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Tomi Taba

Rosie the Riveter
WWII American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by
David Dunham and Candice Fukumoto
in 2014

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Tomi Taba

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Interview 1: August 6, 2014

Fukumoto: Okay. Today is August 6, 2014, and we're here with Mrs. Tomi Taba. And we're in Lihue, Kauai. So we're going to just begin at the beginning, just if you could tell us your full name, where you were born, and when you were born.

01-00:00:23

Taba: I was born in Lawai, Kauai, on March 18, 1916.

Fukumoto: 1916. And your full name?

01-00:00:33

Taba: Tomi Taba. People, when I tell them my name is Tomi Taba, then they'll ask me, and what is your last name? They think Tomi Taba is my first name, so I better go slow. Tomi Taba. It's Tomi, T-O-M-I, T-A-B-A.

Fukumoto: Right. It's a catchy name. It's a fun name. So what do you remember about your parents or the first people who came to Hawaii from—? You said you're family's from Okinawa. Is that both your parents? Both your parents were Okinawan?

01-00:01:07

Taba: Yeah.

Fukumoto: Do you remember what park of Okinawa they were from?

01-00:01:11

Taba: They're from {Chinisashiki?}. I don't know too much about Okinawa, but I know when they talk about where they came from—. I have never asked any history or anything, only they told me they're from {Chinisashiki?}, Okinawa. Maybe you don't know.

Fukumoto: I just know Gushikawa because that's where my—.

01-00:01:39

Taba: Oh. Shimajiri-gun.

Fukumoto: So were your parents strong in identifying as Okinawan? Did they raise you to say—.

01-00:01:51

Taba: But I'm adopted. Yeah, yeah. My biological parents had thirteen children. When my mother had a surgery in Honolulu, I was the second from the youngest; but the youngest, my mother took him with her for the surgery also, so the child can be with her. But then my biological father's father had a relative here, and they had no children, so my biological cousin or relative took care of me. Then I got very attached to them. Then since they didn't have any children, they gave me away to them.

Fukumoto: Oh, wow.

01-00:02:49

Taba: Yeah, so I've been adopted, because my mother had thirteen children. And then I was the number six, I think, from the top.

Fukumoto: Did you see your brothers and sisters often, though? Were you able to at least interact with them?

01-00:03:04

Taba: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, we were living in the same place.

Fukumoto: Oh, okay. So you still got to see them; you were just living—.

01-00:03:10

Taba:

Fukumoto: You said with your cousins? Were they your cousins, you said, or you auntie or uncle, that you lived with, or [had] been adopted by? They were still relatives of yours.

01-00:03:25

Taba: My biological father's relative adopted me. So I grew up as a Chinen, basically, not Nishime. But my biological name, [of my] parents, was Nishime. But when I was very young, only about three or four years old, I was adopted and my name—. But those days, they just didn't do anything by the way legally, so after this many years, then it was changed to Chinen. But at first, I went as Nishime. But even I was adopted by Chinen.

Fukumoto: Oh, so interesting. So what was your childhood like?

01-00:04:09

Taba: Childhood like?

Fukumoto: Yeah. As a little girl, what kind of things did you do? What can you remember about your childhood?

01-00:04:17

Taba: Well, it was good. Nothing special. Because we were living in the countryside, so we don't have too many children to play with, but I know that I saw my parents, my biological family, a lot because we were pretty close, only about a mile away.

Fukumoto: Yeah. Do you remember what they did on Kawai? Were they farmers? Did they work in the plantation?

01-00:04:47

Taba: Yeah, yeah. They were farmers, I guess. Well, my adopted father owned a pineapple field. So he owned a field. But my biological father, he worked for a plantation.

Fukumoto: Did you have to work in the pineapple fields?

01-00:05:14

Taba: Yeah, yeah. I used to help after school. But you see, I went only till eighth grade. So I used to help after school, help my adopted mother, because that was my family already, so I used to help in the pineapple [fields].

Fukumoto: What do you remember about working in the pineapple fields? Besides hard work. What did you do, weed?

01-00:05:48

Taba: Well, we'd weed and all that. Of course, my parents hired workers, Filipinos. They used to hire Filipinos to work for them. Then I remember I used to wash their clothes.

Fukumoto: Oh, wow. By hand, right?

01-00:06:07

Taba: Yeah, by hand, at that time. At that time, by hand.

Fukumoto: Now, did you take the clothes to your home?

01-00:06:13

Taba: Yeah, to my home. No, no, I didn't go to the Filipinos' place, because they came to my father's place to work, so they would bring the clothes and I would wash. Of course, it's not free; they would charge .

Fukumoto: Yeah. Do you remember how much?

01-00:06:29

Taba: No.

Fukumoto: No. Did your money just go to your family, or did you get to keep some of your money that you earned?

01-00:06:38

Taba: No.

Fukumoto: Did you get to keep any of your money, or did all that money just go to your family to help out?

01-00:06:46

Taba: Well, they didn't pay me, because I'm working for the family.

Fukumoto: So it just went to the family, yeah.

01-00:06:50

Taba: Yeah, yeah, it went to the family.

Dunham: Did you communicate with the Filipinos? And if so, in what language?

01-00:06:58

Taba: No, not very much. At that time, we were afraid of Filipinos. Because we used to refer to them as Filipino poke knife.

Fukumoto: Oh, right.

01-00:07:07

Taba: Yeah, yeah. Because they were very uncivilized people, so we used to be afraid of Filipinos. But the ones that my father hired, they were real nice people. So it doesn't mean that all Filipinos were bad.

Fukumoto: Right, right.

01-00:07:25

Taba: But as the whole, we used to be afraid of Filipinos. Yes.

Fukumoto: So you grew up in Lawai or Kalaheo?

01-00:07:34

Taba: Yeah, yeah, Lawai and Kalaheo.

Fukumoto: Your friends or people you played with, were they different ethnicities, or were they mostly—?

01-00:07:45

Taba: No, no. Yeah.

Fukumoto: All different?

01-00:07:48

Taba: No, no. Well, at school, it's all the Portuguese and all that, but most of all, with those that lived near, close by, and they were mostly Japanese.

Fukumoto: What do you remember eating? What was a common meal that you would eat when you were a child?

01-00:08:13

Taba: Well, saimin.

