

Kaz Ishimitsu

Interview by Sumi Hayashi and Cory de Leon

This is an interview with Mr. Kaz Ishimitsu, General Contractor of Ishimitsu & Sons Inc. The interview is being conducted on Sept. 17, 1993 at Mr. Ishimitsu's sister's home at 2512 - 21st Ave. South in Seattle. The interviewers are Sumi Hayashi and Cory de Leon representing the International District Oral History Project.

Cd - When and where were you born?

KI - I was born here, right here in Seattle, 1929 July 30th and I told everybody I called it the Great Depression but I'm not strong enough to do that you know. 1929, that's just about the start of the big Depression.

Cd - Were you raised in Seattle?

KI - mmmhhmmmm, I was born and raised right here in Seattle.

SH - And what neighborhood?

KI - Well when I was born, I don't recall, now my memory started after, after I broke my arm about 4 years of age so in the early years I think I lived by ~~Billy Gatchett?~~ ^{Bailey Gatzert} school on Weller Street ok. I believe I was hatched, I mean born at uh, what's the name of the hospital over there..? It's still a hospital. I think it's called the Maynard Hospital. Maynard Hospital as I recall, that's what I hear, but I don't recall anything as far as my birth is concerned.

SH - Do you remember where you lived as a boy?

KI - Well yeah, then we moved over to....my recollection start at 2512 21st Ave....no...1022

Sturgis Ave., 1022 Sturgis Ave., now, that portion is an avenue that ran parallel of Corwin Pl. you know. That's now taken over by the freeway approach to I-90, right about between the Marine Hospital and Corwin Place, someplace between Rainier Ave. and Beacon, 12th Ave. South.

Cd - What did your parents do?

KI - My father's, for as long as I've known, has done carpentry work. He's trained in Japan as a carpenter. He's a good one, very rigid disciplined training in carpentry training from a master in Japan so he knew how to do carpentry work.

SH - So he..so he was Issei and he came over as an already trained carpenter?

KI - Oh yeah, he had already had some kind of...that type of training in Japan. I guess they start them fairly early. I mean some of them are 14 years of age.

SH - Did he ever tell you why he left and came here?

KI - Yes, it's probably his...with a pioneer spirit is the thing that I can imagine because he wasn't uh, uh did everything according to (you know) according to the way it's supposed to be done. He liked to be different and he wanted to go out there like the others to make his fortune and go back to Japan perhaps you know, some of the dreams that they have. He never did go back, well, I mean except on business you know, just little trips for fun that's all.

SH - Did he ever say why he never went back?

KI - He never went back?

SH - mmmhmm

KI - He didn't have the money for one. He never gained enough money to go back there to

live off of it.

SH - So did he teach you carpentry?

KI - Well I observed, I observed, but see carpentry...Japanese carpentry's different from American type. They use nails etc., but they don't have much nails. He was master with the chisel, saws and handsaws

SH - with the joints?

KI - Yeah, yeah, yeah, boy he was very good in sharpening his tools. Every night he's meticulously sharpening the tools. That's the custom. That's the way they do it over there. That's the way they did. I don't know what it's like over there now.

SH - Are any of the buildings that he did still around?

KI - Oh yes. One of my early recollections was of course...well let's see, Ranier Meat Market was on Jackson street. It's about between 10th Avenue and 12th Avenue on Jackson street. The Ranier Market, just above east of Garland? Florist and next to that was the Cobb Lumber Co. and all those type of buildings.

SH - And he built that?

KI - Yeah, he built that portion. Also he remodelled the grocery store up there. Oh it must be about...up there on Central area anyway. I've forgotten the exact address. They're still around and probably 1939, 1940 when they built the Nisei Vets Hall today's Nisei Vets Hall at 1212 S. King street.

Cd - Did he design it?

KI - Yeah, he and Mr. Yoshimoto, there's so many...Mr. Shiyota, they all got together and they built that.

SH - That's built Japanese style?

KI - Yeah at the time it was called Kendall Hall, Kendall Hall. But when the war broke out, the leadership was taken away. They were incarcerated very quickly. I think it was fear that they'll uprise and make trouble. Although it wasn't realized but somebody had strong fears. I read Town? report and such, so much of it was made up from fear.

SH - So Kendall Hall when after the war became...

KI - The Nisei Vets Hall.

SH - Immediately after? Do you remember?

KI - Soon after it was given to the Nisei Vets. Well they just felt that if you were to stay in this country, you had to divorce yourself, eliminate this type of culture for a while to let things cool off and that's what they did.

SH - So the Nisei Vets Hall was built Japanese style carpentry?

KI - Nope, it was not Japanese style carpentry. It's....

SH - American.

KI - Yeah. That's one of the jobs that the Union picketed. But they won't ... with the Union. He was an undesirable alien, you've got to remember that. And that went down until far after the McKerrin Act was passed. We were all, Asians were all undesirable aliens anyway as you recall and the war precipitated it. People don't know it but back in 1920's when all this stuff went, 1924, '26 somewhere around there, we got to look at history books on that.

SH - So the carpentry union picketed the construction project.

KI - Oh yeah, yeah, we got picketed.

SH - Even though it was all Japanese building a Japanese building?

KI - Oh. I remember his telling me...I think there was many catching in there too cause that's quite a large building is all and he was able to get all that stuff up there with the jim poles and whatever ways and means.

SH - How old were you then?

