

****[00:00:00.590] - Speaker 1****

Yes. I am Gensho Hara from Lahaina Jodo Mission. I've forgotten how old I am this year, but I am 87. No, I am 88 years old.

****[00:00:21.170] - Speaker 2****

My name is Yayoi Hara. I am 49 years old, I am interviewing my father at my sister's home in Wailuku where we are displaced from the fire.

First, how did you come to Maui and Lahaina?

****[00:00:50.870] - Speaker 1****

Well, it happened when my teacher, Bishop Shinko Nakajima, was the bishop. One day, I received a letter from him. The letter said, "I know you are the eldest son of a temple. But now, we are having trouble with an empty temple in Hawaii. A temple without a minister. Please work there for three years. Working abroad while you are young will surely be beneficial for your future." At that time, I was a graduate student. Post-war Japan was very challenging. I grew up in a temple in a mountain area called Iida in Nagano Prefecture. From childhood, due to old customs, the eldest son of a temple had the destiny to succeed the temple.

****[00:02:46.970] - Speaker 1****

So, since childhood, everyone in the village looked at me as the future head priest. It was a tremendous pressure from a young age. During the war between Japan and America, about 60 children were evacuated from Tokyo to our temple to avoid bombs. We lived together for about four years during the war. My temple had a big storehouse, rice storehouse, miso storehouse, and a document storehouse, all with white walls. The rice storehouse was always full of rice, and the miso storehouse was always full of miso. It was a very wealthy temple. But after Japan lost the war, General MacArthur implemented land reforms, and the temple, which was the landlord, had to give up its land to the farmers. The temple lost its wealth, and the rice storehouse became empty. The temple's finances were in dire straits.

****[00:06:18.190] - Speaker 1****

As the eldest son, I felt a strong sense of duty to revive and restore the temple. But I also had doubts about whether I could handle the pressure. When I received the letter from the respected Bishop Nakajima, I decided to go. However, in the countryside, the eldest son leaving, even for three years, required the approval of the temple's board members. We held a board meeting, and I assured them I would return in three years. At that time, a song about the dreamlike Hawaii route was popular, and many people who had never been to Hawaii thought of it as a dreamland.

****[00:08:23.950] - Speaker 1****

There were concerns that I might not return from such a wonderful place. My father also supported me, asking the board members to let me go. Finally, they agreed, and I applied for a visa. I took the ship President Wilson from Yokohama to the mainland U.S. The port of Yokohama was dark, and both the sea and sky were dark. But as the days passed, the sea and the sunlight became brighter. During my voyage, President Kennedy had allowed several hundred special refugees from Hong Kong onto the ship.

****[00:10:17.100] - Speaker 1****

Due to this, the ship's economy class was crowded, and a few of us were upgraded to first class. I was a young man of about 27 with no special qualifications, but because of my title of "Reverend," I was placed in first class. In first class, we had the freedom to move around the ship.

****[00:12:24.960] - Speaker 1****

In the dining room, the menus were in French and various other languages, and they served many dishes I had never eaten before. Sometimes, I didn't understand the menu, so I pointed with my toes to the items I wanted. Watching the sea surface every day, I noticed the tiny bubbles rising and disappearing. It made me realize that I am like one of those small bubbles in the vast cosmos. Even though I am just a tiny being, I am still alive in this universe. I felt deeply aware of this and also felt that I was going to a faraway place.

****[00:14:35.600] - Speaker 1****

Every day, the ship's staff would tell us to set our clocks forward by one or two hours. When we crossed the International Date Line, there was the same day twice. The journey took about ten days, and I truly felt that I was going to a distant place, with a different culture and a different world.

[00:15:37.220] - Speaker 2

How many days did it take?

[00:15:40.190] - Speaker 1

I don't remember exactly, but it took around eight days. I'm not sure because there were the same days twice. There were many people on the ship, making it a small world. It was a very valuable experience. In Honolulu, I was taken to greet the temples of various denominations, and then I was brought to Lahaina. Back then, planes were propeller aircraft, and the Kahului airport was very small, with only one traffic light nearby. I think it was the only traffic light on Maui at that time.

