

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #463-4

with

Agnes Eun Soon Rho Chun (AC)

March 1, 1993

Honolulu, O`ahu

BY: Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

MK: This is an interview with Mrs. Agnes Eun Soon Rho Chun at her home in Honolulu, Hawai`i, on March 1, 1993. The interviewer is Michi Kodama-Nishimoto

I guess we can start today's interview with your experiences with the Korean-language school. I think we had talked about your going to a Korean-language school, and we talked about some of the emphasis. You know, when you look back on that experience, how much Korean language do you think you learned?

AC: Not real—not much, in my opinion. At least as far as the writing is concerned, I learned, but if you look at the writing that I do now, it's very, very basic, almost like kindergarten level. I'm really not sure of the characters also. But because I don't use it, and only in my contact with, say, a piece of paper with the Korean character on, I can at least read it and if it is a word or (phrase) that I kind of understand, then it's all right. Otherwise, if the words, the vocabulary is something new, contemporary, I wouldn't know. So, the conversations that we have with people coming from Korea now is very difficult because many, many of the vocabulary that they use is not what we had learned. Most of our contact in Korean language would be with our parents, and that was just household language.

MK: And then, you know, I know in terms of Japanese families, there are different dialects that were spoken. In the Korean families locally, were there different dialects of Korean spoken?

AC: I think not much. They have a little—they call that Kyongsang-do, and they have the Pusan way of talking, but basically the words are all the same, I think, most of it. I mean one part of Korea might say a word, and it'll be pronounced a little different, down south, for instance, but not that much (difference). I think more so like Filipino and Chinese, I understand, they have such diverse dialects. Now, we do have in Korea this place called Cheju Island. Cheju Island (dialect) is entirely different from the other Koreans, but as we know, they do speak the regular Korean language. I had the experience when I went down in 1975. The first time I went to Cheju Island for a visit, the tourist guides gave us an example of what the Cheju Island people's language is. It's entirely different, it's like a different kind of language. But they spoke the regular Korean, and I don't know too much about the history of that language.

MK: And then, you know, when you were a youngster, and as a young adult, how much Korean did

you actually use?

AC: Very little, just conversation with our parents (and) our neighbor ladies, and then at school, whatever we were learning. But as I said before, we were always very inattentive at school. So I really didn't pick up too much in the way of speaking. So it was all picked up at home.

MK: And then, you know, in the Japanese-language schools, they had something in their curriculum that they would call ethical teaching, or morals teaching through stories about what is good behavior. How about in the Korean-language schools? Was there anything like that?

AC: I just vaguely remember (the teacher) telling us different kinds of stories, but the only stories that I could remember were the historical stories about kingdom of Paekche and Silla, and so forth. But I really can't remember.

MK: And then, was there any sort of teachings that could be considered political or something about the nation of Korea, or Koreans as a group?

AC: I really don't know. All I could remember (is) that she gave us the history of Korea, and whether it was political, I don't remember. Not even about the Japanese (was) brought up or anything like that in class.

MK: And then, I know that in addition to the Korean-language school, your family was active in the Korean church. What was the name of that church?

AC: It was the Korean Christian Church, and as far as I could remember, it was located on School Street at one time. Then they moved. That was where they had the church services and the Korean-language school. And it was in a lane, right off School Street, and that property is where the Korean Care Home (now) sits. And the Korean Care Home had the cottages built there, plus a main complex. The other old building that we used to use as a church and school was torn down.

MK: And then, this Korean church, Korean Christian Church, was it a Methodist or Congregationalist, or . . .

AC: We're considered Protestant Congregational. And our church is independent. In other words, it was found(ed) by Dr. Syngman Rhee. Originally they had church services in other places, like in Kaimuki and Puunui. Finally, they purchased that School Street property. The Korean Christian Church always was independent (until a few years ago) we joined the United Church of Christ, mainly because we need to have our church identified with the main group for, I would say, training purposes, when you have training of Sunday school teachers and leaders of the church. (Although we are a member of the United Church of Christ) our church is still independent. In other words, the property still belongs to the church.

MK: And then, as a youngster, I'm wondering what sorts of church activities were you involved in?

AC: Oh, as a youngster growing up, I joined the junior choir. And we had what we called CE, or the Christian Endeavor Society. And we had Sunday school, and I also joined the Girl Scouts, which was sponsored by the church. And the Christian Endeavor meetings were held early

evening on Sundays, about 5:30, 6:00, and it was a group of youths getting together with other churches also. They had Christian Endeavor Societies all over in the islands and we would get together with them or we would have our own meetings. The junior choir sang in the church service whenever they had us scheduled.

MK: You know, I was wondering, did you look forward to those activities or was it something that your parents wanted you to get into?

AC: You know, it's a funny thing but it's—when you compare it to today's youth, it was something for us to do, because there was really nothing we could do. The only thing that you could do was go to a movie, right? We kind of looked forward to going to church. It wasn't something that was forced on me. I kind of felt that it was in fact required. So even the Christian Endeavor, we had at least fifteen to twenty kids, at one time. The junior choir was a good number too. So we more or less were members of the choir and the Christian Endeavor. (As) for the Girl Scouts, we had a good number also, maybe about fifteen girls, that was also something that we kind of looked forward to, during the weekends.

MK: Yeah, and I'm going to sort of change the subject. That was like a way to kind of finish up the interview that we had last time. I know that your father was ill since about 1933, and he passed away in 1935 after your mom tried all sorts of remedies and everything. Now, when your father passed away, how did your family manage financially and otherwise? Just to, you know, stay together, survive.

AC: My mother was working, and I believe she was, at that time, working for a tailor shop. And I don't recall whether she had gone to the tailor shops to work, but I know she had, you know, these pieces of trousers and shirts that were brought over, where she can sew at home. And she also worked at the pineapple cannery [*Hawaiian Pineapple Co.*]. And then, at a point, I think what happened was that she had to pull out my oldest brother. The eldest had to quit school. He was a junior, and I know many, many years even after that, she always said, "I wish I didn't pull him out of school." And she said, "In retrospect, I sometimes wonder why I didn't get welfare." Because, at this point, when she was telling me this, the other ladies who were in the same situation—because many of them, their husbands were much older than they were, and they passed away. Some of them had divorced and so forth. But many of them were on welfare and evidently, they were able to send their kids to school continual(ly) and they had enough money to invest in buying homes, you know—apartments and rooming homes, houses, or whatever you call them. So she often wondered. I know that what she did several times was to hold that *tanomoshi*. The *kye*, they call that in Korean. That's how you get money to work with. So she'd be the *tanomoshi* boss. You would collect and use the money at that time. She would then have to pay each month whatever number of months there were. But anyway, she also did that. I think she had made loans with other women, too. I remember one lady who loaned her money. My mother was very good friends with her and she always was very thankful that she was able to get loans from the lady. Then my brother, second brother graduated from high school and he went to work. And then my sister, the third in the family, she had to quit school too. She quit school when she was in the eighth grade. To help with the family and she worked in a tailor shop. So again, she was the one that my mother felt bad about. But all in all—I mean, all the children grew up. And then my sister, Violet, which is number four in the family, she was able to finish high school and then she even had two years of college. Just before the war broke out, I think she quit school. I mean, she was able to only

go (for) two years, and then the war broke out. She never did return. So that was how we got along. Everybody pitched in and worked. So really, my brother was the breadwinner of the family.

MK: And, you know, you mentioned that like your mom took in sewing from a tailor shop. Would you remember what kind of tailor shop that was?