KI - I must have been about 10 yrs. old. Somewhere around there. I remember he badly hurt his toe, the big toe. He really squished it. Somebody dropped a 2X4 from up above and it landed on his toe.

KI's beeper goes off at this point and excuses himself for a couple minutes.

SH - We were talking about Nisei Vets.

KI - Yeah Nisei Vets Hall. Like I said, he was picketed on that job, but they still wouldn't let him in the union because of that on-the-job alien clause stood fast. Even after the war my brother refused to join the union and we got beat up pretty hard on certain jobs because, 'cause he said 'Nope, unless my Dad can join, we're not gonna join the union.

SH - So they never would let your father in?

KI - Oh, until the McKerrin Act, they had to take it off eventually through government pressure 'cause this country was really...you think about it, the good parts of it is excellent because support what's positive among them you know. If we don't do that, we'll go down the tubes. Our nation is getting weak primarily because morality is so bad through TV media and all that kind of stuff. We've lost it. We've lost that particular

strength. Strength of character and moral principles that every nation's got to have, got to have it. All the way down through history, they've, without it, they've collapsed. Anyway, that's the way it was. We were pretty well battered up, except my brother anyway. He was pretty strong 'cause I remember when he told them. I heard one of the union goons say "Who in the hell are you to tell us what to do?" He said we're not gonna join because you have that clause in there. My Pop has worked with us, he reared us. The least we can do is show a certain amount of loyalty to him as a family,...but they got us anyway. Well, we couldn't prove it to the police because they hit you at night time. They hit you hard.

SH - So you and your brother worked for your Dad?

KI - Well I was going to school then yet. I was working part-time 'cause I served between '51 and '53 in the army, drafted in '51.

SH - Is your brother still alive?

KI - Oh he passed away early. He was a hard worker. About 1970, December 7, 1970 he passed away...cancer.

SH - Is the name of your firm still Ishimitsu?

KI - Yeah, that's all it is. That's they way it'll go in the wayside. It's a lot of work to do our type of work. It's a lot of physical...you've got to enjoy construction. You've got to enjoy that type of work...it's hard.

SH - Are there other buildings that your Dad and you and your brother worked on?

KI - Oh, quite a few, even down on...we worked on Bush Garden.

SH - When it was built?

KI - No not initially. Initially I believe it was Mr. Kokitai? Let's see what's his name...Tatsuo Korimoto?

SH - These were other carpenters?

KI - Yeah, yeah they were other carpenters.

SH - Were they like your Dad's age or around more his generation?

KI - No, they were younger. Some were younger than my father. My father was one of the older people. He came over in 1906 to this country, born in 1887. He just passed away this year. That's a long life. Some of the other buildings still existing. We just did work in Rainier Heat and Power Buildings. That would be the Bush Hotel, the Governor Hotel, Rainier Heat and Power, Puget Hotel, American Hotel. Those we worked on. But that was mostly repair work and not as a whole structure. Now right after the war, we initially built that teahouse at the Arboretum because it came written in Japanese you see and he's the one that could read that, how to assemble it together. I could read *miyi hidadi, ooey, shta*, but that's limited. But fortunately he was there 'cause in the whole of the ship, much of the timbers on that twisted. You can picture the moisture on the ship when it was shipped over. It made the wood twist so he chiselled away to make it fit again. But they burned it down within a couple of years, 2 or 3 years, I forgot how long. People just didn't like ya. It's funny, people are awfully funny how they want terrorist type of activity.

SH - How did your father react to that?

KI - Oh he's *takaganai* type. His attitude was that. That's how he lived a long life. He just let it roll off. If you took everything to heart, it'll be awfully hard. But that's the way

a lot of good things have been done. People that were positive and they acted on it; but it's difficult to act on something. It takes a lot of dedication. It takes a lot of effort.

Cd - Was he at all bitter about those terrorist-type tactics?

KI - I believe everyone has a fear. I think everyone has that particular fear particularly because of the fact that they were family men. There was a lot of things you couldn't control. I went to Judge Otter. I pleaded for his help when I got hit back in 1967 and I was taking these kids to court. I pleaded with Judge Otter in his private chamber, 'I need help,' and he told me, Judge Robert Otter told me you've got to prove that these kids that I'm taking to court are doing that. And they're hitting you at the middle of the night, 3:00 in the morning and the only person I could have help me was Steve Ichihara. He and I sat there and tried to watch it but we fell asleep. That's why I said I've got to be a little bit of an activist to get these guys out but I did not. He's still in there in the Superior Court. When we started out we couldn't get help. It's tough. It was so hard to get help from the judges.

Cd - Did the police help you at all?

KI - Oh they sure did. They just warned me how dangerous it was to take these kids to court. But the Judge Otter claimed that he said he threw their casework out primarily because as children, as young people, only one person was over 18, the rest were minors and they weren't properly represented when they gave the information to the police. You gotta have this, somebody to stand by and tell them of their rights, and they didn't do that so all the police work was thrown out, but they showed me all the rapes, robberies, purse snatchings beaten up with gangs, you know that type. They used to gang rape gals

up there. Mrs. Green was a lady that tried to take him to court and her house was burned down. That's what the police told me, 'So Kaz you gotta be careful.' So what I did was since the judge gave them my name, write about you Kaz Ishimitsu, do you live by 3033 19th Ave. S. That night, the whole family moved. I moved to an apartment. Yeah, I moved out. It's dangerous but you couldn't get help. I couldn't get any help, he says I had to prove it. I said it's impossible to prove, how do catch these kids in the middle of the night like that--infra-red camera? He said it'll help. That's what he told me, it'll help. That's the kind of help I got. And so, see, it prospered, this kind of terrorism prospered. There's nothing to fight it. You try your best. You appeal for help and the court system, *boom*, cuts you right down. Good people like Robert Udder, Superior Court and I can say oh man, no character. Where is the standards? Who are the people that are gonna fight for goodness? It's all their way. I'd like to see them go a biblical way that's stronger than that,... if they could do it. That's my opinion.

