

OREGON HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY HISTORY PROGRAM

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW

WITH

Alfred K. Ono, M.D.

Interview conducted September 12, 2000

by

Tadaaki Hiruki, M.D.

SUMMARY

Dr. Alfred Kazuo Ono is an obstetrician in private practice in Portland, Oregon. He completed the residency program at the University of Oregon Health Sciences Center in 1975, and subsequently held an adjunct post in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at OHSU. In this interview, he talks briefly about his involvement with OHSU, concentrating more on his experiences as a Japanese American physician.

Dr. Ono begins with a discussion of his early life and upbringing in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He talks about what it was like to grow up in a bilingual household with Nisei parents and about the Japanese American community in Minneapolis. He became interested in medicine at an early age, when his older sister was diagnosed with glomerulonephritis. He went on to attend the University of Minnesota Medical School, and he discusses his education as well as his experiences as a minority student. Upon graduation, he moved to Fresno for his internship. He talks about the large Japanese community in Fresno, and compares it with the communities in Portland and Minneapolis.

Following the advice of friends, Dr. Ono came to Portland to complete his residency training. He talks about the Japanese community in Portland and about racial prejudice he has encountered in Oregon. After graduating from UOHSC in 1975, Dr. Ono did a two-year stint in the Army at Fort Riley, Kansas. Back in the Midwest, he assumed he would eventually set up a practice in the Minneapolis area; but when he received an offer from former OHSU faculty member Dr. Raphael Durfee to join him in practice, Dr. Ono decided to return to Oregon. He talks about some of the unusual cases he worked on with Dr. Durfee, including many sex-change surgeries.

For much of the interview, Dr. Ono focuses on the Japanese American community and his involvement with various community groups. He talks at length about his family, which is both interracial and interreligious. He comments on the cultural differences between Japanese and Japanese Americans, and on the differing experiences of “established” Asian communities, such as the Japanese American and Chinese American groups, compared to communities of more recent Asian immigrants. He also describes a trip to Japan during which he learned more about his ancestors and their decision to come to America.

Dr. Ono touches briefly on Chinese traditional medicine and Eastern philosophy, particularly Buddhism, and how Eastern ideas might benefit Western medicine. He shares his pessimism about the future of clinical medicine, noting that the long-term physician-patient relationship is rapidly becoming a relic of a bygone era.

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Interview with Alfred K. Ono, M.D.
Interviewed by Tadaaki Hiruki, M.D.
September 12, 2000
Site: Good Samaritan Hospital
Begin Tape 1, Side 1

HIRUKI: This is OHSU Oral History Project interview with Dr. Alfred K. Ono, obstetrician-gynecologist, in one of the vacant labor and delivery rooms on the maternity ward at Good Samaritan Hospital in Portland, Oregon, on Tuesday, the twelfth of September, year 2000, in the afternoon in the middle of one of Dr. Ono's workdays. The interviewer is Tadaaki Hiruki.

Why don't we get started.

ONO: Okay.

HIRUKI: Dr. Ono, do you agree that this is an interview for research purposes, not a media interview, and it is for the archives of Oregon Health Sciences University?

ONO: Right, that's fine.

HIRUKI: Why don't I begin by explaining that the purpose of an oral history is to find out the who, the what, the where, the when, the why, surrounding an event or period or life. Usually I have my subjects start with the who. Maybe we could start with that.

ONO: Okay. My name is Alfred Kazuo Ono. I was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1945, and I grew up in Minneapolis. We ended up in Minneapolis because my parents were in Sacramento, California during the start of the war and were relocated in Poston, Arizona, the relocation camp there. My uncle, who was my father's stepbrother, was a Japanese language teacher in Minneapolis. Outside of Minneapolis, there was a U.S. Army Japanese language school; and so most of the people who originally came to Minneapolis came there because they either taught or were associated with or were students at the language school there. This uncle subsequently went back to California and was teaching Japanese at the Presidio in Monterey till he retired, but my parents stayed in Minneapolis, and that's how I ended up there.

I went to school in Minneapolis, started in South Minneapolis, which is kind of right in the center, and then moved out to the suburbs and grew up in the suburbs of Minneapolis, a city called St. Louis Park. I went to elementary school and junior high school and high school.

In Minneapolis, the Japanese community is fairly small, or at least at that point in time; and, interestingly, St. Louis Park was the suburb that a lot of the Japanese lived in, so our school was kind of an exception in that there were more Japanese than in a lot of the

other schools in Minneapolis or the suburban area. But, certainly, once you ventured out of the Twin Cities area, you were considered, literally, a foreigner, and people always thought you were an exchange student, or something like this—which relates to some stories I'll get to in medical school. And so people would presume you were an exchange student or you just came here off the boat, or something like that, so it was really strange for them to see somebody who wasn't blond and tall and Swedish, Norwegian, or German, which were most of the people who lived in Minneapolis area.

The other thing that was unique about that area was that I knew a lot of the kids that were my age, and we knew each other through Junior Japanese-American Citizens League and through the Buddhist dharma school. And so we knew a lot of the kids and we were—organizational stuff, but we really, on a day-to-day basis, had our own little groups of friends and saw each other only kind of socially or at New Year's or family gatherings or the Japanese community picnics. So the Japanese community there was fairly tight, but not really big.

The standing joke around that time was that you go to California. All my relatives lived in California, in Sacramento and in Menlo Park, and so every other year we'd drive from Minneapolis to California and see all the relatives and then drive all the way back to Minneapolis. Only as we got older did the trips expand and we actually got to see most of the western United States, because of this trip that we would do every other year out to see the family.

The standing joke was that I'd come out there—I was supposed to go out there and learn how to garden from my—I have two uncles who were gardeners, and I was supposed to garden. The underlying part of that thing was that you'd meet some Japanese girls and hopefully not marry a *hakujin* [Japanese for “white person”], and I ended up marrying a nice Minnesotan *hakujin* [laughs]. But it was kind of the joke that as you got to high school you were supposed to go out to California and meet more Japanese people. So it was interesting that we kept the interest.

In our family, actually, and as a lot of families that had Nisei parents, the household was bilingual. Since all my relatives were all in California, who all spoke Japanese, there wasn't that much, but my father was raised in Japan, actually, and so he was actually pretty knowledgeable in Japanese.

HIRUKI: He was born in the States, though?

ONO: He was born in the States, and his father died when he was a year old, and so his mother went back to Okayama and remarried. So all the other relatives, other than an older sister of his, are all Shinagawas. The story goes that, in fact, he was shipped around. When he was younger, he went to Korea and Manchuria for his education. And I finally found a family album and found all these pictures that he was in, and, “Oh, yeah, he was there, he was there.” Then he came back to the States with the language-teacher brother in the mid-1930s, and then grew up in the Sacramento area, and then all the stuff that we went through at that time.

So the Japanese community in Minneapolis, again, was diverse, but it was kind of—you knew it was around, or at least we felt it. It had a role in the community.

Anyway, in our household, it was still kind of Japanese, but not. You know, the old thing that you don't want to be too Japanese-y but you don't want to lose it. So my parents were bilingual, and I learned some Japanese, which I later found was farmer, Hiroshima, pre-World War II ancient Japanese, so anybody who is from Japan now, if I tried this stuff, I'd get this look of, "How can you say that?" Words like *benjo* [Japanese for "toilet," now considered crude or vulgar]. I mean, for all of us kids, that's what we learned to—and, you know, we talked about modern-day Japanese, and people kind of go, "Oh, my gosh, what kind of language do you speak?" And so the Japanese is kind of like little bits and pieces. It's almost—and all the kids that I grew up with, when your parents start speaking Japanese to each other, that means they don't want you around. So at the dinner table, if they start speaking Japanese, you just kind of eat until you got back to English again.

We used *hashi* [chopsticks], we ate a lot of Japanese food, we had big *shogatsu* [New Year celebration], we did *mochi* [sticky glutinous rice, a seasonal food], so we were, to a degree, brought up in some of the—what we feel are the Japanese cultural things, and so I still have an interest in it and I like it. My father tried to maintain it.

And they established a Jodo Shinshu Buddhist church in Minneapolis, and the ministers who presided over all the churches were all grad students. So we had a pathology grad student who was a minister; we had some sociology grad students; we had the daughter of one of the big ministers in the American Buddhist church movement—the Buddhist Church of America—she was a grad student in literature, I think, or something like that. But they would run—they'd be at the church and do all the services and everything else, and then we had a regular minister who would come out from Chicago once a month, who spoke Japanese, and so it was kind of like, "Great, we have somebody who actually we understand."

So the Buddhism, that's what I was raised in, and my kids are still Buddhists, too, so we're active in the Buddhist temple, even though my wife is Catholic. That's a whole 'nother story, I guess [laughs].

So the Japanese-ness was really in the family life. The other joke was always talked about was that when my mother would say, you know, "Are you going to...?" We didn't invite people over for dinner very often because we didn't know what she was going to cook, and we were kind of embarrassed about having people over in this household, so it was kind of like we had to warn my mother if somebody was coming over. And the joke was if we said we were going to bring somebody over for dinner, she presumed it was going to be *hakujin*, and she'd say, "Should I make potatoes?" Because otherwise they have rice, *gohan*, every night. And so it was kind of, "Oh, okay."

And we used to have people over—actually, there were two big families that we were kind of—since we didn't have family in Japan or Minneapolis, they kind of did things

together. And the two big families all used to have a big *shogatsu*, and they just cooked these huge spreads, and everything else. But we started making *mochi*, and my mother would do some of it, so she'd have teriyaki and sushi—before sushi became en vogue. And so some of my roommates would come over when I was in college, and she'd go, “Well, you really don't have to eat the stuff. And if you don't like the stuff, you can spit it out. And that black stuff around it, you can take it off.” [Laughing] You know, the *makizushi* [rolled sushi, wrapped in seaweed], and stuff. So it was kind of like, “Oh, don't be too Japanese, because people will think bad of you,” or something like that. So we had to kind of mix the two.

So from my perspective, as a Sansei [third generation Japanese-American], it's actually humorous, looking back on it, but it was—you always worried that, are you going to look too strange, or something like that.

Medicine wasn't in my life at all. My father was a car mechanic, my mother did various jobs, and she ended up working in the public schools at the junior high school as the lady who washed all the athletic towels and the uniforms. So they were certainly very definitely blue-collar kind of folks, and they both came from families of farmers. So for us, to go to college was a pretty big deal.

HIRUKI: Where did the push to go to college come from?

ONO: Actually, the push for college was the push that all of us—you know, the old thing, “We want you to go to school, we want you to do well in high school.”

And, actually, I have two sisters, and one of them—this is kind of where some of it, maybe the medical part started, or at least I kind of think of it. She wanted to be a physician, and she always wanted to be a physician and a pediatrician. When she was sixteen, so I was thirteen—actually, it was bit before then. She would have been, probably, of the three of us, the biggest success story of the three of us. She did very well in high school, was a cheerleader, and did well, and came down with chronic glomerulonephritis. About that time—and so she was—the diagnosis—people were just starting to study immunology.

There was a guy named Robert Good at the med school who was kind of one of the big pioneers of immunology at Minnesota and nationwide. So when she was there, they were just starting to understand what immunology was all about. And so she was in the hospital for nine months, with her kidney disease and that stuff, and it was pretty hypertensive and became pretty aggressive. She was at home for a while and then passed away, oh, I think about a year and a half after her diagnosis. I later found out that was about the time Scribner was starting the dialysis machines in Seattle, but that was—if she had lived a few more years, she may have been eligible for some of that stuff.

