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Champ Ono

Rosie the Riveter
WWII American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by
David Dunham
in 2014

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Champ Ono

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Interview 1: August 9, 2014

Fukumoto: It is August 9, 2014, and we're in Lihue, Kauai, and we're with Mr. Champ Ono. We're just going to begin at the beginning. If you could just tell us where and when you were born.

01-00:00:12
Ono: I was born in Pu'unene, Maui, on March 5, 1922. I was raised on—they called it HC&S Company, Hawaiian Commercial & Sugar Company. It's still there. My parents came from Japan. I never asked them about the past. I knew they came from Japan and what prefecture, but I never asked them where they landed or whatever, so I don't know. I never asked them those questions.

Dunham: Did they marry in Japan, or did they meet here?

01-00:01:08
Ono: I have no idea. I never asked those questions, either.

Dunham: Did you have many siblings?

01-00:01:15
Ono: Well, we had seven children in the family. My brother was the eldest, then I had two sisters and myself, and three sisters after me. Interestingly, we were all three years apart. Except between me and my sister below me, the rest are all three years apart.

Dunham: What was life like growing up on Maui at that time?

01-00:01:46
Ono: Well, we lived on a plantation. In those days, housing was free, was given no charge.

Dunham: Was it deducted from—?

01-00:01:58
Ono: But the house itself was separate from the kitchen. The kitchen was outside, and we had to go into the house. The bathroom was way out there, too.

Dunham: What kind of bathroom was it?

01-00:02:15
Ono: At first, it was just like a old one, with a pit can. Then they built one with a trail of concrete, big ditch, and they built a bathroom that could take care of four houses. Two, one here, one there. In that bathroom was a toilet, a washtub. You had to put your own bathtub in there, to flow. We had something down below, just like a fireplace, where you burned the wood and the water come out the flow. Yeah. Everybody had some yard. So we grew some vegetables, and I think almost every house had a mango tree or papaya or avocado, kui. Of course, everybody had to raise chickens, because that's

about the only meat we could eat. They used to have vendors come every—after they go fishing, they used to come in the camps to sell the fish. Mostly tuna. That was the meat that we ate the most, fish, because it was cheap and very available.

We went to school, which was about, I would say, a good two or three miles away. We had to walk to school. We called it grammar school, and they had eight grades top, and after that we went to high school, which was Maui High School. The thing is, after the English portion of the school was over, we went to Japanese school, which was an hour after that. So they ran up to eighth grade, also; high school went to twelfth grade.

Dunham: Was the language school at a temple or where was it?

01-00:04:36

Ono: No, they had a school. They had their own school buildings and grounds.

Fukumoto: Was your grammar school pretty mixed ethnically, or mostly Japanese?

01-00:04:48

Ono: No, it was mixed. Yeah. See, all those that worked on the plantation, except the haoles, went to that school. But in the plantation, every ethnic group was separate. See, we had a Japanese section, a Philippine section and a Portuguese section. So our camp, I lived in Magiro camp. This, I think, was the largest camp in the whole plantation. We about over 500 people in there. Then what they did was they hired one Portuguese guy and one Japanese guy to kind of police the camp.

Dunham: How did that go? Were there many challenges in the camps? Or what kind of challenges?

01-00:05:46

Ono: No. Well, the Japanese camp, mostly families Filipinos were mostly men.

Dunham: Single men.

01-00:06:01

Ono: They were men, only men. So they were always up a section. And the others were mostly Portuguese families.

Dunham: So the Japanese police, was that just for the Japanese area then, and the Portuguese for the Portuguese?

01-00:06:17

Ono: Yeah, mostly.

Dunham: But what about the Filipino area then?

01-00:06:223
Ono: They both took care of it.

Dunham: Because maybe with all the single men, maybe there were more challenges there?

01-00:06:26
Ono: Yeah, right. But those days, every ethnic group was very separate. They never intermixed too much. There was never an intermarriage in that thing, because Japanese, they never did like to marry Filipinos, or Hawaiians or any others.

Dunham: Yeah. What about Okinawans? Were there Okinawans within the camp?

01-00:06:54
Ono: Okinawans were also kind of separate. Yeah, they weren't treated very well by the Japanese. They were kind of taught that they were inferior to them. But we had one Okinawan family living next to us. Yeah. But they did their own thing. But there was one family in our camp, the Teriya family. They're the ones that had the only car in the camp. Because they were the ones that raised pigs. They also have a tofu and a burgese factory. Yeah, in the camp. I don't know how they got the—

Fukumoto: Were they Okinawans, the family?

01-00:07:44
Ono: No, not Okinawan.

Dunham: Because sometimes raising pigs, you associate with Okinawans.

01-00:07:50
Ono: Yeah, the Okinawans, right. So they were kind of a little bit separate. They had their own group. But they were the richest in the camp.

Dunham: Were others able to use the car or get them to help for rides or anything?

01-00:08:08
Ono: Not very often.

Dunham: So you got around all on foot, which was barefoot?

01-00:08:15
Ono: Mostly barefoot. Yeah, we went all over, walking. If you were smart enough, you could get a bicycle. But boy, those were about the only things instead of walking. But we didn't have any money. That's a problem, because most of the men were lucky if they made a dollar a day. You made about thirty dollars a month. Twenty-five to thirty dollars a month.

Dunham: What work was your father doing, exactly?

01-00:08:53
Ono: My father was one of the very few that went to high school in Japan, which was very unusual. So he did a lot of writing letters for the people around. They asked him to help. But I don't know what happened. I was young yet. He was getting to be a kind of foreman; but he got into a accident, hurt his hand. I don't know what happened. So he wasn't that great after that. But he could still write and do things for the people.

Dunham: Was he not able to work in the fields anymore after that?

01-00:09:37
Ono: I don't know what he did before that.

Dunham: Do you know how old you were when that happened?

01-00:09:42
Ono: I don't know. I don't know how old I was.

Dunham: I just wondered if it impacted the family financially.

01-00:09:47
Ono: No. So he ended up being a janitor in the carpenter shop. But since we didn't have money, my mother had to go to work in the cane fields.

Fukumoto: Do you remember what kind of work she did in the cane field?

01-00:10:08
Ono: Most of the women did some kind of a cleaning-up job in the fields. Or else they were cutting grass in the cane fields.

Dunham: Did it pay less than the men then?

01-00:10:19
Ono: Yeah. So we were lucky if they made over thirty dollars a month.

Dunham: Did all of your older siblings go through high school, too? Or did any of them have to stop and work?

01-00:10:31
Ono: No. None of them did. My brother didn't go, but he went to commercial school in Honolulu, which was very unusual. Then my first oldest sister, after eighth grade, she went to a tailor shop as an apprentice. She learned how to—because she was a good sewer. My second sister never went to high school either, but she was sharp. So she ended up going to San Francisco to learn how to be a hairdresser. The first letter she wrote was so interesting, because she said she couldn't fathom that haole boys were cleaning up the streets and doing all the janitor jobs, because nobody did that. All the haole kids that came, they didn't know anything about sugar, but they were made foremen. Yeah. That's how it was going.

So anyway, then I came. I guess I was kind of a little bit of a little rebel in there, but anyway. Then my sister below me went to high school, and she went to business school. Then my next daughter [sic] went to high school and she became a Mormon. She learned a little more, went to school with the Mormons. She went to Japan for a while, too. Because after high school, they all went through college.

Fukumoto: That's right. Did you grow up being Buddhist?

01-00:12:36

Ono: No, I went to a Congregational church. Yeah. And my last sister went to BYU. So she's the only one that went to college.

