

VLADIMIR NICHOLAS OSSIPOFF

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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(1907 - )

Val Ossipoff, one of Hawaii's leading architects, reminisces about his early childhood in Russia and Japan where his father was stationed for many years. He tells of his multilingual upbringing, his education, and his vivid memories of the 1923 Tokyo-Yokohama earthquake.

Following this experience, the family moved to California where Mr. Ossipoff graduated from Berkeley High School and the University of California, Berkeley, majoring in architecture. He recalls many of the part-time jobs he held during this period and the lasting friendships that began then.

After his move to Hawaii in the early 1930s, Mr. Ossipoff worked with several local architects before opening his own firm in 1936. He discusses some of his firm's projects and recalls several of his prominent clients.

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INTERVIEW WITH VLADIMIR NICHOLAS OSSIPOFF

At his office 1210 Ward Avenue, Honolulu, Hawaii

March 17, 1986

O: Vladimir Ossipoff

S: Alice Sinesky, Interviewer

S: Is there anything in particular that you remember about your childhood in Russia, wasn't it? Your first ten years were spent there?

O: Actually, I was born in Vladivostok in 1907, November 25. Two years were spent there. Why was I there? My father was a colonel in the Russian Imperial Army and he, for some reason or other, was studying Far Eastern diplomacy, I guess you would call it, because he was then on his way to the--I believe it was the Far Eastern Institute in Khabarovsk and on his way there he met my mother in Kyakhta near Lake Baikal in Siberia. How they happened to meet--how they happened to get married--I have no idea.

As a result of that marriage, I was born in Vladivostok. I don't remember anything about it except one small anecdote. I was riding, bundled up in furs I suppose, in a tarantass. A tarantass is sort of a plebian, crude carriage, like half a barrel, horsedrawn. I was then two or under and the street was very, very bumpy--sufficiently so that I was bumped right out of the thing into the mud. That's all I remember about Vladivostok. (laughs)

S: Do you remember if you were with your mother? Probably.

O: I don't know. The thing that one can remember from those days is the smell of the driver and the horse. Well, it's cold and the driver's bundled up and he sweats and the horses sweat and it evolves in a particular odor which strangely enough is something one can remember. So much for that. What next?

S: Where did you move to from there?

O: Father was attached to the military attache in Japan and we travelled back and forth between Japan and Petrograd,

oh, three or four or five times on the Trans-Siberian. [The city known as St. Petersburg from 1703 until 1914 became Petrograd until 1924 and is now Leningrad.]

S: Did you have brothers and sisters? Were you the eldest?

O: I'm the eldest. I didn't have any brothers and sisters then. I had them later. On the Trans-Siberian two things stand out; one, of course, was the huge driving wheel of the locomotive--at least it looked huge to a small child. The other thing I remember is when we were stopping somewhere, there would be peasant women who would bring to the train windows not baskets, but containers made of birch bark full of berries and things like that, mushrooms perhaps.

Another memory of the Trans-Siberian was--you know the Trans-Siberian took about six or seven days to cross--I remember lying in the bunk and seeing a lantern over the door to the compartment with a flickering candle in it. Something that stayed in my memory. Another time when the train was on its way to the Crimea, I think, it came to an abrupt halt. It had hit a cow on the tracks. Silly things to remember.

S: It's surprising when people start going back over the years they come out with these and they say, "Oh, I hadn't thought about that for years." And as you say, it's inconsequential things, but obviously they made some impression on us in our youth.

O: We also, it must have been in a horse-drawn carriage, went to my father's birthplace in the Caucasus on a very tortuous road, because the Caucasus are pretty steep mountains as you know. There was a place there where we stopped and picked capers which were growing wild. Capers are little flower buds on the bush. Another place was called Pronessi nass Gospodi, which translates into, "God, carry (or take) us through." The thing is there's a big overhanging rock or something under which one has to pass--that particular spot was called that. That's all I remember about that.

One of the times we were in Petrograd I remember being pulled on a small sled by my mother to a nearby park where I used to--what do you do on a sled--when you slide down?

S: You go sled riding.

O: Sled riding. (laughs) Well, we're talking about a little child's sled. I remember that affair. This is sort of out of sequence, but the address was something or other Furshtatskaya. About twenty-five years ago when Bill Ewing [William H. Ewing] was still the editor of the Star-Bulletin, he organized a group of about twenty or so people

from here to go to Russia. When we were in what is now Leningrad, I tried to find that address. That was sort of interesting because no one knew--no one had heard of that street until I talked to the doorman late at night once, who was old enough to remember it and said, "It's not called that anymore, it's called so and so."

I took a streetcar, the next day I guess it was, looking for it, found the street and it had a parkway down the center. People were sitting on benches there sunning themselves so I spoke to them and asked if this was such and such a street. Yes, it was. But I don't remember it having this parkway. Oh, the parkway's been here always. I said, "I'm talking about fifty years ago." Oh well, they didn't know.

Another childhood recollection is riding a horse-drawn carriage and being in the backseat. The streets were covered with hard-packed snow so this was a sled rather than a carriage, but a nice one. As it turned the corner it slid sideways, and I can remember those in the carriage--not me personally--stopping the slide by bracing themselves against another horse-drawn cart which was full of bales of hay.

Another little thing I remember. The Neva River was frozen over and I remember people out on the river sawing through it--blocks of ice. I guess that's fairly common, but I don't think I've ever seen it since then.

S: Were they going to fish there?

O: No, they were taking the blocks of ice--what for I don't know. I remember being in Moscow and the Tsar Kolokol--it's called the Tsar's Bell. It's a big, big fellow which we saw in 1925 and it's still today big. It's so big that it tore itself loose from the top and a big hunk of it has broken off. Along it stands a big cannon and cannon balls about a foot and a half in diameter. I don't know that it ever fired, but there it was. What else do I remember?

S: What about your early education?

O: Well, we're coming to that. I remember something called a fortuchka. A fortuchka was a single, small pane in a window, which was hinged. It was cold, you see, and these were big windows. I think they were double-glazed and they were fixed, but for ventilation you opened just that little single pane. I remember it wasn't more than eight by twelve, nine by fourteen, a little thing.

I don't know what year this was. 1914? 1916? We were in Petrograd then when the Revolution--oh, before that--we'll come back to that. When the first great war broke out, my father was sent back immediately to Japan. We were going back to Japan and I remember very well the train

crossing Siberia when we came to--what do you call those things when the tracks separate and come together again so trains can pass each other--there's a name for them--not a siding, but something like that. I remember very well trains going the other way--flat cars with soldiers going to the front singing. Somehow I've always been spared the direct horrors of war.

In Petrograd there was a two-story, large, I guess what you'd call today a shopping center, a shopping mall, a series of shops on the ground floor and the second floor. What was it called? Torgovy Dom. That translated literally would mean Trading House. As a kid, I got lost in it, but I guess I was found. (laughs) It was a big place to get lost in then. Today--we saw it on our last trip and it doesn't seem too huge, but it seemed huge to a small child.

Crossing from some place in the Caucasus, crossing the Black Sea to Crimea, I ate a lot of cherries. The sea was rough and I was very, very sick. (laughs) In Odessa we went to a small zoo, I guess it was. There was a monkey in a cage and I was feeding it straws and the straw kept breaking off so my hand was getting closer and closer to the cage. The monkey finally grabbed it and pulled it in and bit it. I still have the scar on the little finger of my left hand. I was taken to a pharmacist, an apothecary, who put iodine on it and said what a brave little boy I was. But everybody says that to a little boy.

Well, that just about does it. Oh no, no, no. I remember spending a summer at my grandfather's place, my mother's father. Her maiden name was Bushueff B-U-S-H-U-E-F-F. He looked very much like Leo Tolstoy--the same kind of shirt, you know, the beard. He was a nice guy, very nice. Nice simple house. A nice man. There were some reeds growing in a marsh near there and he used to make me whistles out of those reeds.

In those days there weren't as many people in the world. It was more open. There was lots of room for everybody. I remember there being an open meadow on which there was something on the order of a maypole, a big one, from the top of which were suspended half a dozen or more stout ropes ending in a--something which looks like a horse collar. I was too small to be using it, but the young men and young women would put one leg through that horse collar and run with it, and it was called the Giant's Steps because you would fly out around and around, touching the ground at what seemed like great intervals. I forget what it was called in Russian. That was a very nice time, very pleasant.

I remember another time--I don't know where. You know, drinking tea is the national pastime and samovars were

sometimes started outdoors with pine cones and we used to try and throw them so they would go down the samovar's funnel. Funny things you remember. Another time I was left with--my parents were going some place, I suppose--so some bachelor or other was baby-sitting me and I wet my pants. That didn't phase him at all. He took my undershorts off and put them over the samovar to dry them out.

S: A very practical baby-sitter.