SH - Where was the construction offices at that time?

KI - At that time, my father had a little shop at 1022 Sturgus Avenue, but he couldn't own property, so they were renting it from a Mr. Martin.

SH - So this is all before the war?

KI - Oh, this is before the war. This is before the war that they built the Kendall Hall, for instance and he had a little shop they put up himself all that property at 1022. He built this little shop and it had all his machinery in there, old-fashioned belt driven, you know, you turn this motor on and those things would operate other saws and things like that.

- So he built that but lost it in the war, all of it. You couldn't take it with you. He had to leave it.
- SH - So do you know what he did with it? He just stored it someplace?
- KI - No,...well the portable tools we stored down there at the Pioneer Square Building.
- SH - What was your connection there?
- KI - Well Mr. Poncin, he worked for Mr. Poncin, P-o-n-c-i-n, and because of that particular connection, he said leave it in the basement there, but they broke in and took everything. There was nothing we could do. They took every bit of it so we had nothing left.
- SH - When did your father start Ishimitsu and Sons?
- KI - After the war?
- SH - After the war? When did your father start the company, his own company?
- KI - Oh, he was working as a *daiku* carpenter for a long time, but start of the company was after the war. It was after the war that actually he started his own company, otherwise he was working for somebody.
- SH - You said he was a *daiku*?
- KI - *Daiku* is a carpenter. Excuse me, yeah, *daiku* is japanese...if you want to say it politely, *daiku-san*, you know, but *daiku* is a carpenter. Pardon me I just interjected words in there a little bit.
- SH - Do you remember...what do you remember doing at the Bush Gardens?
- KI - Bush Garden Restaurant? Eating there mostly.
- SH - Do you remember doing any work there?
- KI - Me?...oh we did, well my Dad did some. He made certain things, you know. Yeah,

he used his talents. It's hard for me to recall exactly what he did. Sad did a lot of it too. Mostly the artwork probably was done by Roy and his crew, Roy Secko.

SH - The artwork?

KI - Yeah, 'cause he had that Shoji company, Roy did. Though my Pop primarily...he made shojis too. Now the shojis that he made...for the family, he made one for each one us, you know.

SH - But not professionally?

KI - To sell? Oh yeah, he made quite a few to sell. Gee whiz, if I have to recall all those he made it for..Mr. Horikay, Fuji Ten Cents Store, but for their house. In the Fuji ten cent store you gotta have..a shoji screen. It's after the war we did Kaiyo Restaurant. Kaiyo restaurant. It was Teradas that had it and things do change. He made a lot of carpentry work in there and we'd put it in.

SH - So what kind of carpentry work?

KI - Carpentry work again it's japanese. He did make shojis up there.

SH - And then like booths, installing booths?

KI - Yes, installing booths as well. Yeah he made all of those up there, my father did that Tempura Teriyaki that was on 4th Avenue I believe, 4th Avenue about Virginia street. We did Kaseo Florist. Was it before the war or right after the war he built the cool, cooler box, the cold box, the walk-in type and it held up for many, many, many years. We've lost Hakemishimbu now but they were loyal and they really appreciated utilizing his talents.

SH - They were customers?

KI - Yeah they were customers and Mr. Miyaki of...Mr. Miyaki used to be a photographer. Takano studios, they called it. Takano Studios was at 7th and Jackson.

SH - And your Dad built it?

KI - Yeah, he built that and the was only...was amazing. He did the plaster boarding himself. He just lifted it up there put a T underneath it and it was amazing. They marvelled at his capacity to be independently doing things yourself. Today it takes 2 men to take it up. He used to rig it up so that he could do it by himself. I don't think I'd want to do it myself. I don't have that...hard worker. I work a lot with this.

SH - Were you always the talker of the 3 of you with you, your brother and Dad?

KI - No, no, no not really. I had to perform my duties. I did work too - all the way through.

Cd - How did your father start his business after the war without any tools?

KI - Tough, It was **very** difficult. The best he could do was to buy the tools from the Tashiros, but the Tashiros had difficulty getting skill saws and stuff you know. They just wouldn't sell them. So, most of the places won't sell it to him. So he went...Abe Aronson of Aronson Hardware is the one that sold him a skill saw.

SH - They wouldn't..

KI - Oh, a lot of places didn't. Remember, it's just right after the war and they thought we were the dirty guys all along. That's the way...if you look at the newspaper prints, you wouldn't blame the public for thinking that way. The news media is a **powerful** instrument.

SH - Were you in Minudoka?

KI - Yeah, that' where I was.

SH - You and your whole family?

KI - Whole family. My brother left. He went to Ottawa. The Ottawa University Baptist College and he worked his way through as a dishwasher and all that kind of stuff, waiting on tables. He went to Chicago and went to work for a defense firm you know.

SH - Which?

KI - Clark I thing, no they lived on Clark street...I can't remember. You'd have to ask Kiyoshi where he worked, my brother.

