

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #465-1

with

Toso Haseyama (TH)

April 16, 1992

Honolulu, O`ahu

BY: Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

[Editor's Note: The interview was conducted in Japanese by Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto and translated by Judith Yamauchi. Only those sections relating to the immediate prewar years, the wartime, and early postwar years are published here.]

MK: This is an interview with Mr. Toso Haseyama at his home in Nu`uanu, Honolulu, Hawai`i on April 16, 1992. The interviewer is Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

Then in 1937, 1938, 1939, and 1940—you [*Toso Haseyama, owner/operator of Haseyama Tailor at 981 Iwilei Road in Honolulu*], had tailor-made and ready-made and alterations. Was there anything else?

TH: Yes, there was. There were rental suits. And, after the war, there was judo gear. I also used to sell aloha shirts.

MK: You sold aloha shirts?

TH: Yes, in those days, I was so busy before Christmas. So they would wait for them to be made in order to take them home.

MK: Then in 1939, 1940, 1941 how many workers had you hired at Haseyama Tailor's?

TH: What do you mean? Workers? At that time, at the most, including those who worked part-time in their homes during the busiest times, there must have been about thirteen in all. And, in those days, there were about five or six in the shop. After the war and before the war it was about that many.

After the war there were war brides who came and they worked part-time. But those [*war brides*] who came from Japan then would complain about this or that and would fight among themselves. I had a terrible time. Those Japanese war brides—but among them there was a good person too. She was announcing part-time at KGMB [*radio*] at that time, and after she finished, she would come over to my place. And she would do exactly as I asked her to do, so she was good.

MK: So business during 1938, 1939, 1940, 1941 boomed?

TH: Yes, sales increased and I needed more workers.

MK: And you handled ready-made and suit rentals. Were there one or two workers who took care of these exclusively?

TH: The salesladies who were in charge of suit rentals would fit the sizes—have the pants and coats tried on and matched, pinned, and then the tailor would do the alterations. These were all part of their jobs. Also they would sell. But they didn't take orders for suits—I did that. But they sold the ready-made and the aloha shirts and pants, and they would handle the suit rental and fitting.

MK: In those days, what sorts of people ordered suits?

TH: Nearly all were Japanese. In the old days, the parents would—when people died they would need black suits—the parents would have these suits made for their children. That is not so these days, is it? These days it's okay for the people to wear even aloha shirts to funerals. In those days, the parents had to have one black suit made for each child. They didn't rent these suits.

MK: Did they order khaki pants, too?

TH: Yes, khaki pants for their children. They said ready-made ones were difficult to iron, so they insisted on made-to-order. So immediately after graduation, they would make their orders by phone. And I had to get those ready by the time school resumed.

However, after taking the phone orders—they would order three or four pairs—they would add up to several hundred. They just all couldn't be made before school started. So I would usually make one or two pairs [*per order*] and finish the rest of them one or two weeks after school started.

MK: So, after the order was taken, did the customers come to your shop to pick it up or did you deliver it?

TH: They picked it up. If possible, after I called them, they would come to pick it up—after paying. There were some who had left a deposit. There were also some who did not.

MK: Did the parents also have things made such as pants?

TH: Yes, suits and things.

MK: Who rented items in those days?

TH: In those days---in June there was the school graduation. In May or April they would rent. They would make orders so I would keep them for them—suits.

MK: How many did you have in your shop, in Haseyama Tailor shop?

TH: I can't remember, but let's see—there were white suits for weddings. Traditionally, we would need ten or twenty suits. I can't really remember but. . . . There were black suits for funerals and blue suits. . . . Perhaps there were 2[00] or 300.

MK: Were they all those you had made?

TH: No, the navy blue ones were ready-made. But the white ones—there were some which were made and some ready-made.

MK: So for a rental, there was the suit top, pants, shirt and . . .

TH: There were some who only wanted to rent a coat—or a pants—or a shirt only. Or only a necktie. The charge for each would be different. The pants would be such and such and the suit would be such and such and the coat would be such and such. Also for the necktie, shoes, shirts, each was priced differently.

MK: After they were returned, did you take them to the dry cleaners?

TH: Yes, I had to take them. So I usually—weddings are usually held on Saturdays—they would be returned on Monday or sometimes Tuesday, but usually Monday. So when they were returned, the altered parts such as pants length or sleeves would be changed back and they would have to be taken to the laundry.