O: I think that's about all the anecdotes that I can remember. I wish I were like Nabokov, you know. What's his book Memories Speak or Speak Memory. [Speak, Memory: an Autobiography Revisited by Vladimir Nabokov] Wonderful. Okay, so much for that. As I said, at the age of two I went to Japan and so here begin my memories of Japan.

You were asking about my education and I was too young at the age of two, too small for schooling in Russia. My first school was called the Tokyo Foreign School, which later changed its name to the American School of Japan. In between the two eras, I went to St. Joseph's College run by French priests in Yokohama. They were very strict. They used to have little switches at the desk and used to switch the kids' legs--switch them about the legs--not very hard.

I was boarding there and one of the things I had to do at dinner was go up and have my cod liver oil. Weekends I used to take the train from Yokohama to Tokyo. My folks were still living there. On one of those trips when I was in Tokyo I broke down--I guess that's what happened--I didn't want to go back and my parents let me stay. I guess that's when I went back to the American School of Japan.

S: Now could I ask you--you were a young Russian boy in Japan being taught by French priests--what language did they use in the school? St. Joseph's?

O: English. Yes, it was English. I'm not the only one from St. Joseph's, by the way, here. I think Phil Bickel is from--no, he's not from St. Joseph's. He's from the American School of Japan.

S: So you spoke English. There was no problem.

O: As I say, I went to Japan when I was two and that was too early for school so probably my first language was Japanese. Well, my first language could have been Russian. I don't know--I suppose--we had Japanese nurses around us. And I was playing with Japanese kids.

S: (laughs) You just spoke what everybody around you was speaking, in other words. Children are amazing like that. They have the faculty for doing that.

O: Well, on that schooling business. It wasn't until 1923 that I came to California. I remember living in a two-story Japanese house with a Japanese garden, a small garden. Like all Japanese houses, it had a fence around it, a wooden fence. In that small Japanese garden I learned how to ride a bicycle. The garden suffered.

I had a nice dog--sort of a terrier. The school was quite a ways from where we lived, 33 Hikawa-cho. It was another house, a three-story Occidental house, not a Japanese house. The school was on the outskirts of Tokyo. I remember canals, barges on the canals. You went there by street car and then somehow or other--I don't know how we got to the school. Anyway, that dog ran after me on the street car and spent the whole day under my desk. He was just a mongrel, but he was a good dog. A very good dog. Silly little anecdotes. Is that all right?

S: That's fine. Anything about your schoolmates, your playmates?

O: That will come. Coming back home from school I used to take the streetcar and get off at the station--I don't remember the name of the station--and often take the rickshaw from where the streetcar stopped to the house itself. I remember the open--I guess they weren't sewers, but they were ditches--on each side of the street. Used to see rats running up and down those things. Then they'd duck into the sewer lines going up to the houses.

The three-story house that we lived in had what we now call lanais, but they were then verandas, enclosed, and my father got two or three monkeys and turned one of those verandas into a monkey house, which I don't think lasted too long because they were very smelly.

S: I bet you fed those very carefully.

O: I remember we had them, but I don't remember any anecdotes attached to them. The kitchen was on the ground floor; the dining room on the second. There was a manually propelled dumb waiter between the two floors. There was a wooden shaft maybe two feet or so square. I remember climbing down the shaft from upstairs.

I remember a concert pianist, Vinogradof, coming to our house one time and playing the piano and I know the tune very well--I know the piece very well--but I can't think of its name. It's still played by concert pianists; it's one of those bravura pieces.

S: One of the concert pianists' war-horses.

O: That three-story house had flush toilets, but wasn't connected to a sewer. The honey-bucket man would come once a week, I think, and carry away on the poles across his shoulders two buckets. That used to go out to the country for fertilizer.

And speaking of country and fertilizer, we had a summer house in Ninooka--Ninooka is a little community--a foreigners' community where there were summer houses. You went through rice fields. There was an automobile road, but the short cut was through the rice paddies--small paths--which had--and maybe they still do have--I guess you'd call them "ceptors" for lack of a better description for this night soil. We washed our vegetables carefully.

The little house that we had--we had two houses. The first one that we had didn't have refrigeration, but there was a little stream that came down from the mountain--the hillside--that ran the length of the street where the foreigners' houses were and ran through our house and was used as the coolant for the things that needed cooled, vegetables, butter and so forth.

This little house I'm telling you about was next door to a tennis court where we kids used to play. There were snakes about in Japan, quite a few snakes. I remember often running across them and killing them. We had another house, a two-story house at the time of the earthquake, the 1923 earthquake, but that's another story. Once when frolicking under a tree in our yard a snake was slithering overhead from branch to branch. We'll get to the earthquake later. What else?

It was ten or twelve years ago. My brother was working for the CIA and was stationed in Japan, in Tokyo then. My wife and I made a trip to Japan and he drove us to this community. Things had changed somewhat. We couldn't find the house, the tennis court was gone and so forth. Well, since you don't care whether this is in sequence or not, I'll tell you about the earthquake.

If I've been in one earthquake, I've been in a hundred --maybe more because we had small ones in Japan all the time. It didn't bother us. We used to laugh about the fact that soup would slosh out of our soup plates sometimes. There were about four or five of us young people in another house in that community when the '23 earthquake hit at noon and this time we weren't laughing about it. [September 1, 1923] It wasn't a matter of women and children first--all of us were out of the house in a flash. It shook so hard that I was on my hands and knees clutching the grass. It really

shook. And it shook for three days or more--off and on--the aftershocks.

We went back to the two-story house. My parents were there, not inside the house, but outside. You didn't dare go in because you didn't know when it was going to shake again. We'd dash in and dash out taking with us night clothes, blankets. We spent the next two nights, maybe three, in a little bamboo grove not far from the house. Didn't dare go in. That same day late in the afternoon we walked to Gotemba, the railroad station, about I don't know, two, three, four miles away. Along the way we could hear the rumbles of other earthquakes. There were big cracks on the road and I remember we would stand with our legs braced so that we would be at right angles to the perceived direction of the quake because, as I said, it was so strong you couldn't stand up.

As we were approaching Gotemba, the village, we heard this great, strange sound in the air. We didn't know what it was until we got to the railroad tracks themselves and on it practically the whole village encamped on the tracks wailing. Now I've never heard them do that before or since. The sound in the air we had heard was the wailing. It was frightening. The tracks had S-curves in them. No trains were running, of course. It was about three days later that we were able to get on the train, which did not take us back to Tokyo, but took us the other way to Kobe. The train was jammed full. On the way, I remember the train stopping at different stations and I was amazed that already--maybe it was four or five days after the quake--they were selling articles of clothing on open tables--socks, shirts and so forth--and surreptitiously they would lift something to show and sell photographs of what had happened in Tokyo.

What had happened in Tokyo was--something like 90,000 died as a result of the earthquake, not by it. It was a result of the earthquake in that they were asphyxiated--asphyxiation isn't the right word--but in trying to escape they went to open areas, which became encircled by fires which consumed the oxygen and there was no oxygen for the escapees to breathe.

- S: Similar to the San Francisco earthquake where so many people died not from the earthquake itself, but from the resulting fires.
- O: Someplace I read the statistics on this earthquake and the casualties were fantastic. Much greater than San Francisco. [Combined casualties for Tokyo and Yokohama were estimated at between 100,000 and 143,000 while those for San Francisco were estimated at between 500 and 700]

S: Well, even at that time Tokyo was more densely populated though?

O: More densely populated than San Francisco? (S nods affirmatively) I imagine so.

S: Of course you're talking at least twenty years difference in the time span. San Francisco was in the early 1900s versus 1923. But I always think of Tokyo as being an extremely densely populated city.

Did you ever find out if the house that you lived in withstood that or not? The one you left?

O: We were then living at the embassy, the Imperial Russian embassy. The embassy still functioned. Of course, it couldn't function as representing the government because the communists were in and this is the Imperial. Apparently the embassy had enough cash stashed away that it was able to continue to function. Since the Japanese government had not yet recognized the communist one, my guess now is that it wasn't functioning as an embassy but as a refuge--was helping refugees and that sort of thing.

So it was from Kobe that we left in 1923 for California --my mother, my brother, baby daughter and myself. My father stayed on in Japan. He never did make it to California. He died accidentally a year or so after we got to California. Maybe less, nine months or so. There's a three year difference between myself and my brother and another thirteen years between my brother and the daughter, a sixteen year difference. She, by the way, is arriving here on vacation with her husband the end of this week.

Going back to Petrograd. The Nevski Prospekt was the main thoroughfare. It was paved in wood blocks. They do that now once in a while; they used to do it anyway in factories. Wood blocks which are on end, you know. Well, that was the pavement. It's very nice, too, because it's quiet. You can hear the horses' hooves go clop, clop, clop. Of course, the side streets were paved in cobblestones and the sound of the horses' hooves on cobblestones was quite different from the sound of horses' hooves on wood block. I don't know whether any streets in the United States were ever paved that way, but I can easily imagine Fifth Avenue having been paved that way at one time or other.