SH - What was your brother's name now?

KI - Kiyoshi.

SH - And your sister?

KI - They're younger than I am. I'm next in line.

SH - So it's Kiyoshi, you, and then your sister.

KI - Yes, Sadamu is the oldest, Sad, Sadamu.

SH - So the three of you worked for your dad?

KI - Yeah, well Sad and I mostly, Sadamu and I, but Kiyoshi...he's more of an artist type - furniture. He used to work for KCW furniture when they used to fabricate furniture and they utilized that building in fact, the Kendall Hall for that purpose for a while, right after the war. Mr Kamahachi created work for the people in that way. It's hard to get a job particularly if they don't...if they think you're the enemy. They had...you see, in my opinion, hate and love make strong emotions and hate is what causes murders, a lot of bad things.

SH - Now didn't they remodel Nisei Vets recently?

KI - Oh recently?

SH - No? They haven't done any remodelling?

KI - Oh they've already improved it. They always have somebody there improving it. We've done work on the thing.

SH - What kind of work have you done?

KI - On that building? I think we did some finishing work. We just roofed it, a portion of it. Well I didn't, I subbed it out and put new gutters on and it's due for refinishing the floor but I don't think you can. It's already been refinished once and the nails start coming up then. We'll see what we can do. You take people like Joel Nakatsu and Shakino, that Nisei Vets group, they're terrific. This one right here.

SH - This is from the Seattle Times?

KI - Yeah, these are the guys right there. Kaun Onodera, Sato, that's Mack Shoji, Yoshito Mizuta. This is Mas Watanabe and I think Francis Fukuhara. Here's a good man. In the redress, he wrote so many letters to the congressmen as a vets commander. I just wrote very little. I don't like to write. This is Mack Shoji. These are the people that...so many of these people never came back and that's how come it gives me a purpose. You don't want to let them die in vain. They really worked hard to improve citizenship, the Nisei vets did. A lot of them never came back. They weren't much older, only ten years older than I was you see, eight to ten years older that's all.

Cd - How did your father feel about the redress checks?

KI - Redress? Oh he was very happy to receive it. It's not much but it certainly does help.

It's certainly nice to be addressed and it makes everybody realize, hey there's something wrong. See they didn't do it to the Germans or Italians and they were the Axis powers. They're the dirty guys of the last world war, World War II. The third world war, I don't know who. They said it'd be the Russians, but right now, Russia is, *click click*. But the money is in the hands of the Islamic people. They get involved with quite a bit of terrorist activity. So it's kinda scary. That's the way they handle the situation...How far did we go on the questions?

Cd - What were your first memories of the International District?

KI - Oh I liked, we used to go Chinese food. Mom would say, 'hey let's go have China Meshi.' We used to call it that in those days you know, and they had a couple places that were very good. It was quite a gregarious group down there. We'd go upstairs. Upstairs, where today is Silver Dragon. I forgot what it was then and then above, we used to go to King Cuttle which is above on 6th and Main and then we used to go to Yo Kokan which was on Main street between 5th and 6th. The buildings are gone now.

SH - The old Nihomachi?

KI - Yeah, the old Nihomachi, saigamiya, you know, where they use to make Japanese teacakes. Other places...as I recall, the sidewalks were made out of wood before the war you know. It was all wood down there by the Igo Ten Cent store we used to go shopping at periodically. They used to have men's stores up and down the restaurants, small ones - American style. We used to go down to Seafirst Bank, Seattle 1st National Bank. It was on Jackson Street. So we used to have to go down there. Right after the war, Eddie Kato had his tv, I mean, they didn't have tv's back then, radio repair shop

right there on 6th Avenue, now the post office, International District post office.

SH - How old were you at the start of the war?

KI - 12 years old.

SH - And where did your family go when they came back from Minudoka?

KI - Right back here, but we had no place to live. We stayed at the Renton Highland, but the quarters were so small. As I recall the Escibosas gave me a job as a houseboy and I moved down into the Madison Park area and I tended the furnace, babysat, washed dishes.

SH - Escibosa?

KI - Yeah, Escibosa. Hector and Ann Escibosa. Mr. Escibosa was the General Manager of Frederick & Nelson then he became President of I. Magnin but because he lived such a stressful life, he died early of a heart attack. Their kids were small. Mrs. Escibosa asked me to stay but I had to keep going. I was gonna go to college and I needed a bit more money. Otherwise, I couldn't make it through. It's costly to go to school. They didn't have government loan programs then.

SH - Where did you go?

KI - UW

SH - What did you study?

KI - Well, I thought you know...I was in General Courses then. I didn't do well at the University of Washington. Then I got drafted and it changed my whole life then. You felt worthwhile. You did something. I was a lab technician. In camp I also was a lab tech. Not lab, I mean orthopedic technician in the army. That's my MOS. Although

I started out as a teletype operator.

SH - For medical?

KI - No, I was a teletype operator for our artillery group and then I got injured. I fell into a grease pit walking guard duty you know. Water was coming out of a warehouse and I went to examine it to see where the water was coming from. And then by the warehouse, I fell into this big old hole. I must have bumped my knee and they took me to the hospital. It's hard to do nothing in a hospital, so I was helping these guys in the orthopedic ward and he said well why don't you learn this type of operations. I liked it. I enjoyed that. In Minudoka, I was also a lab tech.

Cd - Did you encounter any discrimination in the army?