Fukumoto: Ooh. I love that. Did you grow up eating more rice or sweet potato or—?

01-00:08:26

Taba: Oh, well, rice and sweet potato about the same. Because Okinawans ate lots of sweet potato.

Fukumoto: Right.

Dunham: Were there a lot of Okinawans in the area?

01-00:08:40

Taba: Yeah, yeah, quite a bit, yeah.

Dunham: So did you grow up with a strong sense of Okinawan culture, would you say?

01-00:08:49

Taba: Yeah.

Dunham: Yeah. Did your family play instruments?

01-00:08:53

Taba: Yeah. My mother, my adopted mother, never told me that I was adopted. So until I went to school, I didn't know I was adopted. So when I went to school, my oldest sister was still in grammar school, and then they would tell me, oh, you are so-and-so's sister. Her name was Elizabeth. Elizabeth, she's a Nishime. Then I would say, "No, I'm not her sister; she's my cousin." But I knew that we were somehow close, but I didn't know. So I said, "No, no, she's not my sister, she's my cousin," until other—. I don't know why my parents never told me I was adopted.

Dunham: Did you talk about it with them after that? After school, you started being told this, or no, not really?

01-00:09:47

Taba: I don't know, maybe I did. I don't know, I forget. This is so long ago.

Dunham: Did you have other siblings with your adopted parents, or were you the only one?

01-00:09:56

Taba: Yeah, I'm the only one. Well, my father in Okinawa, it was their custom—I don't know what you call that—that one of my adopted father's brother's son's would take the name of my adopted father, to carry on the name. Then they wanted me to marry that guy, but he lived in Okinawa. But {inaudible}.

Dunham: Was that a serious thing? Did they want you to go back to Okinawa, then?

01-00:10:40

Taba: Well, they always talked about it, but I didn't want to go.

Dunham: Okay. How come you didn't want to go?

01-00:10:46

Taba: Because I had friends here and I didn't want to go to Japan.

Fukumoto: Yeah. This was home, right?

01-00:10:50

Taba: Yeah. Why do you have to have this? [referring to computer laptop]

Dunham: Oh, we just have some notes on here. We don't have a printer with us; sometimes we print. So we're just using this.

01-00:11:06

Taba: Yeah, yeah. My family, I had one girl and three boys; but the girl died when she was only eleven.

Dunham: Oh, I'm sorry.

01-00:11:17

Taba: The Lord took her home. So then I had only three boys. But we are all Christians. So my children all went to Christian college on the mainland.

Dunham: Can I ask, when you were growing up, though, what religion were you as a young girl? Did you go to services?

01-00:11:37

Taba: I didn't have any religion.

Dunham: Okay. So you weren't Buddhist or—?

01-00:11:40

Taba: Yeah, yeah.

Dunham: Okay. All right.

01-00:11:42

Taba: As I told you, because I'm only a eighth grade graduate. I didn't go to high school. But children all went to high school and they went to college.

Dunham: That's wonderful.

01-00:11:50

Taba: My husband wanted them to go to the mainland college, and to a Christian college. So they went to a college by the name of Wheaton College. When my oldest son was at Kauai High School, he was the class president and he was the football co-captain and all that, so he was very well known in Kauai High School. So when he went for college, he applied for Wheaton College, which is a Christian college, and the University of Illinois. But he chose to go to Wheaton College, because that's the Christian college. So one the teachers called me. He called me at my house and he said, "Now, why did your son—?" He could have gone to University of Illinois, because he was—. What do you call that? Not chosen, but—.

Dunham: Oh, a scholarship?

Fukumoto: Like a scholar, yeah .

01-00:13:00

Taba: Yeah. Well, not scholarship, but he could have gone there.

Dunham: Accepted. Accepted.

01-00:13:04

Taba: Yeah. But that school was a pretty well-known school, yeah, so the teacher was very disappointed. He wanted my son to go to University of Illinois. So he told me, "Wheaton College, what kind of college is that?" So I didn't want to answer him, so I made him call my husband, who was working at the office, because we had a pot store. He had a pot store business, so he was there, so he talked to him. I guess my husband must have told that teacher, "No, my son is going to Wheaton College, even if he was accepted at the University of Illinois."

Dunham: Well, that's great. No, and I'd love to talk more about that later. I want to go back a little earlier, though, now, and talk about when you still were young for a little bit more, if we could.

01-00:13:55

Taba: Oh, all right.

Dunham: So when you were growing up, what language or languages did you speak in the home or outside?

01-00:14:01

Taba: Oh, oh. In the home, I spoke Japanese to my parents. Because my parents spoke only Okinawan language with each other, but to me, they would speak Japanese.

Dunham: Okay. Did you understand the Okinawan language at all?

01-00:14:17

Taba: Yeah, I did. I did understand, but I couldn't—

Dunham: Speak it.

01-00:14:21

Taba: —make a conversation, because I don't speak. But I understood everything what they said.

Fukumoto: Wow. That's terrific.

Dunham: I know you weren't able to go to school after eighth grade, but before that, did you go to Japanese language school, as well as—?

01-00:14:37

Taba: Yeah. Japanese language school.

Dunham: Yeah, okay. So what was that like, at the time?

01-00:14:41

Taba: Well, I don't know. Well, it was okay to me, I guess. Just okay.

Dunham: It's a lot of school, to go to regular school and also go to language school.

01-00:14:51

Taba: No, only English school and Japanese school. Two schools, yeah. For the Japanese school, it was after the English school, the Japanese school.

Dunham: You'd mentioned you lived kind of in the countryside. So how far away was the school, and how did you get there?

01-00:15:06

Taba: Well, those days, even two or three miles, we all walked to school.

Dunham: Yeah, barefooted too, yeah.

01-00:15:13

Taba: Yeah.

Dunham: So your feet get—?

01-00:15:16

Taba: Well, the English school, Kalaheo School, was in Kalaheo. And then the Japanese school was in Lawai, just the next town. So I don't know how far, but walked a ways.

Dunham: Yeah. Okay.

Fukumoto: Did you enjoy school? Did you like school?

01-00:15:36

Taba: Yeah. But I had the problem of stammering. I used to stammer a lot. That's why I didn't go to high school.

Fukumoto: Oh. Well, it sounds like no problem now.

01-00:15:50

Taba: Yeah.

Dunham: That must have been hard, though.