So during all that time, we were really involved in going to the hospital and coming home, and that stuff, so it became kind of intriguing, the whole idea of medicine. So I quit the idea of engineering and decided on medicine—and I've always had an interest in biology, and stuff, so it was kind of a nice little linkage.

So, then, when I got into high school, I started doing some science projects. When I was—was it ninth grade? Ninth grade or tenth grade science project, a *Nihonjin* [Japanese] dentist said—I was looking for a project, and he says, “I’ve got a great project. You take a frog gastrocnemius muscle and you put a little electrical current in it, and you watch it twitch, and you go through muscle physiology.” So we did this thing, and I’d get these frogs from the bait shop and take out their gastroc muscles. It was a real—now that I look back at the pictures, it was a real primitive setup. You put a little electrode, and you could actually have a wheel that turned, and you would look at the components, and you could stimulate the leg and make it go into fatigue, and all this other stuff. So I did this project, and I went to the state science fair with it. So then it became more interesting. It’s kind of like it’s fun.

And, then, the final thing that really got me into it was, I was looking for a summer job, and there was a clinic, that is now a huge clinic in Minneapolis, that was just starting out at that time, and my dad had talked to somebody, and he says, “Go down and talk to my internist.” And so Bud Green was one of the founding guys, and he says, “Yeah, we’ll see if we can find you a job.” So I got a job working in the lab, you know, doing little tests in the lab, and that stuff, and working in the x-ray department putting films through the developer. So I got really into the system, and from that, then, I was hooked. I learned how to do EKGs; I learned how to do chemistries; I learned how to do urinalysis, and one of the techs was teaching me how to do hematology. That’s where I learned how to draw blood.

I used to wash the frogs. The frogs got shipped to us in the mail, for pregnancy tests, and you inject—you extract the urine, and you inject it in the frog and see if it makes sperm; if the hCG levels are high enough, the frog makes sperm. So that was my job, was to keep the frogs alive and well so they could get the pregnancy tests done. So it was primitive medicine—hot stuff at that time, but that really got me into it.

And from there I could follow the internists around, and they would do things. That’s where I met one of the OBs, and he took me to a delivery, we did a C-section, and I really kind of said, “This is for me; this is fun.” So that’s where the medicine vein started. So by the time I was in high school, I was pretty sure I wanted to go into medicine.

And there’s one other guy who worked at the clinic, too, who was also interested in medicine, and Dave’s a pediatric radiologist now on the East Coast. And so we went through high school together always saying, “We’re going to go to medical school, we’re going to go to medical school,” and we were roommates in college, and we were all in premed together, and then he went to Penn and I stayed at Minnesota for med school. So that’s where the doctor part came from.

As far as how to—do you want to keep going on that line?

HIRUKI: Sure.

ONO: So I went to med school at the University of Minnesota, and did my undergraduate in psych at the University of Minnesota, and was in a lot of activities and stuff. And at Minnesota, when I was in college, there was a program called Panel of

Americans, and it was a—where you'd actually go and talk about—it was the beginning of understanding of diversity and that stuff. And the panel usually consisted of a Catholic, a Protestant, a Jew, a black, and somebody else, and I was the somebody else. And sometimes I'd talk about Buddhism and sometimes I'd talk about being Japanese American. And that's the first time I really investigated the intricacies of the relocation camps and did a lot of reading about the camps.

HIRUKI: Had that subject been brought up when you were small?

ONO: When I was small, people talked about camp, because most of the people, I remember, when I was little, that was kind of your identity: "Which camp were you in?" And people would talk about the camps. And because Minneapolis was kind of an offshoot, you'd get quite the mixture of people talking about various relocation camps. And my older sister was born—from talking to my mom—she was born, and when she was only a few weeks old, they went off to camp.

So I had these pictures, and I remember always looking at the picture books and seeing these kids on slides, and it was—you know, you never put the Quonset huts together as anything, these little huts and these people running around. And everybody talked about, "Oh, that's what camp was." And, actually, I felt kind of deprived because I never got to go to camp like everybody else. And they lived there for two and a half years. It was kind of like, "God, I never got to go there. It looks like fun, all these kids and all this other stuff."

So a lot of people did talk about camp, but it was referred to as "camp," as your kind of identity. And so I never really got into any of the detail of it. Like my wife says, it's ironic that most of the information I got about my folks' camp experience was indirect, not them telling us about it. And for us to ask them questions about it, it was kind of like, "Oh, no, that's just camp." And so it always kind of got pushed aside.

But as we got into high school and some more people started talking, and then I started being on this panel, I would start asking my folks more pointed questions about camp, and then you really found out what it was really about: about the whole relocation; about property that was lost—my dad lost a gas station in Sacramento; that he was on a camouflage net crew, and they made camouflage nets in Arizona; and the dust storms in Poston, and all this other stuff.

And it was actually interesting that some of our neighbors then started to find—the kids would say, "Can I come over and talk to your parents about the relocation camps? It's something we're just starting to hear about, you know, and we want to get some information." So they'd come and they'd talk to my parents, and then suddenly they'd start telling these stories about camp, and it was kind of like, "I didn't know that!"

And now my kids have gotten into it. My son is studying Japanese at Berkeley, and so he's actually interviewed one uncle about his camp experience, and interviewed my mother about her camp experience—my dad had already passed away by that time. And from him I've gleaned even more specific information about it; that my sister was two weeks old when

we went to camp, and some of this stuff. So it's information that I never got, and I don't think my siblings ever got, and it was certainly never volunteered, but it was certainly there. And it's interesting how it's all gleaned out, and now I have a much better picture of what the relocation camps were all about.

I don't know how I got on that tangent.

Anyway, so I went to the University of Minnesota and did my undergraduate and worked on this panel, and that's the first time I started getting interested in Japanese Americans. The initial panels that we did, I mean, people talked about Buddhism as kind of like, "It's too weird," and now it's kind of very "in." The relocation camps were something that, "Oh, no, that will never happen again." This was the—now we're into the 1960s, and it's kind of like, "No, that would never happen again," or, "That was a fluke," or, "It was for your own self-protection." And now it's interesting how people are looking at it from a totally different perspective. I hope to get into that later.

So anyway, then I got into medical school, and my friend went on to Penn. Medical school was a really different experience there. Minnesota has a good medical school. We had a class of about 165. There was one other Japanese in our class, who I didn't know until medical school and I still don't know really that well. There were six Petersons, five Olsons, and three Knudsens and four Larsens in our class. I think that was the only other Japanese in the class. Being Asian or being Japanese in medical school really wasn't a big factor, other than people remember you, which was good and bad.

And when I got into the clinical part, I really liked it. When I was in the basic science part, it was hard for me, and I really had to work hard, but got through it all.

The funniest incident of just being Japanese was when I was in histology. It was the first quarter that we were there, and it was the first midterm I took, and I was just working my butt off and doing horribly. And I thought, "Oh, my God, I'm going to fail out of medical school?" or something like that. And I had gone and talked to my anatomy professor, and he says, "Yeah, you'll be fine." And it was just kind of, "Don't be so nervous about it, just do it." And then I just got back going.

Well, my histology professor—I got a C on my first midterm, and she's passing out the tests, and she came down our table. There was a guy named Dave Olson, who I knew as an undergraduate, and we always sat next to each other because he was Olson, and so we shared a table in histology. And he got—I think he got an A minus on it, and I got a C. And Dr. Carpenter says, "Well, don't worry about it, Ono. You'll do better. I realize you have a language problem." And I said, "Oh, yeah." Dave's going, "Right, Ono" [laughter].

But there was still, I think, that presumption around the Twin Cities that Asians are foreigners, you know. And there were certainly a lot of foreign students who were residents and fellows, and that stuff, at Minnesota, but most of them were foreign students. They all had an accent. And so the comment that you usually got was, "Gee, your English is pretty good." It was kind of like, "I've always spoken English" or it's kind of like, "Don't you

speak Japanese?” or something. So it was a little strange. So the Asian-ism still came up, but the presumption was always that you’re a foreigner.

As far as patients go, I don’t think it really was a thing, other than you were the strange doctor.

HIRUKI: Strange?

ONO: Strange, because you weren’t white. And Minnesota is—Minneapolis is now probably more integrated or more diverse than Oregon is as far as—Oregon is very white. But still, I think, to be Asian in Minneapolis is still a little unusual.

It’s interesting that there were a lot of good role models because there were a lot of very good Japanese and Japanese-American physicians at Minnesota. So to that extent, you’re coming through with kind of like, “Gee, there’s Dr. Yonehiro,” and some of those people who were really well known and really well respected, and that stuff. So that was a nice up, at least.

HIRUKI: Can you talk a bit about them?

ONO: Yes. I’m trying to think of—I mean, there was a guy at this clinic that I worked at, who was a general surgeon named Earl Grant Yonehiro [Earl G. Young]. Everybody liked him, and he had the reputation of being really fast, and he was. I scrubbed a few surgeries with him, and he really had really good hands. And I liked him, and he was a good role model about, you know, that you could do things. He was a Nisei. And he’s since passed away.

I’m trying to think who were some of the other Japanese-Americans that were in medical school. I can’t think of any off the top of my head, but I can visualize some of them.

Anyway, so there were some good people that said, “It’s okay to be in this profession.” There weren’t a lot of Asians or a lot of Japanese in the Minneapolis area or the Twin Cities area that came necessarily through the med school. But a lot of people who came from the small towns, the small farm towns around—it’s that same thing that, when you traveled around to a small farm town, it’s kind of like everybody turns and looks at you and says, “Oh, who are you? You must be some foreigner.” So when they come into the Twin Cities and you say you’re their doctor, or you’re a med student or something like that, they look at you and kind of go, “Oh, another one of these foreigner people.” So it was that kind of thing.

Actually, it was interesting, because there was a program that my sister went to, that I didn’t, where you go to a farm. And they took four African-American kids, two Asian kids, and they lived on a farm for a week. And the thinking was, like, these are inner city kids, and we’re going to really show them that milk doesn’t come in cartons and show them what the life of a farm is all about. It was interesting that it was almost like, if you’re a minority and

you live in the city, then you must be—we have to kind of get you up to speed with everybody else. An interesting concept.

So anyway, when I finished medical school—and I don't think in medical school I—you know, the question always goes, “Was there ever any prejudice or was race ever an issue?” And I think, to me, through high school and through all my education stuff, race, if it meant nothing else, was, one, they remembered you. So when I ran for student body president in high school, and when I did some stuff in the university in politics and that kind of stuff, people remember you, and, hopefully, in a positive way. And with a name like Ono, people always remember it, it was a good political thing. So to that extent, it worked to my advantage.

I don't think, because—again, we were foreign enough that I don't think it worked to our disadvantage. In the Twin Cities area or the Minneapolis area the “bad” minorities were the Native Americans and the blacks. There weren't that many Hispanics. And at that point in time there were still kind of enclaves—people kind of stuck together, the Chinese and the Asians and the Japanese, in their little communities.

In medical school, I don't think it really was an issue as far as I was concerned.

