictures? (Photograph labeled Aiea Mill shows a two smokestack refinery)

Shigeru: What's supposed to be? (inaudible) smokestack?

A.C.: These are supposed to be from 'Aiea mill.

Shigeru: This?

A.C.: When it was Honolulu Plantation.

Shigeru: (Pause) I think we only had one. [

A.C.: One smokestack. [Honolulu Plantation never had two smokestacks. The photograph misidentifies Oahu Sugar.]

Shigeru: Yeah.

A.C.: So this one (photo) would not be 'Aiea because, more than smokestack.

Shigeru: Uh, yes.

A.C.: May I show you this photo? These are the homes that were, I think, above the mill. With Pearl Harbor all the way in the distance. Is this, like the neighborhood you moved into?

Shigeru: Sometimes, pictures hard to tell. I don't recognize it.

A.C.: Okay. Yeah. It could have been a different neighborhood. (End of tape two, side one)

Shigeru: That's the way. This is all the train. And this is all Portuguese fellow.

A.C.: Portuguese workers.

Shigeru: They had a storage place. This way, they had a, they called, machine shop....Those people had more pay but do all the important job. Fixing machine part of the mill, yeah. (Pause) Compared with us, they were higher class than us. They do all the important job.

A.C.: On the trains? The machinery.

Shigeru: What the mill did. What. You know. They do all that. The blast (inaudible) But they say (inaudible) is bad. That's a way you can get cancer. Yeah.

A.C.: Well, let me see if your daughters have any questions to ask you.

Lynn: Where you able to save any money for yourself? Or did all the money go to the family?

Shigeru: Myself? I used to save five dollar a month. They had a bank over here, see. Post office. Where the library is now, used to have a big store.

Lynn: Did you save money for something special?

Shigeru: I used to save five dollars a month.

A.C.: Did you do something special with that money?

That I don't remember. That. It was very little money.

Lynn: But you still saved.

Recreation in 'Aiea in the 1930s

Lynn: So what did you do for fun?

Shigeru: Fun? Uh. You cannot call all that thing, the "plan" (plantation) fun. It's all awful. Hard living.

Lynn: But, on Sunday. on your day off, what did you do? To relax or to---What was-- Any kind of entertainment?

Shigeru: The other two fellows. They used to go Waipahu (inaudible). Shigenobu and Yokutoshi. I stayed there. Sometimes, the lady, The lady, the boss (inaudible). She say, "Shigeru, chop wood." So I went chop wood, yeah.

Lynn: Is that where you learned to play the harmonica?

Shigeru: Harmonica? I (inaudible) and the family was all living Kalihi. I stay family Masaki Higa. He used to work in the Kress Store. But his family, used to live Waimalu Pump. One night, I learned how to play the harmonica.

Lynn: He's a good harmonica player.

Shigeru: You'd be surprised if I play the harmonica.

A.C.; I'd loved to hear that now. Nobody plays the harmonica anymore.

Lynn: Not too many. But all the family parties now, he'll bring---I should have told you to bring your harmonica. He plays. He used to play saxophone too. Right? At one time.

Shigeru: In fact, my daughter asked me to play on a wedding party.

Lynn: One of our friends' daughter.

A.C.: Wonderful.

Shigeru: Wedding party. And they said, "Oh, you play good!"

Lynn: So, Japanese songs. You know. Campfire kind of songs.

A.C.: Yourself....You just learned by yourself?

Shigeru: Well, I learned by my country. Bought. Bought three. (inaudible) My country. That's how I learned to play.

A.C.: And how did you learn to play the saxophone?

Shigeru: 'Aiea has a band by itself. Waimalu Camp. They had their band. (inaudible) That's how I played the saxophone...I played pretty good on the saxophone. Yeah.

A.C.: I have a picture of Mr. Hatchacha in Filipino band. And looked like there were lots of music. Did you went to the community center? So you learned how to play from---

Shigeru: All wind band. Not like this (string instrument band). All wind.

A.C.: All wind. You blowing. They had different. Different. Different bands.

Shigeru: 'Aiea has the best band.

A.C.: They had the best band?

Shigeru: They learned from this fellow named, they called Molo. Haole name.

A.C.: Molo? Hmm.

Shigeru: 'Aiea was the best band. Yeah.

A.C.: Was it the school band?

Shigeru: No. no. All Filipino.

A.C.: So it was the camp?

Shigeru: Filipino. Yeah.

Lynn: But Daddy, didn't you also play the taiko drum for the Bon Dance?

Shigeru: Yeah. But I. (misunderstands and brings up baseball topic) We had competition. Baseball. Filipino team. Portuguese team. Japanese team. We had competition in baseball.

A.C.: Did you play baseball too?

Shigeru: Uh. No. Minoru played little bit.

Lynn: Your brother.

Shigeru: You know, on Sundays? We all get together. Football. And we (inaudible) Sunday. That's the only thing.

A.C.: Would people go to the baseball field near the gym?

Shigeru: Yeah.

A.C.: And, there would be people from all the camps? Or just 'Aiea? Would people come from Waimalu Stable Camp?

Shigeru: No. They're strictly from 'Aiea.

Japanese and Filipino in the 1930s

A.C.: Only 'Aiea people. Well, that's still a lot of people! In the 1930s, the plantation hired 2,000, 3,000 workers. That's just the workers. That's not their families.