S: But it would only be suitable for certain types of traffic, right? What would they use for a base?

O: I have no idea. One of the latest installations of that kind of paving, which was used as a floor, is right here at the Academy of Arts in the new addition which was done by John Hara. [John Hara Associates, Inc., in 1977] I guess it's the Clare Booth Luce wing. He made the mistake of using creosoted blocks and they had a terrible time getting rid of

the odor.

S: It delayed the opening quite a while, did it not?

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

July 10, 1986

O: Well, you see, Japan is a fairly long episode, too. I'm very fond of Japan. Like everywhere else it was crowded, but not as crowded. Again, let's talk about a few childhood memories.

One distinct memory was the Tokyo station. Then the Japanese were wearing traditional kimonos and getas [Japanese wooden clogs] on their feet. Getas are those--you know what they are. In the Tokyo station the sound of the getas scraping on the floor was a very pervasive sound. You could just hear it. I made a special trip through Tokyo station a few years ago and the sound wasn't there, not any more. I missed it. It was one of those things with which you associated.

At the end of the road, which ran between the foreigners' community, Ninooka, were a series of steps which led to a Japanese temple. At the foot of the steps was a big cryptomeria tree. [evergreen] A cryptomeria tree is almost as big as a redwood. I didn't climb it when I was back there fifteen or twenty years ago, but I did climb it when I was a kid and some place up there my initials are carved.

S: It was still there? You saw it when you went back?

O: The tree? I can't remember the tree. When we did go back--whenever it was--I'm terrible on dates, don't pay any attention to them--we went to a temple grounds that was adjacent to the three-story house I was telling you about. The temple grounds were where we used to play--my brother and I--so we went to visit it this time. He was driving. I got out onto the grounds and saw a grounds keeper wielding a rake or a broom. I asked him if he remembered a family by the name of "Ossipoho" who used to live right around here. Yes, he remembered and he remembered one boy named Tora san. My brother's name was Anatole and short for Anatole was Tolya and many Japanese have trouble with l's so it became Tora (Tora means tiger) so it became Tora san. He remembered Tora san and I said, "He's in the car." The three of us had a wonderful reunion--not a reunion--but sort of an emotional meeting. We agreed to come back later in the day to take photographs of him.

When we were there, he was an acolyte I guess. I also mentioned to him that as I remembered the grounds, the trees, the ginkgo trees, were much taller than they seemed to be now. That's always the case--things looked bigger when you're a boy. And he said, "No, they were taller. The napalm bombs burned the tops off." So they actually were shorter.

When we first went to Japan back in 1909 or 1910, we went to Nara. Why Nara I don't know. Nara has on its temple grounds live deer roaming around. I remember that. Lake Hakone is a place very well known by tourists. Today everyone goes there. I remember then going in an open touring car--maybe the top was up--but it was a touring car with wire spoked wheels. It was such a curiosity that when we stopped on the way, it gathered big crowds of kids. It was a real curiosity to have an automobile go through there at all.

We spent some summers at Kamakura, which is on the seashore. I remember there was a trolley--a rapid trolley--you wouldn't call it a trolley--a rapid transit--it went by a place where we saw a chap was sitting on the seashore on a rock staring out to sea. Well, what am I remembering? I don't know what I'm remembering. Something had to do with his hair turning white in a matter of hours. It also had to do with his committing suicide by drowning. Something there. It doesn't much matter.

The Great Buddha is at Kamakura. We used to go there at night--very wonderful and beautiful. Every place now is so crowded. The peaceful aspect is gone.

A Boy Scout troop was formed and I was a member of that. The troop was camped out at Lake Chuzenji and one day I won the neatest tent. My tent was the neatest of them all. The scoutmaster, the assistant scout master I suppose, was going to hike all the way around the lake. I went with him. I was the only one. I practically had to run all the way around and was really almost sick I was so tired when I got back.

- S: Well, in talking about your school mates, your play mates, your Boy Scout troop--were these Japanese, were they haoles, were they...?
- O: They were all foreigners, all haoles. Jaime Rivas was the son of the Bolivian ambassador. I'm getting my people a little mixed up.
- S: Was this foreign community segregated? You went to school together, you played together.

O: I think there were some Japanese students there. As I say, the original name was Tokyo Foreign School.

S: It was similar to the schools that are set up now in a foreign country for the children of military, diplomats, civilians.

O: A family that I knew in Yokohama was a British couple. Haddon was their name. They were in Yokohama at the time of the earthquake. They went to Yokohama Bay and stood chest deep or neck deep in water to escape the fires and from time to time they would duck under. Their house was gone and we saw them in Kobe. Our house at the embassy I never saw because well, the fire... You see from Kobe we took the ship to America and the ship did stop on the way at Yokohama. I think my parents went to take a look at Tokyo, but I didn't. We stayed on the ship.

Yokohama itself was burned flat. All you could see, here and there, were skeletons of buildings, not very high, maybe six stories, eight stories, steel. And Tokyo I imagine was much the same way.

Our house in the embassy grounds--the embassy grounds were pretty spacious with a big garden around them and so forth--so I don't think the damage was great. Except that I have a clock--one of those spherical clear glass clocks that you can see the guts--the works--with the face of it damaged because the chimney fell on it.

S: The clock kept working?

O: Well, I don't remember if it kept working, and I don't know how the face was damaged without the crystal being broken. The clock works now. I have it at home.

I went to Tokyo a few years ago on the way back from Singapore. The embassy was not far from an intersection called Tora-no-mon. Tora-no-mon meaning tiger's gate, and I couldn't recognize it. No embassy, no anything. I think that's where the Okura Hotel is now standing. I remember when we were living there the Imperial Hotel, Frank Lloyd Wright's Imperial Hotel, had just started construction. I remember it being completed. [1923] On Sunday afternoons they would have chamber music and we would go and sit--the lobby had two mezzanines on each end of it. The chamber orchestra would be on one mezzanine and we would be on the other mezzanine.

I remember coming home from that area--not from the hotel--I remember crossing Hibiya Park to our house at the embassy and being met by my father who, as I was coming up, was taking off his belt to give me a licking, because I was very late.

Well, back to--we're still in Japan aren't we?

- S: Basically it was a pretty happy time--earthquakes aside. I mean you had a good, happy childhood with a lot of fond memories obviously.
- O: Well, I guess everybody has a good one, don't they?
- S: Not everybody.
- O: In your interviews with different people, do they ramble the way I'm rambling? Do they have the same kind of memories?
- S: Yes. As I said, one man was so amazed that something had popped into his head--he just couldn't get over it--he said, "I hadn't thought about that for years." It's interesting--the things that people do remember--the things that make impressions at that age. A lot of people formed associations, friends that they've had over the past fifty or sixty some years.
- O: Yes, it's been about sixty years almost. Yes, sixty years. At the embassy there was a little chapel, Greek Orthodox as I remember it, a very nice little chapel, almost a separate building, but attached to the main structure. I have photographs of all the ladies in their ostrich plume hats and furs and all that. What do I remember about that? Only that the Easter services used to go on until late at night or maybe it was more like twelve o'clock at night they would finish and that was when you would break fast and you would have this tremendous spread at the embassy. That was fun--not fun, but nice. I guess that must have taken place early, because if we left there in 1923, I should remember more about it than I do. It must have been before that.
- S: Were you brought up with much religious training?
- O: No, I wasn't. I respect religion all right and I respect people who want to believe in all this hokum, but that's up to them.
- S: I just wondered if it had played an important part as far as your parents were concerned.
- O: Probably it played an important part for my mother, but not my father. Well, is this a good place to stop?

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

O: Going back to the earthquake because I think that's where everything changed. The trains were not running to Tokyo. There was nothing in Tokyo anyway, it was burned out completely. We took the train to Kobe. We stayed in Kobe maybe two or three weeks, then we left for California. Father stayed back. My mother, brother, sister, who was a baby then, and I went to California travelling under diplomatic passport. We went to San Francisco.

S: Was the main reason for the move the earthquake?

O: That's what precipitated it. Father had always thought since the revolution that we would be going to the United States and so that's when he sent us off. He stayed back.

S: He was still a diplomat at that point?

O: Yes. He was in a strange position. The Czarist government no longer existed and Japan had not recognized the Communist government as yet. The embassy was functioning. I suppose it was functioning on monies that were left over from the Czarist days. They must have had a vast sum.

So here we were. I was what then? Seventeen years old. I should have been more akamai as we say now than I was, but I didn't recognize the enormity of the problems my mother was facing. I don't know the connection, but our first abode in San Francisco was in Catholic housing, which was attached to the church on Van Ness Avenue, on the west side of Van Ness Avenue just south of.. It's a big church, it's still there. A Catholic cathedral. We stayed there for a while. Then we moved to Berkeley.