KI - Oh yeah, absolutely, you can't help it. Some people don't like ya. They just don't. They're ingrained with that absolutely. I think we all will. In other words, if a white man went into another area like Japan, you know, they might have it. Although they're highly respected because some of the men were, they did bring good will...some..others did not. Depends upon the moral character of the people and the purpose for what they do. When I first came back, it was very, very interesting because there was an Asian population that stayed here all the time. They had to weed out? the Chinese --- but otherwise if you were Japanese, they'll get ya. That's what they wanted to do. They couldn't tell the difference.

SH - So how long did your family stay out in Renton?

KI - In Renton? My sister moved into Broadmoor so they were out there not too long. Then we moved over to, a couple of years, then they moved to King street and then we built

this house right here back in 1949, we started it about 1950.

SH - You and your brothers and your Dad?

KI - Yeah, Pop built this house right here at 2512 21st Ave. S., So it's been up 40 some odd years.

SH - Do you remember what year your Dad started the business?

KI - Thanks to my brother, Sad, he was able to start the business back right after the war in a sense. Right after the war my Mom appealed to him and I remember I had to write the letter. I had to do the calling. We had to get out of those camps and my Pop was not capable of returning back and starting because of the language barrier primarily. He could work, but coming back here doing things it would be tough because the Japanese people as a whole didn't have the money see. They took everything away from ya in the first place. Most of the Asians were, I would say they were brainwashed too by the press.

Cd - In what way?

KI - Oh because there were enemy Asians. We were enemies. The Japanese were enemies. If you went down there to that Wing Luke Museum Display, you saw the headlines all the time. That was a constant thing. You were bombarded by this hate campaign. Dr. Gunther at the University of Washington Psychology Department was the head of propaganda. He did a real good job, excellent. He knew how to rile the people up to make them move except there was a negative end. He had to create hate. Like I said before, hate and love are 2 very strong emotions. But Dr. Gunther, knowing what he had don when he came back, he hired Mrs. Seiko to be the house lady. Kato Seiko's

Mom. These are wise men. Leaders are wise. They know what they're doing. You could create hate, you can create love, but you've got to make people do something. That's why one of the 7 wonders of the world...when you think about it, the pyramids in Egypt. Boy you had to have a lot people to move those blocks. You can't do it by a couple of people or a small group like ours. Even with all the logs and everything to move the stones, you had to have hundreds of thousands and thousands of people working together. They were trying to reach probably God somehow, something greater than we are, our creator, probably. So, I get off on these tangents, that's the way my mind runs. You gotta bear with me. I know you guys wanna get something out of this Asian thing because of the things that we have done for the International District primarily. Yeah, we worked Taitung Restaurant that's another one.

SH - Is that a recent remodelling?

KI - No, that's a earlier one, back in 1960's, 70's.

SH - Do you remember what you did?

KI - Ben Wu was the architect. He's a good man, he's positive, that's the way he wants it. If there's a problem he talks to the group and tells me we'll do it this way Kaz.

SH - Do you like his design?

KI - Ben Wu's designs? Well some of it is different. At that time it's very progressive. He didn't interject a lot of Asian architecture but he's the one that...Hing Hay Park I think he was a part of, and he was head of the...what's that group they have down there at the Bush Hotel?

SH - Hapatayda?

KI - He gave good leadership in that sense.

SH - Have you done any other work with Ben?

KI - Oh yeah. Who was it that did the ACRS? Who was the architect, was that Ben?

SH - Did you work on the ACRS?

KI - Yeah, ACRS.

SH - The 12th Ave. office or the ..one they moved to the Bush Hotel?

KI - Nope, nope, before that. What's that where they get medical help?

SH - The clinic?

KI - The clinic on Maynard.

SH - The one next to the old coke sign?

KI - Yeah we remodelled that one.

SH - Before the clinic moved in?

KI - It had not been there at that time.

SH - So what had been there do you know?

KI - Gee, when we went in there, it was nothing. It was a dirty, dank place. Then we utilized it and fixed it all up, made rooms, clinics, and we did the best we could at keeping the cost down as much as possible. That was a goal. So you're limited when you have that kind of goal because you have to get it done, make it look clean, you gotta pass the health department. So the Asians aren't the richest in the world or anything like that. Although some people have said they are.

SH - Was your Dad still working?

KI - Oh yeah, oh yeah.

SH - How long?

KI - He worked 'til he was 101. So he had something to do all along absolutely. All the cabinetry, he did in there, unless we bought them.

SH - Would he go to the site or would he do that kind of work you do at the shop?

KI - Yeah, he did a lot of it at the shop. He preferred to stay. That was his joy in life, to be productive in that fashion because that was something he knew. Anything that you can do well, it makes you feel better. It builds up your own self-esteem.

SH - So your brother Sad died at 70?

KI - Sadamu? Sad we called him, S-a-d, uh 1970, yeah.

SH - And your other brother?

KI - He's still living.

SH - And what is he doing?

KI - He's retired. He was working in Mutual Fish and he had a little grocery store, I mean a little fish store up here in Beacon Hill for a while and he worked for Mutual Fish and then he retired.

SH - So he only worked for your Dad right after the war?

KI - Yeah, very little yeah.

side B

Cd - Do you belong to any community organizations?

KI - Oh yeah, JAACL, Nisei Vets, and a couple of churches you know, Japanese Baptist Church and the Faith Bible Church are the two I belong to. And of course, I used to get involved with a small business organization but I didn't have time to participate in it.