Dunham: Did many others in the Japanese camp go to the congregation you went to?

01-00:12:56

Ono: Well, I was about five, I think, when I first started to go. That was before some of my neighbors were going. One of my neighbors were very religious, and they had connections with the church, so they asked me if I would go. I think what tempted me to go at the beginning was, Christmas time, they were giving apples and oranges and candies, which we never had much [laugher]. Yeah. So I went right through high school, right through. So I went to Putanay School. Well, they had what they used to call receiving grade and first grade. I don't know how they decided who went to receiving grade and who went to first grade. But anyway, some of my friends went to receiving grade, but I went to first grade. I don't know why. So those that were one year older than me ended up in the same grades, because I went to first grade and they went to receiving grade, which was like kindergarten. But they didn't call it kindergarten; they just called it receiving grade. I went to eighth grade. But we used to go to testing programs every now and then. Then when I was in fifth grade, I think it was, we took a test. Or sixth grade, we took a test. Then about four of us were told that we were promoted to the next grade. Interestingly enough, there were three girls and me. Yeah. I don't know how, but it seems like it turned out good. So we got promoted. I didn't want to get promoted because I was small. I think I weighed about eighty, ninety pounds at the time. Eighty pounds or ninety pounds. So I didn't want to go up, but they told me I had to. Anyway, so I finished elementary school one year earlier. But there was one lady art teacher, Mrs. Williams. I still remember. She's the one that got us interested in reading. She used to tell us stories. Nobody used to read stories to us because they didn't know English. But she made us really get interested in reading.

Dunham: Was it a difficult adjustment, skipping a grade, being smaller and all?

01-00:16:11

Ono: No.

Dunham: Did you get teased at all about your—?

01-00:16:13
Ono: Didn't bother me at all, except math. Because they were going from percentages to fractions. I think I kind of fell back there. So then of course, after I went to high school, I took algebra in my freshman year. I failed. He gave me an F. So I told him, "Gee, I don't think I deserve an F. I guess you could give me a D." But anyway, it was interesting because just as an aside, after I started to teach, he was still teaching. So I kind of found out why he wouldn't give me a different grade.

Dunham: Yeah, the teacher's perspective.

01-00:17:11
Ono: Yeah. Personality-wise, I kind of figured it out.

Dunham: Well, when you skipped a grade, was it challenging socially?

01-00:17:22
Ono: No, because I knew most of the people there anyway.

Dunham: I know you went on to coach; were you always into sports, growing up?

01-00:17:29
Ono: I was always. From the time we were about six years old, we were playing basketball. And softball. But we never played football. Funny. At that time, we weren't interested. All the people in the camps were interested in basketball and softball or baseball, but never—

Dunham: Did you play at the camps or at school or both?

01-00:17:58
Ono: Well, both. Camp and school.

Dunham: What was basketball like at the time? Because it was a little different style then, wasn't it, yeah?

01-00:18:05
Ono: Well, basically, not much difference. Basketball, hardly any difference either. Oh, yeah. Only thing, that maybe we used to toss four quarters before. And they used to throw the ball.

Dunham: Every time? Every quarter?

01-00:18:23
Ono: Every quarter, right.

Dunham: But you played both ends of the courts? Maybe it's girls basketball I read about, at one point, where they only played one end of the court or something.

01-00:18:30
Ono: Yeah, yeah, half and half.

Dunham: Yeah. But boys didn't do that then?

01-00:18:33
Ono: No. At that time, girls hardly played anything. They might've played tennis, but we didn't have money to buy tennis rackets.

Dunham: What about basketball courts? Did you make your own at the camp?

01-00:18:48
Ono: No, they set up baskets for us in the camps. Yeah. So we just about lived over on the—. And they had fields that we could play in.

Fukumoto: What else did you do for fun, growing up?

01-00:19:10
Ono: Take care of the chickens, the yard. We used to have bathrooms outside, so we had to make fire. So every month, they used to deliver kavi trees, branches, and we had to cut them up small and chop it. So we had lots to do.

Fukumoto: Did you swim in the ocean a lot? Do you know how to swim?

01-00:19:38
Ono: Nobody taught us how to swim. We had to learn ourselves. But we never had kids drown.

Fukumoto: That's good.

Dunham: That's good, because we heard some stories of drowning and of people afraid of the water.

01-00:19:54
Ono: See, where we lived, to the ocean was from Pu'unene to Kahului. I would say that would be about five miles. We used to walk to the ocean.

Dunham: How often would you go?

01-00:20:09
Ono: Oh, at least once a week. Weekends, we used to go, walk. Like Saturday, we used to walk, or Sundays. We used to do a lot of pole fishing. Well, at least we could buy bamboos and lines and hooks. We used to catch a lot of crabs. We used to walk in, throw the net and come walk out, and then go pick up the crabs. When we were in high school, somebody asked us, "Weren't you afraid of going in and out?" I said, "Afraid of what?" They said, "Oh, sharks." We never even thought about those things. Yeah. The bait we used to use was the guts of the fish that we bought. But we never thought about those things.

Fukumoto: Yeah, just lived, huh?

01-00:21:19
Ono: Yep.

Dunham: When your mom had to start working in the fields, was that a difficult adjustment for her? Did siblings have to help take care of the younger children more?

01-00:21:28

Ono: Well, the work fell all on the sisters, because once they're gone—because they used to get up about four. By five, they were out already, because they started to work about five-thirty or six o'clock. So the adjustment wasn't that difficult because it kind of was a habitual thing. Everybody knew what they would have to do. They knew what they had to do so it wasn't a problem. Even for us, too. We were assigned what to do.

Dunham: So what chores? You said taking care of the chickens. What else did you have to do?

01-00:22:11

Ono: Take care of the chickens, take care of the yard, saw and chop the kavi tree branches. The girls took care of all the house stuff, the laundry what not. But it wasn't hard to do whatever you were supposed to do, because you already fell into it. So we had no problem.

Dunham: In the home, did you grow up speaking Japanese then?

01-00:22:48

Ono: To our parents, mostly. But in school and outside, mostly we have to speak English. Since we had the parents who were Japanese, that's why we went to Japanese school, so at least we could communicate with them. Yeah. So it wasn't that bad, really. At least we had to use our ingenuity to make toys, to make our tops, all the playthings we had.

Dunham: Yeah. What about clothing?

01-00:23:31

Ono: Clothing, most of it we bought. A lot of jeans stuff, the kind that last long.

Dunham: From local stores?

01-00:23:41

Ono: All our underwear, our parents made our underwear for us, the shirts and shorts, because we couldn't afford to buy those things. It was interesting because it was mostly flour bags.

Dunham: Right. Yeah, we've heard, from rice bags or—

01-00:24:04

Ono: Oh, yeah.

Fukumoto: Not so comfortable.

01-00:24:09
Ono: Oh, it was fine. No problem.

Fukumoto: It was okay?

01-00:24:11
Ono: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

Dunham: Lasted long?

01-00:24:13
Ono: Well, you had nothing else, so you didn't know any difference.

Fukumoto: Right, right, you can't compare, yeah?

01-00:24:17
Ono: Well, yeah. And we walked to school every morning. Then some of us, after we got to about the seventh, eighth grade, we would come back home, have something to eat, and go back to Japanese school. Except when it rained hard, it was difficult. Aside from that, no. But we still had to go to school, rain or shine.

Dunham: So in the rain, you just had to troop through? Or did you try to wait it out, ever, on the way home?

01-00:24:47
Ono: Well, we had raincoats. We had raincoats, yeah.