[00:17:10.120] - Speaker 2

So that was in 1963?

[00:17:12.310] - Speaker 1

Yes, that was in 1963. When I arrived in Lahaina, the elderly folks welcomed me, saying, "Thank you for coming to such a lonely place." But I felt differently. The people from my rural Japanese temple thought I was going to a wonderful place, and the elderly in Lahaina thought it was a lonely place, but I came with the hope of achieving enlightenment. So, I didn't feel lonely at all. I was about 27 years old then, and the elderly who had experienced life's hardships called me "Sensei" (teacher).

[00:19:09.220] - Speaker 1

They called me "Sensei" because I was teaching Japanese at the school. This was the first time I was called "Sensei," and I was really saved by the warmth of the elderly people. They invited me to meals, brought me food, and took care of me. Back then, the

first and second generations were still active, and many of them spoke Japanese. I didn't speak much English due to my insufficient studies.

****[00:22:06.530] - Speaker 1****

Most of the people worked at the sugarcane fields and pineapple industries. After work, they would gather at the temple, where there was always a mountain of Primo beer. After work, they would come to the temple and drink the Primo beer. In Japan, I was forced to drink alcohol in high school, but as a monk, I was firmly against drinking. However, in Lahaina, when everyone gathered and drank, they urged me to drink with them. I eventually started drinking beer in Lahaina.

****[00:23:50.840] - Speaker 1****

A reporter from the *Rafu Shimpo*, a Los Angeles newspaper that no longer exists, visited the temple and wrote about his impressions. It's a bit long, but I'd like to read it to you. His name was Mr. Kuromizu, a journalist from the *Rafu Shimpo*.

****[00:25:10.040] - Speaker 2****

That sounds interesting, but let's leave that for the end, Can we talk about the food you found most delicious in Lahaina?

****[00:25:58.610] - Speaker 1****

Well, I don't really remember specifically. As a monk, I ate whatever was offered to me. Many of the locals were from Hiroshima, so there were many dishes from that region.

[00:26:49.670] - Speaker 2

In Hawaii, what kind of dishes were your favorite?

[00:27:04.700] - Speaker 1

Well, I've eaten various things, but I've forgotten them all.

[00:27:11.270] - Speaker 2

Everything is delicious.

[00:27:12.350] - Speaker 1

Delicious.

[00:27:23.870] - Speaker 2

What was it like when you first arrived to Lahaina, your first impression of Front Street?

[00:27:31.310] - Speaker 1

Well, Lahaina's Front Street had a large Japanese community at that time. It seemed like they were the majority. So there were quite a few Japanese stores like Nagasako Store, Kishi, and Nishino Fish Market. However, during the day, there were hardly any people around. In a way, it was a very rundown town. This was around 1961, I think. During that time, many pineapple factories closed, and operations moved to Kahului. Additionally, the sugar plantation started to mechanize, laying off many workers, making the town very desolate. Given this situation, the minister who was in Lahaina before felt there was no future for him in Lahaina and moved to Chicago.

[00:29:37.070] - Speaker 2

What were the big events at the temple?

[00:29:56.150] - Speaker 1

Well, the temple's main event were the services. The temple was a place where people gathered, a place of rest, a place for prayers, and also a meeting place. So, it's a bit long-winded, but the situation of the temple at that time is very well depicted in an article from the Los Angeles-based Nikkei newspaper, *Rafu Shinpou*. The article is from March 23, 2004,

In the western side of the Island of Maui, there is a small town called Lahaina. Once a bustling port during the whaling era, Lahaina has now completely transformed into a town visited by tourists. In this Lahaina, there is a temple with a large Buddha statue enshrined by the seaside.

[00:31:40.950] - Speaker 1

I had always wondered what it was whenever I passed by seeing the temple bell. Last summer, when I visited Maui, I was fortunate to meet the temple's resident priest because of a friend, whom I visited, had been a frequent visitors to the temple for years.