We get together down there in the valley once in a while where Rimo Borikimi and people who had all the problem with that dope trafficking and their trying to get rid of that. Everybody had to get alarms in their places and stuff. They lost their rationale. Yes, that type of group, but it fades out. And I've been involved with the Scout program quite a bit, the Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts. I think they're all positive things because you gotta do something for these..

SH - Do you have children?

KI - Yeah, three boys, still if they ask for help, I'm willing to give help there.

Cd - Are they all in Seattle?

KI - Who my kids? Oh yeah, well one's in Bellevue. The others are in Seattle. They've been gone too, down in California for a period of time.

Cd - Do you still visit or shop in the International District?

KI - I sure do. Uwajimaya, Wah Sang, once in a while, Higo, I like to bring back old memories you know.

SH - What do you remember about Higo?

KI - Higo? Oh I remember those gals you know. There's Betty, Basi, and Kay passed away you know and their friends, friends that's been with them down there. That very peculiar, distinct, atmosphere and aroma of Higo is always there.

SH - I mean I remember that from my childhood, do you remember how far..

KI - Oh yeah, from way, way, way, way, back. We've done work there, we put new roofs on, etc. with Crow Roofing. At that time, I was working with Crow a lot, a good company, still existing. Yeah, many, many people that I work with are still around.

Down there in Chinatown, where else did we shop? Todas, you know, for glasses. A lot of Chinese stores, small ones. In fact the Vietnamese stores too, the vegetables are kind of cheap. I go to city produce all the time. That's Chinatown right there, City Produce. They're still there, even if the boss doesn't make any money. The owner doesn't make anything, but it survived with all the new supermarkets, with all the veggie stands, you know, like the Desimoto's right here. It's still going, amazing. It's a lot of work and they did a good job of it. They have high quality stuff down there at City Produce. Yes, I do go into small Chinese places that's unique and different. I go down to the bakeries. There's a couple of bakeries down there.

Cd - How would you say it's changed over the years?

KI - Oh, I would say the whole area has changed. It tend to be modernized a little bit. They have brought new items in there that is appealing. They've used certain advertising. I think Uwajimaya has done a good job. They advertise a lot for the Asian type of foods you know, for instance and that's what's necessary to promote the eating habits of people. The thing that's dangerous down there. The word got around that it's dangerous down there. The gangs and shootings, that scares people away, that fear, but if they could promote good will. Oh, I'm also a member with IDEA, the International District Economic Association, I try to support to.

SH - How long have you been a member?

KI - Oh, since it first started off. For the longest time, I set up the power for the street fair and then Mahayashi took over, Ken. You know Ken? Gosh, he's an electrician you know. So he took over and I gave him all this stuff and there was a lot of work. I used

to get Eddie Carlos help and Tira Tarakato's help to do this and set it up to get the power whether we borrowed it from City Light. We used to, at one time, tap into the wire up above, but now we take it out of the Health Clinic. We take that power out and put the panel in there. I've done things that weren't really right, but that's the only way we could get the power at early morning. Remember, we're sitting up at 6, 7:00 in the morning and I used to have to scrape the wire off there and put the connections. It's kind of fun and all the Scouts, troupe 53 set up the booths. You know, we're all created by God, every one of us, I don't care if you're Filipino, Chinese, Vietnamese. You've got to like what you do. Understand the culture, the Chinese culture, the Filipino culture, know it. It gives you a lot of strength and wisdom. God gives it to you not myself. It makes life very interesting. Go down to the Wing Luke Museum -- terrific, absolutely terrific what you guys do to develop all this stuff. It just doesn't come by, somebody puts the effort behind it.

SH - Do you remember the first street fair, what year that was and how you ended up doing that?

KI - The Scouts were the ones that really need the help and we had the truck. They asked us if they could drive it and we said sure, you're welcome to it and then the insurance company got after me after a while to drive it but I didn't drive it. We let them do it. If I get caught, I'd have to figure out a good reason. I'll pay even if I have to sell the shop, I'll pay for the damages, it's all right. That's the worse that could happen. They could only take away what you've got materially. That's all, so they could have all of it. You know, if they're strong enough, they take it, it's all yours. I think that each

down there is a melting pot and they have to be proud of what they're doing and just encourage them as much as possible, every group.

Cd - Did people other than Asians ever visit the ID?

KI - Oh yeah

Cd - Or shop down there?

KI - Shop down there? Oh many of them. Oh yeah.

Cd - Even in the 40's?

KI - Yeah, even in the 40's they used to come along. Some weren't the highest caliber people, but their people. Before the war, they had a company called Furiya, a Japanese owned company. But the people, my folks had money into it. The Sunitoba Bank, that's where we lost it all, we didn't have anything.

SH - You mean because of the war?

KI - Yeah, because of the war. The government confiscated that part. They took the whole of it because of the alien thing you know. My Mom, she's an honorary gal. She had a pride that I liked. I think that's good. Biblically speaking, it does tell you, do unto others as you would do unto you. Like yourself or you can't like the other person. That's why the International District should be proud of what they're doing. If anything starts again like Raymond Chin, he worked hard to clean up the area, trying hard to get rid of the prostitutes that were roaming the streets there that all brought down the image of the International area.

SH - This was when?

KI - Raymond Chin's a good guy to talk to. Raymond Chin of Wah Sang. He worked hard

and he's a very strong, dedicated member of the Kiwanis Club. I'd been asked to join the First Alliance but when my brother died, we were up to here in debt, the shop and all that. I had to, I didn't have buy and sell, so I had to buy up his share of the company and 200 dollars a month for 14 years takes a lot of effort.