Dunham: Yeah? Well, that's good. What was dating like back at the time? Did you date in high school or have dances?

01-00:24:59
Ono: Barely. Very little. In fact, you were lucky if you had a girlfriend.

Dunham: Did you?

01-00:25:08
Ono: No. We didn't have time for that. Because the girls didn't date much. That's what now they wanted to do, but then thought we couldn't, we used to do. If we had a party, we had plenty girls and many boys. But not single kind. Well, we had some that [were] single, but very, very rare. So we had no problem with that.

Dunham: When you were a young boy, did you have an idea of what you wanted to do when you grew up?

01-00:25:51
Ono: Get out of the plantation. Well, the thing that I didn't care [for] about the plantation was they told you what to do. You couldn't do what you really wanted to do. The things that you wanted to do, you couldn't do. So then after

I finished high school, my mother had everything planned for me. So she found a job for me at the plantation store. I told her, "No, I don't want to work." I said I wanted to go to university. Well, the big question was, where are you going to get the money from? But that's it. I told you earlier that I flunked algebra my freshman year. So when I applied for University of Hawaii, they told me I wasn't eligible because I didn't have a math major, the course. So that was a question I had in my mind. "Now what the hell am I going to do?" So I told my parents, "I'm going back to school and pick up the algebra course, and then go to university after that." Well, they didn't agree with me, but I told them that's what I'm going to do. So that's what I did. Because I had skipped one grade, so it didn't matter to me.

Dunham: What year did you graduate high school then?

01-00:27:36
Ono: 1939.

Dunham: So then you took the algebra class over and then you got into UH eventually?

01-00:27:45
Ono: Right. They accepted me. But the funny part of it, see, when I went to UH, I didn't know what I wanted to do, really. My sophomore year, I figured, gee, I might go into prelaw. So I was in prelaw. Most of my friends and the guys, the Niseis in college, the men, most of them went to TC, teachers college. They were in teachers college. The funny part about that is that after the war, because of the [G.I.] Bill of Rights, at least they had money to go back to school. They all became lawyers or engineers. I would say a lot of them became lawyers. I was one of the very few that went to teaching.

Dunham: Oh, after not having started there, yeah.

01-00:28:45
Ono: [laughs] That's funny, yeah. Well, that was some experience that I had before that, that's why. Anyway.

Dunham: How were you paying for school, once you got in?

01-00:28:55
Ono: My brother helped me. You don't believe me, but he gave me twenty-one dollars a month to go to college. So I had to do some work to earn extra money.

Dunham: That's the brother who went to commercial college?

01-00:29:12
Ono: Yeah.

Dunham: What was he doing then?

01-00:29:15
Ono: He was working for the electric company.

Dunham: So it was good work?

01-00:29:18
Ono: Yeah. He was working for Maui Electric Company. He stayed there for all his life. Yeah.

Dunham: Wow. So what was U of H like, after you got out of the plantation? When did you start, in the fall of—?

01-00:29:33
Ono: ’40.

Dunham: So what was that like, that transition?

01-00:29:39
Ono: Oh, going from Maui to Oahu was different. Of course, we were traveling on ships. No airplanes or anything like that.

Dunham: Had you ever been?

01-00:29:53
Ono: No. That’s the first time. Well, no, I’d been to Oahu before, because when I was in the fourth grade, I won the—they used to have statewide pentathlon championships, and I took the Maui junior champion. That’s why they used to call me Champ. That’s how I first got the name. I went there on a scouting thing. I’d been to Oahu a couple of times before that. So the only place that was cheap enough for me to go and was common was Okumura Home, which was run by the minister of the Castle Church. Yeah. A lot of the island people, native island people, used to go there. A couple of very popular with Kauai people, too. So I got to know a lot of Kauai people. They were still there. So I did part-time work. We used to get paid about a quarter an hour.

Dunham: What were you doing?

01-00:31:16
Ono: Helping with some class or something.

Dunham: On the campus.

01-00:31:20
Ono: Yeah. Yeah, on the campus.

Dunham: The place where you were living, was it near campus?

01-00:31:27
Ono: No. We had to walk about a mile and a half, two miles home. So we didn’t have the money to go, so we used to walk. But we had to catch a ride on

Monday, Wednesday and Fridays, because we were taking ROTC. So one of the members, McDonald, bought a car and we used to pay him to take us. That was the guy that just passed away, Bekata Naguchi. Yeah. We got used to it. Well, we had breakfast over there, and then we had to buy a lunch. Then we had dinner there. But for that amount, you don't get very much. So when I went home the first year, my parents told me, "Gee, you kind of pulled down, huh?" I told them I lost about ten pounds. So when you weigh about 125 and you lose ten pounds— [laughs]

Fukumoto: Oh, wow. That's significant, yeah.

01-00:32:46
Ono: Yeah.

Dunham: Were you able to keep playing sports?

01-00:32:50
Ono: No. No, not at that time. But afterwards, I did.

Dunham: But at that time, you were too busy working and studying?

01-00:32:59
Ono: Yeah. Well, I was too small too. Because in high school, I wanted to play football. The coach told me, "No, don't play. Too small."

Dunham: Did you play basketball and baseball in high school?

01-00:33:11
Ono: No. I played softball. We started a softball league in high school. Up to then, they didn't have any baseball. Oh, in high school, I was sort of active in the Boy Scouts. So we had a good troop in Pu'unene. We were one of the best troops in the state.

Dunham: Was anyone else from your high school going to U of H at the time? Any of your friends from growing up?

01-00:33:44
Ono: Gee, not that I remember.

Dunham: So you made all new friends.

01-00:33:48
Ono: I know one friend who went to Japan, in Wasilla. Oddly enough, when I was in Japan after the war, I was in this park. After walking around I sat down and [was] looking around, and I saw him. I met him over there.

Dunham: So he went to university in Japan right before the war?

01-00:34:18
Ono: Waseda. Yeah. Well, he was in the Japanese Navy. He got drafted in the Japanese Navy. He left Nagasaki about three days before they bombed it. So it's interesting, yeah? You see, we had to go from Pu'unene to Hamakuapoko for high school. So we had to catch a bus.

Dunham: So then you had a bus.

01-00:34:50
Ono: That's about, I would say, ten miles.

Dunham: That was the nearest high school?

01-00:34:54
Ono: Oh, yeah. That was the only high school on that side.

Dunham: You had to have a bus.

01-00:35:00
Ono: Oh, yeah. So anyway, whenever we wanted to play sports we couldn't play because we didn't have a way to come back. So that kind of discouraged us from playing, first of all.

Dunham: You would've missed the bus, to stay for practice.

01-00:35:13
Ono: Yeah. So even practice, yeah.

Dunham: That's too bad. So U of H, was there anything else specifically about newfound freedom, kind of being off the plantation, that you were able to explore?

01-00:35:29
Ono: Oh, at least we got out of it. Yeah. No, but what I wanted to do, really, was to get out and see what's available for us. But see, the only two colleges that were open to us at that time were teachers college and social work.

Dunham: As a Japanese man, you mean?

01-00:35:53
Ono: Yeah. Yeah. You see, I had two friends that became architects. No jobs. Nobody would hire them. So they finally had to move to the mainland.

Dunham: So you could go into the college programs, but they couldn't find jobs.

01-00:36:10
Ono: Yeah. That's right. I knew three guys that went to ag. One guy got a job with the plantation. You know what he was doing? Cutting grass in the cane fields.

Dunham: With a college degree.

01-00:36:25
Ono: Yeah. So there was no opportunity in the other colleges to be made. So that's why most of them went to teachers college. So my sophomore year, the war started.