On a Sunday afternoon, I joined the *nikei* (of Japanese ancestry) community gathered around outdoor shaded tables, enjoying tea and conversation. The resident minister, Gensho Hara, looked calm in a tshirt, and his wife, Setsuko, who had a beautiful smile, made me feel welcomed. We spent time together, chatting freely.

Just then, an elderly woman offered us her homemade mango mousse, which had a refined taste and wasn't too sweet. Everyone had just finished painting. They had started early in the morning and were finally taking a break. Listening to the sound of waves gently lapping against the white sandy beach in front of us, drinking tea, eating sweets, I pondered the days gone by, wondering when this temple was built and what kind of people had come here.

[00:33:17.140] - Speaker 1

The temple has a large kitchen building, and even when there are no rituals or services, people from the island come and go, bringing ingredients to cook, enjoying meals together at tables with ocean views. There is no desire for fame or conflict among people here. The people who come here love the temple and admire the minister and his wife. I felt that strongly during my short stay here, and it warmed my heart. Seeing how deeply faith is rooted in daily life on this rural island of Maui, even a non-believer like me found this way of faith truly admirable. I think this was well depicted by Mr. Kurokizu. That is how the temple and the Japanese community were at that time. The temple was a place where everyone gathered and relaxed.

[00:34:58.200] - Speaker 2

When you first came to Lahaina, there was no Great Buddha. How did the Great Buddha come to be there?

[00:35:14.670] - Speaker 1

Well, the story of the Great Buddha is quite long. We developed a connection with Masao Omori, a Japanese businessman. At one point, Mr. Omori, who always observed our living conditions, came to sit in front of the temple's main hall and told me, "Come and sit with me. You, with no money, just keep having children." He said, "Without a financial base for the temple and home, you won't be able to continue." He pointed to the area in front, which was a wooded area at that time, and said, "Buy up all the land you can see here and build rental houses." I said, "Even if Mr. Omori says to buy it all, our parishioners are mostly retired and don't have that kind of money." Then, in my

mind, I recalled a large storage room next to the mountain gate at the head temple, where a Buddha statue was kept. That statue had been placed there because it was damaged during air raids.

[00:39:54.610] - Speaker 1

When Mr. Omori told me to buy up the land in front, what came to my mind was that Buddha statue. I thought that the immigrants, who had been called "discarded people," were actually those who had been abandoned. To heal the hearts of these discarded people, it was that forgotten Buddha that I wanted to bring here. When I talked about this, Mr. Omori immediately asked, "Can you get it?" I said I thought I could if I talked about it, and he said he would make the donation right away. And then he said, "Call the head temple." I said...

[00:41:51.550] - Speaker 1

This is an important issue, so a phone call won't do. I said I would go to Japan myself. He said, "Start collecting donations from everyone, starting tomorrow, however much you can, to buy the land. I will cover the rest," and that's what he told me. So, I went to Japan, and when I visited the head temple, I found that the Buddha statue had already passed away. It had been moved to a temple in Yokohama that had been destroyed in the war. The temple there had been rebuilt, and the statue had been placed there as the main deity. I went to the Yokohama temple and asked the priest if I could acquire that Buddha statue, but he said, "We just rebuilt the temple and this statue was just welcomed here," and upon closer inspection, I saw that the statue was now covered in gold leaf, which was contrary to the plain style of the original Buddha.

[00:44:14.230] - Speaker 1

The priest said that this was done according to the instructions from the head priest, as the sutras describe the Buddha's appearance as radiant with light. Typically, deities at temples are adorned with gold leaf to symbolize eternity, but this gold leaf didn't quite match the simple sentiment of the immigrants. So, I was told that the gold leaf had to be removed. However, the priest insisted that he could not part with the statue. He mentioned that many such statues were available throughout Japan. He offered to help me find one.

[00:46:19.150] - Speaker 1

So, I decided to search for another statue. In the religious newspaper, I placed an ad saying that next year would mark 100 years since Japanese immigrants arrived in Hawaii. The ad stated that in commemoration of this 100 years, and to console the spirits of the pioneers and wish for a good future, we wanted to welcome a similar Buddha statue to Hawaii. I included the address of the Yokohama temple's priest and requested information from anyone who knew of such a statue. Responses came from all over, from Tohoku, Kansai, and various places.