01-00:15:56

Taba: Yeah. Hard, yeah.

Dunham: So what did you do after eighth grade?

01-00:16:01

Taba: After I graduated eighth grade, I went to a sewing—. Not a school, but a family that owned a tailor shop. They were kind of distant relatives to my adopted parents. So I went there for about two, three years, and I learned how to sew pants at the tailor shop. So I sewed all my children's clothes. We never bought any clothes. We didn't have money to buy clothes. But I was happy

that I could sew for them. And I would sew for my sister-in-laws and brother-in-laws, too, their clothes.

Fukumoto: Oh, that's terrific.

01-00:16:44

Taba: Because when I got married, I lived with my in-laws and their family. So I lived about seven years with them.

Fukumoto: Oh, wow. Was that also in Kalaheo?

01-00:17:00

Taba: Yeah. Kalaheo, yeah, and Lawai.

Fukumoto: Terrific.

Dunham: I was just going to ask, what was life like, what was an average day like, for your mom, your adopted mom, when you were growing up? What did she do? Did she work on the pineapple farm?

01-00:17:18

Taba: Yeah, yeah, yeah. With my father, yeah.

Dunham: Yeah, okay. So what kind of work was she doing then?

01-00:17:24

Taba: Oh, maybe help pack the pineapple or that kind of job.

Dunham: Okay. Okay. Do you know about how many employees there were, people working on the farm?

01-00:17:40

Taba: Well, different Filipinos. Mostly Filipinos.

Dunham: Okay. Okay. So what was it like when you started doing the sewing? Were you doing that—?

01-00:17:50

Taba: No, no, they had a pineapple cannery at Lawai, so the pineapple was all sent to the cannery.

Dunham: Okay. Okay.

Fukumoto: So did he have that pineapple farm throughout—?

01-00:18:09

Taba: Yeah. Yeah, my father, yeah. But he didn't own the land. He leased the land, but he raised pineapple.

Dunham: So were you still living with your adopted parents when you were doing the sewing work, after eighth grade? Or did you move? When you started doing the sewing work, where did you live then?

01-00:18:35

Taba: The sewing. Oh, with my parents.

Dunham: Still with your parents, okay.

01-00:18:40

Taba: Yeah. I wasn't married yet.

Dunham: Okay. It wasn't too far to go?

01-00:18:44

Taba: No. We couldn't walk it. It was done by mail.

Dunham: Oh.

01-00:18:49

Taba: I lived in Kalaheo, Waimea. So no, I lived with them.

Dunham: You did? Okay. So what was that like, living with a different family then?

01-00:18:58

Taba: Oh, it was nice. Because at home, I had no brothers and sisters. I had, but not living with me. So at least they had other people that used to come to that sewing thing. But they didn't sleep there, but they used to be there, so I had somebody for company.

Dunham: So you had more social interaction then, yeah.

01-00:19:20

Taba: Yeah.

Fukumoto: Was Waimea very different from Kalaheo during that time?

01-00:19:26

Taba: Yeah, because it's a town and Kalaheo was not a town. Kalaheo was called a {Portugesta?}.

Fukumoto: Right. Right, right, right. So did you have more time? Did you go to the movies ever? In Waimea.

01-00:19:44

Taba: Yeah, yeah, Waimea. I used to go to Japanese movies every Saturday night. I used to like Japanese movies. Not the other movies, because they're too much. Japanese movies, I really liked.

Dunham: What is it you liked about them?

01-00:20:04

Taba: Well, they're just more towards our—. I don't know what you call it, but I liked it because haole—well, we used to call it haole movie[s]—was more kissing and all that kind of stuff, so I didn't like that. Whereas Japanese ones, they didn't have that kind of stuff.

Dunham: It was more respectful?

01-00:20:30

Taba: Yeah, more respectful.

Dunham: Okay. Okay. Interesting. Do you remember any of those movies?

01-00:20:38

Taba: No, that's so long ago.

Dunham: Yeah, I was just wondering if you had. Would you see the same actors in different movies over the years, from the Japanese films?

01-00:20:47

Taba: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Dunham: So you followed and knew them, okay.

Fukumoto: So was this at the Waimea Theater?

01-00:20:53

Taba: Yeah.

Fukumoto: The one that they just remodeled, yeah?

01-00:20:56

Taba: Yeah. Yeah, I'm surprised you're both asking me all of these questions. I thought you were going to ask me only what happened—

Fukumoto: We will.

01-00:21:06

Taba: —the day that Pearl Harbor was bombed.

Dunham: Yeah, we do want to ask you about that, but we wanted to get a real sense of growing up in Kauai at that time. You don't mind, do you?

01-00:21:16

Taba: No, no, no. Only I didn't expect [it].

Fukumoto: No, I know. Because we're interested in what it was like and just the kind of things that you did. I'm interested in what kind of snacks you ate at the Waimea Theater. Were you eating li hing mui? Did they have popcorn, that kind of stuff?

01-00:21:37

Taba: No, no, they didn't have all that kind of stuff. We never bought. No more money to buy.

Dunham: How much did it cost to go to the movies?

01-00:21:46

Taba: I forget. I don't know.

Dunham: Okay. When you were doing the sewing work, were you able to keep some of the money at that time, or did you have to give it—?

01-00:21:54

Taba: No. No, no, I didn't get paid.

Dunham: Oh, you didn't get paid.

Fukumoto: Remember, it went to family.

Dunham: Oh, still. Okay. Okay. Yeah. So you did that for two or three years, you said?

01-00:22:04

Taba: Well, yeah. I don't know exactly how long.

Dunham: Okay. This is the late twenties or early thirties?

01-00:22:11

Taba: Yeah. Well, I graduated grammar school fifteen years after I was born.

Dunham: Okay. So you were born in 1916?

01-00:22:24

Taba: Yeah, 1916.

Dunham: So about '31, probably?

01-00:22:26

Taba: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I graduated Kalaheo School, yeah, 1930 or '31.

Dunham: Okay, '30 or '31. Okay. So this is also the time of the Depression. Did that impact you and your family significantly?

01-00:22:44

Taba: No. I knew that I went through depression once or twice, I forget.

Dunham: Well, I meant the economic depression of sort of the thirties. But I know it was tough all through. Times were always tight. So you made do.

01-00:23:02

Taba: I know before the 1920s, there was a much greater depression, I think. According to my parents.