We had a small two-story house behind--in the back yard of another one. I went to Berkeley High. I became friends at Berkeley High with Doug Slaten, who drove a big car--not a fancy car, but a big Cole. I was very impressed.

Moving picture theaters at that time had pipe organs. I was very taken with those, I remember. All the girls wore pleated, long skirts. White ones.

S: Were you very taken with those, too? (laughter)

O: I was very surprised to find people on street corners listening to what turned out to be football games over loudspeakers. Are you surprised about that?

S: Yes. Was this a common occurrence?

O: Well, I wasn't aware of football seasons and things like that and I wondered what was going on. There were loudspeakers here and there and people were at street corners listening to what was going on.

S: I guess we can compare that to all the men sitting in Sears now in front of the televisions. (laughs)

O: I think you're right. I'm jumping ahead a little bit here, but I think it was my freshman year at Cal when there was a demonstration of the super heterodyne radio. When I was in that little house that I spoke of earlier, like all kids, you had to listen to other things when you were doing homework. I had a crystal set. You fooled around with a tiny needle or a little wire on that little crystal which was embedded in the set. Sometimes you got reception and sometimes you didn't. So radio was quite new. Everyone didn't have one; therefore, the speakers on the street corners. That's what they were.

S: You said that your father had planned on joining you in California, but that he was killed. He was in an accident prior to that?

O: Let's call it that.

S: Okay. Well then, how did your mother support the family, may I ask?

O: With difficulty. When my father died, she went back to Japan to attend to his burial or funeral or what have you. I guess she must have taken my sister, who as I said was a baby, with her because I remember that my brother and I stayed with a Mr. Warren. How we happened to stay with him, I don't know. But we did. He also had some property down Santa Cruz way. I remember we went down there and cleared brush or something.

S: But when your mother came back from Japan, that's when you got settled in Berkeley?

O: No, no.

S: You were still in San Francisco?

O: No, we were in San Francisco just a very short while.

I remember being very impressed when we moved to Berkeley that there weren't fences between houses. The lawns merged. I was very impressed with that because in Japan every house is surrounded by its own fence. Well, that's not correct, but things are fenced and there aren't lawns in front of houses.

S: I was going to say that in Japan a house site was probably much smaller.

- O: They're adjoining. The houses had party walls.
- S: Yes, I would think that in Berkeley you had actual single-family dwellings with lawns.
- O: That's correct. Bungalows. The fact that there were lawns, even small lawns, in front of each house which merged together was very, very impressive at the time.
- S: Did your mother have to work during these years to support the family?
- O: She did not work at first, but then she did go to work here and there. How it happened I don't know, but she went south, Los Angeles way, because a friend of ours from Japan, General Kalishevsky--he didn't take up taxi driving as other generals have done, but he did run a small chicken farm south of Los Angeles, Compton.

I had three years to go in high school, didn't I? I'm a little bit confused here. I don't know when Mother moved down there. I know she was in southern California when I was at the university. I had a monthly stipend, which my mother sent me, of about fifty dollars. When I was at Cal, I did odd jobs on the weekends. Cal had an office that listed odd jobs that one might have.

One time I remember I was polishing brass andirons for somebody. That was one weekend job. Another one I remember, I was told to kill a chicken. That was quite a traumatic experience. I got the chicken--I think somehow I knew that if you get the chicken's head down with a straight line coming out from its head, it stays pretty motionless. So I had the chicken down there and the hatchet in my right hand. I had practiced elsewhere hitting it properly. Finally, I struck the chicken to behead it and naturally missed a little bit so I had to strike it again. It was flopping around as chickens do, headless. I think I've done it since then and it hasn't bothered me like that. That was the first time. (laughs)

- S: Did you have to pay tuition in those days?
- O: Yes, we had to pay tuition, but it was very reasonable. I don't know what it was, but it was very reasonable. I'm taking a figure out of the air, something like \$150. It was a state university after all.

I roomed here and there. I roomed with my friend Doug Slaten. His father was the pastor of the largest Unitarian Church in the country. In New York, I think it was. Because of that connection, Doug had access to a house that the Unitarian Church had on Austin Way in Berkeley right across the street from the campus. We shared a room there.

Another time I had a room on the north side of the campus. The ground floor, the basement, I guess it was. The house was on a steep incline on a hill. Therefore, although this was a basement, it had regular low-silled windows. Wisteria grew outside. Some of the tendrils of the wisteria would find their way into the room, which was very nice. Very pleasant.

S: You adapted to life in the United States without any difficulty.

O: I had no difficulty.

S: I didn't think so.

What did you major in?

O: Architecture from the very beginning.

S: When did you decide that was what you wanted to do? Back in 1923 when you saw that Frank Lloyd Wright's Imperial Hotel was still standing?

O: Long before that. Well, not long before that--maybe a year or so before that. I was in the embassy gardens sketching and my mother came around and said, "When you grow up, why don't you be an architect?" I said, "Okay." So I decided to major in architecture.

Did I talk about the Imperial Hotel? It was very interesting.

S: You just mentioned in passing that you used to go to concerts there on the mezzanine. I thought it was interesting, of course, that the hotel was just completed in 1923 and it was one of the few buildings that withstood the earthquake.

O: Well, when we took the boat from Kobe to the United States, it made a stop in Yokohama. It had suffered just the way Tokyo had. I did not go ashore, but from the ship I could see steel buildings which were still standing. They were burned out.

The Imperial Hotel is not a steel building, but is of masonry. It sits on many, many piles. Not isolated piles, but a forest of piles which are fairly short and are embedded in mud. It's almost as though the building had footings which were in Jello.

S: Shock absorbers.

O: That's what they turned out to be. With all the shaking taking place, it shook, but not as much as terra firma.

S: Did Frank Lloyd Wright design it because of his knowledge of the earthquake problem?

O: I think if you'd asked him post-earthquake, he'd say, "Yes." (laughter) I think it was designed that way because of the condition of the soil where he was building. It turned out to be a fortuitous thing. Maybe he had that in mind, I don't know. I'd met him you know. He was a great man.

Where were we?

S: Getting you through architect's school. You were telling me about some of your jobs while you were in school.

O: Oh, another summertime job I had. I always liked, and I still do like, to ride horses. So here was a job in Humboldt County where I was supposed to tend sheep for a man who had a sheep farm. I went up there. Took the train to Alderpoint, I think it was, and then there was a bus that ran from Alderpoint once or twice a day to maybe it was Harrisburg. I'm not sure. Harrisburg then consisted of maybe half a dozen houses. Nothing at all.

From there you walked maybe half a mile or three quarters of a mile to this chap's house. I've forgotten his name. He had maybe a couple of hundred sheep. I had a room in this little house. The sheep were in a corral every night and I drove them out of the corral and tended them all day long.

There's an interesting story about this whole thing. I think in most places sheep were not corralled at night. They were just left out at night. But he was very paranoid about some Indians who lived there by the name of Jewett. I think that is why he had a young man like myself on a horse tending these sheep and had them corralled every night. It was very hilly country. There was a big rock promontory on one of the hills called Jewett Rock. I guess some of the Jewetts were pure Indian, but some of them were probably mixed breed. It was very hot in the summer time during the day, but the Indians riding horses wore flannel shirts, dark flannel shirts buttoned all the way and black hats.

On Sundays it was a day off for me and I'd walk back to Harrisburg and back again. There was a store there. I tried to go rabbit hunting. Never hit one, thank goodness. The rabbits at sundown would come out of the woods, sit at

the edge of the woods, admiring the sunset perhaps. I was a bad shot and, fortunately, didn't hit any.

S: You stayed there all summer. You didn't go to summer school. You worked every summer?

O: I worked someplace every summer. I'll tell you about another job later on, but let me finish this one. He was married, this fellow, to a woman who had red hair and who had been a school teacher. We used to take baths Saturday night in a tin tub in the kitchen. Really quite primitive. She was pregnant and one night she was about to deliver. So off I was sent to get the doctor. Saddled the horse and galloped through the night like Paul Revere without a lantern--it was a moonlit night though--not too far away, maybe three miles, to the doctor's house to fetch him. Everything was fine. That night I spent in the corral with the sheep.

Before I get to the end here. Sheep are the most stupid animals you could ever come across. What is the saying about following each other like sheep? They do that. In midday I tried to keep them in the shade so they wouldn't go wandering about. I had a little dog who would round them up. The poor little thing was a very hard working dog, but the poor little thing wasn't as active after a few weeks as when I first started. Found out that the grass seeds, like wheat seeds with sharp ends on them, had embedded themselves in his paws. So here he was limping around in all this pain. Poor thing.