Dunham: Where were you when you first heard of the Pearl Harbor attack?

01-00:36:54
Ono: I was out in the yard, washing my underwear, when I saw all the smoke coming up that way. That was the bombing. Then we were kind of wondering, so we turned on the radio to find out what's what. Then we found out that we were getting bombed. Then later on, over the radio, came the message that all those in the ROTC program, report to headquarters in the university. So most of us in freshman, sophomore, you had to take ROTC, so we went. There was some guys, like Sparky, who was [in] the advanced class, they all went, too. So we got recruited in the Territorial Guard.

Dunham: The Hawaiian Territorial Guard.

01-00:37:55
Ono: We got one helmet, we got one raincoat, and we got one rifle, and five rounds of ammunition.

Dunham: Had you ever had a rifle before?

01-00:38:09
Ono: Well, we had in the ROTC school, yeah.

Dunham: You practiced in the ROTC?

01-00:38:13
Ono: But we never thought about the five rounds of ammunition. Well, I was in a group that went to the waterfront at that time. So everybody was shooting at anything else.

Dunham: So this is the very day, December 7, afternoon, evening?

01-00:38:31
Ono: Yeah. And then by December 8, everybody was set already. So we got into this Territorial Guard. Then we were assigned to different groups. Each group was assigned to waterfront or what we would call installations all over the island. Then two of us went up to the armory roof, because they're talking about dropping of people up there.

Dunham: Oh, really?

01-00:39:11
Ono: Yeah. They were thinking of invasion. They were worried about invasion. So yeah, we were up there guarding for people.

Dunham: You were one of the two on the roof?

01-00:39:21
Ono: Yeah. The first night, I was there on the waterfront. They were supposed to pick us up the next morning. They never came, till almost evening time.

Dunham: Wow. And you had no food or—?

01-00:39:40
Ono: Yeah. Next time I was up on the army top, they forgot me over there, too.

Dunham: Wow. So you must've lost some more weight. Was that a frightening time?

01-00:39:56
Ono: Oh, it was frightening in the sense that we didn't know what was happening or what was going to happen. Because they were talking all about invading, landing, and airborne. But it never happened, fortunately, which is good.

Dunham: The first night, you talked about kind of people firing all over. Were there many hurt by friendly fire that night, do you know?

01-00:40:22
Ono: No. They were shooting that things that move. Especially cats and dogs, because nobody else would move around here, unless they wanted to get shot.

Dunham: Did you stay on the rooftop for a while, at your post?

01-00:40:40
Ono: Yeah. Went up about seven o'clock at night. They forgot to pick me up at midnight, and [I stayed there until] the next morning, till about eight o'clock in the morning.

Dunham: Did you fall asleep, or did you stay up all night?

01-00:40:55
Ono: We stayed up. Oh, yeah. At that point, we were kind of a little bit excited, so we didn't care to sleep.

Dunham: What training, if any, did they give you on the fly in this moment? Did they tell you exactly sort of what to look for, or it was just sort of—?

01-00:41:13
Ono: Well, they didn't even tell us how to load the gun. [laughs]

Dunham: Who is "they?" Who's in charge of your outfit, at this point?

01-00:41:25
Ono: Gee, I don't know. I guess the ROTC guy's in charge. But after we got into different groups, there were people that had experience. One of them was a

guy, a family I knew from Hanalei, Shimonishima I said to him, "We took two inches, but we're kind of tired." Because we had nothing else to do.

Dunham: Where were you sleeping?

01-00:42:01
Ono: Oh, over there. Wherever we were stationed.

Dunham: They had a place for you.

01-00:42:04
Ono: They had cots and stuff for us. So after about four months, they fired us, because we're Japanese ancestry. They called us enemy aliens. So well, most of us didn't know what to do after that, because the university was still closed. So at that time, there were about three guys, like Governor Burns—at that time, he wasn't governor—and this guy Yoshida was one of the Japanese Nisei leaders. Shigeo Yoshida. And Hung Wai Cheen, he was the head of the YMCA there. They were trying to help. There were a couple of guys—I can't remember their names; haole guys—that were sympathetic to our cause. They were instrumental, also in helping form this group at the university.

Dunham: The VVV?

01-00:43:23
Ono: Yeah. That was the VVV.

Dunham: Can I ask, going back, when you were kicked out of the Hawaiian Territorial Guard, how did you and others take that? Was there resistance to that? I've heard some folks were very upset, understandably.

01-00:43:37
Ono: We had no choice. Yeah. The only question we asked was why.

Dunham: How was that answered?

01-00:43:45
Ono: Never got answers. But we knew why. We found out why.

Dunham: Well, it was pretty obvious who they were kicking out.

01-00:43:51
Ono: Yeah. Because nobody else got fired.

Fukumoto: Just the Japanese, right?

01-00:44:56
Ono: But the question we had was why would they do this? Because at the beginning, it was the most dangerous and they picked us up, so why would they fire us after it's calm? But then we found out why. So a lot of us, a lot of the native island guys went back home, came back home. But many of us also

stayed there, too. So we were looking for what to do. Think about back to the U, but it was closed so we had no choice. But I would say about 160 of us volunteered. Called the Varsity Victory Volunteers.

Fukumoto: What did you do when you volunteered for the VVV?

01-00:44:55

Ono: We were assigned to a engineer battalion in Schofield, so we stayed in Schofield. And the interesting part is that while we were there, we did things to help them. We set up barbed wire fences and all those things. Even made roads and even made warehouses. But the 100th Battalion guys came through while we were there, so we knew where they were going already. But actually, we didn't know where they were going, but we knew they were going to the mainland. But what for, we didn't know. But we knew they were going because they were aliens. We knew a lot of them. So anyway.

Dunham: So you were staying at Schofield?

01-00:45:51

Ono: Yeah, we stayed in Schofield for almost a year. Well, we had our own group. We had our own staff, for the kitchen and all that, and barracks. They selected local officers for us, people that we knew. One of them was a former football coach down in Kalikow, Hawaii. The company commander was a Chinese guy. He was a captain. The guy in charge of our group used to work at the university, Ralph Hempoko, yeah. So we had our own group. We were divided into about five different gangs in there. So each gang had their own leaders. Most of them were seniors. So we went all over the place doing things.

Dunham: You were self-organizing, but the military was helping advise you?

01-00:47:01

Ono: Well, we were doing things on our own, but upon what the engineers wanted us to do. So we were putting up rail guards and all kinds of stuff, and helping them with the buildings and the roads.

Dunham: Obviously, it was a huge blow when you got kicked out of the Territorial Guard. Where there other anti-Japanese sentiments being expressed to you at the time, informally or formally?

01-00:47:37

Ono: Nothing before that. That was really sudden. So we were surprised.

Dunham: After that, did you have any—or with other ethnicities around, did they—?

01-00:47:49

Ono: No. I guess everybody figured, "Well, what are we going to do?" That's why they formed this triple V. We had a lot of volunteers. So we got notices of dissolving the group when the 442 was being formed, because we were the

first ones they asked to volunteer. I would say 80 percent of us volunteered. But not all of us got in. So anyway.

Dunham: Based on physical or other—?

01-00:48:33

Ono: Yeah, mostly physical. They were looking for 2,000 first; then they came to 5,000. We had about 10,000 volunteers. So they had a good choice.

Dunham: Yeah. Your parents, how did they feel? I know they weren't initially excited for you to go to U of H. What's your correspondence with your parents like at this time?

01-00:48:58

Ono: No correspondence.

Dunham: So you're doing your independent thing?