MK: Was there a particular laundry which you always used?

TH: Yes, there was. It was predetermined.

MK: Which laundry was it?

TH: It no longer exists. They've closed down. It has been twelve years since they retired.

MK: At that time, were there other rental places?

TH: Yes there was. There was Hale Niu. There weren't too many others. Nowadays, there is Sears [*Roebuck and Co.*] and various others. But then there weren't any others.

MK: When you look at business in those days, among the tailor-made, ready-made, and rentals—which was the most important?

TH: That would be made-to-order. There was more money in that. Rentals were cheap. But with made-to-order, one suit was expensive. That was the best.

MK: When you look back at the competition then, what do you think?

TH: Actually, if you advertise, there is that much difference in sales. People who don't know you, get to know about you. They read the newspapers and listen to the radio. So you just have to advertise. Usually Japanese tend not to advertise. So they don't become known.

(Before the war, there was a Japanese-language radio program on KGMB. Before the war, I advertised during the news portion on KGMB on Sundays. I did that for over ten years. I stopped during the war and resumed after the war was over. I did it until I closed the store [i.e., sold the business]—on radio. In the newspaper [*e.g. Hawai`i Hochi and the Hawai`i Times*], I would put out a large ad for summer or beginning of school or before Christmas. I'd also put a big one during sales.)

MK: Did other people besides Japanese, *gaijin* come to Haseyama Tailor?

TH: Yes, they did. Toward the end, although there were some in the beginning also, there were many people from Okinawa-ken. There are a lot of rich Okinawa-ken people. So there were a lot of them who ordered suits.

MK: So, before the war when your business was booming, you mentioned that you ordered a lot of fabric. How did that turn out?

TH: At that time, in 1941 before the war, I stocked up on about \$10,000 worth from [*Theo. H.*] Davies [*and Company, Ltd.*] and Von Hamm Young [*Company, Ltd.*]. Of course, today to stock \$10,000 worth isn't much, but in those days, that was a sizable amount. That was the time when gabardine pants cost fifteen dollars. So you can compare and understand. Suits cost about forty or fifty dollars—via made-to-order. This was at such a time.

At that time when I bought \$10,000 worth, after the war started I worried about whether or not I could pay for it. But after the war started, it turned out I didn't have to worry since I paid it all off. Even at that time, I used to order a lot of ready-made pants. But after the war started I canceled it. Afterwards, the salesman from Von Hamm Young said to me, “Mr. Haseyama, you shouldn't have canceled at that time.” (Laughs)

It's true though. But, at that time, I was a little worried.

MK: But why were you worried?

TH: What I ordered, I thought I wouldn't be able to pay for. So I was worried.

MK: But at that time, couldn't you borrow from the bank?

TH: Yes, I could have borrowed it, but I didn't. I should have borrowed, but—as it turned out, I didn't have to. After that, I used to borrow, though. In the early days, I didn't borrow. Borrowing a lot and getting into debt might have been okay if there wasn't a war going on—but there was, so I worried whether or not I could continue in business. So after buying so much, I thought I had done a bad thing. But, fortunately, it turned out well.

MK: And you canceled.

TH: Yes, I did, but I thought at the time I shouldn't have canceled. I was ordering gabardine pants—ready-made ones and selling a lot of them. So I ordered them. But the war started and. . . . (Laughs) I got scared.

MK: The war started on December 7, 1941. What were you doing on that day?

TH: That was on a Sunday. Since it was Sunday, the shop was closed. The boys [employed at the shop] were cleaning the machines and washing their own personal pants and shirts and hanging them up. On the second floor we had made a place where we could hang up fabric to dry. When I got up there—usually the smoke [visible from the Pearl Harbor/Hickam Field area] is white—but on that day the smoke was black. I thought it was strange since it was usually white but today it was black.

As I was thinking this, a plane flew over our place once. Then, at about eight [*o'clock*], I went to get my car at a garage I had borrowed at a machine shop on Beretania Street. When I went

there to get my car, the lady there asked me where I was going. I said I was going to the temple. She told me not to go to the [Buddhist] temple since she heard on the radio that a foreign plane had come and Pearl Harbor had been bombed. She told me not to go.