The sheep weren't well. This is not a very pretty sight, but their entrails would protrude. He'd just sew them up. Finally, I don't know why, but he decided--he was a little bit strange--that I was in cahoots with the Indians, that he had lost some sheep. Whereupon, either I was fired or I quit. I don't remember which, but I was glad to get out of there.

S: How long did you last?

O: It must have been a month and a half or two.

It was at the time while I was out there tending sheep on horseback that [Charles A.] Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic. That dates that. [May 20-21, 1927]

S: It's interesting, as we go through life, how we can pinpoint certain things that we were doing at times of big events.

O: I'm very poor on time; particularly having lived here for fifty-three years. Time means nothing. One day's like the next. No seasons and I don't keep track.

So much for that job. Another job that I had was down south in Los Angeles for Goodrich or Goodyear. I don't remember which. I was checking their loading tires into boxcars. That's interesting. You don't know how tires are loaded in the boxcars?

S: I'd really never thought about it. (laughs)

O: They aren't piled on top of each other. They're layered like leaves, overlapping, so that the rim or the edge of one tire goes into the void of the next one. That way you get a lot more of them in there. Just checking them was no fun so I used to throw them, too. That job went on for a while.

Another job that I had--this was back in San Francisco again. This was not during summer. This must have been during school. I worked for the SP, the Southern Pacific. On one job I was in the office. The Southern Pacific had its offices on Market Street at the eastern end of the south side. I guess the SP building's still there. Menial jobs. Stamping tickets and things like that.

Another one that was more fun in a way was when I was receiving and dispatching ferryboats. A facet of the job was raising and lowering the car ramp, depending on the tide, to meet the incoming ferry.

S: Was that down where the Ferry Building is now?

O: Sure. That was fun for a while.

S: Better than killing chickens. (laughs)

O: Yes. I had a little cap that I wore--a little straw cap with a visor that said whatever it said--SP or whatever. I was taken with a girl by the name of Lois Walker at the time and I remember she was on the ferry one time and I was embarrassed to have her find me with this cap on. That was before I met my present wife.

What other odd jobs did I have? I worked for a pharmaceutical company. It consisted of taking care of the stock. Arranging it on the shelves, counting it and so forth. I remember one time about four or five o'clock in the afternoon and the post office was about to close. The post office was not too many blocks away so the boss wanted me to deliver something to the post office before it closed. I had never driven a car before. He wanted me to deliver it by car. So I got in and drove it. Fords were tricky cars. You didn't have gear shifts and that sort of thing. First of all, you didn't have a door on the left hand side of the car. You had to climb over. You had a hand brake, which you didn't use. There were three pedals on the floor. The right pedal was the brake, I think. The middle pedal, if you

depressed it, you were in neutral. The left pedal, if you depressed it, you were in low gear; if you let go, you were in high gear. You accelerated and decelerated by operating a little lever which was under the steering wheel on the right. You also had to advance or retard the spark by another lever which was under the steering wheel on the left where you nowadays have the turn signal lever.

S: And you had just observed enough to get in and do it.

O: Uh-huh. Let's see, what else did I do? Maybe I'll think of something later.

S: So on the basis of all these part-time jobs and so forth you finally got through school.

O: Sure. I was supplementing my... Another job that I had. In return for a room at the Bancroft Hotel I operated the switchboard. The switchboard was the kind where you had a battery of cords, the lights, the plugs. The Bancroft Hotel. I think it did burn down afterwards.

I dated a girl by the name of Margaret Pfander P-F-A-N-D-E-R, who came through here two or three years ago. Called me up. Didn't recognize her. She was a very pretty girl when I was in school. She is now, shall I say, plump. (laughs)

Getting back to Los Angeles. Compton is the name of the town. My mother had remarried to a man I wasn't very fond of. Presently, she wasn't very fond of him either, fortunately. They separated.

S: Were your brother and sister with her?

O: Good question. I think so. My sister must have been. I think we went through that earlier. She's sixteen years my junior so I think she was there.

There were trains running, of course, and there were busses running, but there were also--what shall I say, illegal or unlicensed--cars that ran.

S: A jitney-type operation?

O: Jitney type, but they were nice cars. I guess what was illegal about it, looking back on it, was that they didn't carry insurance and didn't have licenses to carry that many passengers. I took that one day and it took us all day and most of the night. When we had to buy gas, everybody in the car had to pitch in.

Another time I hitchhiked. The second day or so between Bakersfield and the Tejon Pass there's a long straight

highway which crosses practically a desert. I got a ride halfway to the pass. Still in the middle of the desert and in the late afternoon the fellow stops and turns off to go some oilfields. He lets me off in the middle of this. Here I am walking on this highway and it's pretty desolate. The cars coming along just zoom by. Finally, a car stops and lets me off at a gas station where I was to see if I could pick up another ride.

Finally, I must have just walked up and asked a truck driver to give me a ride. He told me, "Okay," that I could just hang on. I hung on to the truck's outside and went that way for a few miles. Then he took pity on me and let me into the cab. We drove all that night and got into Los Angeles about four o'clock in the morning.

S: These were trips to visit your mother?

O: That's right. That was quite an experience.

Sometime during my college career I bought myself a car. My friends then were Doug Slaten and Al Hunter. We were all buddies. Al Hunter had a Ford with an exposed engine, no top, no anything, a nothing kind of a car. Doug and I borrowed it once and drove it to Carmel. Monterey. We camped under a bridge the first night. Woke up in the morning with ice formed in the puddles around where we were sleeping. Really cold. I had a makeshift fur coat that my mother had made from furs that she had. Maybe they were cheap furs. Either she took a coat and lined it with fur, but there was fur around it.

About that time I bought my first car which was fancier than anything else anybody had. I paid \$125 for it.

S: This was a used car?

O: Yes, a used Ford roadster.

S: By this time you had a license, I hope.

O: Oh yes. I don't remember taking an examination or anything like that. I don't know that we took licenses. I don't remember having a license, getting a license, and I certainly didn't take an examination.

S: That's interesting. We should go back and see when all the licensing really started.

O: I drove it one time. It was very cold starting out from Berkeley early in the morning. Isinglass curtains which leaked air. Very, very cold. Drove all day. In the late afternoon...

## END OF TAPE 2/SIDE 1

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...I woke up with the car bouncing in the ditch on the left-hand side of the road. That woke me up for the rest of the trip.

- S: It was just the monotony of the road and the landscape.
- O: And the fact that I had started so early in the morning. Also, in the afternoon it had warmed up and here was this warm air. I think I stayed in Bakersfield that night at the house of Lois Walker. A very beautiful girl. Quite thin. High cheek bones.

She used to go to art class at Berkeley. The Arc where I was and the art building were adjacent on the north side of the campus. I used to see her walking from the art building to the Arc and I was very taken with her looks. Talked to Doug and he said, "Why don't you ask her for a date?" I did and we dated. All of that changed, though, when I met Lyn.

- S: And all of this is going on while you're still in school?
- O: I'm still in school. I think it's as true today as it was then. The class probably started with as many as ninety or a hundred people the first year. The second year it was down to about thirty. I think we finally had about six or so when we graduated. A lot of young people think they're going to be an architect because they fool around with their houses. They think they can do it all. They find out there's more to it than doodling.

John Galen Howard was the dean of the school and was responsible for all the fine buildings on the Berkeley campus. They're fine classical buildings. A very fine library. A fine mining building. The Campanile. Boalt Hall which is the attorneys. All of them. He designed those.

- S: When were these built primarily? During the twenties or prior to that?
- O: Prior to that because when I came there in 1923 they were already standing. Some construction went on while I was in school, but it wasn't...they weren't as classical nor were they as expensive nor as of fine materials.

In school also was Professor [H. H.] Jory and a fine Armenian chap by the name of Torossian. A very dear fellow who taught analytical geometry with which we all had difficulty although I appreciate it now. I didn't do badly in that, but he would try so hard to make us understand what

he was trying to teach us that he almost cried. He was very lame. A very nice man.

Mike Goodman was our arc class teacher. I think we were his first class. He was then, of course, a younger man and so his teaching was reflected in what we were doing. It was much more at ease than what we had been doing before.

About that time--back to our Fords--a curious thing about those cars--the gas tank was immediately in front of you under the hood. It was above the engine. The gas to engine was fed by gravity from that. If you were low on gas and came to a steep hill in Berkeley, the level of the gas would be below the carburetor and the gas wouldn't flow. So you backed down, turned around and went up the hill backwards.

S: (laughs) Which was fine as long as there wasn't too much traffic.

O: There wasn't too much traffic.

S: Do you have any idea of how many students were at Berkeley during those years?