AC: The tailor shops at that time were all located on the bases, like Fort Shafter. In fact, all I could remember, they had Fort Shafter and they had Wheeler Field—and that was in Wahiawa. And they had also on Luke Field, that's the Ford Island. Luke Field on Ford Island, they had a tailor shop there. In fact, my brother, the second brother, he finished high school and he went into a tailoring. He worked as a tailor on Luke Field. He eventually used that as his trade. Before the war broke out, he worked at Pearl Harbor, when they started hiring. And he worked for the sail loft in making anything (involving) sewing. They would fix upholstery and the sail, whatever is required on the boats. So he got that as a trade. My big brother, the eldest, worked as a painter at the Pearl Harbor shipyard, so that was his trade all his life. My sister Violet, when the war broke out, worked at Ford Island, and two months after the war broke out, that's where I started also.

MK: Okay, let me see. And, you know, just going back to the period right before the war started, from, say, 1935 to '41, with your brothers, your sister helping out financially, how did you think your family was managing? Did you feel like you folks were having a hard time or did it seem okay?

AC: You know, it's a funny thing, but I never, as a growing child, had been deprived of, like, food, for instance. My mother always made *mandoo*, and she had *kalbi*. And one thing that I remember we always ate was this boiled ham. You know the ham that comes in that pack now, hanging on the refrigerated section, the ham slices. We would always have that. I had all my eggs and whatever. So when we talk about kids growing up in the plantations and they didn't have too much to eat and so forth, I don't know what it means to have to go through that, because as far as eating was concerned, we always—in fact, almost when I was growing up, that was a sort of ritual every day we would walk down Pua Lane going to the markets along King Street. I would go with my mother and we'd go to the market and (buy) pork (for) thirty or thirty-five cents a pound. My mother always bought tenderloin. She would call that, “tenderline.” So I don't think we ever had any problem (with) food. At that time, we didn't have Korean restaurants, so making *mandoo* was a big deal and you really eat that only during the New Year's holiday. My mother would sometimes cook that (on weekdays and) we'd have *mandoo* (after work). I know she must have struggled, but I didn't see it that way.

I had clothes. I don't remember wearing hand-me-downs. (There was a) five years difference between me and my sister above me so there was nothing that could (be handed) down. So I just can't remember that I had a difficult time.

MK: And then in terms of school activities, were you ever denied an opportunity to participate in something because of lack of money, or lack of time, or . . .

AC: No, I never did. I only remember that I was always in the health class because I was underweight. I was tall. I was always one of the tallest girls in the classroom, and in fact, taller

than the boys, and so I was underweight. So I was always in that underweight class, and we would have to (drink) milk and (eat) cracker. So I never really had any experience of not having money for lunch or any kind of activity.

And I remember like when Christmastime comes around and we had the New Year's (holidays). At the Dole Pineapple Cannery [*also known as Hawaiian Pineapple Co.*] (grounds on Dillingham Blvd.), they would have big carnival. They'd have a big carnival and that was a big thing (for us). I always went there, and I remember that was where we had (our) first experience of carnival. So I really can't say that I was deprived. For instance, at Sunday school, I remember we had our Sunday school programs at (near) where the city hall now is, in that vicinity. We would rent that (place), the church would, and have our Christmas programs, and it was a big deal. We would have each of our classes perform. I remember, many, many years, we would have to wear all white dresses (and) black shoes. I remember those Mary Janes. I had them and I didn't have any problem of ever not having anything. So I don't know how my mother managed, but she did.

MK: And then I know that during the summers, you mentioned that you did work, though, to help supplement.

AC: That's right. So when I was thirteen, fourteen—no, fourteen—fourteen, fifteen and sixteen, I worked at the cannery. And I had two girlfriends whose sisters were going to summer school, and they had previously worked. So they told me that they were going to work for the cannery at Hawaiian Pine. So I found that this lady, Sara Lee, was (not) working and was going to have a baby. So I got her card. Then three of us went to the cannery and worked. The first year I went, I went in as a trimmer. And I trimmed pineapple. And oh what an experience. I still remember that. Shall I talk about it?

MK: Oh yeah.

AC: (I) went as (a) trimmer. Those two girls went as packers. Because Sara had become a trimmer, so I had to go as a trimmer. So I was alone, and I remember most of the trimmers, you know, were old-timers and they were sort of big women. The pineapple would come down (on the belt) and everybody was supposed to pick one. They'd have a girl at the beginning of the pine[apple] line (to control the flow of pines). (For example, for nine trimmers.) She'd hold the pines, and when she has five of them, then she'd let it go. (The first five trimmers are to pick one. Then she'd hold four for the four trimmers and this five and four is repeated. Each trimmer knows which group of pine is hers and must pick one each time.) So in the meantime, as a beginner, you're trying to learn how to hold the pineapple and having a hard time (with) the juice (running) down your gloves, and you can hardly wield the knife the right way, they would let you get away with it. The ladies would do extra work and cut the pine (for you). But later on, when you didn't pick up your pine and they knew that you were doing all right, they'd just slam it in front of you. (They do this) when the other pine (is) coming down (and just in front of you, they'd send the stray slamming it). You learn real quick that you better wake up. I was very fortunate, I didn't have to go to the big huge pines, but people would literally get aches in their thumb picking up the pines and holding it. But I was fortunate, I had small pines.

One experience I had was that while I was trimming I heard this voice, somebody calling, "Sara, Sara!" And this woman or whoever Sara was would (not) answer (and) finally the

calling stop(ped) and then pretty soon (I felt) this hand on my shoulder. (The) forelady said, “Sara, I've been calling you,” and (then) it dawned on me, I was Sara.

So I turned around and (quickly) told her, “Oh, I'm so sorry.” I said, “You know, I didn't hear you.” Ever since then, I kind of tuned myself to the name Sara. I got away with that for the first year.

The following year, I requested a change to go to packing. I got in as a packer. I traveled with those (two) girls (and) learned how to pack. So three of us would go from one table to another. And we would have a lot of fun. And that was when I was fifteen. During the second year, they (had a) table of gems (or) cubes. Instead of packing, (two girls would) grab the pine and put it in (a) little chute (on either side of a) boy in the center. And we would really like that because you're right next to a guy.

(Laughter)

AC: We'd try to get (to that table but) periodically, they would take us away because they want(ed) us to pack. Because (the gem table needed no thinking, it was very popular). (In) the third year, I remember, (the) head forelady (Mabel) came by.

MK: Oh, Mabel Kozuki?

AC: (And) tapped me on the shoulder and said she wanted to see me. (I said to myself,) “Oh no,” don't tell me I'm going to get caught for being Sara.”

So I followed her into the office and then she told me, she said she wanted me to do something for her, something special. And I said, “Well, what is it?”

She said, “I want you to take this pan,” and it looked like a baking pan. She says, “Stand at the end of the packing table, and when the round pines [come down to the end] that packable, pick it all up and put it in the pan. And then, put the table number and then bring it to the office.” (I made two round each night.) Later on, the foreladies found out what I was doing. And so, as soon as they spotted me, they would say, “The round pine girl is here. Hold your pines.” And then you see nothing coming down. Hardly anything coming down, all packed. Many times what they'd do is they'd just squash it. They're lazy to even determine what size, what grade it is. They had the fancy, the standard, and the B grade. And then so what they do is they kind of squish it. So if I see any of those that were folded over, I just pick it up and just put it in the pan. As the results came to the foreladies, that's when they found out what their tables were doing. So that ended after two weeks.

(Laughter)

AC: And then, after—it was towards the end of the season anyway, and I never went back.

MK: Do you remember how much you were getting paid back then?

AC: Oh must be, what, twenty-five cents? I don't even remember. All I remember is they gave us a *bango*. And then, you never signed anything, and you had a little brown envelope. Small little

envelope and your pay was in there, in cash. And then so we'd just show our *bango*, and we'd get our pay.

MK: And then, when you got your pay, what did you do with it, the money?

AC: I really don't know what I did with it, I just don't have any recollection. I don't even remember giving it to my mother. But I remember how we were going to work, though. I always worked on the second shift, and we were in Pua Lane, so we had a whole group of kids that worked over there also. So we'd join the second shift and we'd go to work around one o'clock, maybe two o'clock, and then we'd come home in the evening. And we'd all walk home, and we never had any problem, transportation-wise.