I went to Fresno, California, for my internship and did a rotating internship—I got matched there—and that was my first exposure to a big Japanese community. We were on the west end of Fresno, where the Japanese Town is, and Japanese Town is right next to the Mexican Town, some people kind of go, “Oh, my gosh, you can't go down there.” And I'd go, “Oh, yeah, I know some people”—and some friends of my parents actually knew some people that lived down there. And then I found a guy that I used to know in Minneapolis, whose parents had moved to Fresno, and I looked them up. So we'd go to their house if we wanted Japanese food. And they had a big peach orchard, and a bunch of stuff like that.

So, in fact, I ended up meeting quite a few Japanese people out there. The Buddhist temple there is huge; Aki Hardware store and all these other things. So it was the first time to really go to a Japanese barber and to have a Japanese food store by, and the like. So it was a real different experience, living in Fresno, California, with a community and, again, with kind of a pre-established kind of background.

HIRUKI: How did that make you feel?

ONO: Actually, it was kind of fun. I rather enjoyed it. To me, it was kind of ethnically awakening, kind of like, “Gee, look at all the stuff here.” I'd go to the food store and go, “Wow, all this stuff. They've got [unclear] and everything else.” I thought it was great fun.

The only thing that was interesting—my aunt, who was my mom's youngest sister, they lived in Sacramento, and they were relocated to Arkansas during the relocation. Their assembly center was the Fresno County Fairgrounds. So when we were in Fresno for the year, we—my wife and I—I had just gotten married at that point in time, and my wife and I

would drive around, and I went to see my aunts and all this. It was a great opportunity. You didn't have to take this two thousand mile car trip anymore, they were actually within a half a day. So we'd go out and see them, and everything else.

My aunt once told me, "You know, I'm never going to come down and see you." And I said, "Well, Fresno isn't that far away." And she says, "No, you're"— we were three blocks from the fairgrounds. And she says, "I told myself I'd never go back to that place again. I never want to see that place. I never go to Fresno." And I went, "Ooh." That's the first time I had ever heard somebody say something really moving about camp, which before was always, again, it was just camp, that thing back there.

So internship was fun, and Fresno was kind of strange.

HIRUKI: Was obstetrics part of the rotation?

ONO: Yes. We had an obstetrics rotation for two months, and it was pretty busy, because we were at the county hospital in Fresno, so we did a lot of indigent patients. That's where I learned more of my Spanish, there. When I was a senior, I did three months in Bogotá in Columbia and did obstetrics. It was interesting.

I always wanted to be a pediatrician until I got to my senior year, and I did some pediatrics and I found out I didn't like parents; they drove me crazy. And I liked obstetrics: it was fun. You do some surgery, which was great fun.

When I was in medical school, I worked in John Najarian's lab. Najarian was the head of the surgery department there and was one of the big transplant people. And so he had a lab, and I worked in there for a summer, and we did—I learned how to put kidneys into goats and dogs.

And at that time we were splitting—they were doing some immunological stuff, and they were taking the short arm of the—oh, I can't remember what it was. We were trying to bind up the binding site so you couldn't bind complements so you wouldn't reject the graft. And I think that's the spin-off of what is now—what's this stuff used for preventing rejection in grafts? Not the imuren stuff, but it's that kind of stuff. That was the beginning of—we were doing a lot of stuff with the immunological molecules, and stuff like that, and that's why we were doing the dog transplants and the goat transplants. But, for me, it was fun just getting in there and learning how to do vascular surgery. I loved surgery, and so I thought, well, this is the best ...

[End of Tape 1, Side 1/Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

HIRUKI: This is the continuation of an OHSU Oral History Project interview with Dr. Alfred Ono. We're just talking about Dr. Ono's internship experience with obstetrics in Fresno, California.

ONO: Actually, we had a good time, and you could kind of—although I was still peripheral, we were busy enough that I really didn't get involved very much in the Japanese community.

Obstetrically, you know, about half our patients there were Hispanic, so everybody learned how to say *empuje*, to push and all this other stuff, so you learned a little bit of Spanish. My wife is a Spanish teacher, so she kind of laughed at my Spanish, but we'd get along. And so it was a busy enough service that I had a real good time.

You had the comment about—and, actually, at Fresno is where I saw the only case I've ever seen of Tsutsugamushi Disease, and I said, "Oh, look at that!" You know about Hashimoto's thyroiditis, and stuff like this kind of stuff. Well, there's Japanese people out there, I guess.

Anyway, so when I was in—and this has nothing to do with being Japanese, but how I ended up in Oregon. When I was in medical school, as a junior, I think the first four interns that I had were all from Oregon, and they said, "You should go out to Oregon and interview out there. You'd really like it. It's like Minneapolis." And there are a lot of Oregonians in Minneapolis, like there are a lot of people from Minneapolis here in Portland. There still are, from the Midwest.

HIRUKI: What are the similarities?

ONO: The temperature. Actually, to me, the reason I got interested in the Northwest was I came out for the Japanese American Citizens League. JACL had their national convention in Seattle during the Seafair, so we stayed out here for a week. I came out all by myself. And I said, "I really like this town." And Seattle and Minneapolis are really alike; very water-oriented, pretty cosmopolitan city, and I said, "I could really like this." And so then when people started talking about Portland, I thought, "Well, cool."

So I went up and interviewed for residencies—this was when internship and residencies were separate programs—both at the University of Washington, and I interviewed down here at OHSU. This was before they matched; they basically said, you know, "If we like you, we'll take you." So it was a rolling admission, and so I got admitted, and it was great. So I ended up down here to do my residency. And it was a pretty good residency.

HIRUKI: What did it consist of?

ONO: The residency itself?

HIRUKI: The training program, yes.

ONO: The training program was actually—it obviously has evolved. I think Oregon at that point in time was a fairly good program, had good things, but they had a real small faculty and a lot of the res program was really the senior residents taught the junior residents,

and the staff wasn't that around. The department head was a guy named Ralph Benson, who was one of the grand old men and had written a lot and, you know, as far as the American College goes was one of the grand old guys.

HIRUKI: A draw, then.

ONO: Yes, and I think Benson was a draw. And they had some good folks that kind of came and went. It's interesting, of anybody in medical school—and I think there's a question in here [indicates paper] about this. I don't think Benson would have a connotation fit about it. Of all the people in medical school that I think I've ever, you know, got the twinge—is there some bad feeling about being Japanese or Asian?—was Benson. You know, you'd go in and talk to him, and you'd get the feeling of either condescension or kind of like, “Oh, you.” And I'm not sure—it was never been drawn out; there was never anything overt, but you certainly got that—if anybody ever gave that feeling.

And it was interesting, because when I came out here, my father said, “Do you really want to go to Oregon?” And I said, “They have a good program out there and it's not a bad place to live.” And he says, “Well, one of the friends that worked in the post office said that they looked up a rating system of prejudice, or something like that, and Oregon was, like, in the top ten, along with Mississippi and Alabama and all this other stuff.” And now, having lived out here, I can really see it's probably really real. I mean, Oregon had a Ku Klux Klan and the like. And when you get out of the metropolitan area, you go out into the periphery of the state, and there are definitely some feelings about Asians and minorities and that kind of stuff. So my dad was a little concerned about, you know, “Is something really going to happen to you?”

And I can't remember the incident. Something came up somewhere, and I came home, and I called him up and I talked to him once, and he said, “You should go in and talk to them.” He says, “That's prejudice. That's outright prejudice against you. Something's happening to you, and you'd better go talk to somebody.” And I said, “Nah, nah, nah, I don't want to do that.” So I kind of pushed it aside, and everything else.

But that was the only thing that was kind of funny about the residency program was that that was the first time you really had kind of a funny feeling at times: it's there.

HIRUKI: Staff and patients?

ONO: Myself and staff. The people themselves that I worked with, you know, the other residents were—it was a pretty good bunch. Although, interestingly, in my residency class—you see some of the residency classes coming out now, and our class wasn't necessarily that tight. Ron Marcum actually was down in Corvallis, and he's teaching back at the school; John Burkhardt's up in Port Angeles; I was in the class; one's in Oklahoma; one's in Battle Creek, Michigan. I think that's where Anderson is. And who's the other one? Oh, Don Montoya. I think he's retired, he's not even practicing. He was in Oregon City for a while. So it's—you know, everybody's kind of dispersed, and it isn't one of these little, tight groups.

Anyway, so the residency program was pretty straightforward. It was just, you know, a residency program. It was busy, we learned pretty well. As we went through the programs, some new people got picked up onto the staff. Bissonnette came on board. [Pauses.] Who else came on board? Anyway, some of the pretty good faculty came on, and I think the program expanded and grew from that, so by the time we were finishing, you were pretty well trained. And I passed my boards and it was pretty straightforward and everything else.

HIRUKI: Was there anything unique to the Oregon program, or anything that it did particularly well?

ONO: I think the thing that the Oregon program did do well—I mean, I talked to some friends who were in big programs. USC was doing a thousand deliveries a month and we were doing—I think when I was up in the Med School, I think we were doing, like, a hundred and twenty, a hundred and fifty a month. So we were busy but not crazy busy.

Then we'd go to Emanuel, and then, at the end of the program, they started rotating down here to Good Sam, so we were going to the community hospitals. And I think that's what—still the program is good, that I think there is the Hill stuff and the community hospital stuff. And you do get a really different perspective or a different picture of the practice of medicine, or specifically OB: the downtown stuff versus the medical school stuff and the patient mix and the like.

So I think that was good. We were busy enough that I think we got fairly well trained technically: we got enough surgery to do and enough deliveries and there was enough stuff going on technically, but we weren't overwhelmed. You talk to the USC guys, and that stuff, they were on twenty-four, off twenty-four. You know, you're doing a thousand deliveries, and you're just running around from room to room, and whoever's going to catch the baby catches the baby, that kind of stuff.

I mean, as far as just plain obstetrical stuff, I probably got more experience in Columbia, when I was in Bogotá, because they were doing about sixty, seventy babies a day there. So, you know, we just—I was one of the people on for twelve hours, and we'd just catch everything that came in the door, and so we saw all kinds of stuff there.

HIRUKI: Was that a special program?

ONO: It was a program that had started—it was an elective in your senior that one of the other med students had kind of put together. So several people went to Cuzco in Peru, and then I went down to Bogotá, and Dave Olson, this friend that I was talking about, went to Medellín and did internal medicine and that kind of stuff. So it was kind of fun, and that's where I kind of began to pick up some Spanish, just by necessity.

But the program here in Oregon, I felt it was a fairly balanced program, that they spent a lot of time, and so you got a pretty good didactic knowledge of what's what, and there were enough things going on that I think technically you got exposed to a lot and got to

do a lot; and so I think coming out of the program you were fairly well trained. And I think it wasn't one of these things that you've seen one of everything, it's not like, again, being in Houston or one of the real big centers where everything in the world comes through the door, that you have to kind of grow, but I think it gave you enough of, to me, a really good basis that you could then just grow out from there, and the like.

And actually, what happened, the spin-off of that whole experience was that one of the people on the staff there—his name is Raphael Durfee; he did the gynecology, he did the oncology up there. He came up with Benson, I think they both came up from San Francisco in the fifties, or something like that, to the Med School to kind of get the department growing. He dropped out of the Med School about—let's see, I finished and he was still on the staff, and then I got drafted—I had a delayed draft deferment, so when I finished residency program, I had to go to the Army, so I was in the Army for two years in Fort Riley, Kansas.