O: I think 12,000 for the whole state. UC Los Angeles had not started; UC Santa Barbara didn't exist. I was going to say five or six thousand, but I think it was twelve thousand for the whole state. Maybe five or six thousand at the Berkeley campus. I'm sort of contradicting myself. I'm saying that other campuses did not exist yet they must have. The one in Los Angeles could have existed. But the new campus was just being built. Went to see that campus about two years ago. Really quite nice. I remember when it was being built. It was a barren area. Now there are big trees. Good outdoor sculpture.

S: What year did you graduate?

O: Nineteen thirty, except for one course in engineering, which I had to take for an additional year. That's all I took for an hour or two twice a week.

S: Were you working while you were doing that then? (O nods affirmatively) But this was right in time for the Depression, wasn't it? You timed that beautifully.

O: Yes, I timed that beautifully. I'll tell you about that after a while.

During the campus business. My wife Lyn was then going with Al Hunter whom I mentioned earlier. One evening he was a little too tight or something happened and I came to her rescue you might say. That's not right. I think you'll

have to ask her how it happened. (laughs) Our friendship then ceased--Al Hunter's and mine.

S: Along with hers and Al Hunter's. (laughs)

O: Along with hers and Al Hunter's. We had good times then in those days. The class used to go out to Mount Diablo for picnics and things like that. I have photographs of those days.

S: But you had known her while she was dating Al Hunter?

O: No, I didn't know her. It was that evening. That was when we met for the first time.

S: Was she a student, too?

O: No, she was working in San Francisco, but lived in Berkeley on University Avenue.

One time I was climbing Mount Diablo and, as I was reaching the top, we had a storm--heavy rain, cold, wind blowing and at the peak of Mount Diablo was a little box with a little notebook which I signed at the time saying that I'd been there. It was there for that purpose.

S: Quite a place to have a guest register.

O: It was a weather-beaten box, but it was anchored all right. That was its purpose. Looking back I don't see now why it was such a great feat to climb Diablo. Things have grown up so. Diablo isn't isolated any more, is it?

S: Hardly anything is anymore!

O: That's right. The population of the United States at that time was under a hundred million. Now we're over two hundred twenty-five.

S: At least two hundred twenty-five. And growing. I think I just heard the other day that the population of the earth is now five billion. Some days I think all of them are on Ward Avenue. (laughter)

O: And I think they're all on the Kalaniana'ole Highway where we live. But we're going to be moving soon.

S: I moved out of there last year. I couldn't handle the Hawaii Kai traffic.

O: And now they're going to put eighteen hundred more houses there. Eighteen hundred. One thousand eight hundred!

- S: Which means at least thirty-six hundred more cars. At least.
- O: Probably. I flew to Kauai yesterday and as you take off from the airport you can see the new car lots and they're packed with new cars for sale.
- S: And pretty soon...
- O: They'll be on Ward Avenue. (laughter) I have to go around the block to get on the freeway.

Lyn and I used to take long walks in Berkeley from her apartment on the west end of the university up into the hills. I don't know where that is now. The north side of the campus. She was a great walker.

When she moved to San Francisco, she lived not far from the Legion of Honor on California Avenue. She was then working for C & H on Market and she used to walk to work. All the way from the Legion. She was in the Matson Building right next to the SP building.

I used to buy gardenia corsages for fifty cents. When I bought her a corsage, I had to skip lunch or dinner.

Oh, I was saying that I was going to school two or three hours a week and working. I was working for a firm called Crim, Reasing and McGinnis. Crim was the founder of the firm, obviously. He had died and Reasing and McGinnis were there. I had a job with them. They had a big school that they were working on. I think there were twelve or thirteen of us. This was the beginning of the Depression--really the middle of the Depression. When they finished the school, there was no more work. They fired everybody and kept me, not because I was good, but I was the cheapest. I think I worked for a hundred dollars a month and I was there just by myself. Presently, I was cut down to fifty dollars a month.

About then I had a letter from Doug who had moved to Honolulu because his parents were here. I think I told you about his father who had been a New York pastor. A brilliant man. A good thinker. A fine man whose teachings or beliefs or philosophy were perhaps even too liberal for the Unitarians. I think I'm right about this. He was relieved of his pastorate of the Unitarian Church, came here and worked as an editor for the Star-Bulletin. One of the editors who just write articles. He wrote and lectured occasionally. I remember one on Africa. I guess I remember it because he likened the shape of Africa to the shape of a sheep's head. There was doom ahead. I don't think he was then thinking about South Africa but as a third nation or continent where nothing remained.

So I had this letter from Doug saying, "Why don't you come on over? You have nothing to lose." I said, "That's right." So I came on over. When I left my fifty dollar a month job, it was readily snatched up by another good friend Tommy Perkins who lives here now. I was responsible for his coming over here as I was responsible for my other classmate Allen Johnson. Tommy was an upperclassman. He was a year or two ahead of me. Allen Johnson was a classmate. He was then living in Chicago with his wife Charlotte. Freezing. So I prevailed on him to come over.

S: And what year was this when you first came over?

O: I think it was late 1932 or early 1933. I came over on the--I used to see the SS Lurline and some other ship--all white--I think it was the SS Los Angeles. I'm not sure. I came over steerage. My steerage mates were gypsies. We had heavy pancakes every morning and I got off the ship pretty sick because I was constipated the whole time.

S: Did that take about a week in those days? (O nods affirmatively) A week of heavy pancakes will do it to you.

O: I guess that's what did it. Not very good.

They (the Slatens) were living then in Pearl City. Pearl City sounded great. Pearl City Peninsula, as a matter of fact, was what it was called. You went over Red Hill. Red Hill then had no housing. There was a little pineapple stand at the crest of the hill.

S: What was your first impression? You had never been to Honolulu before?

O: Except coming through from Japan. The ship stopped overnight. Is it all right to talk about that?

S: Sure.

O: The ship docked about the same place, Pier 8, I guess. We got off the ship and I was impressed with the fruit that the Hawaiian women were selling, which was spread on sheets, I guess they were, on the sidewalk at the pier. I bought some wonderful-looking, short, thick bananas that turned out to be inedible. You had to cook them. (laughs) I don't see them in the market anymore. I bet those things were two and a half inches in diameter--that thick--and maybe six inches long.

We took a streetcar to Waikiki. We went over a long trestle, I remember. We got off the streetcar to see Waikiki Beach. Waikiki Beach was just a narrow strip of sand. Dark. No lights except for the Moana Hotel. That's all there was.

S: This was 1923. Do you remember the name of the ship that you went to California on?

O: No, I don't know. I don't remember.

S: But it was just an overnight visit.

O: Midday or so we left. Between here and as we were going through the channel--I forget the name of the channel--between here and Molokai I first got seasick after having crossed 2,000 miles of ocean. But it was pretty rough.

What was my impression of Honolulu? That particular day I was surprised to see some smokestacks. There were no highrises. We got here in the afternoon. We did not get into the city.

Going back to the second time, the 1932 business. Mrs. Slaten, Doug's mother, took me around. I was very impressed with the First National Bank--what was it called then? Bishop Bank--because all the counter tops were lined with hibiscus. She took me to the Advertiser where I was impressed with the inner court. It had ferns, a little fountain, quite tropical.

S: How long did you stay with the Slatens?

O: I stayed with the Slatens while I was looking for a job. It was Depression then. I was told that I wouldn't be able to get a job. I got a job. I got a job to run the home building department at Theo H. Davies. I was really--what's the phrase? cut your teeth?--I really cut my teeth on that job. I learned what building was all about. They had a department which was run, more or less, by drafting people. Lewers and Cooke had all the business. Lou Underwood was the head of the lumber department. He was the one who hired me.

S: How long were you unemployed? Just a matter of a few months?

O: Just a few months. I've been lucky.

S: Well, from what I've heard Hawaii was not as hard hit as the mainland during the Depression years.

O: That's right. Well, we didn't have people selling apples on the sidewalk as we did in San Francisco. They had pencils. Walking from the SP building to the ferry--the bridge hadn't been built yet--we all used the ferry, used to stop on the way on the north side of Market and buy a crab cocktail, which was a really good crab cocktail, for two bits apiece. Wonderful ones. Not as an appetizer, but just as a snack.

Going back again to San Francisco days. Tommy Perkins and I used to see a lot of each other. He lived on Green Street. I had a little brass tag with the telephone number of my bootlegger who used to deliver to the house bootleg alky, which we used to put through charcoal. We used to get tight on it and wake up with horrible headaches. I mean really awful headaches. There might be half a dozen of us staying at Tommy's house after a party. We would hear the bells ringing down on Columbus Avenue. What's that nice church down there?

I had a Ford with me then. When I got through school altogether, I had a room in a house on Union Street one block or so east and paralleling Van Ness. Another street east of Union had an apartment building on it, a tall one, and alongside of it was an empty lot. I used to park the car there. Then I'd walk down steps which led to Union and then walk south half a block or so to the house where my room was on the north side of Union.