But I remember there was a radio program—funny, some of the things that you can remember? There was a radio program that was called “Hilltop House.” And I remember listening to that every day, about eleven o'clock, before I went to work, (sometime) around eleven. And that was one of the things that was so very interesting. Here, I don't even remember now what the plot was about, but all I could remember was the name, “Hilltop House,” and we'd listen to that and then we'd go to work. We'd all meet and then walk to, go through Robello Lane, and then go to work.

MK: You know like you mentioned that, you know, as young girls, you liked to work at the gem table because there were boys there.

AC: Yeah. (Chuckles)

MK: How much of it was social, going to the cannery, I mean? I know you worked hard, you know, but. . . .

AC: It's funny, but I never did have any kind of date or anything. We never did, all of us. We just worked and we knew them and that's about it. Because they were much older than we were, right? We were like fourteen, fifteen and sixteen, and they were much older kids than we were. And they had tray boys also. You know, they pull out the trays, but it wasn't that much fun because tray boys would be walking back and forth. But then, we'd be talking stories with this guy (at the gem table). (Chuckles) So it's real funny.

MK: That's a nice memory to have, you know. You can remember how you felt back then.

AC: I remember, and I remember that cannery, I tell you, was really a—what you call? What's the word for it? They had us so programmed. They would have neon light(s), a green and a red neon light. When the green went on, we can go to the bathroom. And the bathrooms were all located right above the walkway so you go to the nearest one to your table. When the red goes on, you have to come down. And that's how it was, and that's how they controlled your break time, to use the bathroom. (But) they had good music at the time, playing throughout the day, which was very interesting. That's how I kind of remember so many of the old songs.

MK: And how about the foreladies? How did they treat you?

AC: Oh, we had no problem with the foreladies. They were very nice and they had the relievers

also. The relievers were white caps with brown strip on the top. They were really very nice. I guess if you pay attention and do your job, you really don't have any static, like anything else. But they would get after some kids who would (slack) off. They'd break pine, let the pine run down. And that's where after I got to be a good packer, all three of us, they'd usually try to separate us to different tables. We begin at the same table, and they'd come and take us away, one by one. What they'd do is they'd put us at the end. And then, when you constantly get pineapple coming down and you're backed up, as the last person, you have to roll your pineapple in the front of you on that little tray, until you get time to pack it. So when it starts to really get going, the second and the last person, what we'd do is, we'd kind of wait as the pine comes down and we'd see who the person is missing it constantly. Then when we see the pine coming down right in front of her, we'd get this extra pine that we held back, and we'd just shoot it up, and then it'll just splash in front of them. Like the trimmers used to do. But now, I had the opportunity to do it, right?

(Laughter)

AC: But you know, we were really rascals. But it was really an experience for three years. And then, 1941, June, July, August, that was the last year that I worked. And then '41, December, the war broke out. And then I never went back.

MK: Yeah, okay. And now when '41 came along, you were still going to school, right, at McKinley. And then, Pearl Harbor Day comes, December 7 comes. Now, what happened on December 7?

AC: Well, after working at the pineapple (cannery) in August, I quit in August. In September was my junior year. I had September, October, November, and then the war broke out on December 7. Okay, shortly before the war broke out, I decided I'm going to take a job. So I went to Kress [*S.H. Kress and Company*] for Christmas vacation, Christmas job. Now I'm sixteen years old and that's when you're allowed to work. So Christmas, I was already sixteen in June. At that time, I was working as Sara, so here comes December. So I applied for a job, sometime I guess in November. And then I was supposed to start on December 6. So I went to Kress, worked all day at the counter. In those days, Kress was—all department stores usually had a counter, display counters. And then the girl stood in the center, or two girls. If you wanted anything on the counter, you would pick it up and then she'd come over, and then you'd pay her, and then there's a cash register right there. So every counter had one or two persons. So that day, I worked with someone at the counter and we sold, I think at that time sanitary belts, ribbons and things like that. So, I remember having to bend over and look under the counter all day to refill. So (at the end of the day) I remember getting paid, in a small little envelope again, cash. I remember it was like a dollar, ninety-somewhat cents [*a little more than \$1.90*]. So I went home and that was the first day of work, legitimate under my name. So I was really proud for a dollar, ninety-somewhat [*cents*], eight hours a day.

And then, next morning was December 7. All I remember was I was in bed when we heard planes flying over and then the radio was on. I heard (some) commotion outside, and I got up. When I went out, they said, "Oh, the war. There's a war." There's planes flying around and when I looked up, we saw (a) plane flying, and it was with the round red circle.

So we ran inside and as we were listening to the radio, about 9:00, 9:30 [*A.M.*], we heard this thud-like (sound). We all rushed out, and there was a little store in the front, and there was a

lane next to it, and then our cottages, six of them were in that vicinity. Right next to the lane, there was this duplex. And lo and behold, right under the veranda, there was a huge hole. We all ran and were looking at the hole. While we were standing over there, some kind of uniformed people (came) running. They told us to evacuate. So the whole neighborhood had to evacuate, and luckily, at that time, my brother had married and gone out of the house. This is the older one. So he had been married maybe two years. His mother-in-law had just bought a home. That's where (the) Continental Apartments on Lunalilo Street (stands). (There was) a huge home (but) it was not occupied yet, so we all went there and—oh, in fact, they were about ready to move in, so they decided to just spend the night there. So we all spent the night there. From there, we looked towards Pearl Harbor (and saw) the smoke coming up. We could still see the smoke coming up, and that's about as far as—I mean near, as near as I could see anything. And we never, I never knew anything about the McCully area being bombed and so forth, until afterwards. We went home the next day.

MK: You know, on that December 7, when you have the planes going overhead, you've heard that war is on, you see the hole in the ground, you've been told to evacuate, what did you feel?

AC: We were all scared, and especially at night when they told us all the lights had to be out. At this great big home, we were literally in the dark, because we couldn't do anything to the windowpanes or anything. So it was really an experience. And I remember, we had to sleep on the floor, and next morning, oh, I was so sore because all day I had gotten that job the day before, and I was probably using muscles that I never used. So I was really hurting and for the next few days, we were hurting. Eventually, they made announcements to let us know that—that was maybe a few weeks later, that they wanted us to help with the identification process. And so, since I was in a typing class and shorthand, I went to help. They called us and told us to come and help. So we all went, and . . .

MK: You were saying that all of you went to Central Intermediate?

AC: Those of us assigned to Central Intermediate went there every morning and helped with the identification process. Each one of us had to have a state ID, and we were fingerprinted, so this was the process we had to go through. [*On December 27, an order was issued to fingerprint and register all civilians. Teachers, qualified students and others spent long hours at this task.*] And that was the first time I found out who entertainers were. (Chuckles) We had kids—I mean, you know, we were all young kids at that time. So when people came, you have to ask them what they were doing, their occupation. Many of them were entertainers, and so I just kind of naively said, “Oh, what kind of entertainer?” And then, I was kind of hushed. And then, later on we found out that they were prostitutes, right?

(Laughter)

AC: That's how I got my first experience about prostitutes. And they all probably were in (the) River Street area, right? And so, they came to Central Intermediate.

MK: So you would ask them for their names, their addresses?

AC: Addresses and whatever.

MK: Occupation and fingerprint them?

AC: (Yes.)

MK: And then, would you then give them a card with that information . . .

AC: I don't remember. Yeah, I think we had to give it to them at that time, if I'm not mistaken. I'm not sure now what had happened. But everybody was given a card.

MK: And were you required to always carry that around with you?

AC: Oh yes. I think I still have one of my mother's, ID [*identification*].

MK: And when would you have to show it, the ID?

AC: Any time. Any time they stopped you at night, if you were out. And this was just about any place, anything you did, you had to show your ID. That was to indicate that you were registered.