Dunham: Do you remember anything they told you about that? No? Yeah, I know you were so young. Well, after the sewing job, what did you do after that?

01-00:23:23

Taba: Then I got married.

Dunham: Oh, how did you meet your husband?

01-00:22:29

Taba: Oh, we grew up together. But then the family moved to Oahu. Then when the father died, then they moved back to Kauai, and they moved with their grandparents. We were neighbors yet, but—. No, no, I think we had moved from there already, and that he went to Kauai High School. And then of course, he wanted to continue on school, but he was the oldest in the family, so he couldn't go. So he worked for what they call the Kampai Motor Company, an automobile parts store. So I got married to him.

Fukumoto: And when was that? When did you get married?

01-00:24:20

Taba: Hm-hm. [they laugh] Well, about 1938, I got married.

Fukumoto: 1938.

Dunham: Okay. Okay. So you were in your early twenties.

01-00:24:35

Taba: Yeah.

Dunham: Yeah, okay. Until that time, did you continue with the sewing job? Or were there other things you did?

01-00:24:49

Taba: You mean until I got married? No. No, before I got married. Yeah, yeah. No, it's after I finished Waimea, the sewing place, I came home, and then I was helping my parents in the pineapple field.

Dunham: Okay. Yeah. The business in the pineapple, did it change much during that time? Or had it been pretty much the same type of operation? Was there technology or things that changed it?

01-00:25:23

Taba: Well, my parents had plenty of Filipinos hired.

Dunham: Yeah, okay.

01-00:25:33

Taba: But they didn't really own land, but they leased it.

Dunham: Yeah, yeah. But they ran the operation, right. Okay.

Fukumoto: Anything else prior to December 7, you want to ask?

Dunham: No, go ahead.

Fukumoto: Okay. Okay, so now you're married and you're living with your in-laws, right?

01-00:25:58

Taba: Yeah.

Fukumoto: With the Taba family.

01-00:26:02

Taba: Well, yeah. And with all the—. Because my husband was the oldest, so he had all these sisters and brothers.

Fukumoto: Oh. How many brothers and sisters did he have?

01-00:26:16

Taba: Oh.

Fukumoto: A lot. He had a lot.

01-00:26:19

Taba: Six or seven.

Fukumoto: Oh, okay. Do you remember December 7, 1941? Do you remember when you got news of the bombing?

01-00:26:28

Taba: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Fukumoto: So where you?

01-00:26:31

Taba: Well, I know that day, I was pregnant to my second son. I was supposed to have him before December 7, but then I didn't have him; I was still pregnant to him. So I went to see the doctor that day. As we were coming back, I stopped at the service station, which my uncle owned. Then when we stopped over there, my brother-in-law, who was below my husband, came over to the car and said, "You know something? Something awful happened on Oahu." Then my uncle heard him say that. Then, because he was uneducated and all that, so they always considered him not too smart. So he said, "Ah, no. No, he doesn't know what he's talking about." He was just, "Yeah, he doesn't know what he's talking about." Then I think somebody heard that, too, and then they must have turned on the radio. Then they heard, so they came. So I don't know where it was, but I heard this person say, "Yeah, Pearl Harbor was bombed." I said, "*What? Pearl Harbor was bombed?*" We were shocked, really shocked, yeah.

Fukumoto: Absolutely. When they said the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, what did you think? What was your immediate—? Oh, man, Japanese bomb? Were you just like—? Yeah.

01-00:28:13

Taba: Well, I didn't think anything just because the Japanese bombed.

Fukumoto: You just knew, bomb, oh, no.

01-00:28:20

Taba: Yeah. But I heard this Captain [Mitsuo] Fuchida, who was the captain of that {Lukoda Eskota and?} whatever, and they bombed Pearl Harbor. Then after that, he became a Christian. He came to Kauai and he spoke at the different churches.

Fukumoto: Oh, interesting.

01-00:28:42

Taba: I went to hear him twice.

Fukumoto: What do you remember about his speech?

01-00:28:46

Taba: I remember him saying when he bombed Pearl Harbor, he said, “{_____?},” the Emperor of Japan, the "Banzai. Hoorah!" He was so happy. Yeah, he was so happy. Well, in Japan, if you're a captain like that and you bomb, you are really looked up to, yeah.

Fukumoto: Sure, sure.

01-00:29:10

Taba: But then after that, he became a Christian and not long after that, he died. But I remember that he said, “{_____?} banzai.” That's the emperor's name, you see. Yeah, he was so happy for the emperor.

Fukumoto: Wow. Oh, wow.

01-00:29:30

Taba: Yeah.

Dunham: Well, it must have been very stressful, being pregnant, due with a baby at any time, and then to hear that news. Or was it extra stressful? How soon did the baby come after that?

01-00:29:46

Taba: Well, he was born January 2. So it was not too long after that. Well, Pearl Harbor was bombed December 7, and I had Russell, my second son, January 2.

Dunham: Okay. Okay. So what was life like here on Kauai, immediately after Pearl Harbor?

01-00:30:07

Taba: Oh, oh. Well, when you traveled at night, you have to have the lights on. Anyway, when I was going to give birth to my son, oh, we were stopped several times on the road. They had all these soldiers on the road, watching. Then I know that at home, we couldn't have the lights on, showing from the window. Had to be all dark. Then we dug a hole. What was it? But yeah.

Dunham: Bomb shelter?

Fukumoto: Like a bomb shelter? Yeah.

01-00:30:51

Taba: Yeah, bomb shelter. I remember all that, yeah.

Fukumoto: The soldiers, the military gave you gasmasks, right? Did you have a gasmask?

01-00:31:01

Taba: No, I don't remember that. Maybe I had one, but I don't remember now.

Dunham: So you started to say about when you gave birth. So it was at nighttime, that labor came on?

01-00:31:12

Taba: Yeah, yeah.

Dunham: You were trying to go to—. Was it a hospital or what was it?

01-00:31:16

Taba: The hospital, {_____?} Hospital.

Dunham: Yeah. So you had to drive with your—. Because it was nighttime, but you weren't allowed to drive with the headlights on?

01-00:31:24

Taba: No, no. Now, who drove? Because I didn't know how to drive at that time. I don't know who drove.