I used to start the car in the morning--I wouldn't use it except on weekends, perhaps--used to have to start the car by cranking it. You needed to choke the gasoline and that was done by a little wire with a loop on it that you poked through the radiator. You'd pull on the wire with the forefinger of your left hand and you cranked it with your right hand. On a cold morning that took quite a bit of cranking.

One morning it wouldn't start up. Finally, it coughed, coughed, started up, got away from me and went down the steps. At the foot of those steps usually there were some fancy cars parked at ninety degrees to the curb. That morning somehow there was nothing there. My last view of that car was with its top bouncing down those steps. With a crash it landed on the street below.

I calmly walked down the steps and, as I was walking down, windows were flying open on my left and right, people poking their heads out wondering what the crash was about at the foot of the steps. I didn't even stop. Just kept on going. I called the garage and paid them five dollars to haul it away. I guess that's fun to read about, isn't it?

S: I think so, but it wasn't funny at the time.

O: I guess it's interesting, but it wouldn't happen today.

S: Well, you didn't have to worry about transporting your car over here.

O: When I got the job here, I moved from Pearl City Peninsula to Prince Edward Street. A chap by the name of Weatherwax--there were two brothers, Charles and Wayson.

They had a one-car garage in back of their house on Prince Edward Street. The one-car garage had been converted into two rooms and a bath. The room, therefore, was six feet wide and nine feet long. The bathroom between was probably four by six, which left three feet for a closet.

I wonder if I moved before I had a job because I remember doing an odd job for--making a layout--for an army aerial photography of a grouping forming some sort of insignia. I had my drafting board propped up. I sat on my bed because there was no chair, and the drafting board took up the space between the bed and the bathroom wall. The bathroom, which was between the two rooms, served both rooms. Had a connecting door. Not very private.

S: How did you get back and forth from Pearl City Peninsula when you were job hunting in Honoulu? What kind of transportation did they have then from that area?

O: Doug had his parents' car. He had a job though. His older brother Fitz--maybe I came to the city with him. I don't remember.

So that was Prince Edward Street. While I was there, Weatherwax used to tinker with clocks. He had a collection of clocks. The man had very poor eyesight. He wore very thick heavy glasses. I think he had a couple of small children. Prohibition was still with us. Once in a while we went to a house on the Ala Wai where we had bootleg oke. I don't know what we paid for it, but we'd have a drink or two. It was oke and lime.

While I was living there in this converted garage, I built myself a surfboard. You were able to buy for that purpose a redwood slab three inches thick, twenty-four inches wide, eight or nine feet long. I shaped it into a surfboard, varnished it and so forth. Used to carry it down to the beach. I weighed about a hundred twenty or twenty-five pounds; the board weighed ninety-five pounds. I used to carry it down there and paddle it.

The very important thing we were all told was not to pearl dive because you'd damage the front end of the board, and never to let go of it, and rightly so, because here would be a ninety-five pound board hurtling toward shore. It could easily kill somebody. We hung onto it for dear life. Good exercise. I have photographs of that. Me standing. Used to get on shore, prop it up, balance it on my shoulder, carry it back.

While I was working for Davies, there was a salesman there by the name of Tai [Taijiro] Miyahara who had a small lot in Kaimuki. I made a deal with him whereby he would build a house if I would rent it from him. The house was

going to cost one thousand five hundred dollars and I was going to rent it from him for twenty-five dollars a month. It was a cute house. It was about then that Lyn decided to come on over.

I made arrangements for us to be married the day she got here which was supposed to be nine o'clock in the morning. I ran around and got all the attendants organized and so forth. Nine o'clock came and there was no Lurline. The Lurline or the Matsonia? I think it was the Matsonia. I'm not sure. Ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, no Matsonia. We were supposed to be married at four or four-thirty that afternoon. I think the ship finally docked at one-thirty or two o'clock in the afternoon. It had run into a heavy storm sufficient to delay its arrival. The ladders from one deck to another had been washed out. They really had had a bad time.

S: This was January 24, 1935.

O: That's correct. How'd you know that?

S: In looking over the bio sheet, I noticed the January 24th date because that's my birthday. That's why it stuck with me.

O: Isn't that interesting? Well, here she was. At two o'clock and we were married at four-thirty. We were married at Puiwa Road. A nice old house there at Puiwa Road and Puiwa Lane. Friends. I don't know how I got to be friends with them, but Marvel Hart, who is still living, and Mildred--I've forgotten her maiden name--married Jeffrey Lloyd who died, and she is now non compos mentis at the convalescent home across from Kuakini Hospital. We were married in the garden which was very nice.

What are those tiny, waxlike flowers, pink? I had a muff made instead of a bouquet. Nothing standard. (laughs) She stood there, weaving slightly, because she still had her sea legs.

S: And you made all these arrangements yourself? How terrific.

O: How else? We lived in that little house that I was telling you about. We had nice times there. We had people in and we had a little lanai. I had a little fenced-in garden on the mauka side.

END OF TAPE 2/SIDE 2

S: How long did your association with Theo Davies last?

O: I must have worked for them for a year and a half or two. With my wife's encouragement, bravery and keeping secret our sad financial status, she let me quit. (laughs)

S: This was to go into business for yourself?

O: No. Thereupon I worked for different architects. I worked for an architect by the name of Cayton. Herbert Cohen Cayton, I think it was. He had one job (he wasn't a very well-known architect) in association with C. W. Dickey. That was the Immigration Station. Hobson was the man running the job. Roy Kelley--the famous man with more hotels than anybody else in Hawaii--was running the office for Dickey then.

When we got through with the Immigration Station, I think the office more or less closed. I worked for Claude Stiehl a short while. My good friend of whom I spoke earlier, Tommy Perkins, was working for him then. I joined them for a while.

Then I worked for Dickey and we got along fine, Pop Dickey and I, and he was sorry to have me leave. I left again with support from my dear wife because I had a single job, and that was a house for C. E. Pemberton. Pemberton was then the chief scientist, I guess you call them, of the HSPA. Did a house for him in Makiki Heights, just above Roosevelt High School before you get to Makiki Heights Road. From there I went on and on and on. The rest is contemporary history.

S: What year was that when you went into business for yourself?

O: Nineteen thirty-six.

S: I like to ask people who lived here during World War II what they remember about Pearl Harbor day, and how the war affected their lives and their business.

O: Okay, but before I get to that--when I went into business I was living on Puiwa Lane in what was Lita Wight's carriage house. It was a two-story barn. It was a carriage house. Previously, it had been the offices of Thompson and Thompson. Robert and Catherine Thompson. Do you know them?

S: No.

O: They were married. A very unlikely couple. She was a Richards. Atherton Richards. Very straight-laced. Very proper. He was a hell-bent guy.

This carriage house had very attractive ponds about it. Bricked terraces and so on, which they had done. We had moved from Kaimuki to there, Lyn and I. Our bedroom was upstairs. There were sliding partitions and the front portion of the upstairs was the office.

You reached the second floor from Puiwa Lane over a little footbridge. At the ewa end of the footbridge I had a sign "Vladimir Ossipoff, Architect." I did some work then for Hal Lundberg, whom I recently saw as a tenant in 999 [Wilder], where we're going to move. He's in very bad physical shape. Bent over double almost. Walking with two canes.

That business of having an office in your home is something I do not recommend because you get phone calls all day and all night and you're working all day and all night, which is, I suppose, all right when you're young, but it finally gets to you. I had a draftsman, Harry Onomoto, and one day we moved downtown. The whole office went into a pickup truck. The whole works was in that pickup truck. We moved to Halekauwila Street, the second floor of the Dillingham Building Annex. We had two rooms and a lanai.

A good friend of mine at the time was F. Gordon Chadwick and his wife Pat. I designed a house for them in Maunalani Heights. I think it was one of the first houses up there. No trees, no anything. The earth was scored, I guess you would say, because at one time they grew pineapples there, believe it or not.

I remember when we first moved to the Nuuanu house. There was a lovely stream, auwai, running through there. I opened up the downstairs, made a large opening, so that you could hear the stream and see the stream in the downstairs living room. The first night that we moved there--the carriage house had not been occupied for a while and it was full of mosquitos. I had Lyn lie there on the bed with her bare back exposed and I think I swatted something like two or three dozen mosquitos. Then we quit. (laughs)

We lived there for two or three years. I then built a house for ourselves in Lanikai. I bought the lot next door to me mauka and later on bought the lot next door to me makai and built a little house for my mother on the mauka one. No need to describe it, but it was very pleasant. I built a house on the makai lot and rented it to Greta Gollmer. She was a decorator. A nice woman. Used to make great lentil soup. And being Austrian, I think, or German, she used to sing and sing Wagner. Siegfried. You could hear her through the whole valley.

S: You didn't mind commuting from Lanikai in those days?