01-00:49:03

Ono: I did whatever I wanted to do.

Dunham: So you volunteered for the 442nd.

01-00:49:10

Ono: Oh, yeah.

Dunham: What's that like?

01-00:49:13

Ono: They didn't take me. Yeah. They didn't tell me why. But then I finally found out why. At that time, I had a palpitation of the heart. I don't remember having anything like that before. But see, there was a lapse of about three months before they took us to be examined. So I had nothing to do, so that might have something to do with it. But who knows?

Dunham: You mean the VVV was dissolved three months before you actually had your exams?

01-00:49:55

Ono: Yeah. Yeah.

Dunham: What were you doing during that time?

01-00:49:59

Ono: Well, I went home. Doing nothing.

Dunham: Now, at that point, what are your conversations with your parents like? Were they supportive of—?

01-00:50:11
Ono: Oh, they didn't say anything, because they figured that I knew what I was going to do. Because they knew I was going to do whatever I wanted to do.

Fukumoto: Right, strong-minded, yeah?

01-00:50:28
Ono: They gave me pretty much leeway. So even going to university, they asked me how I'm going. So I said, "Well, I took out my life insurance that they made for me." So at least I had beginning funds to go. I said, "Well, in the meantime, I'll do some good in between." Then my brother offered to help me, so that kind of eased the problem.

Dunham: So that three months you came back home, were you kind of taking it easy, thinking you're getting ready to go for war, risk your life?

01-00:51:07
Ono: Well, waiting for the exam. So we didn't do anything. Yeah, so the question after that was, what to do? Luckily, university opened.

Dunham: Were you upset when you found out you didn't get into the 442nd? Or how did you feel?

01-00:51:29
Ono: Well, very disappointed. But no choice. So I figured, "Well, at least I can go finish up my university work." But then my senior year, half of the senior year, they called me to go. Finally, I passed the exam. So after I went in, they told me to go with the 442, because I would've been in the end of Italy and beginning of France, if I went. The other offer was MIS, Military Intelligence Service. I figured, gee, that would be lasting longer, so I thought I better be going that way. So that's why I volunteered for that side.

Dunham: I want to hear about that, but first could I back up a little bit? While you were with the VVV, and just during that time, could we talk a little bit about Oahu and/or when you came back to Maui under martial law, and what that was like, how the island changed, with curfew and blackouts and bomb shelters and such?

01-00:54:03
Ono: Well, the only thing that used to bother me was the blackouts. But aside from that, about a year and a half later, things were pretty back to normal.

Dunham: After the Battle of Midway and once there was less concern about invasion?

01-00:53:20
Ono: Well, even before Midway.

Dunham: Even before Midway?

01-00:53:22
Ono: Yeah, yeah.

Dunham: There was less anxiety about an invasion very soon?

01-00:53:25
Ono: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Well, the only question was how they felt, our parents. Whether they wanted us to go into the service or not. But I said, "We have no choice, because we're Americans." But aside from that, for the dimming of the lights and whatnot, and blacking out, I think after a while, everybody got used to it, so it didn't bother [us] too much.

Dunham: There are a lot of soldiers patrolling around civilians—

01-00:54:06
Ono: Yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Dunham: —the island? I know you were away, but many of the families, people we've talked to have talked about burying or destroying Japanese memorabilia or hiding it, because of potential home searches and that kind of thing.

01-00:54:26
Ono: Well, that was more earlier.

Dunham: Soon after Pearl Harbor?

01-00:54:32
Ono: They came to inspect the houses and took all the things.

Dunham: Yeah. Do you know if your family—?

01-00:54:38
Ono: Well, I don't know. And I've asked them about that, because I wasn't around. But when I came back and I looked in the garage, where they used to keep the things, most of them were gone. So I guess they must've either thrown it away or my sisters threw it away or something. Or they kept whatever they wanted to. But you couldn't keep anything Japanese.

Dunham: And they closed the temples and the language schools?

01-00:55:08
Ono: Yeah, they were all closed for a while. No schools, no temples. Of course, all our ministers and all the teachers was evacuated to the mainland.

Dunham: Some of them who'd been your teachers or you had known?

01-00:55:27
Ono: Yeah, yeah.

Dunham: Did you know, at the time, what had happened to them?

01-00:55:32
Ono: Oh, some folk came back. But most of them were kind of old already, so—I don't remember too many of them anyway.

Dunham: Being here in Hawaii, had you heard about the executive order and what was happening to Japanese Americans on the mainland?

01-00:55:51
Ono: Oh, yeah. We knew all about it.

Dunham: How did you feel about that?

01-00:55:56
Ono: Well, we thought that we would be evacuated. But then kind of hearing people talk, we found out that if they took away all the Japanese, there wouldn't be any workers at the plantations. So the plantation was not too keen about us being evacuated. Also there were a couple of haole guys that were really for us, so they didn't feel that we should be evacuated, which helped. Can't remember the guys' name[s]. There were about two, three guys that really—

Dunham: In leadership roles.

01-00:56:41
Ono: —supported, yeah. But the main thing, I think, was because—or my guess anyway—that taking all the Japanese, there would be no workers in the plantations.

Dunham: But a challenging place to be in, to be both patriotic and feeling American, and yet seeing fellow Japanese Americans being treated like that.

01-00:57:06
Ono: Oh, yeah. Well, for us, most of us didn't feel anything, because we were born here and raised here, so we had no other loyalty to any other country. So for us, it was no different than anybody else.

Dunham: Well, I want to take a break.

Dunham: Today is August 9, 2014, and this is tape two with Champ Ono. I definitely want to hear about your MIS experience. Before we do that, is there anything else, with either you or your family, your friends, about the civilian experience back in Hawaii during the war years that we didn't talk about, that you might want to share?

02-00:00:20
Ono: Well, after the triple V, I went back to Maui, because school was still not in session. One of the teachers at the school was recruited by the 442, so they asked me if I would take their place. So this was about, I would say, March or April till June. So I said okay. That's how I got interested in teaching. I enjoyed it, so when I went back, I went to TC after that.

Dunham: Yeah. So you taught that March in Maui?

02-00:01:06
Ono: Yeah.

Dunham: At the middle school or high school?

02-00:01:08
Ono: No, it's a grammar school. One through eight.

Dunham: So you were kind of thrown into that. What was it like, your first days teaching?

02-00:01:19
Ono: Well, they didn't throw me into it. I went into it.

Dunham: But to me, being married to a teacher, any time somebody starts teaching, it's a challenge. I don't know, did it come easily to you?

02-00:01:34
Ono: Yeah, no problem. Because some of the kids knew that I used to play a lot. Sports. So it didn't bother me at all.

Dunham: Were you primarily coaching sports, or were you teaching academics, too?

02-00:01:50
Ono: All academics. Then after school, I used to go to basketball and stuff like that.

Fukumoto: Do you remember what you were teaching? English, science, math?

02-00:02:00
Ono: Every subject.

Fukumoto: All the subjects, wow.

Dunham: Because it was a small school?

02-00:02:04
Ono: Yeah, yeah. After I got into it, I ended up at UH, when I went back. I didn't know that I majored in English and social studies.

Fukumoto: Oh, you didn't know?

02-00:02:25
Ono: Well, it was interesting.

Fukumoto: What did you think you were majoring in?

02-00:02:39
Ono: Oh, I thought I was in teachers college. But I had a lot of English courses, too so—but anyway.

Dunham: What was your experience with the MIS? How did that start out?

02-00:02:55
Ono: Well, it was interesting because most of the people that I met over there in my class—we had quite a few haole people, but we had a lot of mainland guys.