Dunham: Oh, no, you were a passenger, but you were stopped by the military, you said, right, many times that night, trying to get to the hospital?

01-00:31:41

Taba: Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, but because they wanted to make sure we were not enemies.

Fukumoto: Sure.

01-00:31:47

Taba: Yeah, yeah. So they stopped us several times.

Dunham:

Okay. Did they give you hard time? Or do you remember?

01-00:31:52

Taba: Well, I was happy that they stopped us, because then I knew that they were taking good care of us. So I was, in a way, happy that they were—.

Dunham:

At that time, did you have fear of a Japanese invasion, shortly after Pearl Harbor?

01-00:32:17

Taba: I don't know. Maybe, maybe, yeah. Yeah, maybe, maybe. I know that, well, the war lasted kind of a long time, yeah? Not too far from where we lived, the military used to keep their ammunitions over there. So they would pass our place all the time. At that time, I had children already. So my children will go out by the gate, and then they will go {_____?} of America {_____?}. I don't know what they did, but I don't want—all of a sudden, this gate, when the military would—.

Fukumoto:

Would drive by?

01-00:33:06

Taba: Yeah, yeah, drive by. They would just run out and go, victory.

Fukumoto:

Were the soldiers nice to your family?

01-00:33:16

Taba: The soldiers?

Fukumoto:

Yeah.

01-00:33:17

Taba: Yes. Well, because they were living close by, and then we wished to have a shower outside, not in the house. So my husband invited them to come and take a shower at our place. So they used to come over and take a shower at our place, and my boys used to play with them. Yeah. Then of course, my daughter was still living at that time. When they saw my daughter, they thought my daughter was so cute. They said, "She's the most cutest baby we saw on Kauai." Because she had wavy hair and all that. So I remember that.

Fukumoto:

Oh, that's sweet.

01-00:34:03

Taba: Yeah. Then my husband used to invite them for dinner. Yeah.

Fukumoto:

Oh. So you had to cook a lot, huh?

01-00:34:12

Taba: Yeah.

Fukumoto: Did you cook a lot?

01-00:34:15

Taba: Then at that time, of course, he was not a Christian, too, so he used to drink, so he used to give them drinks, too. Of course, my mother-in-law didn't like that idea, for my husband to; but then my husband is the boss, so he wouldn't listen to the mother.

Fukumoto: Was she just afraid of having soldiers come into the home? Or was it more the drinking together, she didn't like?

01-00:34:42

Taba: Yeah, drinking. And the idea to have the soldiers come over; she didn't like that idea. But my husband wanted to.

Fukumoto: Became friendly.

01-00:34:53

Taba: Wanted to help them. Or I don't know what he felt, but several times, he invited them over for dinner.

Fukumoto: Were you okay with that? Did you enjoy it?

01-00:35:02

Taba: Yeah, yeah. I was okay, because he was okay. Well, because it was our American soldiers, so I was happy for that, because I was all for America, not Japan.

Fukumoto: Sure, right. And the soldiers, they were from all over, right, the United States?

01-00:35:23

Taba: Yeah. Yeah.

Fukumoto: So do you remember any one particularly? Any soldier that you remember right now?

01-00:35:31

Taba: No, no, I don't remember.

Fukumoto: No? Too many.

01-00:35:33

Taba: That's a long time ago.

Fukumoto: Yeah.

Dunham: Well, you said they came over for meals. You were having Japanese? Or what kind of food were you having?

01-00:35:42

Taba: We served them Japanese food.

Dunham: And they enjoyed it?

01-00:35:46

Taba: Yeah. Of course, they liked it because [it was] something different, yeah.

Fukumoto: That's terrific. You guys had your own garden? Did you guys raise your own animals?

01-00:36:04

Taba: Yeah, yeah. My mother-in-law, she raised pigs. Okinawans are known for their pigs.

Fukumoto: Yes. That, I know.

01-00:36:17

Taba: She used to raise pigs, and then the vegetables.

Fukumoto: What kind of vegetables and fruits did you guys have?

01-00:36:25

Taba: Oh, she raised all different kinds of vegetables.

Fukumoto: All kinds.

01-00:36:31

Taba: Yeah, yeah. Although she worked for a pineapple company, or in a pineapple field.

Dunham: She did, too?

01-00:36:39

Taba: But then she was able to raise whatever she can. Then my in-laws, when they come home, they have to water the vegetables.

Fukumoto: Yeah, so food wasn't really a problem for you all during wartime.

01-00:36:56

Taba: No. Yeah.

Fukumoto: Because you guys had your own. You just grew your own and [were] able to cook. Not like other places, where—.

01-00:37:05

Taba: Yeah, well, because I lived with my in-laws. Of course, my father-in-law wasn't there; he was already gone. I used to do all the cooking. Yeah. Then I used to make what we call bento, with rice and—. For my in-laws, sister-in-laws and brother-in-laws, to take to school, because no more money to buy food all the time.

Fukumoto: Right. Oh, yeah.

Dunham: Did you learn to cook from your adopted mother, your mother?

Fukumoto: Yeah, how did you learn how to cook? You just did it? Or did you learn?

01-00:37:46

Taba: No, I didn't learn, just found out what they do. They don't teach you; you have to watch what they do.

Fukumoto: Right. Best—.

01-00:38:00

Taba: Not like now, they teach you. But no, those days, you look at it, you follow what they do.

Fukumoto: So did you use a lot of bitter melon, too, when you cooked, and make just—?

01-00:38:16

Taba: You mean bitter melon?

Fukumoto: Yeah.

01-00:38:18

Taba: Don't ask me what I cooked; I don't know.

Dunham: So that was a while ago, too?

01-00:38:24

Taba: I just, whatever have now, too, I guess.

Fukumoto: Well, that's terrific.

Dunham: So your husband's family was Okinawan, as well?

01-00:38:38

Taba:

Dunham: Sometimes we've heard, or even Candice's family has talked about, of Japanese and Okinawan, and Okinawans sometimes feelings as second class, if you will.

01-00:38:49

Taba: Yeah, yeah.

Dunham: What was that like, either growing up or at that time? Did you have that sense?

01-00:38:55

Taba: Well, I know that I didn't like that idea that we were second class.

Dunham: Did you and your family take pride in being Okinawan?