MK: And you know, you mentioned that you folks were called down to help. Was it a whole class of students or how did they get the help?

AC: I think what they did, they announced that they wanted students of the schools to come and help. And then especially those that were in the typing classes. The business groups [*classes*] were asked to come over to help. And so that's how we got there.

MK: And then, you know, another question I have is, you know, with the Japanese attacking Pearl Harbor, and your mother being Korean and having lived through a time when the Japanese occupied Korea, how did she react to all this?

AC: (Laughs) It's so funny, because we had this neighbor next door, and of the six cottages in this little compound, they were the only Japanese. So my mother would say, "Look out there, they must have known this was coming on. Because they're not out there watching." She says, "They all know that this was probably planned. They're not even out there watching."

(Laughter)

MK: Oh.

AC: And then, later on, you know, they had pictures in the paper about an ad that came out. I think it was the Musashiya [*actually, Hawai`i Importing Company*], that fabric store. There was some kind of ad that came out and they [*military intelligence*] questioned [*it*]; they said there was something in there that said what day it [*the attack*] was going to be and so forth. So when I told that to my mother, she said, "See, I told you so."

(Laughter)

AC: But I don't think it was ever proved, but that's what she would tell me. That's what the reaction

was.

MK: Did she express any fears though?

AC: Well, I think we all were afraid. But you see, we didn't know how—I didn't, anyway, until many years later. I never did probably follow through because I was busy doing my own thing, and at that time, I don't think I subscribed to the newspaper. I was living alone with—oh, at that time, my brothers and sisters, right, were with us. And then, shortly thereafter, my brother, the second one—the first one was married, and my sister was also married. So my brother, who was the second brother, married in January of '42, right after the war. And then my sister above me, she married in July of '42. So they were out, so I never got the paper. So I never really—and then too, during the time that I was helping with them and you know we had this blackout. We would have to have our windows all blacked out and they were selling this kind of tar paper. We didn't own a car at that time, so we didn't have any problem, but just coming home in blackout, it was really (something). And my brothers were at work. They were called at different, all hours of the day. So I hardly ever saw them. And then, my second brother moved out, and so I hardly ever saw them. So my sister and myself and my mother. When my sister moved out, just my mother and myself. And in '42, actually, when I started to work, my brother-in-law was working at Pearl Harbor, on Ford Island. And he had my sister work there too. He got a job for her and then in February, they asked me if I wanted to join them. So I went in as a messenger. So between, just going to work and coming back and it's blackout, there's nothing you can do. We were just eating and sleeping already. So that's all I could recollect at that time. Then you would have these wardens, the neighborhood wardens come around and check you out. I don't even remember going to church. During that time, work was more important. And I think church was holding services, but when they started holding services, I don't even remember.

So my time, actually, was just between home and work. And from February, that's in '42, I worked as a messenger. Then in June of '42, I became a GS-1 [*general services-1*], or at that time, they were called a CAF, clerical administrative and fiscal, CAF-1. In fact, when I started off as a messenger, what they did was this was something new at that workplace. The air station decided that they needed a gofer for each department. So each department—first, when I went in, they didn't start it at the department level. This was only in the admin[istration] office. The admin had to do with all of the incoming mail and outgoing mail, so they needed mail clerks. So we were hired to work in the admin. I was one of, I think, maybe about two or three that first came into the admin office as messengers. We were responsible for picking up the mail, and sending out the mail. At this time, the admin office took care of mail that came in for the whole department, the supply department. I worked for the supply department. The supply department did the procurement for all of the other departments in the station. So they would have aircraft parts that came in bundles, shipped through the postal service. So we would have to have a big [handcart], like (a) pushcart, the flatbed. The flatbed thing with that handle. And we'd push it to the post office, and then we'd pile all of these packages and whatever you have. Sometimes, two of us would have to go.

I remember one time it was so heavy, we were trying to push it over this hump on the road, and we couldn't do it, this girl and myself. There was this fire department and those guys were just sitting around, watching people pass by. So they were watching us for a while. Then they decided to help us, so they (came running) across and they'd help us push it across the hump.

We'd take it to the elevator, and make the distribution. And then, I stayed there just about, what, until June. Then they promoted me to a CAF-1, and I became a clerk for the time section, payroll section. So I became a timekeeper. I left that admin office and became a timekeeper. And then I became a two [CAF-2], I think, a year later.

MK: You know, when you first started as a messenger, how did you get that job?

AC: Oh, my brother-in-law was working for that accounting department there. They were hiring kids. So when he heard about messenger positions open, he asked me if I wanted to take the job. And then, when I was being processed in January, sometime at the later part of January, I told him I wanted to work, so they started to send me the paper. While I was being processed, the announcement came that school was going to be opened on February 2, [1942], the first day of school after the war. So I didn't know what to do, whether to go back as a student in (my) junior (year) and pick it up from there. But since I had the job and it was going to pay me ninety dollars a month, it's ten-eighth, \$1,080 per annum. I still remember that. So, I decided I might as well go to work. I told my mother I was going to work and she said okay. We had no income, really. And so my sister, my brother had gone out, and so it's my sister now. And so my mother says, well, up to me. So I says, "I'm going to go." So I went to work.

I earned ninety dollars a month. Later on, my mother had a job with the air force, at Hickam Field. They were recruiting people. This was—I don't know when it was, but maybe after 1942, when the air force and all of the services were recruiting (more) people from the Mainland. They were being housed at the cantonment, the navy cantonment at Pearl Harbor area. Hickam Field had their own cantonment too. So they were hiring these ladies to do cleaning. So my mother, her contemporaries were going to work, they said, "Why don't—" they asked her if she wanted to work. So she decided to go to work. A whole bunch of Korean ladies went to work. They had their social security [number] and they started working as cleaning ladies. I remember, my mother had worked with this lady, Helen Choy's mother. They were cleaning with this disinfectant, I think. And they got toxic (poisoning of their) hands. That toxic thing got into their hands and their hands got swollen, and oh, was so huge and big. St. Louis School was (the military) hospital. [*Originally known as Provisional Hospital No. 2, but after June, 1942, it was called the 147th General Hospital.*] So they put my mother and this lady in the hospital over there, and they were taken care of, and they got well after that, after all the toxins were removed.

MK: Did that take a while?

AC: I don't know how many days she was in there, but they were placed in there and then after she was well, she went back to work. But they were told to be careful about the usage of that.

MK: And like how did---you know, in your case, where your brother-in-law told you about the job, was there any testing involved or. . . .

AC: At that time, they just had us fill up an application and we were hired.

MK: Was there a sense that it was a lot of competition for these jobs, or was it something where you could easily get a job?

AC: Well, that was just the very beginning part, and people were getting aware now of these jobs, so right away, they had this employment office opened at the main gate. Outside the main gate, right next to the main gate, they had this Pearl Harbor employment office, and that's where all the people were, getting jobs. It was advertised that they need(ed) people. But since I had already had the inside information, I was able to start on the second of February.

MK: And you know, you mentioned that there were two or three of you hired. Were they also friends of yours, or were they people that you didn't know?

AC: No, I didn't know who they were. They just came in and then later on, they went to the employment office and put in for it. Many school kids came by too, like myself. In fact, they announced it at schools too, they have different positions open and asked the kids to join. So many of them did. There were about six of us on Ford Island, that—not in my department, other departments. There were about six of us, I think, that continued to work instead of going back to school. So I stayed out all of my junior year. June came along, I was still out. My senior year, I still worked, full-time, and we earned annual leave and sick leave.