[00:48:23.230] - Speaker 1

I spent about a month traveling throughout Japan. What I learned was that remaining Buddha statues in Japan are those with historical significance or special reasons for their creation. During the war, the Japanese government forced the surrender of temple bells and other items that could be melted down for ammunition. Therefore, remaining statues are either very historically significant or deeply rooted in their local area. Moving such statues is like cutting down a large tree; it would be like killing the life of the Buddha.

[00:50:19.890] - Speaker 1

So, I concluded that the only option was to create a new Buddha statue. To convey this to Mr. Omori, I visited his home in Oiso. Luckily, while taking a taxi there, the driver asked where I was from. When I said I was from Hawaii and was searching for a Buddha statue, he said there was one on a mountain. I asked if he could take me there on the last day, and he was very talkative and drove us up the mountain. However, as we went, the houses disappeared, and he became silent. He was driving fast, and I started to fear that I might be taken to be harmed since I had brought money from Hawaii. When I asked if we were almost there, he said we were close. Indeed, we reached a flat area on the mountain where the statue was. The statue had an appearance reminiscent of the Tang period, with a long, flat face, and did not seem particularly impressive. There was a sign next to it that read "Ginza Museum," with a phone number, indicating the owner.

[00:53:51.560] - Speaker 1

I went to Mr. Omori and explained the situation. I told him that today, I had found a Buddha statue on the mountain, but it didn't look very impressive or sacred. Mr. Omori got angry and said, "It doesn't matter what the face looks like. What if there were no Buddha statue at all? Everyone is moving forward with buying the land. Who has it? Who is holding it?" When I said I had also called, he told me to explain the purpose over the phone. I explained that I had come from Hawaii and that next year marks 100 years since Japanese people arrived in Hawaii. I wanted to welcome a Buddha statue to commemorate this centenary. The person on the other end said, "If that's the case, it's not impossible to part with it." Mr. Omori then picked up the phone and said, "Let me handle this. How about we offer to buy it for a little over 10,000 yen?" He slammed the phone down, gave me a sharp look, and asked if I knew what he had said. I said I didn't. He told me they had demanded 500 million yen or something like that, which was a lot of money at that time. Even Mr. Omori was taken aback and hung up the phone abruptly.

[00:55:45.860] - Speaker 1

So, after a month of searching for a Buddha statue, I realized that moving a Buddha statue is like cutting down a large tree and moving it. It would be like killing the Buddha's life. To mark the centenary, I suggested creating a new Buddha statue through Japan-U.S. cooperation. Mr. Omori agreed, saying, "Yes, let's do that."

[00:57:27.000] - Speaker 1

Thus, a new Buddha statue was to be made, but the story doesn't end there.

[00:57:41.430] - Speaker 2

At the end, there was a longing for Lahaina, a longing for Hawaii.

[00:57:55.830] - Speaker 1

It wasn't that I longed for Hawaii. It was more about my own confusion and the hope that a new self might be discovered, which brought me here.

[00:58:24.390] - Speaker 2

At the end, becoming a new person.

[00:58:30.600] - Speaker 1

Actually, I was supposed to return in 1934, but there was a fire. The old temple burned down, and since it was destroyed, it had to be rebuilt. Everyone helped wholeheartedly after the fire. Feeling a deep sense of gratitude for their support, I ended up staying longer.

[00:59:24.450] - Speaker 2

It burned down again.

[00:59:28.530] - Speaker 1

Indeed, 60 years have passed in the blink of an eye, and I deeply feel that I have been able to move forward thanks to everyone's help. Now, the nostalgic town of Lahaina has burned down.

[01:00:05.260] - Speaker 4

Many...

[01:00:07.120] - Speaker 1

...members' homes have been destroyed, and some members have passed away. The temple has also been lost. After the fire, I received countless words of comfort and encouragement. I have taken those words as the voice of the Buddha. In response to everyone's encouragement, I believe we must rebuild the temple as a place for the community to gather.

[01:01:16.920] - Speaker 2

And that's the end. Thank you.