01-00:39:12

Taba: I guess so. I guess my parents, my biological parents. Well, my biological father was well educated. I mean Japanese. Did you know that in Okinawa, before Japan took over, they used to trade with China? So all their customers, more Chinese than Japanese. Even now.

Dunham: Yeah. Yeah. So did you grow up with some of that, with the music, playing?

01-00:39:43

Taba: Yeah, yeah.

Dunham: Your family played music and sang?

01-00:39:47

Taba: No, no, my family didn't play.

Dunham: Okay. But you went to—

01-00:39:50

Taba: Yeah, we did the Bon dances.

Dunham: Bon dance, yeah, okay. Okay. During the wartime—and let us know if you need to take a break or go; we'll try to—did you hear about the Kauai Morale Committee or any of the other kind of volunteer efforts and things that were going on?

01-00:40:16

Taba: You mean during the war?

Dunham: Yeah, during the war years.

01-00:40:19

Taba: I cannot remember.

Dunham: Okay. That's fine, that's fine. We'd heard of a thing called the Mothers Girls Forum. Did you hear anything?

01-00:40:26

Taba: No, no, I don't know.

Dunham: Okay. Okay. There were things—do you remember—like the barbed wire being put in around the beaches and kind of like clearcutting?

01-00:40:38

Taba: Yeah, now that you mention, I think they had barbed wire. That's the first time somebody asked me about the barbed wire.

Dunham: Okay, okay. Well, what things have we not asked you about, about that time, that you'd like to share with us? Aside from the curfew and other restrictions—you mentioned the lights out—what other kind of things were different then, and challenging?

01-00:41:03

Taba: You mean during the war?

Dunham: Yeah, yeah.

01-00:41:09

Taba: I don't know. I know that from where we lived, we have to go up to the store in Kalaheo town, which was a walk. I did lots of the shopping, walking.

Dunham: Yeah. So was that especially hard during the war years, then, if it was—?

01-00:41:30

Taba: Yeah, yeah. No, well, I just took it that, well, that's the lifestyle.

Fukumoto: That's the way it is, yeah.

Dunham: Yeah. We talked some about growing up with other ethnicities. You lived in a mainly Portuguese area and Filipino workers. How were those other groups? How was it interacting with them during the war years? We know there was some anti-Japanese sentiment at times?

01-00:42:00

Taba: No, no, no, I don't remember.

Dunham: Okay, there wasn't—

01-00:42:04

Taba: Yeah, no.

Dunham: —extra sort of tension or—?

01-00:42:08

Taba: I know that my boys, when they were growing up—because we lived in—. Kalaheo was known as a Portuguese town. So all their friends were Portuguese, most of their friends.

Dunham: Were the Portuguese mostly dairy farmers or other things? Do you know what kind of business?

01-00:42:30

Taba: Did all kinds of things.

Dunham: Yeah, all kinds. Police, okay.

01-00:42:34

Taba: But now it's not Portuguese town anymore, it's haole town.

Fukumoto: Yeah, that's what I heard. We're staying in Kalaheo, so my cousin said, "Kalaheo is mostly haole."

01-00:42:43

Taba: So even our church, because I go to Kalaheo Missionary Church, they're all getting to be more haole, haole, so it's nice.

Fukumoto: Wow, yeah. So you see the change.

01-00:42:54

Taba: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Fukumoto: Yeah, you have seen the transition.

01-00:42:57

Taba: Yes.

Fukumoto: Yeah. Well, I think Kauai has changed a lot, too, right? Development, all these buildings. This place is brand new, right?

01-00:43:10

Taba: Yeah, yeah, yeah. They have all nice houses, practically.

Dunham: Yeah. During the war, did you follow news of the war through radio or word of mouth or movies, newsreels, anything?

01-00:43:26

Taba: We didn't have any TV, no radio.

Dunham: Yeah, yeah. Okay. So were you following the war somehow?

01-00:43:36

Taba: I don't know.

Dunham: Okay. Or maybe having dinner with the soldiers, did they talk of the war, what was happening?

01-00:43:41

Taba: No, no. I didn't have to talk to them when they came over to have dinner with us, because my husband did all the talking.

Fukumoto: He was the social butterfly? Did you stop going to the movies during the war? Because you used to go to the movies, right? Did you stop going to the movies during the war, or did you still go?

01-00:44:05

Taba: No, no, we didn't go.

Fukumoto: No movies. Too hard.

Dunham: They stopped having Japanese movies, probably?

01-00:44:09

Taba: Yeah, maybe, yeah. I don't know.

Dunham: I know you weren't in school at that time and your kids were young, but they stopped having the Japanese language schools?

01-00:44:18

Taba: Yeah, maybe. I don't know. I know there were many—. I think Japanese schoolteachers, they were taken to the concentration camps.

Dunham: Did you know anyone who was taken to the camps here?

01-00:44:36

Taba: We did, yeah.

Dunham: Did you know any teachers or community elders who were taken?

01-00:44:39

Taba: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Dunham: Do you remember who, or what they did?

01-00:44:45

Taba: I didn't know what they did. But we had one here from the mainland. She just moved to this place. She was in the concentration camp. I mean no—.

Dunham: On the mainland.

01-00:44:55

Taba: No, they called that internment.

Fukumoto: Well, it's concentration, yeah.

Dunham: Yeah, it's debated. It's debated. But they were camps they were taken to, no doubt.

01-00:45:04

Taba: Yeah. Now, she was there. The whole family. So when she first came to Kauai, she didn't like the haoles.

Fukumoto: Sure, yeah. Right.

Dunham: Yeah. At the time of the war, had you heard about what was happening to the Japanese on the mainland, going to the camps?

01-00:45:23

Taba: No, no. Maybe I knew at that time, but now it's all—. So many years, I forget.

Dunham: Sure, sure.

Fukumoto: Do you remember the end of the war, when it was what they call VE-Day or VJ-Day? Do you remember those days, end of the war?

01-00:45:46

Taba: Yeah. Then after the war was with Japan, yeah?

Fukumoto: Yeah.

Dunham: Yeah, when Japan surrendered.

01-00:45:51

Taba: Yeah. Yeah. Because right at the end of the war, my last baby was born. August 16, and the war ended August 15.

Fukumoto: So you remember that.

01-00:46:06

Taba: Yeah, yeah.

Dunham: Do you remember how the reaction to the end of the war was here on Kauai?