Dunham: Heard there were some different styles.

02-00:03:11
Ono: Oh, yeah. Well, it's interesting, yeah, because style is different. So we had to get used to them.

Dunham: How does that play out? There were challenges?

02-00:03:27
Ono: No. After a while, you get used to it. So we kind of accept whatever they had. We accept whatever they had.

Dunham: Well, how would you describe the Hawaiian style versus their style?

02-00:03:40
Ono: Hawaiian style is more open. We're not conservative like they were. We're a little more open to everybody. They were kind of to themselves, mostly. But after you stay with them for about a year, it didn't make much difference. Yeah.

Dunham: And this is in Minnesota?

02-00:04:06
Ono: Yeah. Minneapolis. Well, it's between Minneapolis and St. Paul. I think St. Paul.

Dunham: So that's a big climate adjustment from Hawaii, no?

02-00:04:20
Ono: Oh, very great. We never felt so cold in our lives. I tell you.

Dunham: Did everybody make it through the winter, everybody stay?

02-00:04:33
Ono: Yeah. Well, see, we went there, got used to, accustomed to, what they were going to do, we were going to do, and they told us what things we had to learn. After that, we went to get basics in Alabama. We took basic training. Wintertime, it's cold. The funny part about this whole thing—we kind of laughed about it—was, [it's] very cold. When we were training in the fort, our bathroom was a ditch. We'd just straddle the ditch, in twenty degrees. I said, "Gee, we have never had an experience like this before." The other experience was the first time we had leave we went to this restaurant. We sat there for half an hour and nobody would serve us. Yeah. Then going out, I looked at the toilet; it says, white. Yeah. These things, we never saw before. So after we

went back and told our CO, "Hey, how come they don't serve us?" About two days later, they did serve us.

Dunham: Oh, really? The same restaurant did?

02-00:06:13
Ono: They did change.

Dunham: They still had the white-only toilets though?

02-00:06:17
Ono: Oh, yeah.

Dunham: Are you considered white then?

02-00:06:21
Ono: Well, we wondered whether to go to the white or the black. So we did ask the CO, "Which side do we go?" He said, "Go to the white side." So we went to the white side. No problem after that.

Fukumoto: No problem? Oh, man.

02-00:06:39
Ono: Yeah. Even the restaurant, too. We had no problem after that.

Dunham: Anywhere else you went, did you ever get given a hard time?

02-00:06:48
Ono: Well, no.

Dunham: Racial name calling?

02-00:06:51
Ono: No, no. They were curious who we were and they would ask, "Where is Hawaii?" It's amazing how much they didn't know about us. Yeah. Even the West Coast. Yeah. Gee. Most of them, the answer was, is it close to the Philippines? Yeah, so telling my friends, I said, "Gee, what the hell do they teach over here?" [laughs] It was so funny. Yeah.

Dunham: Were most of the mainland Japanese guys coming from incarceration camps?

02-00:07:44
Ono: Yeah. From camp, yeah. From camp. But they were pretty good, though. They were smart. Because I think they had just as much or more language training than we did. Because they talked more. We didn't talk that much Japanese in Hawaii. Yeah.

Dunham: So what did you focus on, or how were your studies there? What did you think of the school?

02-00:08:18
Ono: Well, it was mostly military language. So about interrogation, interpretation of documents, interrogation techniques. So mostly military stuff, language. So interestingly enough, when I first went to Japan, I got stationed with the 90th military government. The first night we were there, we were all working, so they wanted to take a shower. No shower. So I had to laugh because they asked me, "Go ask the Japanese to get a acetylene torch and all those things." So I said, "Gee, I don't know what the hell that is in Japanese." [laughs] Because I said, "It wasn't in a military language." Oh, it was funny.

Dunham: So how did you make do then?

02-00:09:30
Ono: Well, I got the message across.

Dunham: You got the message, in charades?

02-00:09:34
Ono: Yeah. What we needed. A barrel and all that stuff.

Dunham: About when did you get to Japan?

02-00:09:43
Ono: The war ended in—gee, I can't even think of it.

Dunham: August '45, September '45, yeah.

02-00:09:52
Ono: Yeah, it was in about two months after the war ended. Before that, I was in the Philippines, because we all went to the Philippines. The war ended while I was going to the Philippines, so I stayed in the Philippines about a month. We were sent there to train for the invasion of Japan. I didn't know at all, but somebody told me that I was in the first wave to invade Japan, the first wave. So I said, "Gee, I got spared of all that." [laughs] Anyway. So we went to Tokyo, got a little bit oriented toward whatever we're going to do. Then we got assigned to different outfits. But in the meantime, I went to Yokosuka, to look at the place over. I don't know why they sent me there, but I stayed there for about a month. After that, I got sent to that outfit in Kanazawa city, Ishikawa-Ken, which was the capital city for summer resort of the emperor. That place had the best spas, hot springs. Because the emperor was going there every summer. They had a park in his honor over there. But we didn't know that.

Dunham: Oh, so you didn't visit at the time?3 You didn't know that?

02-00:11:41
Ono: Yeah, well, we went there; we didn't know that. But I found that out, yeah. Oh, boy. Nice place.

Dunham: What was it like being there in Japan at that time, and what was your role?

02-00:11:59

Ono: My role was interpreter-interrogator. My job was with a captain who was in charge of schools and factories. My job was to go and inspect schools and inspect factories, to find ultra-nationalists. Yeah, that was my job.

Dunham: How did that go then? Did you find—?

02-00:12:27

Ono: Found nobody. [laughs] No. I told the captain of our group and all the officers, I said, "There was one regiment of demobilized Japanese soldiers in the city. One regiment." They knew that, too. So they were very afraid. So they wanted us to put guards, floodlights. I told them, "If I know these people," I said, "You don't have to worry. They're not going to do anything. On top of that," I said, "If you want guards on our area, get Japanese policemen to guard us." No.

Dunham: They did take your advice.

02-00:13:25

Ono: They put up all this stuff and—because I knew the soldiers and I knew Japanese style. So I said, "No need to worry," I said. "We don't need that many guys around." No. So we had to stand guard. We had sixty guys in our outfit. Half of them were either on TDY, temporary duty, someplace else; and the other half was the teaching crew. So we only had about twenty-five guys left. He assigned us to stand guard from 6:00 to 10:00, because we had to work the next day. I told the captain, I said, "Gee, you don't need to stand guard." I said, "Go hire Japanese citizens." He thought I was crazy.

Dunham: Did they ever do that?

02-00:14:33

Ono: No, never did. But it was interesting. Yeah.

Dunham: Where was it that you met—your old classmate, was it?

02-00:14:46

Ono: In Tokyo. Yeah, when I was on leave. When there was one day off, I went. Looking at, you know, I was on my way back, because I was at deportation camp, and close to Tokyo. So I used to take the train and go into Tokyo.

Dunham: What was it like on leave there, when you had time?

02-00:15:15

Ono: No problem. I could go anywhere. At that time, the people were used to seeing us around.

Dunham: Did you have any idea about your parents' family back in Japan, where they were?

02-00:15:31

Ono: Well, that's an interesting thing, too because I asked my CO if I could take a leave. This is after about eight months, and things were pretty normal already. So I said, "Can I take off and go see my—?" My parents came from Fukushima-Ken. He refused me. So I said, "What's your reason for refusing me?" He said, "Well, I don't want you guys to go anywhere," he tells me. He wouldn't let me go. Interesting part is, we had three interpreters, including me, and I was in charge of the group. One of the guys asked, about a month later, to go to see his—and he sent him. So oh, wow. But by that time, I said, "Oh, the hell with it."