So I came home. At that time, there was a civilian at our corner [*Iwilei Road and North King Street*] standing there with a gun. At that time, they were at all the corners [*in that vicinity*] with their guns. But I still didn't believe it was a war. In the afternoon, from the second floor, I was looking at the Iwilei sign in front when I saw a Packard car which was full of holes being towed in front of us. After seeing that, I thought, "Wow, the war has started!" That was when I realized it, seeing that car shot full of holes. I guessed the Japanese machine guns had shot it. [*Editor unable to verify who shot the car.*]

MK: So, what did you think when you saw the car?

TH: At that time I thought the war had started. Until then, I didn't think about a war starting. Just like, when I went to the garage and the missus told me not to go [*to the temple*] and I reluctantly went home and didn't go. In the afternoon when I saw that car being towed, I realized the war had started.

MK: When you realized it was war, how did you feel?

TH: Well, not that strongly. What I just worried about was my business. I had bought all that fabric and, what with the war, I wondered if I could continue in business and such. That's what I worried about. But fortunately, one way or another, I managed to get to this point.

MK: How did you feel as a Japanese national, not being an American citizen?

TH: I was frightened. And I could only have with me \$200 cash. [*No one was permitted to hold more than \$200 in cash after January 1942. This prohibition was to prevent currency hoarding and made large amounts of cash unavailable to the enemy.*] So what I had, I hid in the shop—because I couldn't keep it. We couldn't go out at night [*due to curfew and blackout restrictions*] and of course we weren't allowed to buy liquor—because we were aliens. [*All adults with the exception of enemy aliens could obtain a liquor permit to make purchases.*] But, that was nothing because I didn't drink.

MK: When you heard that aliens and others were being taken to the immigration office and [*O`ahu's*] Sand Island [*to be detained and sometimes, interned*], how did you feel about your own situation?

TH: At that time, I really didn't think about it. After all there were so many Japanese—but I heard the talk [*rumors*] about the Japanese all being gathered together and sent off to the island of Moloka`i and such. But if they rounded up all the Japanese, they couldn't carry out the defense of this place.

So they kept the Japanese [*here*] and had them work. So people like Japanese-language teachers [*and others*] became carpenters with hammers. (Laughs) That's what happened. Of course, some of them were pulled out and [*later*] sent to Honuliuli [*internment camp near `Ewa, O`ahu*]. [*The wartime economic boom opened up job opportunities for island residents, including those of Japanese ancestry. But Japanese were not able to participate fully in this boom because they were excluded from certain jobs. They also suffered losses due to internment of business heads and the government takeover of alien assets and property.*]

If they were nisei [*and interned*], they were sent to America [*U.S. Mainland*] but they came back—because they were nisei, i.e., Americans. If they were *teikokujin* [*citizen of the Imperial Country, i.e. wartime Japan*], they were interned [*and some were repatriated to Japan*], but the nisei all came back. So even if the nisei went over, they came back.

MK: You were an alien and as an alien were you concerned for yourself?

TH: I was worried. I had kids and the like. So I worried. But America, being different from Japan, had some tolerance so it was good. And in business, a law was passed that you couldn't keep raising your prices, [*i.e., a ceiling price was set*]. In implementing this law, they couldn't decide how to carry it out since it was something new.

So I often got together with my accountant to work it out. I went to the government office for price control many times. He [*i.e., the local administrator for price control, and later, from 1943, the Office for Price Administration*] finally set it for me. He praised me saying it was very good, but we couldn't make much money under those conditions. That was no good. (Laughs)

Since the *gaijin*, such as Filipinos, Koreans, Chinese, since they weren't Japanese, they would do bad things. But the Japanese all were scared and wouldn't do anything.

MK: When we spoke before, you said you were even too scared to collect your bills.

TH: Yes, after the war started, the FBI [*Federal Bureau of Investigation*] came to investigate. So, I burned them all.

MK: What sort of things did you burn?

TH: I burned all the orders for suits. So there were no records.

MK: Since there were no records, afterward . . .

TH: Since there were no records, nobody sent any money [in payment]. Ultimately, I just took a loss.

MK: Others have reported that they hid or destroyed such things as their pictures of Hirohito or the Japanese flag. What about in your case?

TH: There were records, so hiding things would do me no good. Before the war, in the Japanese villages, there were records of who went to war, etc. So the people living here used to send money and things back there. At that time I used to be the treasurer [*of a group that sent funds to Japan*]. At that time, before the war, I had sent over ten thousand dollars—in my name.