So the following year after my senior year, around October, they announced that kids who had gone back to school—I mean, gone to work, if they want to come back to school may do so on a half-a-day basis and the department of defense worked with them to have us come back to work part-time. So the deal was, you go to school from eight o'clock in the morning to about 11:00, or 11:30. And we had four courses. And after the fourth course, you go to work. Because we worked on Ford Island, we had to catch the ferry or the launch. Well, at that time, we had the Army-Navy Y [*Army-Navy Young Men's Christian Association at the corner of Hotel and Richards streets*]. And across the Army-Navy Y, they had (a) bowling alley, and they had the Black Cat Cafe. And they had the Pearl Harbor Drivers' Association, with buses that went into Pearl Harbor. Previously, they didn't have any buses going into Pearl Harbor, they just went outside to the main gate, and that's it. The Pearl Harbor Drivers' Association had a bus that went all the way into the landing (area), way inside of Pearl Harbor, by the dry dock area. Then from there, they had a launch that connected to Pearl Harbor, Ford Island. So what we did was we'd run for the bus, as soon as class was over, run for the bus, catch the bus—and at that time, it was those trolley buses. We'd catch the bus and get off at the Black Cat Cafe. And then, get a hamburger and milk shake, or whatever, and run across the street for the Pearl Harbor bus. And then, we'd catch that bus and go to work, and we'd get there just in time to catch the launch. So that's why we had to rush because if we miss(ed) that bus, we'd be late. And then, we'd get to work around 1:00, 1:30 [*P.M.*]. Then, we'd work until—see, they had two shifts on Ford Island. So we'd work until five, six o'clock, when the day was long, and to seven o'clock sometimes. Then, when the (days got) short(er), just until five.

MK: And then, you'd again . . .

AC: Then catch the ferry or the launch back home. At that time, we didn't have that highway like we do to Pearl Harbor now. You had mud—oh, that place where they used to park the cars, buses over there, used to be a mud hole.

MK: Were you ever coming home so late that you'd have a problem with, you know, the blackouts and all that?

AC: Well, not really. We had to be out of the streets, early enough. So in the beginning part, we'd try to get in before it was dark. And then, we'd have to study anyway. We had to do our homework and then go to school next morning. Was really hard thing. I had English and social studies, that's the core studies. I had a Mrs. Claire Smith in that senior [year]---oh, they made us, they gave us time for working in our junior year. So when I went back, it was only the senior year that we finished half a day. So really I didn't have much of an education, when you come down to it. We went back to core studies, and then I had typing and shorthand for the two periods. Then after I---then we had graduation in June of '44, which was not really my class, but I attended the graduation ceremony. And then that was in '44 I graduated. So the annual leave that I had accumulated was able to carry me from October of 1943 until, I think it was around April of 1944. Then, I graduated in June. So I had full pay, until I had leave without pay. In other words, starting from around the ending part of April, I went to work, say, four hours, I get paid four hours, and then four hours leave without pay. But I was credited with my full year, because I had enough work time—in other words, unless you had x-number of working hours, you would be considered leave without pay, and then you wouldn't be counting the full years. But I did have enough time.

So during the working years, I really was not very active in anything, because there was really—we worked overtime, after I graduated. I worked overtime, and I worked on Ford Island until I was---in 1947, September, I transferred from Ford Island. We had this fellow working---you see, when you work on Ford Island, you get to be very close with many people because you ride the ferry, and you have to get there early. Rid(ing) the ferry, takes about twenty minutes. So really, almost half an hour, you're waiting for the ferry, you're talking to your friends, you're with them on the ferry, then you get off. In the afternoon, the same thing again. So we had (Mr. Jong Chock) who had a sister working on the Pearl Harbor, on this side. He told me, “Oh, you know, my sister (Ethel) is looking for someone that can run this payroll check writing department, as a supervisor.” The position is a CAF-4, at that time. And then so, he said, “Why don't you go over and take that job? You don't have to come on this ferry,” and so forth.

So I told him, I said, “Oh, I'll think about it.” And, you know, the weeks went by, and this lady was going to move to the Mainland because her husband was leaving. (He was in the) military.

So finally one day, he told me, he said, “You know, Ethel called me, wanted me to know what your decision is.”

That day, just happened that when we were working on Ford Island, (Rose Au) who had a car (was kind enough to take five of us to the beach). (In fact all six of us), every payday, would either go to a movie, after dinner, or if it was not that situation, what we'd do is we'd go to lunch (on weekends) to different places like hotels, like Young Hotel. They had that nice dining room. And we'd go to (the) Royal Hawaiian, (the) Queen's Surf, and Lau Yee Chai. And then later on they had (the P.

Y. Chong restaurant). We'd go to these different places for lunch on Saturday and make it a day. We had a lot of fun doing those things, but that day we decided we'd go swimming.

He said, “Well, why don't you go before you folks go swimming. I'll set up an appointment for you to get an interview.”

So I said, “Okay.”

So we went there, I had an interview. I walked in, I walked out. We went swimming. And that fellow told me, he said, “Oh, when can you start?”

And I said, “Well, I think probably, no less than two weeks, because that's the normal procedure.”

So he said, “Okay.”

So I'm hired already, you know. So I went back to work the next day—and then this was Wednesday (that) we went—Thursday, I told my boss. So he told me, “Okay. Go see the chief clerk.”

I went to see the chief clerk and he was (Clifford) Kong. And you know, he---I'm much younger than they were, and so they treat(ed) me like a kid. And he's a very rough guy, but he's real smart. He became the chief clerk and he told me, “Well, okay, two weeks, you know.”

So I went back to my desk. And then, I was thinking along the lines, I said, “Gee,” I've been teaching this girl who was working under me all the ropes and she knows everything, and so I really can leave without having too much left behind. So I told my boss [*Luke Lai*], I said, “You think I can leave tomorrow?”

He said, “Why?”

I said, “Well, you know, Leilani (Mattoon) can do everything.” And I (said), “Maybe I can just go and you won't miss me.”

And he knew that I was doing, extra work for him, and so forth. So I said, “Then I can just start on my new job.”

So he said, “Okay, go see Cliff [*Kong*].”

So I went back to see Cliff, and he listened to my story, and then he told me, he said, “Are you sure that's what you want to do?”

And I said, “(Yes.)”

And so he said, “What did Luke say?”

And I said—his name was Luke Lai, my boss—I said, “(Yes), he said okay.” So I said, “You know, I've taught Leilani everything so there's nothing to worry about.”

So he said, “Okay, get the hell out of here!”

(Laughter)

AC: And I said, “Oh thank you.”

The next day, I left and it was so sad. I mean, I just left so quickly, right? I cried and I cried. I almost missed the ferry going home. That was my first employment, really, that was meaningful. So that was from '42 to September of '47. And shortly thereafter, after I left there, you know, '47, '48, they got word that they're going to close in '49. So the whole station closed up. So I went on to that new job, and then I stayed there doing the supervising (of) the check writing. Then, shortly thereafter, the check writing was taken over by the Naval Supply Center, so at that time, the bureau now gives our office—this was the Fourteenth Naval District Disbursing Office I had transferred to. They decided that they were going to give us new duties in accounting. We had not had any accounting. The name of the office is going to be changed from Fourteenth Naval District Disbursing Office to the Navy Central Disbursing Office. And it's going to take in a new type of work. It just happened that the payroll went and they put me in charge of that accounting department.

Subsequently, this is now in '51, I get a baby. My first son, Marcus, came along. So I was on maternity leave when they moved from the Pearl Harbor main complex area, into the Supply Center. So our disbursing office became a tenant of the Supply Center at Pearl Harbor. I was (now) in the accounting department. In fact, before we moved from the Pearl Harbor, and before I got pregnant, I had this IBM [*International Business Machines Corporation*] experience, not knowing what IBM machines were and etc. Our department was in charge of doing the mechanical work of accounting, and so they had the shipyard department—and I guess you would call that the IBM room—take over. So they plugged all the boards for us and they had this big electrical accounting machines, predecessor of (the) computers. And then, so what this assistant of mine and myself would do is we'd go to the shipyard office with all of the keypunching that was done in our office, and we'd go up there and he'll tell us how to put the cards in. That's how I learned. How to put the cards in, the IBM cards, and run the machine. It was so funny, we had no formal training. So he would tell us, “If you have any problem, just raise your hand,” and he'd come along. This was a man by the name of Arthur Hill. I still remember him.