Dunham: You just asked the wrong guy or had the wrong captain.

02-00:16:46

Ono: Yeah.

Dunham: Had you or your parents been in correspondence or had any word with your family there?

02-00:16:54

Ono: No. The only communication we had about them was my sister. She's a Mormon, so she went on a mission over there, to Japan. So she went to see them.

Dunham: Years later?

02-00:17:12

Ono: Oh, yeah. Way after the war. Yeah. She found out that they had quite a bit of land. The funny part about this was that they had about five daughters and my father. My father was the last one. And they sent him to Hawaii. So I kind of figured that [it] must be funny, because normally in Japan, everything goes to the son.

Dunham: Did you ever have an explanation for why that was?

02-00:17:54

Ono: No, I didn't even ask. I knew why.

Dunham: Why?

02-00:17:58

Ono: Because I think all the sisters got together to send him to Hawaii. That's what I thought.

Dunham: Otherwise they would all be second-class to him, yeah.

02-00:18:09
Ono: It was funny. Yeah. Like I said earlier, that it's interesting because he was one of the few high school graduates. At the time, to go to high school—so maybe that was the reason why. They figured maybe he could make more money coming here.

Dunham: How much longer did you serve in the MIS? And anything else you want to share about that experience?

02-00:18:39
Ono: I got out in September of '46.

Dunham: And returned to U of H?

02-00:18:47
Ono: Yeah, I went to U of H, finished up. So instead of being a prelaw graduate, I became a teaching graduate.

Dunham: Which was mostly inspired by your brief time teaching back in Maui?

02-00:19:02
Ono: Well, I like working with the kids, that's why.

Dunham: At that time, when you came back from the war, did you feel like there would be more opportunities for Japanese Americans in other fields? Or did you still feel—

02-00:19:13
Ono: Not at that time.

Dunham: —there was going to be that prejudice?

02-00:19:16
Ono: Not at that time. Yeah. Because they hadn't changed that much yet. It only changed after the guys came back, the veterans. The 442 guys and our guys.

Dunham: Yeah, yeah, and really fought for—.

02-00:19:29
Ono: They came back and went into politics. That's when it started to change. Because we told them we want certain things, like pension and all the big records just needed for us to be good. See, people on the mainland don't know Hawaii has one of the best health systems. Yeah. Everybody's fighting for pensions and they lose the—the only thing we forgot was the health system. We didn't have a definite health system that stays. Like now we can change it every, let's say, year. So you can change the contents.

Dunham: In a good way or a bad way, do you mean that you can change it? Better for the employees or—?

02-00:20:30
Ono: Well, if it's changing, it's going to be bad.

Dunham: So you'd rather it was set long-term.

02-00:20:37
Ono: Oh, yeah. Well, a system that's consistent, that helps everybody.

Dunham: But overall, you're saying there's an above average healthcare system here.

02-00:20:48
Ono: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. In fact, after being on the mainland in schools and whatnot, I find that most of them did not have the kind of system we had. Because a lot of them didn't even have a pension system, or a health system, even, on the mainland.

Dunham: Was that from just visiting, or did you ever work in the schools on the mainland?

02-00:21:15
Ono: No, visiting.

Dunham: In California or other states?

02-00:21:18
Ono: All over. Yeah. I went to Georgia, too.

Dunham: Oh, yeah? Was that mostly because of sports competition, or other types of things?

02-00:21:28
Ono: No, it's a conference. For my job.

Dunham: When did you finish teachers college at UH?

02-00:21:38
Ono: In '47.

Dunham: Did you go right into teaching?

02-00:21:43
Ono: No. Since I majored in English and social studies, I couldn't see myself correcting papers during weekends. So I used the [G.I.] Bill of Rights, and I went to Springfield College, Springfield, Mass.

Dunham: Near the Basketball Hall of Fame, right?

02-00:22:05
Ono: Yeah.

Dunham: Was it there then? I don't know when it started.

02-00:22:07
Ono: I don't know, no.

Dunham: We've been to it. We're basketball fans.

02-00:22:11
Ono: Yeah. Well, anyway, that helped. The Bill of Rights did help. So I went there, and I majored in PE and health, and got my masters over there.

Dunham: What was Springfield like? You've been a lot of places in the world, by this time.

02-00:22:32
Ono: Good school. Well, to begin with, that was one of the best-known YMCA-directed school[s], as well as PE, teach. You find graduates all over the world. And you find coaches all over the world. Oh, yeah.

Dunham: Were there many Japanese Americans there at the time?

02-00:23:01
Ono: About three of us. One from Japan, two from Philippines. Yeah. A few from Europe someplace. I think there was one from Iraq and somewhere else. Yeah. But they were well-known already, and they came to pick up more.

Dunham: So that was a very rewarding program?

02-00:23:38
Ono: Yeah, it was good. Good school.

Dunham: And you're still single at this time?

02-00:23:42
Ono: Yeah. Couldn't get married. My God, no one wanted me.

Dunham: Were you dating through these times? No?

02-00:23:51
Ono: No.

Dunham: Just focused on your studies?

02-00:23:54
Ono: Well, I had a haole girlfriend, when I was at Springfield.

Dunham: Was that your first time dating interracially?

02-00:24:00
Ono: Yeah. Well, going steady, yeah. But I knew I had to come back, so finally had to quit.

Dunham: Were there any challenges with that, dating there in Springfield, or was it—?

02-00:24:13
Ono: No, no problem.

Dunham: Didn't face any—.

02-00:24:18
Ono: The problem is amazing in Chicago, and [it] didn't last.

Dunham: Was she in Chicago or did she come to Springfield?

02-00:24:29
Ono: She was in Chicago.

Dunham: Followed you there?

02-00:24:34
Ono: Well, she went to work in Chicago after that.

Dunham: Oh, that's what's separate, when she went to Chicago. I see.

02-00:24:44
Ono: It was interesting because it was something, different experience for us, because we never dated white girls before. Found out that they're no different.

Dunham: Same challenges, same plusses?

02-00:25:00
Ono: Oh, yeah. It was interesting, because she was a very outgoing girl. She was running this store for them. So I said, "Oh, boy."

Dunham: Is that how you met, in the store?

02-00:25:18
Ono: No, I met her with one of her friends, which was a Japanese girl.

Dunham: Well, we've interviewed some folks who were close to marriage—Japanese men, actually, with white women—and who lived in states where it was illegal to get married, at the time.

02-00:25:37
Ono: Oh, yeah. That's right.

Dunham: So I wondered, too if you encountered any hostility, just being out in public together.

02-00:25:48
Ono: No. At that time—. I don't know, but didn't bother us at all.

Dunham: That's good. That's good.

02-00:25:57
Ono: But I know that in some states, especially in Southern states, it was different.

Dunham: But even in California, it was illegal until '50 or '60.

02-00:26:11
Ono: Not too long ago.

Fukumoto: I know. Really, it's not.

02-00:26:14
Ono: Yeah.

Dunham: So after Springfield?

02-00:26:19
Ono: I looked for a job. I didn't want to go to Maui, because I came from there. I figured all the guys I played for might second guess me, so I wanted to go where nobody knew me. Well, before that, since there was hardly any jobs on Kauai, I asked the department to [get] a job [on the] Big Island. There was one way down past Kohala area, but—see, I had to go to summer school to pick up my credits for administration. See, because I looked at all the other alternatives that I could go into, besides what I was doing, and the only thing I could do was go into administration. So I had to go to summer school to pick up administration credits. Interestingly enough, it seems like everybody that I was dealing with always told me, forget it. Because when I went to get out of high school because of problems I had with the principal, I asked for a transfer to another school. They wouldn't transfer me to an elementary school. I said, "I had a teaching practice in elementary school, so I know what it's like." The principal wouldn't transfer me, and the district superintendent wouldn't transfer me. I went through all these administration courses; I took the principal's exam. The guy in charge of assistant superintendent, he said I passed the test. You know what he told me? "If I were you, I'd forget it." Very, very interesting, yeah?