(KI's beeper goes off)

KI - People that are active, you've got to get people that are active in the community down there.

SH - There's, I think they're interviewing a total of 46 people.

KI - I hope Raymond Chin is one of them.

SH - I think so.

KI - Good. I think he's a good man. I think Raymond's a good man. Raymond or Byron they're all good people that struggled away and they appreciated it. Value only comes from the amount of work you put into it anyway.

Cd - Can you describe any of the traditional community events and festivals in the ID?

KI - Beside Bon Odori?

SH - Did they have Bon Odori down there?

KI - Oh yeah. Down that way? Yeah. Actually, you know that...we use to have not a ceremony for the Japanese school every year and it used to be held at that...Gee whiz who's the fella that remodelled building there? It's on top of that hill. Nippon Kan, Nippon Kan Theatre.

SH - Do you remember when it was before the Nippon Kan Theatre?

KI - Oh yeah, well it was the Nippon Kan at the time. It was the Nippon Kan Theatre at the

time. And there was a dirty old road, unimproved gravel, and muddy road there as I recall. Before all the freeway was in there, it was tough to get to, slippery places.

SH - I was thinking of the name of the hotel that was on the other side.

KI - I just remember the Nippon Kan Theatre.

SH - Do you remember going there?

KI - Oh yeah, I remember. Then there used to be a Tacoma Hotel right there in Jackson street that they had to tear down. In that one Mr. Kowkami and Mr. Hara that had it, but they're gone now. Uwajimaya was on 5th Avenue there, right after the war, I think even before the war, 5th and Main. There's the Alki Hotel. The roads have improved there. Remember, it was just, it wasn't one of those places that was just washed off like the Denny Regrade. But they did, as I recall, looking at pictures from long ago, they did wash a portion of that hill. I think Jackson street and all that. It would have been much more severe if it weren't for all the work that they did on it. Yesler, named after the fellow Yesler, those guys were men of...they did things. Character wise, I don't know. They had more brothels than anything then. I used to stand in awe of the Smith Tower as I stood in the International District. The Smith Tower, the King Street Station, they were massive things to me. That was my memory. Then when Cecil, bought that, Cecil Leong had the place that across the street from the King Street Station, Union Station on 5th Avenue, he bought it. But that thing was sinking away. But he fixed it up. Out of the long haul, if it'd stay fixed like that, but I don't know. Moss Cafe...before the war, the things we used to go observe down there was...we used to go to a place called the Atlas Theatre.

SH - Where the Atlas Hotel was?

KI - No, Kokosai, what's the name of that theatre there?

SH - Kokosai?

KI - Yeah, next to that.

SH - It was called the Atlas?

KI - Yeah, the Atlas Theatre.

SH - And was there movies?

KI - Oh yeah. I saw a scary movie called *Frankenstein* I recall. But some of the things that we went to see, it was more than that. Bon Odori was on main street. It was on 6th and Main. My father built a float one time and it depicted the world, what do you call?

Cd - A globe?

KI - Yeah, a globe.

SH - He built it out of wood?

KI - Yeah, I don't know how in the world he did that, he was working day and night on that thing. I mean all the way through the night, that man, my father did.

SH - This was when you were a child?

KI - That's before the war yeah.

SH - Was it on wheels?

KI - Apparently it was on wheels yeah, to move around, absolutely.

SH - This was for Bon Odori?

KI - Well, part of that thing. that little thing they used to have right in front of Yoko Kan. It would be, today, would be where Uwajimaya used to be and up the hill from that.

That's where those festivities were. That was Japanese town.

SH - So you went there for Japanese language classes?

KI - Nope, it wasn't a language school. I went to language school over at Tip School which is the Japanese Community Center now, you know, that old building. That was a Japanese school on Ranier and between King and Weller Street. That was the old Japanese school because all these guys went there. A lot of us went over there. I remember getting that penny a day to spend on ginger at the grocery, Chinese ginger. Maybe that's why I have high blood pressure today huh? That's where it was, right there Main Street. What other things? A Chinese function I can't recall. You'd have to talk to Raymond Chin on those guys, but they did have those down there, particularly New Year's. That was a great festivity then.

SH - So you would go down there or be down there already?

KI - Well we used to go to observe. Now what did we observe in those days?

SH - This would be your family?

KI - No, I'd go by myself or with friends, you know, just trying to be independent, I know after work, we used to go to a place called Hashedatei-yu.

SH - What's that mean?

KI - Yu is a tub, you know, you've got a great big Japanese tub there. It was in the basement of an empty hotel. Mr. Sano ran the thing and he lives right up here. He used to. He passed away many years ago. It's a summer event. If you're sweating, you just go over there and you pay, I forgot, \$.15, \$.25.

SH - Japanese baths?

KI - Oh yeah. Scrub yourself up outside and then you go into the big tub and just relax. It was too hot for me. I didn't like it. It was a little bit on the hot side and I think that it's not good. I'm gonna tell the ladies in Japan that you gotta be careful 'cause it gets too hot. If you're pregnant, it could do damage to the baby. That's what it said in the University of Washington report.

Cd - Does it still exist?

SH - The empty hotel is still there. I don't know what's in the basement

KI - In the basement, you came in from 6th Ave. South side, right next door to Maniki Theatre, I mean, Maniki Restaurant. It's a place to go there, that's where we went.