The FBI investigated those things. They would check the banks. So there would be records of that implicating me. If I were just a member and not an official or anything, they wouldn't know. But, in my case, there was a bank record of it—of sending money to Japan. So the FBI. . . .

[*Also*] after the war started, I would advertise. If I put an ad [*for sales, etc.*] in the [*Japanese-language*] newspaper, without fail the next day they would come—the FBI. So I went to the

Dillingham Building and was investigated. In the end, I couldn't help it—I told them what I thought. Then the next day, they told me to bring my suitcase. (Laughs)

MK: What sorts of things did you tell them?

TH: Their questions to me were things like, “Have you bought [*U.S.*] war bonds?” or “Would you like it if Japan were to win or lose [*the war*]?” In the end I couldn't take it anymore, and I said I would hate to see Japan lose the war. (Laughs) At that moment, my head was relieved. But the next day, the FBI told me to come and bring my suitcase along. (Laughs)

I had parked my car in the back. I told them I wanted to take my car to the garage, but they wouldn't trust me. They thought I would try to escape. In the end, I took the car to the garage and then rode with the FBI to the immigration office—on the first [*of July*]. On the Fourth of July (1942) I went to Honouliuli.

MK: According to your recollection, how many times had the FBI checked on you previously?

TH: Earlier my parents had gone to Japan and returned. At that time, they bought things like swords as presents for my children. The FBI didn't understand about those things and thought they were real swords although they were toys. They checked them out and said this or that about them and in the end they made me go to Honouliuli. As I said, every time I put an advertisement in, they would come [*to question me*] for sure.

MK: The person who came to investigate was an FBI man?

TH: This is how it was. There was this table and I would be on one side and on the other side sat the army and the navy and an interpreter. Four of us would participate.

MK: So it would be the FBI and the army and . . .

TH: The navy and the army and the interpreter and me—the four of us sat around this table.

MK: Was the interpreter from here?

TH: Yes, a Japanese.

MK: Did you know him?

TH: It was not always the same person.

MK: When they questioned you, were they gentle or harsh? How was it when they questioned you?

TH: They would ask me if I thought Japan's emperor were a god, and things of that nature. Would it be better if Japan were to win or lose the war? Or whether or not I had bought war bonds, etc. Those are the sorts of things they asked me.

MK: What were your answers?

TH: After they asked me three or four times—until then I was rather vague. But in the end, I just answered clearly.

They asked whether my children or my parents [*Goichiro and Tsune Haseyama*] were here or who was in Japan or—for one or two or three times, I didn't say very much. But finally (laughs) I said it, so that was the end.

MK: The following day you had to take your suitcase.

TH: Yes, in the end, the FBI came to get me.

MK: At that time, you had [*three*] children [*Dora, Clarence, and Sanford Haseyama*]. They had no mother [*Toso Haseyama's first wife, Sachiko, died in 1934.*—the children's mother. What were your feelings like then?

TH: Well, there was nothing I could do. But at that time my younger sister [*Yoshiko Haseyama*] was watching them. So even after I went to Honouliuli, once a week, on Sundays, they would come to see me at Honouliuli. The bus would come. Then for one or two hours, we would meet in the mess hall. We would meet and talk and when the time was up, they would go home.

MK: What about your business?

TH: My younger sister was taking care of it, but since it was during the war, she was able to manage—somehow or other. But normally she wouldn't have able to.

MK: Was your younger sister born here? Was she a *Nikkei* [*American of Japanese ancestry*]?

TH: Yes, she was born here. Only I was born in Japan. [*Toso Haseyama's four siblings were born in Hawai`i.*]

MK: If your younger sister hadn't been a *Nikkei*, could she have continued your business?

TH: Yes, she could have. But unless there is a husband, business is difficult. It was because there was a war going on that she was able to get along. Otherwise she couldn't have made it.

MK: At `A`ala *Reng*, were there other people [businessmen] who were investigated?

TH: Yes, there was. (Taketo) Iwahara [*Iwahawa Shoten*] who was next door and (Taichi) Sato [*Sato Clothiers*] and later (Shigezuchi) Morikubo of Pacific Woolen [*Company*]. Just the three of them.

MK: Why were they investigated?

TH: Sato was involved in certain [*Japanese community*] things so—but Iwahara wasn't. Morikubo wasn't either. Only Sato-san.

END OF INTERVIEW