Shigeru: At one time, when the Philippines Islands, new Filipinos working guys, used to come work the plantation. And, when they came here, already they see the Japanese. Philippines Island. They see the Japanese soldiers (in the Philippines) hit their head.

A.C.: So how was the relations between the new Filipino workers and ---?

Shigeru: We work together. We were on good terms.

A.C.: Yeah. Same jobs. So, no fighting?

Shigeru: No. I didn't see that.

A.C.: Good.

Shigeru: At the Filipino Camp, you hardly see Filipino girls those days.

A.C.: First, just single men.

Shigeru: All Filipino.

A.C.: Yeah.

Shigeru: But today, there's full of Filipino. That generation. Lots of them.

Bango Tag

A.C.: Well, after. The last time, I asked you, did you sign a contract, the first time you came to work when you were fourteen, fifteen years old. You said you didn't remember.

Shigeru: Oh that. I didn't sign one.

A.C.: But after that, you must have signed to keep working, yeah?

Shigeru: They give you a card with numbers. I think my card number is 224. When payday comes, they call you by the numbers. And you go up, you get your pay.

Lynn: Even when I worked in the cannery, I only lasted ten days, but um, we had a bongo number. And you worked in the cannery. You worked in the cannery, right? For what, two and half summers or something?

Shigeru: You know, the cannery? When the ladies come out, going home. They

smelled awful! All the pineapple. They smelled.

A.C.: Well, one of the reasons why the mill was productive, was because it was making sugar for Hawaii consumption, including the cannery.

Shigeru: Well, 'Aiea Plantation was the only plantation where white sugar—

A.C.: Right. Refining.

Shigeru: Refining.

A.C.: On the island. Later, liquid sugar.

Shigeru: Yeah. Different islands. White sugar.

A.C.: The demand would go up. They would have to make more, when it was canning season. So, then that would go right down to the canneries.

Honolulu Plantation Strike in 1946

A.C.: Can I ask you if you remember anything about the strike? 1948 strike (actually 1946). 1949. After that, Honolulu Plantation's stops. You know, their fields got taken over by the military, so, Hickam, Pearl Harbor.

Shigeru: Oh. This time. We strike because we want more. They were (inaudible) me. We (inaudible) too good. So Filipino and the Japanese would strike, went down--

A.C.: But together?

Shigeru: We --We walked. With a car, we went to bus stop. From there, we walked all the way to the capitol. And, we had an order, Big Five man. (inaudible) Right before that. But we had, uh,

A.C.: From all the plantations?

Shigeru: No. Just--

A.C.: Honolulu Plantation.

Shigeru: What was his name?

A.C.: He was our (inaudible) making the speech.

Shigeru: Who?

A.C.: Harry Bridges?

Shigeru: No. Harry Bridges was a bad man.

A.C.: Bad man? That was a mainland man.

Shigeru: Yeah.

A.C.: He came here, special, for the strike. I just want to know how you felt about it, and if it was hardship for your family?

Shigeru: Real hard. And when this time (inaudible) and then, we used to get a lot of eggplant. We used to live on the eggplant. To survive. Because it was cheap and easy to grow.

A.C.: Oh. (Pause) Did people in 'Aiea take care of each other? Kind of share?

Shigeru: No. We had a sack lunch. You get free lunch. Sack lunch. But most all Filipino go. Japanese get pride. So they don't want it. Go eat. But the Filipino. All go there.

A.C.: So when the strike was over, how did you find out? Did a truck go around with a megaphone?

Shigeru: No. No. The strike was, uh, very hard. Hard life.

A.C.: So when you stopped working at the mill, and you retired, you worked how many years?

Shigeru: I worked plantation many years, you know.

A.C.: You started 1929 (actually later since he was born in 1919). But your last year was---when did you stop working at the mill? What year? (Discussion about his working thirty years)

Shigeru: In the wartime. 'Aiea lost plenty sugarcane. The army took the place. I don't know. But we lost plenty of that to the services. And that's how 'Aiea went fold up, as Oahu Sugar took over 'Aiea. And then, we work under the Oahu Sugar. Yeah.

A.C.: Would you say life was better before the war or after the war?

Shigeru: Before the war.

A.C.: Why?

Lynn: I can see where it was better. From his point. Just living it.

Shigeru: Work for Oahu Sugar. You want only stay in 'Aiea.

Work at Oahu Sugar Company

A.C.: You only stayed in 'Aiea. After the war, you had to go to Waipahu?

Shigeru: Yeah. You go there. They ask, "I assign you to a new job," eh. "What you can do." Yeah.

A.C.: And new boss? Not the 'Aiea foremen.

Shigeru: No. Boss name is Tony Moniz. Plenty Portuguee boss.

A.C.: Oh. Uh-huh. Maybe this is a good place to take a break. Yeah. Actually we've been going an hour. And that's long. But that's good to know. That's a good way to end it. Or to start it.

Shigeru: Main thing. We must. I don't think at my age. My age, knows all what I can say. I don't think there's somebody else can take my place.

A.C.: Yeah. Absolutely. That's why we're so fortunate. We're so blessed that you want to share. And have opinions about it. That's why we're doing this.

Shigeru: I surprised my own self! I know the people who lived there.

Lynn See him come alive. (Tape continues but not transcribed)

END OF INTERVIEW