Cd - So what would you like to see happen in the future.?

KI - I think if we could get the right leadership like yourselves, interested parties that could give this life to these things like history and people could pick up the bits and pieces realizing the fact that they work so hard to retain the culture to understand themselves better. I like to refer it as a ...the creator made us all different, written biblically, you know, I believe it. You know with the Tower of Babylon and all the different tongues came out. It's nice to study that and try to raise the morality of the nation back to what it was to be. Be up there because as children, when I was a young kid, we didn't even have locks on the doors, but there weren't as many people. There weren't as many cars. It wasn't fast moving. We didn't have television. Television is bringing into this world all kinds of funny things and some of the things that they're saying in television, you know, taking pictures of the International area may not enhance it. Wing Luke did a good job. He tried to build Chinatown up. He brought lights in there. That's the type

of leadership probably, that'll have to be somewhat gutsy enough to come in and say 'hey let's develop this, let's get the monies that's available, let's build up somehow' and the pride of each group, each community group, chipping in may provide through the Chamber of Commerce, or whatever. Put a little sparkle, take away some of the fears, give love and contribution to the community attitude. It gives strength, I think and it takes a lot of work and people have to cooperate. Down there it was marvelous when they built that float. We built it for several years right there in our shop, you know, right next door.

SH - For several years...all by yourself?

KI - No, no, no, no, no the whole community chipped in. We ran a booth too. My brother, he wanted to build a..tear down the Japanese school and build a community center with a swimming pool and basketball courts, you know, that kind of thing.

SH - Who did?

KI - My brother Sad. That was his dream, but he got kind of clobbered by the Nisei Vets who were at that time, felt there were many integrationist in there. You know what integrationist is? To become into a melting pot. Don't make it any issue of your cultural background. Now it's different. They promote that down there in the Nisei Vets Hall, but it took a little bit of time. My brother was way ahead of his time, Sad was. That's why we built that float there and every year we put tons of money into it. Our tools, they'd lose all our tools, etc, but I wish we kept the letters. The letters, a lot of them were written and said hey, we don't want a japanese...They wont be isolated again if there's a war or problem. They'll put you into a concentration camp, put you

away. So if you don't make any waves, don't make it into a Japanese thing. Even today, if you go Akubakara, it says American-Japanese garden there. The white populace, in their narrowness figures that its got to be American first otherwise, if you're Japanese...but you see when you put a German American or Japanese American, it's telling you, describing the type of American you are so it's actually an adjective in front of the noun, but they don't see it that way. They see it in a prejudicial fashion. It says hey, you're not American, you're Japanese first. No that's not so. You won't have situations like this, like this kind. That's why I promote that these guys didn't die in vain. Lots of them died there to prove citizenship and that's wrong. And I know some of the officers gave them some of the dirtiest work to do. To save 126 Texas people, they lost 3 or 400 or 500 of the Nisei soldiers. See the odds are not there, but they had to be, went both for broke attitude and they did it that's all. Thanks to all of us. I think all the Asian population, knowing what had happened would give everyone strength and I just commit myself to support it. This is written in the...

SH - Seattle Times article that was a couple months ago, the article?

KI - Yeah, several months ago.

SH - The article on Nisei Vets?

KI - Yeah this is the one. I've got to make copies of this one. This is the one I had post on the wall because this is the way I felt on the reparations. That's my Pop right there. The pictures are across here, family pictures.

SH - We'd like to look at your pictures.

KI - I notice the tape is still going so maybe I could answer any other questions you'd like to

ask.

SH - I wanted to find out a little bit more about the float. Now do you remember what year?

KI - Gee, when was that? It was in the era when we...Frank Hatori was then the big leader behind that, promoter to be part of the community. We're contributing something to the SeaFair. So when did Seafair start...1960?

SH - So this was a different float from the globe float?

KI - On the globe float? That was a long time ago. Is that the one you were speaking of?

SH - No I was confused, you said the float...

KI - No the float over here the one that we built here was after the war.

SH - That you and your brother built?

KI - Yeah, no the whole Japanese community. Shegotani was there all the time, John Nakashima, every day for 2 months he took a vacation from his work and stayed there day and night.

SH - What was this float?

KI - The float, they were looking for the King Neptune's trophy. They won it once.

SH - So it was a Japanese Community float?

KI - Yes a Japanese Community float. I think that was back in the 60's, early 60's, late 50's.

Cd - What did it look like?

KI - Do I have a picture of that? I no doubt have a picture somewhere, a King Neptune float winner. That would be interesting if I could dig those up. Somehow, the different floats that were built there. John Nakashima, he'd be a proud man. Frank Katori's passed away. Roy Secko, Jarrel Namatomei, the people that hang out at the Bush Garden were

the main contributors and the manpower of that float. A lot of good people were there and yet we had these integrationist that said no, no, we won't support you guys. I mean you shouldn't have a Japanese community float, you should support Lake City float, West Seattle float, Hillman City float, Renton float, the particular community where you live rather than to a group like this. If you yourself want to get into a Filipino group only, that's no good, is what they're telling us. We got some pretty sharp letters reflecting that. They were right in their sense because we could be best buddies and you could tell it our name is Japanese. Ishimitsu is definitely Japanese. It can't be Filipino hardly. Now if I could find pictures I'd like to give you, you could have that one. I've go to take a picture of this one, you could take it with you.....