01-00:46:18

Taba: Hm. Well, I don't know.

Dunham: Oh, okay. Well, I want to ask, because you have young children, including giving birth right after the US joins the war, what was it like being a mother? It seems like it would be extra challenging, in these times, to raise young children. Were there any particular—?

01-00:46:39

Taba: No, no.

Dunham: Did your mother-in-law help with the kids?

01-00:46:44

Taba: No, no, we went to the hospital.

Dunham: No, but I mean once they were born and you were back at the house.

Fukumoto: Help raise.

01-00:46:49

Taba: Yeah. Well, no. My mother-in-law didn't help very much, because she worked outside. Because I was always at home. Yeah, so I took care.

Dunham: So it was all you, kind of, raising the kids.

01-00:47:02

Taba: Yeah. Then when my sister-in-laws come back from school, then they would help me. But until then—.

Dunham: So your husband's siblings—sisters at least—would help.

Fukumoto: Oh, okay. Now, did your children grow up just speaking English, or did they learn Japanese, too, from you?

01-00:47:21

Taba: Well, I think they must have spoken pidgin English, I don't know. They spoke more English than Japanese.

Dunham: But they didn't go to Japanese school, like you did?

01-00:47:36

Taba: Well, yeah. Well, two of them went to a Japanese school in Hanapepe, now that you mention [it]. I had forgotten all about it.

Dunham: Was it similar to the type of school you had gone to, or had it changed? Because I know they were closed. The Japanese language schools closed during the war, and then they reopened, I think, a couple years later.

01-00:47:59

Taba: Oh, I don't know.

Dunham: Okay.

Fukumoto: How many kids did you have, four? How many children do you have?

01-00:48:08

Taba: I had four, but one—.

Fukumoto: One passed.

01-00:48:11

Taba: The girl died, yeah. She was the only girl I had.

Dunham: I'm sorry. Do you mind if we asked how she passed?

01-00:48:18

Taba: She had Hodgkin's disease.

Dunham: Oh, I'm sorry.

01-00:48:21

Taba: You know Hodgkin's disease?

Fukumoto: Mm-hm.

01-00:48:22

Taba: Because she died when she was young, yeah. At that time, there was no cure for Hodgkin's disease.

Fukumoto: It must've been hard, yeah.

01-00:48:32

Taba: Especially when a child had [it]. But my husband—he died 1968—he had Hodgkin's disease, too.

Fukumoto: Oh, is that right?

01-00:48:41

Taba: But the doctor told my husband, "No, this is not hereditary," you see, because my daughter had, and he had, too.

Dunham: But he said it was a coincidence?

01-00:48:49

Taba: But the doctor had told him, "No, it's not hereditary." So I'm glad. But they say now, Hodgkin's disease, it's the easiest cancer to have it under control or something, yeah. Because it's a cancer of the lymph nodes, yeah.

Dunham: Yeah. How did things change here on Kauai after the end of the war? Did they go back to kind of somewhat how it was before the war? Or did they go in a new—?

Fukumoto: You were just busy raising kids, huh? You were just busy raising your own children and working?

01-00:49:35

Taba: Yeah, with children.

Dunham: We didn't ask, but sometimes we've heard people tell stories of, at the beginning of the war, destroying or burying their Japanese or Okinawan items.

Fukumoto: Or hiding them.

Dunham: Did you or your families bury, or even destroy, in some cases, any things you had from Japanese or Okinawa?

01-00:50:00

Taba: No, no, no.

Dunham: Okay. Did you have some items and things? Was your home ever searched? Sometimes people have said their homes were searched.

01-00:50:10

Taba: Yeah. Well, mostly, it's those like if you were a Japanese schoolteacher, or maybe a Buddhist priest or something.

Dunham: Okay. Where there was theoretically a suspicion, even though it was—. Okay. Well, when did you become involved with the Christian church?

01-00:50:33

Taba: Oh, in the 1940s.

Dunham: Oh, yeah? So soon after the war or during the war?

01-00:50:41

Taba: The war.

Dunham: The war ended in '45.

01-00:50:45

Taba: '45, yeah. No, I think after the war.

Dunham: Okay. So what led you to the church?

01-00:50:53

Taba: Well, there was a missionary that came from the mainland, into our church. She used to come over to my place. Because my mother-in-law used to go to a Christian church, so I used to go to a Christian church, but I didn't know Jesus at all. So this missionary used to come and visit us, and she invited me to—. She used to come and talk to me about Jesus all the time, because I didn't know anything about Jesus, until she invited me to go to a Baptist church in Waimea. Then they had the revival service there, and that's where I heard about Jesus and I accepted Jesus. Because this speaker was—. Well, he said that he was not a Christian, he was a Buddhist, too, but then he heard about Jesus and became a Christian. So his testimony was very helpful. Then after that, this Miss Dorothy, who's the missionary, used to come all the time and help me, and used to talk to me more about Jesus, so I won't change my mind. So today, I'm happy that all my children—. I have twelve great-grandchildren, and I have—.

Dunham: Oh, congratulations.

01-00:52:30

Taba: Yeah. So altogether, with my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, I have thirty of them. Twenty-nine are living right in Kalaheo. No, no, no. No, my great-grandchildren. I have twelve here; eleven are living in Kalaheo. Only one [is] living in Washington.

Fukumoto: Wow. So family is close by.

01-00:52:58

Taba: Yeah, all together.

Fukumoto: Lucky.

01-00:53:01

Taba: Yeah, because my two sons were able to buy the lot next to where I live. It was a four-acre lot and that was a nice lot, and my oldest son—. Because I used to be a good friend with the people that owned that lot, a good friend with one of the girls, and I used to do a lot of favors for her and drive her to church and all that. Then she used to tell me that her brother-in-law said that he will never, never sell that lot because he really liked that lot. They had a house there, too, that the family lived [in]. The house is still there, over 100 years old.

Fukumoto: Oh, that's great.

01-00:53:45

Taba: Yeah. So she used to say that no, the brother-in-law will never sell. Well, but my oldest son was very interested in that lot, so he told me, try to ask my friend if the brother-in-law wouldn't sell that lot. So I told my son, "Well, you heard her say that the brother-in-law will never sell that lot." But he scolded me. He said, "Try, ask again. No harm in asking again." So I asked her again. So she talked to the brother-in-law, and the brother-in-law said, "To the Tabas, I would sell."