HIRUKI: Nineteen...?

ONO: Nineteen seventy-five to '77.

HIRUKI: So the Vietnam War.

ONO: The Vietnam War had just finished. My fear was, "Oh, great, we're going to go overseas." And I was—you were considered a surgeon, so I thought, "Oh, this is going to be unfun."

So, as it turned out, the war finished just before then, so we went to Fort Riley. And there were four of us there, and we just did obstetrics. And we did a lot of obstetrics, did a lot of surgery, and really had a pretty good time there. And I think it was a real good grounding to just kind of—it's like being a chief resident with no supervisor. You just kind of can really just do what you want to do and make your decisions. And I think that was—it was just kind of a get-your-confidence-up kind of program, and the like. So that, as much as I didn't like the Army, which was a whole 'nother experience again [laughs]—it was a nice training ground for somebody just finishing up.

And the four of us actually—one came from Nebraska, one came from Oklahoma, and one came from Baylor, and, then, I came from out here. So everybody had come through pretty good training programs, and so had, I think, reasonable knowledge, and that stuff. I think we could support each other, and, you know, if you get into a dilemma, call somebody, and you'd feel like you had good hands, and that stuff.

The hospital commander actually was an obstetrician, but he was Army first and obstetrician ninety-seventh down the road, or something like that. But he'd come to our journal clubs, and his big donation to our journal club was, "If you ever have somebody delivering at home, take the shower curtain down and put it on the floor. It'll keep the floor clean." And we'd go, "Thank you."

When I was looking—and I always presumed that since we were in Kansas that we'd go back to Minneapolis. We were close enough that it was an eight-hour drive up, so we'd drive back and forth to Minneapolis from Fort Riley and see our parents, or they'd come down and see us. And so we kind of kept the connection there, and I always presumed that we'd go back. And my wife said she always wanted to stick close to the relatives. And we had a daughter by that time, and we thought it would be nice that our kids could interact with an extended family.

Well, I looked at some practices in Minneapolis, including the guy that started my interest in obstetrics way back when, when I was in high school and college. He offered me a job in their practice, which I thought, "This is going to be it." But it just didn't have the good feel, and it had gotten to be a bigger practice. And then Raphael Durfee, the guy from the Med School, said, "Do you want to come back to Portland?" And he was in practice all by himself. Several of the people got disenchanted with the Med School and all left and went into private practice, and most of them ended up coming back to Good Sam. So he was in practice by himself, and he said, "Do you want someplace to practice?" And I said, "Sure."

So I came down, we talked about it, and it actually—what that did for me was really—we were together, what, four years? Four or five years. But it was like four or five years being in an expanded practice. He didn't do any obstetrics, so I was kind of off on my own, learning obstetrics. At that point in time, he was just—but he did oncology; we were doing sex-change operations. And he was kind of one of the innovative people around here. So to be the guy that gets to scrub in surgery with all this other stuff, I learned a lot of stuff: a lot of surgical techniques, a lot of vaginal stuff, and vaginal surgery wasn't in vogue at that point in time. And so I got to be pretty proficient in a lot of vaginal techniques and vaginal surgery and that kind of stuff. So, for me, it was like four more years of mentorship, of apprenticeship with this guy.

And you feel confident enough with your own knowledge, but, then, working with somebody—and you can just do some really weird things. He got referrals for some strange surgeries, and with this sex change business, it was actually interesting to—I did a paper that I presented at the Nebraska OB-GYN society. It was their excuse for all the Army guys to get together. I presented a paper on transsexuals, transsexualism and the surgery that's involved. So it was fun to kind of get into the hinterlands of gynecology with him and just get really confident doing surgery. So that was one of the growing portions.

It was a small practice, and so we just kind of went along in a very simplistic way. Then after he left, then I really found out the real ins and outs of how to run a practice, the business of it. I was kind of like, "Oh, we were pretty primitive in the way we ran it; we could have done it a lot more efficiently," or stuff like that. But from that it really grew.

And so since that time—I've been in Portland since 1977, and have kind of gone in and out with several people, and our practice has kind of grown and joined with some other practices, so now we're in a practice with six people. And I still like it.

It's interesting, the thing about being here in Portland is that there is a fair-sized—it's

not California-sized—Japanese community. I've gotten active in the Oregon Buddhist temple, which is the Buddhist Churches of America, kind of a Japanese-based temple, and that was my kind of inroad to who's who in the Japanese community. So I've gotten to meet a fair number of people over here. But still being an outsider, it's kind of like you really don't know all of the people who have been around here since before the war and who knew about the Nikkei community and all this other stuff. So it's interesting to kind of talk to people about what Portland was like there, right after the war, and a lot of this stuff.

And it's pretty scary to hear some of the people who lived out in the fruit orchards and then were evacuated and came back. And some people really got a very positive experience coming back to Oregon, and some people really got a pretty scary, you know, "Go away, Japs!" kind of thing even after the war was over. And Portland still does. I mean, the Portland community is pretty diverse, and I think it's pretty open in its thinking, but Oregon still does. When you drive around, you can still feel that kind of, are you still that foreigner, or something like that.

But it's been—as far as being involved in the Japanese community, I work on some projects. We do a lot of stuff. I've been in the temple, and I've been the president of the temple. I've been working on a lot of projects, and I teach Sunday school to a high school class. I've done a lot of talks about Buddhism. There was a guy who had a class at Tigard and Tualatin high schools, and I'd go out and talk about Buddhism every year. He's retired now, so I haven't done that talk, but I used to go and talk to his class.

HIRUKI: How has that been received over the years, do you think?

ONO: Actually, it's been fun. It's interesting—again, when I first started talking about Buddhism, like back in college, it was kind of like, "Oh, it's that weird thing," you know. And then it was kind of, "It's strange." And now Buddhism is almost hip. And I think people are finding out—if you look at our temple, our temple is probably at least twenty percent Caucasians. People are just kind of interested in it. I think there are various Buddhist temples around town.

The Japanese organizations here are not as big and strong as I would have expected on the West Coast. They're all Sanseis now kind of running it. But they're fairly outspoken. They've made the park down by the waterfront where the relocation is. Bob Murase did that. So, you know, it's a small but pretty hard-working group.

I've worked the last three years on this—there's a scholarship program for seniors, high school seniors, for a college scholarship, and both my kids got a scholarship in that program. It's a banquet and a thing at the first part of May for Japanese students who are graduating from high school.

What we're finding is, it's harder to find out who's Japanese. Like you said, if you run down the list of names and try to pick out who's who just based on names, you're going to lose a chunk just because they don't have Japanese-sounding names. Some of the Japanese, like in some of the suburbs, are there because their parents are in the States, so

they're not Japanese Americans. They're here for a few years and that's it. They go back to their home. And I see that as different than the kids who are growing up here, and the like.

My kids have both gotten really interested in their ethnic background. My wife is Dutch, German, Lithuanian, and grew up in a small southern town, and the like. When we got married, people kind of wondered about—you know, are things going to work out okay.

HIRUKI: How did you meet?

ONO: When I was in medical school, we rented a house, and she had the apartment across the hall from us. So she actually was dating my roommate for a while. He was a grad student, and she helped him grade papers and that stuff, and I'd just go over there, and we'd just kind of—I'd gripe about all the girls that I didn't meet, or whatever else, and we'd just kind of talk. And then we started sharing tickets to the Minneapolis Symphony, and so we'd see each other periodically through the year just because we'd meet at the symphony, and sometimes we'd go to the symphony together. And then we just started dating after that. So it was interesting. So that's how I found out more about the small southern towns in Minnesota that I didn't know before, living in Minneapolis all that time.

So, actually, it worked out okay. Talking to my wife, she said when we announced that we were getting engaged, there was some flak from some of her family members that were not real happy about that. But as far as I know, it's pretty settled.

HIRUKI: And on your side, then?

ONO: On our side, actually, it was interesting. My sister married—I have a younger sister, too; the older sister who passed away, and I have a younger sister, who's still in Minneapolis. She married a *hakujin*, and my parents were more upset about when they announced their engagement than when we told them we were going to get married.

We go back and have a good time, but my kids have grown up—and both of them were born in Portland. One was born when I was a resident, and one was born when we came back here, and so they consider themselves, one, as Oregonians; and, two, I think they see themselves more as Asians than they do necessarily of a mixed thing.

It's interesting, because my son, I think, is more aware of being *Hapa* [Hawaiian for 'mixed race'], you know, that there is this mix. And I think he's always been interested in his background. He went to Japan when he was in eighth grade, with the Sister City program. He went to Sapporo and met a bunch of kids, and so he's been back to Japan three times now. I think the Sapporo trip really got him interested in his ethnic background, and so he's really been more interested in that.

We live over in Northeast, but both my kids went to Lincoln. But it's interesting that most of my son's friends are other minority kids. There are African American kids from the north side, several Southeast Asian friends that he has. And if you look at his friends, the number of Caucasian—oh, he's got some—friends, as opposed to African American and

Asian kids, are in the minority of his friends. My daughter has mostly all white friends, and she went to Lincoln.

My daughter went to the East Coast for school, and so she was not only a minority because she was a minority, but she was also that because she was from the West Coast—much less from the Northwest. It was kind of like, “Where is that?” And I think she likes to get out there and be “the thing.” So it’s interesting, her path: she’s now studying at the University of Iowa in anthropology, so she’s now back in the Midwest, and it’s really white there, and she says, “They don’t have a clue around here.”

But my son really wanted to follow that vein, I think, of being Asian, and the like. And so we started going to the Buddhist church here, because when my daughter—who is the older one—started talking about God, and everything else, we decided we’d better make a decision what we’re going to do, because these kids are now at the point where religion becomes part of their lives. And so my wife says, “Well, I don’t necessarily—I think I’ll always consider myself Catholic, but I don’t necessarily want to raise my kids that way.” And she says, “You seem more interested in Buddhism, and you like the ethnicity of the temple.” And I said, “Yeah, it’s great. You get sushi and real teriyaki and real good food.”

They always eat. Every time you do something, you eat. So to me, for a while it was a great treat to go to a meeting just because I’d get to eat.

And so the kids started going to dharma school there, and they went all the way through from kindergarten all the way through high school, till they took off. So I think my son really got interested—he took Japanese at Lincoln for four years, went to Japan several times. Then he decided he wanted to stay on the West Coast, wanted to go to a big university, and ended up going to Berkeley, and he loves it down there. And he’s in an Asian fraternity, and almost all his friends are all Asians. His girlfriend was from Stockton and was a Namura. I think it’s Namura.

And so that’s the first time he’s really seen the extended Asian family, because he’d go to Thanksgiving at their house. And her grandmother lived in Sacramento, so he’d go there, and he could speak *Nihongo* [Japanese language], so the *boochan* [Japanese for “grandmother”] was all happy because somebody could speak Japanese, and she’d talk to him. And he’d go there, and he’d go there for *shogatsu* and all their special family gatherings. So that’s the first time he really saw a big Japanese family kind of all together, so for him it was, “Whoa, this is what it’s all about.” So I think he’s really into ethnicity.

His major is Japanese, his minor is business, and he wants to go to Japan and do some work with, probably, an American company in Japan. But I think he really wants to—he’s really taking that vein. So it’s interesting how it’s gone through this whole thing, the ethnicity part of it. And you can see it, how it’s come out in our two kids.