Dunham: Do you mind if I ask what the conflict was, what the challenge was with the principal?

02-00:28:39
Ono: No. No, I just wanted to see if I could get a job. Before they even tell me anything, they tell me forget it. Anyway, in the meantime, a state PE job came up. Be director at the state level. So I applied for that. I was two of the last contestants for the job. The assistant superintendent was in charge of that, too. We used to have a beginning principals workshop, before, for one week, and

he was in charge of that. But anyway, the attorney I was at the university and finishing up my administration courses. I was supposed to go to Big Island for a principal job. They had a school called Kogalau School, between Kilauea and Anahola. The principal got sick, in the month of August, so as I was finishing the courses, the superintendent called me, asked me if I wanted the job. So I said, "Well, instead of moving to Big Island; I might as well go there." So I said, "Okay, I'll take the job." You know what his last words were? "You'll probably do a lousy job at it; it's okay."

Dunham: Wow.

02-00:30:24

Ono: Yeah. Talking about being negative, eh? But anyway, I went there and I did the job for one year. After I finished one year, I saw the superintendent again, the school superintendent. This time he told me, "Thank you." He said, "You did a good job." [laughs] First praise I got. Anyway, since they were having this principals workshop for new principals, they told me I want to go, even if I did Waimea job. So I went. The assistant superintendent was in charge of that. That week, on Tuesday, they had the interview for me for the PE job at the state level. So they tied three to three. And so the assistant supe had to make that decision, and he picked the other guy. Well, this was on Tuesday now, and he was in charge of the workshop. So Friday, the last day, I just happened to run into him, and we were working to the cafeteria to eat lunch. You know what he tells me? He said, "Gee, if I had known you, I would've given you the job." [laughs] It was so funny.

Dunham: So instead, you stayed on?

02-00:31:56

Ono: Yeah, I stayed on. Then the next school I went to from there—well, that school had about seventy-five kids. So I had to do a bunch on top of the teaching, too. Thanksgiving, all the schools got turkey. That school didn't get turkey. So I asked how come. Too small, not enough enrollment. So I told the guy in charge, I said, "What difference does it make? You still have kids who are in school." No, they wouldn't give me. So I just said, I got the turkeys. [laughs] It was so funny. So anyway, I stayed. The kids only used to play softball, so I had to teach them basketball.

Dunham: So you introduced basketball there?

02-00:33:00

Ono: Oh, yeah. Well, I put up a net. They had the court, but they didn't have anything else. No balls, no nothing. So I got all that stuff.

Dunham: Where was this?

02-00:33:11
Ono: Koloa School. And there was a guy that used to be principal before. He planted a lot of macadamia nut trees over there. So when I went there, the trees were big and a lot of nuts. So I used to pick up all the nuts, clean them, take the husk off, and sell it to this nut factory guy. So that's how I got the money to buy all these things.

Dunham: School fundraisers?

02-00:33:40
Ono: Yeah. Anyway, then the next year, they told me to go to Kamakani School, which is on the west side. That school was like Koloa School. People used to stay one year and transfer to a big school, because your pay was dependent on enrollment. So being a small school, they all go there to begin, and move. So when I went there, the first question—I met with the manager of the plantation, come out and look at the sugar—and the union head. Yeah. They usually don't get together, but they were there together. You know what question they asked me? "How long are you going to stay?" [laughs]

Fukumoto: What'd you say?

02-00:34:38
Ono: I anticipated the question already. So I said, "Before I came," I said, "I'll offer you three years." And I stayed there for three years. So they were happy. The kids were happy. Yeah.

Dunham: Well, I wanted to wrap up so you have time for dinner.

02-00:35:06
Ono: Ah, don't worry about it.

Dunham: Well, is there anything else you'd like to share with us today about going back to the war years or your experiences there, or anything since, before we close, reflecting back on that time?

02-00:35:22
Ono: No, just that when I went to Kauai High School, I coached three sports. First of all, there were six periods; I had six classes. On top of that, they gave me a homeroom. On top of it all, I was the AD, athletic director, for free. The reason why I transferred out of there was that before my sixth year, I told the principal the AD job—see, it has to make all the arrangements for teams, traveling and whatnot. It was getting a little bit hard, so I needed time. I never had any free time. So I told them to double up on PE class, freshman PE class, so I'd get one free period, I could do my AD job and a few other things. He did that. You know what he did? He stuck me with a social studies class in there. I studied for one week straight, every morning. I said, "I have more things to do than any teacher in your school, and you hand me some more?" So that's why I said I asked for a transfer and they wouldn't transfer me out.

Dunham: So that's when that came about. Wow.

Fukumoto: They didn't want to get rid of you.

02-00:36:48

Ono: Yeah. No, but you see, when I get introduced to people—the guys who know me said, "Oh, he used to coach at Kauai High School." See, I used to coach football, basketball, and track; but football was the main sport, because that's what supposedly made the most money. That's the most popular sport.

Well, first three years, I played for the championship twice, and I lost twice. One year I lost by one touchdown. The next six years, I won six years in a row. So the people in Kauai—I think I got the name Champ by winning all those championships. But see, the difference was, the guy before me was interested in going to Honolulu, to be in the Honolulu league. High schools. So his style of playing and his treatment of people was different. Especially the kids. They were just like gods in the school; they couldn't do nothing wrong. Well, my philosophy was totally different, because I came with the philosophy that this is a sport that you play. You learn about it, and you play, and you, hopefully, will carry on some of the things you learn. After high school, most of you will never get to college.

So after we won the six straight and I looked at the players that I had, I'm very proud because all of them did very well. That's why I like football, because football is a team game. See, they learn sportsmanship, they learn discipline, they learn how to listen, they learn how to do it. I said, "There are no stars in football. You can be the best quarterback; if the line doesn't block for you, you're dead." Same thing with running backs. But I said, "Good quarterbacks, if you give them time, they can do it. Running backs, you give them time and make good holds, the good ones will go ten, fifteen, twenty yards. The better ones will go all the way." So I said, "You've got eleven guys playing, you've got to have eleven guys doing the job." It's not like on a job like basketball, you have one guy that's a better player than others. And baseball, same thing. But not in football. So I said, "That's the reason why I like football."

Fukumoto: I love that.

Dunham: Yeah, that's great. Candice coaches basketball some.

02-00:40:02

Ono: That's what I felt.

Dunham: It's great to teach those values, because as you said, most of them [are] not going to go on to play college, or certainly, pro. So it's really sort of the values and approach and sportsmanship—

02-00:40:12

Ono: Oh, yeah.

Dunham: —is what matters, right, that comes out of it.

Fukumoto: Build character, right?

Dunham: Is there anything else you'd like to add, before we close today?

02-00:40:20

Ono: Well, no, just that in addition to this, I met some of the bosses of my players. Their comment was, "Gee, they can do what you tell them to do. They listen." So easy for them, eh? Good workers. They work hard.

Dunham: Well, it's clear you are a great coach and communicator. Thank you for sharing some of your stories and wisdom here today with us. We really appreciate it.

Fukumoto: Yeah, that was wonderful. Thank you.

[End of Interview]