O: It was a tortuous road then, the Pali Road.

When we were living in Lanikai, off Lanikai as you know, are two small islands which were used for target practice by the Air Force. On Sunday morning when we heard the alert and so forth, I did not believe it, because they had been using those islands for target practice all the time. Planes flew over my head and I looked up and seeing the red discs on the underside of the planes I said, "Well, this is going too far trying to make it realistic here." Pooh, pooh. I heard all these tales about people being wounded and so forth and I thought all of this was just practice. It was not until about two o'clock that afternoon that I finally believed that it was so.

S: Was Lanikai pretty sparsely populated in those days?

O: Less populated than it is today, but it wasn't sparse. Lanikai's a strange place, actually. It's ideal in many ways in that there is no through highway. It should be very, very good. It was developed by Charlie Frazier. He bought the whole thing, you know. He lived there. It started out well. I did a number of houses. I did one for Conrad Von Hamm there. I did one for Lou Paris there. I did a number of others. Anyway, Lanikai in spite of its desirability, somehow is somewhat seedy. I don't understand why that should be. It really should be something.

You were asking whether the commute got to us. Well, the war came along and I closed my office and went to work for PNAB, Pacific Naval Air Bases, contractors for PNAB. I worked in Pearl Harbor. I worked in the yard as a project engineer. That was exciting and interesting, not the work, but being in the yard and seeing these ships come in, seeing them being worked on.

S: Did you go to work for them shortly after the outbreak of the war?

O: Shortly after. Actually, Archibald Carswell, who recently died, was vice president and superintendent for Hawaiian Dredging or Dillingham, I guess. He was a friend of ours and he had a rather high position in CPNAB at Pearl Harbor and it was through him that I went to work there. Again, I was commuting back and forth from Pearl Harbor to Lanikai. I had a company car and we used to share rides. We had regular hours, which I didn't have when I was in business for myself. Strangely enough, it was easier.

Boyd MacNaughton, former president of C. Brewer, bought the Larsen's house in Puu Panini, which is on the east side of Diamond Head. He asked why I didn't buy the house next

door to him, which was Brud Larsen's house, which we did. Sold the house in Lanikai and moved to town. Boyd died, as you know, several years ago. His house is now occupied by his son, Duncan MacNaughton, for whom I did some work just this last year or so, and whom I've seen grow from a baby to his present status.

Boyd MacNaughton got his job, as I remember, through Alex Budge who was president of Castle and Cooke, for whom I also did a house at the end of Portlock. Portlock ended maybe half a mile or three quarters of a mile this side of where it ends now. There was a gate and beyond there was nothing but kiawe. No road. Nothing. It was there that he had a great big parcel of land which now probably houses half a dozen or maybe a dozen houses. He didn't care what the house looked like as long as it was comfortable and did certain things that he wanted. I liked him very much. A very positive man. I liked his wife, Ruth, very much.

He gave me some fatherly advice when I visited him in his office at Castle and Cooke. He said, "Watch out for a man who smokes a pipe. He'll waste your time. He'll fumble with his pipe. He'll fumble with his matches. He'll fumble for this, fumble for that." I've never forgotten that.

It might be good to mention some of our friends in Lanikai, because as someone reads this they may recall these people. One of our friends was Kenneth Barr who's still living. His wife died. I did a little house for him in Lanikai. High up on a hill.

During the war, we first sent the children back to the mainland. Our second daughter, Valerie, was just a baby. Estelle Kelley took her back on her lap. I don't remember how the elder child, Sandra, went back, but anyway the two of them were there and Lyn went back to be with them. So I was here by myself.

S: Did they have family to stay with on the mainland?

O: Yes, Lyn had a sister in San Francisco and another sister in San Bernadino.

S: You just have the two daughters? (O nods affirmatively)  
And the first one's name is?

O: Alexandra. The kids went to Hanahauoli and then Punahou. I'm terrible on dates. But because of all that Boyd MacNaughton's suggestion that we move to town made good sense. So that's what we did. It was a big house. We remodelled it.

S: It was after World War II that you made the change?

O: During the war.

S: During the war? I understood that Lyn and the girls were on the mainland and you were here batching it.

O: But they came back.

S: You mean after things quieted down?

O: They came back and Lyn told me that they were in bunks stacked seven high and they zigzagged across the Pacific. It was a terrible ordeal getting here. But things had quieted down. I guess it was after Midway.

Speaking of Midway, we all belonged to--I've forgotten what it was called--a citizens militia of one kind or another. We were issued revolvers, learned to shoot, shooting ranges, patrolled the streets at night.

S: Was it part of the Civil Defense?

O: There was a special name for them. I remember when we were patrolling. When I say patrolling I mean walking the length of Lanikai to see that no lights were showing, which was ridiculous, but there was tension in the air, very definite tension in the air.

As project engineer I was involved with procuring materials for the Kahului Naval Air Station. It now has the Kahului Airport, which by the way we designed. It's in terrible shape now, but no one gives us credit for the fact that it was designed for traffic one-seventh as big as it's trying to accommodate today.

The project manager of the Kahului Naval Air Station was Edward P. Mitchell. They used to call him "E. P." Mitchell. We were very good friends. He had a house up in Kula, and was project manager over there. One weekend we went to Hana and came back after dark with headlights which you may remember were all blacked out except for little spots a quarter of an inch high and one inch wide. Those were the lights that we had. Mitch was driving and I had to get out and run ahead sometimes to tell him where to turn. That's a tortuous road, too.

S: Even in broad daylight today.

O: He died, too.

He had an interesting recipe. I don't do it anymore because I try to avoid fat, but a very good thing is to have half an avocado and fill it with melted butter. A very oily

vegetable with butter, very good, amazingly good. I don't do that anymore.

Now where were we. I keep getting off track. Thanks to Boyd MacNaughton--he carved out a piece at the end of Hopeloa Street at the end of Puu Panini which jutted into Bishop Estate property. If you look on the city map at the line which divides city-owned land and Bishop Estate land, there'll be a little jog into.. .he carved that and I built a house there.

Kahala was then pig farms, vegetable gardens and so on. When that started to develop and roof tops started to appear, I decided that I didn't want that. We moved from there to where we are now and sold the Puu Panini property to Charles Raymond who has since passed away.

I suppose you want to hear about architecture, the philosophy and all that but I covered that in the Pacific Business News and I think that's good enough.

S: Well, you also covered that in the oral history that you did for the American Institute of Architects. I certainly would like to get some in. I don't imagine that you've changed your mind lately. The IBM is still your favorite?

O: As office buildings go, sure. But I've had some good clients. Frank Atherton, Al Ostheimer. I did his house originally for Margaret Vanderbilt Emerson. Margaret Emerson. Who was the Vanderbilt? There was some connection. Then the war came along and Kaiser bought it. He wanted something done to it and he got me there. We didn't see eye to eye for one minute. I bowed out. I sent him a bill, which I had a time collecting, but finally collected. So he ruined it. Then when the Ostheimers bought it they put it back into shape. I helped them. It's a nice house. It's now owned by Joe Ridder.

I fixed the Kahala house for the Ostheimers and then did the major remodelling of a house on Maunalani Heights for them. At the very top. A very uninteresting house which became an interesting one. They were very good clients. I visited them in Santa Fe, New Mexico. They met me at the airport in Albuquerque. We were driving from Albuquerque to Santa Fe and Al said, "You know, I always thought I was indestructible." He had been told then that he was getting--kidneys--and he would have to be on dialysis. He died.

The rest is too contemporary. I have nothing more to say.

S: Well, you've certainly seen a lot of changes in Hawaii during the past fifty years.

O: It's not the same place. It's not the same place. You really feel as though you lived somewhere else.

S: But you were lucky you got here at such a good time because you were here during the very best years of Hawaii from what I've heard.

O: I've been lucky right along, I guess. Been lucky in many ways. Hope this move to 999 is a lucky one.

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## THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Watumull Foundation Oral History Project began in June of 1971. During the following seventeen months eighty-eight people were taped. These tapes were transcribed but had not been put in final form when the project was suspended at the end of 1972.

In 1979 the project was reactivated and the long process of proofing, final typing and binding began. On the fortieth anniversary of the Watumull Foundation in 1982 the completed histories were delivered to the three repositories.

As the value of these interviews was realized, it was decided to add to the collection. In November of 1985 Alice Sinesky was engaged to interview and edit thirty-three histories that have been recorded to mark the forty-fifth anniversary of the Foundation.

The subjects for the interviews are chosen from all walks of life and are people who are part of and have contributed to the history of Hawaii.

The final transcripts, on acid-free Permalife bond paper and individually Velo-bound, are deposited and are available to scholars and historians at the Hawaii State Archives, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii and the Cooke Library at Punahou School. The tapes are sealed and are not available.

August 1987