HIRUKI: Do you think it might have been different if his last name hadn’t been Japanese?

ONO: To a degree, it might have. I have a hunch that a lot of it is—and my wife always laughs about it. She says everything goes back to food. And this thing about hobbies—you know, you listed things, and one of the things that I find really recreational, actually very relaxing for me, is cooking. And so I've got a whole shelf full of cookbooks of all kinds. But I've always been trying to replicate, you know, what my mother cooks. So my mother is getting fairly old now, but you cannot ask her, you know, "How do you do this?" and "How do you do this?" Some of the stuff was kind of like, "Well, you put a little bit of this and a little bit of that and a little bit of this."

For two years when I was in medical school, I'd work on Saturdays for a Chinese grocery store. Mr. Wong was kind of one of the old Chinese cooks in Minneapolis. When somebody would come to town, he would go there and cook with them for a few weeks and see that their restaurant was set up, and then he'd supply them with all their supplies and everything else. But he was one of those same things. That's where I learned about ginseng and all those Chinese herbs. He had this whole drawer full of herbs.

So I'd kind of work in the store, and then I'd run to these little places and do small deliveries, not the big deliveries. And he'd say, "And you give them this too." So you'd go back in these Chinese restaurants, and you'd find all the gambling equipment back there. And you'd give them these little packages of herbs, and they'd go, "Oh, good." To cure their cold, or whatever [laughs].

So, you know, to me, I've always been brought up around Asian-ness and—but, you know, you talk about your Asian-ness, but, you know, having only been to Japan last year for the first time, I don't consider myself *Japanese* Japanese. As far as I'm concerned, the Japanese are a totally different group.

HIRUKI: Tell me about that trip.

ONO: The trip to Japan actually was fun.

HIRUKI: Had you planned it for a while?

ONO: Well, we've had several groups of—you know, there are a lot of students that come from Japan to Portland and want home stays. So we've had a whole bunch of students for home stays for various times. Well, one of the students that came—there is a program in Sapporo that is an essay contest, and they write an essay, and the prize is you get a trip to Portland [laughs]. And so we got one of the students that came. Yuki came and stayed with us for a week, and we loved it. And she even said, "I'm coming back here." And we said, "Well, come on back and visit us. We'll always be here." We tell everybody that, and I don't think we've heard from any of the other students that we've had, and we've had a ton of them. But Yuki kept writing to us and saying, "I'm coming here."

Then she wrote and she said, "I want to come back to Lincoln"—where she had visited the school—and says, "I want to go to school there for one year." And so we actually looked into it, and they said in the Portland system foreign students, other than through a

program, cannot come, and the school is not set up to have private students come and pay. The system just isn't set up—I guess Tigard has it or some other schools you can do it. And you pay the school system \$8,000, or something like that, and you can go to school there. But they said Portland just isn't set up for that. So they said the only way you can really come here is through an organized program.

So she looked into American Field Service and wrote to them and said, "I want to come here as an American Field Service student, AFS student." And we said, "Well, you can apply." So we talked to AFS, and they said, "Well, they apply, but they apply to the entire United States." So they said, you know, "We just send them wherever there are people available." So she could end up any place. She said, "No, I want to come here." So they said, "You can apply. And if you're going to do it, you have to apply as host families, and we make no guarantees."

So she applied and said, "I want to come to the Northwestern portion of the United States." And we said, "We want a student that's probably from Asia, and probably a girl" [laughs]. And so we kind of limited ourselves to some degree. And then they pulled strings, and it all came out that she came. So she ended up living with us for a year. And it was fun, because Alistair was studying Japanese at the time and Yuki was studying English. And then you could really see the idiosyncrasies—she was a year older than my son, so they went to school together, and you could really then start seeing some of the idiosyncrasies between Japanese kids and American kids, and that stuff.

HIRUKI: Like what sort of things?

ONO: Well, what was funny with us was that you could really see through the stuff. We went to—she belonged to a different sect, a religious sect, in Japan, one of these new ones, but she'd come to church with us.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2/Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

HIRUKI: This is a continuation of an interview with Dr. Alfred K. Ono for the OHSU Oral History Project, twelfth of September of the year 2000. The interviewer is Tadaaki Hiruki.

We were just talking about some differences in Japanese high school students and American high school students that Dr. Ono observed through a student exchange—or, rather a student program for coming to Oregon.

ONO: So anyway, it was funny, because at the church we'd sing these songs. And everybody had service together, so the adults and kids all had the same service, and we'd sing these songs. Actually, it was funny, because the director was really proud that we were singing these songs in Japanese, and Yuki started laughing. And I said, "So what's so funny?" She says, "This is little kids' songs." And I said, "But we all sing it." She says, "It's like if you all sang 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star' and a bunch of little adults were singing it. You'd start laughing too. It's hilarious. This is what you expect three year olds to be singing,

not adults.” So I went, “Oh, I guess that’s true.”

And little things, like when we’d sit down to eat or we’d cook things or something like that, she’d go, “We don’t do that kind of stuff in Japan.” “I thought that was how they did it in Japan.” And she goes, “Nobody does that kind of stuff.”

That’s where I found—that’s the biggest part. I found out that the Japanese that I learned from my parents—you know, I would try out some of this stuff, and I thought I was going to impress her with the little Japanese that I know, and she’d look and just go, [demonstrates], “I never heard that before,” or, “My grandfather talks like that, but he doesn’t even talk like that,” or, “I read it in some book about old Japanese.” She says, “Nobody says that kind of stuff.” And I took a year of Japanese in college, and so between that and what I can remember, and that, I was going to impress her. And I thought, “Wow, I’m really out in left field on this kind of stuff.”

So it was interesting. Actually, she’s been back to visit us a few times, and she’s getting a little more—she’s kind of in a dilemma, because I think she’s kind of Americanized and so feels kind of out of it in Japan. And she comes here, and she feels that her Japanese-ness still kind of shows through. But we’d talk about things, and they were little things. Alistair would—you know, some of her determination to do things just correctly, and all this, it’s kind of like, “Come on, loosen up. You’ll have more fun if you hang loose,” and some of this stuff. I’m trying to remember some of the specifics.

It was interesting. She came here, and they gave her a senior schedule, and she had American history, and she says, “I can’t even read the book.” And, you know, they thought, “Oh, wouldn’t it be good if these students had American history. Then they would understand history.” But you have—there’s a lot of stuff in senior American history that is kind of presumed: you know who George Washington is, you know who Abraham Lincoln is. And a lot of these students, they didn’t have the vaguest idea what you’re talking about, you know. You know approximately when the Civil War was. So we got her out of that class.

She took a math class, and she was in two kind of advanced algebra classes, and they were advanced math classes. She says, “I’ve done all this stuff before.” I said, “Well, you can get an easy A in the class.” And she says, “Well, I don’t understand when he talks about it, but I know what he’s talking about.” And so she ended up taking art classes, and some of this stuff, and she really said, “This is what I really like to do.” She says, “In Japan, you take English, you take Japanese, you take math, you take science. They don’t have any of this elective stuff.”

So, for her, it was a great treat to be able to do all that. She took a computer class, and she’d never even seen—I said, “I thought Japan would have computers all over the place.” This was about four years ago. And she says, “No, they’re just starting. Most people don’t have them.” And so, by the time she left here, she got home, got a computer, got an Internet thing and started on the Internet. And she says, “I got my parents to buy me these things so we can kind of communicate through the Internet.” I thought, “Oh, we’ve got to go.” So she took a computer class and stuff. So for her, it was a way for her to really expand in areas that

I thought, oh, they would be pretty proficient. And, actually, she went back home and told her parents she wanted to go to art school instead of going to the university, and they almost flipped out. “You can’t do that!” So she’s in Sapporo going to university there, but, still, it’s, I think, her real love.

And it was interesting, because the art teacher said that what she does in some of the things she creates are just really unique, and she says she has a very different eye than all the other students about—when they start a project, what she comes up with, she kind of goes, “Wow.” And she is pretty creative in—what I won’t say is an obviously different vein, but it’s a real thought difference, thought-process difference. So it was fun.

So anyway, on our trip to Japan, we went and stayed with her folks in Sapporo, and we got wined and dined and taken all over the place. It was funny, because her mother said—her mother and father speak a little bit of English, not much, and we speak a little bit of Japanese, you know, but then it’s kind of a lot of hand-waving. So Alistair and Yuki ended up being the translators for a lot of this.

But her mother said, “I understand you like cooking.” And I said, “I love it.” So we had Japanese breakfasts every day. And Yuki said, “My dad loves this, because my mother doesn’t cook like this all the time.” But, I mean, you know, we’d have a little bit of fish and a little bit of the vegetables, and all these little plates of stuff, and every day was different. And my wife says, “Can we have toast?” She says, “Does Yuki’s mom...?” I said, “I don’t know if she would get mad if we asked if we could have toast.” So it was fun. And we’d go to the grocery store, we’d go to the fish market, and all this other stuff. So, for me, it was just a real treat to kind of run around. We went to the—what’s the hot springs?

HIRUKI: Onsen.

ONO: Onsen. It was great.

And then we went down to Hiroshima, and I looked up my dad’s family down there. I’d only met them once before. They were once in Minneapolis. Mr. and Mrs. Ono. And, actually, one of their sons lived with my parents for two years, because they wanted their sons to live in the United States for a while; and they lived in St. Louis Park and went to the high school there. And so both the sons are fairly fluent in English. Actually, I happened to be in Minneapolis the same time they were passing through, and Yuji, their younger son, was in New York City, and he was doing the same thing, he was going to school there. And, basically, they found him an apartment and dumped him off and said, “Go to school.” And so Yuji was going back with them, and so they stopped in and saw my mom.

And that’s where I found out more about my family history, because they found my dad’s photo album as I was going through this, and that’s when she started telling me, “Oh, yeah, my mother and your dad were the outcasts of the family,” because their mother came back, married Mr. [Nagawa?], and he wanted to dump off the two Ono kids. So, technically, we were supposed to be Watanabes, I guess. He says, “If you go to Okayama and look for Ono,” he says, “You won’t find your names there, you’ll find your dad and your aunt’s name

under Watanabes, because the uncle across the street adopted them,” and then they got shipped out to all these places to go to school, and everything else. So you kind of go, “Oh,” you know.

And then we went to the photos, and you could see all the stepbrothers and sisters, and so I got a picture and I’ve got them all written down, who they are. They’re all back in Nihon [Japan], and everything else. The only one I know there is the brother who was the Japanese-language schoolteacher in Minneapolis. I asked, “Who are all these people?” They said, “Those are your aunts and uncles.” So it was interesting that she had this background.

So we went to Hiroshima. They live in downtown Hiroshima, and Mr. Ono owns a bunch of buildings, I guess. I guess he’s doing pretty well. So we met the two boys who speak very good English, and we got to travel around. We got to see the memorial; we got to go out to—oh, what’s outside of Hiroshima? Big *torii* [shrine gate]—that island out there. Miyajima. We went to Miyajima. We saw the section of Hiroshima where my mother’s family is from. She said, “Somewhere in here, somewhere up and down here, that’s where your mom is from.” Then we went on to Okayama and saw Okayama and found the place where they had grown up, and then we found the old—we were driving around looking, and she says, “It’s somewhere in there.” And so we found some old lady, neighbor lady, who said, “Oh, no, no, no you’re in the wrong place. I’ll show you.” So she took us all out, through the bushes and into the woods, and back there there were all the gravestones. It was very inspiring.