So he'd come by and he would look at the machine and fix whatever is wrong and then press the button and here we'd go again. But it was so funny, when I first talked to him on the phone. I had called him to let him know that I was told to contact him and make an appointment to see him. My name was Rho at that time. I was not married at that time, I called him and he spoke with me, and then I went to visit him. And he looked at me and I said, “Mr. Hill?”

He said, “Yes.”

Then I said, “Oh, I'm Agnes Rho.”

He looked at me, and then he said, “You're the person?”

I said, “Yes.” And I said, “What's the matter?”

He said, “I was expecting a *Haole*.”

(Laughter)

AC: I said, "Why?" I said, "I don't talk like a *Haole*."

He says, "Yes, you do." He says, "I listened to you on the phone, and I was so sure I was going to see a *Haole* come up."

(Laughter)

AC: That's how I first got involved in this computer thing. But really, IBM was so different, from what they have now. Oh my goodness. And we would have to do a certain process and you'd have to pull this plug out and wire and put it into a different slot, and that would be so—I just didn't know what I was doing. So it was really an experience. When we moved over to the other Pearl Harbor Supply Center Complex, I stayed there until I left there for Ford Island again. I stayed there, that disbursing office, from 1947, September, until, let's see, it was in July of 1967.

MK: And then what happened from July 1967.

AC: I was in accounting, and then I stayed there until 1953. Then from 1953, they put me down into the military pay. Some of the accounting department jobs were going to San Diego. Now, they were shifting the direction. So I was put down into the military pay, and the commander wanted me to go down there for one reason, that the military pay (division) had about twenty-five military personnel, and about ten civilians (with) a (military) chief doing the operational supervision. (His tour is only) two years. Then the payroll master('s) (tour was also) two years. The disbursing officer had two years, and the cashier was a (warrant) officer. He was also military. So they wanted somebody there that could keep continuity. So he decided to put me there, but I told him, "I don't even know what a payroll looks like." I mean, the pay record.

But he said, "No, I know you can do it."

So I was put there. And I worked there in one corner with a manual. (The military), they were very much against it, someone outside coming in to supervise. But eventually, I looked around the operation and I noticed that there were some things that could really be standardized, like writing letters. All of the clerks were sending letters for individuals to the bureau for some kind of entitlement, and they each had to compose the letter, get the address, (etc.). So I started to standardize letters in form, form letters. And eventually I had shelves of form letters for different kind of entitlements. Then, later on, I also made a transmittal letter with different boxes to check off. In the beginning, I had a lot of flack from the (workers). They didn't want to use it, but eventually, I found out that they accepted it when the supply was running down, and they'd tell me, "Oh, we don't have this form," or, "This is the last form that I'm taking." I knew (then) that they had accepted the situation.

Then I also did some changes in the way they entered the items in the payroll, pay record. Instead of having each one typewritten, I had rubber stamps made so that everybody had a set of rubber stamps and all they do is pick up the rubber stamp and just rubber stamp it in, put the date, (etc.). So it became sort of a uniform system. And later on, when we had transition, every six months we had to open up a new pay record. And that was a real hassle with lot(s) of

overtime. So I devised little charts, showing the progress of the transition. Because while you're closing out, extending the line entries and closing out the pay record and balancing it, you still had to keep the new one going because you had to get it ready for the payroll that's coming up for the first of the month. It began January to June and July 1 to December. So these people have to be paid, and we have to service them over the counter at the same time.

So I had the transition going smoothly, and so I eventually found out many years later, seven years after I had left that office, (the) boss that hired me, he was the executive director. He called me one day and he told me, "You remember that transition schedule that you used to (chart the) progress (of the closing of the pay records)? Do you have it?"

And I said, "Gee, I don't think so, but I'll look around."

So I looked through my papers and I couldn't find it, and I (asked him), "What's the matter?" He said after I had left they had a heck of a time, keeping the overtime and the transition going. And he said, he decided to call me, seven years later.

MK: Oh, gee.

AC: But anyway so after I stayed in that (payroll) office, there was an announcement, the fellow that took my job in the accounting department was going to Hong Kong. He took a job (in) Hong Kong, for two years, and he would come back to that job. So they called that the obligated position. So it was announced and I decided to put in for it, because in the meantime, while I was down there, the job had just gotten up until a ten [GS-10]. It became a ten. So I put in for the job, and I got it. So I went back to the old job.

So not even a year, ten months later, there was an announcement at Ford Island again. Now Ford Island is opening up.

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

MK: Okay. We can just continue where we left off, yeah. Here we go.

AC: Okay, so anyway, while I was at the accounting office, the job for a budget and accounting officer opened up at Ford Island at the Commander Anti-Submarine Warfare Force Command. And the gal that worked with me (was) told (by) this chief from that office. They were looking for someone to fill that position, so he said it was a GS-11 job. They wanted to know if she knew of anybody, so she recommended me. She came over one day and told me that this job was open (and) said, "Why don't you take it because I know you can do it."

So I called personnel, and they said, yes, I was qualified because I had just gone up to the ten position, and to go to an eleven would be no problem. Because you can jump from a nine to an eleven, you see. So because I had the ten would be even better.

Then just luckily, I had a very good, outstanding rating from my commander. He's not usually the one to rate me, it would be my, the executive officer, the civilian executive officer, but the commander gave me an excellent write-up. So it just happened that way and I was just lucky. I put in for the job, and I got it. I was interviewed by the officer who was leaving, and he left it

open so that the incoming officer taking his place would interview me. So after that second interview, I was selected. And so I went there as a Budget and Accounting Officer, GS-11.

In the meantime, the civil service terminology changed from CAF to GS, meaning general services. I took the eleven position as the Budget and Accounting Officer for Anti-Submarine Warfare Force. (Subsequently), I got promoted to a twelve. In my eleven years there, I had seven outstanding awards. We had (fourteen) subordinate activities. My assistant, who was a seven at that time, went to an interview and got a nine in one of our subordinate commands next door. So I rewrote (the) job sheet, for the assistant, and it came back as an eleven.

MK: Oh.

AC: (Chuckles) From a seven to an eleven. I knew this fellow from the office I left, in the disbursing office. Well, that accounting office now was closing down because the work now was going back to San Diego. (They) were going to close and so he put in for the job and he got it. (He was) with me (for one year and I had) taught him all the ropes. I was very active with the Korean community, so I, one day, casually told my secretary, "Gee, if I had a job in Korea, I sure would like to go there, because when I was there in 1975 for a visit, it was a three-week visit, but I really didn't see much, because I had been sick for one week at the hotel." I came home, not finishing up the three weeks.

And so, one day, about two weeks later, she saw this *Federal Digest* or federal newspaper. And she said, "Jobs in Korea!"

And I said, "Where?"

The army has the overseas employment office, located in the [*Prince Kuhio*] Federal Building. So I called over there and the lady says, "We don't have a job that you are interested in," and it was the financial manager position, that's the name of the position that I hold. So she told me, "You can just put in an application, and if you don't get selected for a job within a year, then we'll just deep six that file."

So I came home and I told my husband, (while) he's reading the paper, and he said, "Up to you."

I said, "How about me putting in for a job in Korea?"

And he was just nonchalant, and I guess not even listening. And then so . . .

MK: Okay, you can continue where you left off.

AC: (About one week later, our personnel clerk calls me and says, "Did you put in for a job with the army?")

(I asked her, "How do you know?")

She says, "Well, we received (a) letter of request for a loyalty check."

I said, "Gee, for an activity that doesn't have a job open, they sure (are) sending out inquiries so quickly."