Fukumoto: Wow.

01-00:54:24

Taba: Yeah. So we got that four-acre lot, and all my family are living all there in Kalaheo.

Fukumoto: Oh, that's wonderful.

01-00:54:32

Taba: Wonderful, yeah.

Fukumoto: Oh, that's so great.

01-00:54:34

Taba: Yeah, yeah. They're right in Kalaheo. Then they have a four-acre lot, too. Yeah, so they have a big lot, too, so the boys can play football and all kinds—.

Fukumoto: Oh, I love that. We're staying in Kalaheo right now. The Kannas.

01-00:54:57

Taba: The Kannas?

Fukumoto: They live in Kalaheo.

01-00:55:01

Taba: Did you hear of Judge Hirano? Kei Hirano?

Dunham: I'm not sure.

01-00:55:09

Taba: Well, if you're not from Kalaheo—. But he was a judge. He's here.

Fukumoto: Oh, yeah. Okay. So yes.

Dunham: Okay, okay. Oh, I think he was mentioned to us for his possible interview.

Fukumoto: Yes, yes.

Dunham: I wanted to ask you about when you mentioned the Buddhist person who had converted to Christianity, and his or her speaking that was really [powerful]. Who was that person? Was that a local Kauai person?

01-00:55:32

Taba: Oh, no, he was from mainland. At the Baptist church? No, he was from the mainland.

Dunham: I see. A Japanese American or—?

01-00:55:39

Taba: Yeah. No, he said his parents were Buddhists.

Dunham: Okay. I know you didn't grow up with a lot of religion, but a lot of the Japanese here did grow up Buddhist before the war.

01-00:55:52

Taba: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Dunham: And a lot of them now are Christian, so I was just trying to—. So what was it? Do you remember this man who talked said about that? I'm just curious what he said about that transition.

01-00:56:10

Taba: Well, he said that he didn't know about Christianity, but then—. Well, before then, of course, he learned about his parents. The parents were both Buddhists, but then they became Christian. So that's how he became Christian, too, the son. And at the service, when they asked for those that want to accept Christ to raise your hand, and I did. Because my friend, Miss Dorothy, who was the missionary from the mainland, used to come and talk to me about Jesus all the time, because I didn't know about Jesus. So I didn't know, so she kept coming to me. Because my children all used to go to Sunday school, because she had a Sunday school class. We used to send our children to Sunday school, but—.

Dunham: Did your husband join you in—?

01-00:57:07

Taba: No. It was way later that he accepted the Lord and became a Christian. I'm glad he was a Christian when he died.

Dunham: Okay. But initially, he did not want to.

01-00:57:19

Taba: Yeah, because he didn't—. He would go to Sunday evening service, because we had Sunday evening service, Sunday school, and then Sunday night service. I mean he only went to Sunday night service, but he didn't become a Christian.

Dunham: Did he grow up Buddhist?

01-00:57:39

Taba: No, because the parents used go to Christian church.

Dunham: Oh, they did. Oh, that's what you said, the mother—. Okay. Well, we're almost near the end of our session. I just wanted to ask, looking back on the war years or anything else about your long life on Kawai. It's gone through a lot of changes. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us today?

Fukumoto: Or what's your secret? You're ninety-eight years old.

01-00:58:12

Taba: Well, I've been walking for many years. Before I came here, I used to walk five-thirty in the morning. So the neighbors used to see me and they would—. Then one of them is staying here. I was surprised. I met her for the first time. She cannot hear at all, so she talks loud. So to talk with her, you have to write, because she has a notebook with her. So she always writes on that book thing. So when they introduced me to her—. Because when she saw me sitting, "Ooh, I used to see you every morning walking. She lived right on my road where I lived, and then I didn't know that.

Fukumoto: That's fun.

01-00:59:04

Taba: Funny, yeah.

Fukumoto: So secret, walking, taking care of yourself. You still walk now? Do you exercise, so any—?

01-00:59:10

Taba: Yeah. Yeah, but exercises, I never did exercise in my life, but I used to walk all the time. But before I came here, well, I had a hard time reading and all that. So my son, who's a retired dentist, told me, why don't I read and exhale. Read and exhale, that will help me. So I used to do that and it used to help me

quite a bit. But that it. I came here. I forgot to do that, because it wasn't bothering me. But I forgot that I used to do that. But after I started to go to exercise—because we have all the kinds of exercise here—now I don't have that problem.

Fukumoto: Wow, that's great.

01-01:00:03

Taba: Yeah, so the exercise is important.

Fukumoto: Yeah, very.

01-01:00:08

Taba: We have about three times a week, three or four times a week, and for one hour, too. Yeah, a long time.

Fukumoto: Oh, wow. That's great.

01-01:00:21

Taba: Yeah, this place, they have people from different areas come and educate us. Yesterday, from Kalaheo, the Kalaheo seniors came and entertained for one hour. They played ukulele and they sang songs.

Fukumoto: Oh, fun. Oh, that's great.

01-01:00:40

Taba: Sometimes the school across from here—

Dunham: The middle school there?

01-01:00:47

Taba: The children came and they entertained. I have granddaughters who are schoolteachers, and one of them teach[es] right here. One of them teach[es] at Kauai High School, and one of them at Waimea High School, and one at Kalaheo School. The one that teaches at Waimea High School, she's married to haole, and he is the principal at Kalaheo School. Then the one that teaches here, she's Robin, she's married to a haole, too, and he's a counselor at Kalaheo School.

Fukumoto: So all connected, yeah?

01-01:01:30

Taba: Yeah, all connected, yeah. So when they brought the children and performed, oh, I was so happy that my great-granddaughter was—

Fukumoto: So that keeps you going, too, huh, all the young family?

01-01:01:49

Taba: I can show you the pictures. I have it all the wall.

Dunham: Oh, yeah. Do you have any pictures from you, when you were young, or going back? No?

01-01:01:56

Taba: No, no, I don't. Because they never took pictures at that time.

Fukumoto: Right, that's true.

01-01:02:02

Taba: Not the Japanese, no, not the Okinawan people from Okinawa.

Dunham: Yeah, yeah. That's too bad. But thank you so much for sharing about your experiences, though. I really appreciate it. You're very inspirational, so I just want to thank you for your time today.

[End of Interview]