So that’s all of Japan we saw, was Hiroshima, Okayama, and Sapporo. So I still have not seen—other than we landed and took off from Osaka and drove through it to the Shinkansen [bullet train] and rode through Osaka on the train, and I thought, “Oh, this is fun.” But I’ve never seen the big stuff.

But it was interesting, because it was a whole ‘nother—to me, it was something that I’ve always wanted to do. And it was funny, because I’ve always, deep down, had this great fear of going to Japan, because several people had gone there. And if you talk to *hakujin*, they say, “Oh, you’ll have no problem in Japan. There’s enough English, enough people speak English, and people are really gracious, and there’s not a problem.” And I’ve talked to several Sanseis that went there, and they said, “If you don’t speak Japanese and you’re a Sansei, boy, you feel like dirt there, because people presume, if you don’t speak Japanese, what the heck are you doing here? Especially with your background.” You know, “Go learn it and come back after you can speak Japanese.” And so I thought, “Oh, great, I’m going to go there and feel like dirt.” So it was nice to have some people who could translate for me [laughs], and so I thought, “Okay, this is the chance I can go.”

My son, if he had been living there—he had lived there for the whole summer, and what he wanted to do was to really get immersed in being in Japan. Not with a program, like he had been before, but really just live there. So he lived with Yuki’s family, and he worked as a waiter at an Italian restaurant. Yuki’s boyfriend owned an Italian restaurant, so he worked as a waiter there, met a bunch of kids, went down to Odori Park and kind of hung out, and went to the clubs and all the drinking parties, and everything else. So, for him, that’s

what he really wanted to do, just find out what life in Japan is like for kids of his age. And I think that really worked out. And we just kind of were in there for one week while we were visiting there. So it turned out being really good, but it was kind of interesting to see the background part of it.

It was interesting to see Japan. The food part made me nuts. I loved it. I could spend whole days in the basement of the department stores just eating.

But you find that cultural difference, that there really is a big difference between—you may have the skin and the facial features, but your thinking is just not Japanese. You know, people never say you're wrong or people never say bad things about you, but you get that look. You're supposed to take your shoes off, and I kind of would walk up there and stand on the next step up and then sit down and take my shoes off and put them down. And my son says, "You don't put your shoes up there." "Well, I'm just sitting." "You don't put your shoes up there, you put them down here. You walk up there." And so I'd walk down there and I'd sit down there and put my shoes down, and he says, "You don't come down here off the floor in your stocking feet." And I said, "What do you do?" He says, "You walk on the shoes." And he said, "You don't bring your slippers down here either," he says, "You've got to keep them up there." And I thought, "Oh, okay."

And it's those things. And we had done that for several days, and Yuki's mom never said anything. And he says, "They never say anything to you. But they'll look at you. If you've ever seen when she looks at you, you know you're doing it wrong." "Oh, okay. You've got to clue me in on these things." So, to me, it was kind of—seeing kind of the backgrounds, the similarities. I'm definitely going to go back to Japan and see it.

Our minister is trying to put together a trip to go to Kyoto and kind of look at the Buddhist part—you know, live in the temple for a day or two, go see all the places, where [unclear] was born, a lot of the stuff there, and then kind of go on to the peripheral area. Hopefully, that'll come through, and that would be fun to do, from a real different perspective of Japan. I love to travel, so, to me, this is more of an adventure, but it's a different kind of an adventure.

I'm not sure if that helps you about OHSU [laughs].

[Reading] "Where was your first practice?" We talked about that. [Reading] "What was it like to be the boss?" It was interesting. You know, I finally found out how to use computers and how they work. And you'd have to be able to let go and let people—you know, that was one of my big things. You can do it well yourself. I think that's a very Japanese-y thing, you know, you can do it best yourself. It's hard to let anybody else do things for you and those types of things: how to delegate responsibility. Now that we're in a bigger office and have an office manager, you finally learn she can do some of those things, my nurse can do some of these things, and they're not going to screw up. And as long as you know they're on the same pathway, you'll be fine.

[Reading] "How about your first day of practice?" Actually, the first day of practice

was fun, because I was on the elevator, and this lady standing next to me in the elevator says, “Are you Dr. Ono?” And I said, “Yes.” And she says, “I thought you were that.” And I thought, “Oh, that’s the Japanese part again.” And she says, “Well, I’m your first patient. And she was, she was my first patient.” And I still see her. I see her daughter now, too. Rivers is twenty-five now—no, not that old yet. Rivers is twenty-three now. So I still see her mom, and it’s interesting. But it was fun. You kind of sit around for a while, and then you get going.

Dr. Durfee was the person I was with. The practice wasn’t in the Japanese community. Actually, there was some of that. I have several people from the temple that are patients, and I’ve delivered their kids. There is a program called *Hatsumairi*, you know, where the new babies come in. One of the *Hatsumairis*—when was it? One of the *Hatsumairis*, I think four of the babies there I delivered, and we were kind of going, “Oh, look at this.” I think there’s a picture, in fact, because Cathy was saying, “Look at this, you delivered all these kids.” And so, to a degree, your name gets out there in the community. The problem is, a lot of the Japanese are *Japanese* Japanese, and so they’re looking for somebody who speaks *Nihongo*. And so I have some people who come to you and then it’s kind of like, “I don’t speak *Nihongo*,” and they go, “Oh.” And then they kind of disappear after a while, and the like.

George Hara, I think, was the last local Japanese American person who really was bilingual—oh, Tom Ishi. Tom came from Japan, and he’s—where is Tom now? I think he’s in the military. He’s in California somewhere. And he came here—he had a subspecialty in oncology. He was fluent in Japanese. Cal doesn’t speak Japanese; Carol doesn’t. So, to that extent, they see you in the little Japanese community book, and they come and see you, and then it’s kind of like, “Oh, you don’t speak *Nihongo*.” So I keep thinking, well, I’m going to—so I learned a little bit and then we’re going to go to Japan and I can take some classes, and then it’s kind of like... I do better in Spanish than I can do with the Japanese, as far as the history goes.

So, you know, I’d like to feel I’m part of the community and involved with the Japanese-American community stuff, but...

[Reading] “Do you retain ties with OHSU?” Yeah. We used to have more residents down here. I’ve had an appointment as an associate clinical professor. When Speroff was up there, I got that appointment. And we see the residents, and so we do the stuff, and I go to most of the graduation banquets because we see the residents. But our role down here at Good Sam has gotten less and less, and the residents that we see at St. Vincent’s really are associated with the Kaiser guys, and we really don’t see them. So we’re seeing less and less of the residents than we did before. Before, up to about three years ago, we knew all the residents very well, because they came down here as an OB rotation, they came through here as a surgery rotation, so we saw everybody and got to know them well. They got to know us pretty well.

HIRUKI: What happened?

ONO: Well, what happened was that the amount of stuff that was going on here was—the residency review committee wanted the residents to spend more time on the Hill. Kaiser, when they moved to St. Vincent's, the volume at St. Vincent's got really huge, so they said they'd do better by having them out there. There's more stuff to do. So they moved a chunk of the residents out there. There's a few still at Emanuel, and we have two residents here who are third- and fourth-year residents who just do GYN. So we don't see them as much, and so our interaction with them is, unfortunately, less.

I still have fondness for the Medical School. And in our group [pauses]—yeah, Mike Collins is the only one in our group of six that didn't train at the Med School; he trained in South Carolina. One of the guys is from Tennessee, and Ted trained here; and I'm from Minnesota, and I trained here; Michelle is local, and she trained here; and Tim's from Minneapolis, and he trained here; Linda's from Hawaii, and she trained here. So all of us have kind of gone through the program and stuck around.

And I think it's a pretty popular area, this area, to come, as far as the residents who want to stay, but I think our notoriety is dissipating as we're involved less and less with them. It'll be interesting, now that Paul Kirk is stepping down, that we all know pretty well, with the new chair. Our connection with OHSU may be less just because the new chair doesn't know us and, you know, we, I don't think, will know him as well as we've known Paul and Bissonette and those people at the Med School. It'll be interesting what happens.

HIRUKI: How will that affect you, do you think?

ONO: I don't think—you know, it's fun working with the residents, and that, and it would be a sad thing not to be involved with residents; on the other hand, there's a point where it's kind of like, oh, well, just kind of move on.

[Reading] “Do you maintain ties with your classmates?” Really, I don't. There are a few. Dave Olson, the guy that I kept talking about that was next to me all the time, is in Yakima, and we see Dave once in a while, and his wife. But I even went back to my medical school twenty-year class reunion, and I came home and kind of went, “No big deal.” I mean, it wasn't like high school. The people that I wanted to see weren't around; some of the people that I really liked had left the Minnesota area and were scattered all around and didn't come back. And, you know, you know everybody, but there are people you really like to see and people you just kind of, “Hi, how are you.” It was kind of interesting to talk to people, but I don't feel any real strong connections.

There are a fair number of people who trained at Minnesota who are out here in practice, but I don't see any real strong connections. I mean, I go back there because there's a good friend of ours who works on campus, and so I go back to campus—more of the undergraduate kind of stuff, still, of the few people that I know from when we were undergrads at Minnesota that we still see when we go back, look them up when we go back to Minneapolis, and that stuff. I think if we were in Minneapolis you'd certainly probably have some strong ties. To me, OHSU is kind of like the medical school I want to be tied to. I see these people because it's local, and that kind of stuff.

I don't see any of my kids going to OHSU. I don't think they're ever going to go into medicine.

HIRUKI: How do you feel about that?

ONO: Actually, to me, I think medicine is fun and I think medicine is interesting, but I think medicine, as far as physicians go, is changing; and I think there are better things out there that they can do. Looking at what they are good at—they are both really good writers and they're very verbal. They're both doing well in their schools, and I think they have a real different look on things. They're not scientists, for sure. To them, they're more social scientists or people-interaction kind of folks, so I don't see them in medicine.

And, to me, medicine right now is kind of up in the air. I mean, you'd almost do better as a nurse practitioner than you would becoming a physician, unless you do what you've done [Pathology to Medical Informatics] and find a different niche. But straight clinical medicine, you may end up just being nine to five, punch the clock, see the people who walk in your clinic. And, to me, the part of medicine that's fun is the business that, I still see the first lady I delivered, and she still comes to see me, and I know her daughter. And that long-term kind of—you know these people, you feel connected with them, and I think that's what makes it worth all the trouble.

And if it was like the two years that I was in the Army, where you just go to a clinic and you just see everybody that comes through and then you work on labor and delivery every fourth night and you deliver everybody who walks in the next twenty-four hours, you know, it's kind of interesting from a medical perspective, it's fun, but the long-term kind of—and I think this is probably getting old fashioned now. The long-term kind of relationship of the doctor and patient is dissipating. And whatever way it's going, I think it's going to be a thing of the past, which would be a shame.

So I think there can be more rewarding things out there, or a different niche if you wanted to get into medicine, become a medicine technician [laughs] and not spend all that money and all that time.

[Reading] “What part of your work are you proudest of?” Actually, all of it. To me, it's been really rewarding. The obstetrical part has been really fun. Now we're seeing some of these kids back as they're taking off for high school and college, and so you see that you didn't do brain damage when you delivered them. It just kind of that people feel good and people know about you. I think our group has a pretty good reputation in town as far as in the Portland area, and so I think that that's nice. It makes you feel that it's all been worthwhile and it's kind of paid off in the community.