So anyway, about two months later—this was in April, right—May, June. About June, I went in for an operation and then I came out, and the day I started to work, just about the ending of June, or early part of July, I got a call one afternoon, from the Korean office, that's the Eighth Army in Korea. The comptroller's office called and the secretary says if I was still interested in the job. So I told her, "Well, depends what it is."

So she says, "The comptroller, deputy comptroller will call you." And she said, "What would be a good time?"

So I said, "Well, call me about five o'clock, local time here." I told her what time it was now, and so I'll be home at that time.

So, sure enough, they called me, and he told me it was the same position title that I had and it would be at the GS-12, step ten, which is the highest, I'm having now. I (said), "Well, that's the minimum I'll take."

So he said, "Yes, it is." And he said, "We have three applicants. We finalized three and so you're one of them. We'll make a choice now. So when we do in about a couple of days, we'll let you know." And that's how I got called. I didn't even go for an interview. And they selected me.

And that's how, when I came home, and I told my husband, "I might be selected, you know." He couldn't say anything.

So I was selected and that's how I made up my mind to go. And the job is obligated two years, which means my job here is obligated, which I can come back to, after my contract. So I said, "I don't have anything to lose, you know."

But he (didn't) want to go because he's a schoolteacher, and he's nearing his end of the twenty years or twenty-five years he put in. So I went on my own, and he stayed back and he became my dependent for transportation purposes. He came and stayed with me. I left here in September '78; June of 1979, he came and stayed with me until August, then came back. And then, I retired in 1980, the following year. I almost extended, you know, but what had happened was that when I got there in September, 1978 on December 22, I was back here because I took some leave before they sent me to school in Fort Lee, Virginia. I was there the whole month of January (1979), and I went back in February, to Korea. And then, stayed there all of '79 and in between I had people coming (to visit). I had somebody come in April, stayed until May 30. My husband came around ten, eleven, twelfth, someplace around there, right after school was over (in June) and stayed with me until August. My daughter came in September, stayed until October. Then my sister and her husband came, stayed with me for two weeks. Then my—another friend came over and stayed with another friend from Pusan. They stayed until the ending of October, when Park Chung Hee passed away. November I was alone. And then, December 11, I came back here for my vacation, and I didn't go back until January 15, 1980. And then, when I was leaving, my husband('s) voice (started to get hoarse). So I said, "Gee, you better check (with) your doctor."

Then, two days later, I had spent a day in Japan, (my son) called me. And I said, “Oh, how's Daddy?”

And he said, “He can't talk,” you know. “Lost his voice completely.”

Subsequently he lost fifteen pounds in about two months and couldn't talk. So they sent him to a speech therapist at the university [*University of Hawai`i*], from Kaiser [*Medical Center*]. I just kind of wondered now what was going on (as) they (said) some polyps (were removed). So I'm thinking to myself, don't tell me he's got some kind of cancer or something and they're not telling me.

So in March, I'm supposed to—six months before your time is up (in) September 1980, I'm supposed to make up my mind as to whether I'm going to renew (my contract). So they asked me if I'm going to renew. I said, “Gee, I'm having a problem with my husband now, so I don't know what to do. I'm going to be fifty-five in June of 1980.”

So when I (told) some people I (had) already put in thirty-eight years, they told me, “Well, why don't you retire so you can leave?”

(I said), “I still have until September (to complete the contract).”

Somebody said, “I think you can because they had a case like that.”

So I went to personnel and sure enough, she said, “If you can convince your commanding officer, you may retire in June and go home, and don't finish up your contract (for) three months, and (you) don't have to refund, reimburse the government for the transportation cost.”

So I showed the commander the picture of my husband. He was so skinny. He lost fifteen pounds. And he looked like a Korean refugee. So he said, “Who's this?” He had met my husband (and could not recognize the photo).

I said, “Oh, that's Soon Ho.”

He said, “Oh, I can't believe it.”

So they let me go. So I retired, when I became fifty-five in June. I came back and stayed for five months and decided to look for a job. Can't find one because I'm too highly qualified. I wanted some kind of low-key job this time, just to get by. Then about---and then I had a job, I found a job. I went to an employment agency and I got a job with this House of Adler. I worked in the accounting office, accounts receivable. Then, about a month later, they had an opening at the navy for the nonappropriated fund, so I put in for it and I got that job, as a GS-7. I put in eight years, and then my husband got sick. So I decided to retire, and then one week after I retired, he passed away. So really---and then, it turned out that it seems like all the activities I went to, they all closed down. (Chuckles) The accounting department closed, you know. And then, I went to Ford Island, that anti-submarine—we changed our name to Commander Third Fleet. So when I left, it was the Commander Third Fleet. I was the comptroller there. After I went to Korea, I retired, then I took the nonappropriated fund. So

Commander Third Fleet closed. Korea now is downgrading, so they're going to relocate from Seoul to another place. And then this nonappropriated fund job that I had, that office close(d) up also. And then, so . . .

(Laughter)

AC: I hated to think about it that way, but it turned out that way. In looking back, I really don't know what would have happened to me and our family. At that time, it would have been just my mother and myself. I would have gone to school, and probably looked for a part-time job, and then probably got employment someplace. But I know the war just turned everything upside down for everybody, and for some people who lost their family members. Even at work too, you had lot(s) of people from the Mainland, contract employees. On Ford Island, we had what they call the A & R, the assembly and repair, that was a naval air station. We had lots of Mainland contract employees who were employed there. They had a program where local boys were recruited for aircraft mechanic jobs. They were helpers in the beginning, or apprentice aircraft mechanics, and they came through, and they were hired through the employment office. For the first time in the history of the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, we employed a Japanese fellow. One Japanese [*ancestry*] fellow came and that opened the door for the rest of them. There was no racial discrimination after that. For many years, only other than Japanese, no Japanese were employed in Pearl Harbor.

MK: When was the first one hired?

AC: I think--I was there between '42 and '47, right. So it must have been around '44, '43, around there, that he was. . . . In fact, his name was, I think, the first guy, if I remember, was Max Isara. I still remember that fellow. The reason why we know about it is because I was working (on the) payroll at that time. I think it was in '43, '44.

MK: You know, when you were working at Pearl Harbor, during World War II, what was it like for you? You know, you're a local girl, you're young. What was it like working on a military base during World War II?

AC: In the beginning, I was really naive. We just worked, went back and forth and I happened to be (in) a department that had all civilians, and they were local civilians, like the payroll and the supply department. So my associates were all local people. And then you had many local girls who married military personnel that they met there. I was not in contact with too many of them, because—working time, and I was one that had a job that was strictly, mostly civilian. Only towards the latter part of my stay there, maybe around '45, '46, they had military personnel come into our payroll department. But prior to that time, we didn't. I worked with WAVES [*Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service*], and then we also had military guys. They were assigned to the supply (department). And especially because the military normally do not get assigned to like—this is a civilian payroll department, not military. We never handled the military, you see. So it was very unusual, but I guess at that time they had enough military personnel to be assigned to this kind of job. So I had a few contacts, not too many.

MK: How---even in those few contacts, how was it for you? You know, you've never been with so many people from off-island, from outside, what was it like?