And now, you know, we always used to think, “Will we ever go back to Minneapolis?” and now I really think we're probably not going to; Portland is where we're going to be. When my white ashes get thrown around, then I'll be buried someplace out here, probably the temple. My wife says, “When I go,” she says, “They're going to go out to the

Pacific Ocean and throw them off the dock.” But we still probably would be here. I don’t think the kids would ever go back to Minneapolis.

HIRUKI: Before we go to the last page of questions, could you say a few words about Dr. Hara, another Portland Japanese American OB-GYN physician?

ONO: Yes. I’ve known George for a while. He’s kind of, from what I understand, kind of the wunderkind of this town. He did very well; I guess he did well in athletics and was a school leader in high school and everything else, and went to camp and came back out and went to medical school, and did well and is pretty well known in the Japanese community. So when I came here, he was kind of up and cruising. He’s always been by himself or with one other person, I think, so he’s never really expanded into anything. He’s done obstetrics, he’s done gynecology. He’s this kind of laid-back kind of guy. That’s probably my best description.

HIRUKI: What is his standing as a Japanese American physician in the Japanese American community?

ONO: I think a lot of the people in the community know him, and I think he’s delivered a lot of people, and that kind of stuff. He’s done okay for himself. He’s done some pretty crazy things. I’ve looked at some of his cases, and, ooh.

And he’s stayed active in the community. I mean, one of the things that we used to see in Minneapolis is that there was, again, that little core that kind of stuck together and did *shogatsu* and everything else, but there was another group that you find out that are out there who are kind of disconnected from the community. And it’s kind of like, “I’m not Japanese, I’m an American, period,” and really have no connections. And I think some of it is they have nothing to hook onto and, you know, if you had a meat and potatoes family, you’d never learn about *gohan* [rice] and *hashi* [chopsticks] and all that other stuff. But some of it is, I think, “I just don’t want to be like this, you know, I want to be like everybody else. How can I blend in there?”

And I think it’s easier for *Nihonjin* to kind of blend in. Although, my dad used to say when he was growing up—when he was in California when he was a young male, he said people—oh, I know, it was Minneapolis. When he came out, he started working for Chevrolet, and he worked for a big car company in Minneapolis called Downtown Chevrolet. He worked there for, like, thirty-something years before he retired. He said he went out once with a bunch of guys, and this guy came up and says, “Oh, look at this Jap,” and decided to really give him a bad time, and they said, “No, this guy’s Mexican.” “Oh, okay.” And he left him alone.

He was telling me this once, and I said, “Mexican?” And he says, “Oh, yeah.” He says, “Even in California, some people thought I was Mexican.” And he says, “It’s safer. I saved myself, because if you’re a Jap, they’re going to get you.” And we were laughing, because my son, who’s *Hapa*, if you look at him right, he looks like he’s Mexican, too.

And the latest thing we were laughing about is my cousin, her son's dad is Mexican, and she's Japanese, and her son looks really—he looks more Japanese, and I thought, this is an interesting *Hapa* mix. When you mix a Japanese and a Mexican together, they really still look Asian, because they always have the little slant in their eyes and enough of their skin color and their features. He looks like he would—he doesn't even look *Hapa*. And he's three, and they all came over and visited us this summer for a while, and we were talking to them, and she says, "He doesn't consider himself Japanese." She says, "In fact, if you mention it, he'll say, 'No, I'm Mexican.'" She says he doesn't like Japanese food, he loves—and Sacramento has all these little taco places and stuff like this. He loves Mexican food. She says he has no association with—even though all the relatives are and it's pretty obvious that he's Japanese.

I thought, "Well, that's an interesting twist." I said, "He probably will—he'll grow up hoping to get away with it, he'll look like it."

HIRUKI: You mentioned earlier you had done some oral history work. Would you talk a bit about that?

ONO: Yes. The oral history stuff that I've done is—actually, some of it was being on your side of the table, you know, asking some of the Isseis and some of the Niseis to give you some background stuff so you could get some more background about what's what.

The temple was doing some stuff, although I'm not a really big part of the temple because I didn't grow up there. I've only been there since—well, since Sarah was five. And so I've seen some of the progress of what's happened with the temple, that people have talked about, some of the things that you've seen that have happened, and the like. But, for me, it's a real limited window, as opposed to people who—Jean Matsumoto, who grew up in there, who's dad was active in the temple and was the president, and so, for them, that's been their whole life, in that particular temple. And that's where some of the oral history stuff has been.

But I think people are doing the same thing. They're trying to get the people before they are too old or before they pass away and get some more of the background stuff. I mean, it's like my kids asking my folks some of the background about camp. There is really a rich background of stuff back there that I don't have the vaguest idea, and I've either, out of embarrassment or whatever it is, never asked them, and they certainly have never volunteered it. So it's kind of like a third party, my kids, going and just really kind of quizzing.

My son wrote a paper for an ethnic studies class on my uncle, and, basically, he told about his growing up in California...

[End of Tape 2, Side 1/Begin Tape 2, Side 2]

HIRUKI: This is a continuation of an interview with Dr. Alfred K. Ono for the Oregon Health Sciences University Oral History Project. We were just talking about things

learned through oral history in the Japanese-American community.

ONO: So, you know, it's interesting, because I think I learned more about my parents through other people doing the same type of oral history thing. And he wrote this paper about my uncle, how he met my aunt, who is my mother's sister, some of the things that happened with the gardening business. He used to take care of gardens in Palo Alto and in Atherton, and saw some pretty [unclear] places. And when I was little, he used to say, "Do you want to go out and swim in the pool? The people are gone." So we used to go to these people's houses, and the maid would let us in, and we'd go sit in the pool and kind of do this stuff, and everything else. So it was really interesting to expand my knowledge of my family through some of this stuff.

So, to me, the oral history stuff is kind of—I have to sit down and think about my thoughts and also to see other people doing it and kind of see what other people's experiences are. I think it's important.

I helped participate in a group. It's called the—what's it called? There's a group down at Lewis & Clark, and they do this thing for Asian students, Asian high school students. They're mostly Southeast Asian students now. I was in a group of about seventeen students, and we were talking about their history. And for some of these kids there is some of that, "I'm not Asian;" and for some of them it's kind of like, "I'm Asian because I have to eat lunch with all the other Asian kids at the high school;" and for some of them it's kind of like, "I'm only here, but I'm not American, I don't see myself as American, and I would actually go back to"—China, or whatever—"and feel that that's part of me," which is the prejudice that started the whole relocation thing: that if it came down to the crunch, "All you Japanese would become Japanese spies, and you'd all go back to Japan rather than be loyal Americans." So it's interesting, for some people, how they see their Asian-ness that's still there.

HIRUKI: You talked a bit earlier about differences between Oregon and Minnesota. Could you maybe expand that?

ONO: It's different, because I think Oregon probably had a bigger Japanese population. They definitely had a *Nihonmachi* [Japantown]. It was down where Front Street is now, and, I guess, Jean [Matsumoto] said the Marriott Hotel was where her dad's store was, or something like that. And I think it went down along First or Front Street down to Burnside, and, then, at Burnside it became Chinatown. And so that area is all totally gone now. So there was a real denser, so to speak, Japanese community before the war.

Before the war in Minneapolis, I think it was just kind of—if there were people around, a few scattered things. So my parents and their friends are kind of the real pioneers. So a lot of stuff I never remembered, being a little kid, or looking at photographs and seeing this kind of stuff. So the Japanese community in Minneapolis, I think, is really kind of a put-together thing. They don't have generations of people there, or something like that. It really started after the war with people just kind of keeping it going. And they've got some pretty involved people in there who are now—my sister is involved with the Taiko [Japanese

drumming] group there. A good friend of ours, who just passed away, got involved in Aquatennial, which is like the Rose Festival here, and got involved with it when he and my dad—they were best friends, and they actually had a float, and the first float they put in, they won a prize. And so they did a few more years of the floats, and then Chester got on the judging committee and became very involved with the Aquatennial after that.

So there are some people who were kind of the pioneers of getting inroads of the Japanese community into Minneapolis, but it isn't as solid as Oregon, which I see as more—you can see several generations of people who have been around here, even before the war and after the war, and some of the farmers out in East County and some of those folks, and the like. So I think it's a deeper community as far as what's done and what's been happening and, probably, to a degree, the size of it. And I see myself as kind of jumping on as part of it but don't have the big investment in it like the local folks do.

HIRUKI: Does that affect community dynamics at all?

ONO: I think to a degree it does. I mean, this lady, Jean Matsumoto, who is at the temple and is kind of like the walking history book: if you ever want to know who's related to who and what's happened there, you ask Jean, and she knows all this stuff. She worked at OHSU for a long time. She worked with Dr. Metcalfe in the Cardiology Department, so she knows a lot of the cardiologists, most of the OB-GYN fellows who went through the cardiology rotation there with Metcalfe. She was around when I was a resident up there, and so our paths crossed, and so we have a lot of people to talk about and laugh about who have since gone on to do really pretty big stuff in cardiology and obstetrics and that kind of stuff. But Jean is one of these people who grew up and really kind of knows the community. But I think that once people get into it, you get into it, and I think—you know, you don't see it, but there is that background every once in a while. We have all these relatives that were related to this person or related to that person, and that kind of stuff. And for us, we were kind of interested, and we had the common linkage, and that makes it fun.

HIRUKI: You mentioned how your name Ono was a help in political campaigns in high school.

ONO: It's memorable. I mean, not only when you're one of the five Japanese, or even Asians in your high school, but when you do things, you know, with a name like Ono, people remember. So between that and your physical characteristics, it's kind of like, "Oh, yeah, I know who you are." And so just so you don't screw up badly, I guess, is the thing.

It's funny, because people presume that with a name as short as Ono that you're Chinese. You know, they think, "Well, I thought Japanese names were all long and complicated." And we go, "No, they're not complicated, you pronounce all the vowels correctly and you pronounce everything, but not they're not necessarily—and it's polysyllabic. There's two syllables in it, so it's Japanese." Or people ask you, "How do you spell your name?" and you go, "O-n-o." And they go, "That's it?" "That's it" [laughs].

My daughter worked with a thing called the Tibetan—the Milarepa Foundation for

several summers. It's all the "Free Tibet" stickers, and everything else. And she was one of the organizers of a thing called the Tibetan Freedom Festival Concert. It was a big rock 'n roll fund raiser that they did in San Francisco, and they've done several since that time. And she met Yoko Ono, and she said, "Oh, you're"—she said she's kind of crazy, but, she said, oh, they got all excited, because she said, "Maybe we're related." And I thought, "Oh, that would be wonderful if we're related to Yoko Ono" [laughs]. So it's one of those names that has associations.

And that's one of the other things that I've found out. People say, "Your name is Ono," and—or, you talk to them, and gee, they talk about Ono, and they say, "So how do you spell it? What's your kanji [Chinese characters]?" "It's just Ono." No, no, there's a whole bunch of—like my son, all the kids—I'm Kazuo, and all my kids have Japanese names, like Sachiko and Akira, and people would say, "What Akira kanji?" And I go, "Akira, you know, like the movie director." "What's that?" So I think there's, like, eight kanji for Akira, or something like that. So we had to go find out what kanji. Okay, what kanji is he? There are some really good ones, but there are some really awful ones too. So I can't remember which one it is.