- AC: Was different. I guess even during lunch hour, they go out and eat, but then we also had contract employees too. Those were civilian contract employees from the Mainland that worked in our office, so they were again different. They had their own style of doing things, but I wasn't a very people person. So I just was to myself. And then too, my sister was working with me, until 1945, I think maybe, '45. She was in the same department. And then I knew some church ladies, women, and other girls same ethnic group, that worked there. And I made friends with Chinese girls, so those were really my contacts and then we had like a group of girls that went out. So that was what I really was doing. I never had---oh, and then maybe we would have parties, like the office parties would go on. And like I said, most of them---see, we were considered very young kids, you know, sixteen year(s) old and seventeen. Those other people were already in their twenties when they started working, you see. So we were, we had a big gap, so we were more like kids. So if they had parties, we never went. But in the latter years, I think maybe at the end, maybe like '46, '47, just before I left, I did attend parties they had. Like weekend(s), they would go to a picnic. Then I would join them, but not before then. And anyway, that was after VJ-Day, '45. So that was it. But, I never gave it a thought, really. You know, it was just going to work and coming back, and the same old routine.
- MK: And then, you know, being of Asian ancestry, when, say, the workers from the Mainland would see you on-base, would it pose any problems, you know?
- AC: I think the mix was more locals, at that time, than Mainland. Especially in the kind of department we worked in, supply department. Most of our workers were locals, and a few, here and there in different departments, we had the Mainland contract employees, but other than that, mostly were locals. And then the sailors were assigned to (the) stores group, the supply rooms, where they issue supplies and stock supplies. They would be there. But I hardly had any contact with them except those that were actually working with us.
- MK: And then, you know, in your case, where you started with defense work during World War II, you started then and you made it a career. How about all the other local kids that starting working about your time? Did many of them continue or did they just stop once the war ended?
- AC: No. Many of my friends continued. Many, many of us retired after twenty, thirty—most of them were thirty years and up that—especially in that finance office, that disbursing office I worked in. We still get together and we have get-togethers like maybe during Christmas. And we still have a close bond. Not with the other places I've worked. I kind of lost—except on Ford Island, I still am in close contact with at least two or three people now. [From one] office we have a whole group of people, almost twenty or more, that we still get together and see each other.
- MK: And did they come from backgrounds like yours, where they had maybe like a high school education and just continued on through?
- AC: That's right. Most of us were high school education only. A few, I think, have gone on to become college graduates, that quit their work and went on. And like that basketball player—what's his name—Red Rocha. He was on Ford Island before too, working in that assembly and repair. But he was just in the assembly and repair. We remember him because he was such a tall, lanky guy. I think there are the other few people that have gone out to work. I know there's a Filipino fellow that I know was working with us in time (section who) went out to

work for the bank, Bank of Hawai`i, Jose Balmores. He was one of the well-known swimmers, in the early times. A few of them, I'm sure, have gone to—I can't recall right now who they are, but then we had many people who also went and had their college degrees while working. They worked and then went on. I probably could have done it myself, but I didn't have that much ambition. I took the GED test at the university, and then I passed, and then I took one course in accounting, and then I got pregnant, so I just dropped it. And then I took one course in math and that was it. I never followed through. I wish I did though.

MK: But you were still able to, you know . . .

AC: So my husband always tells me and other people that, sometimes a college degree means nothing and I did well without one. But still, I feel that the potential for, many other things, probably, would have been at my fingertips if I had a college degree. And then, too, I don't know about other ethnic groups, but the Koreans are very much—especially those that come out now from Korea, they're all highly educated. You know, these Koreans are very much so, and many of them, I'd say a good percentage are college grads. They kind of look down on you, (if) you don't have a college degree. Over here, local people, I don't think we think about anyone as, “Oh, you don't have a college degree,” or something like that. But I think Koreans do that. They tend to play up to people who have a degree. In other words, unless you have a degree, or unless you have lots of money, maybe. If you're in-between, you're lost.

(Laughter)

AC: That's one. I think that's one of my regrets, and that's the reason why when my children were growing up, I kept telling especially my son that he should get a degree. And if he wants to be a beach bum, he can do that after he gets his certificate, this sheepskin. I told him, “You can be a beach bum, and when you're tired, at least you have that to fall back on. But if you don't get a degree,” I said, “I don't care what happens, you can go so far, and that's it.”

And then, too, sometimes I think I probably could have had a higher grade, but, let's see, no matter what they say, one, I'm an Oriental, and I'm a woman. You understand. In those days, in the seventies, it's not what it is today. They did put in for a higher grade, but it always came back as a twelve [GS-12], which was okay, as far as I'm concerned, and I got my step ten, which is the highest. Every time you get an outstanding, you get a step increase. But really, had I been a male, I'm sure I probably would have gotten this male pulling strings for the male, the old boy network, if you might call that. I think there is a difference. I don't care what you say.

MK: And so, you know, you work for the military all the way through and you got married in nineteen . . .

AC: Forty-nine.

MK: . . . 1949. And three children?

AC: Three children. And then I went on numerous trips, my job called for trips. I went to Norfolk, Virginia, I think about three times. I went to Washington twice on conferences and Chicago. Then I went to San Diego many times. Oakland, California, I went to Seattle. We had activities under our command in those areas, so I really was lucky. One time when I was there, in

Norfolk, Virginia, the World's Fair was going on, 1964, New York World's Fair. So we took leave and then went up to the New York World's Fair. And then, one year, I was sent to the, from Commander Third Fleet, I went to the—I think it was called the Anti-Submarine Warfare Force at that time, I'm not sure. But anyway, changed name. Same activity only different name. I was sent to (the) Maxwell Air Force Base, in Montgomery, Alabama in 1974. And then, at that time, I had a friend in Jacksonville, Florida. So over the long President's Day vacation, there was (a fellow) in class (who drove) off (on) Friday night and never come back until Sunday evening. One day I asked him where he was going. We all lived in that dorm (with) sixty-two students in that class. It was a comptroller's course. Professional Military Comptroller's Course. (It) was a mini-MBA [*master of business administration*] (course), can you believe? It was a mini-MBA equivalent. I couldn't believe it, because, I'm not (even a college grad[uate]). They had testing, and I didn't know what the score was. And all these other guys were college grads, and officers. It's a GS-13 position course. But I'm a twelve, but they asked me to go, so I went, not knowing what it was all about. I really had a good time, (but) what an experience. But anyway, he told me he was going to Jacksonville, Florida, (his home). I told him I had a friend over there. So he told me, "Call her up and then, you can go with me and come back."

So I called her, one of our old friends, (who was) running (the) *Hale Kaukau* in Jacksonville, Florida, right behind (the) naval air station, Jacksonville. She said, "By all means, we're old family friend(s), you know."

It turned out that when (my friend) was there waiting for me, (she) found out that their children had the same piano teacher that they knew. It was so funny because it's a small world. They took me down to [Walt] Disney World over the long (President's Day) weekend, and we came back home. It was really good.

So I made all kinds of trips, and then, too, the navy at that time allowed, when I first worked there, in 1940, let's see, in the forties. So anyway, in 1950, let's see, in 1949, I got married. In 1950, my first anniversary would be July 2, but on July 1, I was on a transport going to the U.S. Mainland for the first time. These two girls that worked at supply center came to my office and said, "Let's go to the Mainland on this transport." And at that time, if you worked five years, you were eligible to ride the transport and this is the U.S. Naval Ship, USNS. And you can ride the ship and go for \$7.50, just pay your *kaukau*. So it was the USNS *General Anderson* that we went on. (When I told) my husband (about the girls' trip), he said, "Go." So I went with the girls, three of us.

We caught the boat, and that was right after the Korean War [*started*], 1950. We had blackout on board (the) ship, so (it) wasn't very good, but (we had) nice sit-down (meals). We (docked in) San Francisco. From there, (we went) all the way to Detroit. (One of the girls) picked up a car (in Detroit). We (drove) to Niagara Falls, (New York), Washington, cross-country to Grand Canyon, Los Angeles, and then I went up to Oregon to see my sister. I flew back with my mother. But the two girls came back on the transport. So it was (only) \$7.50. I really enjoyed working for the government. I had all kinds of trips.

MK: So in a sense, you know, the government gave some, well it gave you an opportunity for a job that maybe you wouldn't have gotten outside. Gave you some opportunities for travel. And I guess pay-wise, it was . . .

AC: Pay-wise was good. I was always on top of things. But like I said, had I been a male, I probably would have gotten a little higher, but what can I say. I was well treated and I really enjoyed it.

MK: I'm going to end the interview here then.

END OF INTERVIEW