The other thing that's interesting is that—it came indirectly through the practice, and all that stuff. I've got a patient whose sister worked for the *New York Times*, and she said, "My sister's doing a piece"—was writing a book about growing up Jewish. She and her sister both married into Jewish families. They grew up in Salem. And it's interesting, because they look like they're Jewish, and everything else. And, actually, they have the mannerisms, and I think some of them they picked up since they married Jewish guys.

But she says, "She's writing a book about becoming Jewish, so to speak, and she's writing a piece—or, there's a thing coming out in the *Times* about religion in America, and she wants to write a piece about an interreligious family, and I told her about you guys, and she heard about you when I tell her about deliveries, and all this other stuff. She's going to be in town. Can she come and talk to you?" So we went and talked to her, and she says, "You're just what I want." She says, "It's an interracial, interreligious family, your kids are old enough"—both the kids were—Alistair was in Berkeley and I think Sarah was graduated by that time and back home. And she says, "Your kids are old enough and they have a vision of what's happened to them, being brought up in this environment." She says, "Can I interview you?"

So she came over and interviewed us several times; went out to Berkeley and interviewed my son; and then interviewed each one of us separately. So there's an article about our family in the *New York Times* that came out about four years ago now. It was a Sunday *Times* in December of—oh, shoot. It must have been '97, '96 or something like that. It's called "Religion in America." A big red cover. And if you look it up, there's an article and a picture of our family in there. So we've kind of handed out copies, and it's amazing the people who have seen this, you know, even later on, and have said, "Oh, I saw the article about your family in the *Times*." It's amazing, people read the *New York Times* all over the place.

Oh, a memorable part of that was that the day that—she had sent us a copy of the article like a week before it came to press, and we read it, and it was kind of, “Oh, my gosh.” So we said, “We should go out and get some copies of the *Times*.” So we were down at the bookstore, and we were walking through the bookstore and getting copies of the *Times*, and this lady comes up and says, “Are the you the family in the picture?” And I said, “Yep.” She said, “Is your name Ono?” And we go, “Yep.” “I just read about you in the *Times*. I recognized your”—and I think seeing my wife and myself together, it probably is kind of ‘boink’, and so I thought, “Well, there’s that thing again, they can pick you out in a crowd.”

HIRUKI: I guess you probably have to get going pretty soon; was that your pager?

ONO: Yes.

HIRUKI: Just a quick thing about your army experience. I know a lot has been made of the Japanese American veterans who fought World War II. How do you think your experience compared with what you know about theirs?

ONO: It certainly is nothing like the 442. I mean, the 442 had a whole other thing beyond just being, you know, there. I mean, it was kind of like—I mean, people still use it as an example of the way to prove yourself, and all this other stuff. A very well decorated organization, very well known, and all this other stuff. So it certainly wasn’t that experience.

The Vietnam War was over, which I was happy about, and a lot of the regular army guys had all been overseas and been in Vietnam. We were with the First Division, which was one of these really decorated divisions that was in Europe in World War II, was in World War I. So you go down to the headquarters and there are all these campaign ribbons, and it’s interesting to read about them. But they were in Vietnam, and most of these guys—the regular army guys had been in Vietnam, and so you’d get all kinds of stories, and that kind of stuff.

I don’t think there was anything prejudicial. I think the nice thing about the Army that I learned was that it’s the ultimate bureaucracy, serving in the army. Because I had finished a residency and I had a long enough time, I went in as a major, so if you go in as a field grade, they treat you pretty well. I mean, you get nice housing, and, you know, the pay was reasonable. And you’re among all other—and we lived on-post, so we didn’t—we decided if we’re going to do this, let’s do the whole thing, so we lived on-post. So our whole block was all majors, and so it was just actually kind of fun to listen to their stories and stuff. You know, they would think we’re really strange because we don’t know how to put our stuff on, the uniform, correctly. “Oh, you’re a doctor.”

But I mean, the army was intriguing. I don’t think I would spend my lifetime in it. And that’s what makes me scared about medicine. I mean, I could see medicine becoming like the army, very kind of just rubber-stamped. Fill out the forms, do all the stuff, and that kind of thing. Oh, my gosh, if that’s what it came to, it certainly wouldn’t be fun anymore.

HIRUKI: How do you feel about the situation of Japanese Americans in America

today, and your personal place?

ONO: I think there are two things, and one of them is the position that I—remember, I talked about that conference with the high school kids. I think there are two things that I see. One, I think Japanese Americans are fairly well settled in the United States as far as their position among other ethnic races, and, you know, Asian-ism is kind of in, and everything else, other than the incident in Detroit where, you know, supposedly those car guys killed this guy, who was Chinese, because, you know, “You’re taking our jobs away.”

HIRUKI: Vincent Chin.

ONO: Yeah. So, you know, you can’t be complacent.

I think some people refer back too much to the relocation in the war, and all this other stuff, and it’s kind of like, “Oh, poor us.” But I think the redress was interesting, and I think they did the right thing, that, you know, if you hadn’t been there, anyone still alive, that you really didn’t get any redress, because I think it’s not for the future relatives, I think it’s for the people who actually went through the thing. So my mother and dad got redress money. And my sister would have gotten it if she were alive.

But I think, you know, to a degree there may be some prejudice against Japanese, or at least when Japan was really booming economically and was going to be the power that they were, that I think there was concern about that. But like I said before, I really disassociated myself with *Japanese* Japanese. They’re as different to me as Germans or, you know, South Africans or something like that. I mean, it’s a different world, and I’m not part of that world. All I look is physically the same.

I think the Japanese and Chinese communities are kind of matured and really pretty settled, and I think this term of ‘Asian’ now has kind of spread around. And that may have goods and bads, because I think the Japanese and Chinese community is pretty settled and kind of knows where things go and how to play the system, and everything else, and I think it’s the new Asian community, the Southeast Asian community, the Vietnamese, the Cambodians, and some of this other stuff that are really still kind of up and still are concerned about their ethnicity and the bilingual parents and some of those things that are still kind of at issues, you know, Asian gangs and some of these things. So I see them as probably back right after the war, around there were my parents were the Niseis, around as the new kids on the block.

And so I think there is that difference when people talk about Asians, that the experience of Japanese and Chinese now, as opposed to Southeast Asians, some of those things, I think they’re seeing a real difference in where they are and how they fit in, economically and acceptance-wise. So there are real differences among Asians.

HIRUKI: It is wrong to paint them all with the same brush, I guess.

ONO: Yes.

HIRUKI: What advice would you have for today's and future generations of Japanese Americans?

ONO: My advice, I think—and I've told my kids this, too. I don't think it's something that you can blow off, because if nothing else, there are enough physical characteristics that you're going to stand out. I mean, there are some people who kind of go—you know, it was funny, because there was some minority scholarship money, and I said, "I'm going to apply for that." And I went down there, and they said, "This is only for minorities," and I said, "I'm a minority." And they go, "You are?" "Yeah." And they go, "Oh, I guess—oh, no, you guys don't get it; this is for African Americans and Indians." I said, "Well, we're considered minorities in other things." "Oh, you guys do okay already," you know, and that kind of stuff. So there is some of that feeling that, okay, "You guys do okay enough already." And so you're kind of washed into the everyday thing with everybody else.

HIRUKI: The honorary white.

ONO: Yes. The honorary white, pseudo-kind of minority. But I think there are enough characteristics that when things happen, you really stand out, and I think there's enough differences that I think are there. You know, they talk about fusion foods, you know, and now everybody knows about sushi and *gohan* and *hashi* and all this other stuff. But I think still there is a difference there, and when it gets down to the nitty-gritty, such as getting married, I think there is—I mean, what is it, over half the Japanese community is mixed now, and they figure it'll probably be very much integrated, unless you live in L.A. or something like that, as far as that goes. But I think when it gets down to real family things, there is some real family stuff that's still around.

They claim that by the fourth generation or fifth generation ethnic things really kind of disappear and people kind of get blended in. But to me, one, the physical characteristics will always keep us separated, and, number two, I think there's enough interesting background things that I would hate to see it kind of washed over or lost in the whole scheme of things. So, to me, I think that the ethnicity part, the Japanese-American part, I think is still important enough. I hope it doesn't get lost, because I think there's something unique about it, and everybody needs a little bit of uniqueness to them.

HIRUKI: Is there anything that we covered that you'd like to expand on?

ONO: I think I've kind of yacked enough [laughter].

HIRUKI: Is there anything I didn't bring up that you would like to talk about?

ONO: Not that I can think of. I hope this is useful. I mean, this is a bunch of stuff for me, but...

HIRUKI: Oh, one other thing. You mentioned the Chinese medicines and that sort of

thing. Is that an interest on your part?

ONO: I'm kind of fascinated with it, but I don't know that much about it, and the stuff that I know about it is very peripheral. I mean, there's the stuff that my mother used to do about some of the things. And the stuff that Mr. Wong used to do, he said, "I don't know the words for it in English." And this was before Chinese medicine became really popular. So, you know, he'd tell me what it is in Chinese and what it's supposed to do. About the only thing that I really have kind of remembered from all this stuff is all the stuff with ginseng and some of those things.

It's fascinating. And I think Asian medicine and Asian religions—I think people are finding that it isn't something mysterious and crazy, but there is some basis to it. Pharmacologically there probably is some basis to some of the things that we do. And, you know, philosophically, I think there is something about a non-deity kind of world and religions. Not necessarily personal responsibility, but acceptance of what people are, and that stuff. A different philosophy, the Eastern philosophy as opposed to Western philosophy. So to that, I find it intriguing as far as healing goes and medicine goes.

HIRUKI: Would you say you're able to use it in your day-to-day practice?

ONO: I think it influences—hopefully, what it does is it influences my patience with patients, you know. Understanding why people are different and some people may be crazy, or something like that. To a degree, it kind of makes illness and dying, I won't say not hard, but, I mean, it doesn't—it isn't kind of God's will, and that kind of stuff. To me, it's kind of that's the process that happens, that's change that happens, and you have to understand that. And you can kind of put it into, not escapism, but put it into really what's happening. It doesn't—it's not unfair, it's kind of that's how things move, how things happen.

HIRUKI: And as an obstetrician, I guess you are present when life begins and potentially ends, as well.

ONO: Right.

HIRUKI: How do you feel in that situation?

ONO: It's very exciting, definitely. I feel really privileged, being in medicine like I have, because we get to delve into—one lady told me, she says, "You probably know more about me than my husband does." And I said, "Well, to some degree, I think I do." Because I have some patients I started with when they were teenagers or twenties and have gone through their kids and several husbands and everything else, and boyfriends and moving and jobs and everything else, so some of these people you really do know them fairly intimately. So to me, that's a real privilege, being a part of some of these people's lives. So that makes it very unique. Some day I may go sit down and write my memoirs, but I'm kind of like, "Naahh."

HIRUKI: Well, this will be a record that you can refer to [laughter].

ONO: It'll be interesting to go back and go, "Did I say that?" [laughter].

HIRUKI: Well, thank you very much for doing this. I think we covered a lot of ground and I learned a lot today.

ONO: Good. Thank you.

HIRUKI: Thank you very much.

[End of interview]

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